

COMPOSING DIGITAL MEDIA

writing as layering

Dr. Benjamin Miller

email: millerb@pitt.edu

office: <https://pitt.zoom.us/my/benmiller314>

office hours: MW before and after class; see **benmiller314.youcanbook.me**

EngCmp 0610-1050, Class Number 25017

Spring 2025, MW 1:00-2:15pm

class location: 435 Cathedral of Learning

Our course website: **<https://benmiller314.github.io/cdm2025spring>**

All this information and more will be posted (and updated!) there.

I'll also link from Canvas to connect with your existing workflow.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course (across all sections) requires students to compose digital media while exploring the rhetorical, poetic, and political implications of multiple writing platforms. Students learn how to compose a range of critical media objects using web-authoring languages, text, sound, and images. Classes will focus on theories of writing, composing, design, critique, delivery, and networked distributions; critique and analysis of digital media produced by professional and amateur digital media practitioners; and analysis and revisions of digital media composed by the students themselves.

This particular section will focus on the core concepts of *layers* and *versioning*, applying them in the context of sound editing; image editing; and web design. We'll be using primarily free and open-source software and platforms.

This course can be used to meet the general education requirements for DSAS Creative Work; DSAS Writing Intensive; SCI Expression: Technical, Business, or Research writing; and SCI Polymathic Contexts: Humanistic.

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REQUIRED MATERIALS

We will not have a required textbook; however, I will assign texts to read and videos to watch, as well as some tutorials and walkthroughs for which I expect you to produce your own copies of files. Most of these assigned texts will be available by direct link online; for some, I will share a scanned copy in a limited-access space (so as to respect copyright through fair use). Please do not distribute the scanned copies further than our class members, and please let me know right away if you're having trouble accessing one of these files – or, especially, the course website.

Software

If you wish to use a personal or home computer (vs. the lab computers), you are responsible for downloading and installing the following software packages, all of which cost zero dollars:

- **Git** (<https://git-scm.com/>). Version control software for the command line.
 - I'm going to highly recommend the GUIs (graphical user interfaces) available for both Mac and Windows: go to **<https://desktop.github.com/>**.
 - If you prefer the command line, Mac users may wish to install git via Homebrew (<https://brew.sh/>); Windows users may wish to install GitBash (<https://gitforwindows.org/>).
- **Audacity** (<https://www.audacityteam.org/>). Audio editing toolkit.
 - In addition to the main application, you may want the ffmpeg plugin to import and export in a wider variety of file formats. Look for separate download instructions on the page where you download Audacity.
- **GIMP** (<https://www.gimp.org/>). The GNU Image Manipulation Program.
 - If you strongly prefer Photoshop (which is not free, but which Pitt tuition does license), talk to me; I'll probably allow it, but may also ask for a rationale / feature comparison.
- **Visual Studio Code** (<https://code.visualstudio.com/>) or **Pulsar Editor** (<https://pulsar-edit.dev/>). A cross-platform plain-text editor, with syntax highlighting and other features to support programming.
 - Alternatives like Notepad++ (for Windows) and TextWrangler (for Mac) are acceptable, but you *cannot* use something like Microsoft Word for this.
- A full-featured open-source web browser, such as **Chrome** or **Firefox**, will serve you best in the web unit for inspecting design elements while on the page. Safari and Edge can do it, but not quite as well; and Internet Explorer just isn't all there.

I recommend downloading these at your earliest convenience.

Hardware

All of the software for this class is designed to be cross-platform, but that usually means it's been developed and tested for Mac and Windows operating systems, and often Linux as well. It is *not* guaranteed that it will work for ChromeOS or iOS, so if your primary device is a tablet, you may end up doing most of your work on lab computers or through web interfaces, which are not always as fully featured.

If you're worried about file storage, I highly recommend (but don't require) getting an **external hard drive**, which is also a great solution for regularly backing up your most important files more generally.

Beyond your computer, you may need to make original sound recordings and/or take original photographs; a cell phone of recent vintage should be enough, or you can borrow equipment from Pitt.

In addition, **you're going to want headphones**, pretty often: our first unit deals with sound, and beyond that, you might well want some sonic isolation even in non-aural units.

COURSE OUTCOMES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Students in this course will:

- compose frequently, building a habit of reading and composing as reciprocal activities;
- respond orally and in writing to the ideas in texts about digital media and composing;
- build familiarity with principles of copyright, fair use, and open licensing, so as to incorporate source materials ethically and cite where appropriate;
- develop shared criteria for assessing multimodal compositions in particular genres and/or media, in consultation with the professor;
- respond orally and in writing to the ideas and strategies in their peers' texts;
- revise, using a variety of modes, in response to their own reflections and feedback from peers and the teacher;
- develop proficiency with a number of digital tools for composing in aural, visual, and hypertext modes;
- develop proficiency in one popular tool for version control and collaboration;
- employ various learning strategies for extending knowledge in practical and theoretical aspects of digital media composition;
- assess one's own developing skills and interests so as to communicate what you could offer a collaborative digital composition team;
- complete a portfolio containing, at a minimum, three revised multimodal pieces, one set of drafts, and an introductory reflection.

Students in this course can expect their professor (the "I" in this document) to:

- respond orally and in writing to students' ideas and the ideas in texts about digital media and composing;
- provide exercises for generating, analyzing, and revising multimodal texts;

- provide links to extensive online resources for further individualized study;
- discuss with students rationales for what each exercise is designed to do, and why it ought to help with the goals above;
- encourage students to retry earlier exercises in later contexts, to support the development of mastery;
- choose assigned texts that balance accessibility for novices with constructive challenges that allow for learning;
- provide background context and guidance in understanding difficult texts or genre features;
- structure in-class time, especially time spent working in small peer groups, so there is meaningful work to be done (even if we finish early or run out of time);
- build flexibility into per-class and semester-long schedules, recognizing that the complexity of writing – including digital writing – means insights and lessons do not follow a linear order of development, but leap from teachable moment to teachable moment;
- guide the class in developing shared criteria for assessing multimodal compositions in particular genres and/or media;
- provide a detailed grading contract that outlines criteria for participation and success in the course;
- communicate about students' successes, setbacks, and possibilities.

WELCOME LETTER

Dear digital media composers,

I'm going to start with that recurring question, of grades. There are no graded quizzes in this course, and no tests. Here's the deal: if you participate actively, and meet some baseline unit criteria that we come up with together, your minimum grade – the minimum, not a guarantee, but a floor – is a B. I've got a four-page packet / Canvas module explaining what that means, and how you can go up or down from there, but that'll be part of the reading for homework.

