

Articles Roundtable #1: Aesthetics – W Mar 6 / F Mar 1

Overview

A loosely-structured seminar discussion is the typical format of upper-level undergraduate courses as well as all graduate work (masters and doctoral level). The point of a seminar discussion is precisely that: to discuss. In the process of discussing, you are forced to clarify what you think by articulating your ideas in a clear and persuasive manner, and at the same time you learn from the wide array of perspectives and experiences that your peers bring into the conversation. The discussion may organically move to unexpected topics, but the main takeaway from a learning experience like this one is that all of your knowledge and resources are related—there is no such thing as a separation of academic subjects when you really approach a topic critically. Your familiarity with the assigned material, your own initiative in doing additional research, and your engagement with each other is what will make for an effective and enjoyable class.

The assignment

For this assignment, you will prepare one of two assigned articles (sent directly to you in an email) to discuss as a group. In class, students assigned to the first article will form a circle with their seats facing each other to have their discussion. The students not assigned to that article will form a circle around the first group, listen to their discussion, and take notes as they learn from the discussion. After approximately 30 minutes, the groups will trade places and trade roles: the first group will listen and take notes while the second group discusses.

How to prepare for an effective Articles Roundtable:

1. Read your article (skim for major points, read again closely, define words you're unfamiliar with, read again, read as much of the linked material as possible, read again, take notes, reflect on it)—in other words, do what we do in class on your own).
2. Refer to notes you've taken in class over the course of the semester, past lecture slides, and previous Online Discussions to make sure you're correctly understanding as many concepts as possible. Read additional sources as necessary to ensure that you know what you're talking about with this topic.
3. Prepare thoughts, questions, and ideas that you have about the article. Draw upon your other educational experiences, life experiences, or other expertise. Make use of the various brainstorming methods you've come across in your other classes.

Be ready to have a rich, engaging, and involved discussion with each other as an entire class. Ask each other questions. Offer comments. Respond to each other. I will not participate in this discussion.

Reflection #3 is based on what you learn from this discussion, so use it to your advantage as you prepare that piece of writing.

Grading

This assignment is graded on a scale of Credit/No credit. Any student who is present for the discussion but who receives a grade of “No credit” has the opportunity to write a thoughtful response in order to change their grade to “Credit.” Any student who is not present for this assignment will receive a grade of 0. The process letter accompanying any written rewrite should describe what you think you missed by not being able to participate in the discussion as it took place.

Good discussion and conversation come from being able to contribute three things to the experience, and each student must contribute at least high-quality examples of each of the following in order to receive a grade of “Credit” on this assignment (e.g., if it’s not high quality, it doesn’t count towards your grade):

- **Contributing your own ideas** (not just restating or summarizing what’s said in the article) – You have to have something *interesting* to say, and it should be based on verifiable, factual evidence or reasonable assumptions. A good contribution goes beyond repeating what someone else has said or summarizing the article.
- **Responding to someone else’s idea** – You have to listen to and think about what others say. A good response thoughtful, accurate, and engages with another student’s idea in a meaningful way; it’s not a repetition of something that’s already been said, a summary of the article, or inaccurate, and it doesn’t ignore what has previously been said.
- **Asking a question** – You seek to learn from the experience. The best questions are “open-ended,” meaning they can be answered in many ways, rather than framed as “yes/no” questions.
 - Example of a “yes/no” question: “Do you guys think that...” or “Has anyone ever...”
 - Example of an “open-ended question: “What happens if...” or “Why do you think that...” or “How does that work?”