



PWR 3020-001 / ENGL 4670-001

Digital Writing

PH 306 | TR 1:00 – 2:25 p.m. | 3 credits

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Dr. Eric Detweiler

Email Address: eric.detweiler@mtsu.edu

Office: Peck 323A

Office Phone: 615-898-2585

Student Hours (USE THEM! PLEASE!): 2:30 – 4 p.m. on Mon., 11:00 a.m.– 12:30 p.m. on Thurs., and by appointment (in person or Zoom)

COURSE INFORMATION

Prerequisites and Co-requisites

Completion of 1000- and 2000-level English requirements with a grade of C- or better. For Public Writing and Rhetoric majors and minors, completion of PWR 3000.

Description

An overview of the theoretical and practical work involved in creating, publishing, and circulating writing via digital platforms. Coursework will emphasize the production of digital writing projects, with students collaboratively navigating digital publishing workflows from first drafts through actual digital publication. Students will learn how digital technologies are affecting the ways people read and write in public and professional contexts, including overlaps and divergences from analog writing platforms and genres.

Objectives

The course is designed to teach students to

1. recognize and navigate the rhetorical, ethical, and aesthetic complexities involved in digital writing and publishing;
2. understand how writing circulates in digital spaces;

3. make effective and ethical choices in selecting digital writing tools and approaches;
4. anticipate and respond to the needs and expectations of diverse digital audiences;
5. individually and collaboratively produce, edit, and publish writing in multiple genres using a variety of digital platforms; and
6. use digital platforms to publish their own personal, public, and professional writing projects in the future.

Major or Minor in Public Writing and Rhetoric!

Interested in more courses like this one? Consider majoring or minoring in [Public Writing and Rhetoric](#)! Our program is unique in the state of Tennessee, preparing you with a set of in-demand professional skills that can also help you make a difference in your communities. Our major requires 36 credit hours and can be paired with lots of other MTSU programs as a double major. Our minor requires 15 credit hours, giving you writing experience that can supplement what you're learning in your major. If you want to learn more, talk with Dr. Detweiler.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Textbooks

There is one required book for this course. You can acquire it in whatever format (print or digital) you prefer:

- Caulfield, Mike, and Sam Wineburg. *Verified: How to Think Straight, Get Duped Less, and Make Better Decisions about What to Believe Online*. U of Chicago P, 2023.

All other readings will be available as links or PDFs through Canvas.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Grading Procedure

I've tried to make the grading system for the course as straightforward as possible. Your grades on all individual assignments will be pass/fail. That means if you meet a set of basic requirements for an assignment, you'll get full credit for it. If you don't, you'll get no credit. See the tables below for a breakdown of coursework and how it will correspond to different letter grades. It's a little different from how grades work in most courses and may take a minute for you to wrap your head around. But my hope is that, in the end, it will make it simpler for you to succeed in the course and keep the focus on developing as a writer instead of hitting specific percentages with each assignment just so you can maintain the GPA you want. I will update the Canvas gradebook regularly, so you'll be able to keep track of the work you've completed there.

I will provide more detailed prompts for all the assignments listed below as the semester unfolds.

Assignment	Percentage of Grade
<i>Recurring Work</i>	
<i>Reading Notes:</i> You'll take notes on required readings and submit them to corresponding Canvas dropboxes.	15%

Assignment	Percentage of Grade
<i>Posting:</i> You'll write and post short pieces to a course site we'll discuss in the first few weeks of the semester.	20%
<i>Peer Feedback:</i> You'll provide feedback on classmates' major projects throughout the semester.	15%
<i>Major Projects</i>	
<i>How-To Guide:</i> Using a language called Markdown, you'll create a how-to guide meant to introduce others to a digital writing tool or skill of your choice.	15%
<i>Verification Quest:</i> Using the course site <i>or</i> HTML and CSS, you'll write a longform piece documenting your application of the strategies laid out in <i>Verified</i> .	15%
<i>Writing Digital Culture:</i> You'll collaborate to write and create an HTML/CSS piece about a noteworthy aspect of digital culture. We'll talk more about what that means as the project approaches.	20%
Total	100%

The grading scale for this course is as follows:

A: 90-100 B+: 87-89 B: 83-86 B-: 80-82	C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72 D+: 67-69	D: 63-66 D-: 60-62 F: 59 and under
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Incomplete Grades

Incomplete grades are given rarely and only in extenuating circumstances. Page 56 of the [MTSU Undergraduate Catalog](#) states: "The grade I indicates that the student has not completed all course requirements because of illness or other uncontrollable circumstances, especially those which occur toward the end of the term. Mere failure to make up work or turn in required work on time does not provide the basis for the grade of 'I' unless extenuating circumstances noted above are present for reasons acceptable to the instructor." Please refer to the Undergraduate catalog for the complete Incomplete Grade Policy.

