

ENG 1131 Writing Through Media: Writing Through Comics

Section: 4859

Time: Class: MWF Period 3
Screening: R Period 9-11

Room: Class & Screening: Weil 0408E

Instructor: Spencer Chalifour

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Office:

Office Hours: W Period 4 and by appointment

Course Description:

Comics have long provided creators with unique means of expression. Although comics share several similarities with alphabetic literature, film, and the visual arts, comics are unique in that they combine elements of all these media into a form that American comic artist Will Eisner called “sequential art.” In this class, we will explore the possibilities that comics offer as a medium. This includes examining the technical, temporal, spatial elements that are at play in a comic page and how these elements come together.

Although in the popular mindset comics are thought to be solely the domain of funny animals and superheroes, the medium is in fact capable of a vast variety of fiction and non-fiction rhetoric, as shown by the 2015 publication of Sousanis’ scholarly dissertation *Unflattening*, a work which uses the comics medium (and in fact the first such dissertation at Columbia University to be completed in this format) to explore the nature of perception. In this class, we will also examine in detail the “language” of comics. How does a cartoonist use both text and image to present a narrative or make an argument? What impact do the unique aspects of comics (such as panel size, word balloons, and the gutter) have on the reader?

In order to accomplish this examination, we will deconstruct the multimodal nature of comics and examine the ways cartoonists have used the medium. Several different “genres” of comics, including political cartoons, gag strips, autobiographical narrative, comics journalism, and webcomics will be analyzed (along with several film screenings), in order to discover how cartoonists can use the language of comics to achieve widely different goals. Throughout the course, students will also create their own works of sequential art using both traditional means (pen and paper) and more modern means (websites and software for creating webcomics) in a variety of genres (including the gag strip, political cartoon, and autobiographical narrative). Student work will also be supplemented by explanatory and analytical papers, with a final project that creates a longer argumentative comics work in the spirit of McCloud and Sousanis.

Course Objectives:

In this course, you will

- Demonstrate the perceptual processes involved with viewing a comic page
- Assess the spatial and temporal relations that are at play in comics, especially relating to panel shapes, word balloon placement, page layout, etc.
- Interpret the ideological, historical, and theoretical influences that are at play in different genres of “comics rhetoric”
- Compose analysis papers and original projects that utilize the “language” of comics

Required Texts

Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud. William Morrow Paperbacks, 1994. ISBN 978-0060976255

Comics and Sequential Art, Will Eisner. WW Norton & Co, 2008. ISBN 978-0393331264

Tintin in Tibet, Hergé. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1975. ISBN 978-0316358392

Alan Moore's Writing For Comics, Alan Moore. Avatar Press, 2003. ISBN 978-1592910120

Sandman Vol 3: Dream Country, Neil Gaiman *et al.* Vertigo/DC Comics, 2010. ISBN 978-1401229351

Fun Home, Alison Bechdel. Mariner Books, 2007. ISBN 978-0618871711

Japan, Inc, Shotaro Ishinomori. University of California Press, 1988. ISBN 978-0520062894

Journalism, Joe Sacco. Metropolitan Books, 2013. ISBN 978-0805097931

Unflattening, Nick Sousanis. Harvard University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0674744431

Other readings will be made available online via Canvas

Assignments

Page Analysis: For this assignment, you will choose one page from *Tintin in Tibet* to analyze. Using Scott McCloud's breakdown of panel transitions from *Understanding Comics*, you will analyze the page, paying special attention to the types of panel transitions that the creators used to portray a particular narrative. You will then write a 2-3 page paper explaining what kinds of panel transitions were used and how these choices influence the narrative. You may also wish to

incorporate an examination of panel sizes, gutter sizes, use or absence of balloons or captions, and other formal elements in your analysis. (600-900 words, 100 points)

Comic Strip + Reflection: After our workshop on creating a four panel gag strip, you will finish/refine your comic strip at home and write a reflection paper detailing the choices you made in panel transitions, creating comic “timing,” and any difficulties/revelations you gleaned from creating your strip. (Reflection paper: 600-900 words, 50 points)

