

**Bill Wolff**  
**Writing for Electronic Communities, Fall 2011**  
**Syllabus**

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**Course Info**

**Course Location:** Education Hall 2098

**Office Location:** Education Hall 3075

**Contact:** wolffw@rowan.edu, @billwolff

**Course Web Site:** <http://williamwolff.org/courses/wec-fall-2011/>

**Course Hours:** M 6:30 – 9:00pm

**Office Hours:** T/H 1:30 – 3:00  
or by appointment

**Office Phone:** Not the best way to reach me

**Course Description**

In this course we will be considering the question: how do contemporary writing technologies and practices cause us to reconsider our definition of writing as well as constructs like audience, identity, originality, authority, ownership, materiality, and collaboration? To answer this question, we'll be conducting a semester-long collaborative and dynamic study of how people are writing and composing in popular online spaces (such as Facebook and Twitter) as well as observing how people are writing in their real life professional spaces. The study's conclusions will be informed by our readings, which are on the subjects of Web 2.0; the state of composition in the Internet age, the dissemination and ownership of knowledge; electronic literature, and gaming.

The semester-long study will include observations of how people are writing in their professional and casual spaces. IRB proposals will be completed to ensure research ethics are maintained.

Your final essay will be composed using Google docs and there will be set times during the semester when you are to compose the essay in your groups synchronously. That is, there will be times when all three group members will be writing the essay simultaneously from three different computers as you meet in the same document space. Groups will determine those meeting times. Each group member will compose a series of reflections about the experiences of writing in this collaborative, dynamic, and interactive manner.

We will also be completing a smaller semester-long project: attempting to transform what Google knows and thinks about you so that your search results for a certain set of keywords will be different from the first time to try them to the last time you try them. This experiment will be engaging a theory known as the Filter Bubble, which we'll be learning about in the second set of Web 2.0 readings. We'll also be Tumbling and Tweeting throughout the semester.

By the end of the semester you will come away with a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic, interactive, boundary-free, and transitory nature of writing and how external forces are often structuring what counts as knowledge.

**Required Texts and Materials**

Hayles, N.K. (2008). *Electronic literature: New horizons for the literary*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Shipka, J. (2011). *Toward a composition made whole*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Vaidhyanathan, S. (2011). *The Googlization of everything (and why we should worry)*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wardrip-Fruin, N., and Harrigan, P. Eds. (2004). *First person: New media as story, performance, and game*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

In an effort to reduce textbook costs, multiple readings will be available for free online.

You will also need access to:

- an APA citation guide (print or online)
- a small notebook for recording fieldnote observations---this should be small enough to fit in your pocket or purse (I recommend Fieldnotes Brand 3-1/2" wide by 5-1/2" notebooks with graph paper, which can be purchased online at <http://fieldnotesbrand.com/shop/>)
- Computer with Internet access
- Microsoft Word or any of many online alternatives (see <http://j.mp/4LnxAW>; I do not accept Word Perfect files)
- Rowan email address
- Other materials as needed

### **Class Discussions**

You are expected to come to class with the text(s) read, annotated, and thought-about so that you can contribute to discussion. I expect all voices to be heard in class.

### **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/H 1:30 – 3:00 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 a 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 (#wecf11) 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 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, which meets once a week, the **maximum number of permissible absences is 3**. If you exceed the maximum absence limit—whether excused or unexcused—you will be referred to the Dean of Students for the possibility of a hardship withdrawal from the class. Note: it is your responsibility to know how many absences you have. If, at the end of the semester, I enter your grades and you are over the limit, the hardship withdrawal courtesy will not be extended to you.

### **Excused Absences**

You will be permitted to make up missed work for excused absences only (note below that excused absences are still absences; the main difference is that you get to make up missed work). 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:

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. Lateness is equal to .5 absences. You are late if you arrive in class after the sign-up sheet has made it around the room.

**Course Strands**

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

**Research:** Students will gain greater familiarity with the theories and practices relating to online and (some) qualitative research practices as well as the reflective processes involved in writing extended investigative articles.

**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.

**Communication Technology:** Students will learn about and will use contemporary communication technologies to enhance the research process.

**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:

Semester-long Study (part percentage TBA)	60%
Tumbling	20%
Filter Bubble Experiment	10%
In class and online communication and collaboration (including Twitter)	10%
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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  
B 86

C 76  
C- 72

D- 62  
F 59 and below

Detailed criteria will be provided for each assignment. 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. Missing assignments will receive a 0. **All major assignments must be completed to pass the module.**

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.

If you are having trouble getting a project completed on time (for whatever reason) please let me know about your delays as soon as possible. It is better to complete an assignment late than to not complete it at all, and I am more than happy to work with you so you can complete the best project you can.

I will never mark down or refuse to accept a project because of trouble using computer technology. The software and applications we use are a means to complete the work, not the work itself. They are also often new and still have bugs. I am aware of this and know what can happen. If you run into trouble, let me know as soon as possible so I can help you work through it. There is no reason to sit for hours getting more and more frustrated. Send me an email with as detailed a description of your problem as possible and we'll figure out what is going on.