

**Bill Wolff**  
**Writing for Electronic Communities, Fall 2009**  
**Syllabus**

---

**Course Info**

**Course Location:** Education Hall 2094

**Office Location:** Education Hall 3075

**Contact:** [wolffw@rowan.edu](mailto:wolffw@rowan.edu)

**Course Web Site:** <http://williamwolff.org/courses/wec-fall-2009/>

**Course Hours:** W 6:30 – 9:00pm

**Office Hours:** T 1:00 – 4:00pm or by appt

**Office Phone:** 856-256-5221

**Course Description**

In this course we will attempt to answer the questions: What is literacy? Is it evolving? If so, how? What role are the latest communication and new media technologies playing in that evolution? What are the implications of these technologies on how we read, write, communicate, and think? Where do we think literacy will be moving in the future? What impact will this new literacy have on future writers (of all genres)?

To help us answer these (and many more) questions, we will be reading recent texts (most published in 2008 and 2009) that will challenge us to rethink traditional ideas about reading, writing, text, and communication. Our in-class discussions, our assignments, and the online writing spaces we will use will challenge us to become more nuanced readers and thinkers, as well as critical users of contemporary communication technologies.

We will be blogging and Twittering. We will be using GoogleDocs, Twapperkeeper, and other Web 2.0 applications. It will be fun. It will be challenging. It may sometimes border on the absurd. But, rest assured; by the end of the class you will see literacy in a whole new way.

**Brief Description of Semester-Long Projects**

We will be completing three overlapping semester-long projects.

**Blogging**

This semester the class will name and design a wordpress.org blog from scratch that is hosted on a section of my server called a subdomain. The ultimate URL will be: <http://nameyouchoose.williamwolff.org>. This will provide you with the flexibility that is not afforded when running a blog hosted by blogger.com or wordpress.com. As a group we will decide on a name relating to the overall theme of the course, choose and manipulate a theme, add and remove plugins, and so on. We will be doing this as we are composing our blog entries. It will, then, be a work in progress with its development evolving as we add texts. By completing this project you will learn about the visual literacy that comes with web site design, as well as about servers, FTP, and some basic HTML and CSS coding. For some basics on FTP and hosting a web site, see Julie Meloni's "Web Hosting 101."

Each student will be responsible for 1 blog post and 2 blog post responses per week except for weeks when the student is neither discussion leader (see syllabus) nor responsible for writing that week's collaborative essay pages. Each week we will come up with a weekly posting schedule so

that posts are appearing over time—something that is much nicer for readers. Each week two students will compose more formal posts, which will take the form of reviews of the text(s) being discussed that week. (For sample review essays, see the range of Clay Spinuzzi’s reviews on the Readings page of his blog.) Other posts can be less formal, but no less thought provoking on the subject of new media literacy. They can point to items in the news, pose interesting questions, link to intriguing photos, ponder things happening in your courses, reviews of new media applications or hardware, and so on. The goal is to keep them professional and interesting. One blog post will also be a short rhetorical analysis of one Twitterer’s follower list.

### **@Twittering #wecs09**

Twittering is micro-blogging, a form of communication that, like text messages, uses only 140 characters (including spaces), and it is quickly becoming the communication medium of choice for people around the world. According to Hubspot’s “State of the Twittersphere” for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of 2008, “Twitter has about 4-5 million users, about 30% are relatively new or unengaged users; An estimated 5-10 thousand new accounts are opened per day; Traffic has grown over 600% in the past 12 months (Compete.com); Twitter.com became one of the top 1,000 websites by traffic in May 2008 (Alexa.com).” As of September 2, 2009, Alexa ranked Twitter the 14th most visited site on the Web. It is, in short, a phenomenon—and as a result we are going jump in with both feet and Twitter throughout the semester. Each student will be responsible for at least 3 tweets per day (a post on Twitter is called a “tweet”). Tweets do not have to be about class.

