

Unit Three, Predraft One (P3.1)

The essay assignment for Unit Three calls upon you to analyze a phenomenon having to do with computers, presenting this information for an audience that is not very familiar with your chosen phenomenon. While the bulk of your essay will be devoted to an exploration of the meaning or significance of your phenomenon—what it can tell us about computing, human beings, technology, modernity, etc.—some part of your essay will have to describe the phenomenon in enough detail so that you can go on to analyze it effectively. One of the challenges of this sort of essay is offering a description of your phenomenon for your reader that is interesting enough to draw her in, compelling enough to convince her that there is something worth studying about this phenomenon, and informative and accurate enough to serve as a basis for your analysis, all while leaving room for your analysis and without drowning out your own voice. This predraft exercise asks you to focus on this “descriptive” moment of your essay.

In no more than four hundred words, or about three paragraphs, offer a concise and gripping description of your phenomenon. Imagine your reader as a modern American person who happens not to be familiar with the particulars of the phenomenon you have chosen. Your description should make the thing sound like it is worth studying, probably by highlighting certain strange or initially inexplicable aspects of this phenomenon. You are effectively providing the exposition of a story, setting up the elements that are intriguing, but not yet launching into the actual plot.

Often, an essayist will rely on the colorful accounts of others, perhaps participants or witnesses, to provide an exciting description of the object under study. You are welcome to use the best words of other authors as small or large parts of your description, provided, of course, that you include appropriate citations. Not only does this technique make for lively descriptions, and not only does it add to the truth-claim of your description (because it comes from an eyewitness), but it also brings your reader closer to the object of study, in some cases by placing it before her. For example, if you provide a transcript of an IM conversation, you are not just describing your object of study, you are actually offering that object to your reader.

In addition to your descriptive paragraphs, please list the sources you plan to use in your essay. Indicate which of these sources is the raw or untheorized one. (You may have more than one such untheorized source, but you must have at least one.)

This assignment is due, by e-mail (in-line) on Tuesday, November 1, before class. I may also ask you to bring a copy to class on Thursday, November 3, for peer editing.