

EH 434 Special topics in Professional Writing: Visual Communication

Course Description and Prerequisite:

The study and production of visual communication with special emphasis on print and digital document design and technical graphics. Students will explore the theories, concepts, and methods used to rhetorically analyze, interpret, and create visual images and artifacts. EH 322 or EH 323 prerequisites.

Welcome!

Visual communication is more than just designing well; it's designing effectively for specific rhetorical situations—for example, taking into consideration the goal or purpose of a design, the needs and expectations of the audience, and the context in which the design will circulate.

In this course, you will learn how to use principles of rhetoric and design to create persuasive visual documents. This class will help you to develop your skills by having you redesign an organizational document (such as a flyer, advertisement, etc.), communicating through data, and designing for social change.

Delivery Method

Online: This is an online course and most of the communication occurs in the Canvas Learning Management System. I communicate primarily through email, weekly announcements, and the modules navigation page

Course Objectives

By the end of this class, students will be able to:

- Evaluate, articulate, and respond to a defined purpose and audience for the creation and design of texts.
- Explain and apply theoretical perspectives from related disciplines that study the visual, including professional and technical communication, rhetoric, and design.
- Apply theories, principles, and elements of visual rhetoric to designed documents.
- Identify and use the appropriate, industry-leading creative technologies to compose and edit visual texts.
- Use visual rhetoric to mediate knowledge, values, and action in a variety of social and professional contexts.

Texts and Resources:

- **Textbook:** Williams, R. (2015). *The Non-Designer's Design Book, Fourth Edition*. San Francisco: Peachpit Press. ISBN 9780133966343. New and used paperbacks available on Amazon for about \$25. E-text rental around \$16.
- **Supplemental PDFs.** PDFs of book chapters and journal articles will be provided in Canvas.

Attendance Defined for online classes:

Since this is an online course, your attendance at a physical location is not required. However, you will need to demonstrate active involvement in the course activities by keeping up with reading responses, project deliverables, and other coursework. You will also need to respond to emails from the instructor as well as fellow students promptly to ensure that good communication flows in all directions.

Late and Make-up Policy:

A student may make up missed assignments or turn in late assignments during each module. Once the module has passed, there will be no opportunity to submit late assignments. For example, project 1 is in module 1—once project 1 is submitted, there should be no late submissions of exercises, discussion posts, or drafts.

The missed assignments must also be communicated to the instructor within 3 days. It is the student's responsibility to plan with the instructor for making up the missed work. All assignments must be submitted to canvas. Any assignments submitted elsewhere will not be counted.

Major projects

Assessment	Percent of Final Grade	Course learning outcome alignment
Project 1: (Re)Designing Organizational Documents (individual). Final deliverables due: Week 5, Sunday night 11:59pm	25%	1, 2, 3
Project 2: Communicating through Data Visualization (individual). Final deliverables due: Week 10, Sunday night 11:59pm	25%	1, 2, 4, 5
Project 3: Designing for Social Change (group). Final deliverables due Week 15, Sunday night 11:59pm	30%	1, 3, 4, 5
Engagement/Exercises: Includes all assignments that fall outside of other categories. Students who do not regularly and substantially participate in a professional and congenial manner cannot earn an A in this course. Due: Ongoing	20%	

Critical Assignments

Project 1: (Re)Designing Organizational Documents

Students will redesign three different types of print-based organizational documents applying elements, principles, and theories of design to achieve specific rhetorical goals. Then they will then justify their design choices using a precise vocabulary of established professional terminology.

Project 2: Communicating through Data Visualization

Students will explore the power of data by designing clear, engaging, and insightful graphs and charts. The goal for this project is for students to learn how to take complex data sets and transform them into visually compelling stories that are easily understood by diverse audiences. Students will learn the principles of effective information design, including clarity, accuracy, and aesthetics. They will work with real-world data to create various types of visualizations (such as bar graphs, line charts, infographics, and interactive dashboards). The project will emphasize the importance of context, data interpretation, and user experience in crafting visual narratives that communicate key insights effectively.

Project 3: Designing for Social Change

In this project, students will work as to create visual rhetorics that mediate knowledge, values, and action. For this project, students will create a poster that intends to create positive change in a social cause of your choice. They will also construct deliverables by applying elements, principles, and theories of design to achieve specific rhetorical goals. They will justify their design choices using a precise vocabulary of professional terminology established in Modules 1 and 2 and critique the ethics of their designs.

