

ENGL 4670: Rhetoric and Recorded Sound (85677)

Semester: Fall 2018 | Instructor: Dr. Eric Detweiler

Peck Hall 327 | Mondays and Wednesdays | 12:40 – 2:05 p.m.

Email: eric.detweiler@mtsu.edu | Office: Peck Hall 376 | Office Phone: (615) 898-2585

Office Hours: Mon. & Wed. 11:20 a.m. – 12:20 p.m. & 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.,

Fri. 11:15 a.m. – 1:15 p.m., and by appointment

Course Description

In this course, students will study recorded sound and produce their own recordings as well as writings about sound. Course texts will include readings about the history, theory, and practice of rhetoric as well as podcast episodes and readings from the field of sound studies. Major projects will include a student-produced podcast series, pieces of reflective writing, and audio exercises. 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

- *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio* by Jessica Abel
- Selected PDFs and audio recordings provided via D2L
- Access to audio-production software (e.g., Audacity, which is downloadable for free)

Optional Course Materials

- A USB microphone for use with a laptop (e.g., [Samson Go](#), [Blue Snowball iCE](#)) or a mic for use with a smartphone or tablet (e.g., [Movo PM10](#), [Rode VideoMic Me](#))

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 other people, and
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 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 my response to and assessment of your audio work. There will be three primary reflective writing assignments: (1) a beginning-of-semester reflection on your experiences with writing and audio production, (2) a midterm self-evaluation, and (3) a final self-evaluation.

Responses to Course Texts

Over the course of the semester, students are responsible for turning in responses to twelve course texts. Six of these responses must be submitted in written form (250-350 words apiece); six must be submitted as audio compositions (1-2 minutes apiece). While the tone of the responses may be informal, they should demonstrate thoughtful and careful engagement with the text to which the student is responding. Responses are due via D2L by the beginning of class on the day we discuss the corresponding text. Be warned: don't try to squeeze all these in at the end of the semester.

Podcast Presentation

You will be responsible for giving a short, scripted in-class presentation (approximately 10 minutes) on a podcast of your choice. As part of this presentation, you will have to create a highlight reel for the podcast you select.

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 students went along, each one building on skills students had developed in previous exercises. We'll read about the *progymnasmata* in the course, and you'll be responsible for completing a series of five short projects based on them, three of which will be shared in class. The basics are below, but more details will be provided as each assignment approaches.

1. *Transcription* – Transcribe a five-minute segment of an episode of an existing podcast.
2. *Interview* – Record a short interview with someone.
3. *Narrative* – Record an audio narration of an event you witnessed firsthand.
4. *Soundscape* – Choose a place on campus, then create a soundscape that describes that place.
5. *Imitation* – Record your own version of a famous historical speech of which no audio recording exists. Strive to make your recording sound like the original speech would have sounded.

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 small groups, 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 15-25 minutes long and accompanied by a full transcript.

Grading

We'll be using a portfolio-based grading system called the Learning Record (LR). I'll

provide written or spoken feedback on individual assignments, but not numerical or letter grades. Then, at midterm and during finals, you'll turn in written arguments for the grade you deserve based on the body of work you've done in the course, the grading criteria below, and a few other things that we'll discuss during the second day of class. This system is meant to give you the chance to learn, take risks, and make occasional mistakes without constantly worrying about letter grades. It's meant to give you more ways to succeed in this class and to help keep the focus on your writing and other projects rather than the difference between a 79.4% and a 79.5% average. However, it also requires a lot of work and diligence on your part. Here are the grading criteria:

