Digital literacies

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## Description

How do multimedia, texting, chat, status updates, and hypertext change the way we read and interpret texts? Students study various theories of literacy and how it changes with the introduction of digital technologies. Readings will include selections on new media, new literacy, multiliteracies, multimedia cognition, and visual semantics.

This foundational course provides students a conceptual framework to critically interpret digital media, and to author powerful and effective digital documents. Students have the opportunity to practice and develop these skills, which are central to many aspects of the degree in [Educational Technology](http://education.adelphi.edu/ed-tech).

**Educational Technology 0858-501**

## Goals and objectives

Two overarching goals drive this course. First, students should understand the literacy skills required to critically interpret digital texts. Second, they should learn how to communicate effectively using the tools and techniques of digital media. More specifically:

* Students will develop a conception of “digital literacy” as a multifaceted, social process of decoding audio and visual symbols and signals.
* Students will gain a familiarity with a range of research perspectives which engage with digital literacy.
* Students will refine their understanding of the affordances of a range of media, and these features’ implications for literacy.
* Students will confront and assess their own preconceived ideas about literacy and technology skills and how learners acquire them.
* Students will be able to create a variety of digital texts to communicate in different genres and for multiple purposes.
* Students will be able to articulate the cultural and political implications of communication, with attention to concerns of power and equity online and in classrooms.

## Required books

Lankshear, C. and Knobel, M. (2011). *New literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Learning.* Buckingham [England]; Philadelphia PA: Open University Press. ISBN 9780335242160

Lessig, L. (1999). *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace.* New York: Basic Books.

Mirzoeff, N. (2009). *An introduction to visual culture (3rd ed.)*. London;New York: Routledge. ISBN 9780415327589

Wardrip-Fruin, N., & Montfort, N. (Eds.). (2003). *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press. ISBN 9780262232272

## Other readings

Benjamin, W. (1986). [The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm) In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books.

Berners-Lee, T., Hendler, J., & Lassila, O. (2001). The semantic web. *Scientific American*, *284*(5), 28–37.

boyd, d., Hargittai, E., Schultz, J., & Palfrey, J. (2011). Why Parents Help Their Children Lie to Facebook: Unintended Consequences of the ‘Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act’. *First Monday*, 16(11)

Brunton, F. (in press). The Art Of Misdirection: Robot Readability. in *Spam: A Flood, A Theory, A History*. Cambridge Mass.:MIT Press

Clanchy, M. (1993). *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Conti, G. (2010) Malicious interface design: Exploiting the user. Paper presented at the International World Wide Web Conference Committee, April 26-30, Raleigh, NC.

Feynman, R. (1985). Judging books by their covers. In *Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman!*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Gee, J., (2004). *Situated Language and Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hargittai, E. (2008). [The Role of Expertise in Navigating Links of Influence.](http://www.eszter.com/research/hyperlinkedsociety.html) In *The Hyperlinked Society*, Turow J and Lokman Tsui, eds. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Hobbs, R. (1998). The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement. *Journal of Communication*, 48(1), 16-32.

Jenkins, H. (2006). [Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century.](http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/files/working/NMLWhitePaper.pdf) MacArthur Foundation.

Leu, D. J., Kinzer, C. K., Coiro, J., & Cammack, D. W. (2004). Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the Internet and other information and communication technologies. *Theoretical models and processes of reading*, 5, 1570–1613.

Norman, D. (1988). *The Psychology Of Everyday Things*. Basic Books. ISBN 0465067093

Savolainen, R. (2007). Information behavior and information practice: Reviewing the ‘umbrella concepts’ of information-seeking studies. *Library Quarterly*, 77(2) pp. 109–132

Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Street, B., (1995). *Social Literacies*. New York: Longman.

Street, B. (2003). What’s “new” in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current issues in comparative education*, *5*(2), 77–91.

Tuominen, K, Savolainen, R, & Talja, S. (2005) *Information Literacy as a Sociotechnical Practice*. Library Quarterly, 75.

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Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang. ISBN 9780809071937

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780199567041

Feenberg, A. (2004). *Community in the digital age: Philosophy and practice*. Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 9780742529588

Halliday, M. (1989). *Language, context, and text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780194371544

Jewitt, C. (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis.* London; New York: Routledge. ISBN 9780415434379

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication.* London; New York: Routledge.

Kress, G. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design.* Routledge. ISBN 0415319153.

