

THE DIGITAL AGE

Reading & Writing in the Digital Age

A FIRST-YEAR COURSE AT
NORTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

GO TO SCHEDULE →

Assignment
and

Course
Description and

Grading

WHAT WILL
YOU DO IN
RWDA AND
HOW WILL
IT BE
ASSESSED?

Editorial Rooms of the Phonographic Journal of the F...
(Dictating News Cylinders.)

Learning Objectives

WHAT IS RWDA ALL
ABOUT?

Course Policies

WHAT DOES RWDA EXPECT
OF YOU?

Schedule

Home



WHAT WILL
WE DO
TOGETHER
IN RWDA,
AND
WHEN?

Updates

WHAT IS NEW IN RWDA?

NAME

EMAIL

MESSAGE



Email

r.cordell@northea



Address

Nightingale
Hall 415,

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This seminar explores how we tell stories and make arguments in the age of the internet and “big data.” We will investigate literary works from a variety of eras and genres—including fiction, poetry, film, and video games—to see how writers and readers have grappled with the implications of new reading and informational technologies throughout history. We will also study the ways writers have produced new kinds of writing in response to such changes. We will analyze historical interplays among technology, new media, culture, and literature in order to better understand the social and literary upheavals of our own technological moment. Students will develop skills for making sense of textual data, as well as for writing *about data* and writing *with data* through a variety of media. Students will weave together code and prose in multimodal, online publications; analyze texts using computational tools; and develop projects, such as literary “bots,” that explore the boundaries between digital technology and creative expression.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will:

1. Understand many of the ways that literature helps society grapple with the meaning and implications of new technologies;
 2. Expand your skills of critical reading and interpretation, with a particular eye to navigating and filtering information available online;
 3. Improve your writing skills in a range of media;
 4. Create, analyze, and employ data in support of your ideas;
 5. Compare typical genres of literature with new forms of interactive media and videogames;
 6. and Reflect on your own relationship to IRL and online aspects of life in the digital age.
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Prerequisites

“Reading and Writing in the Digital Age” presumes no prior experience with computational methods and thus is well suited for students interested a “hands-on” introduction to the medium that underlies much of early-twenty-first-century life. The class offers all students an opportunity to develop their abilities analyzing, interpreting, and creating texts in a range of media through a blending of traditional and computational methods.

Course Policies

Shadow Syllabus

Really, all I *want* to write here can be found in Sonya Huber's Shadow Syllabus. There is a lot of truth in this list for your college careers and beyond. Read it and believe it.

Course Logistics

- Meeting Days: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 10:30-11:35
 - Location: Hastings Suite 102
 - Professor: Ryan Cordell
 - Cordell Email: r.cordell@northeastern.edu
 - Cordell Office: Nightingale Hall 415
 - Cordell Office Hours: Monday 1:00-2:00pm, Thursday 9:00-10:00am, and by appointment
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Required Texts

The majority of our readings will be available online or through our course Leganto. We will read a few books, however and play one video game together that you will need to purchase:

Required Books

- Louisa Hall, *Speak: A Novel*, available at the NU Bookstore or on Amazon
- Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*, available at the NU Bookstore or on Amazon

Required Videogame

- The Fullbright Company, *Gone Home* (also available DRM-free for Mac, Windows, or Linux through Good Old Games)

Recommended Book

This book will be on reserve in Snell Library, but if you want to ensure access to it prior to class you should purchase it (because other students might be borrowing it when you come to read it).

- Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec, *Dear Data*, available at the NU Bookstore or on Amazon
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Communication

The best way to get in touch with me is to visit during my office hours. If you're unsure about our readings, struggling with an assignment, or just want to talk, please visit. During the Fall 2018 semester, I will be in my office (Nightingale 415) on Mondays 1:00-2:00pm and Thursdays from 9:00-10:00am. I'm also happy to make appointments at other times—just email me with **at least three possible meeting times** for me to choose among. I can schedule in person or virtual meetings.

The next best way to get in touch with me is by sending me an email. When you write to me: consider your tone and your audience. An email to your professor shouldn't read the same as your emails to friends. For help, see this guide to emailing your professors. I will respond to an email within 48 hours. Often I will respond more quickly, but you should not send me an urgent email, for example, the night before an assignment is due. If for some reason I have not responded to your email within two days, please do follow up—my delay is likely inadvertent and I will welcome a reminder.

Class Engagement

This experiential course requires active engagement in class activities and discussions. There will be few lectures and we will not be building toward an exam. Instead, we will work together to build our facilities for thinking critically about technology, new media, reading, and writing, as well as to improve our skills

writing across media. You should come to every class having read all of the required reading, watched the required videos, browsed the suggested resources, played the required games, and so forth. You should enter the classroom prepared to discuss these materials with colleagues and complete both individual and group in-class assignments.

Participation

I will not explicitly grade participation in this course (i.e. “participation = 20% of final grade”), but I will take account of your reading and course engagement through your class preparation assignments, discussions, and in-class activities. As a reminder, all of our class grading contracts require you to:

Come to class prepared to discuss any assigned readings, games, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.

There are many ways to participate in a college class. Just a few of the most valuable contributions are:

1. Raising ideas from our assigned materials for class discussion, including directing our attention to specific moments you found evocative, inspiring, infuriating, or otherwise salient;
2. Asking questions about materials or ideas you found puzzling or difficult (I cannot overstate how valuable good questions are to a thriving class, and how desperately I wish more students were courageous in asking them);
3. Sending pertinent materials discovered outside of class to the course email list, or bringing them to our attention during discussion;
4. Assisting classmates with lab assignments or other in-class work amenable to cooperation;
5. Visiting during office hours to extend course conversations around subjects or questions you find particularly interesting.

Attendance

Maintaining an active class conversation requires that the class be present, both physically and mentally. “Attendance” does not simply mean that your body can be found in proximity to those of your classmates. You must also be mentally present, which means you must:

1. Be awake and attentive to the conversation of the day;
2. Prepare assigned texts before class begins;
3. Bring your assigned texts to class. If we’re reading online articles, you should either bring a device on which to read them or print them and bring that hard copy. For some of our “texts” such as videogames this will

be a bit harder to accomplish, but we will discuss what precisely to bring before those sessions;

4. *Bring your assigned texts to class!*
5. and, finally, **bring your assigned texts to class!!!** I mean it. Seriously. If you come to class without the day's reading on hand, I reserve the right to count you absent.

If you fail to meet these requirements, I will consider you mentally absent, though you may be physically present.

Missing Class

You may miss the number of classes specified in your chosen grade contract and you need not provide an explanation. If you find yourself in extraordinary circumstances that will impact your attendance, please come talk with me during office hours. When you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, get updates on upcoming assignments, and/or ensure that you are prepared for future classes.

For as many absences as allotted in your grade contract, you will be exempted from the class preparation assignment. If you miss more classes than agreed, we may need to reevaluate your contract.



