

Communication Through the Ages HIST345 002 | Spring 2025

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Office: Cullimore 324 | Office Hours: Monday 9:00 -10:00 am

Class Time and Location: Monday-Wednesday 1:00 – 2:20 pm, Cullimore Lecture Hall 3

Course Description:

The media theorist Marshall McLuhan wrote that information and communications media and technologies, the “extensions of man” (using the gendered language of the 1960s) should be an object of study, as much as the content that they carry because *how* we communicate, shapes *what* we communicate. In effect, he wrote, “the medium is the message.”

This course will examine those communication media throughout human history, from the written and printed word to TikTok and Snapchat and discover how they have each altered the messages they carried and transformed the human experience, as they have drawn us together in a n increasingly shrinking world. We discuss how communication technologies and practices have shaped social and economic interactions and the experience of high and popular culture, politics, and power.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Recognize the ways in which technologies have shaped our history and framed human interactions and, conversely, how political economy has created demand for technological innovation.

Demonstrate that you can recognize, articulate, and analyze the impact of communication technologies on society throughout history

Identify, analyze, and deploy primary sources in conversation with secondary sources to make historical arguments.

Produce a research project with a clear argument and effective argumentation.

Required Texts:

Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, second edition.

Martin Campbell-Kelly et. al., *Computer: A History of the Information Machine*, 4th edition (New York: Routledge, 2023) 978-1032203430

All other readings are available on Canvas.

Assignments

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to attend every class, arrive on-time and stay for the duration of the class. Students may be excused for illness, family emergency and similar extreme situations, and religious observance. Absences for work, job interviews and similar events will not be excused.

Four unexcused absences will result in an automatic failing grade. Students who miss six or more sessions through *any* combination of excused and unexcused absences will not earn credit in this class. Such students should withdraw from the course.

Participation: You are expected to actively participate in classes. Your participation grade will reflect both the quantity and the quality of your participation.

Research Project: You will produce a short video about a communication technology or system after completing research into its significance and historical context. The project will consist of the following components.

- *Proposal:* A 300-word description of the communication technology or system, explaining your choice, and what you believe to be its historical significance. **(Out of 5)**
- *Annotated Bibliography:* (An annotated bibliography of five sources; at least two must be primary sources, and two must be secondary sources. **(Out of 5)**
- *Video:* A 5-minute video presentation on the significance and historical context of your communication technology or system. **(Out of 5)**

Quizzes: You will take four surprise quizzes scheduled randomly through the term.

Midterm exam: The midterm exam will be online.

Final Exam: The midterm exam will be online.

Grading:

Attendance	10
Participation	10
Quizzes	20
Research Project	20
Midterm Exam	20
Final Exam	25

Your grade is calculated as the aggregate sum of your assignment scores.

Students *must* write the final exam to pass the course.

Late submissions will not be accepted except with prior permission and only in the most extreme circumstances.

Grading Scale:

A	90-100
B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	75-79
C	70-74
D	60-70

Academic Integrity:

An essential part of NJIT's policy of academic integrity is that students demonstrate honesty and integrity in their courses. It is also a policy that will serve you in good stead in the rest of your personal and professional life. Turning in a paper that includes plagiarism, was written by someone else and passed off as your own work, or cheating on an examination will result in a 0 for that assignment. All cases of suspected plagiarism/cheating will be reported to the office of the Dean of Students for investigation. If you're unclear on what constitutes an honor code violation, please see the university [policy on academic integrity](#). The unauthorized use of ChatGPT and similar AI tools in an assignment is an academic integrity violation and will be reported to the Dean of Students office.

Students with Disabilities or Special Needs:

Students who have disabilities or special needs should contact NJIT's [Student Disability Services](#) to help procure accommodations in completing coursework.

Other Resources:

There are several writing assignments both big and small for this course, and if you need them, the [Writing Center](#) can provide you with help on every part of the writing process. Also, please don't hesitate to drop by my office hours or send me an email if you're having difficulties. We all need a support network. If you need them, the [Center for Counseling and Psychological Services \(C-CAPS\)](#) in Campbell Hall, Room 205, is available to listen and to help.

Class Schedule and Readings

22 Jan – Class 1: Introduction

27 Jan – Class 2: The Invention of Writing

View in Class: *A to Z: The First Alphabet*

Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (excerpt), Nicholas Carr, "The Vital Paths" from *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*

29 Jan – Class 3: The Written Word

David Olson, "The History of Writing"

3 Feb – Class 4: Transitions

Eisenstein, Chapter 1

5 Feb – Class 5: The Printing Press

Eisenstein, Chapter 2

10 Feb – Class 6: Print Culture

Eisenstein, Chapter 3

12 Feb – Class 7: The Reading Public

Eisenstein, Chapter 4

17 Feb – Class 8: Renaissance

Eisenstein, Chapter 5

19 Feb – Class 9: Reformation

Eisenstein, Chapter 6, Luther Reading

PROPOSAL DEADLINE

24 Feb – Class 10: Scientific Revolution

Eisenstein, Chapter 7

26 Feb – Class 11: Political Revolution

Eisenstein, Chapter 8, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, "What is the Third Estate?"

3 Mar – Class 12: The Typewriter is Mightier than the Sword

Martyn Lyons, "The Birth of the Typosphere" from *The Typewriter Century*

5 Mar – Class 13: The Visual Revolution

Robert Hirsch, "New Ways of Visualizing Time and Space" from *Seizing the Light*

View: "[Faking it. Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop.](#)" Metropolitan Museum of Art

10 Mar – Class 14: Moving Pictures

Daniel J. Czitrom, "American Motion Pictures and the New Popular Culture, from *Media and the American Mind*

View: one video in the Library of Congress's "[Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies](#)" collection.