Feedback

- I will provide feedback on all your major writing projects via the Canvas dropboxes where you submit those assignments. I will provide feedback no more than two weeks after you submit the assignment. In most cases, you will receive audio recording of my feedback. If there is any reason why audio feedback will not work or be accessible for you, please let me know and I'm happy to find a form of feedback that will.
- Most coursework will require you to upload something to a Canvas dropbox, even if it's just a link to a digital project that lives elsewhere on the internet. If you ever have trouble getting something uploaded to a dropbox, just let me know.
- I will also provide short written feedback as needed on smaller course assignments. For instance, if you submit a post or piece of peer feedback that doesn't meet the requirements, I'll note that in the Canvas dropbox.

- All major assignment deadlines are listed in the course calendar and the Canvas calendar.

Deadlines and Late Work

I have deadlines in my classes for three main reasons, which I think it's worth taking a moment to explain as a way of helping you understand where I'm coming from as a teacher:

1. Because of my own limitations. If I have every student turning in every assignment at a different time, it gets easy for me to overlook things, which can delay my feedback and cause confusion for you all.
2. Because you all will be learning to write together. As much as we sometimes think of writing as a solitary activity (a lone author sitting in their room typing away at a novel or essay), learning to write is a deeply social experience. We'll discuss this point in this course. But for now, it means you'll be developing your writing in conversation with each other, and you'll be providing each other feedback on what you're writing. For that to work, you'll need to be working on writing assignments at roughly the same time as your classmates.
3. Because the writing assignments in this class build on each other. That means you'll apply things you learn from writing earlier assignments while you're working on later assignments. If you try to do everything in the last few weeks of the semester, then you won't be able to build on what you've already learned. It would be like trying to climb a ladder by immediately jumping to the highest step—a difficult if not impossible task.

So there will be deadlines in this class, which you'll be able to see using the Canvas calendar. I ask that you stick to those deadlines as much as possible. That said, if something comes up that prevents you from turning something in on time—an illness, a technological issue, a family emergency—please let me know. I am often, though not always, willing to give extensions as needed. I just ask that, if you anticipate needing an extension on a major writing project or other recurring work, you email me in advance of the deadline so that I can plan accordingly. If you don't provide me with advance notice, I may not be able to provide you with a way to make up coursework.

Academic Integrity/Misconduct

Please review MTSU's policy on [Academic Integrity and Misconduct](#).

When it comes to detecting and addressing plagiarism, I refuse to use Turnitin because I have [major problems](#) with its business model and the assumption that students are guilty of plagiarism until proven innocent. I've been teaching for over a decade and am pretty good at noticing when a student is plagiarizing. If I do, I will almost always use it as an opportunity to start a one-on-one conversation about plagiarism rather than automatically failing the student or reporting them to university authorities. If you're ever concerned that you might be plagiarizing in a project you're working on (by not citing sources correctly, etc.), I encourage you to check in with me. I hope this is obvious, but I won't penalize you for accidentally plagiarizing in an early draft of a project that you share with me. If you submit a plagiarized assignment to one of the Canvas dropboxes, you will have to redo it to get credit for the assignment. Resources on how to cite work correctly are available through the website of the

[University Writing Center](#). You may read more about how to avoid plagiarism from the [Office of the University Provost](#).

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- submitting another person's work (papers, themes, reports, drawings, laboratory notes, computer programs, etc.) as if it's your own;
- knowingly assisting another student in obtaining or using materials they attempt to pass off as their own work (this does *not* include collaborating with each other while you're working on a writing project, which I encourage you to do);
- submitting assignments previously used in other courses where you received credit for the work (in other words, you can plagiarize yourself); and
- improperly crediting or not crediting another author's work.

Ultimately, the consequences for plagiarism are my call. If you repeatedly and intentionally plagiarize assignments in this course, possible disciplinary sanctions (including expulsion from the university) may be imposed through the regular institutional procedures for addressing academic misconduct. I have the option of not giving you credit for plagiarized assignments until they're redone or of giving you an F for the course. Students guilty of plagiarism may be reported to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

Okay, what about AI?

As you probably know, large language models like ChatGPT—often referred to as “AI”—have become a big deal in the last couple of years.

