Course Description

Blogs are often classified — and sometimes dismissed — as "personal" writing. Many bloggers thrive sharing the details of everyday life. But blogs are also inherently social; published to the open web, they invite clicks and comments from a wide range of audiences. In this mini course, we will look at blogs as an intersection of the personal and social. After a brief review of blogging’s historical, technical, and economic origins, we will examine the rhetoric of personal blogs. We will explore how bloggers create niches, construct personae, select publishing platforms, make purposeful design decisions, and incorporate new media, all while being attentive to their audiences. You will practice this balance of the personal and social as you create your own blog.

Learning Goals

All of Sweetland’s “New Media” courses expose students to multimodal forms of communication and encourage them to be more critical readers of those forms. In this course, we will follow these two broad aims while also attending to these specific goals:

- Analyze rhetorical principles operating in blogs
- Create a personal blog with a specific audience and purpose
- Appeal to a specific audience with carefully-crafted rhetorical appeals
- Adapt academic citation styles to web-based writing

Suggested Materials

- Free apps:
  - WordPress will allow you to post on the go.
  - Feedly will help you identify strong sample blogs and find material to link from your own blog.
  - Instagram Hyperlapse will allow you to take time-lapse or regular videos with excellent image stabilization.
- If you plan to use your blog as part of a business, consider purchasing your own domain name and using it to power the site you create using WordPress. Wordpress will let you register a domain for a small fee during the sign-up process.
- Again, if you are thinking about blogging as a part of your own business, you might want to pay for WordPress’ premium service. Doing so will offer you more themes and customization options, all of which might be more helpful to establishing your business’ presence.

Required Materials

- a WordPress account
- a back-up system (flash drive, Dropbox, Google Docs) for saving copies of your work

Course Expectations

Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend all class sessions. If an unavoidable commitment or emergency prevents you from coming to any class session, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can develop a plan to help you catch up. If you miss more than one class session, you should expect not to receive credit for the course.
Along with being on time, you need to interact with the class, meaning that you have arrived prepared and shut down all distractions, and that you participate actively in discussions, peer workshops, and other class activities. By “participate,” I do not merely mean speaking out loud; even the shyest student can participate through notetaking, in-class writing, and peer workshops. If you come unprepared or unwilling to participate, I reserve the right to mark you as absent for that class.

Reading
Links to our readings can be found in this syllabus and our course blog ([blogging2015.wordpress.com](http://blogging2015.wordpress.com)). You should bring a print copy of each reading or a laptop to class. If you choose to bring print copies, make sure you have annotated them so that you can participate in class discussion. If you choose to use your laptop for readings, please be aware of the potential impact on your peers’ learning. Clay Shirky’s analysis of recent research on in-class screen use suggests that using computers during lectures and discussions may negatively impact not just your work, but your peers’ work.

Writing Assignments
The writing assignments for this course fit into three large categories: posts to our class blog, reflections, and the final project. You can find full descriptions of the assignments in the attached schedule and assignment sheets.

I do not accept any late work without prior approval. If you know you will miss a deadline, contact me in advance and I will try to arrange an alternate deadline.

Academic Integrity
As a student at the University of Michigan, you are held to a high standard of academic integrity. In this writing-based course, the most important element of academic integrity is not plagiarizing others’ work. Plagiarism refers to using the words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement. The penalties for plagiarism range from failing an assignment to failing a course to suspension or expulsion from the university. You may read the full LSA statement on academic integrity, take quizzes, and get answers to students’ frequently asked questions at [www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity).

Even though you won’t often see MLA Style in a blog, the blogosphere is governed by many informal rules of citation, and breaking these rules can have severe consequences. In the blogging world, your credibility can be instantly destroyed by accidentally or intentionally copying the words of others, as that copying will be immediately visible to anyone careful enough to do a Google search. We will examine citation practices of successful bloggers to develop our own “rules” for citation, and your final work will be held to those rules.

Grades and Feedback
Grades will be determined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of grade</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly class blog responses</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project: your complete blog</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal reflections</td>
<td>10</td>
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Resources

**Accommodations**
If you have special needs as a result of a physical or learning disability, please contact me and your CSP advisor. Please also contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (G664 Haven; 734.763.3000; [ssd.umich.edu](http://ssd.umich.edu)) to see what resources and accommodations may be available to you.

**Course Supplies**
If financial need makes it difficult for you to purchase books, a laptop computer, or other classroom materials, the Gayle Fund (established in honor of Gayle Morris Sweetland) can loan you the necessary materials. You can talk to me about how to apply, or you can get an application form from the receptionist at the Sweetland office at 1310 North Quad.

