

## Course Design

### English 3135: Visual Rhetoric

*Oriana Gatta*

As an advanced rhetoric and composition doctoral student, I taught Engl 3135: Visual Rhetoric, a three-credit upper-level course offered by the Department of English at Georgia State University. Mary E. Hocks originally designed this course in 2000 to, in her words, “introduce visual information design theories and practices for writers [and] examine the use of visual meanings in the production of texts, the influence of visual culture on written discourse, and audience-centered document design” (“Undergraduate”). My own research interests include visual rhetoric/culture, feminist theory/pedagogy, critical theory/pedagogy, digital media/pedagogy, and comics studies, and as evidence of the rhet/comp program’s deep commitment to graduate student professionalization, I was encouraged to redesign Visual Rhetoric to more specifically reflect these interests. My redesign resulted in a course that employed comics studies as a generative framework on which we built theoretically, historically, and culturally informed definitions of visual rhetoric. Students used these definitions to analyze contemporary popular culture and compose their own research-based arguments in comic book form. To view the course website, please visit: <http://criticalrevisions.wordpress.com/>.

#### **Institutional Context**

Georgia State University is an urban, public, four-year research institution located in downtown Atlanta and has an enrollment of approximately 32,000 students. Its 24,000 or so undergraduates select from among 74 degree programs, and over 100 certificate, MA, and PhD programs are home to approximately 8,000 graduate students. English is one of Georgia State University’s largest departments, representing over 500 undergraduates and 300 graduate students. In addition to offering bachelors’ degrees in English with emphases in rhetoric and composition, literary studies, creative writing, or secondary English education and graduate (MA, MFA, and PhD) degrees in rhetoric and composition, creative writing, and literary studies, Georgia State University’s English department houses Lower Division Studies (the first year composition program), the Writing Studio, and the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, which has also become a division of the recently created Center for Instructional Innovation.

Rhet/comp faculty played an instrumental role in forming the Second Century Initiative in New and Emerging Media (2CINEM), an interdis-

disciplinary endeavor begun in 2011 to support and develop intellectual and creative innovation within digital media by fostering local, regional, national, and international collaboration among scholars, students, practitioners, and artists. Currently, it is comprised of faculty from the departments of English and communication, and the Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design, and doctoral fellows from English, communication, and computer science. My course redesign comprised part of the work I completed as a graduate fellow for the 2CINEM's digital pedagogy research group.

The bulk of required undergraduate rhet/comp coursework involves exploring the rhetorical histories, theories, and practices of writing. One required technology-based rhetoric course provides a digital context for this exploration, and to satisfy this requirement, students choose from among five courses, including Technical Writing, Document Design, Electronic Writing and Publishing, Business Writing, and Visual Rhetoric. Students may also take two additional courses from this list to satisfy elective requirements. So, while I could not assume students enrolled in Visual Rhetoric had any level of familiarity with the rhetorical analysis and composition of digital media, I expected them to have working definitions of rhetoric on which we could expand.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

The use of comic books as educational tools in the U.S. has a long, complex history. Between the 1940s and today, approaches to alphabetic literacy, English language acquisition, literary analysis, critical literacy, cultural literacy, visual rhetorical analysis, visual rhetorical composition, and multimodal literacy have at times characterized comics as having pedagogical value. Unfortunately, much of this scholarship approaches comics from the compartmentalizing assumptions that words and images can be easily distinguished from one another and that non-alphabetic images can be more easily apprehended than alphabetic text (e.g., Burmark; George; Hoeness-Krupsaw; Leibold; McCloud, *Understanding*; and Schraffenberger). Similarly, there is a relatively clear-cut division between the analysis and critique of comics as, on the one hand, ideologically imbued cultural artifacts and, on the other, sites of formal design and production. The scholarship employing comics as sites for teaching cultural critique can be further subdivided into those analyzing representations of gender (e.g., Chute, Jonet, and Thalheimer), race/ethnicity (e.g., Chaney, Cong-Huyen and Hong, King, Nama, Rifas, Strömberg, and Wanzo), and sexuality (e.g., Van Dyne), respectively. For composition studies, a field invested in understanding and developing our students' and our own abilities to communicate in complex, multiple, and intersecting historical, cultural, and social contexts, it is counterproductive to take a "separate

but equal” approach to visual and verbal texts and their analysis, production, and ideology

I am not the first to make this claim. Work done by feminist, digital, and rhetorical theorists such as Hocks, Anne Francis Wysocki, and Cheryl E. Ball, particularly in relation to new media and multimodal and digital composition, emphasizes the interrelationship of analysis and composition. Hocks, Wysocki, and Ball, drawing in part on the work of the New London Group, use the framework of “design” to discuss both formal construction and the sets of assumptions or ideologies—such as those that dichotomize images and text, analysis and composition, and even rhetoric and ideology—that shape a composer’s decisions and contextualize an audience’s reception. They argue that the extent to which we can facilitate our students’ awareness and understanding of these assumptions is the extent to which we enable them to be more conscious consumers and, even more importantly, rhetorically savvy composers of culture. Their work therefore parallels and extends a critical pedagogical approach to composition that requires acknowledging the rhetorical construction of ideology.

