

# Digital Writing

ENGL 307T  
Spring 2015  
307t.wordpress.com

Dr. Daniel P. Richards  
Department of English  
Old Dominion University  
dprichar@odu.edu  
Office: BAL 4054  
Hours: T+R 3p-4p

## Course Overview

Most of us engage in **digital writing** on a daily basis. If you've sent an email, commented on a Facebook post, or sent a text message, then you have engaged in digital writing in the way we are defining it in this course: as any form of textual or visual communication **mediated** through a digital technology. This semester you will be challenged to think deeper about the nature of the communication technologies we use often, as well as those we use less often, and how our use of these technologies to write, communicate, and connect in various ways shapes our **social, cultural,** and **political** worlds. You will *also* be challenged in your proficiencies in productively using said technologies.

By engaging in course readings, collaborating with peers, and using challenging writing technologies, you will obtain a critical understanding of the **theories** and an ability to apply the **best practices** of digital writing in a variety of genres and settings. These aims will be facilitated through inquiry, as we pose and continually circle back to the following questions:

- What does it mean to write in digital spaces?
- What makes for effective digital writing?
- What are the processes and conventions of digital writing and how do these differ from nondigital processes and conventions?
- How do we theorize digital writing?
- How do our theories change our definitions and ethics of online writing and **discourse**?

## Course Aims

By the end of course, students will walk away with:

- **Knowledge** of theories of writing and literacy, digital and otherwise
- **Ability** to apply this learned knowledge to a variety of different rhetorical situations
- **Technical proficiency** in WordPress and other writing technologies
- **Research skills** in and about digital modes of communication

## Course Delivery

This course blends **lecture**, **collaboration**, and **workshop** modes of learning. You will be given time during each class to work on your projects. Having time to work in class is not, contrary to popular belief, a time to slack off; rather, it is a crucial time for you to work with technologies you might only have access to at school and to work on high stakes projects with peer and professor assistance.

Here is the specific time-based breakdown of **each class** this semester:

4:20—4:30	Priming
4:30—5:10	Collaborative Activity
5:10—5:20	<i>Break</i>
5:20—5:50	Lecture
5:50—6:00	<i>Break</i>
6:00—6:15	Tech Presentation
6:15—6:50	Workshop
6:50—7:00	Ticket Out Reflection

## Student Work Expectations

Each student will be expected to work approximately an average of **5 hours per week** outside of class time. This follows the general rule of thumb in academia that students are expected to spend twice the amount of hours outside of class on work as there are lecture hours. Thus, if you spend 2.5 hours in class, you will work 5 hours per class. If a student takes 5 courses, then that is 7.5 hours per week per course, for a total of 37.5 hours per week. Hence the notion of a “full time” student. In terms of our class specifically, you will be given time in class to work on your own projects. This is not meant to replace work outside of the class, as it does not mean that whatever you get done in class is sufficient. The expectation when I grade is that you are working on your projects outside of class throughout the entire semester while using the time granted to you in class productively.

## Course Costs

Composition Notebook and Pencils/Pens	\$5.00
Snack for Peers	\$20.00

## Attendance

Attendance is **required**. You can miss one class; missing a second class affects your final grade. Consistent lateness can also count towards an absence. Intellectual absences are also a thing.

## Submitting Assignments

Deadlines are important and it is imperative that you abide by them. Assignments are due by **11:59pm** on the specific due date to the appropriate drop box on Blackboard unless otherwise stated. **Submissions will take the form of hyperlinks to the given deliverable.** If for some reason there are issues with uploading online, send a link via email to me as backup. Late assignments will receive a third of a letter grade penalty per day late, including weekends. Extensions will be negotiated on a situational basis, but permission must be sought in advance.

## Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Plagiarism will result in the failure of the assignment and possibly the failure of the course. Students cannot use work completed for credit in previous courses to count towards this course nor can they lift ideas or content from an online source.

## Technology Requirements

Not having used WordPress is not an excuse in this class. You will be consistently challenged this semester to engage in digital writing technologies that may be difficult and challenge you. This requires a certain degree of **patience** and **professionalism** towards the learning process, as we are all in this together. I have accounted for the high amount of technological work involved in this course by lowering the word counts for the course overall. Specific technology requirements are as follows:

- Old Dominion email account and the ability to attach files
- WordPress account
- A thumb drive with a lot of free memory
- Working knowledge of an Internet browser, a word processing program, and the ability to convert files to PDF

Here is a list of the technologies we will learn how to use this semester:

- Mac Operating System (OS)
- WordPress
- Google Drive
- Social media platforms appropriate for sharing portfolio content
- Bookmarking and annotating tools for web browsers

Much if not all of your work will be public, so be sure to think about your ethos and self-presentation on the web before composing any content.

