

- How can rhetoric foster socially responsible and responsive approaches to content strategy?

We will consider these questions by discussing the relationship between rhetoric and CS. Then, we will enact our ideas by extending CS methodologies with rhetorical theories, audit and analyze web content through rhetorical lenses, and apply our primary research findings to new prototypes.

As with other 4000-level courses, this course will be reading and writing intensive, and it will focus on our deep engagement with theoretical texts and CS practices.

Objectives

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate fundamental knowledge of rhetorical theories pertinent to content strategies;
- Demonstrate an awareness of rhetorical and ethical implications of content strategies;
- Demonstrate the application of rhetorical theories to develop a content strategy for a particular information-communication context;
- Understand and perform diverse professional and technical writing strategies that include fundamental web-destined content tools and skills:
 - Identify, assess, and improve upon content problems with content strategy methods (audits, testing, and scorecards), tools (spreadsheets and prototyping), and communication of solutions (final reports);
 - Design and create a prototypes with HTML/CSS based on recommendations derived from applied research.

Materials

Texts

All of the books below are made available digitally through the library for free. All other texts will be provided as PDF files available on Canvas.

- Bradshaw, J. L. (2018). Slow circulation: The ethics of speed and rhetorical persistence. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 48(5), pp. 479-98. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Brown, James, Jr. (2015). *Ethical Programs: Hospitality and the Rhetorics of Software*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. [\[Read Online\]](#)
- Casey, Meghan. (2015). *The Content Strategy Toolkit*. Pearson. [I will provide scanned PDF copies of some excerpts and tools.]
- Hall, Erika. (2013). *Just Enough Research*. A Book Apart. [\[VT Online Safari Tech Library\]](#)
- Halvorson, Kristina. (2012). *Content Strategy for the Web*, 2nd Ed. New Riders. [\[VT Online Safari Tech Library\]](#)
- Jones, N. N. (2016). The technical communicator as advocate: Integrating a social justice approach in technical communication. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 46(3), pp. 342-61. [\[PDF\]](#)
- McGrane, Karen. (2012). *Content Strategy for Mobile*. New York, NY: A Book Apart.
 - Copy/paste McGrane, Content Strategy for Mobile into VT Library's "[Discovery Search](#)" Bar. The first result should provide a link titled "Available in Safari Tech Books Online".
- Miller, Carolyn. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, pp. 151-167. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Schryer, Catherine. F. (1993). Records as genre. *Written Communication*, 10(2), pp. 200-234. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Wachter-Boettcher, Sara. (2012). *Content Everywhere*. Brooklyn, NY: Rosenfield Media. [\[VT Online Safari Tech Library\]](#)

Tools

- Laptop computer
- Use of your vt.edu Google Drive suite
- Web design prototyping:
 - [Atom](#) text editor
 - [Github Desktop](#) application
 - Mozilla Firefox web browser (It has the best layout tools out there.)

Assignments

Participation (10%)

The success of this class depends on your participation and open communication. Ten percent of your grade will be based on your contributions to class discussions and your engagement in class activities. Participation includes coming to class everyday, on time, and prepared, having completed the required readings and assignments, and ready for thoughtful and active engagement with each other. Participation also includes asking questions, attending office hours, sharing helpful links and media, providing thoughtful and productive feedback about the course, and engagement via email. All students are expected to participate in an active, open, and respectful manner, in small and large groups.

Reading Responses (points integrated into each project)

For each set of readings, you will submit a 500-word response. For each response, you should include the following components:

- Brief summary (no more than one paragraph);
- Discussion of 2-3 key concepts/ideas from the text;
- At least two discussion questions.

Your responses will be graded based on the following criteria:

- Includes all of the components listed above (summary, key concepts/ideas, questions);
- Demonstrates a clear, thoughtful, and engaged understanding of ideas from the text(s);
- Draws connections between the assigned texts and other texts, events, and/or ideas;
- Provides compelling and generative questions for discussion.

Content Strategy Report (15%)

In this 4-6 page report, you will craft a discussion of select concepts, frameworks, and practices that we have reviewed during these first few weeks of class. Your main goal is to choose a particular content strategy practice of interest to you. From there, your report will describe the recurrent problems, concerns, and goals involved with this practice in tandem with what knowledge and skills help content strategists accomplish such goals and alleviate certain problems. Then, your goal is to select 1-2 rhetorical concepts that you seek overlapping with this content strategy practices. By writing about your investment in this broad industry area, you can creatively consider potential new areas of engagement between rhetoric and content strategy. The below questions may help you start to consider your area of investment:

- What concepts and practices overlap between content strategy and rhetoric?
- How might I extend prior CS methodologies with rhetorical theories? That is, what new questions and inquiries does X rhetorical concept or framework provide CS?

Deliverables: Reading Responses, Draft Report, Content Strategy Report

Content Audit (20%)

Imagine managing the web content of a large organization: sometimes thousands of pages, teams of writers and developers, and myriad audiences. Due to these contemporary issues of scale, professional communicators increasingly need to craft more complex means to assess and plan how such content should be modeled and written. In this assignment, your team must develop a metric, translate into the spreadsheet template, and apply it to an audit of your website. Findings from your audit will be written up in the scorecard and guide your action for the following assignments: usability research, sitemapping, and prototyping.

Deliverables: Reading Response, Audit Spreadsheet, Content Scorecard

Research Method (20%)

In this assignment, your team will learn and apply some basic usability research to help refine some of the findings from your content audit. Teams will also learn how to manage their ideas, testing development, data, and analysis as a way forward into the final project. Teams will report their updated recommendations in an Action Brief.

Deliverables: Reading Responses, Project Management, Action Brief with Content Model & Sitemap, and Sketched Wireframes

Final Project (Prototype, Reflection) (35%)

For your final project, your team will define and craft a content model sitemap and design a prototype with HTML and CSS backed by findings from your research. The sitemap and prototype will be accompanied by a 2-3 page reflection paper that discusses the process of developing the prototype, which includes how texts in rhetorical theory and content strategy informed or supported that development. This reflection paper should cite sources from class, and you are encouraged to use and draw from your teams' previous Reading Responses to develop the written portions of this project. Quizzes will facilitate and ensure that you keep up with the HTML and CSS exercises.

Deliverables: Quizzes, Prototype, Reflection