

How to Write an Electronic Literature Directory Entry

The goal of the Electronic Literature Directory is to provide artists, authors, readers, educators, and casual readers greater access to the growing body of works known as electronic literature. Your entry is not going to be the final word on a particular piece, it is going to be the first step. The fields of information will provide basic data that can answer fundamental questions about a work. Well-written entries should help readers find works that will be useful (for scholarship, for information, for aesthetics, for enjoyment, etc.). The entry itself will not only encourage liveliness off the ELD, but it will also stimulate discussion on the directory itself. A good entry is a lot like a roadmap: it can help people navigate, but will never be a substitute for the journey itself.

The Fields

- **Work author:** This field is for entering the author/creator's name. For multiply authored works, entry writers can add additional authors as separate entries. The Directory will automatically recommend existing authors to make the process more consistent. Be sure you check to see if your author appears already to avoid duplicate entries.
- **Year:** This is the year of publication.
- **URL:** This field is for the URL. Be sure to find the most direct URL for the work. Often, readers will learn of a work through a link on a blog, website, or journal, or content will be embedded directly in a page. Find the link to the actual work.
- **Archived URL:** Some works from the Directory will be submitted by the ELO to the Archive-it Project for archiving. You do not need to fill in this field.
- **Language:** This field is to provide information about which human language the piece is written in.
- **Software platform and versions:** In this field, you should indicate which software was used to create the work.
- **Entry Source:** If the entry (or a variation of it) has been published elsewhere online, please include a reference to the original source. You should also make this clear in the body of the review.
- **Reviewed by ELO:** After your entry is completed, we will send your entry to be reviewed by the ELO.
- **The Body of the Review:** This is where your brief review of the work will go. Please read the section below for tips, details, and examples.
- **Author of this entry:** Your name. Be sure to list all entry authors separately.
- **Screenshots:** Select an appropriate moment while reading the work. If you are using a PC, press Ctrl+PrntScrn to capture the view that you see on screen. If you are using a Mac, press Cmd+Shift+3 to select an area to copy to your desktop, or Cmd+Shift+4 to copy the entire screen. Next, use image editing software to paste, crop, and save the image in .jpg format. Then upload your image.

The Body of the Review

The keys to a well-developed entry are simple:

1. Read the work you will be writing about carefully (and read it more than once).
2. Capture its surface meaning: What is the poet/author/artist writing about?
3. Describe its sensual qualities: Image, sound, motion, interactivity, etc.
4. Consider its formal qualities: What type of work is it? Is it a poem, if so, what kind? Is it a “novel,” how so and what genre? Is it a movie? An essay? Is it a code poem? In what ways does it differ from these formal types?
5. Does it remind you of other works of literature, art, or expression?
6. Do you think there is a deeper message to the work in question?

Once you are able to answer these exploratory questions, then you can begin the task of writing. A good entry can be either very short or very long (150-650 words), but it must consider the basic questions listed above. While you might not write on all these steps in any systematic way in your entry, the fact that you have taken them into consideration will mean that you are being diligent and taking your job as a contributor seriously.

When you actually write the entry, a good practice is to identify the author and piece by name, along with a basic description of what it is in the very first sentence. Beyond that, every entry must describe the piece’s surface meaning, its sensual/experiential qualities, and its literary form. In addition, excellent entries will explore the context of the piece within the larger field of literature (and may link to other entries in the ELD), as well as the deeper meanings contained within the piece itself.

A Note on Spoilers: Whenever possible, try to avoid writing entries that spoil surprise endings. Due to the exploratory nature of electronic literature, works often reward dedicated readers with interesting turns. Just as you would not want a film reviewer to reveal the surprise twist in a suspense thriller, entries should not rob readers and writers of the “payoff” that comes with committed reading. A good entry should be able to provide a good sense of what the work is about, and even hint that rewards await the diligent reader, without “giving away” the ending.

After you have accomplished this, the next step is to proofread your work. Are words, names, and titles spelled correctly? If you are using terms that you don’t feel confident about, have you researched these terms? Does the piece read well? Does it highlight aspects that will be of interest to people who read literature?

Please encourage your students to make note at the end of the body that their entry was produced as a part of your course, indicating the professor, course title, institution, and term/year.

Sample Student-Written Entries

Abrey, Amanda. "[I-Ching Poetry Engine](#)." Dr. Kiki Benzon's "Contemporary Fiction." *University of Lethbridge*, Winter 2011.

Kshterri, Shiram. "[Inanimate Alice Episode 3: Russia](#)." Maria Engberg's "Language Studies II." *Blekinge Institute of Technology*, Spring 2012.

Monroe, Melody. "[Pieces of Herself](#)." Dr. Lisa Swanstrom's "Literary Theory." *Florida Atlantic University*, Spring 2014.

Parker, Jacqueline, Laura Blair, and Seamus Riordan-Short. "[Inanimate Alice Episode 2: Italy](#)." Dene Grigar and Davin Heckman's "Electronic Literature." *DHSI @ University of Victoria*, 2017.