

ENG 201 Writing in the Humanities: *Queer Visual Texts*

Winter 2023

CRN: 10690

MWF: 2:30-3:50pm, MW HU101, F HH101

Instructor: Sophia Brauner (she/her)

Office Hours: Wednesday 12-2, HU362; or by appointment (Zoom option available)

E-Mail: braunes2@wwu.edu



About This Course



Welcome to our course... and welcome to the syllabus! The syllabus is one of the most important documents of our course, so read it closely!

In this course, we will explore a variety of visual texts that represent gender, sexuality, and queerness.

Together we'll ask **in which ways different visual texts function as community building, identity exploration, protest, and/or resistance for the queer community and for their various audiences?**

We'll spend our first few weeks looking at visual texts like paintings, photography, and YouTube videos together. For most of this course, you will investigate a topic of your choosing, grounded in our guiding question.

You'll need daily attention to our Canvas site and calendar, frequent access to a computer, and a notebook for in-class writing. All reading material will be on Canvas. Consult the canvas calendar for the schedule of our class.

What are the Humanities?



Whenever you tell a story, see a film or a work of art, or ponder an ethical question, you are encountering the humanities. In other words, the humanities ask how people, from every period of history and from every corner of the globe, invent, construct, and document diverse human experiences. A humanities education provides a deep knowledge of history, language, literature, philosophy, and the visual arts, as well as a profound understanding of the contributions of influential thinkers, writers, and artists from many cultures. Whether you're analyzing a science-fiction movie from the 90s or discussing what board games tell us about how meaning is constructed, the humanities will help you learn how to think creatively and critically, to be curious, and to keep asking questions.

General University Requirements (GURs)



- ♦ At Western, GURs provide you with a variety of **literacies. The term literacy encompasses what you know and how you practice that knowledge.** Each GUR you take addresses a different combination of knowledge and practices literacies.
- ♦ The Core Knowledge Literacy of our class is *Social, Cultural, and Historical Literacies*. Meaning, our class will focus on the foundational knowledge and aesthetic, theoretical, and methodological approaches to studying the diversity of human experience.
- ♦ Our Practice Literacies are *Communicative & Interpretive Literacies, Creative & Problem-Solving Literacies, and Critical & Reflective Literacies*. How do these literacies show up in our class? We will focus on *reading, interpreting, and communicating information* in a range of forms for audiences that are both general and specific. We will encounter methods of *solving complex problems* in order to create aesthetically engaging work and, finally, practice *evaluating and contextualizing* sources and information in order to examine our own, and other's, *assumptions, values, and beliefs* about our course's content.

