



COMPOSING DIGITAL MEDIA

ENGCMP 610 // CL 435 // W 6-8:30 PM

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Office Hours Tues 1-3
& by appointment
CL 436 (inside 435)

Software has become our interface to the world, to others, to our memory and our imagination--a universal language through which the world speaks, and a universal engine on which the world runs.

Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command*

This class is a hands-on introduction to *theories*, *tools*, and *practices* relevant to digital media making. You likely have some experience in this arena. Digital media are less rare, exotic creatures than the fabric of everyday life: if you've written an email or taken a picture with your phone, you've engaged in digital production. This class asks you to think about how digital media move through and shape the world, and how you – as media makers – might move and shape the world yourselves. Together, we'll consider: archives, sound effects, creative reuse, interactivity, color, type, adaptation, circulation, non-linear storytelling, maps and place-based media, and whatever else collective interest leads us to. We'll pay attention to context, too, investigating how a media object's history – who made it, for what audience, to what purpose, with what tools – influences its meaning and travels.

You'll complete three major individual projects (video, sound, and text), revising and extending one of them as your final. You'll also participate in a group media design project grounded in a local Pitt issue and produce several technical tutorials intended for online sharing.

COURSE GOALS

1) Consider technology's role in acts of making.

In this class, you'll work with specific software (Adobe Premiere & Dreamweaver, Audacity, Twine) and hardware (smartphones, computers, microphones), but you'll also think broadly about how the media tools we live among shape the ways we think and write.

2) Practice revision within and across media forms.

Each unit begins with a small project and ends with a larger one, so you'll constantly be working through how to scale ideas up and down, how to pick out the most promising threads in your own work and develop them further. You'll have opportunities to translate ideas and stories from one medium to another as well, exploring how media form contributes to meaning.

3) Embrace experimentation.

Technology changes quickly, and so however expert you become you'll always encounter tools and programs you don't know how to use. Here, you'll get comfortable with the unfamiliar, learning what questions to ask when faced with something new and how to get started on projects without knowing in advance exactly what your finished product will be.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Participation (in-class & online)	20%
Video Portfolio	15%
Audio Portfolio	15%
Text Portfolio	15%
Group Design Project	10%
Final Revision	25%

As a general rule, I care more about thoughtful composition than technical perfection: if you can talk me through the choices you made and the reasons you made them, you can still do well on a project that doesn't quite come together. You'll write a reflection for each major assignment you turn in: these writings are your opportunity to make clear to me the work you've done, the thought you've put in, and so you should reserve time to do them well. **A beautiful media component won't get an A without a solid accompanying reflection.**

Final grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

A = 92 – 100 %	All projects exceed expectations,
A- = 90 – 92 %	they are carefully edited and take risks that work.
B+ = 88 – 89 %	
B = 83 – 87 %	All projects meet or exceed expectation,
B- = 80 – 82 %	they take risks that may not always work out.
C+ = 78 – 79 %	
C = 73 – 77 %	All projects meet basic expectations, some work
C- = 70 – 72 %	may fail to take risks or need more careful editing.
D = 60 – 69 %	
F = below 60 %	Expectations not met. Work is incomplete or careless.

W CREDIT

As a writing intensive class meant to help you work on the mechanics of revision, this class entails serious public engagement with the processes of creation and re-creation. You'll be expected to share your work and comment on the work of others, and workshops and discussions will take up a significant portion of our in-class time.

COURSE MATERIALS

For this class, you'll need:

- A 16GB flash drive
- Headphones
- A blank notebook
- A Box account, via <http://pitt.box.com>
- Regular Internet access
- Something you can record audio with

COURSE WEBSITE

All readings (and things to watch, listen to, and play) will be posted on the course website: <http://www.klcameron.com/cdm>. This is also where you'll write posts for the class blog.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. Because this is a small, discussion- and workshop-based class, your classmates' experiences are directly impacted by whether or not you show up prepared. Come to class on time, ready to ask questions and take part in conversation. If you arrive significantly after class has begun or if you arrive without prepared materials on a workshop day or if you're clearly texting/socializing online during class, you will be counted as absent. **As this class only meets once a week, more than ONE absence is grounds for automatic failure.** That said, I understand that life doesn't always respect class schedules: **come talk to me before you miss class** if you expect to have a problem with this policy. If you are absent, you're responsible for finding out about and making up any work you miss.

LATE WORK

You lose a full letter grade for each day an assignment is late. If you expect to have trouble meeting a deadline, again, talk to me before the assignment is due. **Deadlines are not negotiable after you have missed them.**

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

I expect that you'll shut off your phone's ringer and that you won't text during class---this is part of you having respect for your classmates. When we're in the lab, I expect that you'll only be logged onto a computer if our work together necessitates it. In my experience, your active, conversational presence in class is worth a lot more than taking down the perfect set of notes.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Council of Writing Program Administrators describes plagiarism as follows: "plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source." We'll talk about how to handle other people's creations responsibly, but it is important to note now that videos don't often come "from

Google” and that changing a few words or lines in a quotation does not constitute avoiding plagiarism. All instances of plagiarism will result in an automatic 0 on the assignment and a report to the Dean.

OPEN LAB HOURS

Once this semester gets going, the English department will hire a student with significant media production experience as a TA/lab monitor. He/she will keep our studio space open for you during non-class hours and be available to help you troubleshoot. I'll let you know about the details.

WRITING CENTER

Located in 317-B Student Center, 4024 O'Hara St., the Writing Center is a resource that allows you to work on your writing with an experienced writing consultant. While WC consultants are not necessarily familiar with the media production tools we're using or all of the modes that we're composing in, they can help you think through projects and provide valuable feedback on your written reflections. They can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can work with you throughout the term. Their services are free, but you should call ahead (412-624-6556) or make an appointment online at www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE/MAJOR DUE DATES

UNIT 1: Video, Weeks 1-4

Video Portfolio Due Midnight, Tuesday 1/26

UNIT 2: Audio, Weeks 5-8

Audio Portfolio Due Midnight, Tuesday 2/23

UNIT 3: Text, Weeks 9-13

Text Portfolio Due Midnight, Tuesday 3/29

Weeks 14-16: Revision

Group Design Project Due Midnight, Tuesday 4/19

Final Revision Due Midnight, Wednesday 4/27

More information about assignments is available here: <http://klcameron.com/cdm/assignments>

A more detailed and up-to-date schedule is available here: <http://klcameron.com/cdm/schedule>