

Your Extremely Complete Guide to Assignments and Deadlines

COMS 210

Fall 2020—Covid Edition—Part II

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A reminder of the default grade distributions (see the syllabus for more details as well as the rules on Flexible Assessment—note that MyCourses does not calculate flexible assessment for you):

Quizzes: 35%

Questions: 20%

Make Media Better: 5%

Projects: 40% – 20% for Economy project and 20% for Practices project.

COMS 210: Fall 2020 Revised Tentative Schedule (22 Oct 2020)

This schedule is subject to revision throughout the course. Changes will be announced on the announcements tool on MyCourses. Students are responsible for knowing and following the up-to-date schedule.

Orientations

Learning goals: Explain the purpose and operation of the course, familiarize yourself with how it's going to work. Explain the main features of media and communication and how they work, and how these differ from common sense understandings of media and communication. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

Th 3 Sep – T 8 Sep: O hai! Welcome to Covid Media Studies

No reading, but there will be some orienting assignments to do.

Quiz 0/Scavenger Hunt (8 Sep, or whenever)

Th 10 Sep – T 15 Sep: Media are Many Things

Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler. *Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Labor, Data and Planetary Resources*. Artificial Intelligence Now, 2018, <https://anatomyof.ai>.

Th 17 Sep – T 22 Sep: Communication is Many Things

Stuart Hall. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-9*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis. London: Hutchinson, 1980, 128-38.

Recommended:¹

Stuart Hall, "Reflections upon the Encoding/Decoding Model: An Interview with Stuart Hall." *Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*, eds. Jon Cruz and Justin Lewis. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, 252-274 (some relevant sections have been highlighted with blue markings; don't worry about the rest unless you're curious)

Quiz 1 (22-23 Sep)

Economy

Learning goals: Explain the main economic principles according to which media systems and institutions work, and with what consequences for whom. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

¹ A recommended reading will not be "on the test" but may help you understand the week's material.

Th 24 Sep – T 29 Sep: Media Capitalism 101

Shoshana Zuboff (2019) "Home or Exile in the Digital Future," *Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: Public Affairs, 1-24.

Robert McChesney (2018). "Between Cambridge and Palo Alto," *Catalyst*, 2, no. 1.
<https://catalyst-journal.com/vol2/no1/between-cambridge-and-palo-alto>.

Micky Lee (2011). "A feminist political economy of communication." *Feminist Media Studies* 11:1, 83-87.

Th 1 Oct – T 6 Oct: Labo(u)r

Tarleton Gillespie, "The Human Labor of Moderation," *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018, 111-140.

Lisa Nakamura, "The Unwanted Labour of Social Media: Women of Colour Call Out Culture as Venture Community Management," *New Formations* 86 (2015): 106-112.

Lily Irani, "Design Thinking: Defending Silicon Valley at the Apex of Global Labor Hierarchies," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 4:1 (2018):
<https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/view/29638>

Th 8 Oct – T 13 Oct: Commodities

Siva Vaidhyanathan, "Introduction," *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity*. New York: NYU Press, 2001, 1-17.

Joana Radin, "Digital Natives: How Medical and Indigenous Histories Matter for Big Data." *Osiris* 32 (2017): 43-64.

Quiz 2 (13-14 Oct)

YOU ARE HERE

Practices

Learning Goals: Explain how media manifest power relations through the circulation of ideas and through their ideas and relationships that get built into their technical operations. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

Th 15 Oct – T 20 Oct: The Politics of Technology

Ruha Benjamin, "Introduction: The New Jim Code," *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, 1-32.

Th 15 Oct: lecture drops

F 16 Oct: Questions assignment for students A-K

T 20 Oct: Submission deadline for Economy project, analytical papers and group papers

T 20 Oct 2:35-3:35 Montreal time: “Live” answers podcast (recorded).

Th 22 Oct – T 27 Oct: Scripting Practices

Madeleine Akrich, “The De-Scriptio of Technical Objects,” in *Shaping Technology, Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe Bijker and J. Law. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, 205–24.

Slavoj Žižek, “Cynicism as a Form of Ideology,” in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 24-27. London: Verso, 1989 (note: web versions say it’s 28-30 but my copy of the book says 24-27).

Recommended (not on the test):

Deen Freelon, Charlton McIlwain and Meredith D. Clark. *Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice*. Washington DC: Center for Media and Social Impact, 2016.

