

Writing and the Rhetoric of Social Media

WRIT015-25



Dr. Becca Tarsa
415 New North
rebecca.tarsa@georgetown.edu

Course Overview

Program Goals

Like all sections of Georgetown's Writing+Culture seminar, this course links rhetorical analysis with critical reading and writing in varied genres and styles:

- Read critically, paying attention to the ways that texts reflect their contexts, purposes, and audiences
- Recognize, assess and respond successfully to the specific demands of different writing situations
- Choose among multiple genres, styles, and technologies to design texts that meet the demands of their rhetorical situation
- Deploy the resources of language - not just conventions of grammar, punctuation and syntax but its figurative power and tonal range to write with clarity and fluency.
- Collect, evaluate, and synthesize evidence in order to build and support effective analyses and arguments for different contexts, purposes, and audiences

Seminar Theme: Rhetoric of Social Media

As members of Generation Z, you have a right - even a responsibility - to shape how your generation is represented in contemporary discussion, and how that representation is written into history. For Gen Z in particular, relationships with social media are a significant (and, according to many communications and social science experts, significantly misunderstood) piece of that picture.

On the surface, social media promises connection: a tool that lets us communicate across physical, cultural, and generational divides. In practice however, it's...complicated. All it takes is a look at a YouTube comments section or a conversation with an old-school relative about "kids these days" to see that in fact, social media does *not* universally help us understand each other. Often it does just the opposite. "'Reality is nuanced and messy,'" says social media scholar danah boyd, "full of pros and cons. Living in a networked world is complicated" (16).

This semester, you'll hone your critical reading and writing skills by diving into those complications. We'll unpack what happens when a new form of communication springs up within the space of a single generation - with a specific focus on the challenges and problems social media has brought. We'll think about how we navigate these social spaces, and how our behavior and identity differs across different digital spaces, as well as how it compares to how we present ourselves in the physical world. Just as importantly, I'll be challenging us to think about why those differences matter, and what they mean for us as citizens (and, for some of us) future designers and gatekeepers of the ever-expanding digital world.

Required Texts

Required Print Texts:

- *It's Complicated: the Social Lives of Networked Teens* by danah boyd
- *Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing* by Elizabeth Losh, Jonathan Alexander, Kevin Cannon, and Zander Cannon

Please purchase **paper copies** of these books.

Google Drive

This course uses Google Drive to manage assignments and course information. We'll access+tour the site together during the first week of class to make sure you're all able to find and view it correctly. From then on, it will be your responsibility to make sure your work is posted there correctly and on time. Below is a list of what you'll find on our Drive, and how you'll use it to manage your work.

Course Documents: All course documents will be posted to our Team Google Drive. Materials for the first 5 weeks of the course are available now; the rest will be posted in two sets, just before we begin Units 2+3.

Writing Logs: Each of you will create an individual Writing Log file on Drive, where you will post (almost) all Writing Log entries for the semester. Each new entry gets added to the **top** of the document - when I open it, the first thing I see should be your most recent work.

Drafts+Portfolios: All drafts and portfolios will be turned in through Drive to the appropriate folder - something we'll go over the first time together.

In some cases you'll need to provide a hard copy as well, so be sure to check your assignment sheet and calendars carefully. Failure to provide a hard copy when requested for class will result in a zero for participation that day.

Technology Policy

This is a class about the role of digital communication in the world, taught by a professor who specializes in digital technology+writing. As such, you'll use a computer or other device regularly both during and outside of class. **You should bring your laptop or typing-equipped tablet with you to class every day unless otherwise stated.** If you aren't able to easily comply with this requirements, that's fine - just make sure to let me know ASAP and I'll help you make alternate arrangements.

There will be times when I want us to focus on a reading or particular aspect of the discussion; at these moments I will ask you to put your devices away. Otherwise I expect you, as adults, not to let your devices interfere with your learning and contributions to our class meetings. Inappropriate device use in class will negatively affect your participation grade *very* quickly.

Grading and Assignments

Writing is a process. This is central tenet of this course, around which everything else is structured. As such, I expect you to devote significant time and effort to all stages of that process. Homework and class activities are designed to help with this, providing time and strategies to help you develop as a write at every stage of the process - invention, planning, researching, and revising will receive just as much attention as the drafting itself.

Each unit has between one and three graded assignments. Drafts of these assignments will be due at regular intervals throughout the Unit, for which you will receive feedback to help you revise. At the end of each Unit, you'll turn in a Portfolio containing final drafts of that Unit's major assignment(s), as well as a Writer's Memo describing your writing+revising process and reflecting on the Unit as a whole.

This focus on process is reflected in the course grading system in two ways:

Portfolios: Written work will be graded on a Portfolio system that takes into account all work done throughout the Unit. You'll receive a single grade for each Unit portfolio based on both the overall quality of the work *and* its development from first draft to final.

Writing Logs+Participation: Developing your writing process requires practice and experimentation, and it can be hard to try new things under the pressure and limits of a formal assignment. Writing Logs and classroom sessions are designed to encourage low-stakes experimenting and different kinds of writing practice, both integral to achieving the goals of the course - as their weight in the grading system (below) reflects.

