

**The Rhetoric of Blogging**  
**Writing 201, section 004**  
**Friday 1-3pm, 2230 USB**  
**Winter 2018**

Instructor: Scott Beal  
Office: 1330 NQ  
Office hours: T/Th 12-1pm  
Email: skot@umich.edu

**Course Description:**

Blogs are the perfect paradox of the information age: they're easy to start, but if over 150 million exist, how do you attract readers and connect with them? This mini-course looks briefly at the background of blogging—history, technology, and economics—and the different roles that blogs play. Quickly we turn to examine the writing and rhetoric of personal and genre blogs. We'll look at how writers frame their niches, appeal to audiences, construct personae, and use design and new media. With these elements in mind—and lots of writing prompts to get you typing—you'll create your own blog, and maybe carve out a niche of your own.

Expect this course to be both fun and rigorous. Blogging is an exciting and open-ended field which depends upon your unique personality and perspective and which allows you great creative freedom. At the same time, it is a well-established medium with ethics and conventions that any worthy blogger must understand and navigate effectively. Accordingly, three principles will guide our course:

- Your success as a blogger will require that you develop a critical understanding of how blogs operate (through analysis of others' blogs and through the practice of crafting your own), *and* that you invest your unique personal vision and spirit in the blog you create. Our activities will be designed to honor both sides of this balance.
- While I have some experience as a blogger, you should not consider me “the expert” for purposes of our course. Each of you brings relevant expertise and experience to the class, and as such, your knowledge, discoveries, experiences, and insights will be a vital driver for class learning.
- I approach this course with an unshakeable belief in your talents and capabilities for doing great things. Accordingly, I will set high standards for your performance: in your personal blogs, in your responses to the class blog, and in your contributions in class.

**Learning Goals:**

Sweetland's “New Media” courses expose students to multimodal forms of communication and encourage them to be more critical readers of those forms. In this course, we will follow these two broad aims while also attending to these specific goals:

- Understand the current context for blogging
- Analyze rhetorical principles operating in blogs
- Develop interests, approaches, and a voice, with an awareness of how these fit in broader blogging communities
- Create a blog of your own with an articulated purpose and audience

**Course Readings:**

Assigned course readings are available electronically on the web (links provided on our course blog or via Canvas). Each reading assignment has been chosen because it can teach you something essential about the learning goals outlined above: the context and genres of blogging, rhetorical principles of effective blogging, and how to develop your voice and find your place in the blogosphere. Read the assignments carefully and come to class prepared to discuss what ideas, questions, problems, inspirations, etc. they have raised for you.

You should bring a print copy of each reading or a laptop to class. If you choose to bring print copies, make sure you have annotated them to help you effectively participate in class discussion. If you choose to use your laptop for readings, take notes using an e-notebook such as Evernote. Please be aware of the potential impact of your laptop use on your peers' learning. Recent research on in-class screen use suggests that using computers during lectures and discussions may negatively impact not just your work, but your peers' work.

**Required Materials**

- a WordPress account for contributing to our class blog and creating your own blog

- a back-up system (flash drive, Dropbox, Google Docs) for saving copies of your work
- a digital camera or smartphone for taking and uploading photos (visit the [LSA Equipment Loan page](#) for details on borrowing a camera)

### Required Work & Grading Breakdown:

- **Your personal blog**, with a clearly delineated audience and purpose, demonstrating well-considered rhetorical and design choices to support that audience and purpose. The complete blog must include an “About” page plus at least one entry per week (6-10 posts total; as a guideline, 300-600 words, adding up to about 2600-3600 words).
- **Weekly responses** to the prompts on our course blog (100 word minimum per week, unless otherwise specified). Each weekly prompt has its own criteria, but often you will have a choice between adding a new post or commenting on classmates' posts.
- **Two formal reflections** on your aspirations, achievements, and discoveries as a blogger in this course (one at the beginning and one at the end of the semester).
- **Class participation**, which includes attendance, punctuality, preparation, attentiveness and respect for all members of the class, interaction with classmates through large and small group discussions, peer review, and frequent in-class writing.

You may expect to do, on average, approximately 3-4 hours of work per week outside of class, which is consistent with the University's guideline for a one-credit, half-term course.

### Course grades will be determined as follows:

- Final project – your complete blog: 55%
- Weekly [class blog](#) responses: 25%
- Formal reflections: 10%
- Class participation: 10%

### Attendance and Professionalism:

We plan to accomplish a great deal of collaborative learning during class time, and we only have ~~seven~~ six opportunities to meet. Accordingly you are expected to attend all class sessions. If an unavoidable commitment or emergency prevents you from coming to any class session, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can develop a plan to help you catch up. **If you miss more than one class session, you should expect not to receive credit for the course.**

(Note: In accordance with University policy, students who miss class to (a) observe a religious holiday; (b) represent the University in an official capacity, including athletics, or (c) show documentation of catastrophic medical or other circumstances preventing their attendance—will not be penalized. In the case of (a) or (b), it is your responsibility to notify me early of all expected absences, and in ALL cases you still must arrange with me to make up missed assignments and class time.)

I will not accept late work without prior approval. If you know you will miss a deadline, contact me in advance and I will try to arrange an alternate deadline. All permitted late assignments will receive a 5% penalty per day.

