# Art and Labor

Academic Writing I:
Writing in Academic and
Public Contexts

ENGL 160
Professor Sibyl
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# Art and Labor

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In her 1895 essay "Art and Labor," Hull-House co-founder Ellen Gates Starr makes the declaration that a "product of a machine may be useful, and may serve some purposes of information, but can never be artistic." Indeed, as Starr herself puts it, the moment "a machine intervenes between mind and its product, a hard, impassable barrier—a non-conductor of thought and emotion—is raised between the speaking and the listening mind." This declaration conjures the stark image of mechanized labor that would soon be captured in photographs like Lewis Hine's Sadie Pfeifer, a Cotton Mill Spinner (1908), documenting the degrading conditions of the North Carolina cotton mills. Much like Hine's photographs, Hull-House's mission straddled problems that belonged to both art and labor. It's precisely here at Hull-House, one of the first major settlements in the U.S. to support social reform, that Chicago's fin de siècle arts and crafts movement flourishes. For founders Addams and Starr, the problems of art and labor were not isolated issues but deeply related to Hull-House's central mission which sought to address problems created by urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. The arts and craft movement, positioned as a response to industrialized capitalism, called for the end of the division of labor and the beginning of a shared project of arts and labor activism.

This class explores the legacy of art and social reform central to the Hull-House settlement. Positioning Hull-House as a model of synthesis, we'll explore the legacy of art and labor in Hull-House's adjacent digital and actual archives, resituating research as an active, multimodal community-driven process. In doing so we'll take into account the objects produced by artists and activists, and the role institutions and archives play in shaping aesthetic and social discourse. Through a cross-disciplinary, hands-on approach, students will gain an understanding of public humanities contexts, while taking into consideration how archives, exhibitions, and museums shape our knowledge-based understanding. As students visit cultural institutions at UIC and throughout Chicago, they will examine how institutions historicize and continue to mobilize shared collective experience through art. How can visual art, textiles, drawings, photographs, and spoken histories serve as social documents? Claims about the world? How do curated archives shape our notions of art, labor, and experience?

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Demonstrate rhetorical awareness of audience through different genre-based assignments.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Draw connections at the level of ideas across multiple texts.
4. Defend a position in relation to the range of ideas surrounding a topic.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of peer and instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision.
6. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction.

# Integration with Hull-House Materials

*(Content adapted from original course syllabus by Hull-House educators to reflect how materials were used for in-class instruction and assignments)*

## TOPIC 1: ART, AUDIENCE & THE EXHIBITION

This unit of classes will introduce students to the process of writing an exhibition review, including how to utilize the rhetorical triangle and appeals. Excerpts from reviews of Hull-House's "Radical Craft" exhibit will be read in class, and a writing assignment on "Description, Analysis, Evaluation" will guide students' reflections after touring Hull-House. Outside of class students will read and annotate additional Hull-House material.

### READINGS

- A Mass Politics of Beauty: On Hull-House's "Radical Craft," Jason de Stefano
- Radical Craft: Firebird Community Arts and Red Line Service pick up the threads of Hull-House, Amanda Dee
- Where arts education in Chicago began, Jacqueline Wayne Guite
- "Chicago's History of Radical Art Pedagogy," Lori Waxman
- "Art and Labor," Ellen Gates Starr

## TOPIC 2: FRAMING THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

This unit of classes will introduce students to the multimedia portrait as well as processes of visual and textual analysis. The concepts of collage, photocollage, montage, and mixed media will be discussed alongside additional Hull-House material to be read and annotated outside of class.

### READINGS

- Chicago's Sculptor: Jesús Torres and Mexican Art at Hull-House
- "The Devil Baby," Jane Addams
- "I Discover Hull-House," "A Funeral," "My First Job," from *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, Hilda Satt Polacheck

## TOPIC 3: ART & LABOR

This unit of classes will introduce students to the analytical essay and guide their thinking on conducting research, crafting an argument, and concluding well. An example from Hull-House will be discussed.

