Speech genres of academia—grad edition Fall 2025

*Keywords and capsule definitions of the genres it is assumed you navigate, understand and, in some instances, reproduce, as a grad student at UCR [maybe elsewhere].

Abstract: this is a summary of the argument, method, and archive of a piece of intellectual work (e.g. an essay). It uses lots of action verbs and probably tells you what the conclusions of the piece will be. *Synthesizes*, rather than sequentially summarizing main points. Often accompanied by keywords. Has abbreviated syntax and word limit. Some journals have these, some don't; don't waste your time writing one for a journal that doesn't ask for it. The functional fiction is that it is always written last—how can you abstract something that is not complete?—but in reality, sometimes you need it for applications, conference submissions.

Article: what journals and other publication venues publish. Typically they come with a style sheet—which you should absolutely find and read before even thinking of submitting an article, so you know it is a good/plausible fit, and so you don't write to an ideal, but rather to a real audience. Literary studies tends to be somewhat severe/pedantic about getting things like references and publication dates correct (i.e. they are an index of "mastery" and you can get dinged for simple sloppiness). The style sheet will tell you an acceptable length of the article, in addition to how to organize biblio data (e.g. Works Cited, scripts and Romanization allowed/needed), permissions [ugh], etc.

Book review: should do 3 things: provide an overall sense of the book's argument, perhaps with reference to hot topics, or perhaps pulling out especially interesting things; locate the book in relevant, long-running, hot-button or familiar conversations, to show what is special about the book; and highlight the book's contribution, and any flaws that need to be mentioned. Opinions vary about when and how to do a savage review, but I will note that this task is sometimes compelling (also, "the Internet never forgets"). A journal/publication will always have guidelines—about the pub date of the book (meaning, only recent books are allowed), about length, about format. Look at Submission Requirements before submitting anything, as some journals do not accept ontributions from grads.

Catalog copy: this is a description of a course that someone wrote and that the Committee on Courses approved. (There are actual rules on what this has to include.) CPLT entries start on p. 249 (I would advise bookmarking your own program.) It is a functional fiction—meaning, no course ever fits the ideal 100%, *but* the contents and topics should bear a resemblance to what the description says. You can actually see how your program has changed over 25+ years by looking at past catalogs.

CFP (Call for Papers): this is an invitation to compete to be part of a conference or anthology. It can be super focused ("seeking papers on Bergson's popular lectures") or very vague—so vague it is a large series of un-ordered bullet points that relate through some association to a "theme." (This

often happens with grad conferences, which have to balance a lot of fields or inputs.) Typically you write a description of what you "seek to" do, and establish a connection to the given theme. Professional associations (e.g. MLA, Society for 18th c Studies, etc.) are typically good places to encounter these, as are H-Net mailing lists and other mailing lists.

Class visit: this is when someone comes to your class to observe and take notes and give feedback (to you, or to a third party, like the Institution). This may or may not be official. It is useful to do not only to improve your teaching or let the observer learn something, but also because for letters of rec, in some cases, your teaching ability might be important or useful to talk about.

Conference paper: this is a paper written to be delivered in front of an audience, probably as part of a group or a theme. It may have an AV component (i.e. PPT), which interface should be subordinate to you, the human speaker, but used for quotes, main terms, etc. Your paper should be written ahead of time, but it can be fun to improv certain sections or throw out questions to the audience, where you would like feedback. Different conferences have different norms (about seriousness, reading the paper versus speaking the paper, etc.). If you get nervous, def have the paper there, but be sure to look at the audience—often! Make sure you know how to pronounce phrases and names you have never heard spoken aloud (e.g. "W.E.B DuBois" is a classic…).

Conference proposal: you could take on any of a number of roles in a conference. A proposal means you'll choose, then apply. Panel member/presenter—one of 3 or 4 people who deliver papers on a given theme. Organizer—the person who solicits papers (via CFP, networks, MLs, etc.), pesters people to sign up, pay their dues, turn things in on time, and perhaps presides. Commentator—person who delivers an overview and maybe Q-and-A or just Q to presenters, about ties between papers, issues raised. (These range from the elegant and thorough delivery from a paper with varying degrees of eye contact, to "I wrote this on the plane because I only had 1 paper in advance" [a sad situation one wishes to avoid]). Presider (this is a PAMLA term meaning, basically, "event organizer")—makes things run smoothly, gives intros of speakers, gracefully kicks people out when the session is over. Timekeeper—an important role! Could be an Organizer or Presider, on occasion a panelist (difficult though, as people tend to get absorbed).

Critical genealogy: the/a persuasive account of a concept important to your field, as traced, located and summarized through reading and other research (like talking to other people). This can have 2 components: origin, and discourse. For example, everyone knows the panopticon is Foucault's device, drawing on Jeremy Bentham, but the concept has travelled a lot since first popularized. If you are writing about surveillance in literature, you'd want to pick up on key texts that use, and that define, this term, or texts that use it to great impact (or little but still very intriguing impact). It's a balance between being too casual and aleatory versus bring exhaustive and over-broad, like Borges' map.

Critical Theory/theory: this is a body of thought and intellectual production rather than a genre per se. I include it because there is a difference in Critical Theory-as-from-Adorno-and-Frankfurt-school and critical theory as a reference for "theory" texts which make meta-claims for how to read.

Deadline: always a fiction, sometimes a reality. The date by which a portal, either human or digital, closes. Often negotiable—if you negotiate. Often imagined, wrongly, to be mandatory; in fact, user can completely disregard and file *early*, according to their own intellectual needs. Think of your own projects and how they build on each other, then set your deadlines. There are exceptions (if you are inclined to see the pool before throwing in your application) but typically this can enable you to enable actual priorities, rather than just copy-pasting the institution into your psyche. Also, doing things on time with editors and the like builds trust, and contributes to making you a desirable person to work with.

