WRITING IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

ENG 431 | section 001
MWF 1–1:50pm | Robert Bell 284

Dr. Allison Hitt
(Dr. Allison)
she/her/hers

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Zoom office hours: Monday & Wednesday
12–12:45pm, Tuesday 12–2pm, & by appt.

SYLLABUS BREAKDOWN

COURSE DESCRIPTION

from the BSU Course Catalog

Explores theories and practices of writing with and for digital media, such as copy writing, web and mobile application design, and social media management. Students will produce a range of professional digital texts, individually and in collaboration with others. Prerequisites: ENG 213 (min. grade C) and ENG 231 (min. grade C)

from Dr. Allison

ENG 431 combines and extends the ideas and approaches of both ENG 213 (Digital Literacies) and ENG 231 (Professional Writing) with a specific focus on producing professional writing within digital contexts. It is the capstone course for both the Professional Writing major and minor (and the former Rhetoric and Writing major).

Students will explore rhetorical theory and practice in networked environments; analyze the infrastructures of online writing (including usability and accessibility issues, content delivery, and information architecture); develop accessibility guidelines for digital texts; and produce public, professional content in and for digital environments that is both *ethical* and *accessible*. As the capstone course of the PW major and minor, students will create a digital portfolio at the end of the semester that showcases their work as professional writers.

woman with face mask icon: becris at flaticon.com
hand holding smart phone icon: freepik at flaticon.com

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In ENG 431, students will learn to do the following:
- Give examples of digital rhetoric as both a theory and practice within networked environments
- Describe a range of digital writing practices, such as content delivery, social media management, video composition, web and mobile app design, and information architecture
- Apply principles to problem-solve issues within digital environments, such as the circulation of misinformation, accessibility barriers, algorithmic bias, privacy, and surveillance
- Design multimodal texts using writing technologies and platforms that are informed by theories of visual rhetoric and document design
- Produce professional content within and for digital environments

REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. Horton, Sarah, and Whitney Quesenbery. *A Web for Everyone: Designing Accessible User Experiences.* Rosenfeld Media, 2014. ISBN: 978-1933820972

2. Lawrence, Dan. *Digital Writing: A Guide to Writing for Social Media and the Web.* Broadview Press, 2022. ISBN: 978-1554815678
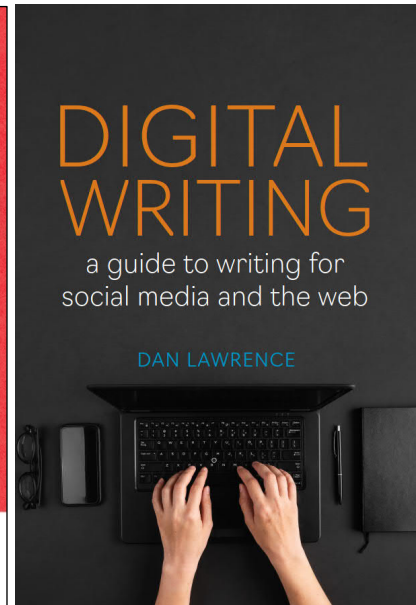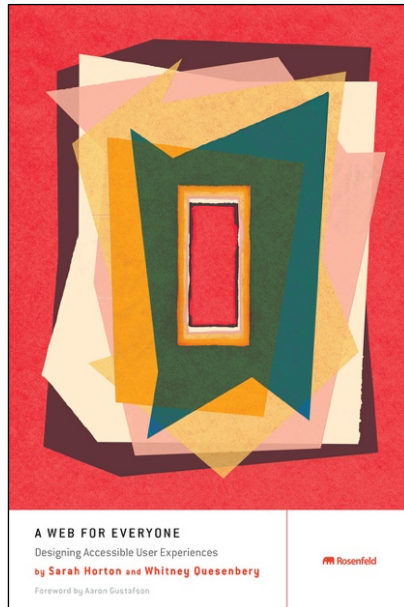
We will also read chapters from academic collections like *Routledge Handbook of Digital Writing and Rhetoric* and *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* and from books by folks working in tech like *Technically Wrong: Sexist Apps, Biased Algorithms, and Other Threats of Toxic Tech* and *Elements of Content Strategy.*

