

The Commonplace Book

Every week this quarter, you'll make an entry in the class Commonplace Book.

Commonplace books have been used throughout history to record interesting quotes and memorable ideas that people want to remember, add to, comment on, etc. This particular commonplace book is in part aimed at creating just such a resource, but it also has a more specific purpose: helping you generate topics, ideas, questions, and issues that you'll be able to choose from in writing the major paper capstone for the course. Additionally, the commonplace book is a place for you to critically engage with sources and current events.

This assignment comes with two parts, explained below.

Part One: By 11:59 PM on Sunday of each week, you should post to the Commonplace Book about one news story that interested you in the last week. There are a couple of restrictions here: the article should come from a reliable news source (more on that below), and you should be able to explain why you thought this news story might be relevant to this class. This might mean that it relates to universities in some way, to education, to communication, or to any of the themes or discussions that emerge throughout the quarter-- i.e., you've found an article about Jewish populations in Europe that you think connects to our discussions on Shylock, or you've found an article on campus inequalities that connects to something Zadie Smith mentioned in "Speaking in Tongues," or you've found an article that reminds you of what one of your classmates said on Wednesday. Articles do not need to be in English or published by English-language news organizations; any source that you evaluate as reliable and trustworthy is fair to use.

Your post should include:

1. The title, author, and publisher of the article, and a link if it's an online article. For example: "Obama Strikes Back at Russia for Election Hacking," by David E. Sanger, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/us/politics/russia-election-hacking-sanctions.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=span-ab-top-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&r=0> (Links to an external site.)
2. One sentence explaining why this article interested you and how you think it connects to class.
3. One quote from the article that you think is important, interesting, well-written, or especially relevant. (If the article is in another language, you can translate the quote if you want, but you aren't required to do so.)
4. A brief statement on the reliability of your source. Why do you think this source is reliable?

Part Two: By Tuesday at 11:59 PM, you must respond to one of the articles posted by a classmate. This doesn't have to be a long response; it should be around 2-3 sentences. Here are some examples of ways that you could respond:

- Note ways that this article connects to something else that you've read or heard about
- Note ways that this article connects to your experience
- Suggest a related source or reading that might be useful to the person who posted the article

- Bring up anything that's changed in the news since the article was written
- Complicate the article by directing attention to another source that approaches the same subject from another perspective--make sure that this is also from a reliable source!
- Find other ways that this article relates to class discussions, readings, assignments, etc. This might mean the way it relates to our class, or to other classes you're taking

By the time you need to write the major paper, hopefully you will have a strong sense, based on your own reading and what others have discovered, of a topic, problem, or question that you'd like to explore!

A Note On Sources

Finding reliable sources can be tricky, especially in the digital era. Much of our news comes through social media, click bait headlines, or second or third hand through news sources that react rather than report. Some of that is probably all right; our friends often do know things we don't know or hear about stories before we do, dramatic headlines are sometimes warranted or harmless, and reading reactions can be a useful way to situate our own feelings. However, the massive amounts of claims and stories on the internet can also create difficulties in assessing information and recognizing a good source from a questionable one. As you continue through 109 and 110 (especially in 110), you'll encounter an emphasis on scholarly sources vs. non-scholarly sources, but scholarly sources play a very small part in most of our lives outside of our specialized fields. Most of us get information through other sources. Some of those sources are extremely reliable; others are less so. Here, I am going to include questions you can ask yourselves when trying to decide if a source is reliable or not:

1. Pay attention to the domain name! Even when sites look legitimate and professional, they may not be. Many domain names will try to trick you by resembling other news sources, so make sure it's the real ABC news or New York Times, and not a name that seems *close* to the name you recognize.
2. Check for an "About Us" section. A legitimate news source will name the company, name the leadership and affiliations, and name an editorial staff.
3. Is there an editorial staff? This is crucial. Everyone makes mistakes, but a good news source will try to limit their mistakes by employing an experienced editorial staff that checks stories submitted by reporters before publishing them. They check sources, quotes, facts, etc.
4. Consider the word choice of the headline and the story. Does it sound melodramatic or overblown? Does the complete story match the headline and support what the headline claims?