

**ENGLISH 306 • Spring 2009**  
**Paper 1: Style, Content, and Stylization**

In her essay “On Style,” Susan Sontag writes that “Whenever speech or movement or behavior or objects exhibit a certain deviation from the most direct, useful, insensible mode of expression or being in the world, we may look at them as having a ‘style,’ and being both autonomous and exemplary.” For your first paper, you will examine the “style” and “stylization,” as explained by Sontag, of one of the films or videos we’ll watch in class. Your choices: the TV series *Southland*; the video and/or lyrics of “Dani California”; or next week’s movie (to be chosen by the class).

Your goal in this paper is not to *interpret* your chosen text. As Sontag writes in “Against Interpretation”:

Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there. This cannot be taken for granted, now. Think of the sheer multiplication of works of art available to every one of us, superadded to the conflicting tastes and odors and sights of the urban environment that bombard our senses. Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life - its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness - conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. And it is in the light of the condition of our senses, our capacities (rather than those of another age), that the task of the critic must be assessed.

What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.

Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.

The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art - and, by analogy, our own experience - more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.

Your task, then, is to “show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.” Some things to keep in mind:

- Your essay should be both focused and exploratory. Make a point, but be persuasive rather than preachy.
- You should incorporate your readings intelligently and well. You should make every attempt to place your own ideas within the context of the larger, textual

- “conversation” about these issues. Don’t use all of our readings, however; focus on two or three that you think best help you make your point.
- You should be as specific as possible; define your terms, quote relevant passages that you relate specifically to your own point, and, if you include any descriptions or narratives, include details, imagery, things that make your paper “breathe.”
  - Your paper should synthesize your readings, not repeat them. Include summaries of your readings and then show how they fit in to your own discussion.
  - You need to include a Works Cited page; refer to an MLA or APA style guide for format.

Preliminary drafts due Tuesday, April 21. Bring two copies of a preliminary draft to class and be prepared to discuss your work—and to discuss the ideas you haven’t quite explored yet. Drafts should be typed.

Final draft due Tuesday, April 28. This paper will end up being around 1000-1250 words long; as long as it is both clearly focused and well-developed, however, it can be any length. Make sure that the entire paper has 1-inch margins and is typed in a readable, 12-point typeface. At the top of the first page—single-spaced—type your name, the class and section you’re in, the assignment (Essay #1), the professors’ names, and the date. Double-space, and then center your title above the rest of your text; the remainder of the paper should be double-spaced. A special note about titles: don’t be boring and generic and name your paper “Style and Stylization Paper.” Give it a real title, something that only applies to your paper. Good luck!