
The “Quest for Meaning” Text Mining Activity

Overview of the Activity

This is an assignment that will run the course of the semester. It entails two related tasks of different temporal scopes.

1. **Weekly Work** – Each week, you are required to perform the follow task:
 - (a) Read roughly one-half of a chapter in Marcel Danesi’s “The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice”.
 - (b) Mine the required reading of the week for “salient sentence sequences”, which are bits of text that are derived in a highly constrained way from the book.
 - (c) Write an abstraction of the contents of the half-chapter from which the salient sentence sequences are mined.
 - (d) Craft a nicely titled, well formatted document containing the abstraction and the set of salient sentence sequences for the featured “half-chapter”.
2. **The Compilation** – Compile the 14 documents created in the Weekly Work part of this assignment into one document, with a bit of structural enhancement.

This activity engages you in the creation of a rather minimal, eclectic semiotic knowledge base from which you should be able to think some semiotic thoughts and perform some semiotic analyses. These two characteristics, minimal and eclectic, of the semiotic knowledge base are appropriate to this course, since it is an introductory course and since the field of semiotics is grounded in ideas deriving from a broad collection of diverse sources.

Operational Details of the Weekly Work

For each of the first fourteen weeks of the semester you are required to read roughly half of one chapter in “The Quest for Meaning” by Marcel Danesi. The particular sections of the book that you are to read each week are specified in the “Reading Schedule” section, to follow. After reading the specified pages for the week, you are required to engage in the following tasks:

1. **Text Mining Task** – You are to “lift” a set of 15 “salient sentence sequences” from the pages specified for the week. What is a salient sentence sequence? For the meaning of the phrase that we will adopt in this course, please see the section, to follow, devoted to defining and clarifying the concept.

The idea inherent in this task is for you to work hard to craft a collection such that your salient sentence sequences possess the following characteristics to the degree that you can manage to achieve them:

- (a) The collection should tell a compelling story of the aspects of semiotics presented in the reading.
- (b) Each item should say something of significance with respect to the field of semiotics.

- (c) Without unduly sacrificing the emphasis on mining **semiotically** salient bits of knowledge, your bits should reflect your personal academic and non-academic interests.
- (d) In the event that a jarring construct should emerge for some salient sentence sequence as a result of removing the short text from its context, the words of the short text should be modified in very modest way with the goal of rendering it more readable at a later date. (For the most part, modification will take the form of making references more explicit.)

In addition to these four basic goals for each set of 15 salient sentence sequences, you are required to adhere to the following constraint: Number your salient sentence sequences from 1 to 15, be certain that each salient sentence sequence appears in your list according to the position in which it appears in the Danesi text, and locate each salient sentence sequence in the text by indicating the page on which it starts, and perhaps its rough position within the page on which it starts.

2. **Summary Task** – Write a 1 paragraph, 6-12 sentence summary, **in your own words**, of the pages which constitute the reading assignment. Please do so with the intent of presenting the content of the pages in such a manner that the reader will appreciate the nature and scope of the semiotic knowledge presented in the reading.
3. **Document Creation Task** – Create a document consistent with the model document presented for textually capturing your weekly task. **You will find this model among the selected course documents on the course web site.**
4. **Document Submission Task** – On Monday of each of the first fourteen weeks, I will send you an email pertaining to the text mining activity for that week. Your job is to respond to this email no later than the immediately following Sunday. Please do so by means of a **reply** to my email, attaching to your email reply a **PDF** file which contains your document for the week (complete with title, summary, and set of 15 salient sentence sequences).

Operational Details of the Compilation

Compile a complete set of your weekly documents into a single document containing:

1. A title page, complete with a title for your document, your name, and abstract indicating the contents of the document.
2. A table of contents representing each of the fourteen weekly documents that you are required to incorporate into the document.
3. Your work for each of the fourteen weekly task mining activities, complete with title, summary, and the collection of 15 salient sentence sequences.

On the Monday of Week 15 of the semester I will send an email to you pertaining to your compilation document. To submit your compilation document, please simply respond to that email, attaching a **PDF** file containing your compilation.

