

EMAC 2321 Writing and Research For New Media

Spring 2012

Syllabus Website

Course Description Digital media play an extremely important role in contemporary writing and research techniques. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to say that all writing and research are now digital! However, the platforms and technologies that make up digital media are constantly changing and shifting. Anyone who only learns writing and research techniques tied too closely to a single platform is likely to find that these skills rapidly go out of date. This course, *Writing and Research for New Media*, seeks to avoid this pitfall by helping students learn broad, transferable skills that will help them use current platforms successfully, and adapt to new platforms as they emerge. As such, this course stresses the *process* of learning over rote memorization! Students are expected to experiment with techniques, and learn to be comfortable exploring new platforms and tools.

This syllabus website is the best way for students to keep up to date with course readings, policies and assignments. See the links below for more information. A [pdf version of this syllabus](#) is available for those who wish a print copy for reading convenience or record keeping. However, you should be aware that the print version will not be updated as regularly as the syllabus website! If the print version and website version of the syllabus disagree *the web version is correct*.

All students must fill out the [group blog questionnaire](#) before the end of the day on Friday, January 20! Students who don't complete a questionnaire will be assigned a group and role at random!

Course Readings This course does not require students to purchase any reading material. Instead, a variety of web-based readings are linked to from the course schedule.

Course Policies, Assignments and Schedule Follow the links below for more information about this course. If you are a student in this course, it is very important that you click through and read *all* of the material here!

- **Contact Information:** Office hours and email addresses for the instructor and TA
- **Course Policies:** Important information about course expectations, and guidelines for success in this course

- **Assignments:** A full list of class assignments, including the percentage of the course grade each assignment is worth and links to full assignment descriptions.
- **Schedule:** The complete schedule of class meetings, including assignment due dates and readings
- **Class Scrapbook:** Notes and images from our class discussions

All students should familiarize themselves with official UTD course policies, as [listed on the provost's website](#). In particular, be sure to carefully review the sections on Academic Integrity, Class Attendance, and Avoiding Plagiarism. Here are some additional guidelines that will ensure your success in this class:

Be Bold

This class is about learning how to learn. The learning process always involves experimentation, trial and error, and making mistakes, especially early on. In some cases, I will ask you to participate in assignments that are designed to give you experience with this process, and in these cases I may simply ask you to attempt to accomplish a particular task using a particular technology, without explaining a detailed set of instructions for accomplishing this task. When this happens, it is important that you *be bold* and experiment with the assigned task. Try your best to accomplish the task, and ask for help from the instructor and your classmates as you encounter difficulties you can't resolve on your own. You will not be penalized for having difficulties!

Furthermore, the major class project, the public blog project, will also require boldness on the part of students. For many stages of the blog project, I will give detailed instructions on how to complete necessary work. However, as the project goes on and the blog becomes your own, you will want to find ways to make the blog meet your own personal goals and aspirations. To do this, you will need to engage in experiments and listen to the feedback provided to gauge when experiments are or are not working. Be brave!

Be In Class

This class is a discussion class. Our class meetings provide an essential opportunity for discussing readings and assignments, working through difficulties and misunderstandings, and exploring ideas from different points of view. I cannot arrange to have a class discussion over again if you miss our meeting! For this reason, your regular attention is essential. All students are permitted three class absences over the course of the semester, no questions asked. Students may miss an additional two classes if they complete a make-up assignment for each absence. Make-up assignments will be devised on a case-by-case basis, but will generally consist of at least a two-page essay summarizing class readings and ideas. Students who miss more than five absences *must* schedule an appointment with the instructor to discuss the reasons for their absences, the steps the student has taken to document these absences with University authorities, and

their prospects for completing the class successfully. Students that miss more than five class meetings and do not promptly schedule such a meeting *will fail the course*.

Be In Touch

This class asks students to be bold, experiment, and try new things. It also asks that they take responsibility for completing a large and complex new media project: the group blog project. All this will require students to keep in touch with each other, and the instructor, much more closely than they do in other courses. Students should expect to receive communication from the instructor in the form of email on a regular basis. For this reason, you should plan on checking your campus email *at least* once per day. Students who do not check their campus email regularly will have difficulty completing this course successfully. If circumstances make it difficult for you to check your email this often, try to find a classmate to serve as your “email buddy,” and send you a text message or call when important emails arrive.

