

Bookends

the Past, Present, and Future of the Book

Topics in Humanities Computing
CRN 86006 ENGL 306/001
MW 1430-1545
G18 Colson Hall
Syllabus: <http://tinyurl.com/9ybzqmz>

Professor Sandy Baldwin, Spring 2012
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Office: G20 Colson. Hours: MW 1300-1430

Required texts (abbr.)

The Elements of Typographic Style, by Robert Bringhurst (RB)
The Book History Reader, by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (F&M)
Uncreative Writing, by Kenneth Goldsmith (KG)
The Non-Designer's InDesign Book, by Robin Williams (RW)

Course Catalog Description

Topics include: literary studies (electronic publications, web-based, interactive fiction, poetry, drama, nonfiction), creative writing in digital media, composition on-line, pedagogy, cultural studies of electronic media, online communications, language studies. Topics rotate; check with instructor.

Course Topics and Goals

"Those who say the book is moribund often cite the computer as the asp on the mat. But the electronic highway is for bulletin boards on esoteric subjects, reference works, lists and news -- timely, utilitarian information, efficiently pulled through the wires. Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever." - Annie Proulx in a 1994 *New York Times* article

Since April 1, 2011, the *New York Times* reports that "Amazon sold 105 books for its Kindle e-reader for every 100 hardcover and paperback books, including books without Kindle versions and excluding free e-books" (including all of Annie Proulx's books)

This course asks and explores a series of questions:

What is a book? What is the history of books?

What is our relation to books? How are we emotionally and intellectually tied to books?

What is the difference between the *form* of a book and the *physical material* object of book?

What are books today? How are books changing? What will books be?

This course also has a pragmatic goal. You will make several books and, in the process, learn about the design and construction of books and typesetting. You will finish the course with a solid understanding of InDesign, the industry-standard software for desktop publishing.

Requirements

Twenty short responses of at least 300 words each, graded pass/fail. **20% of final grade.**

- Where the syllabus states **Response**, you must respond to the prompt with a post to your blog by class time, with the exception of responses on 8/22 and 11/26, which are done in class. In addition, you must email your blog url to Sandy by the end of 8/22.

Four books, each a minimum of 10 pages, letter-graded. **20% each, for 80% of final grade.**

- Book 1. A book that is a creative work, a work of art in your opinion. It must be a non-digital object that you can bring to class, but otherwise the construction is up to you. It can be made of paper or wood or plastic or cloth or etc. The content is up to you as well. Final version brought to class.
- Book 2. An unpublishable/unprintable book, emerging from the class discussion. It must be in digital form. You may use Microsoft Word or any other program you choose. The content is up to you. Final version uploaded to Google docs or elsewhere on the web and linked/posted to your blog.
- Book 3. A digital book designed and typeset with a text authored by you - anything you want, from an essay or a poem or something else, whether written in the past or something newly written - using InDesign and principles learned in Bringhurst and Williams, as well as in the rest of the course. Final version, exported as pdf, uploaded to Google docs or elsewhere on the web and linked/posted to your blog.
- Book 4. A digital book on the future of books, in your opinion, based on your blog responses, using InDesign and principles learned in Bringhurst and Williams, as well as in the rest of the course. Use the content and the design to explore your ideas. Final version, exported as pdf, or other readable format, uploaded to Google docs or elsewhere on the web and linked/posted to your blog.

Attendance and Participation

Attending class and participating in the class activities is indicative of professional conduct and is a basic courtesy to others in the class. You are expected to attend every class. Every unexcused absence or failure to participate after the first week – starting with class on 8/27 – will lower your overall final grade by 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from an A to an A-, and so on). I am happy to discuss the absence policy. I will determine what constitutes an *excused* absence.

Participation includes but is not limited to coming to class prepared and with all the work due; participating in class activities; and maintaining a courteous and considerate attitude in class (for example: cell phones on silent). All work should be turned in promptly, on the due date, with the proper formatting, and with attention to spelling and grammar. Completing ungraded writing such as drafts and other short writings is *assumed* as part of your participation. Every failure to participate in the above manner will lower your overall final grade by 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from an A to an A-, and so on).

