Networked and Multimodal Composition
Fall 2015, Tues/Thurs, 12:30-1:45PM

Course site: https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/eng149fall2015

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reading | writing | image | text | audio | visual | network | maps | links | gesture | hand | compose | create | cut-up | collage | collect | curate | praxis | vector | trajectories | movement | interaction

El Lissitzky, "Self Portrait: Constructor" (1924)

Goals

This course aims to empower you, the student, with the tools, skills, and critical vocabulary necessary to compose sophisticated and meaningful digital compositions. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

• tell stories effectively using text, image, audio, video, physical space, interactive systems, and social media platforms;
• discuss and critically analyze digital technologies and their impact on how we communicate ideas;
• plan, design, build, and publish your own multimodal projects, from start to finish.
Trajectory

We tend to imagine writing as mysterious and opaque – a gift of the Muses, that descends upon us in manic bursts of creative energy. As a result, we spend much of the time that we may have to write not writing but rather waiting to write: waiting for just the right mood, just the right place, just the right lighting, noise, or level of caffeination, in the hopes that inspiration may strike. (We’re all guilty of it!) It is the goal of this course to rid us of these beliefs and habits. Writing is, as any productive writer will tell you, not a lightning bolt of clarity but a slow and steady process of composition, a word that literally means bringing together and arranging. It’s like building a house, or weaving a tapestry, requiring much planning and the steady assemblage of different pieces. In this class, we’ll be practicing this process of assemblage in networked digital spaces.

Accordingly, this course is built around six key practices of digital composition: CONTRIBUTE, COLLECT, CURATE, COMPOSE, COMMUNICATE, and CUT-UP. Think of these verbs as prompts – as actions, moves, and compositional gestures – that we will be rehearsing and performing together at each stage of the semester. Practiced together in class and through small-scale exercises, they will provide a suite of skills that will help you frame and structure your own multimodal project.

The trajectory of this course is cumulative, with each new skill building off earlier activities. Thus it is imperative that you stay on top of the work. Some of the steps may feel small, but none of them may be skipped. If you feel that you’re falling behind or that you’ll be unable to meet the course requirements for any week, talk to me as soon as possible.

Textbook

This course has one required textbook: Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects, edited by Kristin L. Arola, Jennifer Sheppard, and Cheryl E. Ball (Bedford/St. Martins, 2014), referred to on the schedule as “W/D”. You can purchase it at the campus bookstore. Other readings will be provided as PDFs or links to articles and e-books accessible via the UNC Libraries. Readings should be completed before the date under which they are listed.

Assignments & Evaluation

At the center of this course’s workload is your individual project: a long-form multimodal composition on a topic of your choosing. You are responsible for designing, researching, and producing this piece from start to finish. This project is worth 40% of your grade and will be evaluated according to a project contract that you and I produce together.
All other graded assignments are small-scale, and are designed to help you learn and practice the moves needed for your individual project. These are:

**Contributing to Wikipedia (10%)**: For this assignment, you will be contributing your knowledge in service of making Wikipedia a fuller, more representative resource for the world. First, we’ll collectively identify gaps in Wikipedia, using the “requested articles” page as our guide. Then you will individually research and write a short article to fill one of these gaps. After you complete your article, we will edit and revise each other’s work.

**Collecting on Pinterest (10%)**: This assignment asks you inhabit the role of the collector. Using the readings and our discussions as your guide, you will gather 10 media items (image, sound, or video) related to your life at UNC, broadly construed. Think of campus as your flea market, and yourself as the collector who gathers those scenes, moments, and sounds that “strike” you (recalling Benjamin’s evocative phrase). We will gather these items on a collaborative Pinterest board. Each item is worth 1% of your grade.

**Curating on Storify (10%)**: Our Pinterest collection is a snapshot of a week at UNC, as seen through the eyes of all of us together. Its 200-item collection witnesses the diversity of our experiences, even as it coheres around the concept of campus life. This next assignment asks you to carve out your own exhibit from this collection. First, you will identify a story you wish to tell, something that emerges for you from the collection; then, you will curate items from the collection, supplementing them with your own additions, into an exhibit on Storify that narrates this story.