In addition, this course will make extensive use of Twitter as a platform for informal communication, troubleshooting, and collaboration. You are encouraged to make use of the Twitter platform to keep in touch with your classmates and instructor. Twitter can be used via text message, if that makes sense for you.

Be Respectful

This classroom is a safe space. You are expected to show your classmates the highest level of respect. Language or actions that discriminate against class members on the basis of Race, Age, Religion, Ethnicity, Sex, Gender, or Sexual Orientation will not be tolerated.

Be On Time

Work that is not complete by the date due will be penalized 30% for each day or fraction of a day it is late. As work this class will be comprised of many small assignments, it is imperative that you not get behind. If you do find that you have missed an assignment, it may be better to abandon this assignment and complete the next one on time.

Pseudonymous Participation Policy

This class asks students to participate in publicly accessible blogs and other forms of public writing. Writing in public has several advantages for student learning. It creates a closer analogue to the “real world” environment, and allows for the creation of writing that is designed to be shared with a real audience, instead of just an instructor. It also allows students to learn from each other. However, some students may have legitimate privacy concerns about participating in publicly accessible assignments. These students may choose to participate in public assignments under a pseudonym, or assumed name. If you wish to request this accommodation for any reason, please contact me immediately.

EMAC 2321 Assignments

The major assignments for this class are listed below, along with the percentage of the total class grade each assignment is worth. Follow the link provided for a complete assignment description, including instructions and grading rubric.

- [Public Blog Proposal](#) (10%): Before students begin their public blog project, they will write a brief proposal. The goal of this proposal is to ensure that the student has a clear topic for his or her blog, and has located high-quality blogs to serve as models for his or her work.
- [Public Blog](#) (30%): The Public Blog assignment serves as the backbone of this course. Students will blog on a subject of their own choosing, working to master the writing techniques required to be a filter, connector, advocate and critic for real readers. Students are expected to update their public blogs multiple times per week during the second half of the semester.
- [Class Participation](#)(25%): The student's class participation score will be based *both* on his or her participation in class discussions, and on his or her work in a variety of in-class exercises, workshops and presentations. Review the assignment carefully for details about these exercises, workshops and presentations.
- [Digital Participation](#) (25%): Students will be assigned a variety of small online tasks to complete outside of the classroom as well. These tasks will include interacting with Wikipedia and Twitter, and contributing to collectively edited documents on the class wiki.
- [Reflection Essays](#)(10%): The reflection essay assignment asks students to write short pieces about skills they have been learning or difficulties they have been having in this course. Four short essays will be assigned at different points in the semester.

For each class meeting, the schedule lists what you must complete prior to that meeting, if any under the heading BEFORE CLASS. In most cases, this will be reading, but it will often include short preparatory activities. A brief summary of what to expect during each class meeting (discussion, class activities etc.) is listed under IN CLASS for each class meetings. Finally, small assignments are listed under HOMEWORK, with due dates. Due dates for major assignments are listed in **bold** at the bottom of the listing for the nearest class meeting to the due date.

Week 1 Introductions

Tuesday August 28 BEFORE CLASS: None

IN CLASS: Icebreakers and Syllabus Review. Introduction to key assignments,

especially the [Public Blog](#) and [Reflection Essays](#).

HOMEWORK: Set up your Personal blog on Wordpress.com and a public twitter account for use in this class. Email a link to your blog and twitter account to the TA. [Day One Preparation Assignment](#)

Thursday August 30 BEFORE CLASS: Read “Introduction” in *Net Smart* (pgs 1-33) AND come to class prepared with one question about New Media you would like to explore in this class.

IN CLASS: Discuss our questions about New Media, and how Rheingold’s introduction addresses them. Develop a list of shared class goals.

HOMEWORK: Refine the list of class goals posted online by engaging in some collaborative editing. Be Bold!

[Reflection Essay ONE](#) is due at 11:59pm Friday, August 31.