## Cell Phones, Laptops, and Computer Lab Etiquette

Phones can be used for emergencies only, and ringers must be **turned off** upon entering class. Students seen attending to their phones for purposes outside of class activities will lose participation points. During class time, your full attention is expected. Lab computers will be used for class activities and work on projects only. Browsing the Internet for personal purposes during class time is strongly discouraged and will affect your participation grade. Please use the allotted break times for personal phone and computer use.

## Email Policy

Being a student in an upper-level English course only heightens your responsibility to communicate with your peers and professor with **utmost professionalism** in all forms of electronic communication. All emails sent to the instructor must have the following characteristics: pertinent title, appropriate greeting, clear sentences, concise paragraphs, and a signature indicating your full name. I reserve the right to not respond to any email that does not fulfill the above characteristics or that asks questions about the timeliness of grading and/or information presented clearly presented in the syllabus or website (you can ask for further clarification).

### Do

Check your email every weekday  
Expect response within 48 hours  
Think of your teacher as an academic  
Write about concerns of learning

### Do Not

Check it once a week  
Expect a response outside of the 8am-5pm block  
Think of your teacher as a customer service agent  
Write about grading timelines

## Accommodations

In accordance with university policy, a student who wishes to receive some instructional accommodation, because of a documented sensory and/or learning disability, should meet with the instructor to discuss this accommodation. Any student who has a concern or needs to make special arrangements for meeting the requirements of the course is encouraged to speak with the instructor. The instructor must be notified in the first two weeks of the course of any students requiring accommodations. If you have questions about assistance, please contact the Office of Educational Accessibility at 757-683-4655 or visit [odu.edu/educationalaccessibility](http://odu.edu/educationalaccessibility).

## Student Athletes

If you are a student athlete, please provide me with your travel schedule and game schedule indicating when you will need to miss class to participate in athletic events. While travel for athletics is an excused absence, you will need to make up any missed work.

## Deliverables

All deliverables<sup>1</sup> must be completed in order to pass the class.

### 10% Priming Book

Each student will purchase a composition notebook. In order to synthesize thoughts on theoretical course material, students will each week handwrite a one page, single-spaced response to the assigned reading. Then, in class, students will handwrite another page responding to an assigned prompt. This will happen 10 times, for a total of 20 pages. Grades of 1, 0.5, or 0 will be assigned to each entry to achieve a point total out of 10.

### 20% Activities & Discussion

Each class will contain of a collaborative activity aimed at the application of the topic covered. These activities will vary, and may include class discussions, group work, and outdoor activities. Students will be assessed in terms of their level of participation and their completing and submission of assigned tasks to the appropriate Blackboard dropbox.

### 60% Portfolio

Each student will use WordPress to create an online, public portfolio. The portfolio is broken up into three separate but closely related categories: aesthetic, substance, and technical.

#### *The Aesthetic*

Each site will have a theme selected that appropriately reflects the nature of the content and the student's academic and/or professional interests. The overall presentation of the portfolio is an important part of the portfolio as a whole. One of the key features of the site will be the landing page, where the student will introduce visitors/users to your portfolio—this requires an identification of purpose as well as an adequate biography.

#### *The Substance*

The portfolio will consist of several shorter pieces and one longer one. You have some choice, both in terms of deliverables and content matter. For the shorter pieces, **all 6 pieces must be completed** (each short piece will be **500 words** in length):

**Review:** Write a review of a local restaurant, a movie, a book, or a social/artistic event. The review will offer a unique perspective on the given event or place and situate it in relation to other existing events or places.

**Informative Guide:** Write a guide to something that interests you but something that your readers may not know about—make the content interesting and direct it towards a specific audience.

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<sup>1</sup> A "deliverable" is just another word for "thing that needs to be turned in." Many of these deliverables are based on the work of Allen Brizee, Ph.D., from Loyola University.

**How-To Guide:** Write a set of instructions using text and visuals that will help users complete a task (based on *instructables.com*).

**Travel Experience:** Write about their experiences traveling to a destination off of Old Dominion's campus. A map and visual will be included.

**Creative Nonfiction Piece:** Write a piece of creative nonfiction about Hampton Roads or an experience you have had as a student at Old Dominion.

**Interview of Web Writer:** Interview a working web writer (that you find) and write up the information you gathered to share with the public.

For the longer piece, **choose 1 of the following 2 options** (long piece will be **2000 words** in length):

**LifeHack:** Write a piece that provides a reader with advice or insight into how to do something effectively. This will be research-based and will follow the genre conventions of the work done in *LifeHacker.com*. Writers will need to identify the key components of this genre, including the usual elements, style, and rhetorical moves made by other authors (*here is an example*). This piece will be timely, readable, appealing, and will provide appropriate amounts of external sources and context.