Th 22 Oct: lecture drops

F 23 Oct: Questions assignment for students L-Z

T 27 2:35-3:35 Montreal time: “Live” answers podcast; then explanation of “Practices” project. (recorded)

T 27 Oct: Extended submission deadline for Economy project submissions with no penalty.

Th 29 Oct – T 3 Nov: Online Talk, Everyday Practice

André Brock, Jr., “‘The Black Purposes of Space Travel’: Black Twitter as Black Technoculture.” *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*. New York: NYU Press, 2020, 79-105. (chapter goes to p 124 but only pp. 79-105 will be required)

Th 29 Oct: Lecture drops

F 30 Oct: Questions assignment for students A-K

T 3 Nov 2:35-3:35 Montreal time: Live answers podcast (recorded)

T Quiz 3: 3 Nov 3:30pm-5 Nov 3:30am (Montreal Time)

T 3 Nov: 11:30pm Email your prof or TA if you want to change artifacts for the Practices Project (you are encouraged to stick with the artifact from the Economy project)

Th 5 Nov – T 10 Nov: Politics, Power, Publicity, Technology (US Election Contingency Week)

No readings this week. Instead think about how what you see with the US election is connected to the course, and complete the Election assignment for Friday.

Th 5 Nov: Election lecture drops.

F 6 Nov: Election Assignment due—everyone submits. This replaces the regular Questions assignment. We will have a big conversation about it on 10th. See Election Assignment.

T 10 Nov 2:35-3:35 Montreal time: Live Answers Podcast (recorded) and election discussion (not recorded)

T 10 Nov: it is strongly recommended by this date that you write a draft of your Practices paper, share it with a classmate for feedback, using the Feedback assignment from the Economy project as a guide. This is entirely voluntary, and will not be submitted or graded.

Ecology + What Is To Be Done?

Learning goals: Explain the ecological impact of the manufacture, use, and disposal of media technologies (including things that don't seem "technological" like paper). Advance a cogent position on how our media system can be improved. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

Th 12 Nov – T 17 Nov: The Ecological Costs of Media Practices

Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, "Consumers," *Greening the Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 22-41.

Th 12 Nov: lecture drop

Th 12 Nov, F 13 Nov, M 16 Nov: Extra office hours for the Practices Project

F 13 Nov: Questions assignment for students L-Z

T 17 Nov: Practices Project due (no extra office hours after this date)

T 17 Nov 2:35-3:35 Montreal time: live answers podcast (recorded)

Th 19 Nov – T 24 Nov: Thinking Media, Ecologically

Laura Marks, "Let's Deal With the Carbon Footprint of Streaming Media," *Afterimage* 47:2 (2020): 46-52.

Amanda Boetzkes, "Climate Aesthetics in the Ablation Zone," *Afterimage* 47:2 (2020): 35-39.

F 20 Nov: Questions Assignment for students A-K

T 24 Nov: Extended deadline for Practices Project (no grade penalty to submit by this date)

T 24 Nov 2:35-3:35 Montreal time: Live answers podcast and quiz review (recorded).

Th 26 Nov – T 1 Dec: Imagining and Considering Alternatives

Erik Olin Wright How to be an Anticapitalist Today <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/>

Ruha Benjamin, “Audits and Other Abolitionist Tools,” *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, 122-125.

27 Nov: Make Media Better Assignment due (everyone submits—see Make Media Better assignment sheet). No Questions assignment this week.

T 1 Dec 2:35-3:35: Make Media Better discussion, quiz review. (Not recorded)

Quiz 4: 1 Dec 3:30pm-3 Dec 3:30am (Montreal Time)

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Optional Quiz 5 (covers all units): 4 Dec 12:00 Noon - 7 Dec 11:59pm (note the different-than-usual times and timeframe)

The Practices Project (20% of semester grade)
COMS 210—Fall 2020—Covid Edition

Purpose: For you to 1) demonstrate an understanding of key concepts from the readings and lectures for the practices section of the course; 2) to apply those concepts to something in the real world, 3) to spur discussion of and reflection on concepts in the course, and 4) to foster collective ownership of the learning process (and, give you a chance to get to know some of your classmates).

Deadline: 17 November 2020, 2:30pm Montreal time; no-grade-penalty late submission deadline is 24 November, 11:30pm.

