Portfolio 2: Research & “Academic Audience”

Getting Started: The Rhetorical Situation

Your writing assignments this term each build up to/support the next. In our first portfolio, you applied techniques of rhetorical reading to one text of your choice. In portfolio 2, you’ll choose a research topic and question and use those skills, practicing research, reading, and source use as you create an annotated bibliography and review of literature—writing for an academic audience. In portfolio 3, you’ll use this research to write an article for an online publication—writing for a popular audience.

Here’s Your Starting Point: An Assigned Purpose and Audience.

Your purpose is to teach others about a person, group, or event significant in women’s history, here or abroad. It should be someone or something you think modern, youthful readers of an online magazine should know more about for some specific reason.

The research topic you choose for portfolio 2 will be your subject of all the work you do in this class from now through finals. Choose wisely, and work on this diligently across the next two portfolios, and you will have a wonderful piece of history written up and published online before the semester is done.

Getting Started: Develop a Research Question

In choosing a topic, it helps to think about both your interests, and those of your (eventual) readers (the folks who might visit our website). The purpose of the website we will build with your final projects is to teach others about people OR events significant (for good or ill) in women’s history (here or abroad). So, choose someone, or something you want to think others ought to know more about. This who and why becomes your research question.

There are lots of ways to get at topics that both work for our publication and our intended audience that ALSO are interesting and meaningful to you. And lots of possible research questions within any one of those large topic areas.

One way in is to think about groups, communities, issues, or activities that you engage in (or want to). For example: what’s your major? What kind of hobbies do you engage in? And then think on the history and roles of women in that community/connection to that issue.

Example: I love baseball, so I might begin by exploring women in baseball, and then see, from there, who or what catches my eye. I might write about pitcher Alta Weiss, exploring attitudes about women in sports then and now. Or (because I’m Scots-Irish and so find her fascinating, and because of the discussions over how women should/shouldn’t be soldiers even today), I might write about Boudicca, a Celtic warrior/queen. Being interested in social justice and equality, I might research the ERA, or the Payroll Equality Act. Having grown up in Texas, I might research Ann Richards, whom I admired, and contrast her to “feminine ideals” as well as some of the women in politics today. I’d have to decide which of these possible topics I REALLY think others should read about, AND WHY. And then I’d write a proposal expressing these ideas, as a guide to my research into them.
**GETTING STARTED: WRITE A PROPOSAL (DUE 10/9)**

The research proposal is NOT part of portfolio 2—it's just something to have to do to get on with the rest of this assignment. Your research proposal will be graded as complete and thoughtful (full credit), incomplete/undeveloped (half credit), or not done (no credit), and will count as part of your participation grade.

Your research proposal must be posted to the blog by midnight on Tuesday, October 9th.

The proposal should be at least 500 words in length, and should:

- Identify the topic, and your initial research question.
- Tell us a bit about the topic and research questions, and why it's a problem worth addressing.
- Your goal here is to create reader interest in your topic, and illustrate how this person or event is a topic online readers interested in women's history should know more about!
- Tell us what you already know about the topic.
- Tell us what you think you need to find out, and where/how you will look for this information. Draft your proposal offline, in a word-processing program, to give yourself time to think and to polish your writing and your ideas.
- When you post to the blog, first type in this information for me → Your name; the person/topic you are researching (your class time). For example, mine would begin Dundee Lackey: Women in Baseball/Alta Weiss (9:30). (thanks. This will help me build a list easily as I read.) When you've done this, just cut and paste the proposal you drafted into the comment box.

(We will do more “informal but important” writing like this as you work on this project. Take seemingly-low-risk assignments—like the proposal, and a working bibliography, etc.--seriously. These tasks must be done, and done well, in order to succeed on portfolios 2 and 3.)

**WRITING PORTFOLIO 2 (DUE NOVEMBER 8TH)**

Since your purpose in writing, ultimately, is for a specific website—a sort of online magazine, written for the purposes of teaching others about this person or event, and why they are significant to our world right now—you will need to gather information about all of that in your research. You'll write that research up in two academic forms: an annotated bibliography (a list of citations for and annotations of each source) and a sort of review of that literature (a sort of report on what you found out, and plans for how you will use this information in portfolio 3, when you'll write about the same topic, but in a different genre and for a different audience).

You will find multiple resources on doing annotated bibliographies and reviews of literature on the class website. We will read things teaching you how to do these, and will read (and write) samples together. Make use of these resources, and write as you go! **The annotated bib, the review of lit, AND A REFLECTION make up portfolio 2, due to the Blackboard drop box before your class time on Thursday, November 8th.**
PORTFOLIO 2, PART 1: THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

An annotated bibliography is a list of full academic citations (MLA) of sources followed up by annotations—descriptive and evaluative writing about each source. You may arrange citations alphabetically, or alphabetically within categories of information.