Feeling a little better? Or still curious about the course's actual content? (I hope it's both!)

I've arranged the units of the course to build on each other, adding a new layer or wrinkle while carrying forward something of what we'd done previously. In the first unit, we'll think about the *affordances of digital media*: that is, what's made possible by working with electronic bits instead of objects like paper? How do the answers change, or shift, as we move from words into aural and visual modes? The vocabulary we build here, at the start of class, will form a set of lenses that can guide our attention throughout the semester.

For this first unit, rather than build and revise some discrete project, we'll practice using *version control software* – which is to say, tools that help us track what's changing from revision to revision. These tools, Git and GitHub, were developed for computer programming, but they're useful for any kind of digital composing. In fact, GitHub is how we'll be hosting nearly all the materials for this course, including our discussion forum and your projects-in-progress. (The occasional file I need to keep private, I'll post to Canvas.)

The second unit is focused on *soundwriting*; it adds the layer of simultaneity by allowing several audio tracks to play at once (as opposed to the single line of prose text we can keep track of). The major project for this unit is an *audio narrative* of your own design, whether documentary, fictional, or even science-fictional: I'll ask you to record and rearrange the sounds that surround you, layering them into foreground and background for an immersive experience. My go-to software here is Audacity.

Unit three moves into *visual rhetorics*, adding a second dimension to our grid of simultaneous presentation, even as we cede control of the axis of time. (Apologies to anyone who was especially excited to work on video, but I had to sacrifice something in designing this course: 14 weeks is really not a lot of time!) The major project in this unit is *visual argument*: a kind of collage that aims to make an intervention in the world through its juxtaposition of images and text. My go-to software for this unit is GIMP, the Gnu Image Manipulation Program.

The fourth unit, and with it the third major project, take us deeper into the computer's stack: we'll be working with HTML and CSS to build beautiful responsive websites more or less from scratch. If you've never worked with *markup languages* before, don't worry; I've found some amazing tutorials. If, on the other hand, you're used to generating this code using JavaScript frameworks, you may just find that a better understanding of the basic building blocks of structure and style helps you simplify, streamline, and learn more from the websites you encounter every day. As for tools, you'll need a developer-friendly browser, like Chrome or Firefox, and a syntax-aware text editor. There are many of the latter out there, but if you don't have a preference, I recommend the cross-platform Pulsar (simpler out of the box) or VS Code (more tutorials available); both are also extremely extendible with plugins and settings. (Just don't use a word processor like MS Word or even LibreOffice, which would add a lot of junk code behind the scenes.) You can even publish your websites with GitHub's free built-in Pages functionality.

Unit five asks you to put it all together, revisiting earlier projects and/or skillsets to consolidate what you've learned and to project forward beyond the semester. We'll talk more about how to do that as it gets closer.

Maybe you noticed that I'm not planning to teach you any "industry standard" software like Adobe's suite (Audition, Photoshop, Illustrator, Dreamweaver). This is a design choice I made deliberately, if not without some hesitation. Here's why: For one thing, everything I've selected is free and open-source software, meaning you'll maintain access to it and its successors for the low, low price of \$0, even after you leave Pitt. For another, this class is largely an introductory seminar, planting seeds for future growth – not a space to polish a portfolio that will be interview-ready for a design-industry job. What's more, even if I could teach you every aspect of some preferred program, there are many more out there, all of them changing with each new release, each new competitor. Regardless of software, it's important to realize that the biggest differences are in surface trappings – which are a lot less important than the functions they invoke, and the design principles that help you decide what you're trying to do.

That said, if you feel strongly that (e.g.) Photoshop is more appropriate for your learning and career goals, talk to me about it in office hours, and we can work something out.

Ultimately, there's no way to learn all there is to know about Composing Digital Media in one semester, or maybe a lifetime. Instead, what I hope the course can teach you – what I hope you'll learn – are strategies for dealing with that endless churn: a sense of what to look for, and where to look, as you figure out the next new tool or version, and the next, and the next.

So I'll frequently ask you to pause, to notice where your attention is drawn, and to consider what possibilities are present or suggested. I'll ask you to read and respond to both model texts and arguments; to reflect in writing frequently on the choices you're making, and why. And, above all, I'll ask you to keep making choices and making new things. As composition scholar Doug Hesse put it, you can't learn to play piano just by reading about the piano; why should we expect any differently about writing, in any form?

I don't expect us all to become concert-solo ready in fourteen short weeks. But I'm looking forward to rehearsals, just the same.

All best,

Benjamin Miller (please call me Ben)

CARING FOR YOURSELF AND THE CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

Accessing Resources

I strive to set you up for success. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for succeeding, which might include adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

As appropriate, you may also wish to contact the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890 / 412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. For more information, visit <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drs>.

I also ask that everyone in the class strive to help ensure that everyone can learn in a supportive and respectful environment. For my part, I will work to ensure multiple ways of accessing class materials, including written lesson plans in screen-reader compliant html, alternative text for images, and transcriptions for recorded videos. Because proofreading the latter is particularly time-consuming, I ask that you *please [let me know](#) if you will be relying on transcriptions*.

Avoiding Plagiarism

This is a collaborative class, in which we offer each other suggestions and constructive criticism. However, the goal of all this collaboration is to clarify the expression of original ideas – never to substitute someone else's ideas for our own, or to impose our ideas on someone else.

To misrepresent the origins of an idea is *plagiarism*, and it is a problem both for your own learning and for the well-being of the community, which depends on mutual trust.

If you want to incorporate materials that others have created, you can do so **if you give credit to your source**. At a minimum, readers of your work should be able to get back to the original, so be sure to provide at least the author's identity; the original title; the publication venue; the date of publication and/or access; and a URL if appropriate. The English department has some useful resources at www.english.pitt.edu/undergraduate/plagiarism. And if you want to collaborate with an AI, there are ways to do so without sacrificing your learning. Let's talk!

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask, because Pitt takes a very hard stance on plagiarism. It could get you expelled. Here's an excerpt from the official Policy on Academic Integrity, to give you the flavor:

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, from the February 1974 Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported to the Senate Council, will be required to participate in the

outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz or exam will be imposed.

A student has an obligation to exhibit honesty and to respect the ethical standards of the profession in carrying out his or her academic assignments. Without limiting the application of this principle, a student may be found to have violated this obligation if he or she: [...]

