

TR 2:00 – 3:15
TR 3:30 – 4:45

Professor Uselmann
Palmer 310
uselmanns@rhodes.edu
office hrs: MW 3-5

English 151: Critical Thinking and Writing in the Age of Information

“The Medium is the Message.” This catch phrase was coined by Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), a Canadian scholar of modern communication, who contended that the way in which a message was communicated determined the way it would be perceived. According to McLuhan, the specific medium — whether print, television, radio, visual means, etc. — shapes both the information *and* the audience to whom it is transmitted. Do you agree with McLuhan’s statement? What does this statement mean in an age of so many messages and so many types of media?

Welcome to English 151. This course is designed to make you read, write and think on the college level. More than that, it is designed to force you to ask questions about reading and writing that will serve you throughout your college career, no matter what your major. McLuhan’s statement about the power of media has become an important part of the way we think about and experience information: behind every bit of information we receive is a writer and an audience.

The notion that writers can persuade is fairly obvious when we read essays or see an advertisement, but ‘writing’ can also mean something broader, for ‘writers’ can combine words, images and/or music to do the same. One might even argue that *everything* you encounter — from cereal boxes to street signs — may be trying to convince you of something. That is, that everything’s an argument.

But what’s the difference between providing information and trying to convince someone of an argument? In our society, the easiest place to look for an answer to this question is the most pervasive form of persuasive discourse: the media. Communications is a multibillion dollar industry. The average American spends over three hours a day watching TV, and in the average home the TV is on over seven hours a day. Politics, once the purview of only a few, are now a central focus of the mass media.

But just what is the role of the media? We know that media have had a profound impact on our society, but we have barely begun to understand why or how these changes are happening. In this class, we will explore others’ and devise our own arguments about media’s role in society to determine whether McLuhan was right when he said that “the medium is the message.”

In short, good writing begins with good reading. In reading how information is presented to us every day, we will focus on developing the following:

- Locating and summarizing arguments
- Principles of writing and revising essays
- Finding, analyzing, and synthesizing information from texts
- Adapting and writing for an audience
- Presenting arguments orally

To work on these skills, you will produce four major papers as well as a number of shorter essays and writing assignments over the course of the semester.

Course Outline

The course will be divided into three units. At the end of each unit, you will be expected to hand in a **portfolio** of all the work you have done in each unit. The portfolio is designed to highlight your writing process rather than simply the end result. It will include all drafts, reader/writer sheets, smaller assignments, and a cover letter explaining how your essay has changed from draft to draft and why. Below

is a brief overview of the major writing assignments. More specific information will be distributed throughout the semester.

Unit 1: The “Me” in Media. This unit is designed to help you discover the components of effective argumentation and develop your own perspective of how various media operate in our society. We will discuss the terms of the debate over the media’s role in society and explore different ways to approach this issue. There are two essays in this unit – the first is an ad analysis (2 pp.) designed to help you develop a debatable thesis. The second essay (4-6 pp.) asks you to analyze a ‘text’ that you are familiar with in the terms set out by this debate, discover its argument and help your classmates to do the same. **The final portfolio for unit 1 is due on Tuesday Oct. 5.**

Unit 2: The Media and Society. Building on the skills you have developed in unit one, in unit two you will enter the debate more overtly by conducting research on a particular question that deals with the role of media in society. You will write a proposal for your paper (2 pp.), an analysis of one of your sources (2 pp.) and a research paper (8-10 pp.) that may include primary as well as secondary research. This unit will also have an oral component, where you and your classmates will be expected participate in a debate that you have designed together. **The final portfolio for unit 2 is due Monday, Nov. 22.**

Unit 3: In the ‘I’ of the Storm. The final unit asks you to put into practice your knowledge of the issues and strategies you have learned about throughout the semester. We will focus on the choices made by particular print media, such as advertisements, magazines and newspapers and you will be asked to assume the persona of your favorite magazine. What does it feel like to write from the inside, subject to the unpredictable whims of your readers? To find out, you will first analyze your magazine and its readership (3 pp.), and then write an article or editorial that convinces your readers of a point that they would not normally be willing to accept. Your article (4-6 pp.) will need to accommodate the interests of your readers and speak in a voice they are accustomed to, but also stay true to its goal. **The final portfolio for unit 3 is due on Friday, Dec. 10.**

Course Structure

The class meets two times a week in seminar format. Roughly a third of the time is devoted to discussing **assigned readings**. In these discussions, you will be expected to raise questions, pose problems, and interpret what you have read, as well as challenge each other. In addition to the **formal papers** and **in-class discussion**, you will be required to complete **shorter essays** and several **written assignments** throughout the semester. You should also expect short **quizzes** on the reading assignments. All of these elements will factor into your final grade, and more importantly, they are all crucial to your becoming a better writer.