E-mail signature: a paratext of the email itself. the tagline you can automate on every computer/email that indicates biodata and contact info you wish to include. Should not be more than a few lines, but can be useful to include your Zoom link and webpage (if you have one) so people don't have to hunt for them. Hyperlinks are good for paring down the perception of "information overload" conveyed by a lot of text.

Grant application: will have several parts, many of which can be re-purposed from other docs. These likely include: a budget and justification (a sentence about why that thing is necessary); short summary/abstract; longer narrative/project description, which may be broken into parts according to research element or product (e.g. chapter); timeline.

Intervention:

Interview (job): a set time and set format within which you answer a set of questions, whose possible answers have varying degrees of openness and opportunity for improvisation.

Keywords: the concepts or memorable phrases you want people to remember, or that locate you in a field/conversation, that accompany an article. The best way to get a sense of what is needed is by looking at the journal. Then, you can tell how much variety or standardization is possible or desirable, what you want to play with, and what, if anything, to cross-reference (i.e. have the same keywords as, like a key article).

Letter of recommendation: mostly likely, you will be asking, but over time, you will be writing a letter to recommend someone for a job or fellowship. The writer needs up to date info, especially the first time they write "for you." To make this job easier for the writer, you can: keep your CV up to date; give them a decent amount of time to write; provide a spreadsheet or doc with links to relevant documents (don't make them search for your writing or transcript); you can write a short para or give some bullet points about what stands out for you (keeping in mind that the recommender will have their own ideas, it helps the recommender see how you see yourself, and your relation to your field). A face-to-face convo might also be helpful in bringing out important points and contexts (cf the idea that much good intellectual work is collaborative, and a co-production of sorts…so things

may come up in convo that do not come up in isolation for either party). Do NOT write this letter yourself and pass on to the recommender, BTW.

Lit[erature] review: in this case, "literature" does not mean "fine fiction," it means "scholarship." Formerly more of a Social Science genre, Humanities now use the lit review, as well. Typically it is a condensed narrative summary of the "relevant" literature on a specific topic; it does not typically cover material that is boring or useless, unless for whatever reason it is a much-discussed text). It shows that you have read/covered the major places people expect you to cover (with perhaps some interesting connections/contributions of your own). It also shows you have comprehended, digested and put forward in your own words things like methodology, contents the work touched on, skewed to the topic of your diss. In other words, you don't have to summarize the whole thing if only parts are relevant/compelling. It's a lot like an Annotated Bibliography, but with transitions, a narrative, and an architecture beyond alphabetical or chronological order. You will typically put one of these in your prospectus (after exams) and it will likely be dismantled and dispersed—but still used—in your diss.

Method[ology]: the way you do the things you do. Unfortunately, "I'm going to sit in a room and read a bunch of books what is your problem, even?!?" is not sufficient. You may write phrases like: "I will use Translation Studies methodologies to interpret XYZ. This means being attentive to XYZ elements in the text." Usually you will have to provide re-statements of the main points of the method and attach them to your Thing. (These re-statements are known as appositives—"an appositive, by which I mean a re-statement of a term that may be niche or unfamiliar). For example, "I will perform close readings of ABC poetry to filter for ABC figurations of the animal world." Or you can sidle up to other scholars and draw on their language and phrasing and say, "My methods draw on media studies analyses by ___ that [summary, use their programmatic language]."

Office hours: an under-used resource in which people go to an instructor's office, often to ask for something or to workshop something. Or to ask for a favor (harder to say "no" to someone right there and harder to delete than an email!). IMO, key to maintain a rapport with an instructor, and also key to open-ended conversation, as opposed to the transactions one does on email and other things that can be automated. Profs/instructors (that means TAs too) should have OH, fixed or by appt, and if they don't, that is a problem. You can consider sending materials to the instructor in advance of your meeting, if you need thinkage or verbiage that is more than "this is what occurs to me off the top of my head." But this could also be fine! If the convo was important, consider sending a note re-stating what you think came out of the meeting (if you make a big change in diss topic or hash out a lot of materials in an ongoing process, this can be useful for tracking your process, timeline, past thinking, and who has committed to what by when.)

Self-introduction (also, profile, biography): a genre of self-representation that is distributed slightly differently depending on the formality of the venue, but which introduces you to an interlocutor or audience through given filters (on a panel, as a guest, as someone seeking specific feedback, a speaker of ABC language, or XYZ researcher, etc.). It's good to have a public one, like on the UCR HP (homepage), so people can get a hold of you and see what you're about.

Seminar paper:

Social media presence: something you may or may not have, in which you may or may not post using your name or anonymously. I have no position on this! In my posting, I typically mock AI's humanization or promote the work of people I want to support. I try to keep other kinds of activism off line—not only because it is trackable (the Internet never forgets) and may damage some cause, but also because being suddenly pulled away from other things into some discursive dumpster fire I have contributed to can take away from other things I need to do, which are often for other people. That said, some fields are more tolerant of polemic—or expect, need it—so approaches will vary.

Versioning: re-purposing something you have written (performed, etc.) into another context. We do this all the time in scholarship by self-paraphrasing, approaching from different angles, integrating a slightly new example, etc. If you directly copy-and-paste the same prose for years about your topic, chances are you should update it—but in reality, this is important iterative work. Iteration is not busywork (most of the time), it is re-mapping whatever brain matter and printed matter needs to be re-mapped to think anew, more complexly, etc. Also, there is no guaranteed point in being original for every single little thing you do (though it can be fun to experiment with various docs…).