What's different from the Economy Project: you asked for it to be simplified. We listened. There is one due date for one paper or multimedia project worth 20% of your semester grade. We will give you benchmark dates at the end of this sheet, but it does raise the stakes a bit.

This project may be done individually or in groups; it is entirely up to you. If you submit a group project, the requirements are exactly the same (length, rubric, etc.) except that multiple people will receive a grade for a single submission. You may work with anyone you like in the course.

What you are analyzing: you will be applying concepts from the course to a media artifact from 2020. We expect that most people will stay with the artifact from the Economy Project but we will not require it. If you want to change your artifact, please contact one of us for approval by **November 3rd**. Your “artifact” could be a specific object like someone’s phone, or a media text (an episode of a TV show, a TikTok video, a song, a game), or it could be a specific event, like a sporting event.

Your task: write a paper of 2-3 pages (500-750 words—it may be a little longer, we’re not keeping a tight count).

Step 1: Your paper should answer one or more of the following questions: Questions that you could choose to answer might include: what scripts for users are built into your artifact? What kinds of technical skills or literacies does the artifact require from its users or audience? Are there examples of users challenging those scripts or requirements? What kinds of hardware, infrastructures, or protocols are necessary for your artifact to work? Have people found a way to make it work differently? Are there explicitly or implicitly ideological dimensions to your artifact? Does the artifact promote or discourage certain beliefs and attitudes? If so, do users have to believe or agree with them in order for the artifact to work as it is supposed to?

Step 2: Apply a concept from the readings or lectures from the Practices unit to an aspect of the media artifact. Explain how the artifact elucidates the idea from the readings or lectures, or how the idea from the readings or lecture explains something important about the artifact.

Papers should ideally be written in an integrative fashion: the two steps can be done at once, and the writing should reflect a good presentation of your ideas, rather than the order in which you did your work.

Pages should be numbered, and your name should appear in the upper right-hand corner. It should be 12-point font (just don't pick anything too weird), and 1" margins. You can use any known citation style. The paper will be submitted via the assignment page in MyCourses.

You are welcome to submit in a medium other than writing (video, audio recording, etc.). The criteria for the assignment are the same regardless of medium, so a video project or infographic will be evaluated according to the same criteria as a written project.

Evaluation: papers will be graded according to a rubric and earn a score between 0-100%. We will share the rubric with you beforehand.

Deadlines and Feedback: As with the Economy, papers submitted by the deadline (November 17) are eligible for a feedback meeting, and we encourage you to schedule one. For papers submitted after the deadline, we cannot promise a feedback meeting, however you may submit by Tuesday, November 24th with no penalty.

Resources: The readings and lectures will be most helpful for the analysis. Feel free to read one another's papers and provide help (that's what the groups are for!). Please come meet with us during office hours to talk over ideas as well. We are happy to help.

Recommended Steps in Flow Chart Form:

3 November (on or around): Check with one of us if you are planning to change your artifact.



By 10 November (recommended, not required): write a draft of your paper and share it with a classmate for commentary. Use the feedback rubric from the Economy Project to give one another feedback



17 November: Deadline for submitting the Practices Project.



24 November: Automatic extension deadline with no grade penalty.

Practices Project

Name _____

TA _____

	A (85)	B (70)	C (55)	D (40)
Use of Course Material	Applies course material in a really thoughtful or original manner, gets to fundamental intellectual issues in the question.	Clearly uses at least one major idea from one of the designated readings or lectures and uses it correctly. Shows that you know your stuff.	Clearly uses course material but incorrectly or in a cursory fashion (for instance, merely mentions something without using it).	Doesn't show any significant engagement with course material. OR major errors with more than one concept or lots of small or repeated errors.
Quality of Answer	Particularly original, thorough, insightful or cogent answer.	Fulfills the assignment satisfactorily. Answers one or more of the questions well; ideally in an integrated fashion.	Addresses the assignment, but not fully or not in a manner appropriate to the assignment. Claims are unclear, undersupported or underdeveloped.	Does not fulfill a major component of the assignment or otherwise fails to respond to the questions.
Quality of Writing (Multimedia materials will be judged on an analogous basis.)	Easy and fun to read. Really well written.	Readable, concise, and clear. Could have one or two small improvements.	Problems with clarity, presentation, language use or proofreading.	Not appropriate for university-level writing; problems in more than two areas or major problems in one.