We will also be using Twitter in class as a way of engaging our followers with the ideas that are being mentioned. We will not be using it to engage in conversation with each other—that is better done using an online chat interface. Rather, our tweets will inform followers about and briefly reflect on ideas about what is being discussed in class and by whom. In short, we will be replicating the kinds of tweets conference attendees use when tweeting a presentation. And since all but one of the authors we are reading this semester, I hope they will read the tweets and engage the conversation, as well.

### **Collaborative Essay using GoogleDocs**

GoogleDocs is a free online word processing application that allows multiple writers to engage with a document. We are going to be using this space to compose a collaborative academic essay that explores the main questions of the course: what is new media literacy and what are its implications for writers. This semester-long project will challenge our understanding of authorship, writing, and the spaces in which writing is composed. My ultimate goal is to have the essay published along with an analysis of the essay.

### **Final Paper**

A final, individually written paper will also be assigned. The topic will be determined based on the conversations we have in class.

### Required Texts

- Brooke, C. (2009). *Lingua fracta: Toward a rhetoric of new media*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Hayles, N.K. (2008). *Electronic literature: New horizons for the literary*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Available free online at <http://bit.ly/5OU5A>.
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. New York: Routledge.
- Rettberg, J.W. (2008). *Blogging*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Vaidhyanathan, S. (2003). *Copyrights and copywrongs: The rise of intellectual property and how it threatens creativity*. New York: NYU Press.
- Selber, S. (2004). *Multiliteracies for the digital age*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Tyron, C. (2009). *Reinventing cinema: Movies in the age of media convergence*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Wasik, B. (2009). *And then there's this: How stories live and die in viral culture*. New York, NY: Viking Adult.

Web 2.0 packet of online readings.

### Discussion Leader

Starting in the second week of the course, each week will have a discussion leader that introduces and leads a discussion of the text(s) that were assigned. The leader will make a 10 – 15 opening statement about the text, which will take the form of an oral review of the text. The statement must contain at least the following: an overview of the goals of the text, an over of the main points/arguments made by the author, a discussion of the theories the author uses to contextualize the arguments made in the text, some ideas about how those ideas relate to literacy, and a discussion of some of the places in the text that were particularly challenging. Accompanying the presentation will be a handout that lists key terms and ideas the author introduces, as well as their definitions as understood by the presenter. These materials will help ground the discussion.

Some of you have participated in similar activities in other classes with mixed results. Let me explain that I ask for some decorum in our conversations. We come to this course with varying levels of expertise and various backgrounds academically. Let us respect all of those positions. No question is stupid if it is related to the readings and all responses should be valid ones. We are to use this element of the course to enrich our understanding of the material.

While there are no stupid questions, there are more effective questions to encourage richer discussions. Just as in your weekly responses, please refrain from discussion that will elicit or center on whether or not you liked or disliked the text. It is true that some texts are more attractive than others. Ultimately, however, whether we like the text or not doesn't matter and such tautological discussions become rather tiresome. What does matter is how it furthers the overall goals of the class, asks us to reconsider previous understandings and rethink the other texts we read, and so on. Because we will be posting reviews of the text on our blog (and then announcing the posts on Twitter) our ideas will be open will be open to discussion by a larger

readership, as well, so be sure that your reviews are grounded in the text and not in your own life.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours are designed for you, giving you a more private environment in which we may talk about your work, your performance in class, etc. If you are unable to see me during my office hours, do not hesitate to make an appointment to see me at a different time. My office hours are T 1:00 – 4:00 and by appointment.

### **Contacting Each Other**

There will be times during the semester when I will need to contact the class and you will need to contact me. I will contact you via your Rowan email account, so please be sure that you are checking it regularly and/or forwarding it to the email service you use most regularly. I am in my office only during office hours and the brief times before and after class. As a result, calling me in my office will not get you an immediate response.