"Overload" by Sir Mildred Pierce

“Information Overload” Days

I do understand that the semester can get hectic. The reading load for this class is often challenging, and you must balance it with the work in your other classes. Most likely you will have days when you simply cannot—for whatever reason—complete the assigned reading. Please do not simply skip class, compounding your stresses, when this happens. Instead, you may take “*information overload*” (*IO*) days during the semester up to the number specified in your grade contract. On these days you will not be expected to contribute to class discussion and you will receive a pass on class preparation. In order to take an IO day, you must follow these rules:

1. You must attend class, listen attentively to any lectures or class discussions, and take part in any activities or group work not dependent on the day's reading. **Your IO days cannot be used as additional excused absences.**
2. You must inform me **before the beginning of class** that you are taking your IO day. You may not wait until I call on you or until you see day's the in-class assignment. **I will deny any IO requests made during class.** To that end: take special care to be on time if you plan to request an IO day, as you won't be allowed to request one if you arrive late.
3. You may not extend an IO day into another class session. If, for instance, you take your IO day during our first class on a novel, you will not then be excused from discussing the book during subsequent classes.
4. You may not take an IO day to avoid completing a major assignment. IO days will excuse you from reading quizzes, group work, or reflections, but nothing of more serious import. If you are unsure whether an assignment is "major," the syllabus is a good guide. If a particular assignment has its own "assignment" page on the course website, it is a major assignment.
5. In general you should not use IO days to avoid drafting writing before our in-class workshops. The writing demands in this class are high and the workshops are designed to help you stay on task for completing them, as well as to give you valuable feedback as you write or revise. It would strongly advise against foregoing these benefits.

IO days are intended to help you manage the inevitable stresses of your individual semester. Use them wisely.

Digital Etiquette

In-class Devices

Some of this section and much of the rubric below were inspired by and adapted from this cell phone use rubric from Zombie Based Learning.

This should go without saying, but let's say it anyway: while in class, you should be focused on class. You may think that you are an excellent multi-tasker, but there is a growing body of evidence that argues multitasking is a myth: trying to do multiple things simultaneously means you do all those things worse than if you focused on them serially—the act of multitasking literally drains your brain's energy reserves. In a discussion-focused class like this one, it's usually pretty easy to tell when a student is checking in and out of class an other on-screen activities.

In your professional lives, people will have their phones and other devices with them at their jobs, in meetings, at conferences, and so on. Adults do not have

their devices taken away from them. They are expected to manage their own use.

You may have your phone and/or laptop on hand during class, but if so you should use them only for accessing our readings, class resources, or for finding outside materials pertinent to our discussions and activities. You should not use them to follow a game, message your friends, check your friends' Tumblrs, commit (non course related) code to Github. Though it may seem unthinkable, your friends and family may actually survive three hours each week without direct updates as to your whereabouts and doings. They probably won't call the police to report you missing. They will no doubt pine for your witty banter, but that longing will only make your 11:36am updates all the sweeter each Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday this semester.

Periodically during the semester I may ask folks to put screens away. This means I want everyone—myself included—to focus attention on another aspect of class. In fact, it would be a very good idea to have a physical notebook available for classes when phones and laptops cannot be used.

Device Use Rubric

The rubric below outlines my expectations for device use in this classroom. We can discuss these expectations in our first days together and edit them if the class agrees on amendments. I will not be recording marks for device use in every class. Instead, I will assess your use periodically and include these measures in my assessment of your class contributions and your adherence to your grade contract.

1. Unacceptable	2. Below Expectations	3. Meets Expectations	4. Exceeds Expectations
<p>Use is <i>inappropriate</i>. Device is a distraction to others.</p> <p>Examples: A student uses their device to play games, view material unrelated to the course, OR hold social conversations.</p>	<p>Use is <i>distracting</i> to the student, their colleagues, and/or the instructor.</p> <p>Example: A student takes out their phone to look at text messages several times in one class period.</p>	<p>Device is <i>not used</i> except during designed times, or device use is limited to quick checks during times of transition.</p> <p>Example: a student receives an important text from a parent, which they check quickly during our transition between group work and full-class discussion, but waits to respond until an appropriate time.</p>	<p>Device <i>only used</i> as an efficient academic tool for a direct purpose.</p> <p>Device is not a distraction, but used at appropriate times as an extension of work or learning.</p> <p>Examples: A student uses their phone to do research during a research project, or uses their laptop to create a collaborative document for a group project.</p>



“Glitch” by 622

Technical Snafus

This course will rely on access to computers, specific software, and the internet. **At some point during the semester you WILL have a problem with technology:** your laptop will crash, a file will become corrupted, a server will go down, a piece of software will not act as you expect it to, or something else will occur. These are facts of twenty-first-century life, not emergencies. To succeed in college and in your career you should develop work habits that take such snafus into account. Start assignments early and save often. Always keep a backup copy of your work saved somewhere secure (preferably off site). None of these unfortunate events should be considered emergencies: inkless printers, computer virus infections, lost flash drives, lost passwords, corrupted files, incompatible file formats. It is *entirely your responsibility* to take the proper steps to ensure

your work will not be lost irretrievably; if one device or service isn't working, find another that does. When problems arise in the software I have assigned for you to learn, we will work through those problems together and learn thereby. However, I will not grant you an extension based on problems you may be having with the specific devices or the internet services you happen to use.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to complete a TRACE (Teacher Rating and Course Evaluation) toward the end of the semester. In addition, the English Department asks its students to complete a separate, wholistic, largely narrative course evaluation. I will set aside some time during a class period for students to complete their TRACE and English Departmental evaluations.

Academic Integrity

In this class you will abide by Northeastern University's Academic Integrity Policy at all times:

A commitment to the principles of academic integrity is essential to the mission of Northeastern University. The promotion of independent and original scholarship ensures that students derive the most from their educational experience and their pursuit of knowledge. Academic dishonesty violates the most fundamental values of an intellectual community and undermines the achievements of the entire University.

If you have any questions about what constitutes academic integrity in this class—particularly as the concept applies to digital course projects—please talk to me. We will also discuss the ethics of digital scholarship in class.

Writing Center

The Northeastern University Writing Center is located in 412 Holmes Hall and in Snell Library (for current hours call 617-373-4549 or see <http://www.northeastern.edu/english/writing-center/>) and offers free and friendly help for any level writer, including help with reading complex texts, conceptualizing a writing project,

refining your writing process (i.e., planning, researching, organization, drafting, revising, and editing), and using sources effectively. You can receive feedback face-to-face during regular hours or via email/online response. I strongly recommend that you make appointments to go over drafts of your work—including your digital work—before turning it in. Questions about the Writing Center can be directed to neuwritingcenter@gmail.com.

Schedule

Most of our readings will be available freely on the web. There are a few books you must buy (as indicated in the course policies) and others available in our class course packet in Leganto. I will show you how to use Leganto in our first session together, but in general if there's not a direct link that's where you should check.

Wednesday, September 5: Introductions

Introduction to the class and to each other

Keyword 1: Reading

Thursday, September 6: Novelties

Read:

- Leah Price, “You Are What You Read”
- Ruth Graham, “Against YA”
- Hannah Natanson, “Yes, teens are texting and using social media instead of reading books, researchers say”
- 19th-Century Commentaries on Novel Reading:
 1. “On Novel Reading”, *The Guardian; or Youth’s Religious Instructor* (1820)
 2. “The Reading of Young Ladies”, *American Magazine of Useful Knowledge* (1836)
 3. “Devouring Books”, *The American Annals of Education* (1835)

In-class: Introduction to Markdown for “Domain of Your Own” and blogging assignments

Monday, September 10 : Astrolabes &

Read:

- Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti* (bookstore)

In-class: Continuing with Markdown and introduction to Github Pages for “Domain of Your Own” and blogging assignments

Wednesday, September 12: Library Orientation

Meet in Snell Library Room 422

Thursday, September 13: Paper or Plastic?

