



## Writing in Digital Spaces Spring 2016

### Professor

Dr. Daniel P. Richards  
BAL 5032, 5p–7p + Skype<sup>1</sup>  
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### Course

ENGL 439/539  
BAL 2019  
710p–950p

### Media

#engl539odu  
@OduWriting  
wids2016.wordpress.com

Students in this course will be given the opportunity to engage in compositional practice in popular digital spaces, including podcasts, social media, and document design software. This compositional practice will be situated in a set of readings that will provide critical, theoretical, and historical contexts for discussion, in essence building a theoretical apparatus through which we will interpret, critique, and create digital writing practices. This apparatus is situated firmly in rhetoric, and as such will build on students' enculturative experiences in English courses up until this point.

The explicit aims of this course are that students will: (i) deepen their theoretical knowledge of digital writing; (ii) be more able to historicize digital writing practice in the history of rhetoric; (iii) apply theoretical knowledge and historical understanding to digital writing projects; (iv) challenge and familiarize themselves with the use of popular digital writing tools; and (v) hone research skills in the field of rhetoric and composition. These five aims all coalesce around one inquiry that will drive what we discuss and do this semester together: What does it mean—for ourselves, for communities, for rhetoric, for our futures—to write in digital spaces?

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<sup>1</sup> Skype appointments will be made via email. Meeting times flexible. My Skype username is drdprichards.

## Course Delivery & Attendance

This course blends lecture, collaborative, and workshop modes of learning. You will be given time during each class to work on your projects. Having time to work in class is not, contrary to popular belief, a time to slack off; rather, it is a crucial time for you to work with technologies you might only have access to at school and to work on high stakes projects with peer and professor assistance. Due to the collaborative and interactive nature of this course, attendance is required. You can miss one class; missing a second class affects your final grade. Consistent lateness can also count towards this policy, with two lates counting as one absence.

## Course Texts

Hart, Jack. Storycraft. University of Chicago Press, 2012

Lanham, Richard A. The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Ong, Walter J. Orality and Literacy. Routledge, 1982.<sup>2</sup>

Phillips, Whitney. This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things. MIT Press, 2015.

Plato. Phaedrus. Trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff. Hackett Publishing, 1995.

## Course Materials

Printing & Framing Costs                      \$15.00

Snack for Peers<sup>3</sup>                                      \$15.00

## Submitting Assignments & Late Policy

Deadlines are important and it is imperative that you abide by them. Means and dates and times of submissions will vary, so pay close attention to the course schedule. Late assignments will receive a third of a letter grade penalty per day late (e.g., from a B+ to a B), including weekends. Extensions will be negotiated on a situational basis, but permission must be sought in advance.

## Note on Technology

Students will be consistently challenged this semester to engage in digital writing technologies that may be difficult and challenging. This requires a certain degree of patience and professionalism towards the learning process, as we are all in this together—despite our varying levels of technological proficiency. Students enrolled in this course require an Old Dominion email account; thumb drive with a lot of free memory; and a working knowledge of Internet browsers. Specific technologies we will cover this semester are: Mac Operating System; WordPress; Google Drive; Audacity; Adobe InDesign; social media, including Twitter, Instagram, SoundCloud, and Storify. Students will be given time in class to work with these technologies.

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<sup>2</sup> Any edition of Ong's text will work. Plato's Phaedrus must be translated by Nehamas and Woodruff.

<sup>3</sup> We will have snacks every week. The snack sign up schedule is available on the course website.

## Computer Lab Etiquette

Phones can be used for emergencies only, and ringers must be turned off upon entering class. Students seen attending to their phones for purposes outside of class activities will have their participation grade affected. During class time, your full attention is expected. Lab computers will be used for class activities and work on projects only. Browsing the Internet for personal purposes during class time is strongly discouraged and will affect your participation grade. Please use the allotted break times for personal phone and computer use. Also, it is imperative that students clean up after themselves after class to keep the lab clean for the next class period.

## Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

One of the topics we will cover this semester is intellectual property and digital writing ethics. Students cannot use work completed for credit in previous courses to count towards this course, nor can they lift ideas or content from an online source without proper acknowledgement and citation—any citation style will be fine. This is particularly important in the use and borrowing of digital resources, such as images, sounds, and video files.<sup>4</sup> Plagiarism will not only result in the failure of the assignment and possibly the failure of the course, but also, given the course content and coverage, in a level of irony that would sting twice as much.

## Accommodations & Athletes

In accordance with university policy, a student who wishes to receive some instructional accommodation—because of a documented sensory and/or learning disability—should meet with the instructor to discuss this accommodation. Any student who has a concern or needs to make special arrangements for meeting the requirements of the course is encouraged to speak with the instructor. The instructor must be notified in the first two weeks of the course of any students requiring accommodations. If you have questions about assistance, please contact the Office of Educational Accessibility at 757-683-4655 or visit [odu.edu/educationalaccessibility](http://odu.edu/educationalaccessibility). If you are a student athlete, please provide the instructor with travel and game schedule indicating when you will need to miss class to participate in athletic events. While travel for athletics is an excused absence, you will need to make up any missed work.

## Withdrawal

A syllabus constitutes a contract between the student and the course instructor. Participation in this course indicates your acceptance of its content, requirements, and policies. If you believe that the nature of this course does not meet your interests, needs or expectations (amount of work involved, class meetings, assignment deadlines, course policies, etc.), you should drop the class by the drop/add deadline, which for the Spring 2016 semester is 19 January.

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Old Dominion's Information Literacy site for a checklist on how to avoid plagiarism: [https://www.lib.odu.edu/genedinfolit/7ethics/a\\_checklist\\_on\\_how\\_to\\_avoid\\_plagiarism.html](https://www.lib.odu.edu/genedinfolit/7ethics/a_checklist_on_how_to_avoid_plagiarism.html).

## Projects & Assignments

Letter grades will be assigned for each component of the course, and are enumerated as per institutional policy as such:

A	92.5-100	B+	87.5-89.9	C+	77.5-79.9	D+	67.5-69.9	F	<59.9
A-	90-92.4	B	82.5-87.4	C	72.5-77.4	D	62.5-67.4		
		B-	80-82.4	C-	70-72.4	D-	60-62.4		

Late assignments will receive a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade per day, including weekends. For example, an assignment receiving a grade of a B+ will, if submitted two days later, be decreased down to a grade of B-. Note that projects and assignments with an “M+” designation means that they need only be completed by graduate students and will be included in the percentage

### 30% Position Paper | Due: Week 8

Students will write a 2000-word online essay using their own personal WordPress site. This argumentative essay will respond to Nicholas Carr’s WIRED article “The Web Shatters Focus, Rewires Brains” (2010) using the theoretical work covered this semester as well as outside readings found and compiled by students in the field of rhetoric and composition and/or media and literacy studies. In all, students must amply use two authors or texts covered in the syllabus, integrate five sources not included in the syllabus, and include five more hyperlinks to outside informational sources (e.g., biographical, encyclopedic sources). Students will identify a website or digital news outlet for which their essay could be written and follow the genre conventions of the outlet and best practices for long-form digital writing. Essays will be assessed by quality of argument, depth and relevance of research, and style.

### 40% Podcast | Due: Week 15

Students will in groups create a 15-minute podcast that investigates an object, theme, idea, history, person, building, or other element relating to Norfolk. Paying close attention to the narrative structures and elements outlined in Jack Hart’s Storycraft, as well as our collective analyses of a variety of podcasts in class, students will craft a purely audio, placed-based nonfiction podcast that fits within the theme of the podcast series we are creating, “Of Norfolk.” Students will use Audacity for audio editing and will be responsible for conducting whatever type of research is required to compose an engaging, informative narrative about an aspect or object of Norfolk culture. This research might be anything from ethnographic to observational to interview to archival. Technical requirements for the podcast include: musical overlays; multiple distinct voices; three audio effects, used appropriately; non-original, non-musical recordings; and high-quality narration. Podcasts will be judged not only by their technical quality but also for the effectiveness and rhetorical quality of the script—that is, the ability of the students to engage an audience and put forth a compelling story in a digital storytelling format.