Week 2

Tuesday September 04 BEFORE CLASS: Read [Paragraphs and Paragraphing](#) from Purdue OWL, [How to Structure a Paragraph With a Hamburger](#) from Acephealous, and [Paragraph Structure](#) from the UMUC Effective Writing Center

IN CLASS: Discuss paragraph structure and formation. Evaluate paragraphs and discuss how to write coherent multi-paragraph compositions. 15 Minute super-fast intro to Wordpress.

HOMEWORK: Write a single, coherent paragraph that explains your blog concept and post it to your public blog as an “about the blog” page.

Thursday September 06 BEFORE CLASS: Read pgs 35-50 of *Net Smart* and [The Myth of Multitasking](#) by Cathy Davidson. *Optional:* Listen to Davidson’s [podcast](#), which expands on her blog post.

IN CLASS: Attention Exercise and Discussion. How can we learn to pay more attention to attention?

HOMEWORK: Complete Part One of the [Attention Journal Exercise](#).

Week 3

Tuesday September 11 BEFORE CLASS: Read: pgs 50-75 of *Net Smart*

IN CLASS: Discuss basic online attention failure modes and tools and techniques for attention management online.

HOMEWORK: Complete Part Two of the [Attention Journal Exercise](#).

Thursday September 13 BEFORE CLASS: Review your classmates' attention journals. READ pgs 77-89 of *Net Smart*.

IN CLASS: Discuss the Attention Journal assignment. What techniques and tools did we find successful? Which were less than successful? Begin drafting a collaborative class infotention guide. Introduction to effective search techniques from Google's search technique classes.

HOMEWORK: Complete several [Google-a-day puzzles](#)

Week 4

Tuesday September 18 BEFORE CLASS: Read pgs 89-109 of *Net Smart*

IN CLASS: Discuss the search techniques we practiced, and the sources we relied on, to answer the Google-a-day puzzles. Discuss the principles and techniques of source evaluation. In-class source evaluation exercises.

HOMEWORK: Build a twitter list with 7 good sources relevant to your blog and share it with the instructor. Collaboratively edit the class guide to infotention.

Thursday September 20 BEFORE CLASS: Read pgs 111-119 of *Net Smart* and [My Ten Years of Blogging](#), by Malik Om.

IN CLASS: Discuss blogging as a participatory community. How can we distinguish high quality blogs from low quality blogs? How can we build our social capital within a blogging community? Introduction to workshop technique and etiquette.

HOMEWORK: [Reflection Essay Two](#)

Complete draft blog proposals and share them with your workshop partners prior to Noon, September 22.

Week 5

Tuesday September 25 BEFORE CLASS: Review your partner's blog proposal and complete the [pre-workshop checklist](#).

IN CLASS: Blog proposal workshop.

HOMEWORK: Revise your draft blog proposal prior to submission to the instructor!

Blog Proposals Are Due on elearning by 11:59pm Wednesday, September 26

Thursday September 27 BEFORE CLASS: Read [Copyright and Plagiarism](#) from the Penn State University Library, and [About The Licenses](#) from Creative Commons. Watch the very short (3 minute) video from Creative Commons [Wanna Work Together](#)

IN CLASS: Discuss copyright, plagiarism and the ethics of blogging. Debate the

merits of various CC licenses and decide on a license for public blogs. Exercises on best practices for image and video re-use. Final Q+A for public blogs. HOMEWORK: Take a rest and get ready to blog next week. Watch for comments from the instructor and TA on your blog proposal, and be prepared to make and discuss changes.

Week 6

ALL PUBLIC BLOGS MUST POST THIS WEEK AND EVERY WEEK FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SEMESTER

Tuesday October 02 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs 119-126. Come to class with examples of filter, connector, critic, and advocate type blogs selected from your annotated blog rolls.
IN CLASS: Discuss the use of the four styles of blogging, as observed in your blogging community. How might we apply these styles to our own projects?
HOMEWORK: Post a “filter” style post to your blog.

Thursday October 04 BEFORE CLASS: Read Wikipedia Manual of Style
IN CLASS: Discuss the idea of style conventions and explain how we can adapt the Wikipedia Manual of Style to our own needs. Show how Wikipedia’s style conventions meet the needs of its purpose, audience and readers. Discuss how we might adapt the some of these rules to meet our own needs. The TA will lead discussion of best practices for writing and editing blog posts.
HOMEWORK: Post a “connector” style post to your public blog. Begin work on the class-edited blog manual of style.

