Unit 1 Assignment: Definition Essay
What is civic writing?

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

– Thomas Ehrlich, Civic Responsibility and Higher Education (vi)

There are a number of different definitions for civic writing (and civic participation and civic discourse), public engagement, and what it means to craft a civic consciousness. For your first formal assignment, you will map out your own understanding of civic writing and what it means to participate in civic issues, applying that understanding to something concrete.

This first assignment is a starting point for situating yourself within the conversations of our readings and to begin positioning yourselves as civic, rhetorically-minded beings. In our early readings, we see arguments that this generation simply lacks a sense of civic consciousness—a desire to be active and engage with public issues. I’d like you to keep these arguments in mind as you parse out your own definitions of what it means to be civic and engage with public issues: How do you depart from or align with these assumptions? What is civic writing generally, and what specifically can it do for you? The goal of this assignment is to encourage you to critically consider the scope of civic writing and how it relates to you as members of local and global communities.

Opinion Section (The Daily Orange)

Callaghan: Dining halls on SU campus should follow Sadler’s new trayless dining system for environmental benefits
By Meg Callaghan | August 27, 2013
With the excitement that comes along with the start of any semester, one recent development proves to make our eating habits a little greener and... Read more »

EDITORIAL
Obama should think long term, provide details on college affordability plan
By The Daily Orange Editorial Board | August 27, 2013
President Barack Obama must provide more details and think in the long term about the latest government proposal he has laid out for millions of... Read more »

How do letters to the editor frame civic issues?
Guidelines.

In order to form our opinions, we draw on the work of others—weighing ideas and picking particular understandings in order to craft our own. **You must reference three readings** from this unit that have informed your understanding of civic writing. Though not required, you may consider choosing readings that take different perspectives and push on what “writing” can be.

In terms of applying this definition to something concrete, there are a couple ways you might approach this:

- **Civic issue:** You can choose a current (or historic) issue and discuss how it is framed rhetorically as a civic issue.
- **Civic experience:** You can define civic discourse in terms of your own experiences (whether past or current), critically reflecting on your own engagement with civic issues and how a theoretical understanding of civic discourse might usefully impact (or might have impacted) those experiences.

Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:

- What definitions did you find really useful from the readings? Which ones did you disagree with or find confusing or troubling?
- How is civic engagement different from participation, and how do these differ from activism? How does civic writing differ from civic discourse?
- What issues do you care about, and how does writing or rhetoric play a role in how those issues are constructed and conveyed as important to the public?
- Do you consider yourself to be civic-minded?

The Deets.

The Unit 1 Definition Essay should be approximately 1,000 words (4-5 pages), 12 pt. font, double-spaced, and formatted according to MLA guidelines. Your essay should demonstrate a clear understanding of civic writing and how it can be applied to a particular civic issue or personal experience. Please include a Works Cited page and an appropriate title. The essay is due by midnight on **Tuesday, September 24**. Please email it to **ahhitt@syr.edu**.

Manning Mural, NYC (Instagram)

Is this civic writing?