

## **Rhetoric, Writing, and Recorded Sound**

Instructor: Eric Detweiler

Class meetings: 75 minutes twice a week

### **Description**

In this course, students will study recorded sound—from music to podcasts, from ambient noise to sound effects—and produce their own recordings as well as writings about sound. Course texts will include podcast episodes, readings from the field of sound studies, musical compositions, and readings about the history, theory, and practice of rhetoric. Major projects will include a student-produced podcast series, audio versions of famous unrecorded speeches from the history of rhetoric, and conducting and transcribing interviews. Along the way, students in the course will consider the following questions: What are the rhetorical effects, possibilities, and limitations of recorded sound, and how do they compare to the effects, possibilities, and limitations of writing? What makes for effective communication when it comes to recorded sound? What is recorded sound's relationship to accessibility, copyright issues, and social change? How might recorded sound, which has only been around for about 150 years, change the ways we think about rhetoric and writing, which have been around for millennia, and vice versa?

### **Required Course Materials**

- *The Sound Studies Reader*. Edited by Jonathan Sterne, published by Routledge (2012).
- Instructor-provided selections from *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. Written by Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, published by Pearson (5th edition, 2011).
- Selected PDFs and audio recordings provided via course website.
- A digital audio recorder.
- Access to audio-production software (e.g., Audacity, which is downloadable for free).

### **Course Goals**

This course is designed to help students

1. develop their abilities to compose and communicate effectively using both written and sonic media,
2. learn about and enact rhetorical principles, practices, and theories,
3. reflect critically on their creative and compositional processes,
4. listen carefully—both to recorded sound and to others,
5. familiarize themselves with the intertwined histories of rhetoric, writing, and recorded sound.

### **Coursework**

#### *Reflective Writing*

Reflective writing will be a major part of this course. The first assignment in the course, for instance, will be a piece of writing in which you reflect on your comparative comfort and familiarity with both writing and recorded sound. The audio work you and your classmates will do in the course encourages risk, allows for the possibility of rhetorical failure, and might take a variety of forms, so reflective writing detailing and reflecting on

the rhetorical choices and workflow guiding that work will contribute significantly to your grade and play a part in the instructor's response to and assessment of your audio work. The following list includes all reflective writing assignments for the course. More detailed prompts will be distributed as each assignment approaches.

1. **Introductory Reflection:** Describe and reflect on your relationship to and experience with both writing and audio as modes of composing (1000-1500 words).
2. **Reflections on Preliminary Exercises:** Each of the five preliminary exercises described below will be accompanied by a 400-500 word reflection on your production process.
3. **Midterm Reflection:** Taking into account your introductory reflection, course readings, and the other assignments you've completed as of the midterm, reflect on your progress in the course as well as how your relationship to written and audio work has shifted or remained the same (1000-1500 words)
4. **Final Reflection:** At the end of the semester, you will draw on the texts (written and aural) that you produced over the course of the semester. Building on both your introductory and midterm reflections, describe what you learned (or didn't), how you've developed (haven't), and how your attitudes toward/approaches to written and aural composition has (or hasn't) changed over the course of the semester (1500-2000 words).

### *Responses to Course Texts*

Over the course of the semester, students are responsible for turning in responses to six course texts. Three of these responses must be submitted in written form (400-500 words apiece); three must be submitted as audio compositions (2-3 minutes apiece). While the tone of responses may be informal, they should demonstrate thoughtful and careful engagement with the text to which the student is responding. Responses are due the day we discuss the corresponding text in class. Be warned: don't try to squeeze all these in at the end of the semester.

Texts that are eligible for responses are marked with asterisks in the course schedule at the end of this syllabus.

### *Preliminary Exercises*

For centuries, a sequence of exercises called the *progymnasmata* was a staple of rhetorical education. The exercises grew more and more complicated as the student went along, each one building on skills students had practiced in previous exercises. We'll read about the *progymnasmata* in the course, and you'll be responsible for completing a series of five short audio projects based on them. The basics are below, but more details will be provided as each assignment approaches.