8. Depends on the aid of others in a manner expressly prohibited by the faculty member, in the research, preparation, creation, writing, performing, or publication of work to be submitted for academic credit or evaluation.
9. Provides aid to another person, knowing such aid is expressly prohibited by the faculty member, in the research, preparation, creation, writing, performing, or publication of work to be submitted for academic credit or evaluation.
10. Presents as one's own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or words of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources.
11. Submits the work of another person in a manner which represents the work to be one's own.
12. Knowingly permits one's work to be submitted by another person without the faculty member's authorization.

You have the right to a fair hearing, and I'll talk to you before I talk to anyone else, but it's far easier just to avoid plagiarism in the first place. All clear cases of deliberate plagiarism will be referred to the appropriate Dean for disciplinary action, including an Academic Integrity Board hearing. For the University's full policy on Academic Integrity and the adjudication process for infringements, including plagiarism, go to <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>.

Taking Care of Your Mental, Physical, and Emotional Health

Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep, and taking time to relax. Despite what you might hear, using your time to take care of yourself will actually help you achieve your academic goals more than spending too much time studying.

All of us benefit from support and guidance during times of struggle. If you or anyone you know experiences academic stress, difficult life events, or difficult feelings like anxiety or depression, I strongly encourage you to seek support. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty, or family member you trust for assistance connecting to the support that can help. The University Counseling Center is here for you: call 412-648-7930 and visit their website at <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cchome>.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, call someone immediately, day or night:

University Counseling Center (UCC): 412 648-7930

University Counseling Center Mental Health Crisis Response: 412-648-7930 x1

Resolve Crisis Network: 888-796-8226 (888-7-YOU-CAN)

Psychological Services and Sexual Assault Services (412-648-7930)

Combating Sexual Misconduct

In an ideal world, everyone would respect everyone else's bodily autonomy. Unfortunately, we know that is not always the case. Because the University is committed to supporting victims and building a safer campus culture, all faculty and staff members are required to report to the University's Title IX office any instances of sexual misconduct, including harassment and sexual violence; this allows the office to reach out to victims with appropriate resources and support options, and to avoid serial offenses or offenders going undetected for a long time. To clarify: **if I become aware of an incident of sexual misconduct, I must alert the Title IX office; this does *not* mean the police will be automatically involved, but it *does* open options for investigation or accommodations, at the discretion of the victim.**

There are two important exceptions to this mandatory reporting rule. First, some University employees, such as counselors and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality; a list can be found at <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/civil-rights-title-ix-compliance>. Another exemption to the reporting requirement exists for academic work: disclosures about sexual misconduct that are shared as part of an academic project, classroom discussion, or course assignment are not required to be disclosed to the University's Title IX office.

If you are the victim of sexual misconduct, Pitt encourages you to reach out to these resources:

- Title IX Office: 412-648-7860
- SHARE @ the University Counseling Center: 412-648-7930 (8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. MF) and 412-648-7856 (after business hours).
- If you have a safety concern, please contact the University of Pittsburgh Police, 412-624-2121.

Other reporting information is available at <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/civil-rights-title-ix/make-report>.

Drawing on the expertise of the Writing Center

The Writing Center, located at 317B O'Hara Student Center, is an excellent resource for working with an experienced consultant on your writing – and not only alphanumeric writing. They're a great resource for developing ideas, getting feedback from an outside reader, and getting organized for revision and reflection.

Consultants can work with you on a one-time basis or throughout the term. In some cases, I may require that you go to the Writing Center for help on a particular skillset, or to make up for a missed workshop; otherwise, you can decide on your own to seek assistance. To make an appointment, go to the Writing Center or call 412-624-6556. For more information, including answers to frequently asked questions, visit <http://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/undergraduate-services/student-faqs>.

Contact Ben any time

If anything you've read about in this section strikes you as especially relevant to your life – or especially concerning – please know that you can contact me at any time. (For an emergency, please do call one of the hotlines on the previous pages.) I am most easily reached by email at benmiller314@pitt.edu; you can also schedule an office-hour visit at benmiller314.youcanbook.me.

PROJECTS

Over the course of the semester, you will complete four projects – three solo (albeit with feedback) and one collaborative. As the semester goes on, we'll add detail to these assignments and link out to examples; we'll also develop baseline criteria and aspirational goals for each project in class, collaboratively. As you complete each unit, I'll ask you to write a reflection on your process and final product, including your own sense of where you've met or exceeded the criteria.

Audio Narrative

In your first project, you will arrange layers of sound to convey a sense of place and story. In assigning this, I have two main goals for you: (1) to learn how to capture sound and edit it using digital tools, and (2) to explore the affordances of sound as a medium, with particular attention to its ability to communicate *immersive environment* and *narrative pacing and change*.

The genre of the narrative you convey is open: it could be documentary, fictional, even science-fictional. (The title you choose will help steer listeners' expectations, and thus their perceptions.)

Visual Argument / Rhetorical Collage

The second project challenges you to make a rhetorical intervention (a claim) through the juxtaposition of images and text. It's kind of a collage, but a collage with an argument to make. In assigning this, I have two main goals for you: (1) to learn how to ethically obtain images and edit them using digital tools, and (2) to explore the affordances of still images as a medium, and especially their ability to *direct attention* and *help make ideas memorable*.

As with the sound project, the context for your argument is open: you could be making a social commentary, calling for action, constructing a parody, riffing on a pun, explaining a concept, inviting someone inside, and so on. Whatever you choose, you should consider your audience and what they would find persuasive or interesting, and how you therefore wish to attract and direct their attention.

Website Portfolio

For your third project, you will build a multi-page website by working directly with HTML (hypertext markup language) and CSS (cascading style sheets) — as opposed to a site manager like WordPress or Wix — along with any media assets you wish to embed. In assigning this, I have two main goals for you: (1) to learn how to manage a composite project made up of

multiple interlinking files, and (2) to explore the affordances of the web design stack as a medium, and especially its ability to *flexibly render content for multiple audiences or reading priorities*.

As with the earlier projects, content-selection is up to you. You could gather the materials you produced earlier in the term into a shared space; build a more sustainable and public-facing platform from which to manage your online identities; or make a mock-up of placeholder content just to develop and show off your web-design skills. Whatever you choose, you should consider your audience(s) and how they might land on your website, and where you therefore wish to direct their attention and next steps.