I will make additional readings about digital writing and rhetoric available through Canvas, which you will need to use regularly to access weekly modules, view assignment sheets and rubrics, and submit homework and major projects.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Content Analysis (100 pts)**

   For the first project, you will identify a professional organization and observe the content they write across digital platforms. You will analyze their rhetorical strategies, online writing conventions, and practices for circulating information and engaging different audiences. Deliverable: 4-page analysis. **Due 2/8**

2. **Accessibility Audit (150 pts)**

   Next, you will consider accessible user experiences. We will read about web accessibility guidelines and inclusive design, then you will develop protocols that can be used to evaluate the content and design of digital texts. You will create a protocol for assessing the accessibility of a website or mobile app, then conduct an accessibility audit of a social media profile. You will present your results in a 2-page report with the completed protocol attached as an appendix item. Deliverables: assessment protocol, 2-page report. **Due 3/3**

3. **Mobile App Design (250 pts)**

   Working in teams of 3–4, you will develop an app for BSU students: researching what students need, making choices about page and document design, sketching mockups and designing prototypes, and presenting your research through an informal report. You will conduct usability tests on your prototypes. Reports should discuss the issue that the app solves (or responds to), the research process, how the app functions, the content and design choices made to facilitate usability and accessibility, and insights learned/revisions made based on usability testing. Usability test materials will be attached at the end of the report as appendix items. Deliverables: 1-page project analysis memo, usability tests, mobile app prototype, 4-page prototype report. **Due 4/17**

4. **Portfolio (150 pts)**

   For the final project, you will create a digital portfolio that demonstrates the knowledge and skills that you have developed from your classes in the Professional Writing major/minor. Portfolios will include a personal statement, a résumé, and 3–5 documents that are representative of your knowledge and work. All portfolios must be curated and organized thoughtfully, and the design must be accessible and usable. You are welcome to use any platform to design your portfolio. You will also submit a brief memo outlining your rhetorical design choices. Deliverables: portfolio, 500-word (max) reflection. **Due 5/5**

5. **Collective Definition of Writing in Digital Environments (50 pts)**

   To map the theories and processes involved with writing in digital environments, we will create a shared "database" of important terms, theories, and/or technologies relevant to digital rhetoric and writing. Each of you will identify three important terms and contribute an entry to a shared, digital space that we

will decide upon together. Entries should define the term in plain language, cite relevant class (and outside) readings, and provide a relevant example of application or explanation of significance. Deliverables: three entries. **Due 5/1**

6. **Rough Drafts & Peer Feedback (100 pts)**

   Writing is a process that benefits from practice and feedback, and you will be asked to complete rough drafts of all major projects to receive feedback from me and your peers. If you submit drafts (60 pts) and provide feedback to your peers (40 pts) on time, you will receive full credit.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

For each major project, you will be assessed on your rhetorical and technical choices: audience awareness, genre conventions, organization, accessible style, effective delivery, and persuasive rhetorical strategies. All major projects will include specific instructions and evaluation criteria on Canvas. All process work (rough drafts and peer feedback) will be evaluated as complete/incomplete.

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
93-100%	90-92%	87-89%	83-86%	80-82%	77-79%	73-76%	70-72%	67-69%	63-66%	60-62%	59% & below
744-800	720-743	696-719	664-695	640-663	616-639	584-615	560-583	536-559	504-535	480-503	479 & below

⊗ I will provide written feedback on each major assignment that you submit. Please read that feedback carefully prior to emailing me about your grade.

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Accessibility

I am committed to creating a classroom environment that is respectful of and inclusive to different learning and writing processes—whether that is in person, through Zoom, or on Canvas. All the multimodal materials I share will be made accessible: videos will be captioned, audio will have transcripts, and images will be described. If we can work together to make the class more accessible, let me know.

