

The Blog for Narrative and Technology, ENGLIT 0399

Weblogs or “blogs” have become a near ubiquitous part of contemporary digital culture. To all appearances, seemingly everyone and everything has a blog devoted to it. From supplanting previous forms of print journalism with sites like *The Huffington Post*, to blogs completely devoted to a person’s cat, they are a unique and new form of cultural expression, and *everything* is getting expressed. Perhaps most clearly, blogs represent a world of increasing access to information, of instantaneous publication, and of an unprecedented level of individual cultural visibility.¹ As such, for our particular engagement with narratives of technology and technologies of narrative, a blog provides us with a unique object to think about in terms of textual production and interpretation, as well as being a dynamic tool for critically commenting upon texts. I am teaching two sections of Narrative and Technology this fall, so the blog will also allow us to open up a wider and more involved discussion with students from the other class as well.

As noted in the syllabus, we will be keeping a blog during the course of the semester. By Friday, September 5th you should be signed up as an author of the blog and be ready to participate in its composition. The blog’s name is *Narrative and Technology Fall 2014* and can be found at <http://eng0399.wordpress.com>.

Directions

- 1) Check your pitt.edu email address. I will be sending you an email after the first day of class inviting you to be an author for the blog. Note: *check your spam folder*. You can access your spam folder through the “Spam/Virus Message Center Login” link on the right side of your Pitt homepage. In the past, Pitt’s email service has routed invitations from Wordpress.com into this folder, so if you have not received an email from me by the second day of class, please check this folder. If there is still no invitation there, email me ASAP and I will resend you an invitation.
- 2) Click on the first link in the email (or if viewing it in HTML, click on “Accept Invitation”). The link will take you to a window that will allow you to create a Wordpress.com account. Please follow the directions to create an account and write down your username and password somewhere safe. *I ask that you choose a pseudonym for your username* (i.e., do not use your real name). Also note that you do *not* need to create your own blog, just an account.²
- 3) After you have created an account, return to the first email and click the link “Accept Invitation.” This will take you to a login page. Type in your username and password, and you will be taken to the *dashboard* of the blog. Make sure you bookmark this page, and remember your login information, as you will be returning to this page often. You can do everything you are required to do from this page.
- 4) After you have created an account and are all set to go, *please shoot me an email telling me your username*.

¹ For a very interesting theoretical engagement with blogs see Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010).

² In the past, students have accidentally posted reading responses on their own blogs rather than the course blog, so I never saw them. If you are having issues negotiating Wordpress.com, please come to me for help.

- 5) To post, go to the dashboard and click on the “add new post” from the left hand side of the screen under “posts.” Please write your posts by the beginning of the class they are due. I would advise writing your posts in Microsoft Word first and then cutting and pasting them into the text box.³ You can also add additional formatting this way (for example, using footnotes). And don’t worry about any egregious errors in your posts. You will be able to edit them at any point after you have posted them.
- 6) Above the text box of your post is a button that says “Add Media.” Clicking this will allow you to post pictures and video from other sites by linking to the URL, or to upload your own photos and media.
- 7) To add a hyperlink, highlight the text you want to create a link from, click on the icon of the linked chain, and add the URL into the text box. Hyperlinks are an essential aspect of any internet composition. I expect you to make interesting and thoughtful use of links.
- 8) If you are posting one of the four required reading response blog posts, please also check the box to the right of the screen under “Categories” that says “Reading Response.” If you are posting something else, check the box or boxes for what you think is the most appropriate category.
- 9) I would also like you to provide tags for your posts. Tags are like keywords that alert a reader to the content of your post. (For instance, if you are writing about *The Circle*, your tags might be: Dave Eggers, The Circle, Google, Silicon Valley, Control, Panopticon, Dystopia, etc.) Feel free to be creative with your tags.
- 10) *Each day a blog post is due you are also required to comment on at least two other people’s posts.* To comment on someone else’s post, click the title of their post and it will open in a new window that will allow you to comment. To look at the blog, go to its homepage, <http://eng0399.wordpress.com>. Comments should *substantively* address the work of other students (i.e., considerably more than just “I agree” or “I liked your post”).
- 11) If you have any questions, concerns, or problems, don’t hesitate to get in touch with me.
- 12) Your first blog post is due Wednesday September 10th by the beginning of class. Please see the assignment sheet passed out the first day of class for what I expect in your first reading response. The other reading responses are due September 29th, October 27th, and November 24th, all by the beginning of class. I will hand out assignments for each blog post well prior to their due date.

³ That said, with recent changes in Firefox, some of the formatting from Word is lost when pasting it onto Wordpress. Using Google Chrome or Internet Explorer sometimes works better for pasting from Word.

The General Blog Assignment: Reading responses and Additional Posts

There are two aspects of the blog you are responsible for this semester. The first is your four reading responses. We will be looking at a number of different texts this semester and you will be asked to write brief responses to those readings. Each of these posts should consist of *at least* 500 words. Though I will be handing out specific assignments for each post, the general expectation for these reading responses is that they *critically* engage with the text by working *closely* and *carefully* with *specific passages, scenes, or moments*, and that the responses pay particular attention to *form*. These posts will not get a formal grade. Rather I will “like” posts that fulfill the expectations of the assignment in a thoughtful, rigorous, and critical fashion. Posts that do not meet expectations will not receive a “like.” As with the papers, the reading responses will be assessed on the strength of their argument and the quality of their idea. Further, each day a reading response is due you are also responsible for commenting on *at least two* other students’ posts. (Failure to comment will significantly and negatively impact a student’s grade for the blog.)

Doing the bare minimum on the blog—these four posts and eight comments—will earn a student *no higher than a “C”* for the blog portion of their grade (and that’s if their work is *outstanding*). To earn a higher grade, students are expected to engage with the blog *considerably* more than just doing the expected responses.

Blogging can be an enjoyable enterprise. It allows a writer to play with the form of their composition, create hyperlinks to other sites, and insert media, so students are encouraged to take advantage of the specific things that this type of textual production allows. It also allows for considerably more discussion to take place than we have time for in class. We will often use the blog as a tool to expand upon and complicate our understanding of the material covered. Further, as two sections of Narrative and Technology will be represented on our blog, the possibilities for opening up issues even further, in a *variety* of directions, are many. Basically, there are a lot of ways we can use this blog together, and the more actively a student contributes, the higher their blog grade will be. It’s that simple.

Additional posts can be much more informal and need not abide by the requirements of the reading responses. Other than the above stipulations, how we all use this blog is ultimately up to us. Feel free to post links, make additional comments, asks questions, note stories in the news and related articles from other sites, short musings, discussions of other texts, research, videos, pictures, or simply stuff that is cool. The only requirements are that additional posts have to fall under the course’s general theme in some way (which is clearly broad enough to occasion quite a bit), and, of course, that students show respect for their fellow classmates. Other than that, be creative and have fun. What we make over the next four months will be a lasting testament to the time we all spent in Narrative and Technology at the University of Pittsburgh.