

# Digital Rhetorics & Literacies

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Ellis 016  
T, Th: 12-1:20

## Writing & Rhetoric II

### Instructor

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### Introduction & Course Goals

Welcome to Writing & Rhetoric II – *Digital Rhetorics & Literacies*. The design of this course emerges from the assumption that learning writing and rhetoric in the 21st century should include digital literacies that innovations in technology over the last 30 years have brought about. The goals for this course are centered on improving our writing, reading, and critical thinking abilities, but we will also consider what it means to be "literate" during this time in history when texts, and they ways we write and read them, are undergoing massive changes.

To accomplish this we'll read and write frequently to both increase our understanding of digital literacies and practice them, using new media and web technologies for writing projects. One central idea that will be a common thread throughout the course is the notion that texts and the writing technologies used to produce them are tools that influence our social lives, feelings, behaviors, even identities. We're also going to start thinking about texts as more than just printed words on the page. As digital technologies develop and become more widely available, texts are increasingly including image, video, and modes of organization that go beyond the traditional or alphabetic.

### Attitudes for Success

The success of this course depends a great deal on the energy each of us brings. I want to ask that each of you do your best to bring three attitudes to our meetings, the assignments, and your interactions with me and each other. First, I ask that you be interested. Interest, to me, means a curiosity, a desire to learn something new and expand or develop your current ways of thinking. Second, I ask that you are engaged with this course, that you bring a sustained level of physical and mental attention to all of our activities. Finally, I ask that you bring an experimental attitude to the course, that you be open-minded and appreciative of readings and projects that are challenging or present ideas that are new or uncomfortable.

### Required Texts and Course Resources:

Course Text: *Understanding Digital Literacies* by Rodney H. Jones and Chritoph A. Hafner

CourseSite: <http://mattvetter.net/digitalrhetorics>

Style Guide: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

## Course Work: Major Projects

This course is divided into 4 units with major assignments for each. Over the course of the semester, you'll produce:

### Rhetorical Analysis Essay

A scholarly essay that examines the discursive and visual construction of cultural and racial identity in the gaming environment of *World of Warcraft*.

### Found Social Media Essay

A multi-modal personal essay comprised entirely of posts you have made to various social media (Facebook, Vine, Instagram, etc.) written in order to gain a better understanding of the online "self" you have constructed. Alternate: a biographical essay of a public figure.

A **Group Hacktivist Project** that appropriates a digital medium, application, or network to forward a social or cultural agenda.

A **Reflective Argument Essay** in which explain how you've come to understand (digital) literacy by the end of the course.



## Course Blogs and Informal Writing Assignments

At the beginning of the semester, each of you will create an individual course blog using Wordpress. Think of this blog as a class journal accessible not only to you, but to your classmates and the instructor (me) as well. Throughout the course, you'll compose numerous posts on the blog in the form of reading responses and other informal writing assignments. For the most part, every time we have a reading, you'll also have some kind of reading response due. You'll also post proposals and other process work for your major projects on the blog. Everyone's individual blog will be listed on the main course site ([mattvetter.net/digitalrhetorics](http://mattvetter.net/digitalrhetorics)) where I'll also post informal writing assignment prompts, course information, major project assignments and announcements. At the end of the course, you'll turn your blog into a Web Portfolio where you showcase your work.

## Grades

Grades are problematic, especially in writing courses. Traditional ways of grading lead to a lot of stress and anxiety, for both teacher and student. But grades can also hinder learning when we become so focused on assessment that we lose sight of our main objectives: practicing, discussing, and learning about writing. My own approach to grades is to value effort rather than skill. I believe that all students should have an equal opportunity to succeed in my course, regardless of the literacies they bring with them. As a teacher, I'm trying to level the playing field but I'm also trying to get you to work through multiple difficult tasks because that, I believe, is the best way to challenge you to learn. The most practical way (that I've found) to accomplish all of this is to use what's called a grading contract.



## The Grading Contract

This course utilizes a grading contract to maximize learning and facilitate productive discussion about the essays you write. The gist of the contract is that I guarantee a grade of at least a B to everyone who meets the terms of the contract, and in return, you promise to fulfill your side of that contract with an emphasis on doing your best to learn what we are trying to learn. Students who violate the contract (1 major violation or 3 minor violations) will see their promised grade reduced by a full letter grade. At the end of the course, you will have the opportunity to raise your grade by a full letter by producing a superior portfolio of writing gathered from the work you accomplished all semester. If you have violated the contract, superior writing can still raise your grade (if you're down to a C, you could still get a B). The grading contract, then, largely makes grading automatic, up-front, and, I hope, less stressful, which should allow us to worry less about grades and more about learning how to best take advantage of writing in school, work, and life.

## Course Policies

\*I use **e-mail** to communicate important information about the class. You are responsible for checking your school account regularly. You should also check the **CourseSite** often for announcements and informal writing assignments.

\*Your work in this class is **always public**. Don't submit writing you can't let other students see. Drafts of papers must be polished and ready for classmates' feedback on the assigned dates to get Credit.

\***Plagiarism**: Cheating—whether by claiming another's ideas or work as your own (fraud) or making up or falsifying info. (fabrication)- will result in a course grade of F and a report to Community Standards. You are at all times responsible for handling sources ethically by acknowledging the author and source of directly borrowed ideas and language in your writing.

