

FORMAL ASSIGNMENT 1: I Can Haz Essay – Exploring the Internet’s Impact on Language Use

Media for non-oral communication have evolved through history, from hand-made illuminated manuscripts to printed books, telegrams and newspapers, forms sent by fax machine and documents printed from early word processing computers. Now “online” media are ubiquitous, with information instantaneously transmitted and consistently available: text messages, Facebook statuses, Tumblr posts, webpage comments, e-mails, tweets, yaks, discussion boards, and other formats host thoughts, jokes, arguments, gut reactions, and stray opinions that now last indefinitely.

Alongside these new media, we’ve developed new styles, habits, and tics in our reading and writing, and a vocabulary to categorize online dynamics has emerged. We devour (or complain about) “listicles” and “clickbait” (The Ten Things You Must Do To Succeed In WRT 105”; “I Took WRT 105 with Professor Crakes and What Happened Next Is Amazing”), or “hot takes” (quick, unreflective opinion pieces immediately after news events). Online discussion groups and frequent website visitors fend off “trolls”, while written content comes with various warnings and disclaimers, whether a “trigger warning”, a “NSFW” tag, or a “tl;dr” summary. “Hash tags” and emoji pepper posts and texts.

Clearly Internet culture has developed new ways to exchange information. This assignment asks you to address a larger question: do these changes matter? Have phenomena like blogs, tweets and hash-tags altered the use and impact of language in a significant way, or are we witnessing faddish innovations (“zines”- homemade photocopied magazines- were trendy in the 1990’s, for example) and superficial changes to the ways information is packaged? You don’t need to provide an either/or response, and our readings will help you to see how different writers have approached this set of issues. You might think about how language can convey emotion (with emoji? :P), how grammar might change or bend (because the Internet), how language and images interact, or whether the pace of online communication changes how we write (Twitter happens much “faster” than e-mail).

You may use texts from the syllabus as evidence to support and develop your argument: we’ll have read about Andrea Lunsford’s optimistic account of a literacy revolution based on “kairos”, the New York Times on the emotional inflections of emojis, a scholarly work observing difficulties with tone in e-mail communication, and a linguist’s account of how we convey sarcasm in writing. **However, you will also be expected to make use of at least one academic, peer-reviewed article or book from your own independent research.** You don’t need to agree with these writers, but you should engage them as substantially as possible. You can quote these writers to strengthen your position, to provide support for your reasoning, to furnish examples or ideas you can examine in more detail, or to represent perspectives with which you want to disagree.

Focus on making a thoughtful, well-constructed argument that takes a position on its topic (with a thesis) and uses examples and textual excerpts (“quotes”) as evidence. Your thesis should make a strong claim about the impact of new media on language, but one with more precision, detail and nuance than “Everything’s better”, “Everything’s worse” or “Everything’s the same.” Specificity and precision are important, both for your language and your thinking—the two are inseparable-- and every claim should be supported as substantially as possible.

Length: 4-5 pages

Grading Criteria

A strong essay will:

1. Offer a clear, developed thesis (a strong, debatable claim) about the impact of new media and technology on language use.
2. Support its thesis with specific evidence
3. Draw on at least two texts- **one academic**- as evidence, quoting and citing them appropriately (in MLA format)
4. Present its argument in clear, correct academic prose
5. Demonstrate intelligent organization at the paragraph level (each paragraph organized around a claim and supporting evidence) and the essay level (engaging introduction, clear transitions and flow, effective conclusion)
6. Follow MLA formatting conventions (double-spaced 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins) – **guidelines forthcoming**

As stated on the syllabus, you will complete a first draft in order to receive peer and instructor feedback. A copy or copies of that first draft, with peer and instructor comments, should ultimately be submitted in the same electronic file as your final draft of the essay. **In addition, both the first and final draft should be turned in with one or two paragraphs of self-assessment at the bottom- guidelines forthcoming.**

FIRST DRAFT DUE WEDNESDAY, 9/14, BROUGHT TO CLASS FOR PEER REVIEW AND SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY BY THE END OF THE CLASS PERIOD.

INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON FIRST DRAFT WILL BE RETURNED ELECTRONICALLY BY MONDAY, 9/19.

FINAL DRAFT DUE MONDAY, 9/26, SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY BY THE START OF CLASS.