Read:

- Ferris Jabr, “The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens”
- Maria Sachiko Cecire, “Massively Open”

In-class: Continuing with Markdown and Github Pages for “Domain of Your Own” and blogging assignments

Monday, September 17: Reading Futures

Read:

- Octave Uzanne, “The End of Books” (1894)
- N. Katherine Hayles, “How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine” (PDF in Leganto)
- Craig Mod, “Future Reading”

Wednesday, September 19: 17776

DUE: Draft of Course Grade Contract

Read:

- Jon Bois, “What Football Will Look Like in the Future”

Thursday, September 20: Writing Workshop

Read:

- *The Craft of Research* chapters 3-5
-

Interlude: Speak

Monday, September 24

Read:

- Louisa Hall, *Speak*, Prologue-Book One (pg. 1-78)
-

Keyword 2: Writing

Wednesday, September 26: Writing as Technology

Read:

- Ted Chiang, “The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling” (PDF in Leganto)

Thursday, September 27: Fake News!

Read:

- Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Lucas Graves, “‘News You Don’t Believe’: Audience Perspectives on Fake News” (PDF in Leganto)
- Sarah McGrew, Teresa Ortega, Joel Breakstone, and Sam Wineburg; “The Challenge That’s Bigger Than Fake News” (PDF in Leganto)

In-class: Library research session

Window opens for drafting Wikipedia writing assignment

Monday, October 1: Wikiworld

Read:

- Joseph Reagle, “Nazis and Norms” and “Encyclopedic Anxiety”
- Michelle Moravec, “The Endless Night of Wikipedia’s Notable Woman Problem”

In-class: orientation to Wikipedia

Wednesday, October 3: Writing Workshop

Read:

- *The Craft of Research* chapters 7-9

In-class: Wikipedia Continued

Thursday, October 4: Writing in Public

Read:

- Annemarie Perez, “UndocuDreamers: Public Writing and the Digital Turn”

Monday, October 8: NU Observes Columbus Day

No class

Wednesday, October 10: Writing Programs

Read:

- Annette Vee, “Understanding Computer Programming as Literacy” (PDF in Leganto)
- Samuel Woolley, Danah Boyd, Meredith Broussard, Made, “How to Think About Bots”

Browse (choose at least 1 entry you’d like to discuss in class and get to know it):

- Posts on “Letting Neural Networks Be Weird”
- Electronic Literature Collection: Bots
- Jetson et al, *Sunspring*
- Any of the bots mentioned in this *New Yorker* article (there’s some overlap from above)
- Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul, and Nick Montfort, “The Deletionist”
- Computational Poems by Nick Montfort:
 - “The Purpling”
 - * “Shivers”
 - * “Modern Perverbs”

Interlude: Speak

Thursday, October 11

Read:

- Louisa Hall, *Speak*, Book Two and Three (pg. 79-184)
-

Keyword 3: Attention

Monday, October 15: What Gorilla?

Read:

- Cathy Davidson, from *Now You See It* (PDF in Leganto)
- Michael H. Goldhaber, “The Attention Economy: The Natural Economy of the Net”
- Barbara Fister, “It’s the Attention Economy, and It’s Stupid”

Wednesday, October 17: Internet Famous

Read:

- Susanna Paasonen, “Fickle focus: Distraction, affect and the production of value in social media”
- Abby Rabinowitz, “The Meme as Meme”
- Jim Ridolfo and Dànienne Nicole DeVoss, “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery” (make sure to read each of the sections in the table of contents at the top)

Thursday, October 18: Writing Workshop

Read:

- *The Craft of Research* chapters 10-11

Monday, October 22: It’s Pronounced ‘Gif’

Read:

- Kate M. Miltner and Tim Highfield, “Never Gonna GIF You Up: Analyzing the Cultural Significance of the Animated GIF”

- Lauren M. Jackson, “We Need to Talk About Digital Blackface in GIFs”

Wednesday, October 24: Work work work work work

Read:

- Melissa Gregg, “The Productivity Obsession”
- Ian Bogost, “Hyperemployment, or the Exhausting Work of the Technology User”

Thursday, October 25 : #Unplug

Read:

- Virginia Heffernan, “The Internet Is the Uncanniest Valley. Don’t Get Trapped in It”
- Bianca Bosker, “The Binge Breaker”
- Baratunde Thurston, “#Unplug: Baratunde Thurston Left The Internet For 25 Days, And You Should Too”

Keyword 4: Data

Monday, October 29: ROFL

Read:

- Naomi Kritzer, “Cat Pictures Please”
 - Elyse Graham, “The Great LOLCat Massacre”
-

Window opens for drafting Dear (My) Data writing assignment

Wednesday, October 31: Data Visualization

Read:

- Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec, *Dear Data* (spend time with this book and identify 3 visualizations you find particularly interesting/compelling/infuriating for discussion in class. If you are reading the book in library reserves take a picture of the pages you want to discuss)
- Shirley Wu, “An Interactive Visualization of Every Line in *Hamilton*”

Thursday, November 1: Writing Workshop

Read:

- *The Craft of Research* chapters 13-15

Monday, November 5: Quantified Selves

Read:

- Gary Wolf, “The Data-Driven Life”
- Kim Brillante Knight, “Wearable Interfaces, Networked Bodies, and Feminist Sleeper Agents” (PDF in Leganto)

Wednesday, November 7: Don’t Be Evil

Listen:

- 99% Invisible, “The Age of the Algorithm”

Read:

- Safiya Umoja Noble, from *Algorithms of Oppression* (PDF in Leganto)

Thursday, November 8: Data Afterlives

Watch:

- Owen Harris, “Be Right Back” episode of *Black Mirror*

Monday, November 12: Veterans’ Day

No class

Wednesday, November 14: Data Transcendent

Read:

- Ted Chiang, “The Lifecycle of Software Objects” (PDF in Leganto)

Thursday, November 15: Writing workshop

Read:

- *The Craft of Research* chapters 16-17
-

Interlude: Speak

Monday, November 19

Read:

- Louisa Hall, *Speak*, Book Four and Five (pg. 185-314)
-

Wednesday, November 21-Sunday, November 25: Thanksgiving Holiday

Window opens for drafting Interactive Twine Essay writing assignment

Keyword 5: Play

Monday, November 26: You Can't Go Home Again

Play:

- The Fullbright Company, *Gone Home*

In-class: introduction to Twine

Wednesday, November 28: Arcade

Read:

- Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce, “The Hegemony of Play”(PDF)
- Elizabeth Losh, “#GamerGate 101”

We'll play (some of) these in class:

- merritt k, *Lim*
- Molleindustria, *Unmanned*
- GOP Arcade, *Thoughts and Prayers*
- Jordan Magnuson and Kevin MacLeod, *Loneliness*
- Anna Anthropy, *Queers in Love at the End of the World*
- Porpentine, *Howling Dogs*
- ——, *With Those We Love Alive*
- McKinney, *Spent*
- Financial Times, *The Uber Game*
- Zoe Quinn, Patrick Lindsey, and Isaac Schankler, *Depression Quest*
- Star C. Foster and Daniel Ravipinto, *Slouching toward Bedlam*
- Jason Nelson, *i made this. you play this. we are enemies*

In-class: Twine continued

Thursday, November 29: Writing Workshop

Monday, December 3: Choose Your Own Adventure

Choose one of the following to play or, alternatively, pick another game to play and analyze. Either way, you need to get far enough into the game that you can talk about it in detail during class, so start well in advance of this session:

- *Braid*
- *A Dark Room* (the app provides a fuller narrative)
- Depression Quest
- *Papers, Please*
- *Passage*
- *Save the Date*
- *The Stanley Parable*
- *The Walking Dead*
- *Thomas Was Alone*
- *To the Moon*
- *What Remains of Edith Finch*