### READINGS

- "The Long Endeavor: The Early Fight Against Fast Fashion at the Hull-House Settlement"

### CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to daily in-class free writing prompts (done individually or in groups), students will complete four writing projects related to museums we will visit and discuss over the semester. For these, you will be asked to work collaboratively throughout the semester on group annotations, summaries, descriptions, and analyses. This writing will be a way to practice the skills needed for your four writing projects. A final exhibition gallery will be held in the HH Residents' Dining Hall.

### IN-CLASS FREE WRITES

During almost every class meeting you will produce informal quick write or free write reflections related to the day's topic. Warm-ups may be short, individual assignments or longer writing assignments done in groups. You may be asked to share verbally in groups or with the class.

### EXHIBITION REVIEW

For this writing project you will visit an art exhibition at cultural institution in the city and critically review it. Your review will not only report on the content of the exhibition but also assess its strengths and weaknesses according to criteria you create.

### MULTIMEDIA PORTRAIT

For this writing project you will use the digital and actual archives to create a multimedia portrait. In addition, you will select information and writing strategies that best contribute to the picture you want to paint.

### ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Here you will write an analytical essay that in some way relates to Hull-House and the course theme. You will come up a topic and a way to analyze and organize your research.

### REFLECTIVE MULTI_GENRE/MODAL EXHIBITION

The final project will be a multi-genre and multimodal group exhibition in which you will reflect on your own development as a writer throughout the semester. This means that in addition to writing you must include another medium and modality.

# Sample Assignment 1

FREE WRITE ACTIVITY PART 1

NOTICE and FOCUS
As you watch *Halsted Street* what do you notice? Make a list of at least 15 details you notice.
After making your list, rank your details according to the criteria below:
1. What do you find most *interesting*?
2. What do you find most *strange*? What do you find most *revealing*?

Explore why each of your top three choices were particularly interesting, strange, or revealing in writing.

SHARE
Share your observations in pairs.

FREE WRITE ACTIVITY PART 2

NOTICE and FOCUS
As you sit in the courtyard next to Hull-House, describe the environment around you and your position to it.

Walk around the Hull-House courtyard in a half block radius in groups of 3 or 4. Write down 15 things you notice. Write a description of one thing you noticed.

DISCUSSION
How has Halsted Street Changed? What, if anything remains from the time of the video?

# Sample Assignment 2

THE EXHIBITION REVIEW

Relevant Hull-House Readings to Consider:
- Ellen Gates Starr, "Art and Labor" originally published in *Hull-House Maps and Papers* by the Residents of Hull-House (1895) in *Radical Craft: Arts Education at Hull-House* (2024)
- Waxman, Lori. *Hyperallergic*. "Chicago's History of Radical Art Pedagogy." November 19, 2024.
- A Mass Politics of Beauty: On Hull-House's "Radical Craft," *Cleveland Review of Books*, Jason de Stefano
- Radical Craft: Firebird Community Arts and Red Line Service pick up the threads of Hull-House, *Sixty Inches From Center*, Amanda Dee
- Where arts education in Chicago began, *The Reader*, Jacqueline Wayne Guite

WHAT? The Critical Review:
We turn to reviews for more than personal opinions. A review offers readers an informed opinion about an exhibit they might want to visit. We seek out reviews that offer well-supported evaluative judgments based on specific criteria. Of course, the content, focus, and the criteria of reviews vary. Each review will have its own stakes. This largely depends on your audience, exhibit, and its purpose. Imagine you work as a reviewer for a local news source. For this writing project you will visit an art exhibition at cultural institution in the city and critically review it. Your review will not only report on the content of the exhibition but also assess its strengths and weaknesses according to criteria you create. You must attend the exhibition at least once. Your writing projects will emphasize the process as well as the final product. As such, you will be evaluated on the drafts and processes that make up your final review.

