Ongoing Web Project

We will engage in a semester-long web project throughout ENG110. This project will comprise 200 points for the class, and it will be the forum where you will present the majority of your writing for this course.

On Friday, August 22, the class will break into five groups of five. The group that you become a part of will be your group throughout the semester, and much of your success in the class will depend on your interaction with them and, to some extent, on forces beyond your control. If you do not like the sound of that, you should consider dropping this class. If you decide to stick with it, I would encourage you to choose your group wisely. It is important to choose a topic / focus that everyone in the group feels comfortable with, and that will allow you all to remain enthusiastic and focused throughout the semester.

Early in the course, you will be creating a thorough outline for your website, which you will eventually create and publish after Spring Break. In it, you will describe your overall focus, as well as a description of how your site will evolve over the five weeks that it will be in operation. Each week there must be at least five new essays published to your site, including (presumably) one feature in each update. The outline that you create in week four will serve as a contract, where you will describe the writing that each of you will do for each of the five writing assignments (you should also, if possible, describe any “bonus content” or additional writing that you will do for your website). For the outline/contract, though, I’m primarily interested in your description of your various larger assignments and how all twenty-five will function within the context of your website.

I can’t stress enough how much preparation and thought should go into both your overall concept, and into making your writing assignments work together to form a cohesive website. If you do this correctly, and stick to your outline, it should make it easier in those five weeks that you will be operating your websites. This is a seriously backloaded class, with virtually all of your writing due in that five-week period of operation, so it’s important to get some writing done before that period begins. (This is why there is a “Leak” assignment, which is explained on another sheet.)

I will provide feedback on your outlines, though there are no points associated with them. They will be the first impression that your group makes on me, and I will keep them throughout the semester. However, you will have the opportunity to revise your outlines, as needed.

I’m giving you very few guidelines for your website. The primary goals of your website are to have and clearly present a specific focus, to establish a recognizable identity for your site, and to evolve somehow over the course of five weeks. You should have a specific goal – to showcase a style of music, to reflect or promote the work of a band or bands, to discuss a trend, to highlight a set of issues; there are many ways to interpret this task, and that’s deliberate. I want you to have a lot of freedom here, though I’m going to provide feedback on your outline which will hopefully help to keep you moving in the right direction. You can also interpret the word “evolve” in whatever way you wish – you can move weekly through different parts of a band’s career, you can cover five perspectives on an issue relating to the music industry, you can discuss a number of sub-genres of a particular type of music. The most important thing is that, however you approach it, this movement and this focus needs to be clearly represented on your website; throughout the five weeks, you also need to establish a clear and coherent identity for your site. We will view and discuss a number of websites throughout the course (broader webzines, such as rollingstone.com, pastemagazine.com, cokemachineglow.com, and pitchforkmedia.com, fansites for an individual artist, such as www.ateaseweb.com, www.greenplastic.com, or even something like www.bighairmetal.com), but ultimately the design and the focus of your website is up to your group.
At some point during the five-week run of the course, each group will present its website, hosting a party (which I will continually refer to as a “launch party,” in reference to my favorite episode of *The Office*) for the class; during this presentation you will discuss your website’s focus, highlight some of the essays and the content available on it, demonstrate your identity to the class, and describe the overall evolution of your site. Of course, the main purpose of any launch party is to generate interest, and this is the primary goal of your presentation. Over the course of those weeks, we will go “on tour” to the various sites in the class, and you will get a chance to see everything that the class has produced (at some point, I also hope to get some interaction among my three courses of 1102). Obviously, you will want your presentations to be entertaining, interactive, and informative for your audience members. How you do this is entirely up to you; the presentation will last 50 minutes, and it is worth 50 points (5% of your overall grade).

**Feature Writing Assignment**

This will be your primary written assignment for this course. It will comprise 20% of your overall grade (in addition to its inclusion on your website, where it will be graded as a part of that site), and it is your primary written work for this course. It must include a research component of some kind; in other words, while it doesn’t have to be a research paper (indeed, it should not be a straight research paper), it must somehow involve research of some kind, and it must include citations of some kind (since the paper will be published online, I will not require MLA citation). Furthermore, it must include a thesis – it must attempt to prove a point, not merely provide information about a topic. But what will really separate this from your other four writing assignments is depth – I expect you here to cover a topic with a level of depth that would be impossible in a shorter piece.