Narrative Analysis: For this assignment, you can chose to analyze either one of the short stories from *Sandman* or a chapter from *Fun Home*. Using at least one of the theoretical readings from the class to frame your analysis, you will then perform a technical analysis of this story/chapter, paying particular attention to how the artist guides the reader’s eye across both pages and how the pages/panels interact with each other. How do the themes/symbols/ideologies at play in this story affect the artist’s choices? Using these questions as a starting point, you will craft a 3-4 page analysis. (900-1200 words, 125 points)

Editorial Cartoon + Reflection: After our workshop on creating an editorial cartoon, you will finish/refine your cartoon at home and write a reflection paper detailing the choices you made in symbolizing your issue, convincing the reader of your argument, and any difficulties/revelations you gleaned from creating your cartoon. (Reflection paper: 600-900 words, 50 points)

Final Project Proposal: You will present a detailed proposal of your final “comics rhetoric” project, stating specifically how you’re envisioning creating this project and what topic(s) you want it to cover. (500-600 words, 50 points)

Comics Script + Bibliography: You will create a rough script for your final project with a bibliography of at least 5 sources not from the course readings, making sure in your script to indicate where these sources will be used. Comics scripts can take a variety of forms, from the ultra-detailed panel-by-panel scripts of Alan Moore to the looser story summaries Stan Lee utilized for the “Marvel Method.” Use whatever method will work best for you, as long as I have a clear idea of what you hope to accomplish in your project. (900-1200 words, 125 points)

Final Projects with Explanatory Paper: The culminating project of this course will be a work of original “comics rhetoric.” By the end of the course, you will have experienced a variety of ways artists and writers have used comics to make arguments about whatever subjects mean something to them. For this project, you will create an 8-10 page comic (or if online roughly the equivalent thereof) comic, either online or using pen and paper, that makes an original argument about a subject that means something to you. Accompanying this project will be a 5-6 page explanatory paper that details how you chose to combine image with text to inform your audience and convince them of your argument and how the critical theories from the class were incorporated into the project. This project will largely be of your own devising and will reflect how you as a scholar wish to incorporate comics into your research. (Project + Paper = 2100-2400 words, 300 points)

Discussion Posts

In addition to formal writing assignments, students will also be responsible for responding to weekly discussion posts on the Canvas site. In your posts, you will provide insight into the week’s readings with a short discussion (at least 150 words) about the common themes, ideas, or approaches to sequential art seen in the readings. Some weeks will be discussion-free as announced by me so you can have more time to work on other projects. (10 posts, 15 points each – 150 points)

Participation: This grade constitutes participation in in-class discussion, workshops, quizzes, in-class work, etc. (50 points)

Grading Scale

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000	C	2.0	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929	C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899	D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869	D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829	D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799	E	0.00	0-59	0-599

A = An “A” student consistently shows outstanding scholarship and initiative exceeding the assignments (using creativity, outside research, etc.), makes contributions to discussions, and is punctual and regular in attendance.

B = A “B” student demonstrates excellent scholarship and shows some initiative in assignments, is effective in regular participation and completes all work by the assigned date, and work submitted shows that instructions have been followed completely.

C = A “C” student has a cooperative attitude toward class work and demonstrates an adequate grasp of the subject matter, all assigned work is completed in a satisfactory manner, instructions are generally followed well, and assignments generally turned in on time.

D = A “D” student provides an often unsatisfactory effort toward class work, assignments are barely met and turned in late, instructions are poorly followed, and there is little or no constructive participation in group or class discussions.

Assessment Rubric

Each paper will have its own individual rubric, but here is a sample of the common writing qualities I will be looking for across all your work:

Content: Papers exhibit evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.

Organization: Documents and paragraphs exhibit identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement and topic sentences.

Argument and Support: Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.

Style: Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical structure.

Mechanics: Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, papers may contain a few spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive and do not obscure the paper's argument or points.

