



COM 390-101 Electronic Writing Workshop Course Outline and Syllabus

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Office Hours: W/F 11:30-12:30
Classroom: GITC 2400
Term: Spring 2024

Course Description and Objectives

Course Prerequisites: Successfully completing HSS 101 and HSS 102
This class will meet for formal critiques and discussions on Wednesdays and Fridays between 10:00 and 11:20 pm.

Instructional Objectives

*As Theodor Nelson notes in his influential early study of hypertext formats, *Literary Machines*, “a computer is essentially a trained squirrel: acting on reflex, thoughtlessly running back and forth and storing nuts away until some other stimulus makes it do something else;” nonetheless, few tools beyond computation have provided literature and its many genres with the substantial capacity to fundamentally change the foundations of modern literacy. On one level, this course aims to explore the growing intersections between art, information, and computation, which in turn inspire a diverse array of new, often experimental directions in digital writing. Examining a range of exemplary programmable literary works currently circulating, while tracing their historical roots to pre-digital culture, will offer valuable starting points for ongoing critical analysis and discussion. On another, more production-focused level, the course encourages us to work with these technologies as creative artists and thinkers, calling on you to represent a new generation of authors and readers. Participants will have the opportunity to develop a selection of screen-oriented literary projects, utilizing a broad array of digital tools and software designed for electronic art and writing, many of which were created within the last 3-5 years. Building on these foundations, the class will investigate the transformative influence of digital technology on writing practices and literary forms. We will consider how electronic environments not only alter the way texts are distributed and read but also fundamentally change the nature of composition, narrative, and reader engagement. Throughout the course, students will cultivate both critical and practical skills in analyzing and creating electronic literature.*

Course Requirements

Participation:	10%
Formal Critiques (4x5)	20%
Electronic Writing Projects (5 x 10)	50%
Final Exam: Oral Participation	20%

Learning Objectives:

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

- Historicize electronic literature by learning the pre-digital roots of e-lit and expertly showing how historic works have continued to influence contemporary digital creative experiments.
- Expertly analyze each other's programmable texts through critical frameworks we'll study together in class. Students will learn how to successfully evaluate narrative structure, materiality, and reader agency in a concise brief critical paper following each creative work.
- Build literary prototypes using tools like Twine and p5.js, each showing a distinct computational approach, which means that the work is somehow rule-based, possibly database-driven, and may even contain generative material.
- Improve critical skills in reading creative literary work by assigning each of the five prototypes to two to three different readers working as a group; they will analyze feedback, develop a possible revision plan addressing how to improve the reading/playing work, its accessibility, and the use of multimodal elements.
- Build with scholarly reflection a polished portfolio with an artist statement (250 words max.) theorizing how technology transforms writing and reading practices and possibly literacy itself. The statement can also formally acknowledge the artists and ideas that influenced their development of their own approaches.

Each assignment provides creative and scholarly skills based in the following six areas: 1. historicization, 2. analysis, 3. building, 4. UX, 5. Ethics, 6. Publishing with Support.

Detailed Description of Course Assignments

Attendance and Participation:

Each class will offer students the opportunity to engage simultaneously in both a workshop and a seminar environment. The workshop portions of these classes enable students to engage with and actively use sound production technologies. My pedagogy emphasizes a learner-active approach to in-class assignments,

where I hope *learners* lead discussions in class, taking on the role of the instructor. Learners are encouraged to introduce material and ideas they believe are relevant to the topic.

Absences due to illness must be confirmed a minimum of **4 hours** before class by email to avoid penalty. In-class activities and general participation will account for **10 marks** and will be based on both the frequency, relevance, and general quality of the learner's comments, questions, and observations. More than **6 unexcused absences (6 weeks of the curriculum)** will result in automatic failure of the course; excessive unexcused lateness of **15 minutes** or more throughout the course will be considered as **one absence**. Learners who expect to miss classes or exams because of religious observance or athletic events must submit to their instructors a written list of dates that will be missed by the end of the third week of classes. Learners are expected to make up missed work to receive full or partial marks.