Student engagement (or, how to succeed in this course)

Success in this course depends heavily on your individual effort and active engagement. Because this is an **online, asynchronous class**, there are no live meetings to replace missed material. The instructional videos, readings, and activities **are the course**.

You are expected to:

- Watch all assigned lecture videos in full (even if you watch them at 2x speed)
- Complete readings and learning activities by their deadlines
- Actively engage with the course content before attempting assignments or assessments

If you do not watch the videos or engage with the materials, you will **not receive the necessary content or knowledge** to succeed on quizzes, exams, discussions, or projects. Simply submitting assignments without engaging with the instructional materials will likely result in poor performance.

This course requires consistent time, attention, and self-discipline. Online learning offers flexibility, but it also places greater responsibility on you to keep up with the material. Falling behind or choosing not to engage is a choice that directly impacts your learning and your grade.

If you are struggling with time management, understanding the material, or staying motivated, you are encouraged to reach out early for support. Effort and engagement are essential—and expected—for success in this course.

Civility Statement:

You are expected to be respectful of others' opinions, ideas, time, work, and wellbeing, and to treat your classmates, instructor, and their work with the respect they would want in turn – both in the physical classroom and in the online setting. I expect every member of our classroom community to treat each other with equal respect, to strive for understanding, and to allow everyone to express their views without fear of ridicule or ostracization. The diverse perspectives that you and your classmates bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit, and it will enhance students' learning needs. Our class will foster an environment that honors the identities and backgrounds of all individuals. I invite any students who see or experience instances of bias, exclusion, or derogatory language or actions to report these instances directly to me.

Inappropriate Papers and Assignments:

Papers and other assignments that the instructor considers offensive or inappropriate in attitude or content will be returned with a grade of zero. Papers or assignments that do not follow the prescribed assignment will receive a grade of zero. Papers or other assignments that contain AI-generated material when the assignment does not allow for any AI-generated material will receive a grade of zero. It will be up to the instructor to determine whether the student will be allowed to turn in a different paper or assignment and if it will be eligible for any/all points.

Notice of Instructional Use:

All student work in this course may be used for instructional purposes in future classes and faculty professional development unless the student notifies the instructor in writing at the beginning of the semester to exclude their work. All identifying information will be removed from the work prior to using it as an instructional tool.

Technology and Digital Content Statement:

For this course you will need a laptop with video camera and audio microphone, a word processing program like Microsoft Word, and reliable internet access. Please see the university's [Student Laptop Policy](#) for more information.

All videos, documents, and content in this course may only be used in and for this class. No video, document, or content may be downloaded or captured for personal use beyond this class without the

written permission of its owner. Likewise, please seek permission from the instructor before recording (video or audio) the instructor or any portion of class.

University Academic Policies and Statements:

All official university academic policies are housed on the JSU website and apply to every student each semester. These policies are essential to your academic success and must be reviewed. You can access them by visiting <https://www.jsu.edu/academicaffairs/academicpolicies/index.html> or through the “Academic Policies” link included in your Canvas course.

University Academic Honesty Policy:

In a university community, true knowledge can be gained only through honest means. A Scholar’s Code can be found in both the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs and the Student Handbook. Students who violate the Scholar’s Code will be subject to disciplinary actions which could range from a zero on an assignment to failure of the course; repeated offenses can result in dismissal from the university. Records of academic dishonesty are kept in the Office of Community Standards and Student Ethics.

Scholar’s Code Violations Reporting:

Any attempt at academic dishonesty as defined by JSU’s Scholar’s Code—including unauthorized use of AI or AI-powered writing assistants used for sentence editing—will be reported to the university by your instructor via the Academic Integrity Reporting Form. When students are reported for a violation of The Scholar’s Code, they will receive an email notification. Repeated violations will result in additional disciplinary action.

In the English Department, if a student has been reported three times in the same class for violating The Scholar’s Code, a grade of “F” (or “NC” in EH101, EH102, EH103, EH104, EH105, and EH106) may be assigned for the semester.

AI policy

Red Light: The assignments in this class have been designed to challenge you to develop creativity, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills. Using AI technology will limit your capacity to develop these skills and to meet the learning goals of this course.

Use of AI in ways that are inconsistent with the parameters above will be considered academic misconduct and subject to the JSU’s Scholar’s Code. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic integrity in this course or at Jacksonville State University, please feel free to contact me to discuss your concerns.

All work submitted for this course must be your own. Any use of generative AI tools, including, but not limited to ChatGPT, when working on assignments is forbidden. Use of **generative AI** will be considered academic misconduct and subject to investigation.