There are two extreme ways to complete this compilation:

- **Way 1:** Wait until Week 15 and then focus on building the compilation document, from scratch.
- **Way 2:** Craft an “empty” document, in terms of weekly entries, right out of the gate, and then add an entry each week consisting of the contents of your weekly document. That is, build the compilation throughout the semester.

Way 2 is highly recommended!

Salient Sentence Sequences

Please consider a “salient sentence sequence” to be either:

1. A sequence of 1-3 contiguous sentences, lifted straight from the text, which seem to be particularly noticeable or important from a semiotic perspective. This kind of salient sentence sequence will be referred to as a “quote”.
2. A sequence of 1-3 contiguous sentences, lifted from the text with minor modification, which seem to be particularly noticeable or important from a semiotic perspective. This kind of salient sentence sequence will be referred to as a “quasiquote”. The minor modification is simply intended render the text more readable once it has been lifted from its surround.

Reading Schedule

For each of the first fourteen weeks of the semester, you are required to read roughly a half chapter in Marcel Danesi’s “The Quest for Meaning”. Specifically, this is the reading schedule:

- **Week 1** – Chapter 1 - What is Semiotics? (Sections 1 and 2)
- **Week 2** – Chapter 1 - What is Semiotics? (Sections 3, 4, and 5)
- **Week 3** – Chapter 2 - Signs (Sections 1, 2, and 3)
- **Week 4** – Chapter 2 - Signs (Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7)
- **Week 5** – Chapter 3 - Structure (Sections 1, 2, and 3)
- **Week 6** – Chapter 3 - Structure (Sections 4 and 5)
- **Week 7** – Chapter 4 - Codes (Sections 1, 2, and 3)
- **Week 8** – Chapter 4 - Codes (Sections 4 and 5)
- **Week 9** – Chapter 5 - Texts (Sections 1, 2, and 3)
- **Week 10** – Chapter 5 - Texts (Sections 4 and 5)
- **Week 11** – Chapter 6 - Representation (Sections 1, 2, and 3)
- **Week 12** – Chapter 6 - Representation (Section 4)
- **Week 13** – Chapter 7 - Applications (Sections 1 and 2)
- **Week 14** – Chapter 7 - Applications (Section 3 and 4)

Models of Relevant Artifacts

Two models are presented for this assignment, one for the weekly task, and one for the semester task (the compilation of the weekly documents). These models can be found among the selected course documents at the course web site:

http://www.cs.oswego.edu/~blue/course_pages/2021/Fall/CognitiveSemiotics/

Notes on this Assignment

1. It is probably a good idea for you to work a bit ahead of schedule on this assignment. That way, if you are busy some week with other things, you will already have completed your reading/mining/summary activity for the week.
2. The communications protocol for the weekly assignments affords you an opportunity to submit your weekly work several days prior to its due date. It is probably a good idea to avail yourself of this opportunity on a regular basis, so that you generally won't be in danger of being late with your assignment for one reason or another.
3. Occasionally, I will read through someone's weekly work. Generally speaking, however, I will just check to see that you have completed it by: (1) seeing that you responded to the appropriate email, (2) seeing that you have attached a **pdf** file to your email, and (3) looking for title, summary, and 15 properly formatted salient sentence sequences in your **pdf** document. **Please note that any sort of attachment other than a PDF document will be considered invalid for the purpose of this assignment, and invalid documents receive zero (0) credit.**
4. Occasionally, I will ask someone to read some of their salient sentence sequences from an archive that I will maintain of the SBK QM documents that you are all required to submit on a weekly basis.
5. A completed document is taken by me as a **sign** that you have worked hard to sort thought potential salient sentence sequences with a critical eye towards crafting a compelling set of bits of knowledge about semiotics, one which strives to adhere to the aforementioned desired characteristics. Of course, as Umberto Eco has famously observed, if something is a sign, then it can be used to "tell a lie". Please strive to engage meaningfully in this assignment. The more effort you put into this assignment throughout the semester, the more you are likely to take away from the course, and the more satisfaction you are likely to find in the course. Token efforts tend to result in token levels of learning and satisfaction.