Further, as critical theorist Roland Barthes points out, ideologies function in culture at the meta-narrative level, persuading us through repetition to accept the values they indirectly imply, often through stories. Feminist scholar AnaLouise Keating labels these “status quo stories,” stories told and retold to “normalize and naturalize the existing social systems, values, and norms so entirely that [we] deny the possibility of change” (23). As such, teaching students how to analyze narratives has become a common practice at all levels of visual rhetorical education. And as visual narratives, comics have increasingly been used to identify and critique representations of oppressive ideologies of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and to a lesser extent, class (e.g., Chaney, Dong, King, and Thalheimer).

Despite this analytical investment, and like multimodal composing more generally (Palmeri), much of the advocacy for and engagement in composing comics occurs in elementary and high school contexts (e.g., Bitz; Carter; Lamb and Johnson), and most of the work written about composing comics in undergraduate writing classrooms does not address the intersection of rhetorical construction and ideological meaning, nor the opportunities that comics provide for challenging oppressive ideological perspectives (e.g., Carter, Frey and Fisher, and Haendiges). An exception is Wysocki and Dennis A. Lynch’s *Compose, Design, Advocate: A Rhetoric for Integrating Written, Visual, and Oral Communication*, which advocates an embodied approach to the rhetorical analysis and composition of comics (510). In one chapter, “Analyzing Comics,” Wysocki and Lynch argue that students can enact an embodied understanding of comics’ rhetorical construction by drawing on their individually as well as

historically and culturally situated experiences. Employing two well-known texts, the “Common Scents” chapter in Lynda Barry’s *One! Hundred! Demons!* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, Wysocki and Lynch lead students through the rhetorical analytical work of exploring the relationships among authorial purpose, genre, alphabetic texts, visual styles, authors’ self-representations, representations of family, representations of experience, and students’ experiences. Wysocki and Lynch then invite students to begin composing their own comic narratives using the rhetorical structures students identify.

My pedagogical approach to Visual Rhetoric expands on Wysocki and Lynch’s work by making the rhetorical analysis of visual culture and the rhetorical composition of comic (or sequential) narratives the course’s primary foci. In doing so, I aimed to (1) expand definitions of composition beyond alphabetic texts, (2) identify the rhetorical significance of genre conventions and the media through which they are expressed, (3) highlight narrative and metanarrative intersections, (4) explore comics as examples of multigenre, multimedia narrativity, and (5) help students compose original, research-based arguments in comic form on some aspect of contemporary popular culture to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of visual rhetoric. These goals formed a rough trajectory for the coursework.

To begin building students’ vocabulary for and understanding of rhetoric, including and beyond alphabetic images, we began with Ball and Kristin L. Arola’s *visualizing composition 2.0*, which offers definitions and analytical exercises for several visual rhetorical elements (e.g., color, contrast, alignment, organization, etc.) exemplified by both student-produced and professional work. These terms became the first items on the list of analytical criteria we explored and further developed throughout the semester. While completing Ball and Arola’s analytical exercises, we also read and discussed the second chapter of Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* to contextualize visual rhetoric in relation to comics. Additionally, *Understanding Comics* functioned as an example of the kind of work I was looking for in students’ final projects: a sequential narrative exploration of how the topic of interest has been (visually) represented and understood and what we should (not) think/do about that representation and understanding.

We read Stephen Greenblatt’s “Culture” essay, the first three chapters of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*, and Wysocki’s “The Sticky Embrace of Beauty: On Some Formal Relations in Teaching about the Visual Aspects of Texts” to begin considering in what ways still and moving images in different genres and media communicate cultural values. Though Greenblatt is primarily concerned with literary criticism, his claim that art is a conduit for “the roles by which men and women are expected to pattern their lives” did a good job of introducing a connection between aesthetics and culture (228). Berger’s work shifts the analytical

focus from literature to painting and offers numerous examples of the gendered and classed assumptions underlying genre-based, artistic practices. Focusing on a print *Peek* magazine advertisement, Wysocki points out that the separation of form and content in design principles assumes the possibility of an objective assessment of an image's aesthetic value without regard to how aesthetic values are culturally constructed and, in this case, gendered. Consequently, we added "values," "genre," "medium," "symbolism," "bodies/embodiment," "gender," "race," "class," "age," "sexuality," "strangeness," and "absence" to our growing list of analytical criteria during class discussions of these texts.