Extra Credit (up to 5 points can be given for something cool students do that we don't anticipate in the rubric above; grader's discretion—this is for "above and beyond")

Total Score: _____

Your total score is the average of your three category scores.

Practices Project: Peer Feedback

The goal of feedback is to help your peers get better at the kind of thinking we are encouraging for this course, and for you to talk with one another about the ideas in the course. Below is a set of questions for you to answer in no more than a few sentences each (and sometimes one sentence will do).

1. In your own words, what is the author's main claim?
2. How far did you have to get into the paper (video, infographic, audio recording) to understand their claim?
3. What evidence do they use to support their claim?
4. What was most compelling or persuasive about their paper (or video, or infographic, or audio recording)? For instance, are there things covered that you would find particularly interesting to discuss with the author if you were talking together in person?
5. Are there parts of the paper (or video, infographic, audio recording) that could be revised to more effectively advance or support its claim about the artifact? Please be concrete in your suggestions.

Pitfalls to avoid when giving feedback:

Remember you're trying to help the author accomplish what they want to accomplish. You're not trying to get them to write the paper you want them to write. You also don't need to agree with what they are writing to help them improve their argument (though it's good for groups to discuss points on which they disagree). It's also possible to give too much feedback. Focus on what's most important.

U.S. Election Assignment
COMS 210—Fall 2020—Covid Edition

The assignment:

Instead of a “questions” assignment for the week of the US Election, we are opening things up. You may:

1. Answer the following question: **how does a concept or example from the course help you understand something that’s happened during the U.S. election this fall? Post a comment about a specific event or text from the U.S. election (think of the scale of it like an artifact from the projects). You may refer to any idea from any reading, lecture, or answers podcast for the course.**

OR

2. **Ask the prof and TAs a question about something specific related to the election. What do you want to know that we might know? Or do you want our take on something in particular?**

Date Due:

Friday 6 November, 5:30pm Montreal time. This assignment is worth one “Questions” assignment and can be submitted under the “questions” tab in the Assignments section of the course.

Where and what to submit:

You will find the place to submit under the “Assignments” tab in MyCourses. You will need to upload a file. Allowed formats are .doc, .docx, .txt, .pdf, .html for text files; and .mp3 and .mp4 for audio files. Please name the file as follows: lastnamefirstinitialelection.extension. So if I was submitting, it would be sternejelection.mp3 or sternejelection.docx .

More on the assignment:

4 sentences/150 words is sufficient; however, you may write/speak up to 300 words if you really need it.

Evaluation:

Completing this assignment in good faith will earn a score of 4, which will count as an assignment for your Questions grade. We are encouraging you to take a chance here! Failure to submit or serious slacking or BSing will earn a 0. Submissions that seriously mischaracterize the argument from readings or lectures also will not receive full credit.

Feedback:

No additional feedback will be provided for this assignment. But we would like to post a selection of interesting responses on the course website. Please tell us if you are not ok with this. We will also be discussing some of them the following Tuesday in the “live podcast.”

Make Media Better Assignment
COMS 210—Fall 2020—Covid Edition

The assignment:

Instead of a final “questions” assignment for the term, we are flipping the script, and asking *you* the question:

Based on what you learned in this class, what is one thing you (individually or collectively) can do to make media better?

To answer, choose one critique of a media practice, technology, or institution that you encountered in a reading or lecture. Tell us what that is. Then tell us what you would do about it. Make it as concrete as possible: is there a law or policy the government could enact? Is there something specific that an organization of people could do collectively? Is there a campaign you would launch? A hashtag or viral sensation you would create? A new tool or technique? A rule or best practice that companies should follow? A design principle for all new technologies? An environmental or processural test they should have to pass? Is there something you personally want to do in your life? Don't try to fix or change everything. Make it *just one thing*.

Date Due:

27 November, 5:30pm Montreal time. This assignment is worth 5% of the semester grade. Yes, I know this is Black Friday in the U.S. You are welcome to submit early.

Where and what to submit:

You will find the place to submit under the “Assignments” tab in MyCourses. You will need to upload a file. Allowed formats are .doc, .docx, .txt, .pdf, .html for text files; and .mp3 and .mp4 for audio files. Please name the file as follows: lastnamefirstinitialbetter.extension. So if I was submitting, it would be *sternejbetter.mp3* or *sternejbetter.docx* .