**(Digital) Literacy Narrative:** Write a personal narrative outlining the key moments, stories, objects, and people involved in your literacy development, with particular emphasis on technology.

### *The Technical*

Of course all of this wonderful content will go unnoticed if it is not accessible, usable, or easily findable. Each portfolio, in addition to an appropriate theme, a landing page, and content, will need to be presented using the appropriate technical affordances of WordPress. Attention must be paid to: widgets, functional and well-integrated hyperlinks, effective navigation menus and attention to information design, and an overall usable interface.

## **5% Tech Presentation**

Each student will, with a partner, choose a technology and give a 10 to 15 minute presentation and tutorial on an unfamiliar digital writing technology. All presentations must include a visual (four slides exactly, including the cover slide) and a one-page handout that includes the following information: title, name and nature of the digital writing technology, an articulation of its usages, an outlining of its affordances and limitations, and a product comparison with similar writing technologies.

## 5% Tickets Out

At the end of every class students will submit a brief reflection on their learning electronically. The links to these reflections will be made available to students at the end of class. These reflections should be substantive and be critical of their own learning processes and the ideas being presented. Students will receive a holistic letter grade on their reflections from the first half of the semester and the second. The average between these two grades will be assigned as the final grade.

## 2% Bonus: Wiki Glossary

Each student can compose up to four (4) entries for a collaborative glossary for bonus points. A term can be chosen from the lecture given or from elsewhere, so long as it has been given prior approval. Each entry will include a relevant link, a 200-word description, with an example or illustration, and a relevant 75x75 thumbnail image. Only **one term per calendar month** can count towards bonus points (i.e., cannot complete four entries in April). The last possible day to complete the entries is April 21. The glossary will be accessible from the course website.

## Assessment and Drafts

All deliverables will be assessed in accordance with the following system, which is informed by four of the five **canons of rhetoric**:

- **Concept:** Purpose, audience, effective research, knowledge of a topic
- **Structure:** Strong thesis, logical and detailed argument, exploration or explanation, effective paragraph organization
- **Design:** Document design, professional pages, accurate visuals, usable for readers, technically sound
- **Style, Grammar, and Mechanics:** Sentence-level organization, prose, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, citation

Students will receive feedback on their work during the drafting phases, **one time per short piece and twice per long piece**, in accordance with this system to prepare for the final grading. The feedback window runs for a full week beginning on the date the first copy is due. See schedule for the individuals dates of each shorter piece and the longer piece.

## Weighting Scale

Letter grades will be assigned for each component of the course. They are enumerated as such:

A	92.5-100	B+	87.5-89.9	C+	77.5-79.9	D+	67.5-69.9	F	<59.9
A-	90-92.4	B	82.5-87.4	C	72.5-77.4	D	62.5-67.4		
		B-	80-82.4	C-	70-72.4	D-	60-62.4		

Late assignments will receive a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade per day, including weekends.

## Course Schedule

The course schedule below is subject to change. Follow course site and check email for any updates.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Due</b>
Week 1 Jan 13	From Pencils to Pixels	Baron	WordPress.org Account Setup
Week 2 Jan 20	What is Literacy?	Gee	All sign up sheets
Week 3 Jan 27	Information Management	—	Review
Week 4 Feb 3	Orality, Literacy, Electracy	Ong, Ulmer	—
Week 5 Feb 10	Genres + Revising	Miller (2)	Informative Guide
Week 6 Feb 17	<i>Digital Brains (Class Canceled)</i>	Jabr (SA)	—
Week 7 Feb 24	No Class (Conference)	—	—
Week 8 March 3	Digital Bodies	Jabr (NY); Carr	Long Piece Draft; Priming Bk v.1
Week 9 March 10	Spring Holiday: No Class	—	How-To Guide (March 7)
Week 10 March 17	No Class (Conference)	—	Travel Experience
Week 11 March 24	Fostering Networks	LaBarre; Johnson	Creative Nonfiction Piece
Week 12 March 31	Visualizations	Koopman	—



<b>Week 13</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Due</b>
April 7	Peer Review	—	Long Piece Draft
<b>Week 14</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Due</b>
April 14	LifeHacking	Pinola	Interview
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Due</b>
April 21	Usability + Portfolios	De Vivo	Priming Book v2; Glossary entries
<b>Week 16</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Due</b>
April 28	Reflexivity	Edmundson	Final Portfolio; Course Reflection

## Withdrawal

A syllabus constitutes a contract between the student and the course instructor. Participation in this course indicates your acceptance of its content, requirements, and policies. If you believe that the nature of this course does not meet your interests, needs or expectations (amount of work involved, class meetings, assignment deadlines, course policies, etc.), you should drop the class by the drop/add deadline, which is indicated in the ODU Schedule of Classes.