Week 7

Tuesday October 09 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs 126-134. Review your annotated blogroll and add the sources listed there to the class public bookmarks collection on Diigo. Give your additions meaningful tags. Consider how the blogs on your blogroll exercise the curation skills discussed by Rheingold. Explore the photo-sharing site flickr, and the social news site reddit and consider how they utilize mass participation and tagging to filter and content for readers. How does this mass filtration differ from the curation exercised by individual bloggers? How might participating in mass filtration benefit you, as a blogger? IN CLASS: Discuss the concept of curation and how examples drawn from blogs on your blogrolls make use of it. Discuss the potentials and weaknesses of social news sites. Discuss how class bloggers can curate information for their readers, and how we can benefit from mass curation of a public bookmark list.
HOMEWORK: Sometime this week, post a “critic” style or “advocate” style

post to your public blog. Find at least three new sources to support your position. Add your new sources to the class public bookmarks collection on Diigo.

Thursday October 11 BEFORE CLASS: Make significant progress on the homework assignments from last class. Review the class-edited blog manual of style and make any useful edits you can think of. IN CLASS: Continue our discussion of curation and critic/advocate style blogs. What have we learned by building our critic/advocate blog post and the class public bookmarks collection? What questions do we have about what curation means and how to practice it effectively? TA leads discussion of writing techniques applicable to recent public blog posts.

HOMEWORK: [Reflection Essay Three](#)

Week 8

Tuesday October 16 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs 134-145. Review your list of twitter information sources, as well as some of the lists compiled by your classmates. Consider how twitter users craft personas for themselves in 140 characters or less. How do these personas vary depending on the audience and purpose of the twitter account? How do twitter users demonstrate curation?

IN CLASS: Discuss the use of twitter by your sources, and best practices for building an identity online, especially on public social media platforms. In-class exercise building Storify stories (unless Storify fails us, in which case we will work on expanding our twitter lists).

HOMEWORK: Finish your storify story, adding comments and explanation of your own. Post as a “connector” style blog post to your public blog.

Thursday October 18 BEFORE CLASS: Make significant progress on the homework assignments from last class. Review the class-edited blog manual of style and make any useful edits you can think of. IN CLASS: Continue our discussion of building public personas online and twitter. What have we learned by building our storify stories and connector blog posts? What questions do we have about what curation means and how to practice it effectively? TA leads discussion of writing techniques applicable to recent public blog posts.

HOMEWORK: Write a “critic” or an “advocate” style post for your public blog.

Week 9

Tuesday October 23 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs 147-173

IN CLASS: Discuss collaboration online and “crowdsourcing.” In class collaboration exercise/game. Discuss how we might apply mass collaboration techniques to specific future on-line writing tasks.

HOMEWORK: Write a “filter” or “connector” style blog on your public blog. Collaborate with your classmates by leaving at least two constructive comments on their public blog posts.

Thursday October 25 BEFORE CLASS: Make significant progress on the homework assignments from last class. Review the class-edited blog manual of style and make any useful edits you can think of. IN CLASS: Continue our discussion of collaboration. What did you learn from making and receiving blog comments? How do we see collaboration unfolding on other internet platforms, like reddit? How might we tap into this? TA leads discussion of writing techniques applicable to recent public blog posts.

HOMEWORK: Write an “advocate” or “critic” style blog post.

Week 10

Tuesday October 30 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs 173-187.

IN CLASS: Introduction to Wikipedia editing. Professor Famiglietti will briefly introduce the core values and culture of Wikipedia and provide tips for successful editing. Some in-class practice time will be provided.

HOMEWORK: Begin [contribute to Wikipedia assignment](#). Write a “filter” or “connector” style blog post.

Thursday November 01 BEFORE CLASS: Make significant progress on the homework assignments from last class. Review the class-edited blog manual of style and make any useful edits you can think of.

IN CLASS: Discuss our progress on Wikipedia editing. What challenges are we encountering? What have we learned about the process of online collaboration? TA leads discussion of writing techniques applicable to recent public blog posts.