**Composing in-class exercises (2% x 5 = 10%)**: During the COMPOSE unit, our class time will be spent working on five small, in-class projects designed to teach you various audiovisual tools and design strategies that will help you on your individual project. Your participation in each activity is worth 2% of your grade.

**Communicating our projects (10%)**: After we share our individual projects with each other, we also want to share them with the world. In this unit, you will take the reigns, along with your classmates, to produce a digital web-book of everyone’s project. Because this is a collaborative task, everyone in the class will earn the same grade on this assignment.

**Cutting-up your classmates' work (10%)**: Remix, mash-ups, and sampling are crucial elements of digital culture; thus we will finish the semester by practicing these skills on each others’ work. This assignment invites you to develop an ethics of networked communication that shows care and concern for your sources (here, our classmates – the people we’ve been working with all semester!), while encouraging you to carve out a space for your own creativity and play in digital spaces.
Policies

**Attendance:** Each class, we will be learning, practicing, making things, and discussing new ideas together. If you miss class, you will quickly feel lost and behind, and you may be impacting your classmates’ ability to learn. Attendance is imperative. That being said, I understand emergencies. *You may miss two classes this semester, no questions asked and no notice needed.* If you require additional absences, you must email me before the missed class to excuse yourself. I reserve the right to reduce your participation grade for unexcused absences, and to require additional work from you in the case of an excused absence.

**Late assignments:** If you anticipate that you will not be able to finish an assignment on time, be in touch with me well before it is due to set an alternative deadline. Not doing so will result in a 2-point reduction of your grade for each day that any regular assignment is late, and a 10-point reduction for each day that your individual project is late.

**Technology:** Please bring your laptop to class. We will use them. However, know that I know when you’re looking at your time-wasting website of choice (trust me, it is really obvious to every one of your professors), and will probably ask you to stop. Please turn your cell phones to silent during class.

**Community:** Our class is a semi-private community, brought together by the shared goal of creating knowledge while improving each other’s work. Be prudent in how you discuss your classmates’ work outside the classroom. We each write with the knowledge that it will be shared with 19 classmates, not with each person’s Twitter followers, Facebook friends or lunchmates. If you want to share some aspect of someone’s composition, ask her permission first. Respond to your classmates with openness and courtesy. We’re practicing not only our composition skills, but the art of giving, receiving, and responding to criticism.

**Plagiarism:** Understanding plagiarism in the context of networked and multimodal writing can be tricky. We will go over how to cite sources appropriately in more detail in class. The bottom line, though, is that you should never copy someone else’s work and pass it off as your own under any circumstances. Not only is failing to do so a violation of the Honor System and academic integrity, it also results in the loss of your credibility as a unique individual with meaningful ideas to contribute to a conversation. Always err on the side of caution. If you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism, speak with me or review this handout on the topic from the Writing Center: [http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism/](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism/)
**Honor System:** The community and culture of our classroom is a microcosm of the much larger community of UNC Chapel Hill as a whole. As such, it must reflect and embody our institution’s standards of academic integrity, as dictated by the student-led Honor System. You can read more about the Honor System at the website of the Office of Student Conduct: https://studentconduct.unc.edu/honor-system

**Accommodations:** If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully participating in any of the activities of this course, please contact Accessibility and Resources Services as soon as possible via its website: https://accessibility.unc.edu/

**Getting in touch:** I’m here to help you learn and improve as a writer, designer, composer, and critical thinker. Please approach me with any questions, comments, or concerns. The best way to get in touch is through email (trettien@email.unc.edu). Please give me 24 hours to respond. I’m also available to you on Twitter (@whitneytrettien) or during my office hours (Tuesday and Thursday, 2-3PM).
Schedule

Entrances

**Tuesday, August 18**

*introductions; course trajectory, the structure of the syllabus, and class policies*

**Thursday, August 20:**

*what is multimodal composition? how has it changed composition? etymology of “network”*

Readings:


In-class exercise:

- Analyzing multiple modes.

