

# LEAP/ENGLISH 15

## Photography and Writing

Section 230, Summer 2014 - 005 Life Sciences, 2:20-3:35pm Monday-Friday

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*Office Hours:*  
Monday-Friday 12:30-2:00pm  
(and by appointment)

As Andre Agassi and Canon [told us in 1990](#), image is everything. Over the last half-century, the photographic image has come to dominate the cultural and rhetorical landscape (where text and speech used to reign supreme), and visual literacy has become increasingly indispensable. We are subjected to images as constantly and relentlessly as we ourselves are captured and circulated in image form; advertising offers us images, surveillance cameras takes our images, and iPhones live somewhere in between the two. As a way of thinking rigorously and broadly about rhetoric and writing, this course will unpack what it means to compose—textually, photographically—in the era of the image, as we’re surrounded by and immersed in both the products and the processes of photography. How has the advent and near ubiquity of photography changed writing? What literacies has it made more or less important? How do we navigate constantly being on one end of a camera or the other?

As befits both a good photographer and a good rhetorician, we will examine the relationship between writing, persuasion, and photography from multiple angles: how do visual and photographic images function rhetorically? How do they operate differently from text or speech? But also: how does persuasion, even in plain text, depend on the phenomenon of the image? How does persuasive writing conjure images in its audience’s heads, and how do those images embody or enable the act of persuasion? And: why are images so powerful in human culture, to the point that we go to war for flags, threaten violence over cartoons, and regulate or outright censor various kinds of visual depictions? What makes the image so potent, and how might it help us understand rhetoric more broadly? En route to addressing these questions, we will encounter photography, comics, painting, film, writing, speech; we will think about fiction, non-fiction, and various points in between; we will wade into debates about the production, consumption, and circulation of various kinds of images, and about what it is to live in an image society, for good or ill. In so doing, we will illuminate both the rhetoric of images and the images at the heart of rhetoric, and along the way, we will sharpen our own rhetorical, compositional, and stylistic toolkits.

If the “composition” part of the “rhetoric and composition” course listing gives you nightmare visions of diagramming sentences and being quizzed on parts of speech, fear not. At this point in your academic lives, that sort of thing is of little use to you—and it’s not fun for me unless I’m feeling particularly sadistic. (That’s the good news; the bad news is that I will expect you to have a reasonable facility with the written word, and to do the necessary work to strengthen that facility, even without quizzes looming over you.) I believe in the value of addressing your writing and your writing styles individually, with the goal of helping you develop a credible, persuasive authorial voice—I want to help you find your own identities as writers and thinkers. With that said, I will nonetheless help you with the mechanics of your writing to whatever extent the parameters of our class allow: sloppy sentences, mixed-up words, careless punctuation, and unsophisticated language will make it less likely others will take you seriously, whether you’re writing to a professor or a potential employer.

Over the duration of this course, I will ask a lot of you. Above all, I will ask you to be intellectually curious—to be *interested* and *interesting*. I will ask you to read, watch, and listen in ways you may not be accustomed to, and I will ask you to think critically about things you may not have thought much about before. Mostly, though, I will ask you to engage in the class, in whatever sense is most appropriate and productive for you. This will mean the obvious things—coming to class prepared, keeping up with the readings, writing the papers, etc.—but it will also mean actively involving yourself in class discussions, in smaller conversations with me or with other students, in draft workshops, in the class’s online spaces, and in the community at large. I don’t need to tell you that you’re no longer in high school, or that college will be significantly different from what you’ve known and experienced before (and I don’t just mean frat parties and walks of shame). It’s no longer enough to just “show up”—I will ask more of you than that.

For instance, I don’t want to read a paper that bores you to write any more than you want to write it. As such, I urge you to choose writing topics you can be genuinely invested in—things you know about and have opinions on, or things you’re otherwise interested in looking into. Some of our topics for writing and discussion will likely stray relatively far from the sorts of dull, formulaic, academic essays you may have had to write in high school. Not only is that okay, it’s exactly what I want out of you. In return, I will be thoroughly dedicated to helping you achieve the goals of this course; I will give you as much feedback as you need to get your writing where you want it to be, during and long after this course; and I will do my damndest to keep this class from looking anything like the kind of dry, sleep-inducing first-year writing class about which you may have had nightmares.