- **If a class cannot be attended for any reason other than physical illness, I must be notified a minimum of one day before the class is scheduled to enable me to prepare alternative access to the same material.**
- **Extra time to complete individual assignments must be petitioned a minimum of one week (7 days) before the assignment is due.**
- **Assignment drafts or requests for assignment-specific advice must arrive a minimum of 9 days before the assignment's due date if extra help is to be delivered in a timely fashion.**

Alternative submission access for late assignments and extra course material will be provided for each graded task; however, late assignments and missed classes that occur outside these guidelines will be penalized. Late assignments will be penalized by deducting **10 percent** of the task's course value up to 1 week after the submission date. Late assignments will be penalized by deducting **20 percent** of the task's course value from 8 days to 2 weeks after the submission date. Late assignments will be penalized by deducting **50 percent** of the task's course value from 15 days to 4 weeks after the submission date. Assignments missing for more than 4 weeks will not be accepted. No late assignment will receive commentary supplementary to its graded evaluation.

Proper and accepted communication guidelines serve to minimize the risk of penalty in terms of grading as well as critical commentary. Compromising your access to resources, including the time you may need to complete each assignment, can be seriously incapacitating, preventing you from learning the actual skills and approaches required to understand the course material. This will remain a very serious risk throughout the term. Providing information as early as possible concerning any challenges you are facing this term will enable me to work with you more effectively and conceivably prevent the assigned work from overtaking your abilities. Losing access to the course material and my assistance strongly risks a withdrawal or a grade of F by the end of the term.

Learner success in this course demands consistent access and proper use of these electronic resources is the student's responsibility, as it is assumed that their general availability is constant, 24/7. If technical problems with the software or any specific interface occur during the course, it is up to the student to contact either the professor or one of the IT/Help resources associated with the website as quickly as possible.

Electronic Writing Projects

Five different writing projects, each one designed around distinct electronic/programmable tools and some of the themes and debates about creative writing that these technologies often generate, will comprise the bulk of the assigned and assessed work. The coursework has been organized to provide an overview of multimedia formats in literature as their technical complexity and sophistication as digital works of art continue to evolve.

Course Syllabus

Assignment	Description	Course Value
Participation	Active engagement in class discussions and activities	10 marks
Creative Projects	1. Analog Surreal Systems: Cut-Ups, Corpses, & Constraints Your project will show certain predigital methods that already problematize authorship, randomness, control, and material use. Create a 5 page chapbook using at least two techniques: cut-up/collage, exquisite corpse, chance operations (dice/I Ching), or “Oulipian” constraints. Use only recycled/second-hand materials. Add a one-page “system card” that specifies rules, variables, and constraints.	10 marks
	2. Storytelling as Rules → Branching Agency This project will ask you to build a Link/Node work of interactive fiction. We’ll use gaming/walk thru software like Twine, allowing you to build 10 to 20 linked passages, using variables, conditional links, and state (inventory, timers, or flags), building a narrative that can be interactive with the reader/player. The assignment should not only be text, but also well designed with other media, like photos or audio. Test & revise: 3 readers test it and write short critiques that survey and assess its accessibility.	10 marks

Assignment	Description	Course Value
	<p>3. “Sketching” CodingGenerative Imagery/Sound: Parametric Screen Art using openprocessing tools like p5.js or RiTa: This project will show us how art and sound/music can be generated with minimal coding expertise by using readymade coding tools like p5.js or RiTa. These languages come with ready-built processors that can be easily copied and changed, teaching us how procedural and parametric instructions can produce powerful screen effects, while teaching us the basics of coding. We’ll start here: https://openprocessing.org/</p>	10 marks
	<p>4. Experiential Play as Learning and Role-Playing Games.</p> <p>This assignment will have you work in small teams of three to create a short, safe, out-of-class RPG for campus play. Your game can even include non-class participants to help you build an experience and reflect on a real-world system such as campus logistics, data privacy, campus soundscapes, resource accessibility). The game should cultivate what we call “situated understanding,” where playing and acting can produce creative expression, while providing opportunities for critical reflection.</p>	10 marks
	<p>5. Smart Phones and Storytelling Tools</p> <p>This final creative work will ask you to re-imagine your own mobile devices and the use of text messaging as an effective tool for creating text message fiction.</p>	10 marks