I think it'd be unrealistic and impractical for me to just say, “No AI allowed!” Tech companies are squeezing AI into tons of products, and text-generation tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude may play a role in the writing you do in your future lives. Since this is a course specifically about digital writing, we will talk about and experiment with such tools at length. They raise a lot of problems and are things that are worth being able to discuss in an informed manner.

With that in mind, here's the AI policy for this course: You may use AI tools to help you plan and polish your major writing projects (generating potential topics, doing grammar checks, etc.), but you **must** document and submit any AI usage along with your drafts of those projects. So, for instance, if you use ChatGPT to generate a list of potential topics for the first draft of a project, screenshot or copy-and-paste that chat, then submit it with your first draft. If you use Grammarly AI to help you rework a paragraph in a revised draft, submit what you put into and get back from Grammarly AI along with the final draft (this doesn't include using basic grammar-check features that do things like change “than” to “then” or a period to a question mark). There's no penalty for using AI in these ways as long as you document that use. That documentation should include short reflections on what you noticed from the AI output you used.

You may **not** use AI tools to generate a paper for you. For instance, don't ask ChatGPT to write you a paragraph on a particular topic and drop it straight into a draft.

On a side note, I want to emphasize that I am not the sort of teacher who looks for ways to fail students or tell them what bad writers they are. I don't deduct points for grammatical mistakes, for instance. The worst kinds of writing classes just expect students to be perfect writers from the start, then label students as "good" or "bad" writers and grade them accordingly. This is not one of those classes. Writing is a messy process, and I expect you to make mistakes and present half-formed ideas and cite sources that aren't a great fit for your project, then do better based on feedback and practice. I know students often plagiarize (with or without AI) because of anxiety and confusion about how their writing will be received. I hope knowing that my goal is to support your development as writers, not to force you to prove that you're already great at writing, will make you more comfortable experimenting with AI without handing off your whole writing process.

If I have good reason to suspect a project was entirely or primarily written by AI, I will ask you to rewrite the project before giving credit.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

I ask that you miss no more than four class meetings. If you miss more than four, you **must** schedule a one-on-one meeting with me to develop a plan to make sure you can keep up with the course. If you don't schedule that meeting, you won't be able to pass the course. You'll have to schedule an additional meeting for each additional absence.

Email

If you need to get in touch with me outside of office hours, my MTMail address is the best way to do so: eric.detweiler@mtsu.edu. In most cases, I'll reply to emails I receive during the workweek within 24 hours. I don't always check my email on the weekend, so if you have an urgent question and the weekend is approaching, email me by 5 p.m. on Friday.

Per the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#), all communication related to your grade will happen inside Canvas. While I do not typically use my Canvas email account, if you ask me a grade-related question via MTMail, I may suggest we continue the conversation using Canvas email because it provides a little more privacy. While we're on the topic of FERPA: I cannot and will not communicate with your parents, guardians, or others about your grades or how you're doing in the course. That's because of the privacy protections FERPA grants you as a college student. If there is a parent, guardian, or other person you want to grant access to your grades and other educational records, they will need to register through the [Partners in Education program](#). Once they are enrolled in that program, they can request relevant records through the MT One Stop.

OTHER MTSU RESOURCES AND POLICIES

Students with Disabilities

Middle Tennessee State University is committed to campus access in accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Any student interested in reasonable accommodations can consult the [Disability & Access](#)

[Center \(DAC\)](#) website and/or contact the DAC for assistance at 615-898-2783 or dacemail@mtsu.edu.

I know that students may encounter accessibility needs and challenges that extend beyond what is officially on file with the DAC. If I can assist with any additional accessibility issues, please don't hesitate to get in touch. I'm happy to help.

University Writing Center

The [University Writing Center](#) is a great resource for students. Its physical location is room 362 of the James E. Walker Library. The UWC offers students valuable one-on-one assistance with their writing, and they offer virtual appointments. You can make an appointment for a conference using their website or by calling (615) 904-8237. Whether you feel like you're a great writer or an awful one, the UWC is a wonderful resource.

Title IX

Students who believe they have been harassed, discriminated against or been the victim of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking should contact a Title IX/Deputy Coordinator at 615-898- 2185 or 615-898-2750 for assistance or review [MTSU's Title IX website](#) for resources.

MTSU faculty are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are legally obligated to share reports of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking with the University's Title IX coordinator to help ensure student's safety and welfare.

Grade Appeals

[University Policy 313, Student Grade Appeals](#), provides an avenue for MTSU students to appeal a final course grade in cases in which the student alleges that unethical or unprofessional actions by the instructor and/or grading inequities improperly impacted the final grade.