A	Represents outstanding participation in all course activities, <i>perfect or near perfect attendance</i> (typically two absences or fewer), and <i>all assigned work completed on time</i> . Also represents <i>very high quality</i> in all work produced for the course. Argument submitted during finals provides evidence of significant development across all five course strands, as well as activity that <i>goes significantly beyond the required course work</i> in one or more course strands.
B	Represents excellent participation in all course activities, near perfect attendance (typically three absences or fewer), and <i>all assigned work completed on time</i> . Also represents <i>consistently high quality</i> in coursework. Evidence of marked development across the five course strands.
C	Represents good participation in all course activities, no more than four absences, and all assigned work completed. Also represents generally good quality overall in coursework. Evidence of some development across the five course strands.
D	Represents uneven participation in course activities, uneven attendance, and some gaps in assigned work completed. Represents inconsistent quality in course work. Evidence of development across the five course strands is partial or unclear.
F	Represents minimal participation in course activities, poor attendance, serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in course work. Evidence of development is not available.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of you familiarizing yourself with these criteria. Note that the “significantly” in the “A” category doesn’t just mean doing everything required for the course really, really well. It means doing *more*. Taking thorough reading notes on every reading we cover this semester, for instance, does not necessarily constitute going “significantly beyond the required course work.” You will have to demonstrate that you’ve done something or some things that have required time and energy beyond what the course requires and that what you’ve done has resulted in demonstrable learning.

The grading scale for this course is as follows:

A: 90-100 B+: 87-89 B: 83-86 B-: 80-82	C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72 D+: 67-69	D: 63-66 D-: 60-62 F: 59 and under
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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 homework or responses to course texts. However, I will give you a no-questions-asked, 48-hour extension on one preliminary exercise *and* one reflective writing assignment. 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.

Attendance

You are expected to attend class, to arrive on time, and to participate in all in-class work and discussions. Should you miss the equivalent of five class meetings, 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.

Technology

We are fortunate to be in a room equipped with computers. We will use those computers often, and in many cases it will be fine if you use a personal laptop or tablet instead.

As for smartphones and other cell phones, there may be some times when it will make sense for us to use them. In general, though, they aren't a good fit for the sort of work we do in this class. For instance, their screens are too small to engage with readings in the detail-oriented way we will during this course. For that reason, don't plan on using them in class unless we decide otherwise during a particular activity. If you have a particular reason for wanting to make use of your phone in class, let me know.

Email

MTMail will be the official way that I pass on information about this course. Because of privacy laws, I will not use your personal email accounts. I won't send you email every day, but check your MTMail daily to make sure you don't miss important updates from the university, me, or your other teachers. You can find more information on MTMail here: <http://mtsu.edu/email/index.php>.

Students with Disabilities

Middle Tennessee State University is committed to campus access in accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Any student interested in reasonable accommodations can consult the [Disability & Access Center \(DAC\) website](#) and/or contact the DAC for assistance at (615) 898-2783 or dacemail@mtsu.edu.

If I can provide or assist with any accommodations related specifically to this course, let me know. I would be glad to help.

Course Schedule

This will be a demanding semester, and I intend for us to stick to the following 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 advance notice and, in most cases, discussion. If at any point during the semester you have concerns about the schedule, feel free to bring them to my attention. 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. Everything else is a description of what we'll be doing in class that day. "(D2L)" means a reading is available as a PDF via D2L.

27-Aug	Syllabus Overview Introductions
29-Aug	Learning Record Overview Reflection Prompt Distributed <i>Ben Hammersley, "Audible Revolution": https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/feb/12/broadcasting.digitalmedia</i> <i>Cyrus Farivar, "10 Years of Podcasting": https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2014/08/10-years-of-podcasting-code-comedy-and-patent-lawsuits/</i>
3-Sep	Labor Day – No Class
5-Sep*	Preliminary Exercise 1 Prompt <i>Chapter 1 ("Ancient Rhetoric"), <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students</i> (D2L)</i> <i>Ways of Hearing, "Time": https://www.radiotopia.fm/showcase/ways-of-hearing/</i>
10-Sep*	Reflection <i>Ways of Hearing, "Space" and "Noise": https://www.radiotopia.fm/showcase/ways-of-hearing/</i> <i>Chapter 11 ("Imitation"), <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students</i> (D2L)</i>
12-Sep*	<i>Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations" (D2L)</i> <i>Peter Burrows, "The Future is Ear": https://www.fastcompany.com/90212065/the-future-is-ear-why-hearables-are-finally-techs-next-big-thing</i>
17-Sep*	<i>Chapter 10 ("Style"), <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students</i> (D2L)</i> <i>Code Switch, "Talk American": https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=636442508</i>
19-Sep	Preliminary Exercise 1 Preliminary Exercise 2 Prompt
24-Sep*	<i>Jessica Abel, <i>Out on the Wire</i>, pages 1-76</i> <i>HowSound, "Intimate Interviewing": https://transom.org/2017/intimate-interviewing/</i> <i>HowSound, "Interviewing with Your Skeptical Brain": https://transom.org/2016/interviewing-with-your-skeptical-brain/</i>