1. **Interview:** Pretty straightforward. You're going to have to record a short interview with someone.
2. **Review:** Based on the *progymnasmata* exercises called "encomium" and "invective," record a positive, negative, or mixed review of a course text. This is in addition to the responses described above.
3. **Description:** Choose an event, physical object, or place, then create an audio description of your selected artifact.

4. **Imitation:** Produce a piece of audio that imitates the style of a particular person or organization. For instance, you could create a piece in the style of an NPR news broadcast, a drive-time radio show, a 1940s radio play, a sports call-in show, or a particular radio ad.
5. **Remediation:** You will select a famous speech of which there is no surviving audio recording and, after researching the historical, material, and social context of that speech, create a recording that attempts to capture how it would have sounded and been delivered. Options will include Demosthenes' "On the Crown," Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?", and Queen Elizabeth I's "Golden Speech."

### *Podcast Episode*

The capstone assignment for the course will be a podcast series. The class as a whole will decide on an overarching theme for the series. Working in pairs, students will be responsible for producing an episode of the series. The work you do here should take into account course readings and build on the skills you developed in putting together your preliminary exercises. Each episode must be 10-15 minutes long and accompanied by a full transcript.

### **Grading**

Your grade for the course will break down as follows:

- Reflective Writing: 30%
- Responses to Course Texts: 25%
- Preliminary Exercises: 25%
- Podcast Episode: 20%

### **Late Work**

Because they generally contribute to what we are doing in class on the day they're due, I will not accept any late preliminary exercises or responses to course texts—with one exception: you have a no-questions-asked, 48-hour extension on one of each. I would advise you not to blow these extensions early in the semester. I give them to you because I know technology fails and emergencies arise, but you only have one of each. No extensions on podcast episodes or reflective writing assignments.

### **Attendance**

You are expected to attend class, to arrive on time, and to participate in all in-class work and discussions sessions. **Should you miss the equivalent of five class meetings—including individual conferences—excused or not, you will fail the course.** If an unavoidable problem has prevented or will prevent you from attending class, contact me as soon as possible, preferably ahead of time, to let me know. If you are late to class or leave early, it will count as half an absence. If you arrive after I take roll, you are responsible for making sure I mark you as in attendance.

## Course Schedule

The schedule below is both carefully structured and pretty full. This will be a demanding semester, and I intend for us to stick to this schedule fairly closely. Unforeseen circumstances and delays do arise, however, so I reserve the right to revise our schedule as necessary, though I will not do so without discussion and advance notice. If at any point during the semester you have concerns about the schedule (not just that it's "difficult," which is to be expected), feel free to bring them to my attention—I intend this course to be at least as much yours as mine. We will be doing something important every day in this course. Do not assume any day is unimportant. Assigned texts are italicized, while writing and audio assignments are italicized and in bold. Both kinds of assignments are due the day they are listed below. Course texts that are available via the course website are followed with a "(W)." Readings from *The Sound Studies Reader* are followed with "(SS)." Reading and listening ahead is rarely a bad idea.

