**Directions:** *Read the mentor text, which is from a online college course at Duke University. Highlight and annotate good ideas that you could apply to your own digital essay.*

**Digital Essay**

Your second main project for this course is to compose a digital essay—a piece of writing meant to be read on the screen rather than on the page.

So the question is: What new possibilities does writing for the screen open up? Clearly, one thing you can do as a digital writer is to combine modes of expression, mix your prose with images, hyperlinks, videos, and audio files. You can insert written text into a video or slide show, or write the script for an audio file, or layer writing over images. You can also experiment with structure.  Web texts often seem less linear than print ones—that is, they seem to invite readers to choose their own paths through the materials they present rather than follow a single consecutive route through them.

[](http://sites.duke.edu/english211s_01_s2013/files/2012/12/s03.jpeg)

But all that begs the really interesting question, which is: How can you use these new possibilities of expression in imaginative ways? What can you evoke or represent or analyze on the screen better than on the page?

Which raises the question of what it means to compose a digital*essay*. For the purposes of this assignment, here’s what I’d like to emphasize:

* *A digital essay is centered in writing.* While I anticipate that you will make strategic use of images, video, and sound files, as well as various elements of graphic design, your work as a digital writer should be rooted in, well . . . *writing*. Your task here is not to make a video or podcast or mash-up or infographic; it is to write an essay that draws on the resources of the web.
* *A digital essay is a coherent whole.* Unlike the open-ended form of blog, to which you can always add a new post or page or link, the elements of a digital essay need to work together as parts of a cohesive structure. The final version of your essay should feel planned and complete.
* *A digital essay is idea-driven.* Since Montaigne, the aim of the essayist has been to comment and interpret. I will ask you to ground your digital essay in some sort of research, but you can’t simply re-present that research, you need to offer a perspective of your own on it. As a digital writer, that is, you need not only a topic but a project—something you want to accomplish, an insight or idea you hope to convey.

One thing a digital essay does *not* have to be is a Word document. I encourage you to experiment with other formats. You might repurpose a blog platform (WordPress, Tumblr, Wix, Google Sites) or slide program (Prezi, Sliderocket, Vuvox, Projeqt). Or you could experiment with video, audio, animated text, or iBooks Author. The challenge is to work creatively as a writer in a digital environment.

In determining that grade, I’ll look to see if you

* Have an ambitious project as a writer: Your essay must include written text, and be grounded in some sort of reading or research.
* Make your prose as clear and engaging as you can.
* Make thoughtful use of the affordances of the web—links, images, audio, video, slides, and so on. Be able to explain why you’ve chosen to work with a particular platform or program.
* Be professional. Present your work with imagination and care. Make sure your links work, pages are titled, etc. Acknowledge help. Document your sources.

As with your work on the class blog, view these expectations as a floor rather than ceiling. If you want to earn an A, then empty the tank: Be ambitious. Do research. Rewrite. Reshoot. Re-edit. Fuss the details. Innovate. Make something the rest of us will remember.