26-Sep*	Abel, pages 77-106 <i>The Promise</i> , “Part 1: A Change is Gonna Come”: http://thepromise.wpln.org/episode-1/
1-Oct*	Preliminary Exercise 2 Preliminary Exercise 3 Prompt HowSound, “Morphing Print Essays into Radio”: https://transom.org/2016/morphing-print-essays-radio/ HowSound, “Radio is a Visual Medium”: https://transom.org/2017/radio-visual-medium/
3-Oct*	Abel, pages 107-143 Song Exploder, “The Daily”: http://songexploder.net/the-daily Song Exploder, “Julien Baker”: http://songexploder.net/julien-baker
8-Oct*	<i>The Kitchen Sisters</i> , “WHER: 1000 Beautiful Watts, Part 1”: http://www.kitchensisters.org/fugitivewaves/wher-1000-beautiful-watts-part-1/ <i>The Kitchen Sisters</i> , “Archiving the Underground: The Hiphop Archive at Harvard”: http://www.kitchensisters.org/present/archiving-the-underground-the-hiphop-archive-at-harvard/ <i>Cocaine and Rhinestones</i> , “Ernest Tubb: The Texas Defense”: https://cocaineandrhinestones.com/ernest-tubb-texas-defense
10-Oct	Preliminary Exercise 3 Prompt for Preliminary Exercise 4
15-Oct	Fall Break – No Class
17-Oct*	Midterm Self-Evaluation Abel, pages 145-165
22-Oct*	R. Murray Schafer, “The Soundscape” (D2L) Radiolab, “Colors”: http://www.radiolab.org/story/211119-colors/
24-Oct*	Salomé Voegelin, Introduction of Sonic Possible Worlds (D2L) Lewis Gordon, “What Does the End of the World Sound Like? Listen to This”: https://theoutline.com/post/5960/climate-change-music?zd=2&zi=kphhw45k
29-Oct*	Steph Ceraso, “(Re)Educating the Senses” (D2L) Reply All, “Today’s the Day”: https://www.gimletmedia.com/reply-all/36-todays-the-day 99% Invisible, “Sounds Natural”: https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/sounds-natural/
31-Oct*	Abel, pages 167-209
5-Nov	Preliminary Exercise 4 Prompt for Preliminary Exercise 5
7-Nov*	Abraham Lincoln, “The Gettysburg Address” (D2L) HowSound, “Set the Wayback Machine for 1914”: https://transom.org/2014/set-the-wayback-machine-for-1914/
12-Nov*	Chapter 12 (“Delivery and Memory”), <i>Ancient Rhetorics from Contemporary Students</i> (D2L) “Ancient Acoustic Spaces” (D2L)
14-Nov*	Podcast Pitches Due Chapter 9 (“Arrangement”), <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students</i> (D2L)

19-Nov	Discuss Ch. 9 of <i>ARCS</i> Work on Podcast Episodes in Class
21-Nov	Thanksgiving Break – no class
26-Nov	<i>Preliminary Exercise 5</i>
28-Nov	TBD
3-Dec	TBD
5-Dec	<i>Podcast Episode Due</i>
Final	<i>Final Self-Evaluation (due by 5:00 p.m.)</i>