

ENGL 1102: RHETORIC AND THE SOCIAL MEANINGS OF TECHNOLOGY

Dr. Kaitlyn Smith

Skiles 301

ksmith653@gatech.edu



Echte Wagner, collectible postcard, 1930s

COURSE DESCRIPTION

English 1102 will explore the possibilities of college level communication. You will practice communicating your thoughts, opinions, and research through a variety of modes that can shape and be shaped by your own scholarly priorities. There are many ways to “write,” and studying those methods will make you better at communicating complex ideas. The primary artifacts you’ll craft are a research infographic, a rhetorical analysis, and a project proposal. On the way from your first research questions to your final arguments, we will discuss the importance of sound research, the differences between the WOVEN modes, and the power of cultural beliefs and narratives.

The course is thematically centered on the question, “What’s new?” The question opens

multiple avenues for inquiry about technology: interest in innovation, preoccupation with the future, or suspicion of the idea that anything can be new at all. We will consider these approaches as we look at emergent technologies in their historical and cultural contexts. To explore the social impacts of new technologies, we will read fictional and nonfictional narratives about new technologies, including advertisements, essays, and literature. As we focus on the rhetorical situations of various gadgets, you'll also choose some emergent technology to study more closely throughout the semester. No technical knowledge is required—just an interest in the social and cultural context of any technology, very broadly defined, from bicycles to biometrics. The projects you create for this class will express your conclusions and opinions about your technology's social meaning. As a class, we will also endeavor to craft a meaningful answer for the next time we're asked, "What's new?"

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Artifact 1: Infographic Bibliography

Artifact 1 is an Infographic Bibliography. After crafting a viable research question related to the technology of your choice, you will design an infographic that demonstrates that 1. You have gained some understanding of the topic, 2. You have synthesized your research, and 3. You are moving past summary and toward using research for your own goals.

Artifact 2: Web or Video Essay

Artifact 2 is a cultural and/or social analysis of the technology you chose to research for the semester. You will choose from two potential modalities: a video essay or a web essay. Each type of essay will have different requirements and affordances—you will choose and defend which modality offers you the best way to meet your project goals. Both will require you to embed and close read images and prose to make an argument about a social or cultural problem related to your technology.

Artifact 3: Project Proposal

Artifact 3 is a project proposal for a new or significantly altered version of the technology you've chosen. Through class collaboration, you'll consider how you might "pitch" your innovation to various audiences or clients. The proposal must include a diagram as well as a remediation of your cultural research for a non-c audience. You do *not* need to know how to literally create the innovation you're proposing. You should ensure that it is within the realm of scientific possibility, and you should be prepared to defend the ideas behind your design choices.

WEEK 1

You should read any listed readings *before* you come to class on that day. Other listed things like activities, lectures, etc will be done in class.

M 1/9

Read the entire syllabus on Canvas before arriving to class

W 1/11

Woventext pages 1-21

F 1/13

Woventext pages 22-36

WEEK 2

Weekly Objective: introduce theme

Composition objective: confidence defining and talking about rhetoric by the end of this week

M NO CLASS

Artifact 0 Due T 1/17

W 1/18

In-class lecture: Technology Studies in the Humanities

Reading: Pursell, Intro to *Machine in America: A Social History of Technology*

Dickinson, "[I Like to See it Lap the Miles](#)"

Wordsworth, "[On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway](#)"

F 1/20

Read about John Henry [here](#), read the lyrics to the ballad [here](#), and listen to a version of the song [here](#).

Read Komunyakaa, "[Believing in Iron](#)"

Read *Woventext*, pages 36-74.

WEEK 3

Weekly objective: explore rhetoric as both what people say and *how* they say it.

Composition objective: recognize themes and concepts of interest that go beyond summary

M 1/23

Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, [Ch. 10](#)

W 1/25

Woventext, p. 75-87; Twain, [Ch. 40](#)

F 1/27

Washington, *Up From Slavery*, [ch. 8](#) and [ch. 10](#)

WEEK 4

Weekly objective: Research questions, identifying your priorities, and how to do a social study of a scientific object

Composition goal: citation, synthesis of research

M 1/30

Hughes, *Networks of Power*, Introduction

Jean Toomer, "[Her Lips are Copper Wire](#)"

W 2/1

Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, introduction

Read all pages of [this site on the Chicago World's Fair](#) (Introduction, Tour, Reactions, and Legacy).