<b>Unit 1: Play/Listen</b>		
Week 1	Day 1	Course Introduction Introductory Reflection Prompt Distributed
	Day 2	Overview of Rhetoric <i>Crowley and Hawhee Chapter 1: "Ancient Rhetorics" (W)</i> <i>Crowley and Hawhee Chapter 12: "Delivery and Memory" (W)</i>
Week 2	Day 1	<b>Introductory Reflection</b> <i>Gorgias's "Encomium of Helen" (W)</i> <i>Excerpt from Plato's Phaedrus (W)</i> Preliminary Exercise – Interview Prompt Distributed Discuss 24-Hour Sound/Writing Journal Assignment
	Day 2	Overview of Sound Studies <i>Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations" (SS)</i> <i>Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter's "Ancient Acoustic Spaces" (SS)</i>
Week 3	Day 1	Overview of Rhetorical Invention <b>24-Hour Sound/Writing Journal</b> <i>Krista Ratcliffe's "Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a 'Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct'" (W)</i>
	Day 2	<i>Crowley and Hawhee Chapter 6: "Ethical Proofs" (W)</i> <i>WTF with Marc Maron "Episode 617 – Laura Jane Grace" (free download via <a href="http://www.wtfpod.com/guide">http://www.wtfpod.com/guide</a>)</i>
Week 4	Day 1	<b>Preliminary Exercise 1 – Interview</b> Preliminary Exercise 2 – Review Prompt Distributed
	Day 2	<i>Michel Chion's "The Three Listening Modes" (SS)</i> <i>Kate Crawford's "Following You: Disciplines of Listening in Social Media" (SS)</i>
Week 5	Day 1	<i>Steph Ceraso's "(Re)Educating the Senses" (W)</i> <i>Radiolab's "Colors" (free download via <a href="http://www.radiolab.org/story/211119-colors/">http://www.radiolab.org/story/211119-colors/</a>)</i> Midterm Reflection Prompt Distributed
	Day 2	<b>Preliminary Exercise 2 – Review</b>

		Preliminary Exercise 3 – Description Prompt Distributed
Week 6	Day 1	<i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 7: “Pathetic Proofs” (W)</i> <i>Snap Judgment’s “Unspoken” (free download via <a href="http://snapjudgment.org/Unspoken">http://snapjudgment.org/Unspoken</a>)</i>
	Day 2	<i>Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and “A Pay Raise!? Whatever Gave You That Idea?” (W)</i>
Week 7	Day 1	<b>Preliminary Exercise 3 – Description</b> Preliminary Exercise 4 – Imitation Prompt Distributed
	Day 2	<i>John Mowitt’s “The Sound of Music in the Era of its Electronic Reproducibility” (SS)</i> <i>Latino USA’s “A Latino History of Hip-Hop, Part 1” (available to stream here: <a href="https://soundcloud.com/latinousa/1512-a-latino-history-of-hip-hop-part-i">https://soundcloud.com/latinousa/1512-a-latino-history-of-hip-hop-part-i</a>)</i>
<b>Unit 2: Record/Create</b>		
Week 8	Day 1	<b>Midterm Reflection</b> Individual Conferences Instead of Regular Class Meeting
	Day 2	Individual Conferences Instead of Regular Class Meeting
Week 9	Day 1	<i>Shubei Hosokawa’s “The Walkman Effect” (SS)</i> Podcast Prompt Distributed
	Day 2	<b>Preliminary Exercise 4 – Imitation</b> Preliminary Exercise 5 – Remediation Prompt Distributed
Week 10	Day 1	<i>Crowley and Hawhee Chapter 9: “Arrangement” (W)</i> Discuss Potential Themes for Podcast Series
	Day 2	<i>Crowley and Hawhee Chapter 10: “Style” (W)</i> Overview of Resources on Writing for Radio
Week 11	Day 1	<i>Tara Rodgers’ “Toward a Feminist Historiography of Electronic Music” (SS)</i> <i>Selected Tracks from Taylor Swift’s and Ryan Adams’ “1989” (W)</i>
	Day 2	<b>Preliminary Exercise 5 - Remediation</b>
Week 12	Day 1	Workshop Rough Drafts of Podcast Scripts/Recordings
	Day 2	Overview of Accessibility <i>Mara Mills’ “Hearing Aids and the History of Electronics Miniaturization” (SS)</i> <i>Gerard Goggins’ “Cellular Disability: Consumption, Design and Access” (SS)</i>
Week 13	Day 1	Work on Podcast Episodes in Class
	Day 2	<b>Podcast Episodes</b>
<b>Unit 3: Pause/Reflect</b>		
Week 14	Day 1	Revisiting the Course So Far
	Day 2	<i>Jacques Derrida’s “The Voice that Keeps Silence” (SS)</i>
Week 15	Day 1	<i>Joshua Gunn’s “Canned Laughter” (W)</i>
	Day 2	Course Wrap-Up
Finals		<b>Final Reflection</b>