Wednesday, December 5: Open

Assignments and Grading

Assignments Overview

- Class Preparation: written questions or observations about course readings or drafts of writing in progress
- A Domain of Your Own: carve out your own corner of the net
- Blogging: dig into course topics and ideas each week beyond what we cover in class discussions
- Required Writing Assignments
 - No Digital Day: conduct a personal experiment in pre-internet living and write a reflection about the experience
 - We're All Wikipedians Now: create or substantially improve a Wikipedia article
 - Dear (My) Data: record personal data, imagine a novel way to visualize it, and write about what the process reveals
- Optional Writing Assignments
 - Essay: write a “traditional” college essay on a topic of your choice (1)
 - Unessay: make an academic argument through the analytical or creative medium of your choice. (1 or 2)
 - Interactive Twine essay: write branching web-based argument using software such as Twine (1)

Grade Contracts

In this course, you will determine the grade you receive by fulfilling a contract you will submit for my approval on the third day of class: **Monday, September 10.** Your written contract will detail:

1. the requirements you will meet in order to receive the grade for which you've contracted,
2. the penalties you will incur for not meeting those requirements,
3. a calendar you will follow for meeting the requirements you have outlined. Many aspects of this calendar will be determined by windows outlined on the course schedule, but your contract will take ownership of these

deadlines while committing to specific due dates for the course's more flexible assignments.

Why Contract Grading?

As you no doubt know, grading can be a contentious issue in college courses, particularly in writing- and discussion-based courses, where grades can seem arbitrary and contestable. Grading in school does not much resemble the way you will be evaluated in your lives or careers, where you will define many of your own goals and be measured by how responsibly and effectively you achieve them. To quote Cathy Davidson, a professor at CUNY from whom most of my ideas about contract grading are adapted:

The advantage of contract grading is that you, the student, decide how much work you wish to do this semester; if you complete that work on time and satisfactorily, you will receive the grade for which you contracted. This means planning ahead, thinking about all of your obligations and responsibilities this semester and also determining what grade you want or need in this course. The advantage of contract grading to the professor is no whining, no special pleading, on the students part. If you complete the work you contracted for, you get the grade. Done. I respect the student who only needs a C, who has other obligations that preclude doing all of the requirements to earn an A in the course, and who contracts for the C and carries out the contract perfectly. (This is another one of those major life skills: taking responsibility for your own workflow.)

Contract Details

To fulfill **any** grade contract a student must do the following, which should nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval:

1. Come to class prepared to discuss any assigned readings, games, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Complete interim self-assessments when requested during the semester demonstrating that you are on-track to meet the requirements agreed to in your grade contract.
3. Complete the 3 required writing assignments and revise all 3 until you and your instructor agree they are "Satisfactory."
4. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements, submitting it to Professor Cordell by 5pm on Tuesday, December 11.

“A” Contract

To contract for an “A” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation assignments (reading responses and writing-in-progress drafts) save two, meaning you could miss up to two classes, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to two class preparation submissions, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than one information overload day during the semester.
3. Exceed expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Create a website following option 1 or 2 in the “A Domain of Your Own” assignment (and ideally option 1).
5. Write at least 8 “Satisfactory” blog entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the blogging assignment, you may not complete two blog posts for credit in the same week, and you cannot make up missed blog entries at the end of the semester.
6. Complete at least 2 optional writing assignments and revise at least 1 of these until you and your instructor agree it is “Satisfactory.”

“B” Contract

To contract for an “B” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation assignments (reading responses and writing-in-progress drafts) save three, meaning you could miss up to three classes, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to three class preparation submissions, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than two information overload days during the semester.
3. Fully meet expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Create a website following option 1 or 2 in the “A Domain of Your Own” assignment.
5. Write at least 7 “Satisfactory” weekly blog entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the blogging assignment, you may not complete two blog posts for credit in the same week, and you cannot make up missed blog entries at the end of the semester.
6. Complete at least 1 optional writing assignment and revise it until you and your instructor agree it is “Satisfactory.”

“C” Contract

To contract for an “C” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation assignments (reading responses and writing-in-progress drafts) save four, meaning you could miss up

to four classes, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to four class preparation submissions, or some combination of these conditions.

2. Take no more than three information overload days during the semester.
3. Generally meet expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Create a website following option 1, 2, or 3 in the “A Domain of Your Own” assignment.
5. Write at least 6 “Satisfactory” weekly blog entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the blogging assignment, you may not complete two blog posts for credit in the same week, and you cannot make up missed blog entries at the end of the semester.
6. Complete at least 1 optional writing assignment.

“D” and “F” Grades

I’ve borrowed this clause, too, from Cathy Davidson, because I cannot improve upon it:

The professor reserves the right to award a grade of D or F to anyone who fails to meet a contractual obligation in a systematic way. A “D” grade denotes some minimal fulfilling of the contract. An “F” is absence of enough satisfactory work, as contracted, to warrant passing of the course. Both a “D” and “F” denote a breakdown of the contractual relationship implied by signing any of the contracts described above.

What About Exceptional (or Mediocre) Work?

I also reserve the right to reward exceptional work throughout the semester using the full range of Northeastern’s grading scale. If you contract for a “B,” for instance, and submit particularly strong pieces to fulfill that contract, I may elect to raise your contracted grade to a “B+.”

Likewise, if you consistently submit mediocre work in fulfillment of your contract, I reserve the right to adjust your grade one half-step down (e.g. from “A” to “A-”).

Contract Adjustments

Periodically during the semester I will ask you to evaluate your work thus far and compare it against what you agreed in your grade contract. In these moments you can also take the opportunity to request an adjustment to your contract in either direction. If you find that you will be unable to meet the obligations

of your contract, you may request to move to the next lowest grade and its requirements. Contrariwise, if you find that you've been performing above the obligations of your contract, you may request to fulfill the requirements for the next higher grade. **Important Note:** In order to effectively evaluate your own progress, you must keep track of your work, including days missed, IO days taken, blogs completed, and so forth.

Class Preparation

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- Includes written questions or observations about course readings or drafts of writing-in-progress
- Students will prepare individually
- Due nearly every class period

Reading Responses

For most classes, you will be assigned articles or books to read, files to watch, websites to browse, or even games to play prior to class. We will discuss strategies for attending closely to these texts throughout this class, but in general you should not skim. You should pay close attention, note interesting ideas, and ask questions. You will like some of our texts and dislike others, but you should engage them all; don't stop at "I like this" or "I don't like this." Instead, think about what the text is trying to say, and how it's trying to say it. Think about the choices made by its creator—stylistic, tonal, ideological—and how those choices contribute to the text's success or failure. Compare one text with others, whether from our class, from your other classes, or from independent reading.

In order to help you attend closely to our course texts and prepare for each class, you should prepare 3 questions or observations prior to any meeting in which we will discuss assigned texts. These reading responses will serve as prompts for our conversation and demonstrate your initial engagement with the ideas of our class. Your responses should be written down and ready to submit at the beginning of class. In order for your reading responses to be "Satisfactory," they should, in general:

1. Get beyond basic questions or observations of fact and instead work toward questions or observations of significance.
2. Demonstrate close thought about the themes, style, arguments and other elements of our texts, as well as about the relationships among them.

3. Emerge from (and refer to) specific ideas, pages, quotations, scenes, &c. from our assigned texts rather than broad or generic concepts.
4. Genuinely open toward discussion and debate during class (i.e. no leading the witness, your honor).

Reading responses will be deemed “Unsatisfactory” when they indicate lack of preparation or inattentive reading, and will have consequences as outlined in your grading contract.