Grade Descriptors

Adapted from standard grade descriptors for writing courses. These are intended to give general grading guidelines and may not apply in every case. Note: In general, I follow a contractual rather than qualitative approach to grading, i.e. if you do the project as described you will get a strong grade.

A Exemplary work that demonstrates originality and initiative. The content is mature, thorough, and well-suited for the audience; the style is clear, accurate, and forceful; the information is well-organized and formatted so that it is accessible and attractive; genre conventions are effectively used; mechanics and grammar are correct.

B Good work. The work generally succeeds in meeting goals in terms of audience, purpose, and genre without the need for further major revisions. It may need some minor improvements in idea, content, presentation, or writing style/mechanics.

C Satisfactory. Work is adequate but requires some substantial revisions of idea, content, presentation, or writing style/mechanics; may require further work in more than one area.

D Work is unprofessional, requires extensive revisions of idea, content, presentation, writing style, and/or mechanics. The writer has encountered significant problems meeting goals of audience, purpose, and genre.

F Not enough information; inappropriate for the situation; and/or major and pervasive problems in terms of content, presentation, or writing style/mechanics that interfere with meaning. May be incomplete, or plagiarism may compromise the work on ethical grounds.

Academic Integrity/Dishonesty Statement

“The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.”

Social Justice Statement

“West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. [...] If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).”

Schedule

All assignments and readings are due at the beginning of class on the date listed. You must be prepared to discuss the readings in the class they are due. Unless otherwise discussed or arranged, assignments delivered after the due date are considered late and will be marked down by third of a grade for every day after the due date.

8/20 Introduction

In class: Medieval Tech Support <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHx-SjgQvQ>, Borsuk Between Page and Screen <http://www.betweenpageandscreen.com/>, “My Kindle Ate my Homework” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/01/my-kindle-ate-my-homework_0_n_306638.html?, Doctorow, “How to destroy the book” <http://vimeo.com/11469418>

8/22 Read Baker, “A New Page” http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/08/03/090803fa_fact_baker, Johnson, “How the E-Book Will Change the Way we Read and Write” <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123980920727621353.html>, Higgins, “Book” <http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/faculty/reese/classes/artistsbooks/Dick%20Higgins.%20A%20Book.pdf>.

In class: Set up blogs. Look at Institute for the Future of the Book Projects <http://www.futureofthebook.org/>

Response 1 (in class): Top Ten List About Books and You. Describe your relation to books through 10 bullet points. Possible bullets to elaborate: Where do you read? How do you read? What do you read? What books made a deep impression? The points can be anecdotes, thoughts, phrases, etc.

8/27 Read Vogler, "When a book is not a book" <http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/faculty/reese/classes/artistsbooks/Vogler.pdf> and Keith A. Smith, "The Book as Physical Object" <http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/faculty/reese/classes/artistsbooks/Keith%20Smith.pdf>

In class: look at Picturing Words (Smithsonian) <http://www.sil.si.edu/exhibitions/PicturingWords/>

Response 2: Focus on Vogler or Smith. Write three thought-provoking questions about the reading and elaborate (answer) one of them.

8/29 Read Karl Young / Notation and the Art of Reading <http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/young/notation/notate.htm> and Iser (F&M)

Response 3: Choose a book of your own, from your shelf or your desk, and describe it physically. Be as specific and detailed as possible. Try to find the right terms for the parts of the book. Bring the book to class.

9/3 Labor Day. No class.

9/5 Read Darnton (F&M) and Adams and Barker (F&M)

Response 4: Focus on Darnton or Adams & Barker. Write three thought-provoking questions about the reading and elaborate (answer) one of them.

9/10 Read Muller (F&M), Eisenstein (F&M), and Johns (F&M)

Response 5: Write about Book 1. What will it look like? Describe it detail as a physical object. What makes it a work of art, in your opinion? Reflect on the project so far. What do you like about the book? What help do you need?

9/12 Read Noegel (F&M) and Ong (F&M)

Response 6: Focus on Noegel or Ong. Write three thought-provoking questions about the reading and elaborate (answer) one of them.