Accommodations

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

Attendance

Writing is a social process, and I invite you to take part in this process by regularly attending class and completing in-class work. We will spend class time discussing readings, experimenting with different writing technologies, providing feedback on drafts, and collaborating on major projects. Because we are still operating in a COVID landscape, you will not be penalized for absences this semester. Use good judgment about coming to class if you are sick and set boundaries about your physical and mental health. If you can, let me know about your absence *prior* to class; otherwise, follow up with me through email.

Basic Needs Security

I encourage anyone who lacks access to sufficient food to eat or a safe and stable place to live to contact the folks at Student Affairs and/or visit the Basic Needs Security Hub: https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/dean-of-students/basic-needs-hub. This resource offers information about food insecurity, housing support, financial resources, wellness, and homelessness.

COVID-19 Safety

I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the university's current COVID-19 policies: www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/emergency-preparedness/pandemicfluprep/coronavirus. Students, faculty, staff, and visitors are not required to wear face masks inside campus buildings with a few exceptions for certain locations. Individuals are encouraged to make personal health decisions regarding wearing a well-fitted face mask. I will be wearing a mask for both my and your safety, and I will hold Zoom office hours this semester.

Diversity & Inclusion

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university resources found at www.bsu.edu/campuslife/multicultural-center.

Late Work

Assignments are due by the time specified on Canvas. However, there's a good chance that at some point (or at many points) throughout the semester, you will need some extra help. *You can request a one-week extension for any assignment excluding the final project by emailing me.* If you get sick this semester, we will work together to develop a catch-up plan.

Respect

I ask you to be respectful and remain open to ideas and perspectives that challenge your own. I expect you to be respectful when participating in class discussions,

interacting with me in class and through email, and working with your peers. *You do not have to agree with someone to treat them, their ideas, and their work respectfully.*

Technology

Technology is integral to the writing process, and we will be using many technologies this semester to complete work and communicate. You will also need to check Canvas regularly to access weekly modules, assignments, additional readings, and class notes.

In-Class Technology Usage
You are welcome to bring a laptop, tablet, or smartphone to class for taking notes and completing in-class writing exercises, and you will have access to the classroom computers. You are welcome to wear headphones during individual work but not during lectures or group work. If you need to take a phone call, please step outside to take the call. If I ask you repeatedly to stop doing something on your phone/computer or your technology use becomes distracting to others, you will be asked to put it away.

Canvas and Online Communications
You will use Canvas to submit work, access calendars and each week's module, download assignment prompts and readings, and contribute to the class notes. I expect you to check your BSU email daily and to respond within 24 hours during the work week, just as you will expect me to do. *All email messages to me regarding this class should include the course number in the subject line and should be respectful and professional.* If your message is urgent, please note that in the subject line.

Writing Center

All writers improve with practice and feedback, so as a student in this course, you are encouraged to use the Writing Center (in Robert Bell 295, Bracken Library, or online) to get additional feedback on your writing. To schedule a free appointment to discuss your writing, go to www.bsu.edu/writingcenter. Online and in-person appointments are available seven days a week. Plan ahead because appointments book quickly!

COURSE CALENDAR

In the schedule below, the left column indicates the topic we will discuss in class that day and what is due. The right column indicates what homework you need to complete for the following class. Homework and most major projects are due by the start of class (1pm), excluding the final project.