I expect each of your features to be somehow related to the topic of your website, but feel free to be a bit fuzzy on this. They don’t all have to approach the same aspect, or take the same approach. Some variety in terms of these things would definitely be good.

But this is really the place of be selfish; **it is your job as an individual to make this the best piece of writing that you have ever created in your life.** I’m looking for a word count of 2500-3000, which is about 6-9 pages in MS Word. Please don’t worry if it turns out a little longer, or even a little shorter – just so long as it doesn’t feel too long, or too short. Also, feel free to be creative in terms of topic and approach. Rock n’ roll writing works best when it is interesting and when it engages readers. If you have specific questions about ideas, I strongly encourage you to email them to me or ask me about them after any class. We will read a variety of examples throughout the class, but it is important to develop your own style as a music writer. You should not attempt to model your writing too closely on any of the writers that we read in this class, though you can certainly adapt qualities and techniques for your own work.

**Mid-Length Writing Assignment**

Apart from your feature, this mid-length assignment is the weightiest writing assignment that you have in this class. The required word count here is 1200-1500 words, and obviously it won’t be as long as your feature, but it really is a place to take a risk. If you have a great idea that maybe isn’t quite serious enough for your feature and that won’t fit as a short essay, then it might be perfect for this mid-range assignment. This assignment is worth 100 points, or 10% of your overall grade.

**3 Shorter Writing Assignments**

In addition to these two longer essays, you must write three shorter (500-1000 words) pieces. Unlike the two larger assignments, these really should be designed largely to function within your website. While they will be graded on their own merits as stand-alone pieces of writing, the fifteen shorter
writing assignments will go a long way toward creating a believable context for your website (rather than just collecting a bunch of longer essays). You can, and should, use these as a way of establishing weekly features.

The Big Picture

For all of your writing assignments, there are a variety of styles, structures, and approaches that you can exhibit. Whichever type of article(s) you choose to write, there are a few governing principles. First, whatever you do, make sure that your writing is grammatically correct and uses effective sentence structure. Next, you need to display effective writing for the style that you choose; if you choose an interview, the writing needs to be appropriate for interviews - if you choose a review, etc. Next, although each assignment will be graded as an individual piece of writing, you should also always be thinking about how the piece of writing fits into the context of your website (since, at the end of the term, your website and all of its writing will be graded as a whole). In addition, make sure that, whichever piece you are writing (one of your three “short” essays, your mid-length, or your feature), you meet the length and depth requirements of that assignment.

Lastly, be sure that your writing assignment shows off your ability as a writer. You should be trying to impress your readers with the writing, with the structure, and with the content. Music writing is often designed to entertain, and you should keep that in mind throughout, but don’t feel bound by that principle alone. Music writing can also inform, persuade, and do a lot of other things beyond simply entertain, and I’m anxious to see how each of you approaches this project, hopefully in compelling ways that I haven’t even thought of. In The Smiths’ song “Ask,” Morrissey sings “If there’s something you’d like to try, ask”. Although Morrissey is definitely not talking about a writing assignment, that’s a pretty good way to think about the assignments for this class. If you have an idea that kind of fits, or that you’re not quite sure what to do with, please come to me (or your group) with it, and we can discuss how you might make it work. While I won’t promise what Morrissey does (“Ask me, I won’t say no, how could I?”), I will certainly think about how you might fit it into the class.

Here are a number of types of music writing that you might be interested in creating. Any of these can function as feature, mid-length, or short writing assignment.

**Review** (movie, music, song, album)
People love to read reviews. I am addicted to them, honestly, and I read reviews both of music I have heard and of music I have yet to hear. The point here is that a good review is a tough thing to write, because you have to account for both types of readers potentially. In addition to writing an insightful and analytical description of your chosen text (a few ideas – a song, an album, a movie, a concert), you also have to make your review an entertaining piece of writing, something that a reader enjoy enough to read the entire piece. Feel free to think outside the box (what an annoying phrase – think outside the case, how bout that?) in terms of what you are reviewing, and how you approach the task.