Drafts of Writing-in-Progress

Throughout the semester you will work on a number of extended writing projects. I have set aside several class periods for in-class workshops and writing development, generally Thursdays every other week. On these days, you should come to class with a draft of your current writing project in hand, ready for review and feedback from your peers or from me. In order for these classes to be marked “Satisfactory,” you simply need to verify with me that you have your draft in hand at the beginning of class.

A Domain of Your Own

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- Requires students to secure a domain and server space, install web software, and customize their sites
- Students will work individually, though they can help each other if they encounter rough patches
- Due by Friday, September 14
- Must be completed in order to finish many other assignments, particularly the blog

Acknowledgments

This assignment was adapted from the sterling model developed by Brian Croxall.

Rationale

So: the internet. It's kind of a thing, and it doesn't appear to be going away. It is the new media of our historical moment. There are many things that are important about the internet, but most importantly for our class: the internet is a space where writing happens. A ton of it, actually. For at least this one very important reason, learning how to make use of the internet is important for students working in humanities fields, especially in the context of a writing-intensive class. You of course know how to use the internet for finding information, but you will now get some experience creating information: about yourself and your investigation of technology, literature, and new media. I have four primary goals in asking you to build your own website:

1. Becoming facile with web publication is a good first step toward gaining skills you can use in your college career, co-ops, and careers.

2. Having your own website provides you a platform to begin doing and sharing that work with others in the academic and professional communities.
3. Having your own website will enable you to complete your blogging assignment for this class while beginning while building a portfolio of work for use after and outside this class.
4. Finally, I believe it's important for you to have a voice on the web that's *yours*, something beyond content you contribute freely to whatever commercial platforms are currently popular (though those platforms have their place). By the end of the semester you may agree with me about this or disagree, but I would like you to experiment with having a domain of your own, at least for a little while.

The Nitty Gritty

Option 1: Jekyll and Github Pages

We will explore Markdown, Jekyll, and Github Pages in class during our first week or so together. Recently flat HTML platforms like Jekyll have been getting lots of buzz: they load quickly and don't have all the overhead of a database-driven platform like Wordpress. Once the system is set up they're remarkably easy to use, but the setup is more complicated than WP.

We will largely follow Barry Clark's tutorial, Build A Blog With Jekyll And GitHub Pages, though some details have changed since 2014. If you want to prepare for this option ahead of class, you might peruse the supported Jekyll themes for GitHub Pages. There are other Jekyll themes that will work with Github Pages, but the ones on that list work best if you're not familiar with Github or Jekyll. Once your blog is setup, you can edit your Markdown locally and sync with Github, or you might consider Prose.io to create and edit blog posts directly online. For additional help, see Amanda Visconti's Jekyll/Github Pages tutorial at the Programming Historian

Option 2: Wordpress

If you prefer to use a Content Management System to create your website, Wordpress is a popular option, and an easy one using a domain service such as Reclaim Hosting. These directions assume you are using Reclaim, but if you already use another host, or if you prefer to start using another one for this assignment, let me know. I won't require you to use Reclaim Hosting to complete this assignment successfully. I strongly recommend Reclaim because they grew from the Domain of One's Own initiative from the University of Mary Washington, they support academic users phenomenally, they offer the cheapest hosting and domain service I know of for students, and their customer support is phenomenal. Every semester a few students will ask me about various free

Wordpress options, which is totally understandable! In general these services do not give you the back-end access to your domain that I want to cultivate in this assignment and are more in line with option #3 outlined below. Note that option #1 is totally free if that is a primary concern for you and you are fulfilling a contract for an “A” or “B” grade.

Wordpress Procedure

1. Purchase a domain from www.reclaimhosting.com and **send me an email letting me know your domain name**. You are not required to use your own name in the domain; there are certainly arguments to be made for anonymity. If you think you might turn this domain into a professional site in the future, however, consider domain names that will convey the right image.
2. Install WordPress on your domain.
3. Choose a new theme to install on your site and activate it.
4. Because Wordpress is such a common platform, spam is a real problem in comments for any new WP site. To help with this, install Akismet as a plugin. Get an API key and activate it.
5. Create an “About” page. On that page write a brief paragraph or two about yourself that includes the following information: a brief paragraph about yourself. You might discuss what you’re studying (generally) in school and what your educational or career goals are, or you might choose to describe some other aspect of yourself. You do not have to name yourself here, either—you are allowed to adopt a pseudonym or personae.
6. Create one other static page about *something*. It could be where you post an assignment you do for class. It could be about a hobby.
7. Find one thing that you wish your website could do. Find a plugin to do it, install it, and activate it.
8. Post your first blog entry for the blogging assignment. The precise date of this post might vary depending on your agreed grade contract, but I *strongly advise* you to complete this first entry in the first few weeks of the semester regardless of how many total posts you will be writing over the semester. Remember you are not allowed to write more than one post per week for credit and I find it is much easier on students to work hard early in the semester so they can be more flexible later in the semester.
9. When you post your first blog entry, email me your domain, the name of the theme you installed, links to the two pages you created, and the name of the plugin you installed. and, by this deadline.

Option 3: “Out of the Box” Website

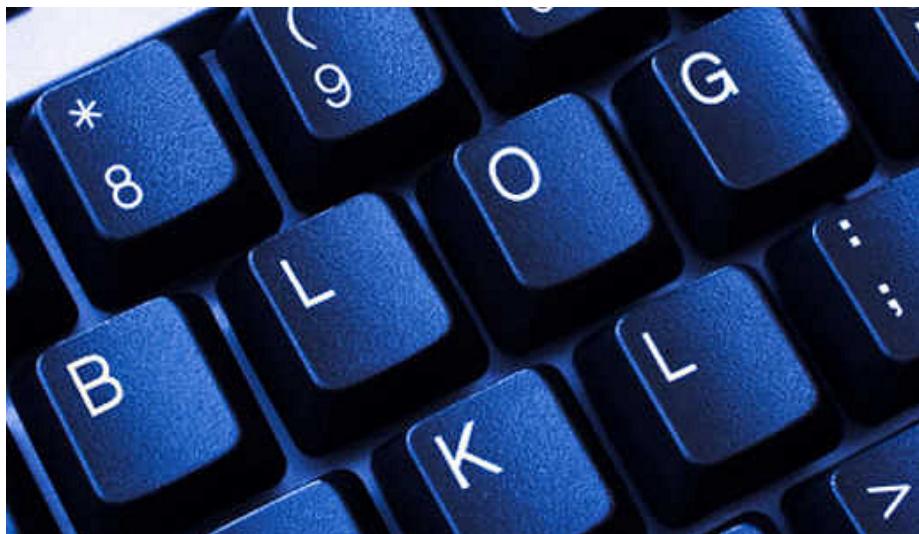
This option is the broadest, and so I won’t outline all of the steps as precisely as in Options 2 and 3. This option is only available to students who contracted for a “C” grade. In short, however, under this option you may choose any “out of the box” blogging solution you like, such as Tumblr, Wix, &c. You will likely have a bit less control over your domain using this option but you will be able to complete and submit your required blog posts.

Blogging

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- Students will use the domains created through the Domain of Your Own to publish blog entries
- Students will work throughout the semester developing their ideas about course themes and questions through writing
- Weekly posts are due by Friday at 5pm, and no more than 1 per week may be published
- Students will write as many posts as agreed in their respective grade contracts



“Blogging” by Daryl Lau

Rationale

Throughout the term, we will engage with the ideas of the course through public writing on your blogs, which I will aggregate on this course blog. I ask you to blog for a number of reasons:

- All writing—even academic writing—is being reshaped by online modes of publication. Many academics maintain personal research blogs in which they try out their ideas and get feedback before developing articles or even books. Outside of academia, public, online writing plays an increasing and essential role in many fields. I believe its essential for modern college students to develop skill crafting an online writing persona and I want to foster that development.
- In a related point, blogs give you the opportunity to experiment with your writing, composing arguments that integrate links, quotations, images, video, and other online media as evidence.
- Blogging allows for a broader spectrum of participation in the class. Even shy students can contribute to a course blog.
- Blog posts give you the chance to learn from each other. You'll read your colleague's writing and, hopefully, learn from it or be challenged by it.
- Public blogging allows us to connect to larger communities outside of our classroom. Who knows? Perhaps the author of an article you blog about will respond directly...

