

English 214: Writing in a Digital Age

Fall Semester 2010
Section: 34 | 35
Course Meets: Tu/Th 11:00-12:15 | Tu/Th 12:35-1:50
Location: Hum. 403 | Hum. 401
Course Web Site: <http://moodle.learningbox.org/>

Instructor: Kory Lawson Ching
E-Mail: klching@sfsu.edu
Office: Humanities 538
Office Hours: Tu 9-11; Th 2-4
(and by appointment)
Mailbox: Humanities 125

:: Course Description

Welcome to English 214: Writing in a Digital Age. The main objective of this course is to help you become a better writer, and we're going to do this using two approaches, one of which is very old and one that's relatively quite new. The old approach goes all the way back to ancient Greece, where interest in discourse and persuasion led to the creation of a new field called **rhetoric**. Through our course textbook, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, we will explore how the discoveries of ancient rhetoricians might help us make sound arguments, establish persuasive voices, and engage audiences today.

But exploring rhetoric could be arguably meaningless unless you have something you want to say. To that end, you will spend much of this semester researching and reading extensively about a topic of your own choosing, and you will write about that topic in a relatively recent format: an online **blog**. Unlike much of the writing you've probably done for school in the past, this writing will be published on the web for everyone to see and respond to, which has its own challenges, but should help you develop a sharper sense of audience. Moreover, writing blog posts and commenting on others' blogs will develop your skills with the kind of **connective writing** that is essential in today's digital environments.

While blogging is an important kind of writing, it isn't (yet) highly valued in academic settings. In order to help you convert your work into something more academically recognizable, you will use your blog as the starting point for a more traditional research essay in the latter half of the semester. What you will find (hopefully) is that a good research essay involves the same kind of connective writing as a good blog post, though important differences between them will also help us better understand the expectations of more traditional academic writing.

:: Required Course Texts

Crowley and Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*
Electronic Course Readings (made available on-line)

:: Grading, Assignments, and "Gaming" the Course

Many elements of this course are structured like a role-playing game (or MMORPG), though you won't need any familiarity with gaming in order to "play" the course. Instead of grades, you will earn "experience points" by completing four different kinds of tasks: encounters, quests, training, and achievements. Encounters are voluntary activities, like writing a comment on another student's blog or linking to a tip on blogging. You can do these at any time during the semester. Quests are required assignments, given by the instructor, that need to be completed within a certain timeframe. Training is accomplished by participating in discussion board exercises and in-class discussion. Achievements can be earned by satisfying certain conditions while doing quests and encounters, such as posting a certain number of comments on other blogs or workshopping a certain number of drafts. The maximum number of experience points that can be earned is 10,000. Note: *The lowest passing grade for English 214 is a C-*.

:: Quests, Encounters, Training, and Achievements

Blog Posts At the beginning of the semester, you will create an online blog focused on a topic of your choosing. You will then write at least 6 posts – about one per week – that are relevant to your blog's topic. Each of these posts should be between 300-500 words in length (longer is fine, but not necessarily better), and each post should link to (or reference) at least one external source. This means that, in order to write posts, you will need to read, on a continual basis, what others are saying about your topic. You may blog under a pseudonym, if you like, but the blog must be publicly accessible.

- Issue Series** About midway through the semester, you will need to identify a specific issue within your chosen topic to explore in a series of four longer blog posts (600-800 words each). Some library research will be required.
- Final Portfolio** At the end of the semester, you will collect all of your materials into an electronic portfolio of your work. This collection will contain all the writing you did for the course, or link to places your writing resides online. You will also need to include a narrative (300-500 words) that describes and reflects on your work over the semester.
- Comments (Peers)** These are comments you write on the blogs of other students in the class or on blogs, discussion boards, or forums related to your own topic. What you comment on, and when, is entirely up to you.
- Metablog** In addition to maintaining your own blog, you will be a co-author on our course “metablog” at metawinada.wordpress.com. This is basically a blog about blogging, where you may link or post anything having to do with the activity of blogging.
- Workshopping** Each week, you will have the opportunity to submit a draft of your work to receive feedback and suggestions from others in the class. When you submit a draft, you are promising to provide feedback to at least one other student’s draft.
- Training Exercises** In addition to quests and encounters, you can earn experience points by doing training exercises. These will (usually) be done on our course discussion board (Moodle), and they will be related to readings and activities in our course textbook, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*.
- Achievements** Achievements can be earned by satisfying certain conditions while doing quests and encounters. A running list of all possible achievements will be maintained on our course Moodle site, though you can view some “Sample Achievements” in the table below. You will need to document each achievement with evidence that you earned it.