Shifting our focus from analysis to production and the more serious consideration of research topics for students' final projects, we read the introductory chapter of Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* and volume one of Mike Carey and Peter Gross' *The Unwritten* comic book series. Both texts foreground the increasingly blurry distinction between producers and consumers of (digital) culture, the opportunities (digital) media provide to both support and challenge a given status quo, and the rhetorical function of intertextuality in contemporary (digital) culture. Additionally, while we consistently drew parallels between contemporary digital culture and genres of print culture, Jenkins' work foregrounded digital production and consumption, and *The Unwritten* functioned as another example of the kind of work I expected students to compose for their final projects: sequential narratives that examine and enact the rhetorical construction of ideology in popular culture.

Students submitted topic proposals after this series of readings and, to gain research experience in multiple media(ted) contexts, they completed digital collages and annotated bibliographies based on these proposals. For the collages, I asked students to (1) select still and moving images that represented various perspectives on their topics (e.g., internet memes, film clips, magazine covers, billboards, etc.), (2) use the visual rhetorical analytical criteria we had thus far identified (e.g., relating to use of color, contrast, emphasis, bodies/embodiment, absence, symbolism, values, etc.) to identify the rhetorical moves at work and to assess the value of these moves to the students' projects, and (3) upload and arrange their digitized images in Prezi as a collage that makes an argument regarding the selected images' visual rhetorical effectiveness. For example, one student researching the relationship between Apple's software marketing and technological innovation juxtaposed images from Apple's "I'm a Mac and I'm a PC" advertising campaign with infographics on Unix-based operating systems to point out how effectively Apple has promoted its products by constructing a binary opposition between "young," "cool," and "cutting-edge" Mac OS X and "old," "ugly," "unreliable" Windows. This student found that one effect of the binary is to neglect the plethora of comparable (and open-source) operating systems. The collage assignment served as a starting point for students'

research projects by familiarizing them with multiple perspectives on their topics. Students then completed annotated bibliographies, consisting of articles from scholarly publications, to further engage the complexities of their topics.

To focus specifically on the rhetorical choices, including “moment,” “frame,” “image,” “word,” and “flow,” available in constructing sequential narratives, we read the first chapter of McCloud’s *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels* (10). Additionally, though I did not require students to use any of these options, we experimented with several digital formats for composing comics, including *Comic Life*, *ToonDoo*, *BitStrips*, and *Pixton*, so that students could assess the affordances of each in relation to other available means such as hand-drawn images. For the remainder of the course, students workshopped drafts, presented finished narratives, and composed written rhetorical analyses of these narratives in which they contextualized their understanding of visual rhetoric in relation to their own work.

### Critical Reflection

Students’ final projects and analyses speak to their level of success mastering course content: their intentional adaptation of the genre conventions characteristic of the aspects of contemporary popular culture they researched demonstrate their ability to engage in historically and culturally nuanced rhetorical analysis and composition that acknowledges and challenges the use-value of a text/image distinction and enacts the relationship between form and (ideological) content. For example, a student exploring (mis)representations of Zen in contemporary Western culture juxtaposed the minimalist aesthetic characteristic of superficial representations of Zen—including basic forms, a watercolor technique, and a black-and-white color scheme—with one character’s use of Zen koans, or riddles, to challenge any simplistic definition of Zen. A student exploring the relationship between celebrity worship and religious human sacrifice employed several visual references to classic horror films to underline the connection between what we see and how we see. And a student exploring webcomics’ creative impact on the definition(s) of comics made a webcomic that offered an expanded definition to a skeptical audience.

According to informal feedback, students attested to their expanded definitions of composition, citing the sequential narrative assignment as a catalyst for moving beyond traditional academic essays. Students also said the rhetorical analysis of real-world cultural artifacts made the visual rhetorical subject matter more comprehensible, and the assignment scaffolding and option to revise most assignments made learning course content easier. These perspectives help validate using comics studies as a frame through

which to teach visual rhetorical analysis and composition. They also suggest that analysis is a useful scaffold for production.

As validating as these perspectives are, the course did not play out exactly as I had anticipated, and there are several aspects of the course I would alter. While Ball and Arola's *visualizing composition 2.0* is an invaluable resource and starting point for discussing formal elements of visual rhetoric, I think students would become more quickly engaged in the subject matter were they to identify and present their own examples of these elements rather than use Ball and Arola's examples for all of the analytical exercises, or even construct their own list of terms, definitions, and examples to which they could compare Ball and Arola's work. Wysocki makes this point in the "Design Analysis" assignment she offers as an extension of her work problematizing formal design categories ("Sticky Embrace" 181).