You should not treat blog posts like a secondary assignment. In fact, I consider your blog post the central assignment of the semester. Instead, *think of your blog posts as an evolving research paper*. They have the same importance and weight and seriousness.

The Nitty-Gritty

Each post must begin from our course readings and demonstrate your further engagement with those readings. You should not try to engage with every reading in a given week. Instead, choose 1-2 that intrigued, perplexed, or infuriated you and really dig in. You should follow these guidelines to be successful in your blog assignment:

1. There are approximately 14 weeks in our semester. You may not submit (for credit) more than one blog post per week, though you're free to write more if you wish. I cannot emphasize more strongly that **you should not wait to start writing posts**. Let me repeat that: **do not wait until week 3 or 4 to begin writing your blog assignments**. Your grade contracts are designed to give you some flexibility during the semester. It is up to you to make that flexibility a boon rather than a bane.
2. Blog posts for a given week are due by Friday at 5pm. Anything submitted later than this will count toward the next week, and you may not submit

for credit more than one post per week.

3. Each post should be 300-500 words long. This gives you enough space to make some keen observations or ask some pressing questions, but not enough space to write a full paper. Your blog posts should be concise. The point is not to write everything you might in one week, but instead to develop a set of ideas and questions over the course of many weeks.
4. Each post should *refer specifically to class reading*, often through *direct quotation*. Your posts should continue and further develop conversations that began in class, demonstrating your evolving understanding of our class themes. I strongly encourage you to read, cite, and link to each other's posts.
5. I highly value posts that link our class to the wider world. I encourage you to use your blog posts to bring outside texts into conversation with our class: an article you found interesting or relevant, say, or something you uncovered while doing research.

Commenting on Posts

I cannot comment on every blog post, though I will occasionally interject when something in a post catches our attention. You should interpret such a comment as engagement, not (necessarily) sanction. Conversely, you should not interpret lack of comment as criticism.

Evaluating Blog Posts

Each week I will review blog posts with the following rubric in mind, adapted by Creative Commons license (CC BY 3.0) from Mark Sample. An exceptional or satisfactory post meets the requirements of your contact, while anything else may require revision.

<i>Exceptional.</i>	<i>Satisfactory.</i>	<i>Underdeveloped.</i>	<i>Limited.</i>	<i>No Credit.</i>
The blog post is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. The entry demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. The entry reflects in-depth engagement with the topic.	The blog post is reasonably focused, and explanations or analysis are mostly based on examples or other evidence. Fewer connections are made between ideas, and though new insights are offered, they are not fully developed. The entry reflects moderate engagement with the topic.	The blog post is mostly description or summary, without consideration of alternative perspectives, and few connections are made between ideas. The entry reflects passing engagement with the topic.	The blog post is unfocused, or simply rehashes previous comments, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.	The blog post is missing or consists of one or two disconnected sentences.

No Digital Day

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- A short, personal reflection of 3-4 pages
- Students work individually
- Substantial planning required (see below)
- Due anytime between semester's beginning and Monday, November 13
- Must start planning ASAP!

This assignment is lightly adapted from Prof. Amanda Gailey's "No Digital Day" assignment for her "Being Human in a Digital Age" course at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln.



"Amish Buggy" by Ted Van Pelt

Rationale

Human beings have interacted with illuminated screens for a portion of the species' existence that is so small it's hard to calculate as a percentage. If humans have existed for 200,000 years, we've used screens for less than 0.0005% of that time. A stricter definition of "human," requiring symbolic thought, etc., dates the species at 50,000 years old, in which case screens still have been familiar for about 0.002% of our existence. Should we feel so cognitively dependent on them now? What does your brain do without the distraction and convenience of the screen?

Sometime between the beginning of the semester and November 13, you will pick a single 24-hour period—which must include an entire waking day—in which you will dramatically reduce your use of screen-based technology and interactive media, according to guidelines below. This activity is meant to encourage you to think about a few things:

- How cognitively dependent are you on screen technologies?
- How frequently are you tempted to distract yourself with various digital technologies? What triggers prompt you to want to distract yourself? Without familiar devices, what do you do instead? What do you think about or do with your hands?
- How much do these technologies aid you in your schoolwork?
- How do you communicate differently with people when these technologies are not available to you?
- What do you do for entertainment?

The Nitty-Gritty

Each student may choose from the following "No Digital" scenarios, depending on how austere you want to be. But: since you have to do this anyway, I recommend you go big. Though it is a classroom assignment, do your best to make the experiment meaningful.

To Prepare

1. Think ahead when picking your 24-hour period. If you need to get syllabi or assignments off the web, do it ahead of time. If our class falls during your 24-hour period, make sure to print out any readings or other required online materials before the day begins.
2. Consider writing a vacation response for your email and changing your voicemail so people won't wonder why you haven't written or called back (and you won't stress as much about them).

3. If there are people in your life who will definitely worry about you if they don't hear from you over the course of a day, let them know what you're doing ahead of time.
4. Get a watch (or at least scope out working clocks in your environment). Very few phones in 1992 had clocks in them.
5. Be aware of how to reach people by phone. You'll need a phone book or you'll need to write numbers down ahead of time.
6. Turn off automatic notifications on your devices. This one is important. If your phone is buzzing all day—even if you never respond—it will pull you out of the experiment mentally. One significant difference between 2018 and 1992 or 1922 is simply in the number of small alerts clamoring for our attention throughout the day.

On the Day

1. Carry a notebook and pen with you. Whenever you feel tempted to check your email or social media accounts, make a check mark in the book.
2. Take notes on your thought process throughout the day. What triggers you to seek distraction? What do you do instead when that distraction is unavailable?
3. Take notes on other aspects of the day. In what ways were you inconvenienced by the restrictions of the assignment? What aspects of daily life presume constant connectivity (and does this leave anyone out)? Did this assignment alter the way you interact with people you care about?

By October 25

Write a 4-5 page reflection about your No Digital Day. What did you learn about yourself? Would you do this again or for a longer period of time? In a final act of irony, post the reflection to your blog.

Option A: 1992

Just before the web became widely available. You probably would have had a phone at home, cable TV, and a word processor. If you choose this option, the following are not allowed:

- Texting
- Web browsing
- Any use of your phone as something besides a phone—that is, you can dial a number and talk to someone, but that's it. Realistically, you wouldn't have carried a phone around with you, but you can do that as long as you only use it as a phone.
- GPS

- Streaming video
- Streaming music, MP3s, etc.
- Online video games, even through a console

Option B: 1922

Before most screen-based and communication technologies we use today were developed or in wide use. If you choose this option, the following are not allowed:

- Any use phones save for direct calls to other phones using a phone number.
- Any use of any web-based technology or services
- Any use of any screen-based devices, television included (actual radios are fine)

A Note on Honesty

Your job is to remain true to the spirit of this assignment. You aren't expected to dress like a turn-of-the-century dandy or avoid refrigerators—the point is to eliminate the kinds of recent technological advances that arguably lead to cognitive dependence and alterations in your mental processes. There are many ways you could violate the spirit of the assignment, such as having a friend look up information for you. I trust you to use your judgment about what violates the spirit of the assignment.

