

ENGL 1101

Professor Lucas Kwong

Unit 4: Conversation Essay Assignment, due Tuesday, November 10.

Skills: Orchestrating a conversation among various writers and ideas in order to forward and support your own idea; close reading; use of more than one source.

Percentage of Final Course Grade: 15%

Word Count: 700-900 words

Readings: One from List A, One from List B.

List A

“Is Google Making Us Stupid?” by Nicholas Carr

“Is the Internet Making You Smarter?” by Clay Shirky

List B

“Raiders of the Lost Web,” by Adrienne LaFrance

“If You’re Not Paranoid, You’re Crazy,” by Walter Kirn

“Get Smarter,” by Jamais Cascio

Assignment Description

Find an exhibit that invites a *scholarly conversation* on the benefits and costs of technological progress in a digital age. You might focus on a recent current events situation that represents any one of the following: the future of hardware and wetware; the prospect of artificial intelligence; digital technology and neuroscience; online dating; etc. Make a claim about how you are using the term “technology” with reference to *both* your exhibit *and* your conversation texts. Your argument should offer a close reading of your exhibit that engages the varying positions of 2 readings.

1 of your sources *must* be either Carr *or* Shirky; the other should be from List B. By orchestrating and contributing to a scholarly conversation surrounding technological progress, your essay should bring the reader to a new understanding of your exhibit in relation to that conversation.

A reminder about vocabulary: An “exhibit” can be a text, an event, a performance, a speech, an image, or anything that can be interpreted and carries the potential for rich analysis. We use the term “exhibit” rather than “example” to connote a site of sustained and expansive engagement. While an example merely affirms an argument, an *exhibit* is dynamic. For example, the exhibit itself may raise problems with our status quo understanding of technology. Through careful analysis, our developing ideas about the exhibit may change or challenge our initial assumptions.

Dates

Due **Tuesday, October 20: Read Shirky’s essay and annotate.** Write a 200 word **blog post** in which you imagine you are an alien reporting back to your home planet on the question, “What is the Internet?” Answer using *one* sentence from Carr and *one* sentence from Shirky. One of these must *begin* your blog

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post, and the other one should *end* it. Try to avoid *merely* summarizing Carr OR Shirky; instead, try to come up with a definition that relies, to a degree, on the arguments of both articles.

Due Tuesday, October 27: Conversation Essay pitch. Pick one of the “good” exhibits, or a similar one of your choice + one other essay on technology that you have read. Write a pitch to a potential editor, proposing an essay that creates a new argument out of the ideas you have encountered, revolving around the exhibit of your choice. How does your project build on some of the major thinkers on the subject of re-visioning the Internet? What are the stakes? The pitch should be 500 words long and should distill **the argument of both of your texts. Each distillation should be at least 3 sentences long.** Bring a copy to class and upload electronically to Blackboard. This will function as an **outline** for your draft.

Friday, October 30: Rough Draft of Conversation Essay due electronically by 4 pm. Comments via Blackboard on the weekend.

Tuesday, November 3: Bring your draft for peer review in Writing Lab.

Tuesday, November 10: Final Draft of Conversation Essay due both online and in physical form, at the beginning of class. Attach to the back of the essay 1) a brief paragraph describing your revision strategy, and 2) a copy of your partner’s peer review comments.

Format

Your final essay must:

- 1) be submitted in a .doc format,
- 2) include an italicized title (NOT “Conversation Essay”!)
- 3) have a header with your surname and page number on the top right corner of each page,
- 4) have your *name*, *assignment name* (i.e. Conversation Essay Final Draft), *course and section number*, *instructor name*, and *due date* on the top left corner of the first page.

Essays that fail to comply with these essential conventions of academic writing will be penalized.

The top of your essay should look like this:

Maximus Carter
Conversation Essay Final Draft
English 1101, D339
Professor Lucas Kwong

November 10, 2015

Title of your essay