Step 1:
In preparing for our first writing project, we will curate a digital archive of exhibitions and institutions available throughout UIC, the city, and nearby suburbs. This collective, small-group led digital archive will include a searchable map, the name of the institution, the hours, the exhibition dates, the name of the exhibition, a short description, keywords, and the name and link to at least one review. Choose any art exhibit listed on the course database. Be sure to choose an exhibition that is available during the time that you will be working on this writing project. You will be asked to visit this exhibition in person. You can visit any exhibit at UIC or throughout the city and suburbs. Although students will write their own reviews, they are encouraged to attend exhibitions together.

Step 2:
Take notes and keep a digital record of all your research in a folder. This includes your writing, citations, images, pdf files, articles, website links, or any other type of information you gather. Respond to prompts below.
- Familiarize yourself with your chosen exhibition before the visit. Preview the digital presence on related websites. Record the title, informative details, and content. What kind of venue is it? Who is the artist? How much, if anything, does it cost for admission? What do they lead you to expect from the exhibition? What's its focus? Who is the targeted audience?
- Prepare for Your Visit: Read up on the artist and the exhibition before your visit to get some context. Look into any relevant interviews or essays written by other critics. Get to know a bit about the artist's life, practice, and career. Take notes. These sources will support the writing of your review. As you prepare for your visit and your writing project gather supplemental notes and research materials, such as: artist statements, exhibition catalogue, recently published articles or reviews, written panels in the exhibition, academic essays, interviews with the artist and or curator, books/journals/websites about the artist.

## THE EXHIBITION REVIEW CONTINUED

Step 3:
Look up and read a few reviews of your exhibition. A strong review often references or writes in opposition to other reviews. Your review should offer a unique perspective. You will bring three annotated reviews about the exhibition you are reviewing to class according to the syllabus calendar. This means taking notes and responding to the reviews in the margins as you read.

- Place at least 3 reviews of your exhibit in your folder. If you are struggling to find 3 reviews, you may use an article written about the artist or the exhibit in place of a review.
- Do a rhetorical reading of the reviews. Take time to read and annotate your reviews with your own words. Note the language, terminology, criteria, and strategies used by the reviewer.

Step 4:
Plan to take notes and photographs at the exhibition. Bring a notebook, a writing utensil, and a phone for pictures. (Be sure to observe the rules of the exhibition. Most do not allow flash). Take notes and photograph the art and the didactic plaques that accompany them. Get a hold of the exhibition brochure for reference. Writing a review often requires more than one visit. Plan to visit the exhibition at least once, and possibly multiple times. To understand your own reaction to the exhibition, you need to visit it carefully and critically. As a critical viewer, you are not passive; you should be prepared to ask questions of the exhibition as you experience it, while noting reactions and details throughout.

Consider these 4 elements as you evaluate the content:

1. Formal techniques
2. Thematic content
3. Artistic context (relation to other artists in the specific genre and period)
4. Social, historical, and political context (how the works resonate with the social landscape: issues such as history, class, race, gender, sexuality, or the environment)

After going through the exhibition, take 20 minutes to free write whatever response immediately comes to mind without stopping.

Step 5:
Consider steps 1-4 and the guiding prompts below as you prepare your peer reviewed draft. Prepare your first full draft of the exhibition review. Aim for as much of the 1,000 words as possible. Then, review your collaborator's work by adding comments using the project description as a review guide.

- Provide a description of the exhibition. Describe what you see when you enter the space, as you move through the space, and as you round the corners.
- Pay attention to the layout of the exhibition. Where in the gallery are the images or objects placed? Where is it in the larger museum? Which exhibitions does it border? How does the physical space and the arrangement enhance or detract from the work? Is there a deliberate intent behind these choices?
- What characteristics does the work have? Is there a narrative arc? A theme or story? Is there a pattern of the way the works are grouped? Chronologically?
- Critically evaluating something doesn't mean that you criticize it, although you can. It means that you evaluate why it's important or meaningful on the basis of specific criteria. The criteria you select is up to you.
- Consider whether or not the artist is working within or responding to a particular genre, theoretical model, or idea. What are the influences? What is the context? Is the artist attempting to undermine the viewer's assumptions or deconstruct a particular idea?
- What idea, theme, concept, or topic does the exhibition emphasize?

*Who are you writing for?*

- A specific group or community? A general audience?

