ENGL 530  
Digital Textuality and Contemporary Rhetoric  
Course Syllabus – Fall 2012  

Wilson 2-274, T/R 6:10-9:00;  e-presence: dl

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Description  
This version of ENGL 530 Writing Theory and Practice blends deep instruction in 20th/21st-century rhetorical theory with investigation of the nature of textuality in digital modes and spaces. We will begin by developing definitions and a sense of rhetorical theory itself: reading the 20th-century theorists who revitalized classical rhetorical theory and further established it as a means for understanding human interaction. We’ll then apply the resulting theoretical framework to today’s modes of screen-based communication and screen-literate rhetorical situations: visually intensive, multi-modal, online, networked writing spaces. We’ll study a variety of online genres including blogs, wikis, webpages, and new media, across a spectrum of professional, popular, literary, and scholarly texts and audiences, as students read theory in visual rhetoric, new media, and human-computer interaction. Throughout this study will weave discussion of writing pedagogy: what and how, given what contemporary rhetorical theory and theory on multi-modal composition suggest about the nature of writing and reveal about writing processes and production, we ought to be thinking about pedagogy and the space of writing classrooms. Drawing all this together, the following questions will guide our inquiry: How do electronic writing spaces and genres change the way we understand “writing”? How does rhetorical theory predict and explain the workings of such spaces, and how are such spaces making us re-write rhetorical theory? How does our understanding of “text” and “textuality” shift when alphabetic print is modulated by channels such as still and moving image, sound, color, shape, and kinaesthesia? And what implications do digital, networked textuality and writing spaces have for college writing instruction?

We have in mind, then, the following learning outcomes for the course:

- Understand central principles of rhetorical theory and experience a range of rhetorical theorists to achieve an introductory graduate depth of familiarity with contemporary rhetoric.
- Study crucial mutual implications of contemporary rhetoric and multimodal writing theory and pedagogy.
- Become more familiar with your own writing processes.
- Think differently, in concrete terms, about the nature of writing and what it involves.
- Build familiarity with central arguments around writing pedagogy in screen-literacy contexts.
- Develop strategies for integrating screen-literate pedagogy in college composition courses.

Texts  
- Brooke, Lingua Fracta (Hampton, 2009)  
- Manovich, The Language of New Media (MIT, 2001)  
- Rice, The Rhetoric of Cool (Southern Illinois, 2007)  
- Shipka, Toward a Composition Made Whole (Pittsburgh, 2011)  
- Wysocki et al, Writing New Media (Utah State, 2004)  
- A collection of articles available on dl constitute much of the reading for the class. Have electronic or paper copies of these available to you for reference in the class meeting for which they’re assigned.
**Coursework**

This ENGL 530 will be a stripped-down reading-and-writing class. In a conscious effort to develop both a reasonably deep survey of contemporary rhetorical theory and understand that theory through digital/electronic/networked/multimedia frames, we have a lot of ground to cover, which won’t afford much time for projects beyond weekly readings and blogs. Beyond those, we have two major assignments: a collaborative multimedia (preferably video) exercise in the second third of the class, and a seminar multimedia project which will fill the function of a traditional seminar paper but be created as a multimodal text (potentially collaborative) that enacts your learning in the class. You will also be responsible to lead class discussion on a reading of your choice, twice, and present on your seminar project during the final class meeting.

**Evaluation**

I take for granted your engaged, mature participation in this course—being present for all classes, wholeheartedly contributing to collaborative work, completing assigned readings, lively participation in class discussions, and turning in all written assignments per guidelines and due-dates. These are minimum requirements to earn a B in the class. Between B’s and A’s lies mostly the quality (and, yes, wattage) of your work, so that consistently outstanding or impressive work earns A’s, very good work earns A-’s, and okay/sufficient work falls in the B range. While I will grade assignments individually, I will assign your course grade holistically, accounting for your earned grades, trends in the development of your thinking, and overall engagement and contribution to our community of learners. I will consult regularly with you on your performance in the course, and I hope that the intellectual ground you’re covering is of far greater interest to you than are grades.

**Policies**

- **Your work in this class is always public.** Don’t submit writing you can’t let us all read.
- **Revision** is substantive development of a piece, not fine-tuning wording. That’s editing.
- **Collaboration** is highly encouraged—real writers write with readers.
- Writing that was or will be submitted for assignments in other courses will not usually be accepted here too. You may work on the same problems, but not double-dip the writing itself.
- If an assignment is **lost or missing**, you must **provide another copy** no matter whose fault it is.
- I decide whether to accept late assignments **case-by-case**. Check with me.
- **Attendance** is of course required. Missing more than two classes limits your course grade to a B; if you need to miss more classes than that, you should drop the course.
- You’re welcome to chat with me about class business at downsDoug@gmail.com. You can find me on Facebook, but I don’t do class business there because of privacy and archival issues.
- **Plagiarism:** You are always responsible for acknowledging source material in your writing. Cheating—whether by claiming others’ work as your own (fraud) or fabricating material—will result in zero credit for the assignment and/or a course grade of F and report to the Dean.
- **ADA:** If because of a documented physical or psychological disability you are unable to meet the requirements outlined in this syllabus, you must tell me immediately. Disabled Student Services (x 2824, 155 SUB) will document your disability and coordinate any resulting accommodations.
- I reserve **final discretion in adjusting grades** to account for unanticipated circumstances.
- I may use copies of your work, anonymously, for samples or for research.
- Your continued enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance of this syllabus and policies.
### Readings

1 – Aug. 28  Course intro

2 – Sept. 4  
- Pirsig - pts 1 & 2
- Covino and Jolliffe – “What is Rhetoric”
- Grant-Davie – “Rhetorical Situation”

3 – Sept. 11  
- Pirsig - pt 3
- Booth – “The Ideal of a University”
- Corder – “Rhetoric as Love”
- Fisher – “Narration”

4 – Sept. 18  
- Pirsig - pt 4
- Fish – “Rhetoric”
- Berlin – “Rhetoric and Postmodernism”
- Gross - “Rhetorical Analysis”
- Polanyi – “Scientific Controversy”

5 – Sept. 25  
- Burke excerpts

6 – Oct. 2  
- Shipka - Intro, chs 1-3
- Wysocki (WNM) “Opening New Media”
- Wysocki – “Multiple Media”
- Murray – “Autobiography”
- Russell – “CHAT and Genre”

7 – Oct. 9  
- Shipka - chs 4-5, conclusion
- Sirc (WNM) “Box Logic”
- Perl – “Creative Discovery”
- Bizzell – “Cognition, Convention,”
- Elbow – “Writing and Speech”

8 – Oct. 16  
- Manovich - prologue, intro, ch 1
- Elbow – “The Music of Form”
- Baron – “Pencils to Pixels”
- Geisler – “Itext”
- Lanham – “Electronic Knowledge”

9 – Oct. 23  
- Manovich - chs 2-3
- Bernhardt – “Seeing the Text”
- Kress and van Leeuwen – ch 4 (viewer)
- Kress and van Leeuwen – ch 6 (composition)

10 – Oct. 30  
- Manovich - chs 4-5
- McCloud – chs 2, 4, 6
- Wysocki – Eilola

(DUE: Collaborative Multimedia Project)

11 – Nov. 6  
- Rice - foreword, intro, chs 1-3
- Wysocki (WNM) “The Sticky Embrace”
- Schuster – “Bakhtin as Rhetorical Theorist”
- Porter – “Intertextuality”

12 – Nov. 13  
- Rice - chs 4-7
- Perelman (Arnold Introduction)
- Perelman, “The Realm of Rhetoric”

(DUE: SMP Prospectus)

13 – Nov. 20  
- Brooke - preface, chs 1-4
- Johnson-Eilola (WNM) “The Database”
- Reither – “Writing and Knowing”
- Jamieson – “Eloquence in an Electronic Age”

14 – Nov. 27  
- Brooke - chs 5-8
- Richardson – “Writing is not a basic skill”
- Hayles – “How we Read”

15 – Dec. 4 – presentations and course wrap

(Seminar Multimedia Project DUE by the end of Thursday, Dec. 13)
Assignments

Weekly Blog Discussion
The bulk of your writing in this class, and much of our discussion, will take the form of blog posts and comments. You'll begin by setting up a blog (use whatever platform you like), and I'll establish a central d2l page to hold links to everyone's. (You should also simply follow each other class member's blog as they get set up.)

Each week, you'll be responsible to complete a significant blog post that speaks to the aspects of readings you find important. (You may also find it easier to create several shorter posts in a given week.) Your posting any given week should be equivalent to a minimum of 2 single-spaced pages of commentary. (But not more than 3 ss pages unless you're really on a roll.) You may in fact find it easiest to compose on a word processor, perhaps over the space of several days, and then copy the result into the blog composing page; or make a series of blog posts during the week evolving as you read. The point of the blog will be, primarily, reflection on what you're learning. That may take the shape of synthesis of ideas across readings, or selection of particular points in some readings to call out for further discussion. Any approach is allowable except pure stream-of-consciousness, undirected reflection. Your posts need to have and make a coherent point (or several, as you wish).

Two other quality considerations to make the most of this modality and genre: First, blogs link. We don't measure quality by number of links, but by their presence and value, their purpose being to capture resonances you discover between your points and other existing work, and thus to expand our sense of conversation while reading. Second, blogs are visual, with two implications. One is to be thoughtful about your blog's readability via its design and layout. The second is to engage more than the alphabetic channel in your posts. Get used to writing multimodally here and it will be second-nature for your seminar project.

Blog posts will be due by the end of Sunday each week. This will allow you time for the second aspect of the blog work, commenting. By class time each week, you'll be responsible to comment on four other blogs. (And we will frequently be reading blog entries and their commentary in class.) Your comments should of course be substantive additional discussion of subjects and issues that the blog post raises. They should be at least two full paragraphs, typically. Given the number of you in the class, each blog should receive at least two comments and hopefully more. I will not assign blogs to comment on at the beginning of the semester, but if comments aren't naturally balancing, we may form commenting circles as the semester progresses.

To evaluate your blogging, I'll look at its totality at the end of the semester, both of posting and commenting, and consider it in terms of the bolded criteria above, as well as simply what it indicates about your engagement, learning, and the quality of your reading throughout the semester.

Collaborative Multimedia Project
Particularly for members of this course who are teaching college composition (now or in the future), one purpose of this class is to help you get comfortable with the idea of teaching principles and genres of multimodal composition. Since it's pretty scary teaching something you haven't written yourself, one of our jobs is to get you checked out on some basics of multimodal composition, up to and including short videos. However, this is not the sort of project I want you spending more than a few hours on during the semester, so consider this a short “exercise” project. You'll work on it with one or two other class members, producing (this is negotiable) a video of not more than three minutes which incorporates a variety of modes (alphabetic, still image, moving image, color, sound, etc). This is a project you should start thinking about around the fifth week of class, and our due-date on it is the tenth week, which should let you put in an hour or two a week on it over several weeks and be just fine. We'll devote some class time over several weeks to demo-ing various principles of composing multimodal documents using everyday tools (Apple iMovie, Window MovieMaker, YouTube hosting).

Seminar Critical Multimedia Projects
It would seem somewhat strange to require a standard 20-page, monomodal (alphabetic-print) “paper” for the
course’s seminar project, and we are not that kind of strange. In a seminar project of roughly the same “mass” (intellectual investment, ground covered) as said busted-ass old genre, then, you’ll do the same kind of critical work that would be expected of any graduate course, but it will be “born digital,” planned from the beginning as the kind of work, and the nature of inquiry, that can use multimodal design to its advantage. You should ask yourself, what kinds of inquiry would you only be able to show in still images, or in video? What research questions might only be investigable (or understandable) through audio recording? What kind of inquiry might you be doing if getting it to audience members was best accomplished by video-recording an interactive talk? What if it were ballet shoes, or a box? In other words: I want you not to do inquiry projects that can be described and conducted almost as well in monomodal alphabetic papers as in multi-modal compositions; I want you to undertake inquiry that requires multimodal composition to accomplish to begin with.

Some additional guidelines to help you conceptualize the piece:

- It must of course be inquiry, question-driven (not reportage of existing information), representing an intersection of your interests and a gap in the field’s knowledge to which you wish to contribute.
- It may be empirical (driven by data you’ve acquired through primary research) or theoretical, as appropriate to your question.
- It may be collaborative with up to two other class members (with the expectation that it would take on additional scope beyond single-authored projects).
- It may help you to think of, and call, the piece a hypertext, webtext, multimedia presentation, video, or multimodal document that’s predominantly alphabetic—or something else.
- It must be extensively researched, demonstrably and deeply in conversation with existing research on your subject of inquiry / research question.
- You’ll need to design, layout, and format your project appropriately to your mode of inquiry (empirical or theoretical) and subject matter. (For example, an empirical project will require a description of primary research methods but a theoretical project would not.)

I’ll require a prospectus detailing your research question, plans for researching and addressing it, short bibliography of related existing research, and plan for project type and design, e-mailed to me no later than our Nov. 13 class meeting—one month before the project’s Dec. 13 due-date. In addition, during our final class meeting (a week and a half before the paper is due), you’ll give a 20-minute presentation on your project. This presentation will not be intended to present the final form of the project. Rather, its purpose will be to give you feedback as you develop your project. In essence, it will be a session for workshopping your project on your way to a final draft.

With the final project, you will submit a 2-3 page single-spaced reflective preface that considers your experience in creating the project and links it to your learning in the course. Think of it as a combination “Making of...” documentary and a “What Happened Here?” retrospective on the project and course. (If need be, you can submit the reflective preface, but not the project, as late as Saturday Dec 15th.)

Consider questions such as the following as you compose the reflective preface (but if you need to ignore them to say what’s important to you, do so, and do not follow slavishly down the list responding to each in order):

- Describe your process in creating the paper—how did you go about doing this project?
- Was anything different in the way you did this project than the ways you usually do research?
- Where did your ideas for this piece come from?
- What do you really like about the piece?
- What did you learn from your project?
- Where does the piece go from here?
- How has the course changed your thinking about writing, and did the project contribute to that?
- What do you see as the most important principles to teach about writing?
- What do you not know about writing and writing instruction that you’d like to?
- Where do you see your own experience, in learning to write and being a writer, in what we’ve studied?