\***ADA:Class Accessibility**: Please let me know as soon as possible if you need an accommodation in order to work successfully in this class. This classroom strives for full accessibility, and it is not necessary for you to have an official accommodation letter from Disability Services in order to request changes to the classroom that will better serve your needs as a student, although you are encouraged to explore the possible supports they can offer if you are a student with a disability. Both able bodied students and students with disabilities are encouraged to suggest any improvements to the learning environment. We're all in this together!

\*Everyone in our class, including me, must remain **civil and courteous** at all times. We will often have opportunity to share our opinions and beliefs, but no racist, sexist, heterosexist, or any other negative communication harmful to an individual or group will be tolerated.

## Materials

\*Flashdrive to save and organize your work. (Remember that you'll be collecting everything for your final portfolio. I'll ask you to bring these on days when we meet in the lab.)

\*Notebook to take notes and do in-class writing in. (Bring to class every day.)

## The Grading Contract

The grading contract allows us to focus less on a quantitative judgment of your writing, and more on qualitative feedback. It might seem strange at first to not receive a grade on your essay, but remember that one of the goals of this course is to have a complex discussion about your writing and that we'll accomplish that goal through meta-commentary about how each of your projects succeeds and what you can work on in the future. I'll spend a lot of time thinking about and commenting on your work, and I expect you engage equally with my comments and to be constantly reflecting on your growth as a writer. I'll use Microsoft Word's comment feature to provide feedback and will also write a short letter at the end of your essay discussing what could be improved. I'll use a blue highlight for sentences/passages that are really well-written and a yellow highlight for sentences/passages that need some work. I'll highlight what I determine to be grammatical errors in yellow. If errors are numerous/distracting, I may ask you to rewrite the essay for credit. Furthermore, if your essay is not meeting the criteria of the assignment in terms of content, length, etc, I may ask you to rewrite the essay. For some of the essays, you will also be responsible for a review of a peer's project. I expect a high level of critical review here, one that earnestly attempts to help improve your partner's writing. If you fail to offer substantial advice, you won't receive credit for these (major) obligations.

## Attendance & Participation

Absences in this course will result in a minor violation. 3 minor violations = reduction of final course grade by a full letter. I will consider, but not guarantee, excusing absences with written documentation, but they must be legitimate, e.g. severe illness. Participation is required in this course as well. We'll do a lot of small group work and frequent class discussions. Please come to class prepared to discuss the reading for that day. Bring your textbook and any notes that will benefit our discussion. Do the reading and be prepared to contribute, but not dominate, the discussion.



## Learning Outcomes for Digital Rhetorics & Literacies

- understand and practice rhetorical analysis in digital environments
- practice writing (in) digital genres (blogs, wikis, social media, etc.)
- gain an understanding of texts and writing as tools that mediate social realities (identities, behaviors, beliefs, etc.)
- recognize how identities are produced in/through social media
- understand the capacity of writing in digital media for social and cultural change
- learn to recognize effective design principles for both print and digital documents
- understand and practice the role of collaboration in the creation among peers
- reflect on and be able to define (digital) literacy

# Learning Outcomes for all English J Courses

## Read:

- read a variety of texts and genres, such as articles from academic journals and popular magazines, visual texts or film, creative writing (e.g. poetry, memoir, literary journalism) and student texts);
- differentiate between primary and secondary sources;
- analyze and/or evaluate texts according to the audience, purposes, and writing situations;
- understand and use a variety of concepts or theories to analyze different texts (i.e. use rhetorical theories of composing or classical rhetorical appeals, feminist theory, use of literary elements such as, metaphor or symbolism; when appropriate, use concepts from film studies, and visual analysis, etc.
- understand and use rhetorical concepts (ethos, logos, pathos, kairos) to analyze texts;
- read own texts reflectively to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas needing improvement;
- respond to peers' texts constructively at both global and local levels.

## Research:

- search a variety of academic databases using appropriate and effective strategies;
- evaluate the quality and validity of sources using clear criteria (e.g. online sources, journal articles, books, etc.);
- understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it;
- document sources correctly using an assigned documentation style or a documentation style from the students' field (i.e. MLA, APA, Chicago);
- demonstrate ability to develop a good question for research (i.e. open-ended, current or relevant, focused, etc.).

## Write:

- write for specific purposes, audiences and situations;
- show ability to quote, paraphrase, summarize, analyze, synthesize, and critique;
- compose original arguments using rhetorical strategies, such as appeals to ethos, logos, pathos;
- show ability to utilize and/or analyze visual texts along with alphabetic texts; (visual text analysis is not required but highly recommended).
- practice writing in a variety of genres (e.g.. researched arguments, thesis-driven essays, literary analyses, memoir, memos, reports, proposals, etc.);
- approach writing as a recursive process;
- use various activities to generate ideas for writing, including class discussion, group work, debates, focused learning logs, freewriting, etc.
- use informal writing as a tool for developing critical thinking (e.g. enacting Elbow's believing and doubting game, focused journal assignments, dialogue journals, double-sided research logs, etc.);
- revise at both global and local levels;
- use correct documentation, grammar, spelling, and punctuation;
- compose a minimum of 20 pages of formal, graded writing, not including revised writing.
- allow students to revise some of their work based on feedback from their peers, tutors, or their instructors