This assignment depends on the honor system. I'm not interested in policing you to make sure you really did this. It's an exercise in self-awareness and you would be cheating yourself by cheating on the assignment. If you can't go 24 hours without a few modern conveniences, perhaps it is time to admit your cognitive dependence?

Dear (My) Data

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- An online composition that incorporates data-driven evidence
- Students will work individually
- Window for assignment opens Wednesday, October 31st



The Nitty-Gritty

This assignment will build on the readings in our “Data” unit—and particularly Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec’s *Dear Data* blog, book, and postcards—to help you interrogate the ways people use data to think about the world. Like

Lupi and Posavec, you will choose an aspect of your daily life to record as data, and you will then design a visualization to help you identify patterns in the data and present those patterns to readers.

This project will require you to make a number of important decisions at each stage:

1. First, you will need to identify some aspect of your life that you believe would be revealing in aggregate. You might record each time you say “thank you” through the week, but what would you hope to learn by doing so? You should choose some *regularly recurring* aspect of your daily life that you suspect would, if collected, *offer new introspective, interpretive purchase* for self understanding. Now, it’s possible that you will collect data that ultimately does not offer such purchase. This is always a possibility when researchers collect data. But you should choose something that might even be telling in its absence of interpretive power: e.g., “I thought recording each time I said ‘thank you’ would reveal something about my own gratitude and outlook toward other people, but instead...”
2. Second, you will need to decide what specific aspects of your chosen phenomenon you will record, and determine how you will do so. For “thank you’s,” for instance, would you record the precise wording of each one? The words or actions that prompted you to say “thanks?” The responses of the people thanked? Would you seek to characterize your tone, or that of your interlocutors? Once you decide what you will record, you will need to determine how. Will binary recording (making a mark for each instance) be sufficient, or will you require text, or numbers? Will you carry around a notepad or use an app on your phone? How will you remember to record your chosen phenomenon, particularly if it’s very common in your daily life?
3. Once you have recorded your data, you will need to decide how to represent it visually. You might do this analog, following the model of Lupi and Posavec, or you might use a digital platform. Either way, however, I would *strongly encourage* you to avoid out-of-the-box visualizations, such as the graphs in Excel. If you are engaged actively with the questions above, your data will likely be too individual and nuanced for such solutions. How can you convey the unique contours of your data in ways that are revealing for you and your readers? Can you balance clarity and complexity in your visual design, using the affordances of visual media to make your data more, rather than less, legible? Does your visualization do interpretive as well as aesthetic work?
4. Finally, you will write up what you learned about yourself and your data in a 4-5 page analysis, which can be presented as a typical paper or published digitally. This piece should include your visualization(s), and potentially draft versions that you abandoned as well. You should use this written piece to reflect on how your data did (or did not) illuminate the aspect of your life you sought to better understand. You should analyze the choices you made throughout the process and consider how those choices

served (or failed to serve) the interpretive ends you hoped they would meet. Finally, you should use this piece to consider how you might rethink your choices in a hypothetical future iteration of this project.

We're All Wikipedians Now

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- A new Wikipedia article or substantial improvements to an existing article
- Students can work individually or collaboratively
- Window for article development opens September 27



“Wikipedia” by cea +

The Nitty-Gritty

In this assignment you will work either individually or in pairs to create a new Wikipedia article or upgrade a Wikipedia stub. Your article should at least reach start class (though B is a good reach goal). You should use the WikiProject Assessment guidelines to shape your process and you can refer to Wikipedia’s training page for students. You could use the page for the Boston Society of Vulcans as a model for what you should write to fulfill the assignment.

We will be working with Amanda Rust (Digital Humanities Librarian) and Brooke Williams (Research and Instruction Librarian) from Snell Library to learn what those categories mean, and how you can write an article that meets these expectations.

You will submit a link to your final article by the date specified in your grade contract. If you are improving an existing article, you should also include a link to the article's state immediately before you began your work for comparison.

Essay

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- An academic paper of 5-6 typed pages
 - Draws on external research
 - Drafted, workshopped, and submitted according to calendar outlined in student contract
 - Students will work individually

When considering the aesthetics of these projects we must remember that art is not materials. By using waste materials

In the example given yet, when looking at it from an aesthetic point of view it is difficult to examine the difference. We can conclude that the style is phrasistic with a complete disregard for

Appropriation comes in the margins of so it becomes clear that we are not strangely drawn to Tijuana, high plazas

The project is a building predominantly made out of waste materials in Mexico, close to the border to California. It features a variety of parts made of offcut wood, corrugated iron, concrete, plastic, etc. The wooden frame is simple enough for the project to be recognizable as such, although they are not used as the previous extended them to be used as another project (see fig 2) were entire prefabricated modules from suburban California developments placed them in unexpected places on raised foundations of steel pillars - again not using them as described? - or as produce individual planning formulates a set of criteria on what embodies artistic needs to control / regulate

Japanet was the term "fukin" to describe the element of design that reflects the human condition that have given rise to it. It determines the extent to which the design fits in with the general human socioeconomic order in which it operates. In other words, the design is contextually based. One can support

Papanek (with the firm of the same name) concentrated

phrasistic!

“Essay” by Pleuntje

The Nitty-Gritty

This assignment asks you to complete a typical academic essay of 5-6 pages. In the first weeks of class we will discuss the expectations for such a paper, brainstorm essay topics, and outline the elements of effective academic argument. You should expect to:

1. Make a specific, debatable claim;
2. Defend that claim with reasons and evidence drawn from at least four sources, at least two of which we did not read in class;
3. Acknowledge contrasting points of view and respond to them.

You may use whatever citation system you wish (MLA, APA, Chicago) but you must cite your sources and do so consistently.

What to Write About

You will develop your own essay topics, though they should be related to our themes in class: e.g. digital and analog modes of reading, artificial intelligence, etc. From that broad mandate, however, you should choose a specific aspect of such themes that you find interesting and conduct additional research into it. You might choose to write a literary analysis of 1-2 of the short stories we've read in class, for instance, or to take a side on a "real world" debate. Ideally, your paper will extend our class discussion into territory we did not cover in class itself.

For a paper to be considered satisfactory, your essay should be critical rather than descriptive. Your central claim (or thesis) must be debatable, meaning a reasonable person could in fact disagree with it. You will conduct research and defend your claim with evidence drawn from *at least four distinct sources*, two of which must come from your own research rather than materials we read as a class. We will discuss all of these elements of argument in class and during our writing workshops.

If you are struggling to come up with a topic or craft an argument, please come see me during office hours to discuss. Whether you are struggling or not, schedule an appointment with the writing center, where they are happy to help with writing at any stage in the process.

THE DIGITAL AGE

Essay

☞ Assignments ☞

Assignment Overview

- Form can vary *widely!!*
- Students tend to work individually, though I am open to collaborative proposals.
- Drafted, workshopped, and submitted according to calendar outlined in student contract

THE DIGITAL AGE



"Buckle Up (*Altered Book 2011*)" by robfos

The Nitty-Gritty

You can develop 1-2 unessay projects over the course of this semester.

1. I *highly prize* creative takes on this assignment. Before jumping into typical paper writing mode, consider other media, presentation styles, and modes of critical engagement you might employ instead.

THE DIGITAL AGE *describe.* Consider using your unessay assignments to get your hands dirty (perhaps literally) with some of the media we discuss in class.