Consolidation Project

Throughout the term, I will periodically ask you to write blog posts thinking about how to integrate – and extend – what you've learned about composing across digital media. For the fourth project, you'll build on top of what you've already made and learned: a *revision*, *extension*, or *combination* of the modes and media you used in earlier units. The unit goals are (1) to integrate and consolidate the skills you've practiced across the semester; and (2) to assess your own skills as a digital media composer, to find ways *you* in particular might best contribute to a collaborative digital project (perhaps in the future). Collaborating on this project is optional, but encouraged.

Final Reflection

The last assignment for the semester is a reflective letter to me, articulating your learning in the class and illustrating your claims about learning by calling attention to features of your compositions or your process. The goal here is less a restatement of what you've already written than an opportunity to think synthetically, across units and into the future.

SCHEDULE PREVIEW

The following schedule is just a preview, and is subject to change; **the full and most up-to-date version will be posted on the course website (<https://benmiller314.github.io/cdm2025spring>)**, including more detailed explanations of each homework assignment and full lesson plans. This gives me more flexibility to adapt the specifics to our needs as a reading and writing community. I will also post links and announcements of any major changes to Canvas, for ease of access.

Assignments are listed (as HW) on the day they are assigned, and are **due online at 10pm the night before** the following class meeting, unless otherwise specified.^[1] You should in general **also bring a copy to class**, so that we have access to it for discussion and/or revisions. Digital versions are usually fine.

Unit I:	Digital Media Stacks	(weeks 1-2)
Unit II:	Soundscapes and Soundwriting	(weeks 2-5)
Unit III:	Visual Rhetorics and Argument	(weeks 5-8)
Unit IV:	Webslinging with Markup	(weeks 8-10)
Unit V:	Putting it Together (Bit by Bit)	(weeks 10-14)
Unit VI:	Reflection and Revision	(week 15)

Final portfolios will be due one week after the last class.

^[1] This early deadline is not my way of being mean; it's just that sometimes things will take longer than you expect, and I'd really like for you to be able to sleep, and for me to be able to look over your work in the morning before class. Those latter two things are the real priorities that the "night before" policy is meant to achieve.

MAJOR PROJECT DEADLINES

Unless otherwise noted, materials are expected by 10pm on the following dates, so I can begin reviewing them before class the following day.

Audio narrative

Sun 1/26	Proposal due: what are you imagining?
Tu 1/28	Preview due: get started with the software
Sun 2/2	Full draft due: try to reach baseline
Sun 2/9	Project due: final at least for now
Mon 2/10	Reflection due <i>by noon</i>

Visual argument / rhetorical collage

Sun 2/16	Proposal due: what are you imagining?
Tu 2/18	Preview due: get started with the software
Sun 2/23	Full draft due: try to reach baseline
Sun 3/2	Project due: final at least for now (ask if you need a spring break extension)
Mon 3/3	Reflection due <i>by noon</i> (ask if you need a spring break extension)

Website portfolio

Tu 3/11	Proposal due: what are you imagining?
Sun 3/16	First tutorial assignment due: get started with the software
Sun 3/23	First draft due: mobile-first content (minimal styling)
Tu 3/25	Second draft due: adding layout
Sun 3/30	Full draft due: try to reach baseline
Sun 4/6	Project due: final at least for now
Mon 4/7	Reflection due <i>by noon</i>

Consolidation / integration

Tu 4/8	Proposal due: what are you imagining?
Tu 4/15	Preview due: get started
Sun 4/20	Project update due: how's it going?
Mon 4/28	Final portfolio & reflection due <i>by noon</i>

DETAILED SCHEDULE

Unit I: Digital Media Stacks

*In this unit, we'll introduce **affordances** and **iteration** as recurring ways to think about digital products and processes – both those we encounter and those we create.*

Wednesday, Jan 8 – Lesson 1 – Introductions

HW for next time includes lots of little things:

- Surveys and sharing:
 - **Complete** two short modules on Canvas, about self- and community-care and the grading contract. This includes a short “quiz” (should take just a minute or two) and a chance to propose changes or adopt the contract.
 - **Read** the rest of the syllabus.
 - **Respond** to the Tech Comfort Survey if you haven't yet done so.
- Written introduction to the people in the class:
 - **Join** GitHub if you haven't yet (you can use your Pitt email to get free private repositories!),
 - **and post** an introduction to yourself on the issue queue.
- Prep software for next class:
 - **Download and install** the GitHub Desktop application
 - If you don't already have one, please **download and install** a plain text editor with syntax highlighting. If you don't have a preference, try either the open source **Pulsar Editor** or Microsoft's **VS Code** or, which runs on PC, Mac, and Linux. (Chromebook users might try Caret, though note that Chromebooks might have trouble with some of the multimedia editing software coming up; talk to me about options if this is your main device.)
 - Especially if you don't know what “syntax highlighting” is, I recommend this 7-minute intro to VS Code.

Monday, Jan 13 – Lesson 2 – Interfaces and Repositories

HW for next time:

- **Read and watch** two versions of “Five Principles of New Media: Or, Playing Lev Manovich,” by Madeleine Sorapure: a text-only version and a video recording of the original Flash site (now defunct); run time is 22:24 at 1x speed.
- **Write** a short blog post: What do you notice? What do you wonder? *What can and can't text do in this context?* Post this on the Issues page.
- EXT for eager readers: interested in more on affordances? Try this short chapter from *Keywords in Design Thinking*.

Wednesday, Jan 15 – Lesson 3 – Digital Affordances

For next time, some intellectual stimulation...

- **Listen** to example audio narratives (see lesson plan for links)
- **Read** the excerpt from *Writer/Designer* on assets and fair use, plus (optionally) a webcomic on Creative Commons.
- **Write** a short blog post: what do you notice? what do you wonder? Post this on the Issues page.

... and some nuts-and-bolts preparation:

- **Download** the Audacity 3.7 audio editor if you haven't yet, or update to the latest version if you already have it.
 - *Optionally* also download the separate FFmpeg import/export library, which may help if you're using your phone to record audio
- **Watch** Audacity Basics: Recording, Editing, Mixing by Kyle Stedman (run time 18:20 at 1x speed) and come in ready to play with the software – and ask any questions that come up

Monday, Jan 20 – no class (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

Unit II: Soundscapes and Soundwriting

In this unit, you'll arrange layers of sound to project a sense of place, and of things happening in that place. The genre of the narrative is open: it could be documentary, fictional, even science-fictional. (The title you choose will help steer listeners' expectations, and thus their perceptions.)

