

Assignment 3 – Group Webzine

Value: 35% of your final grade (Individual Essay = 20% + 5% Individual Comments + Group Composition = 10%)

Due:

1. Draft for comments: March 17 / 18
2. Comments: March 24/25
3. Final for Assessment: March 31 / April 1

Length: Individual Essay: 1500-2000 words, Comments: 5 x 100 words, Group Foreword: 1500-2000 words.

Instructions:

- ✓ Each member of the group must compose and digitally publish a 1500-2000 word research essay on one aspect of their topic. See Assignment 1 for thematic suggestions, and/or consult with your tutorial leader.
- ✓ Your essay should contain at least one hyperlink per paragraph (especially to online, digital sources), and you may insert images if you choose to illustrate your work.

Please note:

1. This is an academic paper, so should adopt an Academic style. See the course website for examples of stylistic restrictions.
2. Your individual essays do not all have to agree with each other. The Conversation represents many points of view. Your Foreword describes the relationship of the different themed essays to each other and to your Webzine's central Idea. Opposing points of view may still contribute much to our process of understanding as dominant narratives are challenged.
3. Similarly, your individual essays need not directly refer to each other. However, it is likely that if you share your work, many links between ideas will be noted. This is also likely to happen as the draft of your work is commented on by your classmates.
4. Include a works cited (MLA) at the end of each one of the essays in your Webzine. Your Works cited is not limited to your annotated bibliography. All the sources used in your essay should be properly cited, including any memes, tweets and images used.
5. Part of the reason a Moodle forum was chosen for this assignment is to limit formatting options. However, basic formatting errors such as broken links, odd line breaks, poorly formatted/inserted images etc. have an effect on your ethos, and so your grade. Your work should look professional. Experiment with Moodle accordingly.

6. Breadth and depth of research counts. Use a majority of credible (and academic) sources, while properly contextualizing other memes, tweets and so on.
7. A practice forum will be provided where you can test the format of your work before it is posted in draft or final form. In general, a Word document ought also to be useful in working on layout.
8. Communicate with your group members throughout this process. Share your research findings. An article may not fit your topic, but could work for someone else in the group.
9. Avoid using Wiki sources directly for this assignment, though of course they will be consulted during your research process.
10. Your tutorial leader may have additional advice for success on this assignment.

Feedback in Online Fanfiction

In the realm of online fanfiction, feedback is the currency that members pay towards their communities. It is partially what keeps the fanfiction economy afloat and what has made it thrive and prosper on the Internet. Every community has a shared goal or purpose according to *The Concept of Discourse Community* (Swales 472), and when it comes to fanfiction, the goal is to re-envision an existing text with other fans through writing. John Swales outlines a list of [six criteria](#) that make up a viable discourse community and feedback is one of them (472). By leaving behind comments, readers are essentially partaking in civic participation; they work collectively towards bettering community members and the fanfictions that are being posted.

Feedback is a recurrent dialogue between writers and readers that lead to the development of conventions in a fanfic community. [Amanda L. Hodges' dissertation](#) describes the revealing nature of feedback and how it is often used to emulate accepted behaviors: “[Feedback has a] major influence on identity, shaping both the social and discursive practices in ways that are unique to that particular community” (Hodges 104). Comments reveal the thoughts and views of community members and that amalgamates into a shared set of beliefs in regards to self-expression, whether it is on the forums or in fiction. One of Hodges’ subjects, a college-aged student called Thomas, says that feedback is used to help better integrate newer members into the community: “Newbies, or people who are just getting into the game might try to change something or mix things you shouldn’t. But other people will comment on it, correct them, help them learn how things are” (113). According to Thomas, more experienced readers can use their platform to take on a mentorship role and fulfill their responsibility in assisting fledgling fanfic authors become better writers and more conscientious contributors. This is supported by the ethnography of a Star Trek community done Camille Bacon-Smith who observed that

“experienced fans actively mentor new fans into appropriate standards of behavior” (qtd. in Parrish 147). Mentorship is achieved through comments that act as a written map; pointing contributors to what community members believe is the right direction.