15% Participation | Due: Weekly

This grade is based upon the students' performance in both in-class discussions and activities as well as online participation. In-class participation will be judged by the level of engagement and evidence of reading preparation for class discussion. Merely having an opinion will not suffice for participation; contributions to discussion should be informed by deep and honest readings of the texts. Participation in activities will be judged by the amount of material produced in Google Drive folders. Online participation will be judged by the level of engagement on Twitter (and other social media). The expected level of engagement is at minimum five original, pertinent tweets and five replies to classmates per week; tweets can be published at any point of the week, but at least two must be published in the backchannel during class time.

M+ Storify-cation | Due: Varies

As part of this participation grade, graduate students will select one class period to help lead discussion. Graduate students will do so by using the online tool Storify to aggregate class tweets about the previous class(es) and use this as a springboard for leading discussion. Graduate students will provide three substantive discussion questions that link the Storify-cation of previous discussions to that week's readings. Students will be judged on their ability to make connections between previous discussions and current readings as well as their ability to compose questions that generate meaningful discussion.

15% Reflection | Due: Week 15

Students will use Adobe InDesign to compose a reflective but public poster that exemplifies their experiences with writing this semester. The poster will include a word, original phrase, or quote that best exemplifies, illustrates, or depicts the student's reflective processes about writing. Students will provide a brief but critical oral reflection during the final class that articulates how their work fits within the larger discourse of texts and ideas circulating the course. Successful projects will help contribute to the academic ambience of Media Park.

M+ Digital Writing Ethnography Proposal | Due: Week 15

As part of this reflection grade, graduate students will compose a four-page, double-spaced research proposal that could lead to a conference presentation, publication, or thesis outline. The proposal must include: a research question situated in the fields of rhetoric and composition, digital humanities, or technical communication; a two-page literature review of relevant literature; a one-page research outline using ethnography as a method; and a one-page reading list. It is encouraged that students use Whitney Phillips' This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things as inspiration or model. Responses to specific call for papers (CFPs) in the fields listed above are encouraged.

## Course Schedule

Follow course website and check email for any updates. Readings must be read and notated prior to class. Numbers after a name (e.g., Ong 4) indicates a chapter; Roman numerals after a name (e.g., Phillips II) indicates a section of chapters. Also note that on the course website there are podcasts associated with each week (e.g., Podcast 6 is to be listened to for Week 6's class, etc.).

<u>Wk.</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings &amp; Media</u>	<u>Assignments Due</u>
1	How Do We Manage Information?	Baron	
2	What's with the Honey-Tongues?	Phaedrus	Sign-Up Sheets
3	How Did We Tell Stories?	Ong 1, 2, 6	
4	How Do We Tell Stories?	Ong 4; Carr	
5	It's an EmerAgency—What Now?	Ulmer	
6	Is Norfolk Weird?	Edbauer; Hart 6, 9	
7	How to Get Our Stories Straight?	Hart 1-4	
8	How Do We Keep Your Attention?	Lanham 1 <sup>5</sup>	Position Paper
9	Spring Holiday	—	
10	Did We Keep Your Attention?	Lanham 2; Hart 11-13	
11	What's Next for Text?	Lanham 3, 4	
12	What Would Ramus Do?	Lanham 5	
13	Why Can't We Have Nice Things?	Phillips I	
14	Wait, We Can Have Nice Things?	Phillips II; Potts	
15	Ooh! Is That Looking Glass?	Phillips III	Podcast; Reflection; Proposal (4/27)

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 1 of Lanham's The Economics of Attention is the only chapter where students are required to read the 'Background Conversations' Lanham includes at the end of his chapters.