

# Writing in the Humanities

## □ Overview

- Disciplines: english, philosophy, performing and fine arts, history, and foreign languages
- A writer in the humanities seeks to analyze, interpret, argue, and/or explain thoughts, reactions, ideas, and emotions.
  - The humanities explores questions that deal with human values, with the goal of explaining or understanding the human experience.
- Research is tightly interwoven with reading and writing. These skills, reading and writing, are integral to the process of research itself.
- These disciplines often deal with questions that have no definitive answer, such as what is justice? Or what are the properties of truth?
  - It is not about finding **the** answer so much as finding **an** answer that is compelling and authoritative.

## □ Evidence and Methods

- The evidence used is textual.
  - Writers work mostly with written documents, but films and paintings are also fair game (we "read" them as texts as well).
  - Writers read these texts closely, looking for patterns, examining the language, and identifying what is present or absent. It is the interpretation of these texts that is the center of the humanities.
- Pattern of Discourse
  - When a writer makes a claim it is usually supported with textual evidence. The writer then discusses the significance of the text. This pattern is repeated until the argument is sufficiently made.
  - Each claim is supported and discussed before the next claim is considered. This is different from the sciences where the discussion is held off until the methods and results have been supported.

## □ Style

- The language tends to value more richness and diversity, as opposed to clarity, concision, and precision in the sciences. This is a generalities as many disciplines, such as philosophy, which value both pretty equally.
- Paragraphs tend to be longer as the result of longer compound sentences being more common.
  - Writing in the humanities allows for more use of images and metaphors for parallel structures to manage long, complex thoughts.
- As a general rule, authors are active, not passive, in their voices.

## □ Challenges Writing in the Humanities

- Structure
  - Form is dictated by content. In other words, **what** you intend to say will determine **how** you are going to say it. So figuring out the best possible structure is difficult
  - Additionally, being able to manage very broad, complex ideas and fields of study can be a daunting task
  - These structure, organization challenges can be off-set, to a degree, through preparation and planning. Outlines, mind-maps, and other planning processes will help identify the form your writing will likely take.
- Focus and Relevance
  - In addition to the above point, it can feel overwhelming to find countless perspectives and not know what to focus on or leave out. It may feel like all thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird are valid (thanks Wallace Stevens), so determining what to write about and simultaneously not lose yourself in your text will take careful consideration.
  - Similarly, asking what is relevant for my argument and text, and then how to make it clear and linear, create challenges for any writer in the humanities.