

RWS411 Digital Rhetorics



Fall 2025 Syllabus



Instructor: Chris Werry

Instructor's Office: SH 114C

Office Hrs: Th 2.00-3.00 and by apptment

Email: cwerry@sdsu.edu

Schedule SH124 MW 3.30 – 4.45

Zoom: [Zoom link](#)

Course Materials:

- 1) Readings, handouts, and online materials are free and available on [Canvas](#) and the [class wiki](#).
- 2) Digital Textbook (supplemental) [Reading, Writing, and Evaluating Argument](#). Free.

What is the Story of this Course?

RWS 411 examines how people use digital media to persuade, construct identity, participate in culture, and engage in political action. It considers what it means to be literate in the age of A.I., TikTok, and Instagram, and explores some of the cultural and cognitive consequences of this. You will write often and receive feedback from your instructor, your peers, and A.I. writing “coaches.” Students will introduce texts, give informal presentations, and respond to classmates’ work. At the end of the semester, you should feel that you have read some stimulating arguments, participated in interesting conversations, and done some writing of which you feel proud.

Writing with Generative A.I.

A.I. is being integrated into the workplace, writing technologies, education, and civic life. We will face the challenge head-on, analyzing arguments about A.I., exploring its rhetoric, and attempting to distinguish between hype, hysteria, and possibility. We will test A.I. writing tools, some of which are new and experimental. This will require a willingness to explore, experiment, and improvise. You will be invited to write with A.I., to incorporate it into your writing and reading processes, and (importantly) to document and reflect on this. You can use it for brainstorming, planning, outlining, interpreting texts, researching, revising, and editing. But the work must remain substantially yours, and you must be transparent about AI use. **Ethical and effective use of AI** means standing behind your work, claiming ownership, and being able to defend AI-adapted material. You must scrutinize, transform, integrate, and verify A.I. output. You are expected to produce writing that is “authentic” and accurately represents your voice and your work. For certain kinds of writing and scholarship, A.I. can supplement and assist your work. If you rely on it too much, or outsource the work, the results will be poor. If you have any questions about permitted use of GenAI talk to me.

How Class is Organized

Mondays will usually focus on discussing and analyzing texts. Students will regularly introduce readings or give short, informal presentations. After module 1, ***most Wednesdays will be writing workshops.*** In these “Wednesday Workshops” you will work on a) your proposal and the main writing project, b) experiment with AI tools, c) short writing exercises. On Wednesday Workshops, I will sometimes present material and ideas for potential use in your writing projects, and suggest projects that could be published in the *CODEBREAKER* journal.

You will complete a substantial portion of the assessed work in these workshops and advance your participation grade, so it’s important you attend them. **At some Wednesday workshops, I will bring snacks/baked goods for energy and encouragement.** You are welcome to bring coffee, tea, or a beverage of choice.

Working with Google Docs & Folders

I have created [Google folders](#) for some of your work. You should draft short writing exercises, your proposal, and final paper in your Google folder. This will allow me to comment on your work and see its development. *Do not hand in PDFs unless you are working on a project that requires special formatting.*

How to be Successful

1. It is important to attend most classes. This is a seminar class, not a lecture class; it is focused on discussion, interaction, and group work. A significant amount of assessed work will occur in class.
2. The first 5 weeks of class are fairly reading-intensive. Writing and discussion will play a bigger role thereafter. Steady, sustained effort is key to keeping up and doing well.
3. You will draft your short writing exercises, proposal, and final paper in the Google Drive folder I created for you. I can’t comment on PDFs, so **unless you are working on a project that requires special formatting, do not save or store work as a PDF.**
4. Email me if you have questions or run into problems. Make use of [office hours](#), and if those don’t fit your schedule, suggest an alternate time. I can meet in person or on [Zoom](#). If you are blindsided by a problem that makes it hard to meet a deadline, contact me **well before the work is due.**
5. If you miss class, you are responsible for knowing what was covered and what was due. I recommend exchanging contact info with two of your classmates.

Student Writing and Assessment

I hope to de-emphasize assessment and focus on your writing. In my estimation, everyone should comfortably be able to achieve at least a “B” by simply completing most writing tasks on time, participating regularly, and putting in a consistent level of effort. You can, of course, achieve a higher (or lower) grade.

Assessment can sometimes make students less willing to take risks and lead away from “authentic” writing - writing that could (potentially) find an audience beyond the class. I will explain how you could share your work more broadly - in [CodeBreaker](#), a journal of undergraduate writing that I publish, sites like [Medium.com](#), the new [wikisummaries](#) project, and other places. This could be aspirational – your

writing for this class might get you part of the way to such a goal. As we read and discuss texts in class, I encourage you to think about how you might use them as part of writing projects that interest you.