Wednesday, Jan 22 – Lesson 4 – Audacity; Sound On, Sound Off

For next time:

- **Read and listen** to the audio recording advice (Fowkes and MacAdam; see lesson plan)
- **Review** the piece on fair use and open licensing from last week if you need a refresher.
- **Write** a *proposal* for your audio narrative, including a prospective asset list (as per W/D); post to the Issues page.
- **Begin** sourcing the sounds you'll need
- **Bring** headphones so you can work in class

Monday, Jan 27 – Lesson 5 – Recording, Ethics, Studio

For next time:

- **Skim** the audio resources on the site, and read more deeply in anything that seems like it would help you.
 - Audacity itself has a ton of documentation on their site: see support.audacityteam.org/.
 - Search is also good! It's how I find these things, after all. But remember that a Large Language Model like ChatGPT or Gemini's AI Overview is not, in itself, a search; it's attempting to recreate and consolidate language it's found elsewhere. Look for the sources so you can see more clearly how to adapt advice from their context to your own.
- **Push** a *audio narrative preview* including
 - the layered Audacity file (.aup3), named for reusability throughout your project (i.e. don't call it "preview")
 - at least one screenshot of your work in progress (.png)
 - one exported playable sound file (.mp3)
 - a brief description of what you've included, as part of your README.md file.

Wednesday, Jan 29 – Lesson 6 – Sound Unit Criteria and Stretch Goals

For next time:

- **Work** toward the baseline criteria for your audio narrative
- **Continue** taking screenshots and posting meaningful commits to GH
- **Push** a *full draft*, with the same four parts as the preview *plus* a file crediting your sources and permissions/license to use them. This can be part of the README or a separate file (e.g. sources.md) that your README will ideally link to.
- **Bring** headphones so you can work in class

Monday, Feb 3 – Lesson 7 – Sound Workshop

For next time:

- Continue to **save, commit, and push** toward your project, incorporating feedback from partners.
 - If you didn't get feedback, please **let me know** asap!
 - If you haven't finished *giving* feedback, please do so asap, and no later than noon on Wednesday for full credit.
- Optionally, **write** a blog post of possible integrative projects for the final unit of the class. What more might you want to explore? Or what do you know you won't have time for now, but maybe could look into and build toward by the end of the term?
- **Bring** headphones so you can work in class

Wednesday, Feb 5 – Lesson 8 – Sound Studio

For next time:

- **By 10:00pm on Sunday**, complete – at least for now – your audio narrative.

- **By noon on Monday**, post a prose reflection to the issue queue that incorporates screenshots of your feedback and of your Audacity project as it developed.
 - Annotations on these screenshots are optional but I've found them helpful in the past, and you might, too.

Unit III: Visual Rhetorics and Argument

In this unit, you will make a rhetorical intervention (a claim) through the juxtaposition of images and text. As with the sound project, the context for your argument is open: you could be making a social commentary, calling for action, constructing a parody, riffing on a pun, explaining a concept, and so on. Whatever you choose, you should consider your audience and what they would find persuasive, interesting, or memorable, and how you therefore wish to attract and direct their attention.

Monday, Feb 10 – Lesson 9 – Can You Picture It? Visual Rhetorics and Argument

For next time:

- **Read** a quick introduction to graphic design principles (see lesson plan)
- **Find** an example of a rhetorical visual design (on your own)
- **Write** a post about your example on the relevant issue queue, using the analytical language from the reading

Wednesday, Feb 12 – Lesson 10 – Generating Visual Ideas

For next time:

- **Skim** the visual media resources on the course site, and read/watch more deeply in anything that seems like it would help you.
 - In particular, I highly recommend the LinkedIn Learning series of videos on “GIMP Essential Training.” It’s about 5 hours of material, which I’m not expecting you to view all of in one weekend (though you do you): as before, I’ve marked some highlights and starting points. I’ve been using GIMP for years, and I confess I learned some things even from the basic tool options videos. Note that there are exercise files, should you want to follow along and make sure it works in practice.
- **Write** a visual argument *proposal*, including a prospective asset list and a rough sketch; post to the issue queue
- **Bring** headphones for sonic isolation, if you’d like

Monday, Feb 17 – Lesson 11 – Generative Studio

For next time:

- **Compose and push** a visual argument *preview*; get it started, see how it feels to work with these tools/materials. A workshop-ready draft due in one week.
- (Weekend reading, should you want it / have more time now: **Read** about fonts, optionally playing a font-matching game)

Wednesday, Feb 19 – Lesson 12 – Visual Unit Criteria and Stretch Goals

For next time:

- **Read** about fonts, optionally playing a font-matching game
- **Work** toward baseline criteria for your visual argument / rhetorical collage
- **Compose and push** a workshop-ready *full draft*

Monday, Feb 24 – Lesson 13 – Visual Unit Workshop

For next time:

- Continue to **save, commit, and push** toward your project, incorporating feedback from partners.
 - If you didn't get feedback, please **let me know** asap!
 - If you haven't finished *giving* feedback, please do so asap, and no later than noon on Wednesday for full credit.
- *Optionally*, **write** a post on the issue queue with more ideas toward the final / integrative project unit. What further possibilities might you want to explore? Or what do you know you won't have time for now, but maybe could look into and build toward by the end of the term?
- **Bring** headphones for sonic isolation, if you'd like

Wednesday, Feb 26 – Lesson 14 – Revision Studio

For next time:

- **By 10:00pm on Sunday**, complete – at least for now – your visual argument.
- **By noon on Monday**, post a prose reflection to the issue queue that incorporates screenshots of your feedback and of your project workspace as it developed.
 - Annotations on these screenshots are optional but I've found them helpful in the past, and you might, too.

Spring break! No classes on March 3rd or 5th.

NB: If you need to withdraw from any class, forms are due by email no later than end-of-business on Tuesday, March 11.

Unit IV: Webslinging (HTML + CSS markup)

In this unit, you will build a multi-page website from scratch, beginning with html, css, and images, to explore the affordances of the web design stack as a medium, and especially its ability to flexibly render content for multiple audiences or reading priorities.

Monday, Mar 10 – Lesson 15 – Midterm Reflections and Generative Writing

For next time:

- Review sample student website projects
- Consider the collections of work you might want to gather

- **Write** a *website proposal*, including at least one hand-drawn design sketch, types of pages, a prospective asset list, and a link to your repo. Post to the [issue queue](#).

