

English 380: Self-publishing and digital branding (MWF 11-11:50)

John Gallagher

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Office: English Building 243

Spring Office Hours: MW 9-10

Course Description:

As writing in the twenty-first century becomes more networked and digital, fiction and non-fiction writers increase their opportunities for success when they find and create their audiences. Central to this aim is writers' ability to serve as their own publishing houses. This course explores specific methods on how aspiring writers self-publish their writing and other content, how they inculcate a digital presence, and strategies for finding/creating/growing a digital audience. For example, we will examine how digital branding works across a variety of self-publishing genres, including reviews (Amazon, Yelp, Facebook), ebooks (Wattpad, Amazon), and online videos (YouTube, Twitter, Twitch). Students will develop an active web presence and write in a variety of contexts. While no previous portfolio of writing is necessary, students are encouraged to bring any writing and other creative endeavors they have previously produced.

Course Objectives:

- To develop a personal digital brand as well as to revise and iterate upon that brand throughout the semester
- To gain first-hand experience of social media management and practice the habits necessary to develop a social media following
- To learn digital branding terminologies and concepts
- To identify activities that self-publishing requires of digital writers

Texts:

- *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (Chip Heath and Dan Heath)
- Other readings are available through our course management system, Moodle

Assignments (details TBA):

- 1) Attendance and participation (10%)
- 2) Quiz on concepts and terms (10%)
- 3) "Building a brand" presentations (20%)
- 4a) Large-scale project OPTION 1: Building a following (40%)
 - a. A daily follower count, visualized over the course of two months (using Excel or another software program of your choice)
 - b. A WordPress site or another content management system of your choice
 - c. An active social media presence of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and at least one other social media site of your choice
 - d. A branded photograph (likely a headshot)
 - e. A branded genre once a week (for a total of 8); should be shared on every social media site
- 4b) Large-scale project OPTION 2: Interviewing influencers (40%)
 - a. Interview 6-10 influencers (for about 15-30 minutes each)
 - b. Analyze each interview (~250 words each)
 - c. Identify patterns and commonalities between those influencers (in a chart or table)
 - d. Write a 1500 word recommendation report about how novices may use your findings to succeed on the specific sites of your interviewees
- 5) Revised personal brand (20%)

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Classroom Community Policy:

- 1) You are expected to submit all assignments, readings, and writings by the announced due date. Late assignments and lack of preparation will be marked down. This includes bringing any texts to class if we are using them. You are responsible for printing them out.
- 2) Cell-phone use is not allowed in class. If you need to text, please do so surreptitiously.
- 3) If you are called on, I expect you to answer to the best of your ability. It is perfectly acceptable to be unsure of your answer—that is the goal of higher education: to take risks. I reward risk-taking. I encourage you to think and venture an answer.
- 4) Everyone in class has different levels of comfort. I expect all members of our community to respect one another. For those individuals who are more comfortable talking, I expect you to ask your fellow classmates questions to encourage them to add to our discussion. For those less comfortable, I expect you to make an attempt to add your thoughts to the discussion, even if it is a brief statement. Further, for those less comfortable talking in class, there will be other types of participation, which includes emailing me ideas to bring up in class, peer review, group work, and so forth. I expect everyone to listen actively to another. In this way, participation includes more than talking; it also includes listening, posing questions, and completing all in-class assignments to the best of your ability. Respect means listening, taking notes, and joining/enhancing conversations that challenge each other and your instructor using respectful language and tone.
- 5) We all come from different lives and have different journeys, so we should expect and embrace vibrant disagreement and productive dissent. A democratic society cannot thrive otherwise. Therefore, I expect us to continually strive for a spirit of grace, compassion, and respect in our learning journeys (both in agreements and disagreements) for the short time we are together in this course. If at any time you feel that these expectations are not being met, please let me know as soon as possible.

Plagiarism/Academic Integrity (http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part4_1-401.html):

The University of Illinois has high standards of academic integrity set out in Article 1, Part 4 of the University Student Code (copied below), which I uphold.