*What's the situation?*

- What's the exhibition's relation to the viewer? Are you writing about the reception or the value of an exhibition today? How does your exhibition relate to former examples in the genre?

*What are your criteria?*

- Is your focus on how the exhibition engages questions of representation?
- Are you interested in the exhibition's aesthetic, cultural, or socio-political value?

# THE EXHIBITION REVIEW CONTINUED

*Once you decide on an audience, the situation, and the criteria, pull it together.*
Your critique should have two goals:
- first to inform the reader about the content of the exhibition,
- and second, to provide an evaluation that gives your judgment of the exhibition.

A critical review:
- briefly describes the content of the exhibition
- and provides in-depth analysis and evaluation of its ideas and purpose.

The descriptive parts of a review should give the reader an understanding of the curator and artist's goals, while the evaluative parts should detail your assessment of the exhibition ideas with concrete examples.

*Analyze specific pieces in the exhibition.*
- This will serve as evidence to support your larger argument.
- Address the formal elements of the visual composition.
- How does these pieces relate to the larger exhibition?

*Writing the Exhibition Review:* Although there is not a set formula to follow when writing a review, below are a number of things to include as part of your critique. These should be part of a carefully constructed essay, complete with topic sentences and transitions.

*What should my exhibition review look like?*
*A successfully formatted exhibition review will have:*
- 1000 words
- numbered pages when appropriate
- your name, date, and title of the review somewhere at the top (Feel free to format your review creatively. You can format it digitally as an online post, imagine it for print in a journal, or as a spoken video.)
- images from the exhibit being reviewed

*The Introduction*
Start with Context: Include the Name of the Exhibition, Name of Artist, Name of Curator, Location of the Exhibition in your introduction.

*The Body*
- Physical Description: Give a description of the work that lets the reader imagine it. Assume the reader hasn't seen the work. Hold off on engaging in interpretation or analysis of the work.
- Art Historical / Theoretical Context: Give some background information about the art historical and theoretical context. How does the artist fit into this context?
- Information about the Artist: Include information and details about the artist that relate to the exhibition you are reviewing. Give an overview of the artist's creative practice.
- Readings, Interpretations: What is the work about? What is the central intention of the work? Come up with an interpretation based on the exhibition and your supporting sources. Here you can cite other reviews to compare or contrast with your own. Analyze several pieces in exhibition.
- Important References in the Work: Look for ways that the work references others.
- Assess the curatorial objectives of the show: What is the intent of the curator in putting this show together? Does the curator successfully achieve that aim? How could the show have been different?
- Critique the success of the curator's show: Note the curator's strengths or weaknesses in putting together the show.

*Conclusion*
Talk about why the exhibition is important and relevant. Take time to connect it with a larger ongoing sociopolitical, cultural, or aesthetic events.

# Sample Assignment 3

THE MULTIMEDIA PORTRAIT

Relevant Hull-House Readings to Consider:
- Jane Addams, "The Devil Baby," The Atlantic (1916).
- Hilda Satt Polacheck, "I Discover Hull-House," "A Funeral," "My First Job," Growing Up," from I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl (1991).

Suggested Resource:
- "Introduction to the Profile" Write What Matters, Liza Long, Amy Minervini; and Joel Gladd eds.

WHAT?
The portrait, most often associated with the intent to represent a person, seeks to capture the essence of someone or something—a place, a group, or an idea often taking sociocultural, sociopolitical, and historical context into account. So, a portrait can be based in fiction, reality, or move between the two. While the focus is on the subject, writers, like artists, announce their presence in selecting which facts, details, and descriptions to reveal. For this writing project you will use the digital and actual archives to create a multimedia portrait. In addition, you will select information and writing strategies that best contribute to the picture you want to paint. While each of your projects will engage historical and social archival material, you can choose an individual, social, or aesthetic conceptual focus. Individual portraits might draw on biographical records in addition to broader social and historical ones. Social portraits might draw on historical records alongside live interviews from community members. Conceptual portraits might draw heavily on ideas, texts, and images.