HOMEWORK: Write an “advocate” or “critic” style blog post.

Week 11

Tuesday November 06 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs 191-215 download the network analysis tool and complete the [Network Analysis Exercise](#).

IN CLASS: Discuss the results of the network analysis exercise. What did your blog’s “neighborhood” look like? How do the link networks your classmates discovered compare to the network you discovered? How would you characterize the “supernodes” of your blog community? What sorts of bloggers occupy supernodes? Who are they? Who do they work for?

HOMEWORK: Submit a post from your blog to a “supernode” blog in your community. Write a “filter” or “connector” style blog post.

Thursday November 08 BEFORE CLASS: Make significant progress on the homework assignments from last class. Review the class-edited blog manual of style and make any useful edits you can think of. Review the class infotention guide, and make any useful edits you can think of based on our experience of finding sources and writing blog posts over the last few weeks.
IN CLASS: Continue our discussion of Network Analysis. Discuss our experience submitting a post to a “supernode” blog. Discuss the class infotention guide, and how it has held up to our efforts to write for the web over the past few weeks. TA leads discussion of writing techniques applicable to recent public blog posts. HOMEWORK: Write an “advocate” or “critic” style blog post.

Week 12

Tuesday November 13 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs. 215-238. Review the blogs on your blog roll, as well as your twitter list. How do you think members of your community build social capital online?
IN CLASS: Discuss social capital and the techniques to build and maintain it online. HOMEWORK:

Thursday November 15 BEFORE CLASS: Read [Transmedia Storytelling](#) by Henry Jenkins. Remember that Jenkins is writing for an audience of mass-media professionals. How can we adapt the insights in his piece to meet the needs of our situation.
IN CLASS: Intro to trans-media
HOMEWORK: Begin the [Group platform review assignment](#). Make plans to meet virtually and continue work during the Thanksgiving break.

Week 13 THANKSGIVING BREAK! NO CLASS!!!

EVEN THOUGH CLASS DOES NOT MEET THIS WEEK, YOU MUST COMPLETE ONE FILTER/CONNECTOR AND ONE ADVOCATE/CRITIC BLOG POST THIS WEEK. YOU MAY COMPLETE THESE ANYTIME THIS WEEK YOU CHOOSE, BUT THEY MUST POST TO YOUR BLOG PRIOR TO 11:59 PM SATURDAY NOVEMBER 24

Tuesday November 20 NO CLASS

Thursday November 22 NO CLASS! ENJOY YOUR HOLIDAY!

Week 14

Tuesday November 27 BEFORE CLASS: Read [Project Reclaim](#) by Boone Gorges. Review the sections on Playbor and surveillance in *Net smart*.
IN CLASS: Discuss the process of critically evaluating platforms for digital writing. What do we need to know about a platform before we participate? What makes a platform trustworthy or untrustworthy? Take a look at some platform EULAs.
HOMEWORK: Write a “filter” or “connector” style blog post.

Thursday November 29 BEFORE CLASS: Review your contribution to Wikipedia for the add to Wikipedia assignment. Has it withstood the activity of later editors? What else, if anything, has changed on your Wikipedia article since you completed editing it. What did you learn from the process of editing Wikipedia?
IN CLASS: Discussion of Add to Wikipedia Assignment
HOMEWORK: Write an “advocate” or “critic” style blog post.

Week 15

Tuesday December 04 BEFORE CLASS: Prepare for [group presentations on platforms](#)
IN CLASS: Group presentations on platforms
HOMEWORK: Write a blog post of any style of your choosing.

Thursday December 06 BEFORE CLASS: Read *Net Smart* pgs. 239-253
IN CLASS: Revisit class goal document from the beginning the semester. What did we learn that we hoped to learn? What do we feel we need/want to investigate further? What surprised us?
HOMEWORK: Write a blog post of any style of your choosing.

Week 16

Tuesday December 11 BEFORE CLASS: Review your partner’s blog and complete the [pre workshop checklist](#)
IN CLASS: Final Blog Workshop. Discuss our final takeaways from our blogging experience. What skills are we now confident in? What would we do differently next time?
HOMEWORK: [Final reflection essay assignment](#).