Beyond employing a more student-centered, inductive versus deductive approach to knowledge creation characteristic of feminist and critical composition pedagogies, generating their own elements of visual rhetoric would also give students another opportunity to discuss audience, as they would need to consider the appeal of their terms, definitions, and examples in relation to their classmates as audience members. Along these same lines, the course lacked more direct conversations about the relationship between students' target audiences and potential sites for disseminating their sequential narratives. These conversations would also allow us to address students' choices of digital composing tools and the extent to which the options and constraints of each match up with students' skill levels, their audience's familiarity with comics, and the visual conventions comics employ.

Citing the creative limitations of any one medium of production, most students employed some combination of print and digital design tools to compose their final projects. These choices demonstrate students' rhetorical intentionality. They also highlight the necessity for recognizing and addressing the multimodality of visual rhetorical praxis. Jody Shipka argues that "*all* communicative practice," not just digital media, is multimodal based on "the roles other texts, talk, people, perceptions, semiotic resources, technologies, motives, activities, and institutions play in the production, reception, circulation, and valuation of seemingly stable finished texts" (13, emphasis in original). Further, using cognitive scientist Patrick Colm Hogan's work as grounds for composition studies' more serious engagement in the interdisciplinary study of creativity, Jason Palmeri argues, "composers are better able to make remote associations if they draw upon and combine multiple creative traditions" (31). Accordingly, in future iterations of this course, a more direct framing of comic production as *multimodal* composition, and the print and digital genres and media we analyze as historically and culturally dependent *modes* of communication may increase students' ability to

transfer their rhetorical skills from one communicative, (inter)disciplinary context to another.

## Works Cited

- Ball, Cheryl E. "Designerly [does not equal] Readerly: Re-Assessing Multimodal and New Media Rubrics for Use in Writing Studies." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. 12.4 (2006): 393–412. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. Print.
- Bitz, Michael. *When Commas Meet Kryptonite: Classroom Lessons from The Comic Book Project*. New York: Teachers College P, 2010. Print.
- Burmark, Lynell. "Visual Literacy: What You Get is What You See." *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills*. Ed. Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin P, 2008. 5–25. Print.
- Carter, James Bucky, ed. *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2006. 1–25. Print.
- Chaney, Michael A. "Is There an African American Graphic Novel?" *Teaching the Graphic Novel*. Ed. Stephen E. Tabachnick. New York: MLA, 2009. 69–75. Print.
- Chute, Hillary. *Graphic Women: Life Narratives and Contemporary Comics*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print.
- Cong-Huyen, Anne, and Caroline Kyungah Hong. "Teaching Asian-American Graphic Narratives in a 'Post-Race' Era." *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice*. Ed. Lan Dong. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. 80–93. Print.
- Dong, Lan, ed. *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. Print.
- Frey, Nancy, and Douglas Fisher, eds. *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin P, 2008. Print.
- George, Diana. "From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing." *CCC* 54.1 (2002): 11–39. Print.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Culture." *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. 225–32. Print.
- Haendiges, J. A. *Mobility and the Digital Page*. Diss. Washington State University, 2010. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 31 May 2011.
- Hocks, Mary E. "Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments." *CCC* 54.4 (2003): 629–56. Print.
- Hoeness-Krupsaw, Susanna. "Ivorian Bonus: Teaching Abouet and Oubrierie's *Aya*." *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy, and Practice*. Ed. Lan Dong. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. 161–72. Print.
- Jonet, M. Catherine. "Our Graphics, Ourselves: Graphic Narratives and the Gender Studies Classroom." *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy, and Practice*. Ed. Lan Dong. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. 119–29. Print.
- Keating, AnaLouise. *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues*. New York: Palgrave, 2007. Print.