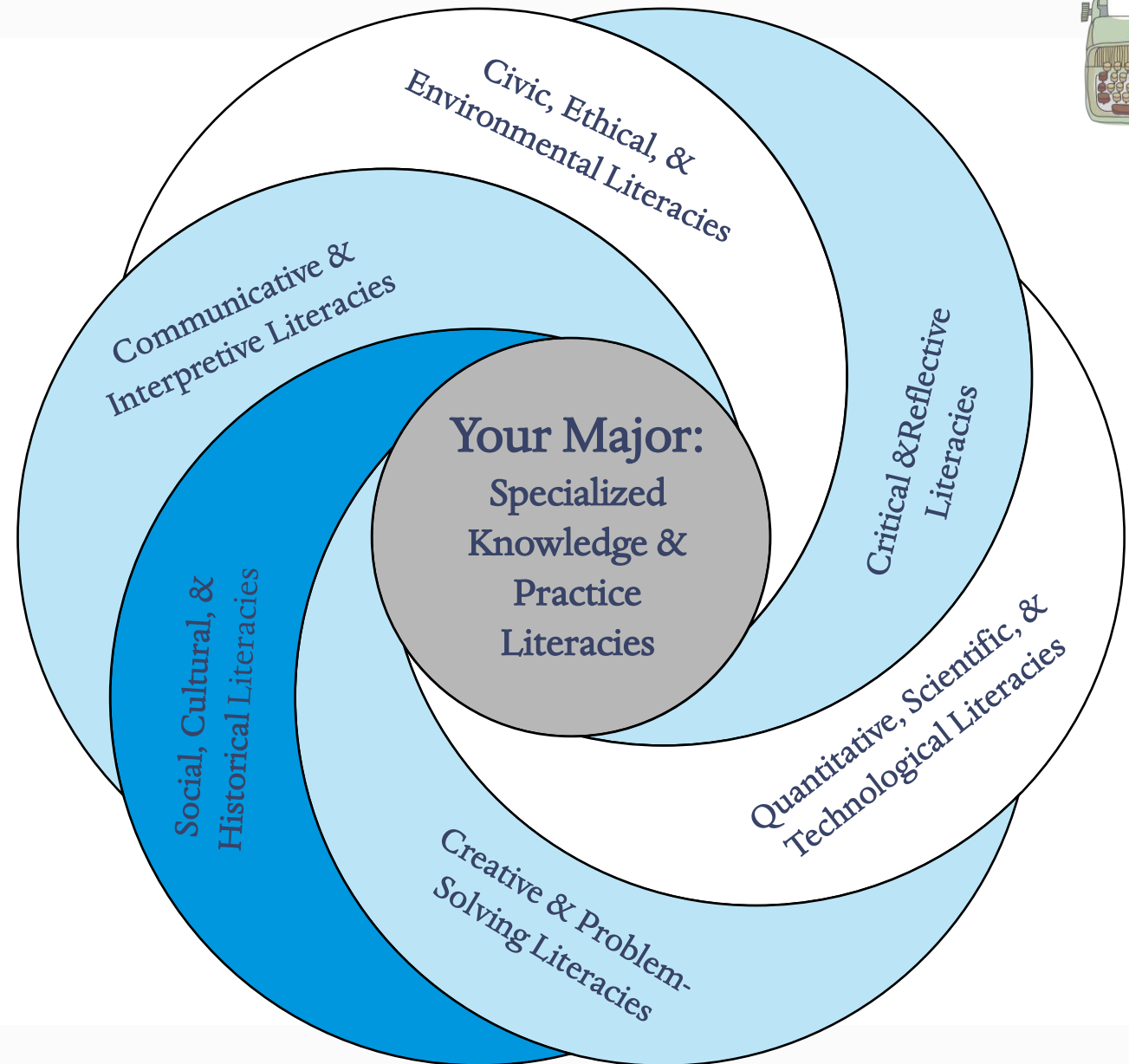




GURs at Western

This is an overview of all Core Knowledge Literacies (white and darker blue) and Practice Literacies (lighter blue) for GURs at Western. I highlighted the literacies that apply to this course in blue.

Think about other GUR courses you've taken at Western so far (for example, ENG101). Which literacies did these courses focus on?



Course Work



Major Assignments

Cumulative Portfolio: Your portfolio consists of six entries that you will submit throughout the quarter. Each entry asks you to find, create, and/or analyze visual texts related to our guiding question. More details are in the assignment prompts on Canvas.

Critical Inquiry Paper: The Critical Inquiry Paper introduces you to ways of writing in the Humanities, which are all forms of joining a conversation of other scholars talking about different texts. Exploring a topic of your choice, you'll put your own spin on our overall inquiry question, thereby joining and continuing a larger conversation about queer visual texts. Your final product will be a source-based "essay" (though we'll challenge some of our assumptions about this genre) accompanied by an abstract.

Reading and Responses

We will read a lot in this course. I will assign several articles throughout the quarter and you will read your own sources for your critical inquiry project. I will ask you to submit reading responses and other small writing assignments on a weekly basis. All reading material and assignment descriptions are on Canvas.



Requirements and Responsibilities



Technological Responsibilities

I expect you are proficient with email, Canvas, and a word processor. I do not expect you to have a firm grasp on other tools we might use, but I ask you to be patient enough with the learning curve, graceful enough with yourself, and brave enough to just keep working at it, pushing buttons until you figure it out or until it breaks. And when that happens, ask the internet for help.