There is “conformity of expression” in reader replies that [Juli J. Parrish](#) mentions in her dissertation, particularly in her analysis on the fanfiction website *Different Colored Pens* (123). Parrish notes that most commenters opted for encouraging responses rather than criticism (123). Anne Ruggles Gere suggests that “one of the attributes most frequently credited to writing groups is a positive attitude” (Parrish 123). This is supported by the research [Magnifico et al.](#) conducted on commenters that frequented Fanfiction.net and Figment. They found that 79.7% of comments posted under Hunger Games fanfiction included positive reading experiences and similar reactions made up 82.2% of comments on Fanfiction.net for the same franchise (Magnifico et al. 163). So what happens when comments become overly critical or just plain harassment? One fanfic-writing college student recounts his experiences with “flaming”: “What happens when some bitchy flame pushes somebody who’s dealing with abuse or horrible stuff too far? I work to say positive things in reviews and to defend writers who are flamed” (Hodges 104). As a reader, he believes it is his responsibility to support and defend his fellow fans. Hodges finds that her subjects will often share a strong belief in the crucial nature of participation and collaboration in a fanfic community (113).

The need to collaborate has resulted in new commenting practices like [beta reading](#). Beta readers are a small group of people that have been entrusted to read and provide constructive criticism on aspects ranging from narrative content to grammar and spelling on a writer’s unpublished draft (Karp 174). Fanfic writers are almost always first to initiate this process,

usually posting on forums or approaching self-advertised beta readers (Karp 174). The word “beta” in this case is derived from the term “beta testers” who test computer software, and the concept of a “beta reader” had not been around prior to the Internet Age (Karp 173). This is not to say that there have not been editors for fanfic-oriented fanzines but that the responsibility was usually only given to the people who had most of the control in the publication process (Karp 173). According to Angelina I. Karp’s article, the earliest appearance of this term was in 1998 and came from Yahoo.com mailing lists and was found on [the UnConventional Shippers List](#) (ucshippers), the Space: Above and Beyond FanFic Flightdeck (saabfanfic), and a multifandom group referred to as Beta_Unlimited (Beta_Unlimited) (173). A year later the term appeared on fan-run sites such as alt.startrek.creative and alt.tv.x-files.creative (Karp 173). Evidently, seeing the widespread adoption of beta reading across multiple fandoms has established [beta reading as a community convention](#) itself.

Feedback facilitates an effective working environment through discourse. Black and Steinkuehler allude to the idea that both writers and readers “co-construct the writing space” (qtd. in Magnifico et al. 159). Beta reading blurs the line between producer and consumer as the audience is incorporated into producing a single text. This is reflected in the published draft which will often, if not always, include the names of the beta readers under the header. In addition to thanking and acknowledging them, the inclusion of their names near the story title becomes a “subtle indicator of the prominence that the community invests in the role of the beta readers” (Karp 175). Beta readers, like writers, must also contribute time and effort into crafting a coherent text that can be shared amongst the fandom.

Beta reading is a facet of “active reading”. Piret Viires defines this term in his article as a characteristic of “[cyberliterature](#)” in which the reader is directly involved in the unfolding narrative (167): “While the traditional role of a reader is only interpretation, in cyberliterature the reader is active, s/he navigates, configures and writes. Analogously, the reader of fanfiction is active: instead of mere reading, s/he actively interferes with the author’s creative process” (167). The ability to leave comments and suggestions on elements such as plot and character has transformed the traditional role of the reader into a contributor that can follow and impact a work of fanfiction from inception to fruition. In [Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups](#), writer Candace Spigelman suggests that “writing group theory relies on a postmodern appreciation of intertextuality— the idea that no text is totally original, the private property of an autonomous creator” (17). Spigelman views texts built upon existing works as a result of a cooperative effort between many parties with no sole creator. Parrish elaborates on the mutualistic relationship of fanfiction and feedback: “Just as fanfiction can tell us a lot about the media texts on which it draws, feedback can shed light on fanfiction” (156). Together, readers and writers use their shared medium to come to a collective understanding about the franchise they support and celebrate.

Feedback is not one-sided. There is an expectation for authors to respond to their comments and by doing so, they acknowledge the reader as a vital component of the fandom and recognize their participation. Parrish says that even readers achieve a sense of authorship: “[Readers are] not just respondents who are either emoting or doing a favor for a fiction writer who craves feedback. Instead, they are crafting critical comments, and they see those critical comments as worthy themselves of enthusiastic response” (155). There is still thought and consideration that goes into commenting and the reader may not always have the confidence to

post their thoughts (Parrish 155). Many writers realize this and often include encouraging notes above their story, asking for even the smallest comment on their work (Parrish 155). A popular writer under the username JustSkipIt on *Pens* writes on [‘The Art of Leaving Feedback’ forum](#) about the writer’s responsibility to communicate with her readers:

RETURN THE FAVOR! If a reader writes you 150 words on what they liked/did not like, don’t say “thanks for your comments.” Elaborate on what they said. Was that your favorite part too? Did they pick up on what you were trying to convey? If they are a good reader, tell them that and tell them why you say so. (qtd. in Parrish 145 – 146)

Evidently, JustSkipIt, and other like-minded commenters, believe that social validation is a significant component of feedback. Comments help both readers and authors feel included and recognized to the extent that people have begun to be known for what they post.