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**Dead-Tree Text** (all other texts available online, via [ANGEL](#) or the class website)

*\*Penn Statements* (volume 33, spring 2014 edition)

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### Grading Breakdown:

narrative self-portrait:	10%	blog:	15%
rhetorical description:	15%	participation:	10%
visual/rhetorical analysis:	15%	(includes discussion, in-class writing, homework, group work, etc.)	
documentary writing:	15%		
critical/cultural analysis:	20%		

To pass this course you must complete **all** of the major paper assignments, as well as the smaller writing assignments. **Papers must be handed in on time.** Missing deadlines will make the rest of the course significantly more difficult, and it will make my life considerably more stressful, which will in turn make me much less pleasant to deal with, which will in turn lead to nuclear apocalypse. (Maybe not.) **Unexcused late papers will normally be docked one full letter grade per day**, unless you get my approval for an extension. Moral of the story: if you think you’re going to have a legitimate problem getting something in on time, *talk to me well in advance*, and we’ll figure something out. Much better than a belatedly emailed expression of desperate shame.

If you feel that your assignment was [graded unfairly](#), see me during office hours. There we will settle the matter using the ancient Germanic law method of trial by combat. You may pick your weapon of choice from the bottom left drawer of my desk, but the broadsword is mine. We will align ourselves perpendicular to the sun so neither party has an advantage, in a quarterstave sixty feet square (somewhere behind the HUB, I think), as standardized during the Great Schwabenspiegel Grade Dispute of 1275.

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is required. Please come to every class, and please come on time, or I will send vengeful ninjas to your dorm room. Your grade will be lowered if your attendance is poor, down to and including "F." This is University policy. Specifically, you are permitted **two (2!)** absences; after that, your grade begins to drop. Excused absences for illness or emergency are appropriate, but beyond that, let me repeat PSU policy (*Policies and Rules*, 42-27): a student whose absences are excessive "may run the risk of receiving a lower grade or a failing grade," whether or not some of those absences are "excused." In other words: **don't miss class**. Don't be That Student™. If you miss a class, it's your responsibility to get assignments, catch up, and submit papers on time—not my responsibility to make sure you do those things.

**Participation:** I want to hear from you, in whatever forms you're comfortable with—if not in class, then in office hours or via email. (Even the occasional telepathic communique is better than nothing.) This is why participation is a major chunk of your grade. I hope you'll feel comfortable weighing in during class discussions, and even if you're not normally inclined to talk in class, I'd encourage you to step outside your comfort zone in this class. We won't bite. (Addendum: please do not bite.)

**Blog:** In lieu of a sixth paper (the horror!), you'll design and maintain a blog, updated consistently over the course of the summer session. Details to come later.

**Plagiarism:** If you have any questions about plagiarism or its consequences, please ask. Plagiarism demonstrates contempt for ethical standards, contempt for me, and contempt for your peers. If you are caught plagiarizing, you run an extremely high risk of failing the course and wasting your tuition money. You may also be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs, and this may result in probation, suspension, or expulsion for academic dishonesty. You will be roundly mocked, your teeth and hair will fall out, your breath will start to smell. You'll be an outcast from the community of your peers and will be unable to carry on conversations with attractive men/women. Kittens will flee from you. In other words: Bad Things Will Happen™, so avoid going down that road (if you have any doubts at all about whether what you're doing is plagiarism, **ask me**—always better safe than sorry).

**Academic Freedom:** In English classrooms, academic freedom most frequently comes up in two contexts: charges of "offensiveness" on the one hand, "brainwashing" or "indoctrination" on the other. On the first count: while you have the right to be free of gratuitous insult, you do not have the right not to be offended. I mean something very specific by this: at a university, you do not have the right to be protected from words, ideas, values, or beliefs—whether conservative or liberal, religious or secular, putatively obscene, or any other category—that you find distasteful. A key part of any education is the careful scrutiny of received ideas, however unpalatable their content or expression. By the same token, you should feel free to disagree, either verbally or in your written assignments, with any idea expressed in class, whether by me or by any student. Your grade will not be determined by how closely your thought agrees with mine or how aptly you mimic my own views in your papers; rather, it will be the product of the quality of both your thinking and your expression of that thinking. Every semester, I happily give "A" grades to students with whom I strongly disagree, because they write and speak with admirable clarity and grace.

**Penn State Sexual Harassment Policy AD-41:** Penn State is committed to an open, sensitive, understanding, and responsive campus environment, and as such, sexual harassment of faculty, staff, or students will not be tolerated. Penn State's sexual harassment policy is available in greater detail [online](#).

**Penn State Accommodations Policy:** It is Penn State's [policy](#) not to discriminate against qualified students with documented disabilities in its educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for modifications in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services at University Park (located in 116 Boucke Building) at 863-1807, preferably as early as possible.

