

Course Description:

This class examines the impact writing technologies have on our reading and writing practices. The class will investigate the relationship between today's digital platforms, i.e., Twitter, Reddit, Snapchat, as well as earlier methods of writerly communication such as cuneiform tablets, paper, and the printing press. We will address some of the challenges writing technologies pose, including the role of social media and artificial intelligence.

Course Goals:

- To examine the non-linear, recursive history of writing technologies, as well as the social forces and infrastructures of those technologies
- To research writing technologies, either defunct or losing influence, and report on that technology using an innovative, media-rich delivery system
- To critique historical writing and communication practices
- To discuss and reflect upon emergent composing practices from contemporary technologies

Required Texts:

All texts are available on Moodle.

Assignments:

- 1) Attendance (10%) & participation (10%)
 - a. I take attendance every class period. If you come more than a few minutes after I take attendance, you will still be marked absent.
 - b. If you need to have an excused absence, please simply contact me. I am flexible here.
 - c. All excused absences (i.e., illness, family obligations) are still excused; just touch base with me.
 - d. Participation includes asking questions, answering queries when called upon, helping fellow students, adding fun, relevant links in our chat function, and sharing interesting readings over email.
- 2) Presentation on a course reading (15%). You are to lead class discussion for a class period. I would like you to schedule the select class by **February 1**. You should prepare. For graduate students, I expect you to lead class discussion on **two** separate occasions. Leading discussion includes:
 - a. Creating handouts and summaries about the readings
 - b. Brainstorming activities for us to do
 - c. Potentially finding readings, videos, and other material related to the readings
 - d. Bring excited energy to class! 😊
- 3) Writing Archeology (30%). This mid-term project asks you to investigate a defunct or decaying writing technology, object, or community, loosely defined. The goals of this assignment are to conduct first-hand research, and learn independently about a writing technology/object/etc. Many other technologies will be considered if you provide the rationale for inclusion.

| Writing material | Object | Digital Writing | Platforms |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Papyrus | Typewriter | Instant messaging | MySpace |
| Vellum | Printing Press | Word Perfect | Geocities |
| Parchment | Pencil (or pen) | Word Processor | UseNet (various) |

- 4) Emergent Writing Technologies (35%). For our final, you are to identify, research, summarize, and critique an emergent writing technology.
 - a. Drawing on the readings from throughout the semester, define writing and technology as it is applicable to your chosen project (no more than 2 pages single spaced)
 - b. A clearly defined and focused technology as well as the significance of your choice in light of our readings from throughout the semester (no more than 1 page single spaced)
 - c. A statement about the role of writing with respect to this technology (no more than 1 page single spaced)
 - d. An *annotated* bibliography of all sources you've cited in the document
 - e. Images, Video, and other media are welcome (they do not count towards your page limit)

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, which I believe is a fair trade for not making you buy any books.
- 2) Cell-phone use is not allowed in class. If you need to text, hide it well.
- 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 civil 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 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/>

Tentative Schedule

Monday 1/25/2021

- Course introductions
- Syllabus review
- Review of necessary books and overview of each
- Review of assignments

Part I: Materialities Tokens and Tablets, Paper and Presses

Wednesday 1/27

- “Origins and forms of writing” (chapter 1 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Friday 1/29

- “The Origin of Writing: An Archeologist’s Perspective” (PDF)
- Optional: “Of clay pebbles”

Monday 2/1

- “From Notches to Tablets” (chapter 1 of *History of Writing*)

Wednesday 2/3

- “History of Writing Technologies” (chapter 2 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Friday 2/5

- “Cuneiform: Forgotten Legacy of a Forgotten People” (chapter 2 of *The Writing Revolution*)
- Please look through the Spurlock’s museum’s [cuneiform tablet collection](#)

Monday 2/8

- “Egyptian Hieroglyphs and the Quest for Eternity” (chapter 3 of *The Writing Revolution*)

Wednesday 2/10

- “Chinese: A Love of Paperwork” (chapter 4 of *The Writing Revolution*)

Friday 2/12

- [The inventor of the world’s first printing press](#) (YouTube video)
- “Paper, Printing and the Printing Press: A Horizontally Integrative Macrohistory” Analysis (PDF)

Monday 2/15

- “History of the Book, Authorship, Book Design, and Publishing” (chapter 4 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Wednesday 2/17

No class--BREAK

Friday 2/19

- “History of Reflection, Theory, and Research on Writing” (chapter 5 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Part II: Social Forces Offices, Work, and School

Monday 2/22

- “Writing and the social formation of economy” (chapter 6 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)
- “The Collection and Organization of Written Knowledge” (chapter 11 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Wednesday 2/24

- “Writing as Art and Entertainment” (chapter 12 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Friday 2/26

- “Writing and Journalism: Politics, Social Movements, and the Public Sphere” (chapter 13 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Monday 3/1

- “History of Schools and Writing” (chapter 18 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)
- “Writing in Primary School” (chapter 19 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Wednesday 3/3

- “Writing in Secondary School” (chapter 20 of *Handbook of Research on Writing*)

Friday 3/5

- “The standardization of a technical practice: Typing (1883–1930)” (PDF)

Monday 3/8

Mid-term presentations

Wednesday 3/10

Mid-term presentations

Friday 3/12

Mid-term presentations

Monday 3/15

- Remembering the Office of the Future: The Origins of Word Processing and Office Automation” (PDF)
- The Origins of Word Processing Software for Personal Computers: 1976–1985 (PDF)

Wednesday 3/17

- “Short-form writing: Studying process in the context of contemporary composing technologies” (PDF)

Friday 3/19

- The Dvorak keyboard (<http://www.mit.edu/~jcb/Dvorak/>)
- “On the prehistory of QWERTY” (PDF)
- “The QWERTY keyboard: a review” (PDF)

Monday 3/22

- “Early challenges to multilingualism on the Internet: The case of Han character-based scripts” (PDF)

Wednesday 3/24

No class--BREAK

Part III: Scales & Speeds **Digital Networks & Artificial Intelligence**

Friday 3/26

- “Emoji, Emoji, What for Art Thou?”
<http://www.harlotofthearts.org/index.php/harlot/article/view/186/157>

Monday 3/29

- *The Semiotics of Emoji* (introduction, chapters 1-3)

Wednesday 3/31

- *The Semiotics of Emoji* (introduction, chapters 4-6)

Friday 4/2

- *The Semiotics of Emoji* (introduction, chapters 7-10)

Monday 4/5

- Catch up day

Wednesday 4/7

- “Challenging the Monetized Template”
http://enculturation.net/challenging_the_monetized_template

Friday 4/9

- “What is an Algorithm?” (PDF)

Monday 4/12

- “How the machine ‘thinks’: Understanding opacity in machine learning algorithms” (PDF)

Wednesday 4/14

- “The Impact of AI on Writing and Writing Instruction”
<https://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/2018/04/25/ai-on-writing/>

Friday 4/16

- “When search engines stopped being human: menu interfaces and the rise of the ideological nature of algorithmic search” (PDF)

Monday 4/19 No class—John giving talk

Wednesday 4/21

- Histories of machine learning: <https://www.dataversity.net/a-brief-history-of-machine-learning/>
- <https://www.skynettoday.com/overviews/neural-net-history>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/08/robot-wrote-this-article-gpt-3>

Friday 4/23

- Symposium on artificial intelligence (<http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/special-edition-artificial-intelligence/>)
 - History of AI
 - Recommendation systems
 - Videogames
 - Brain-computer interfaces

Monday 4/26

- “Writing With Data: A Study of Coding on a Data-Journalism Team”
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0741088320968061>

Wednesday 4/28

- Guest speaker, Chris Lindgren!

Friday 4/30

- “Inscrutable AI: Deep Learning and the Problem of Technology and Trust”
(<https://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/2018/04/23/inscrutable-ai-deep-learning-and-the-problem-of-technology-and-trust/>)

Monday 5/3 Conferences with John about final

Wednesday 5/5 Conferences with John about final

Final due by our scheduled final examination