Grade Advancement		
% Total XP	Level	Grade
96%	12	A
88%	11	A-
79%	10	B+
71%	9	B
63%	8	B-
54%	7	C+
46%	6	C
38%	5	C-
29%	4	D+
21%	3	D
13%	2	D-
0	1	F

Earnable XP by Task			
Category	Task	XP Each	Total XP
Quests	Blog Posts (7)	250	1500
	Blog Post Series (4)	500	2000
	Final Portfolio	/	1000
Encounters	Comments (10)	50	500
	Metablog Posts (2)	125	250
	Workshopping Drafts (2)	125	250
Training	Exercises (15)	100	1500
Achievements	Condition(s) Met	50	500

:: Course Policies

Attendance: Since this is a small, “hybrid” course, your attendance at face-to-face class sessions is imperative. Because “stuff happens,” you may miss one day of class without repercussions; use this “freebie” wisely, or better yet, not at all. Every day missed after that will reduce your final course grade by **100 points**. If you miss more than five classes, you will lose **1000 points** for each additional day missed. Excessive tardiness can cumulate into recorded absences.

Prerequisites and Requirements: Students belong in English 214 if they have completed First-Year Composition (or its equivalent) with a CR or C- or better. English 214 satisfies SFSU’s Second-Year English requirement.

Plagiarism is representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own work in any academic endeavor. Don’t do it. Clearly intentional plagiarism, which is surprisingly easy to detect, will be punished to the fullest extent possible. Sometimes students cross the line unwittingly, so speak with me if you are unsure whether you are using a source correctly. See the “College of Humanities Plagiarism Resources” web site for further information: www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html.

Cell phones should be turned off (or set on “silent” mode) as a courtesy to the entire class. Please also refrain from texting or using classroom computers for purposes unrelated to the course while class is in session.

Civility and inclusiveness of speech will be observed in this course. While you should feel free to express your ideas, any slurs or epithets based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, religious practice, etc. will not be tolerated.

Appropriate accommodations will be made for any student requiring them, in consultation with the Disability Resource Center (338-2472).

Sample Achievements	
Achievement	Condition(s) to Be Met
Being There	Have perfect attendance for every face-to-face classroom session.
Bookmarker	Use social bookmarking to link to at least 25 web pages related to your topic.
Current Events	Write a blog post in which you comment on something relevant to your topic that occurred within the past five days.
Engaged	Write 10 comments on other blogs or discussion boards relevant to your topic.
Flattery Will Get You Somewhere	Write at least 5 positive (and specific!) comments in response to something someone has posted anywhere online.
High Achiever	Earn nine other achievements. This is your tenth.
Illogical	In a blog post or your Research Essay, point out a logical flaw with a source’s argument.
Pathetic	Make a shameless appeal to emotions in at least one blog post.
Reading Rainbow	Subscribe to the RSS feeds of at least 20 sites relevant to your topic.
Shhhh!	Cite at least one source in your Research Essay that you physically retrieved from the library (i.e., not online).
Social Butterfly	Write 10 comments on posts written on other students’ blogs.
Traffic Signs	Get 100 unique visits to your blog (according to your stats page).
Verbosity	Write the maximum number of words for each quest and encounter task you complete.

:: Schedule

- Week 1** **Introductions / Course Overview**
- Reading: "Clive Thompson on the New Literacy" (Online)
- Week 2** **Reading and Writing with Purpose**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 1, "Ancient Rhetorics" (1-43)
 - Blog Quest Given
- Week 3** **Seizing the (Kairotic) Moment**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 2, "Kairos and the Rhetorical Situation" (44-70)
- Week 4** **Asking Questions**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 3, "Stasis Theory" (71-116)
- Week 5** **Finding Arguments**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 4, "The Common Topics and the Commonplaces" (117-157)
- Week 6** **Visual Rhetoric**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 12, "Delivery" (327-373)
- Week 7** **Reasoning and Logic**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 5, "Logical Proof" (158-194)
- Week 8** **Establishing Ethos**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 6, "Ethical Proof" (195-245)
- Week 9** **Appealing to Emotions**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 7, "Pathetic Proof" (246-266)
- Week 10** **Finding and Using Existing Arguments**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 8, "Extrinsic Proofs" (267-291)
 - Research Essay and Annotated Bibliography Quests Given
- Week 11** **Putting It Together**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 9, "Arrangement" (292-326)
- Week 12** **Style**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 10, "Style" (327-373)
- Week 13** **Memory**
- Reading: *ARCS*, Ch. 11, "Memory" (374-404)
 - Annotated Bibliography Due
- Week 14** **Conferences**
- Final Portfolio Quest Given
 - Draft of Research Essay Due
 - Peer Group Conferences to Workshop Drafts
- Week 15** **Collecting and Reflecting**
- Research Essay Due
- Finals Week** **Turning Everything In**
- Final Portfolio Due