

Three Options for Erasure Art

English 295: Lighting the Page ♦ Spring 2020

Choices!

For this hands-on exercise, you can choose **one of two options**:

1. **The manual option.** Start with Tom Phillips's *Humument*, the optional reading for Monday. Using that and the examples gallery of the Erasamatizer 3000, create your own artistic, erasure-based literary text using manual tools. You can use any text you choose as your starting point and manipulate it with whatever implements you want, such as pencils, markers, paints, or anything else that inspires you. Then photograph your project and insert the photo (along with the usual paragraph of reflection) into your learning journal.
2. **Coding with Python.** If you are more experienced with computer code or just want to challenge yourself with it, experiment with erasure in Python. First, get these files from our "PYTHON FILES" folder in OneDrive:
 - punctuation_only_by_line3.py
 - punctuation_only_by_line3.py
 - parenthesis3.py
 - parts_of_speech3.py
 - *amontillado.txt* (the text of Edgar Allen Poe's wild short story "The Cask of Amontillado")
 - *MrsDalloway.txt* (the text of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*)

Upload all of them to Python Anywhere. Make sure that all the files are in the same directory. The first two Python files use slightly different methods to remove everything but the punctuation in Poe's story or another text. (Both files are set to use *amontillado.txt* as a default, so you can just hit "Enter" to select that file.) Once you get your results from PA, you may want to copy them into a word processor to make them prettier. You can create your own txt files to use for this processing; we've done that before, but I've included the instructions at the end of this document as a refresher.

The other two Python files do other things we've talked about. *parenthesis3.py* finds strips away everything but the elements of a text that are in parenthesis, and *parts_of_speech3.py* allows you to erase or reveal one part of speech in a text. You can try messing with the code in any of these files if you're up for that. You have your own copy, and the original is on the OneDrive, so you can always restore the original if your Python Anywhere copy gets messed up.

You may find the `punctuation_only` files most interesting to play with. Each of those is, at its core, a find-and-replace function using regular expressions. They use two find-and-replaces that look like this:

```
line = re.sub("[a-zA-Z0-9]", " ", line)

line = re.sub(" ", "", line)
```

Both lines use regular expressions (`re`) to make substitutions (`sub`) that transform the text. The first one takes any letter or number and replaces it with a space. The second one replaces any space and replaces it with nothing. (That's the double quotation mark with nothing inside.) You can change those find-and-replace functions to whatever you want them to become, creating your own kind of erasure and rewriting. If you are ambitious and want to try this option but need help with the technique, please ask! It's manageable for beginners, and I have resources that can clarify what you need to do, such as this guide to regular expressions: https://www.w3schools.com/python/python_regex.asp.

Creating Text Files for Textual Analysis

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Procedure for Mac

1. Find and open the application called TextEdit.
 - a. (You can also use other plain-text editing programs. I use the free version of BBEdit, for example. But make sure the program is capable of doing true text files, and absolutely do not use Word.)
2. From the “Format” menu, select “Make Plain Text.”
3. Open (or paste in), edit, and save your files as you wish to. Your file extensions should always be txt.
4. If your software has trouble processing the files, check for unusual characters. Watch especially for curly apostrophes and quotation marks, which can often be changed into straight versions (which work better for text processing) by doing a find-and-replace operation for each kind of punctuation. If you have further trouble after that, feel free to send me the file, and I’ll try to help.

Procedure for Windows

1. Find and open the application called Notepad.
2. Open (or paste in), edit, and save your files as you wish to, being sure to select text (txt) as the file format whenever you save.
3. Your file extensions should always be txt.
4. If your software has trouble processing the files, check for unusual characters. Watch especially for curly apostrophes and quotation marks, which can often be changed into straight versions (which work better for text processing) by doing a find-and-replace operation for each kind of punctuation. If you have further trouble after that, feel free to send me the file, and I’ll try to help.