Pahl, K., & Rowsell, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies: Instances of Practice*. Multilingual Matters Limited. ISBN 1853598615

## Class sessions

### Week 1, August 30: Changes in language, changes in literacy

What is literacy? What does it mean to be “literate”? Through exploring the concrete examples of medieval documents and missionary education, this session establishes how the changing nature of documents, and their relationship to powerful social institutions, can change what skills may be required for a person to be considered “literate.”

* Readings due:

1. Clanchy, 1993, ch 9, pp 294-327
2. Street, social literacies ch 2, pp 28-45

* Assignment 1 (tech biography) due

### Week 2, September 6: Literacy and society

Is there only one kind of literacy? What kinds of literacy are “better” than others, and why? This class explores how some “literate” skills may be valued differently by various social institutions, and how different kinds of literacy may be present alongside each other in and outside of classrooms.

* Readings due:

1. Gee, situated language and learning ch 1-4, pp 1-56
2. Lankshear and Knobel, ch 2, pp 32-51

### Week 3, September 13: New literacies

New literacies expands the definition of “literacy” to include different media and different contexts. These two sessions look at the work of major scholars in this field, such as Jim Gee, Knobel and Lankshear, and Kevin Leander.

* Readings due:

1. Leu et al
2. Lankshear and Knobel 2011 ch 1, 3, pp 3-32, 51-93
3. Street 2003 p 77-91

### Week 4, September 20: Visual culture & digital semantics

In this sessions, students investigate the ways that we understand new media and digital media. The session combines work in “visual culture” (Mirzoeff) with analysis of the form of comics (McCloud).

* Readings due:

1. Mirzoeff ch 1, p 35-62
2. Wardrip-Fruin, ch 50 p 711-737

### Week 5, October 4: Reading like a machine

While computers seem to get “smarter” every year, able to predict what we want before we even know we want it, beneath the surface layer of interaction they may still require us to think they way they do to communicate. This class explores some of the ways in which computers “read” differently from people, with limitations and demands which are helpful to understand in navigating digital texts.

* Readings due:

1. Berners-Lee (about 7 pp)
2. Brunton, ch 2 section 4 on Robot Readability (about 20 pp)
3. Suchman in Wardrip-Fruin, ch 41, pp 599-609

### Week 6, October 11: Design and human-computer interfaces

This session draws on work from the fields of human-computer interface (HCI) design, affordance theory, computer security, and interaction design to help students develop a critical understanding of software and other computer interfaces.

* Readings due:

1. Norman ch 1, pp 1-33
2. Conti, 9 pp
3. Winograd and Flores 1986 ch 37 in Wardrip-Fruin, pp 551-562

### Week 7, October 18: Privacy, security, and the law

What do students need to be able to read about digital texts in order to maintain their security and privacy online? As educators, what is our role in working with them on privacy – are we guides, should we remain hands-off, or do they already know more than we do? In class, we will view “Privacy is Dead,” a talk given by private investigator Steven Rambam at the Hackers On Planet Earth (HOPE) Conference.

* Readings due:

1. Lessig, Code, ch 1-4 (in original)
2. boyd et al, 22 pp

### Week 8, October 25: Media literacy

Media literacy has been a field in which the commercial influence of advertising is often taken as shaping texts, often for the worse. Advertising still shapes the content we see online. What do we need to know about the influences of advertising to be “literate”? This session presents the basic questions broached by media literacy scholars, and looks into how they may be extended to digital literacy.

* Readings due:

1. Hobbs, seven great debates
2. some other good establishing document from that field

### Week 9, November 1: Information literacy

Library science and information literacy have attempted to determine how people successfully search for information, beginning with library materials before digitization and continuing to understand how people look for information online today. “Information literacy” has also been referred to in national policy statements outlining what students need to know in a digital world. In this session, we will explore how “information literacy” fits in to other understandings of literacy.

* Readings due:

1. Tuominen et al 2005; 14 pp.
2. Savolainen 2007, 23 pp.

### Week 10, November 8: Source literacy

Every text, digital or otherwise, is constructed by some sort of “author.” Media literacy, information literacy, and library studies agree that it is important to understand a text’s source in order to evaluate the quality of its contents. How far can this go? Most of us know we should evaluate the quality of information on Wikipedia, but how often can we investigate the sources of what we read? Do we always have to evaluate the quality of news reporting? Of textbooks? What are the specific challenges to our sourcing abilities presented by digital materials? This session explores how different literacy traditions have approached sourcing.

