

The following assignment is one I use when I teach Shakespeare, but it can be adapted in infinite ways.

I choose a scene from whatever play we're reading, then I go into YouTube to find two versions of that scene. I like to find two versions of the scene; when students compare just one version to the text, it becomes easy for them to assume that the scene is just "how it is." Comparing two of them to the text encourages them to ask why.

Since all my classes are in WebCampus, it's an easy thing to link the videos directly into the assignment.

Then I invite students to analyze each version, then compare the overall interpretation of the scene. I usually use specific questions to avoid the more obvious sorts of comparisons (the first clip starred Claire Dane, and the second one didn't). The questions are tailored to each assignment, but here are some I typically ask:

What changes to the scene did each director make? These changes might be dialog added or omitted, or the inclusion of actions or visual elements not specifically called for in the play, or other changes. How do the changes affect your interpretation of the scene? What choices in costuming and staging has each director made, and how have those changes influenced the interpretation? How is each version staged, and what is implied by the staging?

And so on.

The exercise can be tailored to various disciplines. For instance, I think it would be interesting and useful to do with two sets of directions for assembly of some product. Directions make assumptions about the reader: cultural background, level of expertise, and eyesight (as I notice quite often these days). Training in the humanities can help students identify those assumptions.