Wednesday, Mar 12 – Lesson 16 – Intro to Markup and Web Design

For next time:

- *Optional* If you haven't yet, spend some time getting to know your plain-text editor.
 - Can it show two or more files side by side? Can it preview how an html file will render? Does it allow plugins or extensions to enable either of those things?
 - If you're using VSCode, you may want to check out some [intro tutorials](#). I also recommend this list of [HTML-specific features and optional settings](#).
- **Do** as much of the [Interneting is Hard \(but it doesn't have to be\)](#) tutorial as you have time for – but **at least parts 1-4** (from Introduction through Hello, CSS).
 - EXT for speedy workers: if you want to keep going, do The Box Model (part 5), then skip ahead to Semantic HTML before looping back to CSS Selectors, then Web Typography. Beyond that, use links below from our class schedule for things like responsive layout.
 - Why? Float layouts used to be a big deal, but they're not recommended now that we have better tools in Flexbox and Grid – and better tutorials for those, as well.
- **Show your work** by pushing your tutorial code to your project repository.
 - Start by copying the pages as written, before attempting to adapt to your own work: confirm that you can get them to look the same as in the tutorial.
 - If your pages *aren't* working the same as in the tutorial, please do check with me! I'll set aside some breakout group time when we get back, but feel free to email or use the [issue queue](#) in the meantime: see if your question's been answered, and if not, [post a new issue](#), because you're probably not alone.

Monday, Mar 17 – Lesson 17 – Studio / Stylesheeting

For next time:

- **Do** more of the [Internetingishard](#) tutorial, including at least The Box Model, Semantic HTML (skip down), and CSS Selectors (skip back up) if you haven't yet.
 - EXT for speedy workers: after CSS Selectors, jump down to Web Typography. Beyond that, use links below from our class schedule for things like responsive layout. The rest of the Internetingishard tutorial is best saved as advanced or historical topics beyond what I'll assign across the rest of the unit.
- **Read** more about [how CSS selectors work](#) *OR* if you prefer game-based learning to straight-up reading, try loading and clearing plates at the [CSS Diner](#). (There's still reading, in the sidebar, which tells you how to win the round.)

Wednesday, Mar 19 – Lesson 18 – Studio / Navigation

For next time:

- **View** Kevin Powell's video on [5 simple tips to making responsive layouts the easy way](#) (runtime: 15:53 at 1x speed)
- **Do** the Internetingishard tutorial on Web Typography if you haven't yet.

- Remember your resources on fonts from the previous unit? They can help you here, too!
- **Compose and push** a *first draft* of your website: a beginning, focused on html content and mobile (i.e. minimal) design.

Monday, Mar 24 – Lesson 19 – Web Unit Studio / Deployment

For next time:

- **Read** Josh Comeau's [Interactive Guide to Flexbox](#) and [Interactive Guide to CSS Grid](#)
 - EXT: Want some layout templates and examples? Try Powell's follow-up video on some common patterns, [Useful & Responsive Layouts](#), [no Media Queries required](#).
 - EXT: Want even *more* layout templates and examples? Try Rachel Andrew's [Grid By Example](#), which also has video tutorials.
- **Compose and push** a *second draft*, now adding or updating desktop layout.
 - **Email me with any questions**, noting that I can help fastest if you include screenshots and links to your site/repo. Better yet, [create a New Issue](#)! Then my answer to you can help others, too.

Wednesday, Mar 26 – Lesson 20 – Web Unit Criteria and Stretch Goals / Studio

For next time:

- **Work** toward baseline criteria for your website portfolio.
- **Compose and push** a workshop-ready *full draft* of your project.
 - If you're doing something advanced (Jekyll, React, etc) that will require a server and not just a browser, be sure to **explain in your repo's README.md file how to load your files**.
 - If you haven't already done so in class, test that your website portfolio is ready for your workshop partners to download: **try to clone it again to a new location** on your computer: if you can successfully open your pages in a local browser from that second location, you should be good to get feedback even from an asynchronous workshop.
 - (You should then also *delete that extra copy*, before you get confused as to where you're revising and pushing from.)

Monday, Mar 31 – Lesson 21 – Web Unit Workshop

For next time:

- Optionally, **write** one more blog post about what you'd like to do in our final / integrative unit. What further possibilities might you want to explore? Or what do you know you won't have time for now, but maybe could look into and build toward by the end of the term? NB: If you're interested in finding people to collaborate with, this is a good time to make a pitch!
 - Post this to [the issue queue](#), as usual
- Continue to **save, commit, and push** toward your project, incorporating feedback from partners.
 - If you didn't get feedback, please **let me know** asap!
 - If you haven't finished *giving* feedback, please do so asap, and no later than noon on Wednesday for full credit.

Wednesday, Apr 2 – Lesson 22 – Post-workshop Studio

For next time:

- **By 10:00pm on Sunday**, complete – at least for now – your website project.
- By **noon on Monday**, post a prose reflection to [the issue queue](#) that incorporates screenshots of your feedback and of your source files and/or browser output as the project developed.
 - Annotations on these screenshots are optional but I’ve found them helpful in the past, and you might, too.

Unit V: Putting it Together (Bit by Bit)*

In this final unit I’ll ask you to build on what you’ve already made: a revision, extension, or combination of the modes and media you used in earlier units. If you have a team (up to 3 people) that can collaborate effectively, go for it. It’s a short sprint to the end of term, so scope your ambitions accordingly!

Monday, Apr 7 – Lesson 23 – Intro to Consolidation / Integration Unit: Charting a Course Forward

For next time:

- *Preparing for the final portfolio:*
 - **Read** Paul Ford’s short “Letter of Recommendation: Bug Fixes” from *The New York Times Magazine* (June 11, 2019). ([Pitt Library link](#))
 - Ford writes, “I read the change logs, and I think: *Humans can do things.*” **Read back** through your own change logs, i.e. the commit histories of your projects; skim through the lesson plans; maybe even review your studio goals and exit notes. What things have you done this semester? What have you wanted to do, but not yet done?
- *Preparing one final project or revision:*
 - Work through the questions in the lesson plan’s EXT, if you didn’t yet, to develop an informal *project pitch* and **post it** to our [shared google doc](#). (The doc, rather than the issue queue, will make it easier for potential collaborators to annotate and for you to edit together in our next class.)