Units and Assignments

Unit 1: Digital Selves

Portfolio: Social Media Autoethnography (4-5p)// Revised Writing Log entry (2-4p)// Writer's Memo

Unit 2: Digital Troubles:

Portfolio: Troublesome History (6-7p) // Writer's Memo

Unit 3: Digital Interventions

Portfolio (Co-Authored): Analytical Study (10-15p)// Digital Project Pitch

Grading Breakdown

Unit 1 Portfolio: 20%

Unit 2 Portfolio: 20%

Unit 3 Portfolio: 20%

Writing Log: 20%

Participation: 20%

Writing Log

In addition to your longer written assignments, you'll receive short writing prompts to complete as homework; this writing will be posted to an ongoing Writing Log document Drive. Entries will be graded ✓-/✓/✓+.

This writing is meant to help you practice both your critical reading and your writing. It's a place to experiment with your style, to practice putting your thoughts in writing, and to reflect on the readings. It can - in fact, it should - be relatively informal, at least compared to your graded assignments. I'll provide more guidelines for this writing during weeks 1+2.

Each of you gets two Writing Log "passes" during the semester - entries you can skip without penalty. But these entries **must be noted in your Log**. For example, if you choose to pass on the 9/8 entry, make sure you enter "9/8 - Pass" in your log by the time that entry is due. Failure to note a passed entry on time will incur a two-point deduction on your Log's overall grade.

Attendance

You need to be in class, on time and prepared, for every meeting. You can miss two classes without lowering your grade. Each additional absence will lower your course grade by 5 points; at five absences, you will fail the course. **Missing a scheduled conference counts as an absence.**

That being said - if something beyond your control (such as a medical or personal emergency) threatens to interfere with your ability to attend class, please come talk to me. Even if you aren't comfortable sharing too many details, we can still work together to find the best course of action.

Participation

This is not a lecture class - it's a seminar. This means it is highly discussion based - I won't be delivering long periods of uninterrupted lecturing. So it is essential that you come to class having done your reading carefully. I try to assign material that's both thoughtful and readable, but this is college so sometimes there will be a lot, and sometimes it will be challenging. Do it carefully; bring your thoughts and your questions to class. Failure to come to class prepared to thoughtfully discuss the reading will strongly affect your grade.

Though speaking in class is one important part of being an active participant, simply talking constantly is not going to earn you full marks in this area. In this class, participation also means listening attentively to your classmates, arriving fully prepared for class, giving thoughtful feedback to peers through workshops, and taking advantage of my office hours. You'll get updates on your participation grade along with your final grade on Portfolio One, and again after Portfolio Two.

For more details, consult the Participation Rubric on Google Drive.

Contacting me

I try to check my email throughout the day, but things get busy for me as well so don't panic if it takes up to a day for me to get back to you. Don't hesitate to come to me with questions – but I **do** expect you to do due diligence before emailing me – checking the syllabus, assignment sheet, etc. or conducting a quick Google search to see if the answer is readily available.

I also encourage you to come by my office hours anytime! If you can't make it during my scheduled set on Tuesdays, email me with two or three alternatives so we can find another time that works. I'm on campus every day except Monday (and sometimes even then) so finding a time shouldn't be too hard.

Guidelines for Formatting Work

Unless otherwise noted, your written work should follow the guidelines below:

- Double-spacing
- 12-point font
- 1-inch margins on all sides
- Single-spaced header in upper-left corner of the first page with each of the following on separate lines: your first and last name, the due date, and assignment name (including draft number).
- A title, printed in 12-pt font. Do not enlarge your titles.
- Include your name and the assignment in the GDoc title

Late work

Drafting sets the stage for the final product. **If you miss the due date for a rough draft, you will lose 5 points off that Unit's final grade**; you also forfeit your chance for feedback on it. **Final work will lose 5 points for every day it is late**, starting an hour after the deadline. Late Writing Log entries will receive no credit.

If you suspect you're going to have trouble meeting a deadline, get in touch with me before the due date passes; depending on the situation it may be possible to negotiate an extension in exchange for a smaller penalty to your grade.

Conferences

You'll meet with me one-on-one regularly to discuss your work. These conferences help us get to know you and your work and also are a place to focus, in detail, on your writing and revision strategies. I will talk to you in class about how I would like you to prepare for conferences. Failure to attend a conference at the appointed time will count as a class absence.

The Writing Center

Since writing is a valued part of this class, I encourage you to visit the Writing Center (217a Lauinger) and work with one of the Center's trained tutors. Research has shown that students who visited their college's writing center overwhelmingly get higher grades on the assignment than those who did not. Just as we, your professors, share our own writing with peers that we trust before making it public, you can share your writing with student peers at the Writing Center before submitting drafts for class. You can go at any stage of the writing process - whether you've barely got an idea together to a nearly-final draft. **To encourage you to use this great resource, students who use the Writing Center at least once during the semester will receive 3 bonus points on their final participation grade.** It's a terrific, free service. To set up an appointment, visit <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>.