WEEK 1	
Mon, 1/9: Introduction to ENG 431 and each other	Read Ch. 1 "Introduction to Digital Writing" in *Digital Writing* (PDF also available on Canvas).
Wed, 1/11: Digital writing	Read PDF "Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric" (Eyman) or access the [ebook chapter]().
Fri, 1/13: Digital rhetoric Introduction to Collective Definition of Digital Writing and Rhetoric	Read PDFs "Digital Media Ethics and Rhetoric" (McKee and Porter) and "Writing with Robots and Other Curiosities of the Age of Machine Rhetorics" (Hart-Davidson). Brainstorm a list of ethical issues related to writing in digital environments.
WEEK 2	
Mon, 1/16: NO CLASS – MLK Day	
Wed, 1/18: Digital media ethics due today: list of ethical issues	Read PDFs "Implications of Persuasive Computer Algorithms" (Beck) and "Algorithmic Inequity" (Wachter-Boettcher).
Fri, 1/20: Writing for/against algorithms	Read Ch. 2 "Writing for Social Media" in *Digital Writing.*

WEEK 3

Mon, 1/23: Introduction to Project 1 Content Analysis	Read Ch. 3 "Writing for the Web" in *Digital Writing* and Ch. 8 "Plain Language: Creates a conversation" in *A Web for Everyone*.
Wed, 1/26: Plain language and accessible web writing	Read PDFs "Content Strategy: More Than Words" (Unger & Chandler) and "Delighted to Death" (Wachter-Boettcher).
Fri, 1/27: Content strategy 101	Read "Basic Principles" and "The Craft of Content Strategy" from *Elements of Content Strategy.*

WEEK 4

Mon, 1/30: Content strategy 102	Decide what organization's content you will analyze for Project 1 and begin browsing their content and taking notes.
Wed, 2/1: Analyzing social media content	Continue taking notes on your chosen organization's content.
Fri, 2/3: In-class drafting	Continue drafting your analysis. Prepare a draft for feedback. Post to Canvas.

WEEK 5

Mon, 2/6: Analysis workshopping due today: Project 1 draft	Finalize your analyses and upload Project 1 to Canvas by the start of class on Wednesday, February 8th.
Wed, 2/8: Introduction to Project 2 Accessibility Audit **due today: Project 1 Content Analysis**	Read Ch. 1 "A Web for Everyone" and Ch. 2 "People First: Designing for differences" in *A Web for Everyone*.
Fri, 2/10: Inclusive design	Read Ch. 3: "Clear Purpose: Well-defined goals" and Ch. 4 "Solid Structure: Built to standards" in *A Web for Everyone*.

WEEK 6	
Mon, 2/13: Web accessibility guidelines	Read Ch. 5 "Easy Interaction: Everything works" and Ch. 6 "Helpful Wayfinding: Guides users" in *A Web for Everyone*.
Wed, 2/15: Usability best practices	Read Ch. 7 "Clean Presentation: Visual design supports meaning" and Ch. 9 "Accessible Media: Supports all senses" in *A Web for Everyone*.
Fri, 2/17: Accessible writing, design, and media	Work on assessment protocols.

WEEK 7	
Mon, 2/20: Accessibility audit of shared digital text	Work on assessment protocols.
Wed, 2/22: In-class drafting	Create a complete draft of your protocol for feedback. Post to Canvas.
Fri, 2/24: Protocol workshopping due today: Project 2 draft	Finalize accessibility assessment protocols.

WEEK 8	
Mon, 2/27: Conducting and reporting on accessibility audits	After completing the accessibility audit, you will synthesize the results in a report and attach the completed protocol as an appendix item. Begin drafting the report.
Wed, 3/1: In-class drafting	Finalize your reports and upload your Project 2 deliverables to Canvas by the start of class on Friday, March 3rd.
Fri, 3/3: Mapping definitions of digital writing and rhetoric **due today: Project 2 Accessibility Audit**	Read "Trayvon Martin and the Hashtag Campaign That Set the Stage for Black Lives Matter" (The MIT Press Reader) and "The Utility of Digital Allyship: #AllMenCan and #CrimingWhileWhite" (Jackson, et al.).

WEEK 9	
Mon, 3/6–Fri, 3/10: NO CLASS — Spring Break	

WEEK 10	
Mon, 3/13: Digital activism and allyship (racial justice)	Read "Women Tweet on Violence: From #YesAllWomen to #MeToo" (Jackson, et al.)
Wed, 3/15: Digital activism (gender justice)	Read PDF "Indigenous Interfaces" (Arola).
Fri, 3/17: Introduction to Project 3 Mobile App Prototype	Read Ch. 4 "Digital-Visual Design" in *Digital Writing* and PDF "Design Principles" (Kimball and Hawkins).

