

*Notes to instructors are in red; please delete before sharing with students.
Assignment updated summer 2025.*

Short Assignment 3: Artifact Analysis

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to analyze an artifact that embodies an aspect of a community, exploring its significance and contextualizing it within personal, historical, social, and cultural frameworks. Through this analysis, you will tell a story about the community you're exploring and identify questions that may lead to a larger research project.

Learning Outcomes

- To greater develop and practice information literacy skills and citation practices
- To read, understand, and evaluate the reliability of a variety of academic and nonacademic sources
- To practice summary, analysis, and synthesis
- To consider multiple perspectives and arguments
- To treat research as a process of discovery
- To gain experience in selecting, narrowing, and focusing on a topic and research question.

Assignment Description

For this assignment, you will find and analyze an artifact that illustrates, represents, embodies, or expresses some aspect of a specific community, preferably local to UW Madison or the city of Madison. By artifact, I mean an object or text that is:

- a product of the community (e.g., a campus map, pottery);
- a tool or technology associated with the community (e.g., Badger ID card, recipe book, fishing rod, educational material);
- something that captures an activity, event, moment, or idea related to the community (e.g., a photograph from a significant event, a sports uniform, one news article, rosary beads, dreidel);
- or something else that you believe tells a story about the community that doesn't quite fit any of the above.

In selecting an artifact, consider its significance—personal, historical, social, cultural, material—and how and why it helps us to understand the community.

You should describe and analyze the artifact by considering the following questions/prompts:

1. *Origin*: What is the “origin” of this artifact? Where did it come from? Who created it? How? Why? Why did you pick this artifact?
2. *Significance*: What does it mean to you? To others? Describe how it illustrates or represents the community to you and others.
3. *Context*: Contextualize the artifact (historical, social, cultural, personal, etc.). What questions does the artifact raise for you?
4. *Implications*: What does it suggest about the community? What does it suggest about the contexts, nuances, and subcommunities within the community (e.g., academic, social, cultural)?

The goal of the artifact analysis is to tell a story about the community through this artifact and to start to identify questions that may develop into a larger research project.

Details

- Length: Approximately **2 pages**
- Formatting: Follow the guidelines in the syllabus
- Include your **name** and a **title** for your piece
- Include a **reflection**: At the end of your draft on a new page, include a brief reflection of 1-2 paragraphs that shares your process for writing this piece, who your audience was, what assistance you received on this draft, what you feel you did well in this draft, what you struggled with, and what you would like feedback about. See more in the Writer’s Memos Instructions document on Canvas.
- Note: Continue to look for more sources on related topics to help you identify a research topic for the Writing Projects

Writing Process Timeline

- Draft and submit your initial assignment by ____.
- Participate in peer workshop on _____. (Note to instructors: peer workshop is not included in the model calendar, but feel free to add one in if you like.)
- Submit the final copy (revised using instructor and any additional feedback) in your Final Portfolio by _____. (Note to instructors: you can decide if you wish to ask students to revise their short assignments.)

Evaluation Guidelines

(Note to instructors: you may use these recommended guidelines in your rubric or use them to guide holistic feedback.)

- *Development or Evidence:* Does the essay clearly identify the origin of the artifact? Is the origin of the artifact accurately and thoroughly described? Does the essay explain why the artifact was chosen? Is the reasoning behind the selection compelling and clearly explained? Is the artifact contextualized within historical, social, cultural, and personal frameworks? Does the essay provide a thorough and insightful context for understanding the artifact? Does the essay identify questions raised by the artifact? Are these questions thoughtful and relevant to understanding the artifact's significance? Does the artifact suggest meaningful insights about the community? Are these insights well-explained and supported by the analysis?
- *Purpose and Audience Awareness:* Does the essay effectively convey the artifact's meaning to the writer personally? Does the essay explain the significance of the artifact to others or within the community? Does the essay explore what the artifact suggests about various contexts within the community (academic, social, cultural)? Are these implications clearly articulated and insightful?
- *Arrangement and Organization:* Are the connections between the artifact and community it is a part of well-explained? Is the essay well-organized with a clear structure? Is the writing clear and concise?
- *Style:* Is there clear control and purposeful use of language? Is the writer able to use variety, repetition, or other related strategies to emphasize and communicate ideas effectively? Is the diction appropriate and deliberate?

Technology and AI Guidelines

(Note to instructors: we recommend engaging students in the process of developing these guidelines.)

- *You may use technology or tools to aid your learning and writing in the following ways:*
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- *You may not use technology or tools to replace your learning and writing in the following ways:*
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- *You should document any assistance you received in your reflection, whether from tools, technologies, people, or strategies to acknowledge that writing is a process and a complex social activity.*