- (1) Policy Statement. The University has the responsibility for maintaining academic integrity so as to protect the quality of education and research on our campus and to protect those who depend upon our integrity.
- (2) Expectations of Students. It is the responsibility of each student to refrain from infractions of academic integrity, from conduct that may lead to suspicion of such infractions, and from conduct that aids others in such infractions. Students have been given notice of this Part by virtue of its publication. Regardless of whether a student has actually read this Part, a student is charged with knowledge of it. Ignorance is not a defense.
- (3) Expectations of Instructors. It is the responsibility of each Instructor to establish and maintain an environment that supports academic integrity. An essential part of each Instructor's responsibility is the enforcement of existing standards of academic integrity. If Instructors do not discourage and act upon violations of which they become aware, respect for those standards is undermined. Instructors should provide their students with a clear statement of their expectations concerning academic integrity. Students Requiring Accommodations: If you have a disability that requires accommodation in order for you to be successful in this class, please let me know immediately. If you haven't already, you should contact the Division of Disability Resources and

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Educational Services (DRES) for accommodation support. Their website is

<http://www.disability.illinois.edu/>

Emergency Response Recommendations:

In an emergency in this building, we'll have three choices: **RUN** (get out), **HIDE** (find a safe place to stay inside), or **FIGHT** (with anything available to increase our odds for survival). Take time to familiarize yourself with the University's emergency response recommendations at

<http://police.illinois.edu/emergencyplanning/general/>

Please email me a picture of a dragon.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Part I: Theory

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| M January 14 | Syllabus review, course introduction |
| W Jan 16 | Why is self-publishing important in the digital age? |
| F Jan 18 | What is digital branding? Why is it part of self-publishing? |
| M Jan 21 | Arve Peder Øverland's <i>Always On</i> , part III |
| W Jan 23 | Applying <i>Always On</i> by creating personas of both self and targeted audience (presented in part III) |
| F Jan 25 | Arve Peder Øverland's <i>Always On</i> , part IV |
| M Jan 28 | Applying <i>Always On</i> by generating a way to turn the organizational system (presented in part IV) into a usable framework for a single content producer |
| W Jan 30 | Thames and Hudson's <i>Branded Interactions</i> , chapter 1.3, "Understanding the User" |
| F Feb 1 | Quiz on terms and concepts (20% of grade) |
| M Feb 4 | Laquintano's "Experimental Self-Publishing and Popular Fiction Writing" |
| W Feb 6 | Building a brand (in-class activity: branded listicle, using color scheme and design) |
| F Feb 8 | Building a brand (in-class activity: digital persona and responsive style) |
| M Feb 11 | Building a brand (in-class activity: 5 different social media accounts in <i>synchronization</i>) |
| W Feb 13 | "Laquintano's "Becoming an author without a publisher" |

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- F Feb 15 "Laquintano's "Becoming an author without a publisher"
- M Feb 18 Use Meloncon's sample persona in "**Embodied personas for a mobile world**"
- W Feb 20 Use Meloncon's sample persona in "**Embodied personas for a mobile world**"
- F Feb 22 Laquintano's "Microclimates of Intellectual Property"
- M Feb 25 Wrap-up discussions of Laquintano readings (bring in a writing or content you'd like to share)
- W Feb 27 Self-publishing on Wattpad or Amazon (sign-up for both before class)
Read user agreement of either Wattpad or Amazon and come to class ready to discuss
- F March 1 FINAL ASSIGNED: Building a following OR interviewing influencers
Self-publishing genres; personal story
- M March 4 Self-publishing genres; how-to
- W March 6 Self-publishing genres; listicles
- F March 8 Self-publishing genres; holiday themed genre
- M March 11 Self-publishing genres; evergreen content and genre flexibility
- W March 13 NO CLASS (John at conference)
- F March 15 NO CLASS (John at conference)

SPRING BREAK

Part II: Applications

- M March 25 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, introduction
- W March 27 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, chapter 1
- F March 29 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, chapter 2
- M April 1 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, chapter 3
- W April 3 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, chapter 4
- F April 5 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, chapter 5
- M April 8 Health and Health' *Made to stick*, chapter 6

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W April 10 Gallagher's "Five Strategies Internet Writers use to 'Continue the Conversation'"

F April 12 Gallagher's "Monitoring the Margins"

M April 15 Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary's Platform Revolution (chapter 9, "Metrics")

Part III: Ethics

W April 17 Erin Brooke Duffy's *(Not) Getting paid to do what you love*, chapter 6

F April 19 Erin Brooke Duffy's *(Not) Getting paid to do what you love*, chapter 7

M April 22 Tarleton Gillespie's *Custodians of the Internet*, chapter 5 ("The Human Labor of Moderation")

W April 24 Discussion of pandering, *ad populum*, *ad baculum*, and other ethical issues of digital branding and self-publication

F April 26 Revised personal brands

M April 29 Revised personal brands

W May 1 Revised personal brands and evaluations

Final to be turned in over email during finals week