

COM507 Assignment 1 guidance

First, read the guidelines for the first assignment very carefully:

Assignment 1: Creative plot summary and reflective commentary (1500 words)

For this assignment, you should pick a famous figure from the present or from history who can serve as the protagonist of a tragedy. Then, to explore key terms from Aristotle's *Poetics*, you should produce a 500-word plot summary. Accompany your plot summary with a reflective commentary (1000 words) setting out how your plot design responds to Aristotle's ideas about tragedy.

To allow for creative license, there are no strict guidelines as to how you should present your plot summary. For example, you are not obliged to divide your summary into acts, but you may find this a useful way of organising events. A sample structure is provided below. When identifying a 'famous figure', you are encouraged to choose an individual and events that have *not* already been dramatized into a play/film/novel etc. This will ensure that you do not run the risk of plagiarising an existing imaginative plot structure. We would like you to choose a tragic protagonist from history or the present day. You should carry out research to ensure a convincing and rich plot, with vivid details and convincing reference points where appropriate. Tragic playwrights throughout history have, of course, also carried out research of this kind to shape their plots. However, like those playwrights, you are not constrained by fact. i.e. you should feel free to embellish/make things up/change names/leave out information as required to ensure the greatest dramatic impact! Your choices in this regard, and your treatment of the 'facts', are of course interesting in and of themselves, and you should discuss them in the reflective commentary as appropriate. Above all, this is an exercise in dramatic structure and organisation: by reading extensively in the critical material about tragedy (esp. Aristotle, but also Poole, Hall, Hammond, Wallace and others on the reading list) you will encounter a range of interesting ideas that can inform your plot summary and commentary. We encourage you to engage with these studies and cite them formally, along with relevant ideas from Aristotle, in your reflective commentary.

Sample plot summary (500 words)

Title of play: *Georgie*

Primary characters:

Georgie: a social media influencer, married to a famous footballer

Kirsty: Georgie's stylist

Emilie: Georgie's publicist

James: a reporter for *The Sun*

Sarah: a famous wife of a footballer

A hotel cleaner

A hotel waiter

The Chorus: panellists from *Loose Women*

Setting: A luxury hotel in Manchester

Act 1 [Restaurant]

On the television: *Loose Women*. The panellists discuss the forthcoming World Cup and the hierarchy of 'WAGS'. Over a drink with her stylist Kirsty, Georgie describes her rise to fame,

detailing her difficult childhood, before she found fame and wealth. Georgie wants a better life for her children. She aspires to be a footballing power-couple and expand her media empire. She is jealous of Sarah, another footballer's wife.

A waiter and hotel cleaner discuss their famous guest. They argue about whether she deserves to be famous or not.

Act 2 [Conference room]

Georgie is in a meeting with her publicist, Emilie. She is amazed that Sarah is being praised in the press for her charitable work as she feels she is driven only by self-interest. She tells Emilie that she has discovered from Sarah's private Instagram account that she is unhappy in her high-profile marriage and has been seeing an actor. Emilie seizes on this information and suggests Georgie leak it to the tabloids to tarnish Sarah's reputation before the World Cup. Georgie reluctantly agrees.

Act 3 [Terrace]

Georgie and Emilie discuss Sarah's affair with James, a *Sun* journalist. They talk about payment, and when the story will go live. Emilie and James both agree that the story should be published online that evening, rather than waiting for the print news the next morning. They also embellish the details of the private Instagram post, to further damage Sarah's reputation. Georgie is hesitant, but nonetheless agrees.

[Restaurant]

Georgie is amazed to encounter Sarah in the bar. Cornered, she agrees to have a drink. She realises that the news will soon flash up, and Sarah will be horrified that her affair has been revealed. In the bathroom she resolves to maintain her composure so as not to betray herself. As the news breaks on the television, Georgie is amazed that Sarah appears unfazed. Suspicious about leaks from her inner circle of WAGs, Sarah had set a trap to find out who was responsible, posting fake stories to her private Instagram account, which she had made available to Georgie only. Georgie's amazement turns to horror as Sarah reveals that Georgie has fallen into her trap. Smiling, Sarah leaves the bar after having told Georgie that tomorrow's news will lead with the story about her leaking false stories. Georgie, distraught that her reputation is ruined, leaves several messages on her publicist's answerphone.

Act 4 [Restaurant, next day]

The waiter and the cleaner prepare the hotel restaurant for the lunch service. They discuss that morning's news. The affair between Sarah and a famous actor has turned out to be false. Instead, the newspapers are reporting the false story was leaked by Georgie. The waiter and the cleaner wonder where their famous guest is, as she normally comes down for coffee. *Loose Women* comes on the television: the panel decry a lack of solidarity between women. The discussion is interrupted by a breaking story that Georgie has been dead in the hotel's underground carpark, from a suspected suicide.

– End –

Some initial questions to guide a reflective commentary (1000 words)

- What was the source material for the creative plot summary? Why did you choose it?
- Which of Aristotle's ideas about tragedy were you trying to explore?

- Did you change any of the ‘facts’, and if so, why?
- How did you decide what to keep in and what to leave out?
- What were the challenges of organising a series of events into a tragic plot?
- Discuss key elements of Aristotle’s account of tragedy (e.g. *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *mythos*, *etbos*, *dianoia*) and how you explored them in your own creative practice. Were Aristotle’s concepts helpful? Did you feel constrained by them in anyway? Did you perhaps subvert or challenge them?
- Did you choose to include a chorus? Why?
- How were your creative decisions determined by what could feasibly be represented on stage?

Bibliography

You should accompany your reflective commentary with a properly formatted bibliography. Ensure that you include the sources you have used to carry out background research on the individuals/events that inspire your creative plot summary (e.g. websites). As well as Aristotle’s *Poetics*, you should also use the introductory reading material on the reading list to shape your creative engagement with tragic composition (e.g. Wallace, Hall, Poole etc.).