There is also a comments box. If you wrote out your suggestion before you recorded it, you can paste in the text there. It will speed things up a little.

More on the assignment:

We are seeking short written or recorded responses that are an echo of the “why media” question we asked during the first week of class. We want you to leave the course thinking about how media ought to be, and how you and others can contribute to improving them.

4 sentences/150 words is sufficient; however, you may write/speak up to 300 words if you really need it.

You are also welcome to submit an audio recording, a graphic, or a short video. But a written response is fine. If you submit an audio comment, please start with your name and where you are.

Evaluation:

Completing this assignment in good faith is worth a full 5% of your semester grade. Failure to submit or serious slacking or BSing will earn a 0. Submissions that seriously mischaracterize the argument from readings or lectures also will not receive full credit.

Feedback:

No additional feedback will be provided for this assignment. But we would like to post a selection of interesting responses on the course website. Please tell us if you are not ok with this. We will also be discussing some of them the following Tuesday in the “live podcast.”

Some Paper Writing Tips

COMS 210 – Covid Edition

0. Revised papers *always* read better than first drafts. There are no exceptions to this rule. Leaving time for substantial revision is probably the best thing you can do for your grade. Revision is the key to success. Everything you read for this class has been revised many times before it reached you.

1. Speaking of office hours, come see your prof and TA. We can help with everything from brainstorming to organization. We do not, however, copyedit, proofread or offer preliminary grades.

2. Make sure you do everything the assignment tells you to do. Students often lose points simply for not doing everything on the assignment sheet.

3. Don't just tell us, show us: explain your thinking in clear detail. Remember that we can only grade you based upon what you put in your paper. We can't guess what you're thinking.

4. Use specific concepts from the readings (and the lecture if you wish). Directly citing material from lecture and readings will help you connect the ideas in your paper to the ideas we've discussed in class. Also, be specific in your claims. For instance, rather than using a big term like "society," find a more specific term to use.

5. Don't let quotes "speak for themselves." When you cite something, be sure to tell us what it means and how it links up with your argument. Don't just drop a name or a concept.

6. Use a recognized citation style: APA, MLA, or Chicago (Chicago with footnotes is the prof's favorite, for what it's worth).

You can now view most of the Chicago Manual of Style online if you are logged in from campus or using a VPN if off campus:

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/home.html>

There are also many online guides to source citation. For instance, try

<https://library.duke.edu/research/citing/>

7. If you cite a lecture, you can just cite it thus: (Lecture 8 September). If you're using notes instead of parentheticals, just put the list it as "Lecture 8 September " in your notes.

8. Check out the wonderful resources at the Purdue Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.purdue.edu>

9. Once you have your paper written, look at each paragraph and ask yourself "so what?" Think about why this might matter to someone who's not enrolled in the course. Put the answer in as the topic sentence of your paragraph and adjust the rest of the paragraph accordingly.

10. A simple way to proofread your paper: read it out loud to yourself. If a sentence sounds

funny, it probably needs to be reworded or rewritten. Some students will make the mistake of trying to sound “academic” by putting in too much passive voice or using words without looking them up—both these techniques make your paper harder to read, not easier.

11. Often the best ideas in first drafts come at the end of paragraphs. Put your most important ideas at the top of each paragraph; use the rest of the paragraph to back up your assertion.

12. Remember that fulfilling the minimal requirements for the paper will result in a C grade. Doing a decent job gets you a B grade. If you want to go for an "A", you need to go above and beyond meeting the requirements of the assignment.

13. If you have fun with this assignment, it's more likely that we'll enjoy reading it. This is a bigger deal than you might think.

14. You can use the Writing Centre for paper help as well. Appointments are required, so plan ahead. <https://www.mcgill.ca/mwc/>

15. The Arts Undergrad Society also has an essay centre. www.ausmcgill.com/en/aus-essay-centre/

Email: aus.essay.centre@gmail.com,

Questions Assignment
COMS 210—Fall 2020—Covid Edition

Every other week on Friday, you will be asked to submit a question or comment in response to the readings and/or lecture for the week. Cumulatively, the questions assignment is worth 20% of your semester grade. Your questions score will be the average of your score on each submission.