Tentative Course Schedule (please note readings are due on the day they are listed)

Unit 1: What Are Comics? – Introduction to Comics Studies

Week 1, January 6-8

- W: Introduction and Course Overview
- R: Screening: *Comic Book Confidential*
- F: Brief discussion of the history of comics || “Commix, An Idiosyncratic Historical and Aesthetic Overview” by Art Spiegelman

Week 2, January 11-15

- M: Scott McCloud and Comics Analysis; introduce analysis assignment || *Understanding Comics*, chapter 1-4
- W: Applying McCloud's principles to analysis || *Understanding Comics*, chapters 5-8
- R: Screening: *Tintin and I – Hergé*
- F: Panels and transitions || *Tintin in Tibet*; “Comic Art and How to Read It” by Don Ault

Week 3, January 19-22

- M: MLK Day – no school
- W: What is Sequential Art? ||, Selections from *Comics and Sequential Art*
- R: Screening: Will Eisner address at the first annual UF Comics Conference, plus selected panel discussions
- F: spatial relations in comics || “The Spatio-Topical System” by Groensteen

Unit 2: How Do Comics Work? – Narrative in Comics

Week 4, January 25-29

- M: Wrap up basics of comics analysis; Time in Comics || “The Construction of Space in Comics” by Lefevre
- W: **Due: Page Analysis**; Intro to Narrative in Comics
- R: Screening: Comic Strip examples – selections from Peanuts, Calvin and Hobbes, Popeye, Nancy, xkcd

- F: What is a gag strip? || “How To Read Nancy?” by Newgarden and Karasik

Week 5, February 1-5

- M: Technique and Narrative || “Prodigious Panels” by Ault
- W: Discussion – How to Write Comics?
- R: Workshop: Creating a Cartoon Gag Strip
- F: Writing for Comics || *Alan Moore’s Writing for Comics*, chapters 1-2

Week 6, February 8-12

- M: **Due: Comic Strip + Reflection**; Creating a Comics Script || “Calliope” from *Sandman* + Neil Gaiman’s original script; *Alan Moore’s Writing for Comics*, chapters 3-4
- W: Discuss *Sandman* and narrative || “A Dream of a Thousand Cats,” “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” and “Façade” from *Sandman*
- R: Screening: *American Splendor*
- F: Intro – Autobiography comics || *Alan Moore’s Writing for Comics* Afterword

Week 7, February 15-19

- M: Narrative and Autobiography || *Fun Home*, chapters 1-4
- W: How to Analyze Narrative || *Fun Home*, chapters 5-7
- R: Workshop: creating a comic from someone else’s script; creating a comics autobiography
- F: *Fun Home* discussion

Week 8, February 22-26

- M: Comics and Multimodality || “What is a Mode?” by Kress
- W: Continue discussion on multimodality, excerpt from *In The Shadow of No Towers*; Introduce Final Projects; Brainstorming
- R: Workshop: Continue working on possible final projects
- F: **Due: Narrative Analysis**; Introduce comics as Rhetoric

Spring Break

Unit 3: How Can Comics Inform? – Rhetoric and Communication Through Comics

Week 9, March 7-11

- M: Discuss *Japan, Inc* || *Japan, Inc*
- W: Continue *Japan, Inc* discussion – how to create non-fiction comics ||
- R: Discuss political/editorial cartooning – examples of Thomas Nast, *Punch*, Trudeau, Oliphant, Susie Cagle, Jen Sorenson, *Charlie Hebdo*; Workshop: Creating a political cartoon

- F: Intro to Comics Journalism || Excerpt from *Comics as History* by Witek

Week 10, March 14-18

- M: **Due: Editorial Cartoon + Reflection** Intro to Joe Sacco; discussion || *Journalism – “The Hague”* and “The Palestinian Terrorists”
- W: Discussion on Sacco || *Journalism – “The Caucasus”* and “Iraq”
- R: Screening: *Waltz with Bashir*
- F: [I will be gone to a conference this day – I will try and get someone to guest lecture on this day, but if not we will discuss *Waltz with Bashir* on Monday] Discussion of Sacco and *Bashir* – what are the advantages of creating journalism through comics and animation? || *Journalism – “Migration”* and “India”

