

WRD 110

Video Documentary Project

Above all, documentary must reflect the problems and realities of the present. It cannot regret the past; it is dangerous to prophesy the future. It can, and does, draw on the past in its use of existing heritages but it only does so to give point to a modern argument. In no sense is documentary a historical reconstruction and attempts to make it so are destined to failure. Rather it is contemporary fact and event expressed in relation to human associations.

--Paul Rotha

We realized that the important thing was not the film itself but that which the film provoked.

--Fernando Solanas ("Cinema as Gun")

Every cut is a lie. It's never that way. Those two shots were never next to each other in time that way. But you're telling a lie in order to tell the truth.

--Wolf Koenig

Short Documentary Overview

For the most part, documentary films are meant to do what their name implies: create an archive about particular issues and subjects. They can make overt arguments about an issue, or they can assume more subtle approaches. The argument of a documentary develops in the editing/composing stages using elements such as cuts, juxtapositions, dissolves/fades, audio, text, etc.

Your documentary will be a response to the question of what person or community in your life has a different story and why it should be captured on film. This is a documentary rather than a narrative film because you will be presenting a visual exploration of your subject as well as incorporating elements of narrative interest, and in so doing you will be creating different kinds of arguments about that person's life and about life and narrative as a whole as you compose your statement around moving images. This also means more than simply speaking to a camera on a tripod. You will need to experiment with locations, camera effects, audio, and much more. The quality of the camera and the video does not matter. What matters is that you explore the possibilities of using moving images. This means that you can shoot on a camera phone or even a web cam if you have to, as long as you understand the rhetorical nature of these choices. We will discuss what these are in class together.

You will have an opportunity to present your project to the class before it is finalized and answer questions. As with most any project, you will do most of the planning and development work in writing, but the final project will take the form of a self-contained multimedia story that readers can watch or view on the web. By "multimedia" we mean that the story must be told using more than one medium of communication, such as a combination of alphabetic text, moving images, still images, and sound.

First Cut of Documentary – 10 percent (documentary grade)

This should not be a work-in-progress but a finished project with the realization that it will be drastically altered by the critiques of your classmates, your instructor, and yourself. This draft will be worth 10 percent of your documentary grade.

Final Cut – 10 percent (documentary grade)

The final project will be turned in at the beginning of the last week of class. It should take into account the critiques performed earlier and be drastically refined from the previous draft. You will present the project to the class, and the film should be between two and five minutes long. The final turned-in project will be worth 10 percent of your documentary grade.

Presentation – 10 percent (documentary grade)

You will need to present, as a formal performance, your video and your research experiences, as well as explain generally your rhetorical choices. In other words, how did you come to make the decisions you did? Why did you choose this particular scene and these specific aspects? This is a formal presentation, so you will be expected to answer these questions and discuss your experience, show the film, and answer a few questions afterward. This presentation is worth 10 percent of your documentary grade.

Reflection – 10 percent (final grade)

In addition, each of you on an individual basis will be responsible for submitting your own reflection essay (1000 words) on your own specific rhetorical choices, the effectiveness of your work habits, and especially any challenges you faced and how you were able to overcome them (or not). The purpose of this essay is to reflect on your role and make your own assessments about all of your work.

Parameters

As set forth in the introduction, it is the medium that matters here, not the instruments. Therefore, you can use whatever camera technology you have access to in order to make your video. I will approve your proposals along the way to make sure you are using the technology in effective ways.

You should consider a time limit between 2-5 minutes (with an ideal target of 3 minutes). This should give you enough time to make a case for your subject's story and to argue for why it is compelling and worthwhile to tell.

You can include (and are encouraged to whenever appropriate) to use other footage or photos, if appropriate, you did not yourself shoot. This is true as long as the majority of the video is footage you yourself own. **Please remember: any footage you use that is not your own must be credited and cited appropriately – otherwise, it is plagiarism.**

You must include audio in the form of narration, music, sound effects, interviews, etc. Again, what to think about is what will help your video appeal to your audience.