Much of your class time will be spent working on writing within the context of small group **workshops**. During small-group sessions, you will learn how to respond to drafts in various stages of development. “Peer review” means that you bring in a paper, with copies for all of your group members, and exchange it so that they can read it and comment on it before the scheduled ‘workshop’ day. On this day, you will receive both oral and written feedback from your classmates, who will suggest specific strategies for revision. Please note that revision is NOT proofreading (though I expect you to do that as well). When you revise a paper, you have to ask yourself difficult ‘author questions,’ like:

- What am I trying to say?
- Is what I’m saying interesting?
- How could I structure my essay more effectively?

Please Note: Painful as it may be, you should realize now that answering these questions may involve hacking out entire pages or paragraphs, and very often starting over. Revision can be (and in my experience *is*) the hardest part of writing, but it is also the most important, and it is what will make the biggest difference. In fact, the willingness to let your ideas develop to the point of having to start over is one of the surest marks of your growth as a writer.

Course Requirements

Attendance:

Since English 151 focuses so much on workshops, you must come to class every day, prepared and on time. Your classmates depend on you. If one person is absent or comes without a draft, it wrecks the workshop for all of the people who are there. Obviously, this is not fair for you to do to your classmates.

To reinforce good habits, the English 151 attendance policy is tough:

- 2 absences? No questions asked.
- 3 or 4 absences? Semester grade lowered half a letter (B to B-, in other words)
- 5 or 6 absences? Grade lowered a whole letter (B to C)
- More than 6 absences will result in failure of the course.

You will be marked absent if:

1. you are not present
2. you do not have the required draft on a peer review day
3. you do not have copies for your group
4. you are more than 10 minutes late
5. you are (less than 10 minutes late) 3 times

Obviously, there will be days then you are sick or don't make it to class – you should factor these in ahead of time. Students are responsible for all work due to a missed absence. **Should a crisis arise, please keep me informed.** Special arrangements can be made when necessary.

Individual Conferences:

In addition to the papers, assignments, oral presentations, and active participation in group and class discussions, there are other requirements for English 151:

- You will meet **twice with me** in the course of the semester, which we will schedule later. These will count as class, so missing one will mean an absence.
- You will also be required to meet **at least twice** with your **Writing Fellow** to discuss questions on particular essays, and/or strategies for revision. Your Writing Fellow is:
 - 2:00 - 3:15 Lisa Ulevich
 - 3:30 - 4:45 Jeta Donovan

Please keep in mind that individual conferences are typically the best way to help you become a better writer. These meetings are required, so that missing one of them will count as an absence and may ultimately affect your grade.

Email:

If you miss a class, or you just want to communicate with your classmates, feel free to send a message to the entire class:

2:00 – 3:15: 10261@rhodes.edu

3:30 – 4:45: 10262@rhodes.edu

Several times throughout the semester you will be required to send an email to the class as part of an assignment, but you should also feel free to send any announcements about upcoming events you'd like the class to know about.

Written Work and the Honor Code:

Students are required to complete the major essays as described above, as well as response papers and any smaller written assignments assigned in class. You must submit all assignments to meet the criteria of the course. All written work must, of course, be your own; turning in a plagiarized paper, no matter how well-written, is unacceptable and may result in failure of the course. You are responsible for knowing and following the **Rhodes honor code**. If you are ever unsure if you might be violating the code, please contact me or another professor to find out.

Grading:

You will be graded at the end of each unit on the work you have done overall (see above, under 'course structure'). The bulk of this grade will, of course, stem from your essay, but it will also include your smaller assignments and written feedback given to your peer group.

Your grade breaks down as follows:

Unit 1 portfolio	20%
Essay #1 = 5%	
Essay #2 = 15%	
Unit 2 portfolio	35%
Unit 3 portfolio	25%
Written assignments, quizzes	10%
Class discussion, workshops	10%

Make sure you have the following:

1. The required textbook, *Everything's an Argument*.
2. A two-pocket folder (for handing in portfolio units).
3. A good system for compiling all the handouts and organizing your assignments. There will be papers, papers, and more papers handed out in this class.
4. Access to a copier (for making xeroxes of materials for your group or for the class). Keep in mind that the library allows you to print out 800 sheets of paper/year for free; after this point they will begin to charge.

Course Syllabus

(as with everything in this class, this schedule is subject to revision)

Week 1

R 8/26

Introduction to argument and Unit 1 debate

The case: Is the medium really the message?