Contribute

**Tuesday, August 25**

*introduction to Wikipedia; does Wikipedia perfectly represent our knowledge about the world? should we expect it to? what is our role in its creation and stewardship?*

Readings:

In-class exercises:

• Comparing Wikipedia articles.

• Editing Wikipedia.

Thursday, August 27

using sources and assets effectively and ethically

Readings:

• “Working with Multimodal Sources” in W/D, pp. 57-76.

Tuesday, September 1

editing each other’s articles; Wikipedia, education, and the question of authority; diving in with collecting

Due:

• Wikipedia article. Email me a link to the article before class.

Readings:


In-class exercises:

• Wikipedia article exchange and edits.

• Collecting with Pinterest.

Collect

Thursday, September 3

Benjamin and the figure of the collector; values and attributes of collecting; how does this differ in digital spaces?

Due:

• Revisions to your Wikipedia article.

Readings:


**Tuesday, September 8**

*collecting in the digital age; obsolescence the urge to total recall; introducing curation*

*Due:*

• 10 contributions (image, audio, video) to our Pinterest board.

*Readings:*


**Curate**

**Thursday, September 10**

*history of curation; how has its role changed on the web? how does this relate to issues of authority discussed earlier?*

*Readings:*


**Tuesday, September 15**

*interlude: storyboarding*

*Due:*

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• Contract (upload to Dropbox)
• Project pitch (upload to Dropbox)

Readings:
• “Assembling Your Technologies and Your Team” in W/D, pp. 77-92.

Thursday, September 17

share our Storify exhibits; wrap-up discussion of curation; introducing composition

Due:
• Curated Storify exhibit. Email me a link before class starts.

Compose

Tuesday, September 22

In lieu of class today, groups of 5 will be meeting with me individually to discuss their projects.

Thursday, September 24

HTML/CSS workshop (part 1)

Readings:
• Complete the Code Academy “HTML Basics” and “Build Your Own Webpage” exercises before class.

Tuesday, September 29

HTML/CSS workshop (part 2)

Thursday, October 1

aural modalities workshop

Readings:
• Before class, please download Audacity: http://audacityteam.org

Tuesday, October 6

visual modalities workshop

Readings:


Thursday, October 8

spatial modalities workshop

Tuesday, October 13

gestural modalities workshop

Thursday, October 15 – NO CLASS (Fall Break)

Tuesday, October 20

share projects in class

Due:

• Your project!

Thursday, October 22

share projects in class

Communicate

Tuesday, October 27

how do we want to publish our projects? begin planning, set up committees

Thursday, October 29

open studio to collaborate on producing our digital book

Readings: TBA, based on class interests

Tuesday, November 3

open studio to collaborate on producing our digital book

Readings: TBA, based on class interests
Thursday, November 5

open studio to collaborate on producing our digital book

Readings: TBA, based on class interests

Tuesday, November 10

open studio to collaborate on producing our digital book

Readings: TBA, based on class interests

Due:

• Completed digital book of our projects!

Cut-up

Thursday, November 12

introduction to remix culture; pla(y)giarism and appropriation in digital spaces; history of cut-up culture

Readings:

• Kirby Ferguson, Everything is a Remix video series, Parts 1-4: http://everythingisaremix.info/watch-the-series/


Tuesday, November 17

sampling + mash-up workshop

Readings:


Thursday, November 19

aleatoric methods and détournement workshop

Readings:

November 24

netprov and social media performance art

Readings:


November 26 – NO CLASS (Happy Thanksgiving!)

December 1

presentation of remixes

Due:

- Your remix!

December 8, 12-3PM: Final exam hour

presentation of remixes, publishing studio to share them with the world!