Canvas Help and Support

Please visit the Online@JSU website for general Canvas help and support and for [Canvas computer requirements](#).

General JSU Tech Support

Website: [Technology Support Center](#)

Email: techcenter@jsu.edu

Phone: 256-782-8324

Cengage Help and Support

1 -800-354-9706

<https://cengage.force.com/s/login/>

Counseling

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with academic performance and/or negatively impact daily life. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, please contact Counseling Services at 256.782.5475 or visit <https://www.jsu.edu/ccservices/index.html> for more information or to request an appointment. Students may also stop by the Counseling Center at 147 Trustee Circle (located between Sparkman and Mason Halls) to request services. Additionally, the office offers [self-help resources](#) to explore ways students can independently support their mental health.

In the event of a crisis after hours, please contact the University Police Department at 256.782.5050 to be connected with the on-call counselor. The National Suicide Prevention hotline (988) is another resource and is available 24 hours a day. You may also reach out to Crisis Text by texting 741 741 where you will be connected to a trained responder.

What do I do if I am struggling in some aspect of my life?

There are lots of taboos that we never talk about. Things like money, food, and shelter because it seems we should all have these things, especially if we're in college. That's not necessarily true. We also don't talk about our mental health enough, and it's really easy to let things pile up mentally to where you start to suffer from the weight of it all.

If you have car problems, sickness, or any other issue not listed here—please come and talk with me. My door is always open, and I'll find ways to get you the help that you need.

Below are some resources on campus and in the community:

- Gamecock market: <https://www.jsu.edu/gamecockmarket/index.html>
- Mental health resource center: <https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center/>

Course schedule: EH 434

Module 2 Topic: (Re)Designing Organizational Documents	Weekly Tasks
Week #1: Introduction to Rhetoric and Principles of Design	Read • Project 1 instructions • Hagen and Golombisky (2017) “What is design?” • Hill (2004) The Psychology of Rhetorical Images • Blair (2004) The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments • Williams, R. (2015). The Non-Designer’s Design Book, Fourth Edition. San Francisco: Peachpit Press. ISBN 9780133966343. Chapter 1-3. Complete

	• M1.1 Exercise: Identifying the Elements and Principles of Design • M1.1 Discussion: QCCQ 1
Week #2: Theories and principles of design	Read • Williams, R. (2015). The Non-Designer's Design Book, Fourth Edition. San Francisco: Peachpit Press. ISBN 9780133966343. Chapters 4-5 • Johnson (2020) Considering White Space Complete • M1.2 Exercise: Creating Alignment • M1.2 Exercise: Creating Proximity • M1.2 Exercise: Constructing Contrast • M1.2 Exercise: Locating Repetition
Week #3: Visual Language, Culture, and Power	Read • Kimball & Hawkins (2008) Chapter 3: Theories of Design • N. Amare and A. Manning, "A language for visuals: Design, purpose, usability," 2008 IEEE International Professional Communication Conference, Montreal, QC, Canada, 2008, pp. 1-9, doi: 10.1109/IPCC.2008.4610192. • Read Adobe Accessibility overview. https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html#make_PDFs_accessible • Read Illinois State Accessibility checklist https://help.illinoisstate.edu/accessibility/website-and-digital/accessibility-tips-for-canva Complete • M1.3 Exercise: Needs Analysis • M1.3 Discussion: QCCQ 2
Week #4: Theory to practice	Read • Project 1 rubric • Read Kostelnick, C. (2020). The Art of Visual Design: The Rhetoric of Aesthetics in Technical

	Communication. <i>Technical Communication</i>, 67(4), 6–27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27340192 Complete • M1.4 Discussion: Group Critique • M1.4 Discussion: QCCQ 3 • M1.4 Assignment: Draft of Project 1
Week #5: Project 1 Self Review of Drafts and Revising Based on Instructor Feedback	Read • Project 1 instructor feedback Complete • M1.5 Exercise: Self-Review • M1.5 Exercise: Revision Planning • M1.5 Assignment: Final Draft of Project 1
Module 2 Topic: Communicating with data	Weekly Tasks
Week #6: What is data?	Read • Project 2 instructions • Read Gitelman & Jackson (2014). “Raw Data” Is an Oxymoron Lisa Gitelman (Vol. 47) Introduction • Read Rosenberg (2014). “Raw Data” Is an Oxymoron Lisa Gitelman (Vol. 47) Chapter 1 • DRAGGA, S., & VOSS, D. (2001). Cruel Pies: The Inhumanity of Technical Illustrations. <i>Technical Communication</i>, 48(3), 265–274. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43090430 Complete • M2.1 Exercise: What is Data? • M2.1 Discussion: QCCQ 4
Week #7: Information design	Read • C. Kostelnick, "The Visual Rhetoric of Data Displays: The Conundrum of Clarity*," in <i>IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication</i>, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 116-130, March 2008, doi: 10.1109/TPC.2007.914869 Complete • M2.2 Discussion: QCCQ 5 • M2.2 Exercise: Visual Analysis Activity