12 Mar – Class 15: Telegraphy

Tom Standage, "The Mother of All Networks" and "Strange, Fierce Fire," from *The Victorian Internet*; David Hochfelder, "Why the Telegraph was Revolutionary," and "The Promise of Telegraphy" from *The Telegraph in America*

24 Mar – Class 16: The Telephone

Hochfelder, "The Telegraph, The Telephone, and the Logic of Industrial Succession," in in *The Telegraph in America*

Robert MacDougall, "Visions of Telephony" in *The People's Network: The Political Economy of the Telephone in the Gilded Age*

26 Mar – Class 17: Radio

Daniel J. Czitrom, "The Ethereal Hearth: American Radio from Wireless through Broadcasting, 1892-1940," from *Media and the American Mind*

Clive Thompson, "[The Debate Over Net Neutrality Has Its Roots in the Fight Over Radio Freedom](#)," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 2014

Listen: *The Mercury Theatre on Air*, "[The War of the Worlds](#)" 1938 59 minutes.

31 Mar – Class 18: Television

Susan Murray, "And Now—Color: Early Color Systems," from *Bright Signals: A History of Color Television*, Marshall McLuhan, "Television, the Timid Giant" from *Understanding Media*

Watch: [The first television broadcast](#), 1936.

2 Apr – Class 19: The Global Village

Marshall McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (excerpt), "Media Hot and Cold" from *Understanding Media*

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DEADLINE**7 Apr – Class 20: Before the Computer**

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 1-3

9 Apr – Class 21: The Computer 1

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 4-5

14 Apr – Class 22: The Computer 2

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 6-7

16 Apr – Class 23: The Digital World

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 7-9

21 Apr – Class 24: The Personal Computer

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 10-11, Time Magazine, "Machine of the Year: The Computer"

23 Apr – Class 25: Internetworking 1

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 12-13, Matthew Friedman, "The Day the Internet Was Born"

28 Apr – Class 26: Internetworking 2

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 14

Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital*, Introduction and Epilogue

FINAL VIDEO DEADLINE**30 Apr – Class 27: The Networked World and Social Media**

Campbell-Kelly, Chapter 15, Fadi Safieddine, "History of Fake News"

5 May – Wrap-up and Review

CITATION FAQ

What do you need to cite?

Any phrase, sentence or paragraph that you have taken from another source, even if it's a sentence fragment. For example, if you use the phrase "to be or not to be: that is the question," you *must* provide a citation to the relevant page in a published edition of William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. As a general rule, if you are using words that someone else wrote, you *must* cite. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism.

Any information that you found in another source (and isn't common knowledge), even if you paraphrase. For example, if you write something like "almost ten per cent of the adult males in the United States in 1924 were members of the Ku Klux Klan," you have to say where you got that information. If you don't, how do I know that you're not making it up?

As a general rule, you don't have to provide citations for information that we covered in class.

What happens if you don't cite?

It depends. A written assignment that does not reference any sources will receive an automatic zero grade. A written assignment that does reference sources but does not cite them will receive an automatic 50% grade penalty.

If you don't know whether you should cite a passage, quote or information, err on the side of caution and cite it.

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What do you need?

As a general rule, you will need a bibliography page, and footnotes or parenthetical notes in text for all of your references. Please use either the University of Chicago/Turabian citation style or the simplified citation style on the next page.

SUBMISSION POLICY

All written assignments must be submitted to the appropriate link on Canvas on the deadline date. No assignments will be accepted after the deadline, *except with prior arrangement and in the most extreme circumstances*. If you miss a class – and a deadline – due to illness or other excused absence, you *must* inform me and submit the assignment to Canvas. Written assignments *must* be submitted to the appropriate Canvas link (that is, not to the assignment comments, etc.) to receive credit.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

Historians refer to primary and secondary sources. A primary source is a document, speech, or other sort of evidence written, created or otherwise produced during the time under study, or by a participant. Primary sources offer an inside view of a particular event. Secondary sources provide interpretation and analysis of primary sources. Secondary sources are usually (though not always) written by professional historians and are one step removed from the original event.

CITATION BASICS

As a rule, historians cite sources according to the University of Chicago style. If you plan to pursue further studies in history, you will find it advisable to acquire *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Eighth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* by Kate L. Turabian. For the purposes of this course, you may use the simplified guide below.

Book

Bibliography:

Lears, Jackson. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009.

Footnote First Reference:

Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 236.

Footnote Subsequent References:

Lears, 113.

Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 113. (If you cite more than one work by this author.)

Parenthetical Reference: (Lears, 236)

Parenthetical Reference (if you use more than one source by this author): (Lears 2009, 236)

Periodical Article

Bibliography:

Rosenfeld, Sophia. "On Being Heard: A Case for Paying Attention to the Historical Ear." *The American Historical Review* 116 (April 2011): 316-334.

Note that you include the volume number of the journal or publication following the title.

Footnote First Reference:

Sophia Rosenfeld, "On Being Heard: A Case for Paying Attention to the Historical Ear," *The American Historical Review* 116, April 2011, 317.

Footnote Subsequent References:

Rosenfeld, 318.

Rosenfeld, "On Being Heard," 320.

Parenthetical Reference: As with books.

In the case of class readings where you do not have the book or journal title or publication information, simply cite sources with the information that you do have. For example:

Elias Hill, "Testimony to Congress Regarding the Ku Klux Klan" (1871), 1., and Elliott West, "Land," 15.