

Homework Assignment #4

Distributed in discussion section on Friday, November 17.

Due in discussion section on Friday, December 1.

Before you attempt to do this homework assignment, you need to do the reading assignment. It's a chapter from the book *You Just Don't Understand* by Deborah Tannen. You can find the reading assignment linked through the course website, or go directly to:

<http://courses.umass.edu/ling101s/tannen.pdf>.

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think critically about Tannen's work, as this work is presented in this reading assignment and in lectures 19 and 20. Critical thinking is the use of *evidence* and *reasoning* to draw conclusions about a topic. Critical thinking is not simply criticism; in fact, one could in principle think critically about Tannen's work and end up concluding that it is fundamentally correct. Critical thinking is the opposite of gut-level reactions — "I just don't like this idea" — or appeals to public opinion — "I think everyone would agree..." (Some would say that critical thinking is mostly absent from political discourse in this country.) If you would like to learn more about critical thinking and its importance in education, you might start here:

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/aboutCT/definingCT.shtml>

To think critically about a proposition, you need three things:

- a. An understanding of the proposition. That is the purpose of the reading assignment and the lectures on Tannen's work.
- b. Evidence bearing on the truth or falsity of the proposition. Your source of evidence for this assignment is described in the next paragraph.
- c. A process of reasoning from the evidence to the conclusion. Previous assignments have dealt with this process of reasoning, and your TAs will review the basic idea.

You have two sources of evidence for this assignment. One source is your own experience of communication between people of different genders who are in some sort of relationship. Throughout your life, you have observed many such conversations and may have participated in them yourself. The other source of evidence is an informant. Your informant should have a current or previous romantic relationship with a person of the opposite sex and be willing to talk about how communication worked or didn't work in that relationship. That person could be your current or past boyfriend or girlfriend, but that is not necessary. If you're gay, you should still find a subject who is in a heterosexual relationship because we are studying gender differences in communication styles, but you may want to address the interesting question of whether the lack of gender differences in homosexual relationships means that some communication problems are more easily avoided.

Remember: The focus here is on communication, so the many other problems that come up in relationships (e.g., money, sex, family, attentiveness, cheating) aren't relevant unless communicating about them is itself an issue.

Write up your results in a 500-word essay.