- King, C. Richard. "Envisioning Justice: Racial Metaphors, Political Movements, and Critical Pedagogy." *Writing the Visual: A Practical Guide for Teachers of Composition and Communication*. Ed. Carol David and Anne E. Richards. New York: Parlor, 2008. 87–104. Print.
- Lamb, Annette, and Larry Johnson. "Graphic Novels, Digital Comics, and Technology Enhanced Learning: Part 2." *Teacher Librarian* 36.1 (2009): 70–75. Print.
- Leibold, Don. "Abandon Every Fear, Ye That Enter: The X-Men Journey through Dante's *Inferno*." *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. Ed. James Bucky Carter. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2007. 100–12. Print.
- McCloud, Scott. *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels*. New York: Harper, 2006. Print.
- . *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993. Print.
- Nama, Adilifu. *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2011. Print.
- Palmeri, Jason. *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy*. Carbondale, IL: SIUP, 2012. Print.
- Rifas, Leonard. "Race and Comics." *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle*. Ed. Frederick Luis Aldama. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010. 27–38. Print.
- Schraffenberger, J.D. "Vizualizing Beowulf: Old English Gets Graphic." *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. Ed. James Bucky Carter. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2007. 64–82. Print.
- Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2011. Print.
- Strömberg, Fredrik. *Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2003. Print.
- Thalheimer, Anne N. "Too Weenie to Deal with All of this 'Girl Stuff': Women, Comics and the Classroom." *Teaching the Graphic Novel*. Ed. Stephen Tabachnick. New York: MLA, 2009. 84–90. Print.
- "Undergraduate Courses." *Rhetoric and Composition*. Georgia State University. n.d. Web. 5 Aug. 2013.
- Wanzo, Rebecca. "Black Nationalism, Bunraku, and Beyond: Articulating Black Heroism through Cultural Fusion and Comics." *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle*. Ed. Frederick Luis Aldama. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010. 93–104. Print.
- Welhausen, Candice. *Toward a Visual Paideia: Visual Rhetoric in Undergraduate Writing Programs*. Diss. U of New Mexico, 2009. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 31 May 2011.
- Wysocki, Anne Frances. "awaywithwords: On the possibilities in unavailable designs." *Computers and Composition* 22 (2005): 55–62. Print.
- . "The Sticky Embrace of Beauty: On Some Formal Problems of Teaching about the Visual Aspects of Texts." *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2004. 147–98. Print.
- Wysocki, Anne Frances, and Dennis A. Lynch. *Compose, Design, Advocate: A Rhetoric for Integrating Written, Visual, and Oral Communication*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2007. Print.

## **(Re)visions: A Critically Comic Approach to Visual Rhetoric**

“I remember standing on a street corner with the black painter Beauford Delaney down in the Village, waiting for the light to change, and he pointed down and said, Look. I looked and all I saw was water. And he said, Look again, which I did, and I saw oil on the water and the city reflected in the puddle. It was a great revelation to me. I can’t explain it. He taught me how to see, and how to trust what I saw. Painters have often taught writers how to see. And once you’ve had that experience, you see differently.”

—James Baldwin, “The Art of Fiction,”  
*The Paris Review Interviews*, Vol. II

“Really, what changes the world is the power of a compelling story. But we seem to carefully limit the stories that reach us to those that won’t push us to change.”

—Elana Dykewomon, “The Body Politic: Mediations on Identity,”  
*This Bridge We Call Home*

“As an experienced screenwriter told me, ‘When I first started, you would pitch a story because without a good story, you didn’t really have a film. Later, once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. And now, you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.’”

—Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture:  
Where Old and New Media Collide*

“Design gives students’ work social and political impact and allows them to learn how to represent new forms of knowledge. To establish a balanced rhetorical approach, then, we must offer students experiences both in the analytic process of critique, which scrutinizes conventional expectations and power relations, and in the transformative process of design, which can change power relations by creating a new vision of knowledge. In terms of visual rhetoric, students need to learn the ‘distanced’ process of how to critique the saturated vi-

sual and technological landscape that surrounds them as something structured and written in a set of deliberate rhetorical moves.”

—Mary Hocks, “Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments,”  
*College Composition and Communication*

## Course Description

Visual Rhetoric introduces visual design theories and practices for writers and explores the relationship among visual rhetoric, digital media, and contemporary culture. More specifically, this course examines the rhetorical construction and use of visual meanings in media production via (1) blogged responses to and class discussion of assigned readings, (2) audience-centered analysis of digital media designed by others, and (3) work with digital communication and software tools to produce a sequential narrative incorporating research that addresses the influence of visual media in contemporary popular/mass culture.

## Course Goals

- Understand the uses of visuals for persuasive purposes and in multiple media.
- Understand the impact of visuals on digital communication.
- Practice visual rhetoric with and for an audience.
- Connect visual rhetoric with rhetorical theory, composition strategies, and technology.

## Course Outcomes

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

- Describe relationships among words, images, and various visual media.
- Identify the major rhetorical elements of self- and other-composed designs.
- Analyze and evaluate the rhetorical success or failure of a design in terms of its audience, meanings, and intended effect.
- Apply rhetorical principles in the digital production of visual media.