 The Plaintiff (text 1): Neil Postman, "The Age of Show Business"

 The Defendant (text 2): Edwin Diamond, "Agenda Setting" and Other Myths of Media Power"

Week 2

T 8/31

Due: "On Summary"

 Summary of texts 1 and 2

 Advertisement Exercise

Mapping the rhetorical situation

Discussion of summaries/advertisements

Introduction to argument analysis, part 1: problems and thesis statements

R 9/2

Due: *Everything's an Argument*, Chapters 4-7

Types of argument

Introduction to argument analysis, part 2: ethos, pathos, logos

Week 3

T 9/7

Due: "Treating Evidence"

 "The High School Essay v. The College Essay"

Atlantic Monthly

R 9/9

Due: Essay #1

Atlantic Monthly

Discuss Essay #2

Week 4

T 9/14

Due: *Atlantic Monthly*
Neil Postman, "Media as Epistemology"
Argument Analysis Worksheet
Media and the Arts: Literature, Music and the Visual Arts

R 9/16

Due: *EA*, Chapter 9: Arguments of Definition
Worksheet on "Observing the Ordinary"
Atlantic Monthly

Week 5

*** Don't forget to sign up for conferences over the next two weeks ***

T 9/21

Due: 1st draft of Essay #2 (bring enough copies for your group, me, and, if necessary, your Writing Fellow)
Handout, "On Revision"
Introduction to revision and "readerly" response

R 9/23

Due: Comments on group #1
Developing Your Analysis/Thesis
Workshop

Week 6

T 9/28

Due: (Substantially revised) draft #2 of essay
Strategies for Organization
Workshop

R 9/30

Due: Comments on group #2
Introductions and Conclusions
Workshop

Week 7

T 10/5

*** **DUE: UNIT 1 PORTFOLIO** ***
Introduction to Unit 2
Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media

R 10/7

Library Session – Meet at Burrow Library
Due: Sample Research paper
"Discovering a Good Topic" (Freewrite)
→ post possible topics to class email list by the end of today

Sat 10/9

*** **DUE:** responses to classmates' topics (see assignment packet, p. 4)

Week 8

T 10/12

Due: Library Orientation worksheet
Readings in Response to Chomsky
Theories of the Media: Noam Chomsky and his opponents

R 10/14

Due: Exercise on Readers
EA, chapter 21: Assessing and Using Sources
Choice of article for source analysis paper
Atlantic Monthly
Gallery of ideas
Moving from topic to issue

Week 9

T 10/19

NO CLASS – Fall Break

R 10/21

Due: “What is Analysis?”

Source analysis essay (see assignment packet, pp. 5-6)

Atlantic Monthly

The Art of Rhetorical Invention

Week 10

T 10/26

Due: “Citing and Analyzing your Research”

EA, ch. 17 (“Spoken Arguments”) and ch. 20 (“Intellectual Property”)

Think piece #1: Invention via analogy

Atlantic Monthly

Moving from Questions to Problems

Analyzing Research

R 10/28

Due: Proposal and annotated bibliography

Think piece #2: Invention via testimony

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Week 11

T 11/2

Due: Think piece #3: Invention via consequence

ORAL PRESENTATIONS (Finish)

Don't forget to sign up for conferences over the next two weeks

R 11/4

Due: *EA*, chapters 10-12 (also review ch. 9)

Response paper: when the stakes are small

Types of claims and subclaims

Organizing your essay

Week 12

T 11/9

Due: First draft of research essay (bring 3 copies)

Review: types of claims, organizing claims

Analyzing evidence and developing claims

Workshop draft #1 with partner

R 11/11

Due: 2nd draft of research essay (bring 3 copies)

EA chapter 19: Fallacies of Argument

Reverse Outline

Argumentative Fallacies

Week 13

T 11/16

Due: 3rd draft of research essay (bring 3 copies)

Introductions and Conclusions

Review of claims: ‘Round Robin’ workshop

R 11/18

Due: Comments on introduction and conclusion of partner’s essay

EA, chapter 22: Documenting Sources

Reverse outline and ‘flow’

Discuss Unit 3 and Final Essay

Week 14

Monday 11/22 *** PORTFOLIO #2 DUE by 5:00 in the cardboard box outside my office door ***

T 11/23 – R 11/25 NO CLASS – Thanksgiving

Week 15

T 11/30 **Due:** 1st draft of essay
Magazine/Audience Analysis
Organizing Claims of Proposal
Workshop draft #1

R 12/2 **Due:** EA chapters 13-15
Humorous, Stylish and Visual Arguments
Workshop #2

Week 16

T 12/7 **Due:** Draft #2
You name it.
Workshop: Grading Exercise

Friday 12/10 *** PORTFOLIO #3 DUE by 5:00 in the cardboard box outside my office door ***