

**Dr. Bill Wolff**

**WRITING, RESEARCH, AND TECHNOLOGY, Fall 2009**

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**Syllabus**

**Course Location:** Education Hall 2110

**Office Location:** Education Hall 3075

**Contact:** wolffw@rowan.edu

**Course Web Sites:** <http://williamwolff.org/courses/wrt-fall-2009/>

<http://www.youtube.com/wolffwrtf09/>

<http://www.youtube.com/oralhistoryvideo/>

**Course Hours:** MW 9:25am – 10:40am

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

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

**Course Description**

In this course we will continue to challenge the idea of contemporary modes of composition first discussed in *Technologies and the Future of Writing*. Specifically, we are going to be extending traditional conceptions of composition by applying it to the medium of video. Kevin Kelly (2008) recently described the emerging video movement as a cultural shift “from book fluency to screen fluency, from literacy to visuality.” As a means of engaging visuality our primary assignment will be to create an oral history video composition that will ask us to think critically about how writing, research, and technology are evolving in digital age. We are going to learn oral history research methodologies, construct interview questions informed by documentaries and Studs Turkel interviews, interview community members, and create short, idea-driven videos that mash together interview footage with still images, primary documents, sound, and other video footage. We will also jump headlong into remix culture by creating our own videos by remixing and building on the creativity of others. It will be a fun, exciting, and demanding course that is going to challenge us all—including Dr. Wolff—in new ways.

The primary video technology we will be using in the course is a Flip Video camera, which we are fortunate enough to have as a result of a Rowan University-provided Innovations in Teaching with Technology grant Dr. Wolff was awarded in June 2008. The goal of the grant is to

introduce students to contemporary theories in and practical applications of visual rhetoric, oral history, and educational outreach. The goal of the assignment is to provide Writing Arts majors with an opportunity to further develop the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that are necessary for a contemporary “literacy [that] today is in the midst of a tectonic shift” (Yancey, 2004). That literacy is visual and textual; it consists of being able to understand the complex, evasive relationships among texts and images—and how those relationships impact and are impacted by contemporary cultures.

Many of the still and video images we will be looking and you will come in contact with as a part of your research at will be disturbing and often intensely personal—because of their subject matter and because of the way certain technologies have been used in print and online media to exploit, reveal, categorize, and define. Yet, those very same technologies—especially in our internet-mediated environment—allow individuals access to information previously locked away. As a result, it will be especially important for us to realize that different people respond to images in different ways, to respect the various reactions, and try to understand why they happen. We will spend quite a bit of time in class talking about the acts of listening, empathizing, and giving people space to explore personal ideas in an environment that welcomes such intense reflection. And, perhaps coolly, we will also talk about how to effectively present such images

when composing our video essays. In short, the course is also about trust: trust in each other as students, in your subjects, in you as researchers, and in contemporary culture as a whole.

Although the course is about video composition there will be a substantial reading component. Our texts will be from various sources, including books, web sites, still images, video, and audio—and through the process of research and creation, we will create our own texts to be read, watched, analyzed, and enjoyed. We will have three units this semester in which we will compose 5 videos of various lengths.

### **Unit I. The One (3 – 5 minute video)**

This unit will introduce us to basic short interview techniques, how to use the Flip Video Camera, and video editing software. It will also very nicely lead us in to Units II and III. Students will enter into their community (family, friends, strangers on the street, and so on) and ask them a question in which they have to consider one thing: the one thing they want to do with their day, the one thing they wish they could change about their life, the one thing they wish for the world, and so on. The result will be an idea-driven video that presents a snapshot of the community you interview, and through that video a commentary about contemporary culture.

### **Unit II. Memes and Remixes (two 3 – 5 minutes videos—one may be collaborative)**

In six words, Lawrence Lessig encapsulates the differences between the older and younger generations: “We watched TV; they make TV.” Contemporary culture is participatory; people create their own entertainment and distribute it online for others to enjoy, critique, or ignore. Much of this entertainment takes older media and represents it in a new way that often adds a new layer of social commentary. This is called remixing. Along with remixes, Internet memes—“a catchphrase or concept that spreads rapidly from person to person via the Internet”—have become important parts of contemporary culture. In this unit, we will create our own remixes that remix prior media and, simultaneously, make some kind of comment about society. A one-page single-spaced interpretive essay will accompany each video.

### **Unit III. Video Oral History Project on an Important Contemporary Social Topic (8 – 10 minute video)**

With Flip Video Cameras in hand (or on tripod) we are going to compose video oral histories. Our videos will not be about people, though we will learn about them through their interviews. Rather, the videos will explore a particular issue as understood by the people you interview. The distinction is subtle, but important. When conceiving of your issue, think in broad strokes at first but then narrow down to local specifics. We discuss this in great detail in class. Our subjects can be family members, colleagues, community members, strangers, and/or experts in a field relating to your issue. Due to the time constraints of the semester (and past experience), it will be better if you have a relationship of some sort with your interview subjects prior to beginning the project. This ten-week assignment will challenge our critical thinking, reading, writing, and composing skills. It will test our patience and bring us thrills. It will ask us to think visually and aurally. We will explore in depth questions writers of written texts often take for granted (or never have to think about), especially those relating to time, transition effects, sound, silence, blanks, color, among many others. The result will be a video of individuals whose voices on important social issues might never have been recorded, preserved, and broadcast to a world eager to watch, listen, and learn about what others think and do.

### **Required Texts and Materials**

Perks, R., & Thomson, A. (2006). *The oral history reader* (2nd Ed). New York: Routledge.

Lee, S. (Producer/Director), & Pollard, S. (Producer). *When the levees broke: A requiem in four acts* [Motion picture]. United States: HBO Documentary Films.

- Flip Tripod for Flip Ultra and Mino Camcorders (available online)
- AA Batteries
- Various online readings and other materials as needed
- Computer with Internet access
- Microsoft Word or any of many online alternatives (papers must be turned in .doc or .rtf; no other formats will be accepted)—see [http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/web\\_20\\_backpack\\_web\\_apps\\_for\\_students.php](http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/web_20_backpack_web_apps_for_students.php)
- Rowan email address

### **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.

### **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**

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 Writing, Research, and Technology, which meets once a week, the **maximum number of permissible absences is 6**. Lateness is .5 of an absence. You are late if you arrive after the sign-in sheet has made it around the room.

### **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:

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

If you have 8 or more unexcused absences 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:

**Video Composition:** Students will develop their ability to compose complex, multimodal video compositions that mash up video footage, still images, primary and secondary sources, and sound.

**Research:** Students will expand their research skills by engaging in primary and secondary research in and outside the library. Students will also learn oral history research methodologies.

**Critical Thinking, Writing, and Reading:** Students will develop their ability to analyze the texts they read and then filter that information in terms of the theories and other texts being read.

**Technology:** Students will learn how to use various online tools and technology-related skills which can help them develop their abilities in the other course objectives.

**Collaboration:** Students will develop the ability to work collaboratively in activities that range from online discussion postings to peer reviews to in-class discussion.

## Grading

Final grades will be calculated in the following way:

Unit I: The One	15%
Unit II: Memes and Remixes (2 @ 15% each)	30%
Unit III: Oral History Video	50%
Classroom Participation and Video Responses	5%
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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.