Wednesday, Apr 9 – Lesson 24 – Consolidation Unit Pitch Market and Studio

For next time:

- *Preparing one final project or revision:*
 - **Meet** with any groupmates (or set some time for yourself) and **set** some explicit goals, with notes on who will take lead on what. Write these notes down and see below.
 - Create a repository, if need be, or choose an existing project repository if you will mainly revise. Add a link to the repo to your planning document.
 - **Post** this plan to the [the issue queue](#) by in lieu of a *project preview*

NB: Ben will be traveling next week because of Passover, so Monday's class and office hours (April 14) will be *canceled*.

Monday, Apr 14 – No class (Passover)

For next time:

- Keep in touch with your groupmates (if relevant) and move forward with your plan.
- **Push** a *preview* of your project, i.e. get something started, so you can assess your needs.
- **Document your progress** as you go! Screenshot, save, commit (or otherwise log changes), push, repeat.

Wednesday, Apr 16 – Lesson 25 – Consolidation Unit Studio / Preparing the Final Reflective Letter

For next time:

- Check in with the calendar and update your deadlines: what are you trying to finish by the last class (in five days!)? Will you continue beyond that, knowing the final portfolio is due soon?
- Continue updating and following your work plan.
- **Push** a project update (i.e. maybe not a finished draft, but closer) to your repository.
- **Document your progress** as you go! Screenshot, save, commit (or otherwise log changes), push, repeat.
- *Optional: choose* something from the course that you want to remember beyond this semester: a thing you or someone else made, or said, that struck a chord with you. We'll share these in the last class.

Monday, Apr 21 – Lesson 26 – Last day of class! Looking back and looking forward

For next time:

- Finish consolidation project
- Work to assemble and finalize your final portfolio and reflective letter, which are due **Monday, April 28, at noon** (i.e. one week after our final class).

GRADING CONTRACT*

As composition theorist Peter Elbow has written in a number of places (see especially his “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking”**), grades are a surprisingly crude way of measuring or producing learning: they reduce complex phenomena to a single letter or number, and thus obscure the differences between, say, proofreading skills and ability to support an argument. Some teachers might try to get around this by assigning percentages of their grades to particular skill-sets, but I find I can’t know, in advance, what any one of you will need to work on: I want us to be free to give more targeted feedback, and set more targeted goals, than any pre-set percentage allows us to do. As I see it, each of you is here to become better than yourself, not better than anyone else. Grades distract from that, and distract from the particular reactions and suggestions that can help you improve.

So to shift our attention away from grading – and therefore toward thoughtful assessment – I’m going to do several things. First, I’ll put the bulk of your final grade into process and participation: *concrete, observable behaviors*, not subjective judgments of quality. No matter where you start out, this playing field is level. Second, for each major unit of the course, we’ll work as a class to develop the *baseline criteria* needed to demonstrate competency (not necessarily excellence) in that unit. **If you participate consistently at this minimum level, I’ll guarantee that your minimum grade for the course is a B.** Your grade can go up from there for excellent work, toward which we’ll set flexible and optional *aspirational criteria* within each unit – one of which will always be trying something new or risky, even if it doesn’t pay off.

Lastly, I’ll keep the final tally of those criteria open *until the end of the semester*, as measured in a final portfolio. My goal is to help you develop competencies for which it may take several failures to reach success, and I don’t want to penalize you by over-weighting an early project for lacking some skill you attained later on.

I hope you take this as an opportunity to explore, to experiment, and to trust that you will learn something in the process: even if you try a new move and fail, you can (in the words of Samuel Beckett) “fail better” next time, without being penalized.

Please respond on Canvas if you can; otherwise, print and scan. In that case, initial each item to signal you’ve read it, and sign at the very end. Students who have not turned in a signed contract by the end of the fifth class may be asked to leave the course.

* This grading contract, including some of the language, has been adapted from Danielewicz, Jane and Peter Elbow. “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching.” *College Composition and Communication* 61.2 (December 2009): 244-268, as well as the online appendix to that article (see their note 1); and from Reilly, Colleen A., and Anthony T. Atkins. “Rewarding Risk: Designing Aspirational Assessment Processes for Digital Writing Projects.” *Digital Writing: Assessment and Evaluation*, edited by Heidi McKee and Danielle Nicole DeVoss, Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2013, http://ccdigitalpress.org/dwae/04_reilly.html.

** Elbow, Peter. “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting out Three Forms of Judgment.” *College English* 55.2 (1993): 187-206.

To earn a B for this course, you must:

Approach the work

1. Engage actively to make the most of class-time. Everyone has an off day now and then, but to the best of your ability, you should be putting in the full 75 minutes of work for each class meeting or asynchronous assignment period. (I'll do my best to ensure you have a clear sense of what to work on, including extensions for if you finish early.) This means you must also be consistently prepared for class: read, annotate, and bring any required readings, and bring a notebook and whatever drafts, files, or research you'll need. _____
2. During every workshop, push yourself to provide your class- and group-mates with thorough, thoughtful feedback. Taking their work seriously enough to both describe it and think hard about how it can be improved is crucial for your success, as well as theirs, in becoming better composers throughout this course. Note that this is not just about praise or criticism: ask questions, make connections, explore possibilities. Open space for them to do or say more. _____
3. Work with your group-mates to complete group assignments and exercises to the satisfaction of everyone in the group. Divide group assignments and time fairly, and complete, on time, all the work you take on. Note that this also means demanding satisfaction *from* your group mates: if one of you is slacking off, the whole group suffers. Let that person know. _____
4. For every assignment, produce a substantial, thoughtful product that follows the guidelines in the prompt – including deadlines and all baseline criteria. _____
5. Complete all assigned readings attentively enough that you could provide examples of key concepts; you may wish to mark up the readings or take notes as you go. _____
6. Help to vet baseline criteria for each major project, so that you are confident you can meet those criteria in the time allotted. If something proposed seems aspirational, more of a stretch goal than a requirement, say so. _____
7. Use the feedback provided by your instructor and your classmates to improve your projects. You don't have to make every change suggested, of course, because your work is yours, and after all, audiences will sometimes disagree. But you must take all feedback seriously, and your drafts (or reflections; see next bullet) should show evidence that you've carefully considered your respondents' suggestions: if a reader is confused or has an objection, don't ignore it, but instead try to clear up the confusion or incorporate and respond to the objection. _____
8. When turning in revisions (as well as for any earlier draft on which it feels appropriate), attach a brief note reflecting on what in particular you were trying to achieve in that draft. e.g., Were there particular comments you were responding to? A genre feature or model you were trying to emulate? You can also use this note to acknowledge suggestions you consciously decided not to take, explaining your reasons. (This may, in fact, help you to discover your reasons.) _____
9. Proofread final drafts to eliminate surface errors and typos to the best of your ability. Use style guides and talk to classmates, me, or a Writing Center Consultant if you have questions. _____
10. Show respect for your classmates and your instructor. This includes taking each others' ideas seriously; using language that honors others' racial, ethnic, religious, political, economic, sexual, and gender identifications or positions; and refraining from distracting behaviors, _____

