

Unit 1 Assignment: Definition Essay

What is civic writing?

“If we view social change at a micro level of interaction we can begin to see where activism fits into the particulars of daily living”
– Ellen Cushman

As we’ve seen from the first part of our course, there are multiple interpretations and definitions of civic writing, including civic participation, public writing, community engagement, activism, etc. For this first assignment, you will discuss your own sense of what civic writing is and the forms it might take in your own life. To do this, you should think about the definitions we’ve covered and the examples we have, in order to apply them to something more concrete for your own understanding.



This assignment provides you the chance to situate yourself within the conversations of our readings. To “situate” yourself does not mean that you must agree. Instead, maybe you will find some definitions you agree with and some you want to challenge. Either way, this assignment asks you to interact with the readings—to really grapple with them—in order to articulate your own understanding of civic writing.

The goal of this assignment is to better understand what it means to be a critical participant in local and global communities.



Guidelines:

Although the goal of this piece is to highlight YOUR ideas of civic writing, you must reference at least **3 texts** that we’ve read in class. Additionally, as we saw in class with the “Je Suis Charlie” posters, you will want to think broadly about the term “writing” and all that it encapsulates.

To think about civic writing in concrete terms, you might consider the following:

- **Civic issue:** You can choose a current or historic issue and discuss how it is framed as a civic issue. Here, you will want to analyze this issue rhetorically, thinking about who the stakeholders are and how civic writing is used.
- **Civic participation:** You can define civic writing in terms of your *own* experiences by reflecting on how you’ve engaged in it. You should also think about how a theoretical understanding of civic discourse might enable you to rethink (understand/challenge/impact) those experiences.

Questions to Get You Started:

- Which definitions stand out to you from the readings? Which do you agree or identify with? Find confusing? Why?
- What terms are being used, and how do they overlap or differ? For example, how does civic writing differ from community literacy, public writing, activism, etc?
- What civic issues stand out to you? Which are you most passionate about and why?
- How does rhetoric play into your understanding of these issues? How does it complicate your definition?

Specifics:

This Unit 1 Definition Essay should be approximately 1,000 words (4-5 pages), 12 pt. font, double-spaced, and formatted according to MLA guidelines (if you have questions about MLA, please let me know). This essay should demonstrate a clearly articulated understanding of what civic writing is, as well as how it might be applied to a concrete civic issue, experience, or example. You should also include a works cited page and title. You may also provide images and other elements for your argument, but they do not count for the page limit. The essay is due by midnight on **Thursday January 29 by 11:59pm**. Please email it to jmpausze@sy.edu.