Assignment	Description	Course Value
Critical Response Forums	<p>Four Forums drafted in class with live Discuss & Response sessions. Each Forum will be worth 5 marks and will typically use assigned readings for a 2-page summary of your critiques</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critical comparison of the “system card” that specifies the rules, variables, and constraints of the creative work 2. Critical Assessment of a Colleague’s Twine story: (500 words or two pages max.) linking the strengths and issues you see in how the link and node narrative helps increase reader agency. 3. Critical paper exploring how useful coding systems/and templates provided by tools like Open Processing for teaching coding 4. Critical paper that discusses whether experiential play can help us develop better creative work. Interactive processes might be brought in as a sub-topic: Is the era of passive reading and viewing over? 	20 marks
Final Exam	ORAL EXAMS	20 marks
Total Course	Sum of all assignments	100 marks

Due dates and resource information are listed in the syllabus

All written assignments should conform to the guidelines for presentation set out in the class. Any evaluative or critical papers should be submitted in accordance with the MLA style sheet as laid out in the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. The correct use of sources and their proper documentation remains a crucial factor in the grading schema.

Course Policy on the Use of AI Content Generators for *Formal Critiques* Only

Student use of artificial intelligence (AI) is permitted in this course for certain assignments and activities. It is not permitted to be used in the following assignments, as doing so would undermine student learning and achievement of course learning outcomes, numbered as above 2. analysis, 3. building, 4. UX, 5. Ethics. Additionally, if and when students use AI in this course, the AI must be cited as is shown within the NJIT Library AI citation page for AI. If you have any questions or concerns about AI technology use in this class, please reach out to your instructor prior to submitting any assignments.

Course Rubric

A = 90-100	B+ = 87-89	B = 80-86	C+ = 77-79	C = 70-76	D = 60-69	F = 0 – 59
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Syllabus Outline

Date	Topics/Projects	Due Dates, Assignments and Readings
Week 1 Sept. 3-5	<p style="text-align: center;">Artifice and Intelligence: An Introduction to Electronic Creative Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Introduction: Electronic concepts on reading, writing, and clicking in the digital and post-digital era 	<p style="text-align: center;">No Reading Assignment</p>
Week 2 Sept. 10-12	<p style="text-align: center;">Analog Surreal Systems: Cut-Ups, Corpses, & Constraints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The constraints of reality as datasets and knowledge Datasets and aesthetics Using datamining tools 	<p>Literary Readings: Selected concrete poems, infoaesthetic technologies; See Canvas site</p> <p>Begin Project 1: Visualizing Language: Begin Chapbooks (Due Week 4)</p>
Week 3 Sept. 17-19	<p style="text-align: center;">Form and Function: An Introduction to Visual Meaning in Writing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Concrete and Visual Poetics</p> <p>Roundtable Discussions: Infoaesthetics and Visualization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative Experiments using Maps, Charts, Graphs and Genealogies, and Datamining tools. How do we compare visual or concrete poetics and digital poetics? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Project 1 Workshop</p>
Week 4 Sept. 24-26	<p style="text-align: center;">Patterns in Language: Making the Patterns Concrete as Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showcase Project One In-class critiques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project 1 Due Showcase Project 1 Formal Critique for Project 1 (Due week 5)

<p>Week 5 Oct. 1-3</p>	<p>Hypertexts: Textuality and Link as a literary device</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted Nelson and the Network as a Readership <p>Introduction to Twine and Network-Based Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Twine as an IF platform • Twine Basics Using CSS/JS in Twine 	<p>Literary Readings: Interactive texts and games provided in class</p> <p>Critical Readings: Harvey, Alison (2014), "Twine's Revolution: Democratization, depoliticization, and the queering of game design." Moulthrop, Stuart (2020), "Twine and the Challenge to Reading." E-lit perspective on how Twine's link-logic reshapes reading practices and literary criticism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Critique 1 Due • Project 2: Take me to your Reader: Experiments in Interactive Fiction (IF) (Due Week 7)
<p>Week 6 Oct. 8-10</p>	<p>Electronic Literary Genres: New Interfaces, New Interactivities</p> <p>Roundtable Discussion: Rhizomatic Thinking: The Reader as Writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From hypertext to StorySpace to the Web • Discuss critical readings and ask ourselves whether the print novel is now obsolete. What is your reading time in comparison to your game playing? 	<p>Literary Readings: (Interactive Fiction and Gaming Narratives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2 Workshop
<p>Week 7 Oct. 15-17</p>	<p>Designing Responsive Modes of Writing</p> <p>Roundtable Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens to literacy and textuality when books, interactive storytelling, and even games all seem to unify into a single new form of reading and writing. 	<p>Literary Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2 Due • Showcase Project 2 • Begin Formal Critique 2 (Due Week 10)