Week 11, March 21-25

- M: **Due: Final Project Proposal** Comics about comics – how do we use comics to create an argument? || *Unflattening*, Chapters 1-2 (including Interlude)
- W: Discuss Sousanis || *Unflattening* chapters 3-4
- R: Workshop: Experimenting with online comics creating software
- F: Continue Sousanis discussion || *Unflattening* chapters 5-6

Unit 4: What is the Future of Comics? – Experimentation in the Age of the Internet

Week 12, March 28 – April 1

- M: **Due: Comics script + bibliography** Finish up Sousanis; Intro to Webcomics || *Unflattening* chapters 7-8 (with interlude)
- W: What are webcomics? || Selections from *Hyperbole and a Half* by Allie Brosh
- R: Screening: Selected interviews with Carroll, Brosh, Beaton, Watson;
- F: Webcomics and the “infinite canvas” || “Infinite Canvas” by Scott McCloud and “Margot’s Room” by Emily Carroll

Week 13, April 4-8

- M: Continue Emily Carroll discussion || “His Face All Red,” “The Hole the Fox Did Make,”
- W: End webcomics discussion || selections from *Hark a Vagrant* and *Hijinks Ensue*
- R: Workshop: Experiment with more online software, in-class work on final project
- F: Day off – attend UF Comics Conference

Week 14, April 11-15

- M: Wrapping up – comics and scholarship
- W: Conferencing
- R: Workshop: Continue work on final project

- F: Conferencing

Week 15, April 18-20

- M: Discussion on current comics scholarship and the future of comics
- W: **Due: Final Projects with Explanatory Paper**; Course evaluations

Attendance

Attendance is required. If a student misses more than **three** periods unexcused during a fall or spring semester, he or she will lose a letter grade from their class average for each unexcused absence after the initial three. Missing class on a double period counts as **two** absences. The **only** exemptions from this policy are those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed.

If you are absent for any reason: You are required to submit by the next class period a 250-word response discussing the missed day's reading. Failure to do so will result in a 5 point deduction from your overall participation grade. If you have to leave class early, it will result in a half absence, barring extenuating circumstances.

Please Note: If students are absent, it is their responsibility to make themselves aware of all due dates. If absent due to a scheduled event, students are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Tardiness: If students enter class after roll has been called, they are late, which disrupts the entire class. Two instances of tardiness count as one absence.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits plagiarism and defines it as follows:

Plagiarism. A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.
2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.

(University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 8 July 2011)

University of Florida students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the entire Student Honor Code.

Important Tip: You should never copy and paste something from the Internet without providing the exact location from which it came.

Final Grade Appeals

For 1000- and 2000-level classes, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Department of English Program Assistant.

Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities (H) Credit

This course can satisfy the General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1314/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

Statement of Writing Requirement

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing-requirement.aspx>

Classroom Behavior

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class.

In-Class Work

Papers and drafts are due at the beginning of class or on-line at the assigned deadline. Late papers will not be accepted. Failure of technology is not an excuse.

Participation is a crucial part of success in this class. Students will be expected to work in small groups and participate in group discussions, writing workshops, peer reviews, and other in-class activities. Be prepared for unannounced quizzes or activities on the readings or classroom discussion. Students must be present for all in-class activities to receive credit for them. In-class work cannot be made up. Writing workshops require that students provide constructive feedback about their peers' writing.

In general, students are expected to contribute constructively to each class session.

Paper Maintenance Responsibilities

Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a

resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.

Mode of Submission

All papers will be submitted as MS Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) documents to E-learning/Sakai and as hard copies. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and pages numbered. **Be sure to staple papers before submitting hard copies.** Unstapled papers will **not be accepted**.

Technology

- **Laptops/Tablets:** You are welcome to bring laptops to class to take notes; however, if your device prevents you from paying attention in class, you will be asked to put it away and will lose laptop privileges for the rest of the semester
- **Cell Phones/MP3 player/Portable Electronic Devices, etc.:** Please keep your device put away and on silent at all times.

Writing Center

The University Writing Center is located in Tigert 302 and is available to all UF students.

Students with Disabilities

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students requesting accommodation should contact the Students with Disabilities Office, Peabody 202. That office will provide documentation to the student whom must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Sexual Harassment Policy

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.