**Weekly columns**
Weekly columns are a great way to establish continuity, and build a readership, within your webzine. Things like reviews, journals, blogs, Q&As, advice columns, etc. can easily be turned into weekly columns, and the work can be divided among group members. This puts heavy importance on the planning (to make sure that you have someone to write the column each week and count it as a short assignment), but, as I said before, it’s a great way to establish an identity for your webzine.
Technology report
Here I’m imagining you discussing some sort of technological development in relation to music. If there’s something you’re interested in, this is a great opportunity to research it. Be sure with this (like with all these assignments) that you have a thesis, rather than simply compiling information.

Industry issue
Often, music writing tackles issues outside of music, including things such as political and ethical issues. Rolling Stone, in particular, often steps outside the boundaries of music to tackle issues that may only be tangentially relevant to music. Other magazines also deal with issues that perhaps aren’t directly related to music, but that somehow affect the music industry. If an issue of this kind interests you, or could somehow fit into your website, you might consider this type of essay.

Letter from the Editor
You might consider having some sort of introductory or explanatory essay for each week of your website that basically outlines what you will be doing that week, and discusses the essays presented on the site. This is a great idea (although not mandatory) that would allow you each to function one week as “editor”, and it would help clarify the goal of each week of your webzine.

Interview
A great interview can provide insight like no other piece of writing. It is a chance to go directly to the primary source and, unlike quoting from a song or another article or interview, present fresh primary text that only you possess. I realize that it’s unlikely that you’ll score an interview with the majority of bands that we will be discussing in class or writing about on our websites… but don’t let that stop you from trying. And don’t let that scare you away from doing an interview of some kind. Celine Dion isn’t returning your phone calls? How about her husband (that old bald guy)? Or a roadie who works on her stage show? Or someone from her record label? You’d be surprised what a little charm, your status as a student, and the recognizability of “Georgia Tech” will do for you.

Think big with your interviews – but be sure to create a backup plan if your big idea doesn’t pan out.

Writing up your interview is, of course, as big a challenge as getting and holding your interview. A simple transcript of an interview will likely be very boring, so it’s important to decide how to frame your interview. Will you include only a written intro and conclusion, with the interview written out in Q&A style? Or will you intersperse the interviewee’s responses throughout your own writing during the entire article? Keep in mind: there are many ethical issues and details involved with interviews. We will discuss these in class, but they include asking permission to tape an interview, editing quotes for print, etc. Keep these in mind when planning and preparing for your interviews.

Personal narratives
Personal narrative is a very important and common writing style, and it can certainly be incorporated into most of these types of music essays in this list. Much of what we read in this class will contain aspects of the personal narrative, and this is quite likely something that you will want to use in the pieces you write for this class.

Other
If you have an idea for some other piece of writing that would fit this assignment and that would contribute to your website (and that would showcase your writing), I encourage you to write it.
Final Writing Assignment

The last act of any good writing class should always be reflection. Reflection is a vital process because it shows a level of self-awareness that we need to have if we hope to continue improving in whatever we do. This class is about writing, yes, but it is also about understanding our place within the realm of rock music and pop culture, understanding how the sources that we take in do, in some sense, define who we are and what we aspire to in our lives.

For this reason (and because writing 4-6 page self-reflection essays sounds really boring), your final project will ask you to create a soundtrack to your life. Please interpret that task in whatever way you wish. Should the songs be about your life (in terms of lyrics, etc.)? Should they be songs that are meaningful to me (but maybe have no relation to my life other than that)? Should they be songs that represent different periods of my life?

The answers to those questions are entirely up to you. The only requirements for this assignment are these:

- You must burn a CD of your soundtrack and submit it to me on the final day of class.
- You must also submit a 2-3 page “Liner Notes” essay, where you provide some sort of explanation for your soundtrack. Feel free to provide a song-by-song commentary, or a more general description of your selection process. Please, though, attempt to present a polished piece of writing here. In a somewhat blurry assignment like this, grammar is an easy way to deduct points.

You will be graded on the following:

- Does your CD present a coherent attempt to “soundtrack” your life?
- Is there some governing principle or idea at work in the CD?
- Does your essay effectively present this principle or idea?
- Is the essay well-written, using interesting sentence structure, compelling style, and correct grammar?
- Does the project demonstrate some kind of creativity in presenting the CD, the liner notes, or both?