Course Readings

All texts will be available on the course wiki or Canvas. The readings for the first half of the semester will not change. In the second half of the semester, I may make a few changes if students suggest readings related to writing projects. Some of the texts on A.I. are “hot off the press,” and our goal will sometimes be exploratory. We will formulate tentative interpretations, ask questions, and approach these texts in a spirit of collaborative inquiry.

Additional Information

Use of Student Work: I may occasionally share student writing in class. Please let me know if you would prefer not to have your work shared (you can send me an email).

Overview of Assessed Work

Participation	75 points
Discussion Board Posts/Homework	150 points
Four Short In-Class Writing Exercises	175 points
Mid-semester proposal & presentation	150 points
Final Paper/Project & Presentation	450 points
TOTAL	1000 points

Assessment in Detail

Participation (75 points)

Your participation grade is based on in-class work, [Hypothes.is](#) annotations, class discussion, and work introducing texts. There will be three “progress reports” over the course of the semester helping you determine how this is going. (How to use [Hypothes.is](#) <https://web.hypothes.is/help/quick-start-guide/>)

Discussion Board Work (150 pts)

Your discussion board posts will help prepare for class discussions and writing projects. **Posts are due by 11.30 the night before class.** For Monday classes, that means Sunday 11.30, and for Wednesday classes, Tuesday 11.30.

1. You will compose two kinds of post:
 - a. **Primary posts.** These are developed, thoughtful pieces of writing that are at least 300 words (more is fine). They should be spellchecked and clear, but don't need to be overly polished.
 - b. **Responses:** you will sometimes be asked to respond to two or more peers' primary posts.
2. [This rubric for discussion board posts](#) explains how I will evaluate them.

Short In-Class Writing Exercises (175 pts)

There are 4 short in-class writing exercises that take place on “Workshop Wednesdays.” You will give a presentation, do a brief analysis, or write about your work with an A.I. tool. If you need a bit more time outside class to finish, you have until 11.59 p.m. on the same day (Wednesday) to submit your work.

Note that there is an optional 5th short in-class writing exercise in case you miss a prior one or want an extra credit opportunity. Due dates:

Sept 22 & 24	Short writing exercise 1 (A.I. group presentations)
Sept 24	Short writing exercise 2 (A.I. Reflection)
Oct 01	Short writing exercise 3 (Ong)
Oct 08	Short writing exercise 4 (rhetorical analysis/creative A.I.)
Oct 22	Optional Short writing in-class exercise 5 (catchup/extra credit)

Mid-Semester Proposal & Presentation (150 points)

Oct 13	Draft proposal (50 points) and brief presentation (20 points)
Oct 20	Revised proposal (80 points)

Final Paper/Project & Presentation (450 points)

Dec 08/10	Brief presentation/progress report (50 points)
Dec 12	Final paper/project (400)

RWS 411 Student Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will

- apply rhetorical theories to better understand the production and interpretation of digital texts
- analyze the rhetoric of arguments about new media literacies
- write with an awareness of how aspects of writing and reading processes may be altered in new media environments
- demonstrate understanding of new media genres and conventions
- investigate how new media texts are used to persuade, collaborate, build community, negotiate identity, and produce change.
- investigate which new media tools work best in specific contexts, for specific audiences, purposes, and forms of interaction, and how they can be adapted to achieve specific communication goals
- demonstrate understanding of the collaborative and social aspects of new media writing environments

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Student Services

A complete list of all academic support services is available on the [Academic Success](#) section of the [SDSU Student Affairs](#) website. **For help with improving your writing ability, the staff at the SDSU Writing Center** is available in person and online.

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#) offers confidential counseling services by licensed psychologists, counselors, and social workers. More info can be found at their website or by contacting (619) 594-5220. You can also Live Chat with a counselor http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/cps/therapist-consultation.aspx between 4:00pm and 10:00pm, or call San Diego Access and Crisis 24-hour Hotline at (888) 724-7240.

Disabled students: every attempt will be made to offer reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in this course. Students with disabilities who may need accommodation in this class are encouraged to notify the instructor privately and to contact the Student Disabilities Services Center as soon as possible. SDS staff are available in the Capulli Center in Suite 3101 or by phone at (619) 594-6473 (voice) or (619) 594-2929 (TTD/TTY). If you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact the Student Disabilities Services Center. Please note that accommodation is not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

For millennia, the Kumeyaay people have been a part of this land. This land has nourished, healed, protected and embraced them for many generations in a relationship of balance and harmony. As members of the San Diego State community, we acknowledge this legacy. We promote this balance and harmony. We find inspiration from this land; the land of the Kumeyaay.