## Required Online Access

Ball, Cheryl E., and Kristin L. Arola. *visualizing composition 2.0*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010. Web. Purchase online access here: [http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rewriting2e/default.asp#t\\_616472\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rewriting2e/default.asp#t_616472_____)

## Required Book-Length Texts

- Kul-Want, Christopher, and Piero. *Introducing Aesthetics: A Graphic Guide*. London: Icon, 2010. Print.
- Carey, Mike, and Peter Gross. *Unwritten Vol. 1: Tommy Taylor and the Bogus Identity*. New York: Vertigo, 2010. Print.

## Additional Required Readings and Materials

Note that all of these texts are available online (via the Georgia State University Library website or the Internet in general), so *no purchase is necessary*. Additionally, we will not be reading any of the book-length works in full, so this reading list is not as massive as it might first appear.

- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 1972. Print.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Culture." *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. 225–32. Print.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU P, 2006. Print.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1994. Print.
- Rifas, Leonard. "Educational Comics." *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*. Ed. M. Keith Booker. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2010. 160–69. Print.
- Wysocki, Anne Frances. "The Sticky Embrace of Beauty: On Some Formal Problems of Teaching about the Visual Aspects of Texts." *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2004. 147–98. Print.

\*High-capacity digital storage media such as a USB drive must be used to save all of your work. Access to email, the Web, and printing capabilities, whether from home, work, or a campus lab.

## Assignments

Note that the assignment descriptions offered below are brief overviews. Full-length assignment sheets that include requirements, due date(s), and evaluation criteria will be posted to the class website (<http://criticalrevisions.wordpress.com/coursework>) and discussed in class.

### Blogging (20%, 200 pts.)

Everyone will create his or her own blog using Wordpress online software. Consider your blog as a visual rhetorical expression of your identity and your understanding of/relationship to visual rhetoric. Each week you will post written responses to required readings on these blogs. Additionally, your blog

will serve as an archive for the research you complete related to your final project.

### *Evaluation Criteria*

As there is no pre-defined number of required posts, assessment will be based in part (150 pts.) on the percentage of posts completed (including a final post that describes and analyzes the visual rhetorical choices you made in designing your blog). This percentage will be calculated by dividing the number of posts you've completed by the total number of assigned posts. For example, if you completed 25 posts, and there were 27 total posts assigned, you would receive an A (93% /139.5 pts.).

The other part (50 pts.) will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- 20 pts: Evidence of rhetorical decision-making related to your blog URL, title, and theme.
- 10 pts: Creation of an “About” page describing yourself and your relationship to/understanding of visual rhetoric.
- 10 pts: Creation of post categories related to your final project.
- 10 pts: Creation of links and link categories related to your final project.

The overall grade for the blogging assignment will be calculated by adding the total number of points earned from your blog posts and blog design and dividing this number by the total possible number of points (200). For example, if you did 25 of 27 posts, and received 50 points for your blog design, your overall grade would be an A (95%/189.5 pts.).

### **Sequential Narrative Topic Proposal (10%, 100 pts.)**

The topic proposal, in which you identify and explain your topic of choice, is the first step towards completing your sequential narrative.

### *Evaluation Criteria*

Your proposal will be assessed based on your inclusion, or lack, of the required elements noted below.

- 15 points: Genre identification(s)
- 15 points: Example text identification(s)
- 15 points: Significance
- 15 points: Tentative claim/hypothesis
- 15 points: Formal tone and linguistic clarity
- 15 points: Length requirement (250–300 words)
- 10 points: Format requirement (MLA)

**Sequential Narrative Topical Collage Prezi and Rhetorical Analysis (20%, 200 pts.)**

Everyone will be introduced to Prezi presentation software. Using this software, you will create and present a visual collage (10%, 100 pts.), or “remix,” of ten still and/or moving images that relate to the topic you have chosen for your final project with the goal of identifying a visual rhetorical approach (or approaches) to your sequential narrative. Additionally, you will submit a written comparative rhetorical analysis of the images in your collage and your “remixing” of them.

*Evaluation Criteria*

Your proposal will be assessed based on your inclusion, or lack thereof, of the required elements noted below.

Visual Collage:

- 10 points: Ten different images used.
- 50 points: Visual rhetorical construction that points to/suggests explanations for how and why the images you have selected are visually rhetorically in/effective.
- 10 points: No fewer than five and no more than six minutes spent presenting your topical collage to the class.

Comparative Analysis Essay:

- 10 points: Ten different still/moving images discussed.
- 10 points: Clear thesis statement regarding the visual/rhetorical in/effectiveness of the images you have selected.
- 50 points: Evidence in support of your argument, i.e., clear and detailed explanations for how and why the images you have selected are visually rhetorically in/effective based on the analytical criteria we have discussed in class.
- 30 points: Explanation of why the decisions you made in constructing your Prezi make it visually rhetorically effective.
- 10 points: Formal tone and linguistic clarity.
- 10 points: Correct MLA format (including Works Cited page) in comparative analysis essay.
- 10 points: Citations on the Works Cited page for each image used.

