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### Connecting with an Audience, Audio Essay and Interview

**Goal:** Assigning a “born-digital” project for this 500-level course was a high priority for me, as much of the work of the Dramaturg in contemporary professional theatre appears online in some format. With the rise of the internet and the ease of content distribution to audience members, most of the materials that Dramaturgs produce in the professional setting is destined for the internet, so this kind of assignment is key to preparing students for the profession. I asked students to create an audio essay that features an interview with an expert on a topic central to a play of their choosing. In my guideline, I encouraged them to think not only of the words they would use and the questions they would ask their expert, but also how the use of sound could enhance their audio essay and successfully prepare audiences for seeing the play.

**Lesson Plan:** You will write and produce a Podcast on a topic related to a play of your choosing. This project challenges you to think about how an essay that is time-based and “born digitally” is different from writing a paper. You will need to think about the multiple ways in which you are affecting your audience, rather than the single, linear way of communicating through a paper. As a time-based medium that can incorporate voice, music, and sound all layered together, the podcast can open up a multitude of ways of communicating ideas to an audience. How can you communicate both information about and the “flavor” or “texture” of the play that is your topic to your audience? The third project is due in class on March 16. Please let me know if you have any questions: [morr@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:morr@mail.sdsu.edu).

- Create an audio essay of about 8-10 minutes in length with an interview component. You may use music, sound effects, and other sounds to enhance your podcast, if you wish. Think about how you can use your voice to express your ideas as well.
- The audio essay should contain both your own analysis of the play and views on the main topic of your podcast (roughly half the time) as well as an interview with an expert that can bring helpful perspectives to your audience. If you need assistance identifying an expert, please let me know. The SDSU Experts Directory may be a good place to start:  
<http://www.engineering.sdsu.edu/experts/directory.aspx>
- Think about your audience as you craft your audio essay. What you would want to know about the play? Try to answer this as you craft both the specific topic of the podcast and your questions for the expert. You will not be able to “cover” the whole play in this podcast, so focus in on one key topic and fully flesh it out. Direct your podcast to an audience who is not yet familiar with the play. You will need to provide some context to your audience but also be careful not to give away key plot points.



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- You may choose a play that you are especially interested in or you may choose Roald Dahl's BFG, which will be performed here at SDSU later this semester. If you choose the BFG, please consult with the dramaturgs for the show (Melissa Hawkins and Kimberly King) and me on your specific topic to make sure your podcast does not duplicate work being done by another person in the class.
- Be sure to title your podcast and create three-sentence summary of its contents. You will put the title and summary on Blackboard when you turn it in. On Blackboard you will find Podcast Corner where links to all podcasts will be posted. We will listen to one another's podcasts.
- Logistics: Microphones are available for your use in the Library's Media Center. If you plan to use the library's equipment to do your interview portion, please be sure to reserve the microphone and room in advance so you don't inconvenience your guest. You can edit your podcast using GarageBand or any software with which you are familiar and comfortable. If you know you need technical help with this aspect of the assignment, please contact your classmates in advance.

Example/Outcome: [Audio Clip]

Reflection: All students in the course completed the project successfully. Most of them were able to produce a highly useful audio essay that enhanced the audience's understanding of a central issue of the play while also preparing the audience for the tone and atmosphere of the play through sound. The main challenge that some students encountered was a lack of technical skill. I did not provide them with a tutorial on how to create an audio essay but encouraged them to seek out advice from their fellow students (two students in the class do a regular podcast for one of the student theatre groups on campus and generously offered their aid). In future, I will have tutorial handouts available to those students who need technical assistance. I would also provide a bit more time in the semester to complete this assignment, as it was more time consuming than writing a short paper (the kind of assignment this audio essay/interview replaced in my syllabus from past years).

NEH Reflection: The network itself was the main benefit I gained from the NEH project. It is a powerful thing to be in touch with colleagues using similar types of assignments across various fields of study. I appreciated hearing from colleagues about the ways that digital humanities is being used in different departments and at different universities in novel ways. I now have a built-in, knowledgeable support group to consult with questions. I also have a bank of sample assignments to draw on when I need to change my approach. I appreciate participating in this network and will reap the benefits far into the future. I hope we are able to continue to meet regularly.