

The Blog for Interactive Literature

Weblogs or “blogs” have become a near ubiquitous part of contemporary digital culture. To all appearances, seemingly everyone and everything has a blog devoted to it. From supplanting previous forms of print journalism with sites like *The Huffington Post*, to blogs completely devoted to a person’s cat, they are a unique and new form of cultural expression, and *everything* is getting expressed. Perhaps most clearly, blogs represent a world of increasing access to information, of instantaneous publication, and of an unprecedented level of individual cultural visibility.¹ As such, for our particular engagement with interactive literature, a blog provides us with a unique object to think about in terms of textual production and interpretation, as well as being a dynamic tool for critically commenting upon texts.

As noted in the syllabus, we will be keeping a blog during the course of the semester. By Friday, January 16th you should be signed up as an author of the blog and be ready to participate in its composition. The blog’s name is *Interactive Literature, Spring 2015* and can be found at <http://interactivelitspring2015.wordpress.com/>.

Directions

- 1) Check your pitt.edu email address. I will be sending you an email after the first day of class inviting you to be an author for the blog. Note: *check your spam folder*. You can access your spam folder through the “Spam/Virus Message Center Login” link on the right side of your Pitt homepage. In the past, Pitt’s email service has routed invitations from Wordpress.com into this folder, so if you have not received an email from me by the second day of class, please check this folder. If there is still no invitation there, email me ASAP and I will resend you an invitation.
- 2) Click on the first link in the email (or if viewing it in HTML, click on “Accept Invitation”). The link will take you to a window that will allow you to create a Wordpress.com account. Please follow the directions to create an account and write down your username and password somewhere safe. *I ask that you choose a pseudonym for your username* (i.e., do not use your real name). Also note that you do *not* need to create your own blog, just an account.²
- 3) After you have created an account, return to the first email and click the link “Accept Invitation.” This will take you to a login page. Type in your username and password, and you will be taken to the *dashboard* of the blog. Make sure you bookmark this page, and remember your login information, as you will be returning to this page often. You can do everything you are required to do from this page.
- 4) After you have created an account and are all set to go, *please shoot me an email telling me your username*.
- 5) To post, go to the dashboard and click on the “add new post” from the left hand side of the

¹ For a very interesting theoretical engagement with blogs see Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010).

² In the past, students have accidentally posted reading responses on their own blogs rather than the course blog, so I never saw them. If you are having issues negotiating Wordpress.com, please ask me for help.

screen under “posts.” Please write your posts by the beginning of the class they are due. I would advise writing your posts in Microsoft Word first and then cutting and pasting them into the text box.³ You can also add additional formatting this way (for example, using footnotes). And don’t worry about any egregious errors in your posts. You will be able to edit them at any point after you have posted them.

6) Above the text box of your post is a button that says “Add Media.” Clicking this will allow you to post pictures and video from other sites by linking to the URL, or to upload your own photos and media.

7) To add a hyperlink, highlight the text you want to create a link from, click on the icon of the linked chain, and add the URL into the text box. Hyperlinks are an essential aspect of any internet composition. I expect you to make interesting and thoughtful use of links.

8) If you are posting one of the four required reading response blog posts, please also check the box to the right of the screen under “Categories” that says “Required Posts.” If you are posting something else, check the box or boxes for what you think is the most appropriate category.

9) I would also like you to provide tags for your posts. Tags are like keywords that alert a reader to the content of your post. (For instance, if you are writing about *Infinite Jest*, your tags might be: David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, postmodernism, irony, addiction, The Entertainment, tennis, etc.) Feel free to be creative with your tags.

10) I will be dividing the class in half: students whose last names start with letters A-L, and students whose last names start with M-Z. These two groups of students will be alternating their posts every week for the first three weeks. If you are in the group that does *not* have a post due, you are required to comment on at least two other people’s posts who do have a post due. (So, for example, if your last name begins with M-Z, on January 27th you have two comments due.) To comment on someone else’s post, there is a link to comment under each post on the blog itself. To look at the blog, go to its homepage, <http://interactivelitspring2015.wordpress.com/>. Comments should substantively address the work of other students (i.e., more than just “I agree” or “that’s interesting”).

11) *If your last name starts with A-L, your blog posts are due: 1.27, 2.10, and 3.24. If your last name starts with M-Z, your blog posts are due: 2.3, 2.17, and 3.31. Everyone has a blog post and two comments due 4.7. Posts are due by the beginning of class. Comments are due by the end of the day.*

12) If you have any questions, concerns, or problems, don’t hesitate to get in touch with me.

³ That said, with recent changes in Firefox, some of the formatting from Word is lost when pasting it onto Wordpress. Using Google Chrome or Internet Explorer sometimes works better for pasting from Word.

The General Blog Assignment: Required and Additional Posts

There are two aspects of the blog you are responsible for this semester: required posts and additional posts. We will be looking at a number of different texts this semester and you will be asked to write four required posts that engage with the reading in a few different ways. Each of the required posts should consist of *at least* 500 words. Though I will be handing out specific assignments for each post, the general expectation for these posts is that they *critically* engage with the text by working *closely* and *carefully* with *specific passages, scenes, or moments*, and that the responses pay particular attention to *form*. These posts will not get a formal grade. Rather, I will “like” posts that fulfill the expectations of the assignment in a thoughtful, rigorous, and critical fashion. Posts that do not meet expectations will not receive a “like.” As with the papers, the blog posts will be assessed on the strength of their argument and the quality of their idea. Further, each day on which a required post for the other half of class is due you are also responsible for commenting on *at least two* other students’ posts. (Failure to comment will significantly and negatively impact a student’s grade for the blog.)

Students’ grades on the blog will be considered based on their overall participation in posting and commenting. Students will not be penalized for doing the bare minimum, but it is unlikely that students will get full credit for the blog unless their work is *outstanding* or they do *considerably* more work than simply four posts and eight comments.

Blogging can be an enjoyable enterprise. It allows a writer to play with the form of their composition, create hyperlinks to other sites, and insert media, so students are encouraged to take advantage of the specific aspects of this type of textual production. Blogging also allows for considerably more discussion to take place than we have time for in class. So writing additional posts is the second aspect of the blog students are responsible for. We will often use the blog as a tool to expand upon and complicate our understanding of the material covered. Basically, there are a lot of ways we can use this blog together, and the more actively a student contributes, the higher their overall blog grade will be. It is that simple.

Additional posts can be much more informal and need not abide by the requirements of the reading responses. Other than the above stipulations, how we all use this blog is ultimately up to us. Feel free to post links, make additional comments, ask questions, note stories in the news and related articles from other sites, short musings, discussions of other texts, research, videos, pictures, or simply stuff that is cool. The only requirements are that additional posts have to fall under the course’s general theme in some way (which is broad enough to occasion quite a bit), and, of course, that students show respect for their fellow classmates. Other than that, be creative and have fun. What we make over the next four months will be a lasting testament to the time we all spent in Interactive Literature at the University of Pittsburgh.