Annotations are different from summaries. Summaries recap the source, but annotations go a bit further: “[a]notations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author’s point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority” (Engle et al). You should also talk about how a single source is “in conversation” with the larger set of sources, and how it helps answer your research question.

The purpose of creating an annotated bibliography is to learn about your topic (although people publish annotated bibliographies as part of larger documents, and sometimes even publish *just* the annotated bib to assist other authors and researchers). The process of annotating requires that you read more critically than you might otherwise, and helps you capture ideas that will facilitate writing based on your research. This process, therefore, is a time-consuming one. Do not put this project off until the week it’s due, or (worse yet) the night before it’s due. The annotated bibliography must be complete before you can create a meaningful draft of the review of literature.

Your annotated bib must consist of a minimum of eight to ten sources, each cited in proper academic form. (We will all use MLA, as this way our citations will be uniform when we get around to building that website.)

You MAY NOT cite Wikipedia, about.com, or the like. You must choose “high quality” sources—the most relevant and credible available on your topic. These sources should represent a variety of perspectives on your research question, as well as a variety of source types (popular and academic, print and online, primary and secondary). Your sources should, as a collection, help you teach an audience all who, what, when, where, and why’s on this person or event. This means that the sources you choose to annotate are not likely to be simply the first eight to ten that you find: instead, you will carefully cull your initial “hits,” carefully selecting those most appropriate to your information needs, as well as to your ultimate purpose and audience.

I am unable to give you a specific length requirement for this document: the length of each annotation will depend upon the length and complexity of each source you choose, as well as its relationship to other sources in your collection. In general, however, good annotations cannot be created in a single paragraph. Aim for approximately one page for each source.
PORTFOLIO 2, PART 2: THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this document (a minimum of five pages in length), you will share what you’ve learned about your research question with an academic audience, and begin making plans for what you’d like to do with this information/about this topic in your final writing assignment.

There are three “moves” you’ll need to make in this review of lit:

1) Your essay will begin with a review of literature, a process that provides your reader with some background information relevant to, as well as a report of multiple perspectives on, your research question. The literature review is not a way of making your own argument, but a way of uncovering and thinking through what others have said about the topic. You might think of this as a “some people say” paper—one that eavesdrops on those who are participating in discussions of your research question, and shares what they had to say with your audience in a thoughtful, unbiased way.

The review of literature is an academic genre with a specific form and pattern of its own. We’ll look at some samples of this kind of writing, and discuss it frequently as you progress.

2) Following your literature review, you will move into a second section in which you express YOUR informed opinion on your research question. (Think of this as a “so what” section. Now that you’ve shared all this information, what do you think about it? How do you think your readers should respond to it?)

3) Finally, you will make plans for where you will go from here. You’ll use this research to write a magazine article for online publication (so it CAN include “multimodal” elements, like video, sound, and images). Consider this bit a proposal for that article. How will you present this information in a way that works for the genre (magazine article)? How will you teach about this person/topic in a way that will interest modern readers, and seem relevant to their lives and interests? What must you do to get from here (this text, the review of lit for an academic audience) to there (the magazine article, a “popular” genre for an online audience)?

Your essay must include academic style in-text citations, and must conclude with a works cited list of all sources used. (MLA style is the default on this project, so that all of our work will be standard in this way when we get ready to build the website.)
The third and final piece of your portfolio is a reflective overview, something you’ll include with EACH portfolio you hand in this term. Reflective writing is a particular type of writing in which you are asked to be metacognitive—to think about your own thinking. Essentially, then, you could consider this document a sort of cover letter in which you unpack the “invisible” work and learning processes that helped you complete the written products presented.

Remember: The purpose of a reflective document is to explain to your readers your work and learning (considering both processes and products). This piece is meant to help you demonstrate your performance as a learner/researcher/writer, but also to help your reader understand the kinds of work, engagement and learning that you went through.

Report on and evaluate the different processes you used in various parts/stages of each assignment, explore what and how you learned, and evaluate whether what you’ve done/learned will be (or not be) useful to you (for this class and others, and in your day-to-day life). Remember to be more than descriptive about your work—be reflective and analytical. Explain the text(s) you’ve created. How? Why? What works? What doesn’t?

Include a section in your reflective overview that serves as self-assessment. Based on the expectations for the project/the course, what grade do you think it should earn, and why? Please list concrete reasons (from the critical thinking and information literacy skills rubrics, which we’ll be working with this term; the goals of the course; and/or from the rubric for the current writing project) explaining why this grade is appropriate.

Because it is such an important piece of writing, this reflective overview will be the result of multiple drafts and peer review. It will represent careful, college level writing. It is more than a description. It is also an analysis and an evaluation. One way to think of the purpose of your overview is to persuade readers that your performance for the period of the project should be evaluated in a certain way, earning a certain grade, with ample reasons to support your claims. Obviously, with this much to accomplish, the overview is important. Effective overviews will be several pages long, well organized, and clear.