

Dr. Bill Wolff

WRITING, RESEARCH, AND TECHNOLOGY, Fall 2010, 41422 & 41423

Syllabus

Course Location: Education Hall 2113

Course Hours: Sec 2 MW 12:15pm–1:30pm
Sec 3 TH 3:15pm – 4:30pm

Office Location: Education Hall 3075

Office Hours: TW 1:30 – 3:00 or by appt

Contact: wolffw@rowan.edu, @billwolff

Office Phone: 856-256-5221 (email, tweet first)

Course Web Sites: <http://williamwolff.org/courses/wrt-fall-2010/>
Section 2: <http://www.youtube.com/wolffwrtf10/>
Section 3: <http://www.youtube.com/wolffwrtf10sec3/>
<http://www.youtube.com/oralhistoryvideo/>

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 two Rowan University grants: an Innovations in Teaching with Technology Grant (2008) and a College of Communication technology grant (2010). We will learn various video editing applications and all of our video compositions will be uploaded to a course YouTube channel. There will be two required conferences.

Many of the still and video images we will be looking at 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 videos of various lengths, each with rough and final drafts, and accompanied by reflective statements.

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. Rough and final drafts will be composed, as well as two short reflective pieces.

Unit II. Remix (5 – 6 minute video)

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. Rough and final drafts will be composed, as well as two short reflective pieces.

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 8-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. Two rough drafts and a final draft will be composed, as well as two short reflective pieces.

Required Texts and Materials

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

- 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://j.mp/4LnxAW>
- Rowan email address

If you have a laptop, I encourage you to bring it to class.

For Windows Users

All versions of Windows since XP have come with a version of a basic video editing software, Movie Maker, which is more than enough for what we are going to be doing in class. Here is a breakdown of the versions:

- XP comes with Windows Movie Maker 2.1
- Vista comes with Windows Movie Maker 2.6
- Windows 7 comes with Windows Live Movie Maker
- It is possible to install Windows Movie Maker 2.6 on a Windows 7 machine

Versions 2.1 and 2.6 are virtually identical in all ways except one: they are not compatible. That is, if you start a movie project on Vista you will not be able to edit it on a computer with XP. Neither is compatible with Windows Live Movie Maker, which has significantly fewer features than 2.1 and 2.6. This is important because of what is installed on Ed Hall computers:

- The PCs in our classroom have Windows XP and as a result Movie Maker 2.1.
- The PCs in the Ed Hall open lab have Windows 7 and as a result Windows Live Movie Maker.
- Windows Movie Maker 2.6 has also been installed on Ed Hall open lab computers.
- (I'm not sure about the PCs in other parts of the campus.)

This is all to say: if you own a PC desktop with Vista: do not expect to be able to edit movie projects on class computers (whether you will be able to edit them on open lab PCs is still up in the air). If you own a PC laptop, bring it to class with you so you can work on your movie and not have to worry about versions.

While having Windows Movie Maker is quite nice because it is free, there are important things for you to take into consideration and be aware of:

- All versions of Windows Movie Maker are known to crash often and without warning (students have had trouble with this)
- Windows Movie Maker gives odd and often mysterious errors that can result in you having to recreate your movie from scratch (students have had problems with this)
- The incompatibility from version to version can be a pain if you are trying to work on a project both at home and at school.

If you find that it is crashing or freezing, then I strongly suggest that you purchase an excellent, robust, and cheap video editor. Two options are (in order of quality):

- Pinnacle Studio HD for \$49.99 (<http://j.mp/dbK9DQ>)
- Movie Edit Pro for \$49.99 (<http://j.mp/cZmGxQ>)

Though the software is quite similar to Movie Maker (though more robust), I am not familiar with either Pinnacle Studio or Movie Edit Pro and as a result will only be able to offer limited help if you have trouble.

Mac users: iMovie HD, '08, and '09 have their own special quirks and glitches, but overall they are much more robust and stable than Windows Movie Maker.

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. Office hours this semester are TW 1:30 – 3:00.

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 Twitter (@billwolff) and/or email, both of which I tend to 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. Twitter is less formal, so feel free to just tweet me questions. Please add the course hashtag (#wrtf10) to all course related tweets.

I'll get back to your tweets and emails as soon as possible—usually within a day. If I don't get back within a day, it may be that I did not see your tweet or email for one reason or another, such as an email going in my spam folder. Send me a polite reminder and/or ask me in class if I got it, and I'll get back immediately.

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 3rd 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 the maximum number of permissible absences, **including excused and unexcused absences**. For

our section of Writing, Research, and Technology, which meets twice 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.

Excused and 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-)

If you have 7 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. Students will also learn and practice 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 Video and Reflections	15%
Unit II: Remix Video and Reflections	30%
Unit III: Oral History Video and Reflections	50%
Classroom Participation and Video Responses	5%
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 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. Missing assignments will receive a 0. **All major assignments (including rough drafts) must be completed to pass the course.** Late major assignments will be deduction have a grade for every class period it is late. 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 then to not complete it at all.