

ENGL 298 J

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Personal Property

Length: 1 page + 2-3 pages

Due: Thursday, April 7th, 5 p.m., via Catalyst Dropbox (linked on the course website)

Grading: full credit with strong effort

Classification systems are everywhere. They structure where you'll find a given book in a library, and how you decide which film to go see. Probably, you think about films in terms of genre (horror, romantic comedy, drama) that you prefer, rather than choosing a film based on what it cost to produce. And when you go grocery shopping, you might move from section to section to find the items that are inexpensive, rather than being able to find all the cheapest items in one corner of the store.

But classification systems didn't just appear one day. They were **made** by individuals, and groups; and sometimes people rebel against them. Perhaps you have a friend who shelves books according to the colors of their spines, rather than the author's name. Perhaps you yourself refuse to sort silverware into the upper-class categories of salad forks and meat forks, teaspoons, soup spoons, and dessert spoons. Perhaps you refuse to separate your silverware at all preferring to save money and toss it all into one drawer.

Organization is inherently political. Organization is also easy to remain unaware of; to treat as a matter of convenience. Only when we take the time to interpret a system of classification can we start to grasp its effects.

In this assignment, your job is to develop a system of classification for your personal property, and write about the choices you made in constructing it. Developing a system of classification means that you can't simply sort your property – you need to sort it into categories that relate to each other. I'm asking you to do this because systemic thinking, i.e., thinking in terms of systems, is an important component of political theory: political theorists often conceive and promote systems that they think will make people's lives better.

How you structure this system is entirely up to you, but you need to explain, in 2-3 pages, what your goals were in creating it.

You may find the following questions useful to think about:

- Is it public, meaning that anyone might figure it out by looking at a directory of it? Or private, intelligible to only you, and/or close friends & family?
- What objects and/or qualities does it emphasize; and alternatively, which objects and/or qualities are minimized, or hidden?
- Is your system based on objective qualities (data), or on subjective ones (emotions, sentimental value, etc.)?
- What might someone conclude about you from looking at it, whether they fully understood it or not? What does it reveal about you?
- Do you see your system as overtly political in any way? (Have you organized it in

terms of economic cost, country-of-origin, or whether the objects were made by you, or by someone else?)

- **Most importantly, why is the classification system that you've chosen an effective one (implicitly, the best one) for your property?**

In addition to the short essay, please turn in a 1-page list (or if you prefer, a diagram), illustrating your classification system, listing specific items, and showing how they fit in.) (If you draw a diagram, you'll need to either scan it, or turn it in at the folder on my office door in Padelford. **In terms of standards, an excellent list will have at least 30-40 items listed within your classification system. A good list will have between 20-30 items, and a fair list will have between 15-20 items.**

If you're not sure where to start with this assignment, start by making a list of everything you can think of that you own. Once you have that list, you can think about how best to organize it.

For this essay, as long as you show strong effort; you'll get full credit – but I've included a rubric on the next page that I'll mark up so that you can get a sense of where your writing and my expectations meet.

This assignment has three primary purposes:

1. It allows you to write about a subject on which you are the supreme expert – your property – and ideally, will encourage you to think about it from a new perspective.
2. It asks you to practice the art of **interpretation**, which you'll need throughout the quarter in both POL S 201 and ENGL 298. Most of the time you'll be reading essays – this time, you're just "reading" your possessions.
3. It gives me an opportunity to get to know a bit about your writing style, and the way you think.

While I do expect you to put your best effort into thinking of a system, and writing about it, I also wanted your first assignment to be one in which you had substantial freedom. Your system can be whatever you want, as long as you explain why.

ENGL 298 J: Personal Property Classification Paper Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
<p>Explanation and Information (40%) Does it provide an effective broad description of the collection of items being classified, and also discuss certain details of the collection to illustrate the classification for the reader?</p>	4.0 3.7	3.3 3.0 2.7	2.3 2.0 1.7	1.3 1.0 0.7
<p>Principles of classification (40%) Can the organizing principle be stated briefly, in 1-3 sentences? Does the author explain the reasons for choosing such a system of classification? Is the system coherent, rather than random? If the system is private, does the author effectively make it understandable to readers in the essay?</p>	4.0 3.7	3.3 3.0 2.7	2.3 2.0 1.7	1.3 1.0 0.7
<p>Clarity (10%) Is the paper well-organized? Is it easy to understand what the subject of each paragraph is, as the author moves between describing the collection, the system of classification, and his/her rationale for choosing that system?</p>	4.0 3.7	3.3 3.0 2.7	2.3 2.0 1.7	1.3 1.0 0.7
<p>Style (5%) Are the sentences and paragraphs structured in a way that makes the paper readable? Is there a mixture of shorter and longer sentences?:(+) Are there any phrases or words that are repeated constantly in sentences and paragraphs?:(-) Does the author find a balance between informal language (slang) and overly recondite and complex language?</p>	4.0 3.7	3.3 3.0 2.7	2.3 2.0 1.7	1.3 1.0 0.7
<p>Grammar and Formatting (5%) Does the paper have significant and repeated errors of punctuation, spelling, or grammar? Is it formatted according to the standards of the syllabus?</p>	4.0 3.7	3.3 3.0 2.7	2.3 2.0 1.7	1.3 1.0 0.7