

Guidance for the “Digital” Selves Assignment

Overview:

In the United States, Europe, and many countries that espouse a belief in the “rights of man”¹, we enjoy privileges uncommon for most past human generations. These privileges – whether they are freedom of expression, religion, belief, and movement – imply that we as individuals can identify, make, and execute our own life choices. Is this true – do we make our individual choices, and for that matter, are we truly individuals?

The nineteenth century historian, Jacob Burckhardt, who authored the influential text, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, initiated historians’ discussion of the issue of identity. He contended that early modern (1500-1800 c.e.) persons perceived themselves, unlike their medieval counterparts, as “spiritual individuals” distinctly separate from social groups. In one of his most poignant observations on the matter, he wrote:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within as that which was turned without—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossessions, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was only conscious of himself as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such.²

Burckhardt’s position, and the corollary ones articulated by Stephen Greenblatt and John Jeffries Martin, suggests that after the 1500s, humanity began to fracture into “selves”. These selves were different and distinct from “groups” – hence – the notion of individual identity.

Prompt:

My question for each of you – Is this true, are you truly an individual according to any of these authors’ definitions? Or, are you a representation of a “type of person”, a member of a group and not necessarily an individual executing their own choices and decisions? Further, how does your “digital” identity demonstrate that you are or are not an individual? That is, how do you present yourself on social media (Facebook, Twitter) and in digital communications (text messages, emoticons, voicemail recordings, email)?

For this two-page paper:

- Please respond to question of whether or not you are an individual using these scholars’ definitions. (This should appear as a topic sentence that is presenting an argument.) Please cite at least one example (B minus-level work) or two (A-level work) from the readings. Please properly quote your examples and use footnotes.
- Present specific examples from your digital life, whether those are images or cut-and-pasted text, to justify why or why not you are not an individual. Use at least two examples (B minus-level work) or more (A-level work). No citations are needed for your personal examples.
- For extra credit, you may give a 5-minute presentation in our next class that presents your examples. You should plan to give this presentation in front of our class using your notes and/or audiovisual materials. (You can earn up to 2 extra points added to your final course grade for this extra credit.)

¹ “The rights held to be justifiably belonging to any person; human rights. The phrase is associated with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, adopted by the French National Assembly in 1789 and used as a preface to the *French Constitution of 1791*.”

² Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 89.

Preparing and Formatting of Your Paper:

- Your paper should be 2-pages in length. In order to do well on this assignment, you must write very efficiently, which means you will need to edit and revise it so that you can compress as much information into the page limit.
- Use 11 or 12 point font, 1 inch margins, double (2) or 1.5 line spacing, and page numbering.
- Use a topic sentence to start each paragraph so that your reader knows what you intend to argue in it.
- Use must use and/or quote two specific examples from the text to support your thoughts. In your footnotes, you only need to cite the author, name of the work, and page number for quoted or paraphrased material. See the footnote example on the prior page.
- You should staple your paper together and attach a copy of the grading rubric to the paper (on the back).

**HIST 1030: Early Modern Europe
Grading Rubric for
Digital Selves Assignment**

Minimum Requirements (All aspects must be fulfilled to receive a grade of “B minus” or better):

Requirements	Yes	No
1. Is this rubric stapled/attached to their paper?		
2. Does the paper utilize a proper introduction, body, and conclusion?		
3. Does the paper present a topic sentence that argues their position on identity?		
4. Does the paper reference at least one passage from one of the authors?		
5. Does the paper reference at least two examples from the student’s digital life?		
6. Does the paper use footnotes properly?		
7. Is the paper at least two pages in length?		

Stylistic Considerations (To earn an “A” or “B”, all considerations must be rated “Very Good” or better):

Issues:	Needs Work	Displays Basic Competence	Better Than Average	Very Good	Excellent
1. No grammatical errors, writing mistakes, awkward phrases, run-on sentences, or fragments.					
2. No spelling mistakes or uses of the wrong word.					
3. No slang or overly “conversational” text.					
4. Definitely uses topic sentences to start each paragraph.					
5. Definitely uses examples and cites where those examples appear in the text. Definitely quotes some text and paraphrases other portions of the text.					
6. Definitely completes all aspects of the assignment.					

Argument/Content Considerations (To earn an “A” or “B”, all considerations must be rated “Very Good” or better):

Does this paper?	Needs Work	Displays Basic Competence	Better Than Average	Very Good	Excellent
1. Make a compelling point about their identity? Do I believe the paper author’s position?					
2. Successfully use examples from the recommended sources?					
3. Successfully use examples from their digital life?					

Three Overall Comments on Your Paper:

Letter Grade: