

## Digital Writing

### Engl 344-001, Spring 2005

#### Course Description

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The primary question that this class will address is, how has writing and genre changed in the context of network culture? On the one hand, standard design principles for writing web sites have already been established and the web is full of print genres published online. On the other hand, digital environments have produced the emergence of a variety of new genres. While the course will look at some "remediations" of print, the primary aim is to investigate what it might mean to write in an "un-remediated" manner with an eye toward producing and inventing genres that are particular to writing digitally. Students will be expected to read diligently, attend technology workshops outside of class, create and maintain a blog, do smaller web-writing assignments, and produce one larger digital project at the end of the term.

- Room: Innovation Hall 336
- Day/Time: M 3:00-4:20
- Professor: Byron Hawk
- Email: [bhawk@gmu.edu](mailto:bhawk@gmu.edu)
- Office hours: W 4:30-7:10 RobA 405D
- Office phone: 703-993-3174
- English office: RobA 487
- Online syllabus: <http://classweb.gmu.edu/bhawk/344>

#### Course Information

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##### Required Texts

- Hayles, N. Katherine. *Writing Machines*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984.
- Rice, Jeff. *Writing about Cool: Hypertext and Cultural Studies in the Computer Classroom*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004.
- McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore. (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1996.
- Miller, Paul. *Rhythm Science*. Cambridge, MA: Mediawork/MIT, 2004.

##### Recommended Technology Texts

- Castro, Elizabeth. *HTML for the WWW*. 5th ed. Peachpit Press, 2003.

(The 5th edition you can find on Amazon used for 10 bucks, the 4th edition, which is all you really need for now, you can find for 2 bucks used.)

- Towers, J. Tarin. *Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004 for Windows and Macintosh: Visual QuickStart Guide*. Peachpit Press, 2004.

(There is also a version for MX, which is also inexpensive used from Amazon.)

- Weinmann, Elaine and Peter Lourekas. *Photoshop 7 for Windows and Macintosh: Visual QuickStart Guide*. Peachpit Press, 2002.

(This one you can find used on Amazon for about 10 bucks.)

#### Course Goals:

The goal of the course is to provide a foundation for each student's future creative and critical efforts in digital writing. This foundation will be different for each student, who will enter the course with widely divergent experiences with technology. Consequently, the workload in this class will vary with prior knowledge. In a workshop environment, students with more skills will be asked to help advance the foundation for students with less experience. No one will come out of the class an expert, but it is important that each person leaves with a higher level of knowledge and skill. Much of this will depend on individual student effort. Students should expect to:

- Understand the issues, culture, and problems of writing in the digital age.
- Learn to identify the changing nature of genre and experiment with electronic texts.
- Learn basic technological skills for facilitating digital compositions.

#### Workshops:

Since this course is a 3 hour course, only a limited amount of time can be spent in class on technical skills. Depending on your level of technical knowledge entering the class, you may need to spend as much as 5-10 hours per week outside of class learning technologies in addition to reading and writing assignments. In order to develop new skills or enhance the ones you have, you should take advantage of the workshops and labs available on campus. You are required to attend at least two workshops and/or visit a lab for additional help in order to extend whatever knowledge level you already possess. Topics, dates, and times for these sessions can be found from the workshop schedules below. Some programs/skills have classes scheduled already, some do not. Check now because some are only offered early in the semester. Registration is required to attend most of these workshops. Most workshops are scheduled during daytime hours. If this is a problem due to work, just visit the labs for further assistance. The Star Labs have many of the software programs you'll want to work with but also have walk-in peer tutoring. Bring in your materials and they can help you with your projects, questions, or problems.

- Star Workshop Schedule
- IT Training Workshops (list of all IT workshops, including Star)

- IRC Workshops
- Star Lab JC 229 (student mentors help walk-in students)
- Star\*T Lab JC 344 (open lab if no workshops are being held)
- Web Star Lab JC 311 (also has peer mentors who will help with web development)

## Text and Community

Each year the English department selects a text for multiple classes, both inside and outside of English, to assign and discuss. School-wide lectures, workshops, contests, and exhibits are then scheduled for everyone's participation. This year the text is William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. *Neuromancer* is one of the earlier novels to paint a picture of digital environments and it credited with coining the now commonplace term cyberspace. Since this course is not a literature course, we will approach the text as an entryway into thinking about the new media spaces within which we now write and live. I will expect students in the class to attend some Text and Community events, but the particular events and expectations will remain TBA.

## Attendance

Each week we will discuss the readings, give presentations, do short assignments, and have lab time to work on projects or technologies. Consequently, attendance is extremely important and will count towards participation grades. It is also vital that lab time in class be utilized. Others around you can help with your efforts. If you stop coming to class, it will be your responsibility to drop. Failure to do so will result in an 'F'.

## Office Hours

I will have office hours in RobA 405D from 4:30 to 7:10 on Wednesdays. If you need to speak to me and cannot make this time, then ask me to schedule a time that is convenient for both of us. I often spend time in the JC reading or grading. If desperate, check the bay windows on the second floor. I check my e-mail several times daily, so this will be the best way to contact me in a hurry if you have a question or problem, especially about what is due that week. The only other option is to call and leave a phone message, but I will not receive it immediately.

## Grades

Students in English 344 receive a final grade of A+ (4.0), A (4.0), A- (3.67), B+ (3.33), B (3.0), B- (2.67), C+ (2.33), C (2.0), C- (1.67), D (1.0), or F (0.0). The bulk of your grade (70%) will come at the end of the semester with the final blog portfolio and the final digital project (see assignments). This means that you may have a hard time sensing where you stand in the class as it progresses. Best advice is to keep up with blog entries, identify a possible final project early, and make sure that you pick up the technologies you will need for it along the way.

## Rewrite and Late Policy

There are no formal papers in this class so technically rewrites don't apply. Responses to readings need to be posted to your blog before each class. I will give you participation credit for

them the next day. Each small assignment will be given in class and you will be able to revise and finish it outside of class. Revisions should be made to the blog posts you turn in for your final blog grade. The final project should be developed over the last few weeks of class, so there should be plenty of time for feedback and revision. Overall, the class will be pretty fluid, but don't put things off until the end of the semester. You won't be able to get it all done at the last minute.

## Course Assignments

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### Blog – (30%)

The first day of class everyone will set up individual weblogs. For class we will be using the free site Motime. If you already know how to set up a blog and want to use a different site, you may. If you already have a blog, you can use it for this class but you may want to set up one specifically for this class so you don't clutter up your personal blog. Once the blog is established, you will be expected to post at least twice a week (this is the minimum). Posts should include responses to weekly readings, collections of notes for your possible project, links to other sites of interest, postings of "found" images online (or links to video clips, mp3 files) along with commentary. You will be expected to read and respond to each other's blogs. There may be class time devoted to blogging and responding, especially early in the semester. Weekly blog posts will count toward your participation grade. For the final blog grade, select your 10 best (most developed or most interesting) blog posts, revise them, and turn them in to me at the end of the semester. I'll grade them based on the level of ideas and detail. There is no particular word length. If you can say something smart, interesting, or insightful in a short space, that's all you need. You can revise the posts on your blog or web site and send me the urls, or revise them and send them to me in a word doc.

### Writing Exercises – (20%)

As the semester progresses, you will also have small digital writing exercises. These may be posted to the blog or as a separate web page (depending on how involved your piece is and where you want to place it). Many of these are small exercises to get you thinking about the possibilities for a final project and to hone some digital skills—skills can rarely be learned outside of some particular project or assignment. The writing exercises will be "layered." I will give two or three options, some having to do with working on a basic technology, others with applying that technology. If you need to learn it, work on learning it in class. If you know that skill already, work on applying it. I will try to give some more formal or detailed feedback on the exercises to give you a sense of where you are in the class. This may come in written or oral form.

### Final Project – (40%)

The end of the semester will be devoted to a digital project of your choice. It can be a work of hyperfiction or poetry, a nonfiction hypertext based on the models we will examine and develop in class, or a more traditional informational web site. We won't discuss the latter much in class, so if you decide to choose this kind of project I will expect you to consult the Web Style Guide and follow the standard web design principles. The project should be constructed so it is viewable from the web. If your project is too large or requires technology beyond standard web use, make special arrangements with me to turn it in on CD. Otherwise your project will be submitted by posting it to your Mason web space. We will have both informal and formal proposals for your final projects that will count toward participation. At some point in the semester I will write a more formal, detailed assignment.