	• M2.2 Exercise: Ethics of Visual Design
Week #8:	Read • Kostelnick, C. (2016). The Re-Emergence of Emotional Appeals in Interactive Data Visualization. <i>Technical Communication</i>, 63(2), 116–135. Complete • M2.3 Discussion: QCCQ 6 • M2.3 Exercise: Working with/ Analyzing Data • M2.3 Assignment: Draft of Project 2
Week #9:	Read • Project 2 rubric • Project 2 instructor feedback Complete • M2.4 Exercise: Self-Review • M2.4 Discussion: Group Critique
Week #10:	Complete • M2.5 Assignment: Final Draft of Project 2
Module 3 Topic: Designing for Social Change	Weekly Tasks
Week #11: Setting up Teams for Success	Read • Project 3 instructions • Two Types of Motivation: Design to Satisfy Users • Read Batterbee (2020) How the design of digital products motivates user behavior. https://uxdesign.cc/how-the-design-of-digital-products-motivates-user-behaviour-41b2758be967 • Read Heller, S. (2015, October 7). Can Posters Still Change the World? Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <i>The Atlantic</i> website: https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/10/can-posters-still-change-the-world/409078/ • Read Kolson, A. H. (2019, August 30). What's the Deal With AOC's Retro-Style GND Posters? Bloomberg CityLab. Retrieved from

	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-30/no-aoc-s-posters-aren-t-based-on-soviet-art Complete • M3.1 Exercise: Posters Can Change the World • M3.1 Exercise: How does design motivate action? • M3.1 Exercise: Defining your topic
Week #12: Social Action and Design	Read • Meng, M. (2019). Effects of Visual Signaling in Screenshots: An Eye Tracking Study. <i>Technical Communication</i>, 66(4), 396–411. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27303390 Complete • M3.2 Exercise: Deceptive Design • M3.2 Discussion: QCCQ 7
Week #13: Designing for accessibility	Read • Sgarro, V. (2018, August 13). What are “Ethics in Design”? Retrieved June 22, 2020, from Slate Magazine website: https://slate.com/technology/2018/08/ethics-in-design-what-exactly-does-that-mean.html • Read Deceptive Patterns: Hall of Shame, https://www.deceptive.design/hall-of-shame • Read Kiess (2019) UX Ethics: Is It Okay to Deceive Your User...Even if it is in Their Best Interest? https://blog.prototypr.io/ux-ethics-is-it-okay-to-deceive-your-user-even-if-it-is-in-their-best-interest-336d3c7e31e2 • Read MacAvery (2021) Dark patterns, the dark side of design. https://www.macavery.com/ethics-in-graphic-design/dark-patterns-the-dark-side-of-design • Read Piller, E. (2025). Inhuman Rhetoric: Generative AI and Crisis Communication. <i>Journal of Business & Technical Communication</i>, 39(1), 42–50. https://doi-org.lib-proxy.jsu.edu/10.1177/10506519241280594 Complete • M3.3 Exercise: Designing for Accessibility

	• M3.3 Exercise: Design Brief • M3.3 Discussion: QCCQ 8 • M3.3 Assignment: Draft of Project 3
Week #14: Drafting Project 3 Deliverables	Read • Dam & Sing (2023) Test Your Prototypes: How to Gather Feedback and Maximize Learning. https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/test-your-prototypes-how-to-gather-feedback-and-maximise-learning • Read: Drive research (2020) Product Prototype Surveys: What Are They and Why Do They Matter? https://www.driveresearch.com/market-research-company-blog/product-prototype-surveys-what-are-they-and-why-do-they-matter/ • Harrison (2019) How To Ask For Design Feedback. https://designlab.com/blog/how-to-ask-for-design-feedback-10-top-tips Complete • M3.4 Discussion: Group Critique • M3.4 Exercise: Self-Review
Week #15: Project 3 Self Review and Instructor Feedback	Read • Project 3 rubric • Project 2 instructor feedback Complete • M3.5 Exercise: Revision Planning • M3.5 Assignment: Final Draft of Project 3
Week #16:	Course close out