WHY?
This project will deepen our structural and conceptual knowledge of composition and the roles the maker and materials play. In addition, we will gain a deeper understanding of the relation between art and labor. In examining the archives, selecting materials, and composing our own portraits, we will prepare ourselves for the research, analysis, and composing central to the analytical paper.

HOW? Multimedia Portion
Collage:
To produce your portrait, you will engage with a technique called collage. Collage, from the French verb "coller," to glue, refers to a process of assembling different fragments of materials to produce a single composition. The individual pieces of the collage will take on a new meaning in the final composition. Your multimedia portrait will achieve something similar. By drawing together and arranging a variety of textual and visual fragments, you will produce a single meaningful portrait.

Documents:
- Archives: During this project you will engage with the Digital Archives to collect documents that reflect the portrait you are trying to create. These documents will become part of your multi-media portraits. As you examine the archives, look for writing or images that stand out to you. How might you use this writing or image to shape your portrait?
- Digital /Actual Fragments: You will be asked to use digital or actual fragments to produce your portraits. This means you can use actual or digital scraps of visual or textual materials, drawings, sketches, photographs, and other facsimiles. While it's not required for this project, I encourage you to visit Special Collections and University Archives.
- Select: Gather symbols, texts, and images that represent the subject being depicted.
- Interviews: If you choose to focus on or include a person as part of your portrait, you may want to conduct an interview. Before your interview, create a short list of questions that reflect your interest in your subject. This means you should come up with specific questions.

# THE MULTIMEDIA PORTRAIT CONTINUED

Written Portions:
Your portrait will have three pieces of writing to accompany it. The first will be the translation, the second will be an in-class peer analysis, and the third will be the artist's statement.

1. The Translation (750 words): This first piece of writing will be a translation of your portrait. For your translation you can choose a single writing genre, or like your collage, merge multiple styles. Check out the suggested genres below for ideas.
2. The Peer Analysis / Close Reading: A close reading asks you to respond to and build on the ideas presented in your portrait. Here you will produce an analysis of the documents, images, and text composing your peer's portrait. An analysis should have:
   a. an introduction to your essay
   b. an organizing statement that makes a claim about the portrait's meaning
   c. evidence from the portrait that supports that claim in the form of direct citation, description, summary, and paraphrase
   d. illustration and explanation of evidence
   e. a conclusion to your essay
3. The Artist Statement: You will produce your own artist statement to talk about the artwork you produced. Pick a focus and reflect on the project. Use the examples and the in-class questionnaire to help you draft your own.
4. Reflective Cover Page: What did you learn about yourself as a researcher, writer, and composer during this project? Reflect on the challenges and the gains you made during the process.

Step 1:
Choose a Portrait Topic: Virtually anything can be the subject of a portrait. Here you are asked to produce a portrait that in some way relates to or incorporates the HullHouse and the idea of art and labor. While you are not required to use Hull-House as the primary focus, you should incorporate one element—a photograph, an image, a drawing, a textual citation, a phrase, or idea—in your portrait. Consider what kind of portrait interests you. Will you do a portrait of an individual? A social portrait of a particular group? A place? A conceptual portrait of an idea?

Step 2:
Multimedia Portrait Digital Archive: What kinds of sources will you use to construct your portrait? Keep a list of websites, images, texts, and other sources as you work. You are required to include mixed media sources, for example, found and written texts, found and produced images, facsimiles, symbols, objects, or even video clips.

You will also conduct first hand research to shape your portrait. Spend time gathering information about your subject. As you select writing and images be sure to record what you find. Take photos and record notes. Be sure to note the archival location. For each of you this task will vary slightly. If you producing a portrait of a place, you might visit that place, take notes, and even pictures. Record the smells, sounds, and sensations associated with this place.