Dates Due:

Your questions assignment due dates are determined by your last name:

Students whose last names begin with the letters L-Z will submit by end of Friday (Montreal time) the weeks of

**11 and 25 September,
9 and 23 October, and
13 November.**

Students whose last names begin with the letters A-K will submit questions by end of Friday on the weeks of

**18 September,
2, 16, and 30 October, and
20 November.**

Your question must address the reading and lecture for the date listed. If you submit a question on a lecture or reading not assigned for the given week, it will not earn credit.

There will be a special assignment for **6 November**, to be completed by all students. These will each be marked and weighted as “questions” entries, though they won’t necessarily need to be framed as questions.

See page 3 for a new option to write a multiple choice question.

Where and what to submit:

You will find the place to submit under the “Assignments” tab in MyCourses. You will need to upload a file. Allowed formats are .doc, .docx, .txt, .pdf, .html for text files; and .mp3 and .mp4 for audio files. Please name the file as follows: lastnamefirstinitialdate.extension. So if I was submitting for the 18th, it would be sternej18sep.mp3 or sternej18sep.docx .

There is also a comments box. If you wrote out your question before you recorded it, you can paste in the text there. It will speed things up a little.

Remember: the preference for audio files is only because it’ll make the answers podcast more interesting to hear. If you don’t want your name (or voice) associated with your question, there’s no reason to submit audio.

The assignment:

Questions are short written responses intended to ensure that students engage with the readings and lecture (we know you have to prioritize!), and so we can know what people are focusing on, and where they might be stuck. We use these to decide what to cover in the Tuesday answers podcast and may also make use of them in writing quiz questions.

Questions are supposed to be short. 3-4 sentences is sufficient as long as you can demonstrate you've read and thought about the piece, and/or listened thoughtfully to the lecture. Nothing over approximately 150 words.

We would *love* it if you would audio record your question, since it can then be put directly into the podcast. But a written response is fine. If you submit an audio question, please start with your name and where you are. If you submit a written question, please also tell us if we can mention you by name in the answers podcast, or if you would prefer to remain anonymous.

Here are some of the topics you might cover in your questions, depending on how well you feel you understood the material:

- Were there any topics in particular that confused you? *What about them was confusing?* References to specific page numbers, or terms in the lecture, would be helpful. It's normal to be confused. Even your prof often has questions on a first reading of something. Questions make you look smart, not dumb. Even basic ones.
- Did you find anything (an argument, a concept, a detail, an example) particularly interesting or exciting? Is there something you would like to hear more about? Or are there questions it raised for you? References to specific page numbers, or terms in the lecture, would be helpful.

An example of an audio file I might submit:

"Hi, this is Jonathan Sterne. I'm in Montreal right now. On page 23 of the Stuart Hall reading, he's talking about images of sweaters. I get what he means by denotative meaning, but what is he saying about connotative meaning? It seems to be about interpretation, but then is it just *any* interpretation? His examples of connotation don't seem to have much to do with one another; why are they important?"

That's 4 sentences plus the intro. 71 words. I cheated with a semicolon; but I love semicolons—and em dashes.²

Evaluation:

Questions are graded on a 0-4 scale. A question that fulfills the assignment earns a 3.4 (85%). A particularly spectacular question earns a 4. A question that is seriously flawed earns a 1. If

² Nerd.

you're obviously slacking or posting things that indicate you just read the title and maybe a random sentence from the middle (we can tell!), or for a non-submission.³

Feedback:

No additional feedback is provided on the questions assignment, however students are strongly encouraged to meet with a TA if they are trying hard and not scoring well on the assignment.

What if I don't have a question?

Great! You can help *us* with questions by drafting a multiple-choice question. We might even use it on the next quiz, though we might also modify it. Multiple choice questions will earn a 3 or 4 if they are constructed correctly according to the formula and the right answer is indeed right. They will earn a 1 if your correct answer is actually incorrect according to the readings or lectures, or the formatting is waaaaayyyy off.

Here is the recipe:

Your question should consist of a question stem and 4 possible answers (only one of which is correct), with the correct answer clearly indicated.

1. The question should address an important concept, fact or example covered in lecture or readings. We don't want to test on trivialities. The question should have a single, clear, correct answer.
2. You may use reading questions as the basis of your question stem if you like, or come up with your own.

The question stem should do most of the work, most of the time. Most of the ideas in the question should be contained in the stem, so that students can easily compare the different answers and judge for themselves. A good question stem always explicitly attributes ideas to a source, either an author by last name ("According to Hall,") or the lecture ("According to lecture.").

The answers should all be roughly of the same length.