<p>Week 8 Oct. 22-24</p>	<p>Literary and Poetic Machines</p> <p>Procedure and Immersion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roots of Procedural Poetry: Potential Literature: from the poetry of Jackson Mac Low to OuLiPo to ???? • Computational Literacy <p>Generative Writing and the Culture of Indeterminacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Algorithm as Author • Remixed Readings • OpenProcessing and Learning Simple coding techniques as a new poetics 	<p>Literary Readings: (Generated Fiction) Selected Experimental Narratives; Selections from Milton Laufer, <i>A Noise Such as a Man Might Make</i> (Counterpath, 2018) Ractor, <i>Policeman’s Beard</i>, (1984)</p> <p>Critical Readings: Daniel C. Howe. “RiTa: Creativity Support for Computational Literature”</p> <p>Blair Subbaraman, S. Shim, and N. Peek, “Forking a Sketch: How the OpenProcessing Community Uses Remixing to Collect, Annotate, Tune, and Extend Creative Code”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin Project 3: The Algorithm as Author: Experiments in Generated/AI Narratives (Due Week 11)
<p>Week 9 Oct.29-31</p>	<p>Gaming and Metagaming</p> <p>Roundtable Discussion: Building Strategies for Interactive Fiction and Text Games</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaming and Rule-based Social Interaction • Text Gaming from Zork to MUD • AI and Text Gaming 	<p>Critical Readings: Aaron A. Reed, “Zork, Pirate Adventure, The Cave of Time” from <i>50 Years of Text Games</i> (92-123) Aaron A. Reed “AI Dungeon by Nick Walton” from <i>50 Years of Text Games</i> (589-599)</p> <p>Literary Readings: Luka Rejec, “Holy Mountain Shaker” (2021) Nick Walton “AI Dungeon” (2023)</p>
<p>Week 10 Nov. 5-7</p>	<p>Roundtable Discussion: Social Play and Community Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can RPGs help build strong social relationships? What are the social benefits and challenges of communities that might emerge from gaming and roleplaying? 	<p>Critical Readings: Alejandro Ponce de Leon: <i>Architectural Soundscapes as a model for Project 4</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Critique 2 Due • Begin Project 4: Interactive Play using Role-Playing Game Models (Due Week 13)

<p>Week 11 Nov. 12-14</p>	<p>Experiments in Performance and Haptic Technologies</p> <p>Roundtable Discussion: Inter/tactile Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Netprov • Time and Interactivity • XR and Apple Vision Pro: Spatial Computing and RPG 	<p>Critical Readings: Rob Wittig, “IntThe Impulse to Fiction” from <i>Netprov Networked Improvised Literature for the Classroom and Beyond</i> (Amherst College Press, 2022) _____, “Literature and Netprov in Social Media” from <i>Bloomsbury Handbook</i> (2018).</p> <p>Begin Formal Critique 3 (Due Week 13)</p>
<p>Week 12 Nov. 19-21</p>	<p>New Technologies = New Art Forms</p> <p>Roundtable Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcase Project 4 • Discuss SMS texting as a form of fiction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 4 Due • Begin Project 5: SMS Fiction (Due Week 15)
<p>Week 13 Nov. 26</p>	<p>Participatory Culture and Literary Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media, Mobile Telephony and Writing 	<p>Literary Readings: Selected Texting or Chat Stories; See Canvas site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Critique 3 Due • Project 5 Workshop • Begin Formal Critique 4 (Due Week 15)
<p>Week 14 Dec. 3-5</p>	<p>Portfolios and Class Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on Portfolio Design • Showcase submitted Texting Stories <p>New Art Forms Emerging in GenAI and Immersive Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Complex Relationship between Communication Technology – Is a new art form emerging? 	<p>Critical Readings: Laura Santini. “The Short Form Reshaped: Email, Blog, SMS, and MSN in Twenty-First Century E-pistolary Novels.” (December 2019) DOI: 10.13136/2281-4582/2019.i14.714</p> <p>Lukcas, G. “DREAMWORK: Cell Phone Novelists, Labor, and Politics in Contemporary Japan. <i>Cultural Anthropology</i>, 28: 44-64. (2013) https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2012.01172.x</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 5 Due • Formal Critique 4 Due
<p>Week 15 Dec. 10</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 min Oral Presentations with Artist Statement • Final Exams During Exam Week/TBA