I strongly suggest you contact me via email, which I check all day long. Email, however, tends to be seen as an informal medium. This, however, should not always be the case. All emails that I send to you will have a meaningful subject line and a proper salutation (“Hi Class,” or “Hi Jane,” etc.). The first sentence will notify you of the purpose of the email, and then will get to the heart of the matter. It will end with a formal closing (“Thanks, BW”). I expect the same from any email you send. Any email that does not will immediately be deleted and not responded to.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Your academic success is important. If you have a documented disability that may have an impact upon your work in this class, please contact me. Students must provide documentation of their disability to the Academic Success Center in order to receive official University services and accommodations. The Academic Success Center can be reached at 856.256.4234. The Center is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of Savitz Hall. The staff is available to answer questions regarding accommodations or assist you in your pursuit of accommodations. We look forward to working with you to meet your learning goals.

### **Attendance and Late Work**

You are expected to attend class every day. You cannot pass this class if you miss more than 25% of the scheduled meeting times, including excused and unexcused absences. For our section of Information Architecture, which meets once a week, the **maximum number of permissible absences is 3**.

### **Excused Absences**

You will be permitted to make up missed work for excused absences only. These include:

- religious observances
- official University activities
- illness
- death of a family member or loved one
- inclement weather

You must provide verifiable documentation. Consult with your instructor for what is considered acceptable.

In the case of religious observances or official University activities, you must inform your instructor **in advance** of your absence for it to be excused.

In the case of illness, death of a family member or loved one, or inclement weather, you must inform your instructor as soon as possible after the fact.

If the events described above lead to your exceeding the maximum absence limit, you will be referred to the Dean of Students for a hardship withdrawal from the class.

### **Unexcused Absences**

Unexcused absences will be treated using the following scale:

1 or fewer	no penalty
2 absences	-2/3 final grade (a B would become a C+)
3 absences	-1 1/3 final grade (a B would become a C-)

This rate of deduction continues until reaching the maximum, after which you will receive an F for the course.

### **Course Strands**

In this course all work will be dedicated to students developing their skills in the following Course Strands:

**Literacy:** Students will develop their understanding of how literacy is evolving in the new media age, as well as their ability to discuss literacy from multiple perspectives.

**Rhetoric:** Students will gain greater familiarity the theories and practices relating to written and visual constructions of meaning.

**Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing:** Students will develop their ability to read judiciously, think about, filter information about, and write about texts in a variety of genres and media.

**Technology:** Students will learn about and will use contemporary communication technologies in a variety of settings.

**Collaboration:** Students will develop their ability to work collaboratively in a variety of in- and out-of-class activities and settings.

**Grading**

Final grades will be calculated in the following way:

Collaborative Essay	30%
Semester-Long Blog	20%
Twittering and Twitter Rhetorical Analysis	20%
Final Paper	20%
Discussion Lead (2 @ 5%)	10%
<hr/>	
Total	100%

Grades will be determined on the following scale:

A+ 100; A 96	B- 82	D+ 69
A- 92	C+ 79	D 66
B+ 89	C 76	D- 62
B 86	C- 72	F 59 and below

Detailed criteria will be provided for each assignment. For every missing major assignment, your grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. For every 3 late non-major assignments, your final grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. It is better to complete an assignment late than to not complete it at all.

Major Assignments will be assessed according to the following grading criteria:

- A, A-** Represents outstanding participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with very high quality in all work produced for the assignment. Work at this level demonstrates activity that goes significantly beyond the required assignment work in one or more Course Strand.
- B+, B, B-** Represents excellent participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in assignment work. Work at this level demonstrates activity that goes beyond the required assignment work in one or more Course Strand.
- C+, C, C-** Represents good participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with generally good quality overall in assignment work.
- D+, D, D-** Represents uneven participation in all assignment activities; some gaps in assigned work completed, with inconsistent quality in assignment work.
- F** Represents minimal participation in all-assignment activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in assignment work.

Final grades correspond to the Graduate Handbook (A-C) for graduate students. All work is expected to be the student's own. Any plagiarism—intended or not—will result in a failing grade for the course.