- In the case of a person or social group you might observe the person or group in different contexts. Remember to take notes and record details you might use later.
- If you are producing a portrait of acculturation, for instance, you might interview family members, friends, or community members who have had experiences of migration, immigration, or cultural change. If you are producing a portrait of gentrification, you might interview business owners or residents of a particular neighborhood. Alternatively, you might produce a portrait of absence. How might you demonstrate absence in a particular place or space?
- Are you interested in a particular place and its history? Its residents? Spatial elements? Architecture?
- Or alternatively, you might produce a portrait of an abstract concept, idea, or principle. Concepts like love, justice, beauty can serve as the basis of a portrait.

This project asks you to practice citation with visual and archival materials. Be sure to include a works cited page along with your project in MLA format.

## THE MULTIMEDIA PORTRAIT CONTINUED

Step 3:
Composing Your Portrait: Once you've gathered all your information and media consider how you will organize it. You can organize it spatially, visually, thematically, chronologically or any combination of those. Consider the impression you hope to convey. Will you produce a digital portrait? Will you compose a physical object?
Be aware of visual rhetorical appeals and situation.

- In what way do you want to the photo essay to address the viewer?
- How are the people in the photos interacting with each other? Their surroundings?

Step 4:
Translation of the portrait to a written form (750 words): After your portrait is complete you will "translate" it from one medium to another, a visual-hybrid to a solely written form. In doing so you will choose writing genres that translate the meaning of your portrait to your audience, and make the indirect claims of your visual art more explicit.

Step 5:
In-Class Peer Genre Analysis (500+ words): Finally, you will analyze the multimedia portrait of another student in the class. On the day the portrait is due, you will exchange portraits with a peer. Each student will complete an in-class genre analysis of 500+ words or about 2+ pages of a peer's portrait.

# Sample Assignment 4

THE ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Relevant Hull-House Readings to Consider:
- "The Long Endeavor: The Early Fight Against Fast Fashion at the Hull-House Settlement," Katie Ackerboom
- Hilda Satt Polacheck, “I Discover Hull-House,” “A Funeral,” “My First Job,” Growing Up,” from I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl (1991).

Here you will write an analytical essay that in some way relates to Hull-House and the course theme. You will come up a topic and a way to analyze and organize your research.

You can choose to write within the 4 themes and examples below:

1. Art and Hull-House
    a. Photographs and Hull-House: Documentary photos of Hull-House residents, Lewis Hines, records of Hull-house events
    b. Hull-House artists and their relationship to Muralism and Mexican art
    c. Ceramics at Hull-House – The Hull-House Kilns, Mexican Ceramic Artists
    d. Hull-House artists and their relationship to African American art
    e. Art as a form of sociopolitical opposition to increasingly industrialized labor
    f. Hull-House and the transnational arts and crafts movement
    g. The theater as a central organizing force at Hull-House
    h. The importance of the architecture of the Hull-House settlement and its relation to the figures like Frank Lloyd Wright or Daniel Burnham
    i. How artist representations of the founders have influenced our perception of Hull-House (Alice Kellogg)
    j. How Hull-House projected its image in its Bulletins
    k. Literary works related to Hull-House
2. Art, Labor, and Hull-House
    a. Child labor
    b. Childhood and art in the context of Hull-House
    c. Art educators at Hull-House and their relation to the surrounding communities
    d. Hull-House and the labor movement
    e. How reformers like Starr, Kelley, and Addams saw the relationship between art and labor
    f. Art as a form of sociality or politics
3. The Changing Face of Hull-House and its Community Legacy: Hull-House, Art, and Representation
    a. How did poets, writers, and artists represent Hull-House or the communities it served?
    b. How did poets, writers, and artists call attention to Hull-House’s failure to serve particular communities?
    c. How does the legacy of Hull-House and its commitment to art live on in neighboring communities? Consider the relationship between Hull-House the Mexican Museum of Fine Art, Maxwell Street and Blues artists,

## THE ANALYTICAL ESSAY CONTINUED

From there you will produce a thesis as a way to talk about your topic.

You should draw from at least 2 archival primary sources and 5 secondary sources to support your claims. These sources will support your argument about the claim being made in your central document. Your secondary sources can be taken from multiple genres but should include at least two peer reviewed journal articles. You will follow the conventions of academic writing with MLA citations of your sources and a works cited page.

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