



## Online Time Capsule

**Preamble.** This situates the assignment within the context of the course and reminds students of what they have been working on in anticipation of the assignment.

Our current technological moment presents particular choices—what should be preserved, what can be preserved, and how best to preserve it. Fortunately, we are not the first culture to grapple with these questions. To expose our role culturally, institutionally, and individually in the survival and loss of culture, we have studied and evaluated the choices made and the methods used during the European Renaissance. In the Renaissance, changing cultural understandings of loss led to developments of new practices in preservation, restoration, destruction, trade, exhibition, translation, and transmission of historic and contemporary materials. Some of these practices we continue to use today, while others seem quite foreign. When looking at their practices or our “best” practices today, it becomes clear that all preservation involves transformation and the lucky avoidance of destruction in the intervening intervals of time.

**Goals/objectives.** Here in the preamble, you should remind students of how previous work in the course has addressed the course goals.

**Scaffolding.** Remind students how what they have done throughout the semester has prepared them for this assignment.

**Mission.** This explains the assignment in broad brush strokes, giving students a general sense of the project you are setting before them.

**Justification.** This explains why the particular genre of assignment you’ve chosen is the best way for you and your students to measure how well they’ve met the learning objectives associated with this segment of the course.

If this is the case, what do we do when the future of the past may be out of our control? What challenges do we face as individuals, and what do we try to preserve as a culture?

You will face these issues directly, as you create and reflect upon an online time capsule of life at Harvard in 2018. This will be a collaborative project that will have you engage with the broader Harvard community, which will vote on the final items for the time capsule. Once the final capsule is revealed, you will reflect on these communal and individual choices, in the form of an article reporting on the opening of the capsule and in the form of a lament for something excluded from the capsule. The best laid plans can

**Genre.** This is a **creative or non-traditional assignment.** The choice of an assignment’s form or medium should reflect the kind of learning experience you want students to have (intellectually and otherwise). By creating an online time capsule, students have to engage with transformation as a part of preservation and address an audience that is not from the classroom. Because these are both activities that would not

be subject to technological limitations, cultural expectations, and bad luck. How will you attempt to mitigate these factors?

have been as easy to achieve with only an essay or exam, a carefully chosen non-traditional assignment is a good option.

**Goals/Objectives.** Some of the skills tested via this assignment:

- Observing and describing
- Cataloging
- Researching
- Weighing options
- Making an argument
- Non-academic writing
- Oral presentation

The **genre** of the assignment, which has Harvard community members voting on students' entries for the time capsule, mimics loss (but in a much shorter time period) and condenses the sorts of social choices that societies make over time when choosing what to preserve.

This prompt clearly explains to students the intended **audience** for their assignment. When Harvard community members vote, they will become a source of feedback for students in addition to the instructional staff.

**Tasks.** This outlines what students are supposed to do at a more granular level: for example, how to start, where to look, etc. If written well, this part of the assignment prompt ought to function as a kind of rubric for students, helping them to decide for themselves whether they are completing the assignment successfully.

**Submission format.** This tells students, in appropriate detail, how to submit their work. For example, should the assignment be a five-page paper? And saved in .docx or .pdf format? Should it be uploaded to the course website? Is it due by Tuesday at 5:00pm?

**Important:** In this regard, this section of the assignment prompt, which combines detailed tasks with information on how to submit each piece of the assignment, acts like a "pre-rubric".

Your mission is:

1. Select one, or no more than two, objects which you would like to contribute to an online time capsule that represents Harvard culture at this moment in time. Remember that you have engaged in various methods of preservation with your personal artifact over the course of the semester. How can your experiences—"failures" as well as "successes"—in preserving and transforming your object help you to choose the most meaningful objects now? To see what other students have elected to preserve in the past, see the list below with links to articles on some Harvard time capsules. Professors at the Harvard Business School ran experiments using time capsules to study the benefits of rediscovery. [Their results](#) might inspire your selections.
2. Compose a brief argument (i.e. no more than 500 words) making a case for why you are nominating this/these objects for the time capsule. What do they capture about Harvard life? Why do they capture those aspects of Harvard life better than possible alternatives?
3. Your objects and narratives will be posted online, and the general Harvard public will be invited to vote anonymously on your proposed submissions. The [some predetermined number of objects] highest scoring objects will become the official time capsule.
4. Once the contents of the digital time capsule are settled, the course staff will introduce randomized loss into the contents, meaning that the final capsule will include fewer items/some damaged items.
5. Once the contents of the digital time capsule are settled, you will contribute two written reflections on the final contents:
  - a. A 1000-word op-ed or magazine article reporting on the opening of the time capsule 100 years in the future. What does the selection of the final objects tell us about Harvard life and culture ca. the year 2018? What can it *not* tell us? How does the choice of preservation methods—i.e. a digital time capsule—affect your understanding of the original culture that produced it?
6. A 1000-word lament for an object which was not (or could not be) included in the time capsule, reflecting on the



**Scaffolding.** Remind students how their prior work in the course has prepared them for this assignment.



**Genre.** This assigned reading demonstrates the benefits of creating and rediscovering memories through time capsules. It also provides some guidance as to what might be a "meaningful" object.



**Creative or non-traditional assignment.** As in a traditional paper, students will need to **make an original argument**, which is a higher order activity. These questions function as a **pre-rubric**.



**Genre.** Here is a more detailed set of instructions to help students understand the **intended audience**. The **form** of the assignment is important, as it mimics time and contributes to the argument that students are making about preservation practices.



**Genre.** In writing of an op-ed or magazine article, students will have to think about the role of communities and cultures in preservation, turning their focus from their individual role to that of the collective. It will also help them to experience the types of assumptions that are made as they look to objects from the past.

logic(s) of loss and destruction at play. What does the omission tell us about the Harvard public that voted on the time capsule?

In addition to the structural features described in the annotations above, note several other important features of this annotated capstone:

- It addresses students in the second person, i.e. as *you*. Students appreciate instructions which address them directly, which seem to recognize them as equal participants in the course, and which make them a promise.
- It tests the claims of class against something that students can do in the world.