3. Take advantage of my advice and help as you develop your unessay ideas. That's what I'm here for!

You may complete your unessays on your own schedule, but they must be turned in by the dates agreed to in your course contracts. I would strongly advise you not to put the assignment off. To motivate you to work earlier, I am happy to offer feedback on drafts submitted at least one week in advance of a given deadline. We can also workshop ideas during class writing workshops.

I have a growing collection of stunning student unessay work that I love revisiting. I will bring some of these into class and I am happy to show you others during my office hours.

Assignment Background

Thanks to Daniel Paul O'Donnell for this brilliant assignment(<http://people.uleth.ca/daniel.odonnell/Teaching/the-unessay>), which I've only slightly modified for our class. For

Galea(<http://dpod.kakelbont.ca/category/research/unessay/>).
THE DIGITAL AGE

The essay is a wonderful and flexible tool for engaging with a topic intellectually. It is a very free format that can be turned to discuss any topic—works of literature, of course, but also autobiography, science, entertainment, history, and government, politics, and so on. There is often something provisional about the essay (its name comes from French *essai*, meaning a trial), and almost always something personal.

Unfortunately, however, as Wikipedia notes(<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Essay&oldid=510540710>),

In some countries (e.g., the United States and Canada), essays have become a major part of formal education. Secondary students are taught structured essay formats to improve their writing skills, and admission essays are often used by universities in selecting applicants and, in the humanities and social sciences, as a way of assessing the performance of students during final exams.

static and rule-bound monster that students must master in **THE DIGITAL AGE** order not to lose marks (for a vigorous defense of the flexible essay, see software developer Paul Graham's blog). Far from an opportunity to explore intellectual passions and interests in a personal style, the essay is transformed into a formulaic method for discussing set topics in five paragraphs: the compulsory figures of academia.

Enter the Unessay

By contrast, the unessay is an assignment that attempts to undo the damage done by this approach to teaching writing. It works by throwing out all the rules you have learned about essay writing in the course of your primary, secondary, and post secondary education and asks you to focus instead solely on your intellectual interests and passions. In an unessay you choose your own topic, present it any way you please, and are evaluated on how compelling and effective you are. Here are the guidelines:

1. **You choose your own topic.** The unessay allows you to write about anything you want provided you are able to associate your topic with the subject matter of the course

THE DIGITAL AGE can even cite the Wikipedia. The only requirements are that your treatment of the topic be *compelling*: that is to say presented in a way that leaves the reader thinking that you are being accurate, interesting, and as complete and/or convincing as your subject allows.

2. **You can present it any way you please.** There are also no formal requirements. Your unessay can be written in five paragraphs or twenty-six. If you decide you need to cite something, you can do that anyway you want. If you want to use lists, use lists. If you want to write in the first person, write in the first person. If you prefer to present the whole thing as a video, present it as a video. Use slang. Or don't. Write in sentence fragments if you think that would be effective. In other words, in an unessay you have complete freedom of form: you can use whatever style of writing, presentation, citation, or media you want. What is important is that the format and presentation you do use helps rather than hinders your argument about the topic. Perhaps most importantly, the unessay allows you to use media deliberately and thoughtfully. You can create a digital unessay, or you can create an analog project—in fact, many of the most compelling unessays I've seen have been entirely analog.

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restrictions on format and presentation, how are they graded? The main criteria is how well it all fits together.

That is to say, how *compelling* and *effective* your work is.

An unessay is compelling when it shows some combination of the following:

- it is as interesting as its topic and approach allows
- it is as complete as its topic and approach allows (it doesn't leave the audience thinking that important points are being skipped over or ignored)
- it is truthful (any questions, evidence, conclusions, or arguments you raise are honestly and accurately presented)
- it makes an argument, taking a particular point of view on the topic. A good unessay doesn't just describe, it *synthesizes* and *analyzes*.

In terms of presentation, an unessay is effective when it shows some combination of these attributes:

- it is readable/watchable/listenable: i.e. the production values are appropriately high and the audience is not

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different modes (using slang, etc.) does not mean the unessay needn't be copyedited. Deliberate stylistic choices can help convey your message, while needless errors will distract from your message.

- it is appropriate: i.e. it uses a format and medium that suits its topic and approach.
- it is attractive: i.e. it is presented in a way that leads the audience to trust the author and his or her arguments, examples, and conclusions.

Why Unessays Are Not a Waste of Your Time

The unessay may be quite different from what you are used to doing in English class. If so, a reasonable question might be whether I am wasting your time by assigning them. If you can write whatever you want and present it any way you wish, is this not going to be a lot easier to do than an actual essay? And is it not leaving you unprepared for subsequent instructors who want you to right the real kind of essays?

remember and worry about violating (actually there are none).
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But unessays are more challenging in that you need to make your own decisions about what you are going to discuss and how you are going to discuss it.

And you are not going to be left unprepared for instructors who assign “real” essays. Questions like how to format your page or prepare a works-cited list are actually quite trivial and easily learned. You can look them up when you need to know them and, increasingly, can get your software to handle these things for you anyway. In our class, moreover, I will be giving you separate instruction on what English professors normally expect to see in the essays you submit to them.

But even more importantly, the things you will be doing in an unessay will help improve your “real” ones: excellent “real” essays also match form to topic and are about things you are interested in; if you learn how to write compelling and effective unessays, you’ll find it a lot easier to do well in your “real” essays as well.

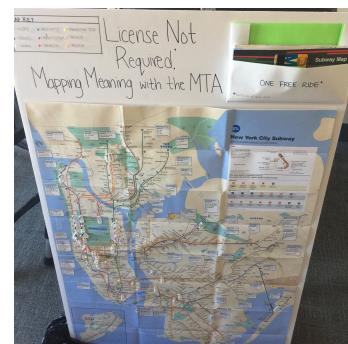
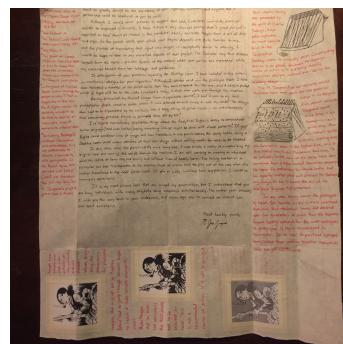
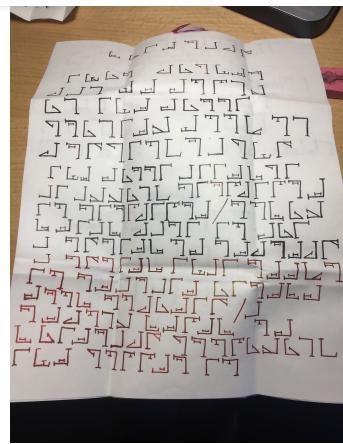
Model Unessays

content of your assignments, as some were completed for THE DIGITAL AGE classes covering very different topics, but hopefully they will give you a sense of what kinds of work you might complete.

- Operation Critique
- Beyond the Words: Text in Art
- Programming a Medium
- Know Code (music available on request)
- ESSAIS1580
- The Evolving Album Cover
- Ada on Ada: A Programmer's Manifesto
- The Best Story I Ever Wrote, Annotated
- Skeuomorphic
- Graffiti and New Media
- Which Text(s) Work(s)?

I have also added some pictures of some elements of physical unessays students have submitted. Most of these were accompanied by written components which I don't reproduce here, but I'm happy to talk about them. I will bring these and some other physical model unessays to class to discuss, or you can peruse them during office hours.

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EMAIL



Email

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MESSAGE

Interactive Twine Essay

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- An argument or creative-critical piece developed using Twine's interactive features
- Draws on external research
- Window for work on assignment opens November 26
- Students can work individually or collaboratively

The Nitty-Gritty

TBA