9/17 Rare Books Room Visit (names A-I). Meet at the 6th Floor of the Library. <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/collections/collection.php?id=47>

9/19 Rare book (names J-Z). Meet at the 6th Floor of the Library. <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/collections/collection.php?id=47>

9/24 Read Poster (F&M) , Duguid (F&M) , Nunberg (F&M)

Response 7: Respond to your visit to the WVU Rare Books room. What did you learn? What was most impressive? What questions do you have?

9/26 Book 1 due in class for workshopping.

10/1 Read KG Chapters 1-3 and "How to write 85,000 books" <http://www.neatorama.com/2010/10/05/how-to-write-85000-books/>

Response 8: Focus on one of the first three chapters of KG. Write three thought-provoking questions about the reading and elaborate (answer) one of them.

10/3 Read KG 4-7

Book 1 due, final version.

10/8 Read KG 8-10 and (look at, don't read all of) "Publishing the Unpublishable" <http://ubu.com/ubu/unpub.html>

Response 9: Respond to one of the works in the series "Publishing the Unpublishable." Describe the work (be specific). Do you agree that it is unpublishable? Why or why not? What is "unpublishable"?

10/10 Read KG through end and “DIY Book Scanner” <http://www.wired.com/gadgetlab/2009/12/diy-book-scanner/>

Response 10: Follow the prompt on page 202-204 of KG, and re-type at least 300 words of another text.

10/15 Read Tschichold, “Consistent Correlation Between Book Page and Type Area” <http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/faculty/reese/classes/artistsbooks/jantschichold.pdf> and Wikipedia Canons of Page Construction http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canons_of_page_construction

Response 11: Describe your unpublishable/unprintable book. What is it? What makes it unpublishable and/or unprintable? How are you dealing with “unpublishability” or “unprintability” in making the book?

10/17 Book 2 due for workshopping

10/22 Read RB through Chapter 3

Response 12: Top Ten List for Bringhurst. Write a bullet list of 10 things you learned in the first three chapters of Bringhurst. For each item, provide a definition - what did you learn? - and an evaluation of why is it important and what will you be able to do with it.

10/24 Read RB through Chapter 6.

Book 2 due, final version.

10/29 Read RB through Chapter 10 and RW Chapter 1

Response 13: Bringhurst has a particular style and point of view. What is your take on it? Poetic? Annoying? Inspiring? Discuss at least three examples in detail. Evaluate how his style contributes or detracts from the overall argument.

10/31 Read RB through end and RW Chapter 2-6

Response 14: Describe Book 3. What text are you working with? Why did you choose it? How are you designing it?

11/5 Read RW Chapters 7-8

In class: image sources for your books, including CCsearch <http://search.creativecommons.org/>, Imageafter <http://imageafter.com/>, and Stock Exchange <http://www.sxc.hu/>

Response 15: Start to write your own vision of the future of the book. Incorporate the discussion and themes of the class. How, where, and with what will people read in the future? (Will they read at all?) Consider the pragmatics of reading: What will reading materials be made of? How will they be distributed? Base your argument on what you’ve learned in the course. Note: we will return to and elaborate this response into a longer text.

11/7 Read RW Chapters 9-11 and Rich, “Curling up with hybrid books” http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/01/books/01book.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=curling&st=cse

Response 16: Where are you at with Book 3? What is working well? What problems are you having?

11/12 Book 3 due for workshopping

11/14 Read (look over, browse) *Flight Paths* (<http://www.flightpaths.net/>), *Persistence* Kickstarter <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/868381914/persistence-a-rich-media-fiction> and *Kafka’s Wound* <http://thespace.lrb.co.uk/>

In class: Work on book 3 and discuss book 4.

Response 17: Return to your response on the future of the book. Add an evaluative or critical perspective. Is the future you project progress or regress from the present? Is this good or bad for reading, and why?

11/19 Thanksgiving. No class.

11/21 Thanksgiving. No class.

11/26 Book 3 due, final version.

Response 18 (in class): Finalize your response on the future of the book.

11/28 Work on Book 4.

Response 19: How are you designing Book 4 and why?

12/3 Book 4 due for workshopping.

12/5 Last class.

Response 20: Top ten list for the class. What five things did you like best? What five things would you change? The list could include readings, ideas, assignments, or other things.

12/10 Book 4 due, final version