Early authors like Chaucer, Dante and Malory wrote texts that we read routinely as great classics of literature, but their texts would be virtually unrecognizable to them today. Before the advent of the printing press, books were handmade objects that were read aloud and treasured as works of art and symbols of knowledge. In this course we will look at how early texts survived major transitions in the history of the book and how these transitions may have influenced our own view of them today. We will be focusing on two main cultural events: first, the so-called shift from orality to literacy; and second, the idea of the book itself and the use of print as a mode of literary production. In the process, we will also explore how approaches to early literature illuminate our own ideas about literature, language and forms of knowledge.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:
Course Reader (CR)
Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Penguin) 0-14-044114-X
Dante, *Vita Nuova*, ed. Mark Musa (Oxford World Classics) 0-19-283935-7

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

*Class Participation, Quizzes, In-Class Writing.* This class comes with a heavy and difficult reading load and will be run primarily in a discussion format. It goes without saying that I expect you to come prepared with your book and having done the assigned reading for the day. Regular, active participation is also required, although I will periodically give quizzes or informal writing assignments in class to help boost the grade of those who feel they haven’t had a chance to contribute.

*WebCT postings:* This is a WebCT course. As part of your class participation, you will be required to respond to the readings by posing a question or series of questions to the class at least TEN (10) times over the course of the semester. The questions are due by **3:00 p.m. on the Monday before class**.

At times I will offer prompts to help guide your responses, but you are not required to answer these. I encourage you to explore your own reactions. The response should be in the form of a question(s) that struck you as you read – for example some incident, passage, framing device, etc. that struck you as strange, unfamiliar, or problematic. The best responses are those that engage with the primary text and draw on or complicate the week’s reading in literary criticism/theory.

*Group-Led Discussion and Response Paper on Literary Criticism/Theory.* Each week, in addition to the primary texts, you will be also be reading secondary sources. These readings address core theoretical concepts considered central to understanding texts written before the age of print, and as such are designed to help you refine your questions about not only the texts themselves but also issues of art and literature in general. Each member of the class (together with a partner[s]) will be responsible for presenting TWICE on
these readings. **Choose only ONE of these on which to write a response paper.** This assignment is 10% of your final grade, and consists of three parts:

1. After reading the article assigned for the day, post a brief summary (250 words or less) to WebCT **by the Tuesday before your presentation.** You and your partner(s) will write this summary together.
2. Design and lead a 15-minute discussion in class. Here, you and your partner(s) might introduce the most salient concepts to the class and/or ask them questions about the day’s reading that struck you as a result of your supplementary reading. You might also choose to focus on a particularly interesting passage that you think illuminates or complicates the article the class has read. Be sure to email me to let me know your plans **by the Tuesday before your presentation.**
3. Write a 2 pg. response paper analyzing the article. This is your own work, to be done apart from your group work. The essay is not intended to be formal, but it will count as part of your grade for this assignment, and so should be clearly written and organized around a core question or set of questions – even if you decide not to provide an answer to these questions (i.e. a central thesis). The essay is **due 1 week following your presentation.**

All three parts must be completed in order to receive a passing grade on the assignment. If you have any questions about the readings or the assignment, or just want to run some ideas past me, please don’t hesitate to email or come by to see me.

**Essays.** There will be 2 critical essays and a research paper. In the two critical essays, you will be expected to balance a thoughtful and in-depth reading of a text with an ability to integrate the theoretical articles we have read. In the research paper, you will be expected to design your own topic (which may or may not be based on themes or concepts we have discussed in class). You will hand in a proposal that explores your initial observations, introduces the main question(s) you wish to answer and the conceptual issues at stake. It will include an annotated bibliography that details the sources you have already read.

**Absences.** Regular, punctual attendance is required. Arriving more than 15 minutes late three times counts as an absence. Failure to bring your book to class or to pass the day’s quiz also counts as an absence. Absences for extracurricular activities, religious holidays, or illness may be excused as long as you have contacted me in advance and completed the necessary homework/make-up work on time. You are allowed two (2) absences free-of-charge; each additional absence will cost your **final course average** two tenths of a point. If you miss more than 6 classes, you will fail the course.

