

Construct Papers

English 7879 | Dr. Christa B. Teston

Rationale. A construct is akin to a key word or phrase that an author develops in order to further their claim (e.g. Rickert's "attunement;" Mol's "multiple ontologies;" Haraway's "cyborg"). One composing strategy that scholars in our field deploy regularly is to unearth a key construct from within a text, article, book, film, blog post, or some other source and compose an argument that relies on the construct's applicability, accuracy, merit, and so on. For example,

"To describe the host of human and nonhuman materials that bear up and make possible human being, Thomas Rickert introduces the notion of "ambient rhetoric." For Rickert, ambient rhetorics are... (perhaps offer a direct quote)...Rickert's ambient rhetoric is akin to (another person's construct) but differs in the following way: (describe that difference). As a theoretical construct, ambient rhetoric offers several affordances. Specifically, these include..."

Scholars sometimes decide to make a theoretical contribution by building off of or extending a previous scholar's construct. Skill at pivoting intellectually in this way is characteristic of good writing and disciplined reading.

Learning Objectives. Facility with talking about other theorists' constructs will help you situate your own creative constructs within a larger conversation. The ability to locate and write about constructs within complex arguments will also help you,

1. Become a better **reader**. Over time, you'll develop a prepared mind for identifying authors' key constructs as a way to synthesize multiple texts in, for example, a literature review.
2. Enact certain **analytical habits of mind**. That is, you will discern the difference between your own understanding of an author's claim/construct versus the actual author's understanding and deployment of their claim/construct. It's my assumption that you all have had a good deal of experience writing position papers where your reading and the author's writing is virtually collapsed. Here, I'd like you to do the difficult intellectual work of untangling your reading from the author's writing—and doing so in a way that is critical, but not heavy handed, unwarranted, or judgmental.
3. Become more mindful of your **audience**. You will be able to describe an author's claims and constructs to lay readers who are unfamiliar with the authors, claims, and constructs you're discussing. This should be done in a way that doesn't merely provide a chronological narrative of how the author's argument unfolds. Rather, your write-up should be a sophisticated exploration of the way the author invents or extends pre-existing key constructs in order to build their own argument.
4. Become a better **writer**. This means, among other things, being able to cite appropriately and properly, remaining mindful of sentences' readability, and choosing language and organizational structures (at both the sentence and paragraph level) that are rhetorically effective. Working with a maximum of 500 words will force you to really discipline your composing choices.

Parameters. Select a construct introduced or developed in one of the readings from the past four weeks. Compose a 500 word description of the construct, how it is mobilized by the author(s), and what rhetorical work it accomplishes. If there's room you might also offer up a critique of the construct, but this is not necessary. Each construct paper should include an APA citation. At the bottom, please include the word count (not including the citation). You should direct quote very minimally, but feel free to cite parenthetically as much as possible. Upload your construct papers to Google Drive in the appropriate folder as "ConstructTitle_Author" (e.g. "Cyborg_Haraway" or "AmbientRhetoric_Rickert").

Deadlines. Upload to Google Drive by 11:59pm on: 9/14 :: 10/12 :: 11/09

Please note: You should expect to revise these construct papers at least once in response to feedback.