F 2/3

Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*, introduction (PDF on Canvas)

Note: By this week, you should also be finding and reading articles for your own research.

WEEK 5

Weekly objective: explore ways to read visual art

Composition objective: practice nonverbal communication through infographic design

M 2/6 – Review the art in these online galleries: [Futurism Exhibit 1](#); [Futurism Exhibit 2](#). See [this page](#) for a brief explainer of the movement.

W 2/8 – Artifact 1 Due, no reading except your own research

F 2/10 – Sylvia Plath, "[Getting There](#)"

Komunyakaa, "Gristmill" (pdf on canvas)

WEEK 6

Weekly objective: refocus on cultural rhetorics of tech and progress.

Composition Goal: begin talking about genre and mode, how they shape and create meaning

M 2/13 –read *WOVENText* 91-119 (ch 6 and 7)

W 2/15 – *Woventext* 119-167 (ch 8 and 9 except for some at the end of 9)

F 2/17 - MEET IN THE LIBRARY – today is our trip to the library archives. Do not go to the classroom. Instead, meet inside the library underneath those big colorful windows. If you are late, ask at the INFODesk to be taken to the basement classroom. Do not bring food or drink to this meeting.

The archivist will be teaching you how to do an important part of Artifact 2. There is no way to get this information other than being present.

WEEK 7

M 2/20 – complete your infographic connections

W 2/22 – *The Cruise of the Rolling Junk*, pt. 1

F 2/24 - *The Cruise of the Rolling Junk*, pt. 2 (all pdfs on Canvas)

SCAFFOLD 1 – Infographic Connections

WEEK 8

M 2/27 – Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (read as much as you can stand, but make sure to get the second paragraph and the last paragraph)

W 3/1 – Flannery O'Connor, “[Good Country People](#)”

F 3/3 – Archival Show and Tell Day – informal discussion

WEEK 9

Weekly objective: Algorithmic Injustice, continue practicing video/digital essays

Composition Goal: meaning in design (hyperlinks, image choices, visual connections)

M 3/6 – James G. Webster - “Structuring a Marketplace of Attention”

Scaffold 2 – Script or Rough Draft with Archival Reflection

W 3/8 – Browne, “Br@nding Blackness”

F 3/10 – Benjamin, “Engineered Inequity”

Scaffold 3 – Script or Rough Draft with Notes on Multimodal Elements

WEEK 10

Weekly objective: Consider where the past is hiding in the future.

M 3/13 – Benjamin, “Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice”

W 3/15 – “Judgement Day!”

F 3/17 – Artifact 2 Due, No Reading

Artifact 2 Due

WEEK 11

Spring Break

WEEK 12

Weekly objective: Imagining Alternatives: Algorithmic Justice

Composition Goal: Audience Awareness, persuasive writing

M 3/27 – Artifact 3 Assignment.

Wendell Berry, “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer”

Choose groups in class

W 3/29 – read *WOVENText Ch. 10*

Collaborative Scaffold Pt. 1

F 3/31 – no reading, come prepared to do Scaffold 1 in class

Collaborative Scaffold Pt. 2

Scaffold 1 – collaborative proposal brainstorm

WEEK 13

Weekly objective: Collaboration for Project Proposals

Composition goal: Invention / exigence

M 4/3 – No reading except for the feedback you gathered from your group

W 4/5 – artifact 3 preparation

F 4/7 – Portfolio Instructions: read instructions on Canvas thoroughly

Scaffold 2 – Project Proposal Draft

WEEK 14

Weekly Objective: Complete project proposals, begin portfolio prep

Composition goal: meaningful revision/reflection

M 4/10 – Begin Portfolio: Reflective Essay

read *WOVENText* Ch. 3, pages 30-36

T 4/12 – Portfolio Workshop: Reflective Essay

F 4/14 – Portfolio Workshop: Artifact 1

Artifact 3 Due, no reading

WEEK 15

M 4/17 – *WOVENText* 188-195

Portfolio Workshop: Artifact 2

W 4/19 – Portfolio Workshop: Artifact 3

F 4/21 – free space for 1. Completing project proposals or 2. writing your reflective essay