**Sequential Narrative Annotated Bibliography (10%, 100 pts.)**

Constructing an effective argument, visual or otherwise, requires research. In order to gain a deeper understanding of your topic and the evidence for (and against) your argument, you will complete a five-to-eight source annotated

bibliography. Three of these sources must be scholarly (see the “Resources” page for a refresher on identifying scholarly sources).

### *Evaluation Criteria*

- 30 points: Three scholarly sources.
- 10 points: At least five sources total.
- 10 points: A sentence in each annotation describing the source’s claim.
- 10 points: A sentence in each annotation describing the source’s evidence in support of the claim.
- 10 points: A sentence in each annotation describing the purpose of the source’s argument.
- 10 points: A sentence in each annotation describing the source’s audience.
- 10 points: A sentence in each annotation describing the use-value of the source in relation to your project.
- 10 points: Correct MLA formatting.

### **Sequential Narrative Three-Minute Work-In-Progress Report (5%, 50 pts.)**

You will write a one-to-two page report detailing your progress thus far and the additional work you intend to do to complete your sequential narrative. In order to receive feedback from your classmates and instructor on your sequential narrative, you will briefly present this information to the class.

### *Evaluation Criteria*

- 10 points: A description of the progress you have made thus far.
- 10 points: A description of the additional work you intend to do to complete your project.
- 10 points: A description of the issues/concerns you still need to work out in order to complete your project.
- 10 points: At least one page in length (not including nameplate).
- 10 points: Correct MLA formatting.

### **Sequential Narrative (15%, 150 pts.)**

Building on all you have learned about visual rhetoric, design conventions, and sequential narrative in the first half of the course, and based on scholarly research about a topic related to course material, you will create your own sequential narrative in comic book form. The purpose of this narrative will be to make an argument regarding some aspect of contemporary visual culture.

*Evaluation Criteria*

- 20 points: At least 50 frames (for a comic strip or webcomic) or 8 pages (for a comic book).
- 30 points: Visual rhetorical construction clearly evidences a target audience.
- 40 points: Visual rhetorical construction clearly evidences a claim, i.e., something you want your audience to think and/or do.
- 20 points: Visual rhetorical construction clearly evidences a purpose, i.e., why you want your target audience to think and/or do what your claim encourages them to.
- 30 points: Visual rhetorical construction offers clear evidence in support of your claim.
- 10 points: Visual rhetorical construction clearly acknowledges at least one alternative perspective on the topic your narrative addresses.

**Sequential Narrative Rhetorical Analysis Essay (10%, 100 pts.)**

You will write a four-to-five page essay explaining the (visual) rhetorical choices you made in constructing your sequential narrative and how these choices relate to your argument. This essay should also include a Works Cited page listing all of the visual, verbal, print, and digital texts you used in constructing your narrative.

*Evaluation Criteria*

- 10 points: Length of at least four pages, not including the Works Cited page.
- 10 points: An introduction that describes your topic and identifies the argument you intend your sequential narrative to make.
- 10 points: A thesis statement that evaluates the effectiveness of the argument you present in your sequential narrative based on the visual rhetorical criteria we have generated in class (and which are listed on the “Analytical Criteria” page of the class website).
- 30 points: Evidence in support of your thesis statement, i.e., clear and detailed descriptions of the choices you made in composing your sequential narrative and explanations of why these choices are visually rhetorically effective based on the criteria you identify in your thesis statement.
- 10 points: A conclusion that identifies any alterations you would make to your sequential narrative given more time and why you would make these changes.

- 10 points: Formal Tone and Linguistic Clarity.
- 10 points: Correct MLA formatting (including Works Cited page).
- 10 points: Citations on the Works Cited page for each source (including images) used.

### **8–10 minute Sequential Narrative Presentation (10%, 100 pts.)**

You will present your completed sequential narrative to class, including explanations you offered in your rhetorical analysis essay for your (visual) rhetorical choices and their relationship to your argument.

#### *Evaluation Criteria*

- 10 points: Used images of your sequential narrative to exemplify each of the points you make about its visual rhetorical effectiveness.
- 10 points: Addressed the visual rhetorical construction of sequential narrative's target audience.
- 10 points: Addressed the visual rhetorical construction of sequential narrative's claim.
- 10 points: Addressed the visual rhetorical construction of sequential narrative's purpose.
- 10 points: Addressed the visual rhetorical construction of sequential narrative's evidence.
- 10 points: Addressed the visual rhetorical construction of sequential narrative's alternative perspective(s).
- 10 points: Coherently articulated ideas.
- 10 points: Employed digital presentation media.
- 10 points: Engaged and maintained audience's attention.
- 10 points: Spent no fewer than eight minutes and no more than ten minutes presenting.