Collaborative Work

While most of our work is individual, we will be writing, researching, and reading as a community which we can only build and grow if we respect each other's work and really listen before we respond to each other. I welcome, honor, and respect your vulnerability and urge you to show every member of our community the same respect.

Readiness

You come prepared and are ready to work when class starts. Always have a pen and paper ready on your desk. When we're in the lab, you log onto your student account right away.



Attendance

I'm taking attendance daily. If you miss more than three days, come talk to me about what's happening—because I'll be worried about you—and it will become less likely you're able to fulfill the requirements of our labor contract (which I explain later in the syllabus). I'm aware that sickness and other circumstances can make it difficult to make it to class each day, which is why you are permitted three absences without it impacting your grade. If you miss class more than three times, it is your job to ask me how you can move forward successfully in this class.

Communication



Class & Individual Communication

During the quarter, I will use Canvas announcements to communicate with the class. Turn on your notifications for announcements so you don't miss any important information.

If I want to reach out to you individually, I'll use your WWU email address.

Communication With Me

You can send me an e-mail, a Canvas message, or visit me during office hours.

Reach out to me if you're struggling with the class, have any questions concerning the class, and/or would like to talk about your own research ideas.

I expect you to inform me about your absences and any course-related struggles. I'm here to help you succeed in our course!

Evaluation: A note on grades



Dear class,

In most learning situations outside of school, you never receive grades. The learning that occurs in martial arts, cooking, dance, or yoga studios does not use any grading. Why? In these “studio” classes, it seems meaningless to give students grades, right? And yet without any grades, those students get better at martial arts, better at dance, and better at cooking. I know we that can’t radically change our institution’s grading culture in one quarter, but these studio learning situations should prompt us to ask some big questions: *Why are grades meaningless in those settings but seem so important in a university setting? How do grades affect learning in classrooms? What social dynamics do the presence of grades create?* In both the classroom and in the “studio,” instructors provide students with evaluative feedback pointing out where they’ve done well and where improvement is still possible. In the studio situation, students help each other, even rely on each other for this feedback. Why is that so rare in the classroom?

So, here’s one of the biggest hurdles I’m trying to overcome: Using conventional grading structures often leads students to think more about their “A” or their “C” than about their writing and thinking; it leads them to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what they really want to learn. Conventional grading may cause you to be reluctant to take risks with your writing and ideas—it certainly stopped me from taking risks in college. The set-up of the educational system moves us to think of our work only in terms of grades, not in terms of personal and professional growth. We get frustrated when we don’t receive the grade we desire and lose track of the cool projects we do produce. Conventional grading, I’m convinced, doesn’t allow you to fail in spectacular ways, which is a primary way in which people learn. The psychological research in education has demonstrated over and over that letter grades not only do not help students learn, but they can actually get in your way.

Evaluation: A note on grades



For these reasons, I am incorporating a labor contract instead of a letter system for grading in our class. The contract is all about the labor you do for this course. In a labor contract, I don't look at how well or clever or creatively you have used a writing move, incorporated a source, or written your introduction. Instead, I look at whether you have used a writing move, incorporated a source, or written an introduction. I look for the labor evidence in your texts.

So, what exactly does that mean for you? I think labor evaluation will help you focus on how you engage your own learning. I'm convinced that such a contract fits better with a course that is built on the idea that a great deal of learning can occur alongside production—alongside the making of cool projects. Ultimately, I'm interested in giving my attention, my concern, and my care to your labor—the work you actually put in and the risks you take. That's what I hope you care about too. Of course, when you give all your attention, concern, and care to the ways in which you work, you'll produce high quality projects that you and I can both be proud of.

What we're going to try to do together is approximate the evaluative conditions of a studio class. If you're looking to game the system and do the least amount of work to get the highest possible course grade, you're going to really struggle here. You'll be frustrated, even angry. But if you wish to challenge yourself as a writer, a reader, and a rhetorician, and are willing to dig into some work, and even take some weird risks within that work, then this is the class for you. **Again, the idea is that I celebrate and concentrate on your labor, not the “quality” of your final projects.** Although we will discuss quality and how it is important to your success, but not necessarily important to your course grade.