The right answer should be clearly right. Usually it is best to use the exact same terminology as the reading or lecture so there is no confusion. For the purposes of the assignment, always make the right answer option A. If we use your question, we will scramble the answers.

A good exam question tests for comprehension, not recognition. A bad exam question can be answered simply by recognition (where the right answer is something you've seen or heard before and the wrong answers are obviously wrong).

³ I am happy to explain the theory behind the grading scheme here, but I will save it for when someone asks.

The following anatomy of a question is copied from the “About Quizzes” handout available elsewhere on this site.

The anatomy of a question (this is from 2013 but you’ll get the point)

According to lecture (and Peters), what motivates the drive toward communication?

- a. Miscommunication.
- b. The drive for profit.
- c. Encoding and decoding.
- d. Cute puppies.

The question stem begins with “according to” and clearly attributes the idea.

“A” is correct. As the Peters essay states, “miscommunication is the scandal that motivates the very concept communication in the first place.” (Peters, p. 6). Also the lecture refers to the technical and therapeutic discourses of communication, where communication is both the problem and the solution. The prof’s Jean Charest and Twitter example illustrated this point.

B is wrong because Peters doesn’t really talk about the profit motive (though it’s a great wrong answer because later in the term, several other authors will discuss it).

C refers to concepts in the Hall reading.

D is *hilarious*. But it also illustrates why multiple-choice exams can’t be tests of opinion. In *your* life, puppies may drive you to communicate (and therefore the example may be experientially true), they weren’t mentioned in lecture or in the Peters reading as a reason for communication.

About Quizzes

Coms 210—Fall 2020—Covid Edition

Purpose: Quizzes give you a compelling reason to keep up with the material, and make sure you know it before moving on to the next section of the course.

For this reason, we test for comprehension, not recognition.

How Quizzes Work:

Quizzes will go “live” at the end of units for 36 hours.⁴ Each quiz will be timed, and you will have to complete the quiz within the allotted time. You will be able to go back and change your answers, but the quiz will not tell you the right answer since others might be taking the quiz after you. Please come visit the prof in office hours to go over your quiz.

What’s On the Quiz:

All the required readings, and all the lectures and answers podcasts from a given unit. Additionally, we may ask one or two questions from previous units.

What We Recommend:

Study for quizzes like you would any other quiz. You might want to create a study sheet or guide so you don’t have to look everything up. Make sure you can define terms, make sure you understand authors’ main arguments, and make sure you understand the difference between those arguments and other positions authors consider, as well as the positions advanced by other authors.

How We Write Questions:

The question should address an important concept, fact or example covered in lecture or readings. We don’t want to test on trivialities. The question should have a single, clear, correct answer. Concepts, arguments, positions, implications are important. Names and dates are less important.

The question stem (which is the question part of the question) should do most of the work, most of the time. Most of the ideas in the question should be contained in the stem, so that students can easily compare the different answers and judge for themselves. A good question stem always explicitly attributes ideas to a source, either an author by last name (“According to Hall,”) or the lecture (“According to lecture.”).

Some sources for wrong answers:

- an argument the author rehearses and then dismisses
- a claim that is the opposite of what the author argues
- a claim made by a different author on a related topic
- a true statement from the reading, but one irrelevant to the question

Why it works this way:

⁴ Since some students are on the other side of the globe, 36 hours ensures students have one full waking day to do the quiz, no matter where they are located.

In the humanities and interpretive social sciences, our currency is ideas and debate, as well as historical and cultural materials. Therefore, it is important to understand who made what argument, how it relates to other arguments that author made, and how that author's line or argument relates to what others have said on the same issue.

Our tests are not tests of logic or of your opinion. They simply test your comprehension of the materials. You therefore could *disagree* with a correct answer. This is a feature, not a bug.

The anatomy of a question (this is from 2013 but you'll get the point)

According to lecture (and Peters), what motivates the drive toward communication?

- a. Miscommunication.
- b. The drive for profit.
- c. Encoding and decoding.
- d. Cute puppies.

The question stem begins with "according to" and clearly attributes the idea.

"A" is correct. As the Peters essay states, "miscommunication is the scandal that motivates the very concept communication in the first place." (Peters, p. 6). Also the lecture refers to the technical and therapeutic discourses of communication, where communication is both the problem and the solution. The prof's Jean Charest and Twitter example illustrated this point.

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