Hope (Lottery) Scholarship Information

Do you have a lottery scholarship? To retain the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship eligibility, you must earn a cumulative TELS GPA of 2.75 after 24 and 48 attempted hours and a cumulative TELS GPA of 3.0 thereafter. A grade of C, D, F, FA, or I in this class may negatively impact TELS eligibility. If you drop this class, withdraw, or if you stop attending this class you may lose eligibility for your lottery scholarship, and you may not be able to regain eligibility at a later time. For additional Lottery rules, please refer to your [Lottery Statement of Understanding form](#) or contact your [MT One Stop Enrollment Counselor](#).

Course Calendar

The following schedule lists the deadlines for readings and drafts of major course projects. Major project deadlines are in **bold**. Both readings and projects are due by the start of class on the day they're due unless otherwise noted. Some days also include a brief overview of the topic we'll be covering that day or other things we'll be doing.

I will do my best to keep us in line with this schedule throughout the semester. However, I reserve the right to make changes as needed (in the event of things like inclement weather, personal health issues, etc.). If I ever do make changes to this calendar, I will announce them in class and via a news item on our Canvas homepage. If you ever see any discrepancies between this calendar and a deadline listed somewhere else in Canvas, please let me know and I'll address it ASAP.

With the exception of *Verified*, All readings will be available in the Content section of Canvas as PDFs or links.

<i>Date</i>	<i>What We're Up To</i>
Week 1	
1/20	Introductions, Syllabus and Course Calendar
1/22	In Class: • Tour of Canvas • Read and Discuss Prompts for Reading Notes and Posting • Get Set Up with Course Site • Discussion: What Is Digital Writing?
Week 2	
1/27	Read and Discuss Prompt for How-To Guide (First Major Project) and Verification Quest (Second Major Project) Readings: • Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, "Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery" • Miles Klee, "AI is Inventing Academic Papers That Don't Exist—and They're Being Cited in Real Journals"
1/29	Reading: • Markdown Guide, "Getting Started" • Anil Dash, "How Markdown Took Over the World" In Class: play around with Markdown.
Week 3	
2/3	Readings: • Kate Eichhorn, "A Brief History of Content in a Digital Era" • Cory Doctorow, "Network Effects vs. Switching Costs"
2/5	Reading:

	- Kate Crawford, selections from <i>Atlas of AI</i> - Karen Hao, selections from <i>Empire of AI</i>
Week 4	
2/10	Reading: <i>Verified</i>, Introduction & Chapter 1
2/12	Reading: <i>Verified</i>, Chapters 2 & 3 Bring an up-to-date draft of your How-To Guide. Time allowing, we may discuss and work on them in class.
Week 5	
2/17	First Draft of How-To Guide Peer Workshop
2/19	Reading: <i>Verified</i>, Chapters 4 & 5
Week 6	
2/24	Digital Lo-Fi Readings: - Monica Chin, "File Not Found" - Karl Stolley, "The Lo-Fi Manifesto"
2/26	Required Tutorial: Christina Truong, "HTML Essential Training" (complete the introduction through section 3) In Class: experiment with HTML.
Week 7	
3/3	Revised Draft of How-To Guide Read and Discuss Prompts for Writing Digital Culture (Third Major Project)
3/5	Required Tutorial: Christina Truong, "HTML Essential Training" (complete sections 4, 5, 6, and 8) In Class: continue experimenting with HTML.
MAR. 9 – 13: SPRING BREAK	
Week 8	
3/17	Reading: <i>Verified</i>, Chapters 6 & 7
3/19	Required Tutorial: Carrie Dils, "CSS Fundamentals"

	In Class: experiment with CSS.
Week 9	
3/24	Reading: • <i>Verified</i>, Chapters 8 & 9
3/26	Readings: • <i>Verified</i>, Chapters 10 & 11 + Postscript
Week 10	
3/31	First Draft of Verification Quest Peer Workshop
4/2	In Class: work on and brainstorm Writing Digital Culture projects.
Week 11	
4/7	Reading: • Webtexts to be determined.
4/9	In Class: discuss and work on Writing Digital Culture projects.
Week 12	
4/14	Revised Draft of Verification Quest
4/16	In Class: prep projects for Celebration of Student Writing
4/17	Required Event: Celebration of Student Writing, 1 – 3 p.m.
Week 13	
4/21	TBD
4/23	First Draft of Writing Digital Culture Peer Workshop
Week 14	
4/28	Closing Discussion and Class Debrief
Finals	
5/7	Revised Draft of Writing Digital Culture (due by 1 p.m., start of final exam period)
5/8	Final Draft of Writing Digital Culture (due by noon)