### **Course Schedule**

To view the complete course schedule, please visit: <http://criticalrevisions.wordpress.com/schedule>.

#### **Week 1: “In a World . . .”**

Reading: Review the class website.

Writing: Email me ([oriana.gatta@gmail.com](mailto:oriana.gatta@gmail.com)) with responses to the following questions:

- What, if any, questions do you have about the course based on your review of the course website?
- Why are you taking this course?
- What are your goals for this course?

- What are your career/life goals?
- What image would you choose to describe yourself or one of your interests? (\*Add as an email attachment)

### **Week 2: A Formal/Cultural Introduction to Visual Rhetoric**

Reading: *Understanding Comics* Chapter 2 (Access on the Resources page of this blog, under “Required Readings” and *visualizing composition 2.0*)

Writing: Post your responses to the questions at the end of the of each *visualizing composition 2.0* module on your own blogs.

### **Week 3: Seeing Culture**

Reading: Wysocki’s “Sticky Embrace of Beauty,” Stephen Greenblatt’s “Culture,” and John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*, Ch. 1 & 3

Writing

- In a post to the class blog, identify at least three criteria Wysocki uses to analyze the *Peek* advertisement, and use these criteria to analyze an advertisement of your own choosing. Make sure to include an image of the advertisement you select and/or a link to it (if it is a moving image) in your post.
- Using your previously selected advertisement, answer in a blog post the six questions for critical analysis proposed by Greenblatt.

### **Week 4: Sequential Culture**

Reading: Henry Jenkins’ Introduction to *Convergence Culture*, Leonard Rifas’ “Educational Comics,” and Mike Carey and Peter Gross’s *Unwritten Vol. 1: Tommy Taylor and the Bogus Identity*

Writing

- Post an original example of cultural convergence as defined by Jenkins to your blog and explain why it works as an example.
- In a post on your blog, identify at least one parallel between Carey and Gross’s story and contemporary culture, and using at least two themes (visually and/or verbally recurring elements) in *Unwritten Vol. 1*, explain a possible argument Carey and Gross might be making about the aspect of contemporary culture paralleled in their comic book.

### **Week 5: Sequential Culture, Continued.**

Reading: *Introducing Aesthetics: A Graphic Guide*.

Writing

- In a post on your blog, identify at least two themes (visually and/or verbally recurring elements) in *Introducing Aesthetics*, and explain a pos-

sible argument Kul-Want and Piero may be making about aesthetics using these themes.

- Using the post title “Unabridged Topic Ideas,” post all of your potential topic ideas to your blog. Read through at least three of your classmates’ topic ideas, and comment on these three with at least one comment and/or question.

### **Week 6: Hot Topics**

Reading: Go to <http://prezi.com/learn/> and watch “Get Started,” “Go to the Next Level,” and “Share Your Prezi.”

Due: Critical Reflection Essay and Topic Proposal

### **Week 7: Work It!**

Writing: Begin working on Topical Collage Prezi.

### **Week 8: Topical Collage Prezi Presentations**

Writing: Continue working on Topical Collage Prezi.

Due: Topic Proposal Revisions, Topical Collage Prezi, and Comparative Analysis Essay

### **Week 9: Topical Collage Prezi Presentations, Continued**

Reading: Margaret K. Woodworth’s “The Rhetorical Precis” and secondary source you located.

Writing: Write a rhetorical precis of secondary source and post it to your blog.

### **Week 10: Work It (Reprise)!**

Reading: Another source located for your annotated bibliography.

Writing: Write a rhetorical precis of another source and post it to your blog.

### **Week 11: Commence Sequential Narratives**

Reading: Chapter 1 of Scott McCloud’s *Making Comics*.

Writing: On your own blog, post a description of at least three similarities between McCloud’s characterization of comic composition and the elements of visual rhetoric we have thus far identified.

Due: Annotated bibliography.

### **Week 12: Continue Sequential Narratives**

Writing

- On your own blog, post a 250–300 word description of your sequential narrative as you’ve thus far conceptualized it.

- On your blog, post a piece of your actual sequential narrative, i.e., a frame, series of frames, character representation, setting representation, etc. for feedback.

**Week 13: Sequential Narrative Progress Reports**

Due: Sequential Narrative Work-in-Progress Report

**Week 14: Break it Down**

Thanksgiving Break

**Week 15: Sequential Narrative Presentations**

Due: Sequential Narratives

**Week 16: Sequential Narrative Presentations, Continued**

Due: Sequential Narrative Rhetorical Analyses