Write and revise

such as gossiping, reading the news, or using electronic devices for non-class-related activities. Ensure that your cell phone doesn't ring during class. _____

11. Attend scheduled conferences with me or your Writing Center Consultant (if applicable), and come prepared to use the conference time productively. **If I indicate in feedback that I would like you to schedule an appointment to talk with me, please reply within one week.** A missed conference counts as 2/3 of an absence (see #13). _____
12. Avoid plagiarism by (a) taking careful notes to help you distinguish between your own ideas and language and those you have borrowed from sources; (b) being generous about attributing ideas and acknowledging those whose work has influenced your own, i.e. by attempting to cite all sources correctly, even in first drafts; (c) mastering citation conventions and citing all sources correctly in all final drafts; and (d) never attempting to disguise another's work as your own, never purchasing someone else's writing services online for course credit, and never engaging in any other act of academic dishonesty.

This is a collaborative class, in which we offer each other suggestions and constructive criticism. But we do so to clarify the expression of *original ideas* – never to substitute someone else's ideas for our own, or to impose our ideas on someone else. If you feel you're making a Fair Use of someone else's intellectual property, include a rationale for your use in a reflection that accompanies your drafts (see #8). This applies as well to AI-generated source materials you incorporate into projects you'll take credit for: provide your prompts, name your tools, explain your use. _____

13. Be present. For synchronous participation, be consistently on time for class, and be absent very rarely; for asynchronous participation (e.g. a makeup class after illness), complete a check-in at the beginning and/or end of your work-time, no later than five days after the equivalent class-meeting. Each missed class is equivalent to three "absence tokens," and vice versa. Joining class after activities are underway earns one absence token, and missing more than 20 minutes of class – or completing async work between 5 and 7 days after it's assigned – earns two absence tokens (though you're still always welcome to come in, quietly). Twelve absence tokens throughout the semester, nine during any one unit, or completely missing a peer review workshop is a major breach of contract (see next section). Having more than 18 absence tokens (equivalent to six absences, or 1/4 of the classes for the term) could be grounds for failure, given the hands-on nature of the course. **Please talk to me before we get to that point!** _____
14. Submit a complete, revised portfolio that meets all outlined requirements by the due date. The portfolio for this class will consist of three major projects (featuring sound, image, and web design), at least one with revision history and a selection of feedback; one additional consolidation project to which you have contributed significantly; and a reflective portfolio introduction. Details to follow, closer to the deadline. _____

If you fulfill all of these expectations, you are guaranteed a grade of at least a B overall. I will do my best to keep you informed and afloat with regard to your successful participation. If you're ever in doubt about your contractual status, feel free to email me and/or drop by my office hours.

Grades Below a B:

If you don't keep the contract, your contracted grade for the course will be lowered as follows:

- For minor breaches (e.g. missing or not bringing in a short homework exercise, missing up to one sixth of the baseline criteria, or failing to acknowledge direct revision-suggestions): in each Unit, I will permit you one “Mulligan” – one minor misstep that will not break the contract. But two minor breaches during any Unit will lower your minimum grade by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter, i.e. to a B–; another breach in the same unit or two minor breaches during the next Unit, and your minimum grade will be lowered further to a C+, and so on. These lowered minimum grades can still be exceeded by an exceptionally strong portfolio. _____
- For major breaches (e.g. missing more than one sixth of a project’s baseline criteria, failing to participate in peer review, not turning in a project reflection): no Mulligans; your minimum grade will immediately be lowered to a B– after the first major breach, C+ after the second, and so on. These lowered grades can still be exceeded by an exceptionally strong portfolio. _____
- For the final portfolio: each day it is late, the minimum grade drops $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter. _____
- The attendance policy is outlined above, in item #13 (though see also #10). _____
- **A minimum grade falling below a C-minus is grounds for failing the course.** Please talk to me before we get to that point! _____

I want to emphasize that I can empathize: I know there may well be important reasons in your life that you're not able to participate as fully in this class as may be my ideal or yours.

If you have extenuating circumstances, and especially if you are having trouble accessing or processing the course materials, please let me know; setting up the conditions for your success is important to me!

Again, I will do my best to keep you informed and afloat with regard to patterns that threaten to break the contract: my goal is to keep everyone engaged, active, and learning. If you are ever in doubt about your contractual status, or want to talk about possible extensions or extenuations, feel free to send me an email or drop by my office hours.

Grades Above a B:

There are two ways to earn a grade above a B: by demonstrating Excellence and Quality in your final *products*, and by demonstrating ambition in your *process* by meeting aspirational criteria. The best portfolios will likely involve both. _____

While the former terms are, unavoidably, rather fuzzy, in my defense I can say only this:

- First, most grades in writing, even digital writing, are somewhat subjective – and at least by using the contract above I'm doing my best to limit and control the arbitrariness of such judgment. We will also collaboratively adjust the aspirational criteria for each unit, as they should vary with the genres, tools, and skillsets at hand.
- Second, I promise to do my very best to articulate, in particular instances, what I think would most help the piece in question achieve Excellence and Quality, and to invite peer feedback I can see, so my perspective isn't the only one considered. One of the characteristics of such

work is that it tends to stand out as its own self, original and often surprising, and it is therefore far harder to give guidance in general terms.

*To earn a grade above a B for ambitious process, **you must make the case** in your project reflections (or final-portfolio reflection) for how you have met the aspirational criteria.* _____

If your work is trending towards a better-than-B portfolio, I will do my best to let you know where you've leveled up over that line, so you can try to recapture and consolidate whatever was working so well. (Don't worry, I'll keep giving suggestions for where you can improve, as well, because I believe that even the best of us can.)

Once more, should you ever find yourself in doubt about your contractual status – whether your work is satisfactory for a B, unsatisfactory for a B, or excelling beyond the B-level, please feel free to send me an email, drop by my office hours, or even to set up a conference at a better time.