

**Midterm study guide**

**\*\* Please bring this sheet to class on October 10. \*\***

Read over these questions and jot down some ideas to help you prepare for the take-home midterm, which will be due in hard copy form on Tuesday October 15. Please also submit an electronic copy to the designated dropbox on D2L (I will need to do a report for the English Department because this is a GER class; having digital files of student writing samples will help me). The format of the actual midterm questions will be slightly different: they will ask you to compare/contrast an issue, theme, or question in two specific texts. You will choose two questions from a list of four to six, and you'll target a two-page (minimum) response for each question. You may want to review MLA style if it's been a while. I recommend a website called the Purdue OWL.

Texts that are possibilities for inclusion in the midterm: Carr, Weinberger, Blair, Shirky, Hugo, Warner, Whitman, Gleick, Kafka, Altschul, Forster, Benjamin, Stein. Below is just a taste of some broad topics we've addressed in class. The midterm will likely touch on some/most of these, but the best preparation is to be caught up on the reading and to have key passages flagged/highlighted in your books.

1. Based on what we have read so far in class, you could make the claim that an era's technologies shape or encourage medium-specific modes of cognitive activity and literary/artistic expression. Try to apply this claim to each text we have read. If you think it doesn't really "fit" a particular text, think about why and what other claim seems more appropriate.

2. Many of the authors we have read are interested in domestic and/or workplace life. Think comparatively about the authors' attitudes towards home, work, and workplace structures/institutions. What kinds of homes, workplaces, residents, and workers do we encounter? Are they glorified, demonized, skewed, or...? What might the absence of home life or workplace life mean, if anything?

3. What different forms of “overload” do you observe in the texts we have read or viewed so far in class? Think broadly—we have discussed overload as a real experience of people, an effect the author is creating, and as a shaping force behind literary practice.

4. In those texts that have specifically engaged the technologies of their day, how do the authors handle the machine/human binary? In other words, for each author, is technology more of an intrusive force, a neutral presence, or a welcome intervention? Or a little of all three?

5. The tension between the individual and the collective has come up repeatedly. In our discussions, the “collective” has meant things like the citizens of a nation, the members of a culture, an interconnected network of users, an institution, a ruling body, and a vague impending force. Trace this tension in the texts we have read so far. In each text, do you see an attempt at reconciliation, resolution, or healing? Or do you observe a highlighting or enlarging of the gap between self and the world of others in which the self lives?