**Sweetland Peer Writing Consultants**
Sweetland peer writing consultants are skilled and trained upper-class undergraduates who can work with you on any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to editing and all points in between. Visit [lsa.umich.edu/sweetland](http://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland) to learn more about how peer writing consultants can help you with your work.

**Sweetland Writing Workshop**
The Sweetland Writing Workshop is staffed entirely by Sweetland instructors, who assist students on an appointment-only basis. Visit [lsa.umich.edu/sweetland](http://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland) to learn more about the Writing Workshop and [umich.mywconline.net](http://umich.mywconline.net) to schedule an appointment.
# Class Schedule

All assignments due by the dates next to which they are posted
Locate readings, review assignment details, and post your work at blogging2015.wordpress.com

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week &amp; Theme</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Read</th>
<th>Class blog</th>
<th>Your blog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Using the e-mail you received from Stephanie on the first day of class, set up a Wordpress account with a user photo so that you can contribute to our course blog.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Week 1**
Introductions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1/16</th>
<th>Blood, “Weblogs”</th>
<th>Post Reflection 1 (see attached assignment sheet) AND Complete one of the following two options: 1. Use the “Leave a Reply” link to respond to the Week 2 prompt. [100 words] 2. Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 2 prompt. [50 words per peer]</th>
<th>Create a new blog using your WordPress account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/16</td>
<td>Sullivan, “Why I Blog”</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Week 2**
“About” blogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1/23</th>
<th>Blood, “Finding Your Voice”</th>
<th>Add a link to your blog to our class blogroll. Complete one of the following two options: 1. Use the “Leave a Reply” link to respond to the Week 3 prompt. [100 words] 2. Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 3 prompt. [50 words per peer]</th>
<th>Benchmark: To stay on pace with the course, you should now have an “About” page.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SWC, “Blogging Basics”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Week 3**
Finding a voice and people who will listen to it
## Class Schedule

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
<td>1/30</td>
<td>Rettberg, “Blogs as Narratives” (CTools)</td>
<td>Complete one of the following two options:</td>
<td>Benchmark: To stay on pace with the course, you should now have an “About” page and 1-2 entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The stories blogs tell</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 sample blogs (see class blog prompt)</td>
<td>1. Use the “Leave a Reply” link to respond to the Week 4 prompt. [100 words]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 4 prompt. [50 words per peer]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>Rosenberg, <em>Journalists vs. Bloggers</em> Blood, “Weblog Ethics”</td>
<td>Complete one of the following two options:</td>
<td>Benchmark: To stay on pace with the course, you should now have an “About” page, a blogroll, and 5-6 entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen journalists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Use the “Leave a Reply” link to respond to the Week 5 prompt. [100 words]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 5 prompt. [50 words per peer]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td>2/13</td>
<td>Comment threads from 3 blogs (see class blog assignment)</td>
<td>Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 6 prompt. Complete one of the following two options:</td>
<td>Benchmark: To stay on pace with the course, you should now have an “About” page, a blogroll, and 7-8 entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Use the “Leave a Reply” link to respond to the Week 6 prompt. [100 words]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 6 prompt. [50 words per peer]</td>
<td></td>
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Class Schedule

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Post Reflection 2 AND Complete one of the following two options: 1. Use the “Leave a Reply” link to respond to the Week 7 prompt. [100 words] 2. Use “Reply” links to respond to at least two peers’ responses to the Week 7 prompt. [50 words per peer]</td>
<td>See assignment sheet for a complete list of requirements for your blog. Make any final changes to your blog by class time today; changes made after 10:00am will not be considered during grading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflection 1

Use the results of your in-class brainstorming exercise to develop three possible topics for your blog. To get started, you might select any one answer from your list and turn it into a blog idea. For example, if the places you want to visit in Ann Arbor are all burger joints, you might create something like Michigan Burger Boys. You might also combine any ideas from your list to develop something new. For example, if your hobby is cooking and you also love archival research, you might create something like Cooking in the Archives.

1.
2.
3.

For each of your three ideas, do a quick Google search to identify your competition/colleagues. Who else is writing about your topic? Who are their audiences? How could you differentiate yourself from their blogs?

1.
2.
3.

Now that you have looked at the competition, toss out the topic that seems most thickly covered. Which two topics are you sticking with, and why?

1.
2.

Of the two remaining topics, how could you make a your blog stick out? What new angles haven't been tried?

1.
2.

For each of these two blogs, what materials would you need (camera, expenses, time to attend events…)?

1.
2.