### Academic Integrity:

The College of LSA's “Academic Integrity” website defines plagiarism as follows:

*Plagiarism is representing someone else's ideas, words, statements, or other work as one's own without proper acknowledgment or citation. Examples of plagiarism include:*

- *Copying word for word or lifting phrases or a special term from a source or reference, whether oral, printed, or on the internet, without proper attribution.*
- *Paraphrasing, that is, using another person's written words or ideas, albeit in one's own words, as if they were one's own thought.*
- *Borrowing facts, statistics, graphs, or other illustrative material without proper reference, unless the information is common knowledge, in common public use.*

This course is designed to elicit your own investigation and expression. Any act of plagiarism or academic dishonesty subverts this aim and breaches the trust of the entire academic community. Accordingly, if you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment, you should expect to fail the course, and your case will be reported to the College of LSA for further discipline. If you ever have the *slightest* question

about whether you should cite a source – in this class or any other context – play it safe and cite the source.

Even though you won't often see MLA or APA style in a blog, the blogosphere is governed by many informal rules of citation, and breaking these rules can have severe consequences. In the blogging world, your credibility can be instantly destroyed by accidentally or intentionally copying the words of others, as that copying will be immediately visible to anyone careful enough to do a Google search. We will examine citation practices of successful bloggers to develop our own "rules" for citation, and your final work will be held to those rules.

### **Accommodations for Special Needs:**

The University of Michigan is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students, and I am committed to making learning as accessible as possible for all of my students.

- If you have a disability and need an accommodation to participate in this class or to complete course requirements, please ask Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to provide documentation of the accommodations that you need. Then, please share this documentation with me as soon as possible, preferably within the first few weeks of class. I will treat as private and confidential any information that you share.
- If you suspect that you may have a disability and would like to be tested, Services for Students with Disabilities can provide free screenings and referrals to low-cost diagnostic services.

Here is the contact information for Services for Students with Disabilities:

location: G-664 Haven Hall  
phone: (734) 763-3000  
website: <http://ssd.umich.edu/>

### **Student Mental Health and Wellbeing:**

University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** at [734 764-8312](tel:7347648312) and <https://caps.umich.edu/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult **University Health Service (UHS)** at [734 764-8320](tel:7347648320) and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs>, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see [www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources](http://www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources).

For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>.

### **Sweetland Center for Writing:**

Few universities have a resource like the Sweetland Center, located at **1310 North Quad**, which is dedicated exclusively to helping students improve their writing. I recommend you take full advantage of their services, for this class as well as your others. They offer one-to-one tutoring in the Writing Workshop, one-to-one peer tutoring at various locations around campus, and online writing consultation through OWL. For more information on Sweetland's services, visit their website: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland>

### **Course Supplies**

If financial need makes it difficult for you to purchase books, a laptop computer, or other classroom materials, the Gayle Fund (established in honor of Gayle Morris Sweetland) can loan you the necessary materials. You can talk to me about how to apply, or you can get an application form from Teri Ford at the Sweetland office at 1310 North Quad.

I gratefully acknowledge my Sweetland colleagues Stephanie Loomis Pappas, Paul Barron, Simone Sessolo, Louis Ciccirelli, Dana Nichols, T. Hetzel, and Julie Babcock, on whose previous work this course design and syllabus have been modeled substantially.

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All reading, class blog, and individual blog assignments are due the day they are listed.

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

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- Week 1:**           **Introductions and Beginnings**  
March 9            Introductions/icebreaker  
                      Review syllabus and class plan  
                      Who are we, why should we blog, and what should we blog about?
- Week 2:**           **What, Why, and How of Blogging**  
March 16          Read: Andrew Sullivan, "Why I Blog"  
                      & Jill Walker Rettberg, "What is a Blog?"  
                      & begin following 5+ sample blogs (see class blog prompt)  
Class blog: Response to Week 2 prompt due (100+ word post or two 60+ word  
                      responses to classmates' posts)  
                      & **Post Reflection #1**  
Your blog: Create a new blog using your WordPress account
- Week 3:**           **Finding Your Voice and Your Audience**  
March 23          Read: Rebecca Blood, "Finding Your Voice"  
                      & SWC, "Blogging Basics"  
Class blog: Response to Week 3 prompt due (100+ word post or two 60+ word  
                      responses to classmates' posts)  
                      & Add link to your blog to our class blogroll  
Your blog: "About" page and first post
- Week 4:**           **Rhetoric of Visual Design**  
March 30          Read: Steve Krug, "Billboard Design 101"  
                      & Robert Berdan, "Composition & the Elements of Visual Design"  
                      & Sasha Zinevych, "Noble Blogger Guidelines: How to Cite Pictures"  
Class blog: Response to Week 4 prompt due (100+ word post or two 60+ word  
                      responses to classmates' posts)  
Your blog: Should have 2-3 posts
- Week 5:**           **Bloggling as Storytelling**  
April 6            Read: Jill Walker Rettberg, "Blogs as Narratives"  
Class blog: Response to Week 5 prompt due (100+ word post or two 60+ word  
                      responses to classmates' posts)  
Your blog: Should have 4-5 posts and a blogroll
- Week 6:**           **Bloggling as Social Engagement**  
April 13          Read: Rebecca Blood: "Weblog Ethics"  
Class blog: Response to Week 6 prompt due (100+ word post or two 60+ word  
                      responses to classmates' posts)  
                      & **Post Reflection #2**  
Your blog: Should have 6+ posts

**\*\*\*Final project (complete blog) due Tuesday, April 17\*\*\***

See assignment sheet for a complete list of requirements for your blog.

Make any final changes to your blog by midnight on 4/17; changes made after midnight will not be considered during grading.