

The general guidelines for writing an essay for this class are available at: <http://hci.ucsd.edu/102a/HowToEssay.html>. Specific instructions for Essay 1 are given below.

Essay 1: Interactions with the material world.

In this essay you will use the concepts introduced in the readings and in lecture to analyze a particular material representation: the weekly planner. This class of artifacts also contains the weekly class grid, day planner, Google calendar (in week mode) and other similar representations of a weekly schedule. You may work with any of these.

Step 1: Find one of these artifacts. Make a paper print out of it. Examine it carefully. Ask yourself about every detail, “Why is this here?” and “Why is it in this form rather than some other form.” “How do the parts fit together?”

Once you have gotten to know your object, begin your analysis. Your analysis of the weekly planner artifact will give you an opportunity to do some research on your own on the history of the representation of time in general and calendars in particular.

Step 2: Identify some possible themes to develop. There is plenty to say about a simple artifact of this sort. I began my thinking about it by going through both *Cognition in the Wild*, and *Mindware*, looking for concepts that relate to the ways that interactions with material objects may have cognitive consequences. I have made a partial list below.

In your essay you could address issues relating to any of the following (and more):

- The cultural practices that orchestrate your interactions with the artifact.
- The extent to which we can consider the weekly planner to be an example of a culturally domesticated space.
- The functional system that is created in interaction with the weekly planner.
- The contributions of internal and external resources. For example consider the perceptual and motor processes.
- The computations that are accomplished in this interaction.
- The way that the weekly planner permits you to do conceptual inferences using perceptual processes.
- The representation of the abstract concept of time as perceptible objects.
- The propagation of representational states onto the class grid and from the class grid to other representational formats.
- The comparison of the class grid to other formats for representing the same temporal relations and the ways that each representational format implies or requires a different functional system.
- The fact that while time is one-dimensional, the weekly planners are two-dimensional. Why?

Step 3: Write your essay. It will not be possible to deal with all of these concepts in a single 1000 word essay. However, you could use this list – or better yet, use your own list generated by your own reading of the texts – to begin exploring the cognitive aspects of the weekly planner. Then you will have to make some choices. Some of these

concepts relate strongly to one another and developing them together will create a coherent argument about the ways that interactions with the weekly planner have cognitive effects.

Be sure to include a figure showing the artifact you are analyzing.

Review the general guidelines for writing essays. Talk to your friends about your work.

Have fun!