Which of the two remaining topics are you learning toward? Take that topic and develop five possible blog titles:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Pick your favorite site title and check to see if it is available on WordPress. If not, try a few different versions until you find a title you like. Then create your site and start blogging!
Final Project: Building *Toward* a Successful Blog

Your blog is the final assignment for this course, and will allow you to showcase your development as a writer and thinker. The best test of whether or not your blog is successful is how many many people follow you and link to your work; however, as we will learn in this course, seven weeks is too short a time frame to build a successful blog, as in most cases it takes much longer to build and sustain a readership. What you can do is build *toward* a successful blog by making careful decisions about audience, context, genre, credibility, and design, and by paying close attention to mechanics and navigation. These choices should make your readers changed for having read your blog, encouraged to revise their thinking or at least see something in a new light. Readers should also feel that you are a node in a network, not simply screaming your thoughts out into the void but engaging with a community of thinkers online.

Your blog must include all of the following components:

- An about page
- Blogroll
- 7-10 entries of approximately 200-300 words each
- At least three visuals (photos, videos…), though depending on your audience and context you may need more

You must submit a complete blog by the last day of class to receive credit for the course. Complete blogs will be graded according to the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sophisticated (A)</th>
<th>Good (B)</th>
<th>Underdeveloped (C)</th>
<th>Limited (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience &amp; context</strong></td>
<td>Topic selection, title, and blog entries demonstrate superior understanding of audience and context.</td>
<td>Topic selection, title, and blog entries demonstrate good understanding of audience and context.</td>
<td>Topic selection, title, and blog entries are directed to a “general” reader.</td>
<td>Topic selection, title, and blog entries demonstrate little understanding of audience and context. Blog is named after the writer/class without explanation of that choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
<td>Each entry is focused on a specific topic relevant to the overall theme of the blog.</td>
<td>Each entry is mostly focused on a topic relevant to the overall theme of the blog, but may occasionally veer into unrelated topics.</td>
<td>There are some connections between each entry and the overall theme of the blog.</td>
<td>There are few clear connections between each entry and the overall theme of the blog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>The about page provides a specific rationale for the blog and establishes credibility without relying on unnecessary personal detail. Where included, examples are always integrated with explanation and analysis.</td>
<td>The about page provides a specific rationale for the blog and establishes credibility, but may incorporate unnecessary personal detail. Where included, examples are often integrated with explanation and analysis.</td>
<td>The about page provides a generalized rationale for the blog and makes some gestures toward credibility. Where included, examples are not integrated with explanation and analysis.</td>
<td>The about page is overly concentrated on biographical details unrelated to the blog content. Examples are not included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>The WordPress theme is appropriate to the blog genre and adapted for specific purposes. Images are thoughtfully prepared and well incorporated.</td>
<td>The WordPress theme is appropriate to the blog genre. Some elements of the theme are adapted, but for unclear purposes. Images are mostly thoughtfully prepared and well incorporated.</td>
<td>The WordPress theme is appropriate to the blog genre, but it is not adapted to suit the blog's purpose. Images are included, but may be poorly prepared or poorly incorporated.</td>
<td>The WordPress theme is inappropriate to the blog genre. Images are not included or are poorly prepared and poorly incorporated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>The blog is nearly error-free. The blog may contain a few errors, but they do not impede understanding.</td>
<td>The blog contains superficial errors as well as those that impede understanding.</td>
<td>The blog contains many errors that impede understanding.</td>
<td>The blog contains many errors that impede understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>A clear organizational scheme unfolds while reading the blog. If tags/categories are used, they are applied consistently to offer better navigation of the site. There are no broken links.</td>
<td>An organizational scheme unfolds while reading the blog. If tags/categories are used, they are mostly applied consistently. There are few to no broken links.</td>
<td>An organizational scheme may be apparent, but not until after multiple viewings of the blog. If tags/categories are used, they are inconsistently applied. There are some broken links.</td>
<td>The overall organization unclear. There are broken links or empty pages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflection 2
Your first formal reflection for this course helped you to develop a blog topic. In this reflection, you’ll set longer-term goals based on your blogging experience. You may answer each of the questions individually or use your answers to these questions to develop a cohesive essay about your experiences in this course. In either format, your finished reflection should be approximately 500 words.

1. How has your blogging impacted your writing in other settings (academic writing, social media, e-mail…)?
2. How has your blogging impacted your reading in those same settings?
3. What are the most important lessons you’ve learned about visual rhetoric (document design, image use, photography…)?
4. What blogs do you plan to continue following (through Feedly or a similar app) after the term ends? Why? How do these blogs extend or challenge your thinking?
5. After reading many different blogs and creating your own blog, how has your understanding of evidence changed? In the blogosphere, what is good evidence? What is bad evidence? How will you evaluate the evidence you find linked in blogs?
6. Summarize your learning from the course as a microblogger…
   on Instagram (describe what you’d take a picture of):
   on Twitter:
   on YikYak:
   on a platform I’ve never heard of, and why: