

FYSEM-UA 652

How We Read

Fall 2017

Tuesdays, 9:30-12:00

194 Mercer St. #308

Professor Lisa Gitelman

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Office: 239 Greene St. #720

Office hrs. 11-12:30 Th & by appt.

## Course Description

Reading is said to be “at risk” in the 21st Century, presumably because of the digitally mediated environment in and amid which we read, browse, and multitask. Predictions of doom follow from the decline of reading, although there is very little consensus about what reading is, what its particular virtues are, or how best to find out. Writing leaves a trace, after all, but empirical evidence about reading can be harder to conceptualize. This course will open the question of how we read in three ways. First, we’ll consider a few episodes in the long history of reading and *misreading*, using works of fiction and nonfiction. Next, we’ll propose and explore varieties of *not* reading that might help circumscribe our subject. Finally, we will do some work to understand more explicitly how we read today, onscreen and online, in this era of algorithms, fake news, click bait, and the cloud.

Our seminar emphasizes many of the same principles as the College Core, with a primary focus on the project of developing your skills as a college-level thinker, writer, and communicator, providing some groundwork for your future areas of curricular specialization, whatever they may be. It has the advantage over much of the Core in that its relatively small size makes sustained discussion and mutual inquiry possible. Together we will analyze and discuss a variety of texts with the aim of enhancing your ability to develop, express, and substantiate complex claims based on those texts. Writing assignments will offer additional opportunities for in-depth analysis while asking you to focus on developing and supporting an original thesis.

## Course Requirements

### Reading

The following books will be available for purchase through the NYU bookstore. These may also be purchased elsewhere if the same editions are obtained. Shorter readings will be available for download via NYU Classes or via links in the schedule below. Please bring the required reading to class with you for discussion as indicated on the schedule.

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Johns Hopkins)

Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (Vintage)

Alan Bennett, *The Uncommon Reader* (Picador)

Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven’t Read* (Bloomsbury)

### Attendance, Preparation, and Participation

A seminar is a space in which knowledge develops collaboratively and cumulatively, so your participation is key. You must attend class to participate, and in order to participate fully and appropriately, you must complete assigned readings prior to class. “Skimming” them is not enough. Strive to be intellectually present in class and aim to demonstrate your presence by adding your voice to our discussions while engaging the ideas of others. Plan to attend every class session. Any pattern of tardiness or of unexcused absences may have a depressing effect on your grade. Excusable absences include those for religious observance, because of illness, or if representing the university (as on a team); please be in touch about these as needed.

- [Writing \(additional details will be provided in class\)](#)
- preliminary personal essay, a literacy autobiography (3-5 pages)
- mid-semester persuasive essay (5 pages)
- peer comment (1 page) on another student’s mid-semester essay
- revised essay (5 pages), flexible deadline. Due in weeks 9-14. Hand in with original version.
- take-home final involving readings from the course (persuasive essay format, 5-7 pages).

### Speaking

- Starting in week 2 a pair or trio of students will be asked to introduce each week’s reading in a brief (5-7 minute) presentation. These presentations should be designed to kick off the week’s discussion. Think in terms of (a) providing a transition from the previous week or connecting to larger themes of the course (b) offering background material you’ve unearthed to contextualize the reading; and/or (c) posing some thoughtful questions for further discussion by the class.
- Every student will also be asked to make one individual presentation (5-7 minutes) in class in weeks 8, 9, 10, or 11. These presentations should revise “show and tell” for the college level. You will be asked to identify and discuss either a text or a group of images that can function as evidence of reading. Think in terms of making speculative evidentiary claims. How can a specific book, for instance, work as evidence of its own reading? Try to build on and extend the presentations by your peers (unless you’d like to volunteer to go first).

### Grades will be determined as follows:

Informed participation in class, including presentations: 10%  
Preliminary essay: 15%  
Mid-Semester essay: 20%  
Peer comment: 10%  
Revised essay: 15%  
Take-home final: 30%

In general I do not accept late assignments. Please plan ahead. If you are having difficulty keeping up with coursework for some reason, please make time to discuss it with me after class or in office hours. Communication is crucial.

Please note: Any student entitled to an accommodations in light of a documented disability should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>. Please be proactive.

Please make yourself familiar with the CAS statement on [Academic Integrity](#). It should go without saying that any plagiarism *no matter how accidental*, will result in failure for the course. Remember, it is plagiarism if you use someone else's ideas without attribution or someone else's words without quotation.

## Schedule of course meetings and assignments

### Fourteen Tuesdays and Other Important Dates

#### 1. September 5

Introductions and distracted reading

- Carr, [“Is Google Making Us Stupid?”](#) (*The Atlantic* 2008)
- Matt Richtel, [“Growing up Digital, Wired for Distraction”](#) (*NY Times*; 2010)
- Johann Hari, [“How to Survive the Age of Distraction”](#) (*The Independent* 2011)
- Take the two multitasking tests on the *NY Times* site ([Test How Fast You Juggle Tasks and Test Your Focus](#)) and be prepared to discuss the results in class. (You may need to update or enable Flash animation.)

#### 2. September 12

Episodes in a history of *misreading*

Ginsburg, *Cheese and the Worms* (ok to skip sections 10, 19, 31-2, 42, 49-50, 58)

#### 3. September 19

Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau” (pp. 215-52)

Preliminary essay due in class.

#### 4. September 26

Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, (ok to start at p. 73; try to read half)

#### 5. October 3

Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (conclusion; read to p. 301)

#### 6. October 10

On the contemporary common reader

Bennett, *The Uncommon Reader*

Workshop, in-progress mid-semester essays

Saturday, October 14, Mid-Semester essay due via email.

#### 7. October 17

On not reading

Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, pp. 3-87  
Peer comment due to an assigned peer (and Cc [lg91@nyu](mailto:lg91@nyu)) by class next week.

8. October 24

Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read* (pp. 88-185)  
Presentations

9. October 31

Considering images, captions, subtitles, and titles

- Zdenek, "A Rhetorical View of Captioning" (pp. 1-32)
- Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed* (excerpt: pp. 33, 53-59, 95-98)
- Yeazell, "Prologue (This Is Not a Title)" (pp. 1-15)
- Rotherberg, <http://emojitracker.com> (browse)

Presentations

Saturday Nov 4 @ 7:30 DJ Spooky performance (required)

<https://nyuskirball.org/events/dj-spooky-rebirth-nation/>

10. November 7

No required reading, discussion of DJ Spooky and of not reading  
Presentations

11. November 14

On machines and reading

- Brown, "Readies" pp. 27-41
- Goldsmith, "Revenge of the Text" pp. 14-33
- Kriss, "[The Language of God](#)"

Presentations

12. November 21

- Jabr, "Paper versus Screen" (pp. 1-5)
- Frost, Carrera, "Haptic Reading" and "Diagramming" (pp. 1-11)
- View and take notes: Young-Hae Chang, "[Rain on the Sea](#)"
- View and take notes: William Poundstone, [Project for Tachistoscope](#)
- View and take notes: Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, [Between Page and Screen](#) (preview)
- View and take notes: [The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore](#) (preview)

13. November 28

Readings TBA (we'll decide on these readings together)

14. December 5

Eagan, "[Black Box](#)"

Concluding discussion, prep for take-home final (due December 15, details TBA)