**Late Paper Policy.** There will be NO extensions on any assignments in this class. Instead, you will be allotted three (3) “free” days at the beginning of the semester, which you may use when and as you wish. Each day is worth 24 hours (e.g. a paper due on Thurs. may be handed in by Fri. at 10:45), and you are free to use them up all at once or space them throughout the semester. It’s up to you, but be aware that once these three days are used up, your letter grade on any given essay will drop 1/3 grade **for each day it is late.**

**Grading.**
Class participation, quizzes, informal/in-class writing assignments and e-postings: 10%
Group-Led Discussion, Summary and Response Essay: 10%
Two Critical Essays (5-7 pp. each): 40%
Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 5%
Research Essay (10-14 pp.): 35%

**Honor Code.** All work must adhere to the honor code.

**Questions, problems, or concerns?** Please always feel free to contact me. Most difficulties can be prevented from becoming serious problems fairly easily -- if the professor knows about them in advance.
# Unit 1: Orality v. Literacy

## Week 1

**R 1/13**  
Introduction

## Week 2

**T 1/18**  
Homer, *Odyssey* I-IX

**R 1/20**  
*Odyssey*, c’tued

Presentation #1:  Walter Ong, “Some Psychodynamics of Orality”  
Albert Lord, “Singers, Performances and Training”

## Week 3

**T 1/25**  
*Odyssey* X-XIX

**R 1/27**  
*Odyssey*, c’tued

Presentation #2:  Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’s Scar”

## Week 4

**T 2/1**  
*Odyssey* XIX-XXIV  
Bede, *A History*, Ch. 23-25 (CR)  

**R 2/3**  
Bede and Cynewulf, c’tued

Presentation #3:  Wolfgang Iser, “Fictionalizing Acts”

## Week 5

**T 2/8**  
*Beowulf*

**R 2/10**  
*Beowulf*, c’tued

Presentation #4:  Paul Zumthor, “The Text and the Voice”

**Draft of Essay #1 DUE**

## Week 6

**T 2/15**  
Plato, *Phaedrus*

**R 2/17**  
Plato, *Republic* VII (CR)  
Plato, c’tued

Presentation #5:  Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy”  
**Essay #1 DUE**

## Week 7

**T 2/22**  
Augustine, *Confessions* I-VI

**R 2/24**  
Augustine, c’tued

Presentation #6:  L. Wittgenstein, “Meaning and Understanding”  
Walter Ong, “Writing Restructures Consciousness”

## Week 8

**T 3/1**  
*Confessions* VII-XI

**R 3/3**  
*Confessions*, c’tued

Presentation #7:  Paul Ricoeur “The Aporias of the Experience of Time”

**3/8-3/10**  
NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
Unit 2: The Idea of the Book

Week 9
T 3/15  Dante, *Vita Nuova*
Presentation #8: Marshall McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*
R 3/17  Dante, c'tued
Presentation #9: Culler, “Poetics of the Lyric”
Essay #2 DUE

Week 10
Presentation #10
R 3/24  NO CLASS – Easter Break

Week 11
T 3/29  Chaucer, *General Prologue*
Chaucer, *Knight’s Tale*
R 3/31  Chaucer, c’tued
Presentation #11: Foucault, “What is an Author?”
Fish, “Interpreting the *Variorum*”
DUE: Research proposal and annotated bibliography

Week 12
T 4/5  Chaucer: Miller, Reeve, Cook
R 4/7  Chaucer, c’tued
Presentation #12: Bakhtin, “The Dialogic Imagination”
J. L. Austin, “Performance Utterances”

Week 13
T 4/12  Chaucer: Wife of Bath, Clerk, Franklin
R 4/14  Chaucer, c’tued
Presentation #13: Lyotard, “The Postmodern Condition”

Unit 3: The Transition to Print Culture

Week 14
T 4/19  Malory, Caxton’s Preface, pp. 528-530
Malory
R 4/21  Malory
Presentation #14: Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

Week 15
T 4/26  Malory
Research projects
R 4/28  Malory
Research projects

Research paper due Friday April 29 by 5:00 p.m.