

## “Easy” and “Hard” Texts (and Genres)

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ENGL 596

Writing strategies we’re working on here:

**Rhetorical analysis:** analyzing audience expectations (readers of your genres, class colleagues), balancing audience expectations with your own. **Critical thinking, reading, and writing:** identifying and analyzing genres, using evidence from text (the genres you select), developing ideas through writing and reading. **Processes:** using writing and reading to develop ideas, working collaboratively on writing, reflecting on your writing processes. **Knowledge of conventions:** understanding conventions of various genres, using conventions associated with standard written English, practice using citation systems. **Use of technology:** Using computers to draft written work.

Reading for this assignment: Ron Suskind, “Fierce Intimacies”; Earl Shorris, “On the Uses of a Liberal Education II: As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor”

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Part of the experience (and, perhaps, the challenge) of coming to college is that you encounter all kinds of different texts – reading, writing, visual, verbal, even experiential – that you might not have experienced before. Part of the benefit (and, again, perhaps the challenge) of being in college is that you get to (and/or have to) develop new strategies to navigate among these more challenging texts. It’s likely, in fact, that these texts have elements in common – things that make them part of the same *genre* (a word that is used to refer to a group of texts that have similarities, like “the genre of rock music” [which might include the Rolling Stones, Avril Lavigne, and Smashing Pumpkins]). This assignment is designed to help you start thinking about what strategies you’ve developed from texts (and genres) you like and how they might help you with texts (and genres) that aren’t as familiar to you.

This is a multi-step assignment (see below). When you finish it, you’ll want to have a response to the questions: **what texts are easy and hard to you, why are they easy or hard, and what strategies (reading, writing, thinking...) do you use to work in these texts?**

You’ll focus your response to this question on two specific texts from two different genres, one that you find easy to read and/or write and one that you consider hard to read and/or write.

To develop the evidence you’ll need to think through, address, and support your response to this question, you’ll first need to choose two texts. What’s easy to you? What’s hard? What genres do these texts represent? For instance, if you say “my biology textbook” is hard, you might say it’s part of the genre of textbooks, or of the genre of school-based

writing, or of the genre of scientific writing. Whatever genre you choose, you'll want to explain why this genre (as illustrated through this text) is easy or hard for you. For that explanation, you'll want to reflect on your own experiences as a reader, writer, and human being. What has made this easy or hard? Perhaps it's your previous experiences with the genre – in a class, in your life, or in some other setting? Perhaps it's a person who influenced you enormously in your work with this genre? Whatever the case, you'll want to provide abundant detail about what strategies you have used to approach this text (in this genre) and how your approach has affected your experience of its ease or difficulty.

The schedule for this assignment:

### **Short Essay One**

For this short essay, write about the easy text you've chosen. What is it? What genre does it represent? Spend most of the SE thinking about your approach to it. What makes it easy for you to read? Is it the content? The form? For example, if you've chosen the ESPN.com web site, what makes it easy? Your passionate interest in sports? It's likely that what makes something "easy" is a combination of the content, the design, and your interest (at least!), so when you write about this you'll want to be very specific about each of those things. Then, think about what experiences have led you to develop the strategies you have for working through this text. How did you learn to read it? (For instance, again using the ESPN.com site as an example, you might write about how you learned to read sports statistics.) Who helped, and what strategies did you develop with their assistance?

### **Short Essay Two**

Again, in this SE you'll look really closely at a genre and your processes for approaching it—but this time, you'll work with the hard text. What genre does this text represent? Again – content? Form? When you encounter it, how do you? Then, think through the experiences that have led you to define this as a hard text. Is it just that you haven't encountered this text as often as the easy text? Or did you have experiences that led you to think of this as hard? (For example, my hard text involves reading statistics; I can point to problematic experiences in math classes beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade that led me to believe that I was not able to understand mathematics.)