### Class Participation – (10%)

In addition to weekly blogging and class exercises, there will be some other separate participation grades. I will count class attendance, individual effort outside of class to learn technologies, attendance of two STAR workshops of your choice, and attendance of Text and Community functions in your participation grade.

## Course Syllabus

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This is a tentative schedule by week for readings, assignments, and activities. Tentative means I can vary it as much as seems appropriate. Many of the writing exercises will emerge out of where we are as a class at the time, so the syllabus will be in regular revision. I will post all additions to the syllabus on this web page. The updated web version will always override the initial printable PDF version. Topics and assignments before the colon will be due/done that day. Homework after the colon is due for the next class period. Check online syllabus for links to web readings.

### Week 1: Blogging

M Jan 24 – go over syllabus, set up blogs: homework – read articles below and post a response to your blog

- Blog Genres
- Mistakes when Blogging
- Ten Tips on Writing the Living Web
- What We're Doing When We Blog
- The State of Blogging
- US soldiers' blogs detail life in Iraq
- Looming pitfalls of work blogs

- Bloggers reveal their motives

W 26 – discuss readings/blogs: homework – read articles below and post a response to your blog

- Blogging as Social Action
- Blogging Thoughts: Personal Publication as an Online Research Tool
- Blog Fiction
- Blogging as a Form of Journalism
- Use the Blog, Luke

Week 2:

M 31 – discuss readings/blogs: homework - write \*whatever\* in your blogs

W Feb 2 – in class blogging/responding: homework – read *Neuromancer* (first half), also see

- *Neuromancer* and Science Fiction
- wikipedia: William Gibson and Neuromancer

Week 3: Cyberspace

M 7 – discuss NM-CS: homework – read online essay/s, post to blog

W 9 – html workshop, work on blog designs: homework – read *Neuromancer* (second half)

Week 4:

M 14 – discuss NM-CS: homework – read online essay/s

W 16 – set up Mason space?, in class blogging/responding: homework – read *Writing Machines* (chs. 1-4)

Week 5: Hypertext Fiction

M 21 – discuss WM: homework – blog on examples

- Lexia to Perplexia
- Interview with Talan Memmott

W 23 – composer tutorial: homework – read *Writing Machines* (chs. 5-8)

Week 6:

M 28 – discuss WM: homework – blog on examples

- Filmtex (Mark Amerika Flash piece)

- Interview w/ Mark Amerika

W Mar 2 – start DW tutorials/writing exercise: homework – read

- A Poem Is a Machine to Think With

#### Week 7:

M 7 – discuss hypertext poetry: homework - blog on examples

- Life with Father (photoessay, click the "life with father" link)

W 9 – DW tutorials/writing exercise: homework – *Writing about Cool* (chs ???)

- Kevin Brooks, Pedagogy article
- Cyberspace, Cybertexts, Cybermaps

**Spring Break:** March 13-20

#### Week 8: Hypertext/Nonfiction

M 21 – discuss WaC: homework - post \*whatever\* to blog

W 23 – Photoshop tutorial, workshop/writing exercise: homework – read *Writing about Cool* (chs ???) and

- Wikipedia: McLuhan
- Understanding Media (read ch1&2)

#### Week 9:

M 28 – discuss WaC: homework - post \*whatever\* to blog

W 30 – workshop/writing exercise: homework – read *Writing about Cool* (chs ???) + *The Medium is the Massage*

#### Week 10:

M Apr 4 – discuss WaC/MM (informal discussion of final projects): homework - post \*whatever\* to blog

W 6 – workshop/writing exercise: homework – *Writing about Cool* (chs ???) + *Rhythm Science* (first half)

#### Week 11:

M 11 – discuss WaC/RS: homework - skim links below and post to blog

- review of Free Culture
- Some Like it Hot
- wikipedia: Lessig, Fair Use, Copyright

W 13 – workshop/writing exercise: homework – *Writing about Cool* (chs ???) + *Rhythm Science* (second half)

Week 12:

M 18 – discuss WaC/RS, go over final project assignment: homework – write up short project proposal and post it to your blog

W 20 – present/discuss proposals

Week 13: Final Projects

M 25 – workshop projects

W 27 – workshop projects

Week 14:

M May 2 – project presentations/feedback

W 4 – project presentations/feedback

Week 15: Finals Week

Projects Due ???