Evaluation: A note on grades

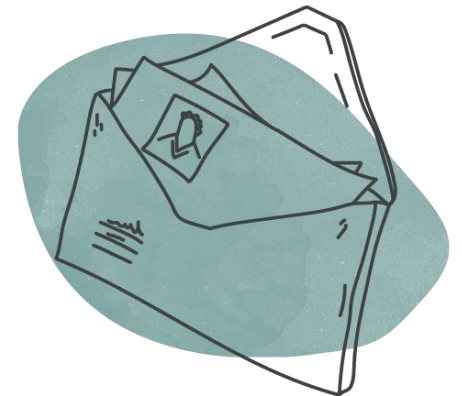


My hope is that this contract system will encourage you to take risks in your writing and to work harder in class than you might be used to, knowing I am trying to value both risk and hard work. Good, deep, important learning often happens because of failure—so it's really not failure at all. **Failure really only happens in our class when you just do not do the work—the labor.** Most importantly, what looks like failure in this class can show us our weaknesses, misunderstandings, and opportunities for growing and changing. This will help you build strategies of self-assessment that function in ways far more useful to you than gauging some professor's approval based on a letter they write on your paper.

I'm happy you're here and I'm so ready to get to work with you!

Cheers,

Sophia



Labor Contract



*This contract outlines the labor that I expect of you in the different activities of this class. Contract grading might be new and a bit confusing for you but remember that it's all about the labor you put into this class. **In short, complete the work I ask you to and you'll get an A.***

IN CLASS

Collaboration, Readiness, Attendance:

- ♦ You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups.
- ♦ You come prepared and are ready to work when class starts. That means, have something to write ready on your desk. When we're in the lab, log onto your student account right away.
- ♦ You agree to hand in all your work on time. I will not accept late work. If a serious and unavoidable problem comes up, contact me prior to any deadline to determine what we can do.
- ♦ You agree to bring your drafts to class, either digitally or printed.
- ♦ You agree to respect every class member's names and pronouns.

Labor Contract



OUTSIDE OF CLASS

Portfolio and CIP

- Each project comes with a rubric outlining the criteria necessary for you to complete the project. If you meet all the criteria, you'll receive an A. You agree to carefully study the rubric for each project and perform the labor that is required to meet all criteria.
- Note that you can't lose points because, in this class, you start with nothing and then work toward what's possible for each of your projects!
- You agree to reach out to me when you can't get your work in on time so we can work out a plan to get you back on track.

Revisions & Copy Editing

- When asked to revise your work, you will reshape, extend, complicate, or substantially clarify your ideas.
- Revisions must somehow respond to your colleagues' and my feedback in order to "count" as revisions and to be marked as complete.
- Your final assignments must be copy-edited, that is free from most typos and weird grammatical issues. As long as I can follow your ideas, I don't care about spelling and grammar—your ideas are much more interesting!

That's the Labor Contract! By staying in class, it's what you agree to do. And it's what will help you create projects of which you can be legit proud!

How your grade comes together



COURSE GRADE	Projects that meet criteria	Missing Drafts	Missing Responses	Absences
A	2	0	3	3
B	2	1-2	4	3+
C	2	3	5-6	3+

Yes, WWU does allow for +/- course grades, which we may have to use at the end of the quarter as we, together, evaluate how well you met the terms of the contract. And yes, you can earn a course grade lower than a C, but do know that you have to earn a C- to earn GUR credit.

So as far as I'm concerned, one of my jobs is to set things up in such a way that you can make projects of which you're proud, and can earn an A (or at very least, a B) in the course.

Accommodations, Resources, Academic Integrity



- ♦ Students with documented disabilities have the right to accommodations. [Click here to apply for accommodations](#). I encourage you to give this a shot! Feel free to talk to me about how we can best support you in this class.
- ♦ I've also put together a list of campus resources for you to check out on our Canvas site. Here you'll find resources for minoritized groups, your mental health, food and housing insecurity, and more. Go take a look!
- ♦ WWU students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure," which you are encouraged to read [here](#).