* Readings due:

1. Laurie Henry 2006 12 pp
2. Hargittai 2008 Links of Influence 16 pp
3. Feynman, pp 288-302
4. If Matt has not covered this elsewhere in the curriculum:
   * http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability
   * http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable\_sources
   * http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No\_original\_research
   * http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\_point\_of\_view

### Week 11, November 15: Audience awareness (shades into identity and also media literacy)

Texts are constructed by authors, but also constructed for audiences. Digital technologies have dramatically changed how audiences can be reached. As readers, how do we think of ourselves as an audience; as writers, how do we communicate to audiences in a dramatically changed world? This session explores these questions.

* Readings due:

1. Lankshear and Knobel 2011 ch 6 (social networking)
2. Shirky ch 3,4? p 55-108
3. Goldhaber, attention economy? http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/519/440
4. 15 Million Merits (video)

### THANKSGIVING BREAK NOVEMBER 22

### Week 12, November 29: Identity online

In this session, students look at online identity: issues of race, gender, and class as well as ideas of anonymity.

* Readings due:

1. Mirzoeff ch 6, 8 (about 50 pp)
2. boyd, “White Flight in Networked Publics? How Race and Class Shaped American Teen Engagement with MySpace and Facebook.”
3. boyd, blog, “real names policies are an abuse of power” http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2011/08/04/real-names.html
4. Falsehoods programmers believe about names http://www.kalzumeus.com/2010/06/17/falsehoods-programmers-believe-about-names/

* Assignment 3 (screencast) due

### Week 13, December 6: Participatory culture and copyright (latter might be its own week actually?)

Digital literacy includes creating digital texts, not just reading them. This session looks at work on the idea of participatory culture; as well as some critics of the need to participate.

* Readings due:

1. Jenkins;
2. Lankshear and Knobel 2011 ch 4 (remixing)
3. copyright clarity?
4. Lessig ch 10 (p 122-141, intellectual property)

### Week 14, December 13: Popular arguments

the shallows, etc

### Week 15, December 20: Presentations

Students will give a lightnight talk based on their portfolio

## Assignments

### Digital portfolio

You will create a digital portfolio that highlights your understanding and proficiency with various digital literacies. You will be adding items to this portfolio throughout the term. You *must* show a breadth of expertise, with basic proficiency in each area of digital literacy. Additionally, you *must* demonstrate a depth of expertise in at least one of the areas below. You will turn in your portfolio for final evaluation at the end of the course, along with a narrative introduction that guides evaluators through it.

HTML/Hypertext

HTML is the basic building block of the Web and the most pervasive form of hypertext in use today. While most HTML is generated dynamically by web-based programming languages and/or GUI editors, understanding how to *hand code* html is an important piece of digital literacy as a both a consumer and producer of digital texts. To satisfy the **basic** HTML requirement in your portfolio, you will write your own resume and biography/introduction in HTML. **Advanced** HTML will include CSS stylesheets and multimedia. It should use principles of Universal Design for the Web, best practices for web usability and design, display well for large, media, small screens, and print, be error free, and, generally look and feel great. *What* you produce in HTML is up to you, as long as it is your own work, or work where you are a principal contributor.

Digital Images

We live in a visual culture, and the ability to communicate using images is essential. The verb, “to photoshop” something has become common place in our society. Everyone’s portfolio must contain a **collage** where they exhibit their skills in digital image editing: cropping, scaling, selecting, composting, using layers, combining text and images. In addition to these *technical* requirements, your collage must also strive for expressive content, common in our study of new media: playfulness, non-linearity and multiplicity, irony/paradox, etc.

Digital Video and Audio

[72 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute](http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics/). Online video for teaching and learning have exploded, popularized by sites like [TED](http://ted.com) and [Khan Academy](http://www.khanacademy.org/). Your portfolio must include a 60-90s video, where you teach *something*. The video can be made with footage that you shoot (with your phone, tablet, flipcam), find online and remix, create from still images, or “screencast” on your computer. At the very least, the video must be edited. Upload your video to YouTube and embed it in your portfolio.

Collaborative Production

Digital literacy is networked literacy. Software, encyclopedias, novels, video games, films, politics, and any number of creative works are now produced collaboratively. To demonstrate your **basic** understanding of collaborative production, you will create an account on Wikipedia (if you don’t have one) and contribute **10 edits** which meet the standards and practices established by the Wikipedia community. These should be minor edits: fixing spelling and grammatical errors, adding reliable sources for unsourced articles, participating in the discussion on talk pages, etc. Your portfolio should include a page which offers a brief reflection on your editing experience, examples of your contributions (before/after), and links to the pages you changed.