Date	Reading Due	Writing Due
7.2		
7.3	Losh, Alexander, Cannon, and Cannon – <i>Understanding Rhetoric</i> chapter 3 (on readings page)	<i>introductory email</i>
7.4	<b>NO CLASS - the Fourth of July! eat delicious things, watch fireworks (do not get confused and eat fireworks, please)</b>	
7.7 (M)	James Franco - <a href="#">“The Meanings of the Selfie”</a> ; Marie McGrory - <a href="#">“The Un-Selfie: Taking Back the Self-Portrait”</a> ; Jared Keller - <a href="#">“What do your selfies say about you?”</a>	
7.8	Sheila Packa - <a href="#">“The Never-ending Selfie: Who Is the I?”</a> ; Laura Bogart - <a href="#">“Rage”</a>	
7.9	Kiese Laymon - <a href="#">“How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America: A Remembrance”</a>	
7.10	<i>Penn Statements</i> p. 4-11	
7.11		narrative self- portrait proposal
7.14 (M)		narrative self- portrait draft
7.15	Megan Amram - <a href="#">“America: A Review”</a> ; Tim Kreider - <a href="#">“I Know What You Think of Me”</a> ; Mike Lacher - <a href="#">“I’m Comic Sans, Asshole”</a>	
7.16	Neil Gaiman - <a href="#">“Nicholas Was”</a> ; Jamaica Kincaid - <a href="#">“Girl”</a>	<b>narrative self- portrait final</b>
7.17	TheLadyAye - <a href="#">“Beauty Is an Impediment: Julia Pastrana and the Modern-Day Politics of Being Seen”</a> ; Roland Barthes - “The Face of Garbo” (on readings page)	
7.18	<i>Penn Statements</i> p. 11-14; Sarah Nicole Pricket - “The Fake as More” (on readings page)	
7.21 (M)	Ann Friedman - <a href="#">“Why Do Women Hate Anne Hathaway (But Love Jennifer Lawrence)?”</a> ; Jennifer Wright - <a href="#">“Anne Hathaway, Ourselves”</a>	rhetorical description proposal
7.22		rhetorical description draft
7.23	Scott McCloud – <i>Understanding Comics</i> chapter 2 (on readings page)	
7.24		<b>rhetorical description final</b>
7.25	Losh, Alexander, Cannon, and Cannon – <i>Understanding Rhetoric</i> chapter 1 (on readings page)	
7.28 (M)	Marissa - <a href="#">“Go Where? Sex, Gender, and Toilets”</a>	
7.29	The Coquette - <a href="#">“Jeremy Meeks and the Trouble with the Viral Mugshot”</a>	visual/rhetorical analysis proposal
7.30		visual/rhetorical analysis draft

7.31	video: <a href="#">“The Most Hated Family in America”</a>	
8.1	Molly Osberg - <a href="#">“Inside the Barista Class”</a>	
8.4 (M)	Rachel Riederer - <a href="#">“The Teaching Class”</a> ; Lawrence S. Wittner - <a href="#">“Why Are Campus Administrators Making So Much Money?”</a>	visual/rhetorical analysis final
8.5	Maggie McGlinchy - <a href="#">“Meet Penn State’s Squirrel Whisperer”</a> ; Jeffrey M. Pilcher - <a href="#">“The Messy Business of Tacos”</a> ; Zachary Crockett - <a href="#">“The Business of Fake Hollywood Money”</a> ; Kirk Semple - <a href="#">“Spider-Man Unmasked! Elmo and Minnie, Too”</a>	
8.6	emma m. woolley - <a href="#">“What it’s like being a teen girl”</a> ; KillerGibsons - <a href="#">“Why I Make Terrible Decisions, or, poverty thoughts”</a> ; Darlena Cunha - <a href="#">“This is what happened when I drove my Mercedes to pick up food stamps”</a> ; game: <i>Spent</i>	
8.7		documentary writing draft
8.8		
8.11 (M)	Susie Cagle - <a href="#">“Through the Watching Glass”</a> ; Kate Losse - <a href="#">“The Male Gazed: Surveillance, Power, and Gender”</a>	documentary writing final
8.12	Trevor Paglen - <a href="#">“Is Photography Over?”</a> ; Emily Badger - <a href="#">“How Instagram Alters Your Memory”</a> ; Syreeta McFadden - <a href="#">“Teaching the Camera to See My Skin”</a>	
8.13		critical/cultural analysis draft

**Final draft of the critical/cultural analysis due by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 17th.**