WEEK 11	
Mon, 3/20: App interface design	Read Ch. 10 "Universal Usability: Creates delight," Ch. 11 "An Integrated Process," and Ch. 12 "The Future: Design for all" in *A Web for Everyone*. Develop team norms and expectations and delegate tasks for Project 3. Email a copy of your agreed-upon norms to Dr. Allison, cc'ing all team members.
Wed, 3/22: Primary and secondary research due today: team norms and expectations	Each team needs to compose a 1-page project analysis memo that introduces your project (including the purpose and audience), summarizes the research you plan to do, and outlines what each team member will be doing moving forward. Post to Canvas. We will discuss your plans in class on Friday.
Fri, 3/24: In-class team meetings due today: 1-page project analysis memo	Read PDF "Wireframe and Annotations" (Unger & Chandler) and "Prototyping 101" (Adobe Blog).

WEEK 12	
Mon, 3/27: Wireframes, annotations, and prototypes	Continue to research. Begin thinking about the ultimate design (in terms of usability, navigability, and interactivity).
Wed, 3/29: Low-fidelity design sketches	Each team member should create one or two lo-fi design sketches (on paper) to vet in class. It might be useful to review Chapters 5 and 6 in *A Web for Everyone* as you consider usability elements.
Fri, 3/31: In-class drafting due today: lo-fi design sketches	Develop prototypes.

WEEK 13	
Mon, 4/3: In-class drafting	Develop prototypes. Read PDFs "Don't Make Me Think!: Krug's First Law of Usability" and "Usability Testing on 10 Cents a Day" (Krug).
Wed, 4/5: In-class drafting Preparing for usability testing	Complete usability testing prep and work on prototypes. You need a "final" version of your mobile app prototypes for usability testing on Friday.
Fri, 4/7: Usability testing due today: Project 3 draft (complete draft of prototype)	

WEEK 14	
Mon, 4/10: Usability testing due today: Project 3 draft (complete draft of prototype)	Review your observation notes and determine what needs to be revised. Synthesize notes for your prototype reports. Begin revising your prototypes.

Wed, 4/12: Prototype reports	Continue working on prototypes and reports. As a team, brainstorm any questions you have about your usability test results or the report that we can discuss on Friday.
Fri, 4/14: Report drafting	Finalize your prototypes and reports and upload your Project 3 deliverables to Canvas by the start of class on Monday, April 17th.
WEEK 15	
Mon, 4/17: Introduction to Project 4 Brainstorming knowledge and skills from the PW major/minor **due today: Project 3 Mobile App Prototype**	Read Ch. 5 "Digital-Writing Jobs" in *Digital Writing.*
Wed, 4/19: Representing ethos digitally & visually	Brainstorm some ideas for the type of digital portfolio you'd like to design and what program you'll use to create it. Create a digital sketch/prototype of your portfolio and post to Canvas.
Fri, 4/21: Idea workshopping due today: portfolio sketch/prototype	Begin developing your digital portfolio.
WEEK 16	
Mon, 4/24: Portfolio drafting	Continue working on portfolio.
Wed, 4/26: Portfolio drafting	Develop a complete draft of your portfolio for feedback. Post to Canvas.
Fri, 4/28: Portfolio workshopping Accessibility audits due today: Project 4 draft	On Monday, we will reflect on the semester by informally reviewing some of the entries you wrote for the semester's ongoing project: a collective mapping of writing in digital environments.

WEEK 17 – FINALS WEEK

Mon, 5/1: Final reflections: Reviewing our collective definition of writing in digital environments Course evaluations	

> ⊗ The final examination period for this class is Friday, May 5 from 12–2pm, so you need to **submit your Project 4 Portfolios to Canvas by 2pm.**