Video Game Literacy

Video games are more popular than movies, and players cut across ethnic, gender, class, and other boundaries. Using the Mechanics-Dynamics-Aesthetics framwork, post a 1-page (300-400 word) analysis of a video game of your choice.

Privacy & Security

Your portfolio must include a **personal security audit**. Your audit will examine your digital and social practices to look for weaknesses. You must consider:

1. what **digital data** is most precious to you? do you have back-ups? how are they managed? can you restore them? if you keep your data “in the cloud”, can you retrieve it all at once? can you keep your own backup? *do you*? are you locked into a certain service (e.g. flickr, facebook, gmail)? are you locked into a proprietary format that would prevent you from switching? are their social/network pressures that influence you?
2. **financial security.** How do you choose passwords? How strong are they? Do you share them? Do you use them across multiple sites? What would happen if one of your passwords an email were stolen from a site you belong to? Can you list all of the sites/services that have financial information (e.g. CC, bank account, SSN)? In order, which of these do you think are the most secure?
3. **personal digital security.** Do you run a firewall on your desktop or laptop computer? Is there a password on your phone or tablet? If I stole your phone, what would I find? Do you encrypt any files on your computer? If I logged into your computer (or networked account) as you, what damage could I do? What steps do you take to minimize this damage?
4. **social security.** If I Google your name, what do I see? Would you want your mom to see it? Your (potential) boss? Do the top hits give the image you want to project? What if I look on Bing, Yahoo, or Duck Duck Go?  
   What about Facebook or that old MySpace account? How much information is public, or shared with your “networks” (i.e. everyone on Facebook)? What is the worst case if your FB account were hacked? What if you have a falling out with a close friend or lover? If you were hoping for a job with the Obama or Romney presedition campaigns and they asked to see your personal FB account, would you still get the job? Do you care?

Data literacy

The networked society is characterized by the problem of overabundance rather than scarcity of information. This means you must be able to to gather, analyze, and communicate large amounts of data. While not all of this information is quantitative, this portfolio item focuses on quantitative analysis. You will demonstrate your **basic data literacy** by:

1. Finding and downloading an interesting (and sufficiently large) data set.
2. Analyzing it using spreadsheet software.
3. Discovering something interesting in the data.
4. Creating a multimedia (text and image) representation of your interesting finding (like a series of graphs or an infographic).

Some places to look for data sets:

* [Bureau of labor statistics](http://www.bls.gov/)
* [U.S. Census Data Tools](http://www.census.gov/main/www/access.html)
* [NYC Schools Accountability Data](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm)
* [National Center for Education Statistics](http://nces.ed.gov/)
* [Wikipedia Data](http://dumps.wikimedia.org/index.html) for the more ambitious
* [Datamob “meta” collector of datasets](http://datamob.org/datasets)

### Workshop

Students in this course come in with a wide range of skills and competencies. As part of your participation in this course, you need to schedule and lead a workshop for your peers on a practical area of “digital literacy.” You don’t need to be an expert in the area – rather, you should take a little bit of extra time to become proficient before leading the workshop. You can run your workshop alone, or with a partner. If you work with a partner, depending on the number of students, you may need to present twice. In addition to facilitating a workshop, everyone must **participate in at least two** workshops. Workshops will be scheduled at the convenience of the facilitators, either on the Adelphi campus or online.

Here is the tenative schedule of workshops. You will have the opportunity to sign up for one, and to discuss the content covered with the instructor. If you have an idea for another workshop, please suggest it.

1. MediaWiki & Wikipedia
2. HTML5 basics
3. Basic image editing with GIMP
4. Shooting digital video (and audio)
5. Basic digital video editing with iMovie and YouTube
6. Podcasting (with Audacity and iTunes)
7. Screencasting (with Quicktime and/or RecordMyDesktop)
8. Who’s afraid of a spreadsheet? excel and spreadsheet basics
9. Functions, graphs, and (more) advanced spreadsheets
10. Visual programming with (Scratch or LEGO Mindstorms or Kodu)
11. Advanced slideshows: animations, transitions, voice narration, and more
12. Cascading Style Sheets: using css to control the look of your website
13. Advanced image editing with GIMP
14. [Blender](http://www.blender.org/): an introduction to 3d modeling and animations

### Participation

Your participation in the course is what makes it worthwhile to you and the other participants. Your participation grade will be based on your self-evaluation in the *professionalism rubric*.