Parrish states that it is very common for a community to have “star writers” and “star critics”. These contributors are celebrated for their respective craft and the ability to create a cohesive text that builds on existing ideas (Parrish 149). Readers are beginning to receive attention for their comments and take advantage of the commenting platform to construct an identity within their fandom. In their research, Magnifico et al. found that many reviews in Fanfiction.net and Figment were personalised and included “social information” (164). “Friendly letter conventions” would be placed at the end of the review such as “minionly love” (Figment) and “hey its me (the kid who sits in front of you in math)” (FanFiction.net) and can feature the occasional short blurb advertising the reader’s story (Magnifico et al.164). As shown in the

previous examples, reviews and comments are used as a medium to establish a persona and an ethos or “their right to comment” (Magnifico et al.164). Some reviewers would [leave comments](#) that followed along the lines of “I had to read the whole thing in one sitting!” or “I couldn’t stop reading” to support their subsequent praise (Magnifico et al.164). Or some would demonstrate prior knowledge of the franchise before going on to comment on certain aspects of the fic (Magnifico et al. 164). Magnifico et al. writes: “For reviewers’ feedback to be valued, it must be socially recognised; for the feedback to be socially recognised, they must establish themselves as avid readers and dedicated fanfiction writers in their own right” (164). Along with offering advice and appreciation, fans use feedback to transcend the typical reader and set themselves apart as individuals who deserve recognition for their insight.

Feedback is an individual and communal pursuit. Fans can use comments to connect to writers on a personal level while also creating and following the rules they come up with as a fandom. Swales believes that constant dialogue is what maintains and contributes to individual and community growth (472) and that makes feedback an essential part of it. Fanfiction is a way to [show one’s love and appreciation for a fictional work](#) and feedback is a way to show one’s love and appreciation for the work produced by fanfic writers. But feedback is also more than just supportive comments and critique as Sassette, a writer on *Different Colored Pens* puts it simply, “This kind of interaction can really add to the feel that the reader is somehow a part of the story” (Parrish 146). It is this collaborative attitude between writers and readers that has become the hallmark of fanfiction communities across the Internet.

Bibliography

- Ashley, Kendall. "Why Do We Love Writing Fan Fiction? | Geek and Sundry." *Geek and Sundry*. N.p., 07 July 2015. Web. <<http://geekandsundry.com/why-do-we-love-writing-fan-fiction/>>
- Borg, Erik. "Discourse community." *ELT journal* 57.4 (2003): 398-400. Print.
- Hodges, Amanda Leigh. *Crafting Fictions and Subjects: Examining the Discourses, Practices and Communities of Adolescent Fanfiction Writers*. 2011 Print.
- Karpovich, Angelina I. "The Audience as Editor: The Role of Beta Readers in Online Fan Fiction Communities." *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (2006): 171-88. Print.
- The BTVS WRITERS' GUILD*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://btvswritersguild.dymphna.net/betareaders.html>>.
- Fanfiction*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<https://www.fanfiction.net/r/10727310/>>.
- Magnifico, Alecia Marie, Jen Scott Curwood, and Jayne C. Lammers. "Words on the Screen: Broadening Analyses of Interactions among Fanfiction Writers and Reviewers." *Literacy* 49.3 (2015): 158-66.
- Parrish, Juli J. *Inventing a universe: Reading and writing Internet fan fiction*. Diss. University of Pittsburgh, 2007.
- "S:AAB FanFic Flightdeck." *S:AAB FanFic Flightdeck*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.fanficflightdeck.space-readyroom.de/>>.
- Spigelman, Candace. *Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000. Print.

Swales, John. "The Concept of Discourse Community." *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Boston: Cambridge UP, 1990.21-32. Print.

"Thekittenboard.com." *Thekittenboard.com*. N.p., n.d. Web.

<<http://thekittenboard.com/board/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=3094&sid=4750a380349dfdf2bac87a1b6a0cc3d>>.

Viires, Piret. "Literature in Cyberspace." *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore FEJF* 29 (2005): 153-74. Web.