



## Course Meeting Time and Place

Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00-3:15  
Storm Hall 126

## Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Jenny Sheppard  
Office: Storm Hall West 103  
Phone: (619) 594-2696  
Email: [jsheppard@sdsu.edu](mailto:jsheppard@sdsu.edu) (best way to reach me)

## Office Hours

Please make use of this time for questions or concerns about the course. These times are available for your benefit.

- Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 and 3:30-4:30
- By appointment

## Course Overview

Visual messages are a powerful way to inform, persuade and educate. Within professional settings, the ability to communicate effectively with supervisors, co-workers, clients, and public audiences through combinations of visual, textual, and technological elements is an invaluable skill. This course takes a rhetorical and professionally-oriented approach to analyzing, organizing, and communicating ideas, educational content, and specialized information through visual and multimodal means. The course readings will introduce you to research on visual communication, basic design and layout strategies for print, presentational, and online contexts, and the use of images and data visualization to convey specialized content. Research and practitioner materials will be used as a basis for evaluating the rhetorical choices in the visual communication work of others and for learning how to apply these concepts to visual composing projects common to the workplace (e.g. a proposal and an infographic/visual data display).

The focus throughout the course will be on learning to evaluate and craft texts that integrate effective visual strategies to create user-friendly, informative, and persuasive texts for professional audiences. In addition to focusing specifically on the visual, this course will also consider these affordances and constraints in relation to other modalities, including textual, spatial, gestural, and auditory. Being better aware of how multimodal rhetorical choices influence an audience can help you to be more critical of what others are saying to you, as well as to make use of these strategies in your own communication.

## Course Materials

- Ball, Cheryl E., Jennifer Sheppard, and Kristin L. Arola. *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*. 2nd edition. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018.
- Knaflic, Cole Nussbaumer. *Storytelling with Data: A Data Visualization Guide for Business Professionals*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015.
- Williams, Robin. *The Non-Designer's Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice*. 4th edition, 2015.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- **demonstrate** how the rhetorics of visual and information design choices affect usability, engagement, and communication in professional documents and presentations
- **use** an iterative design and development process to produce visual and multimodal communication for print, presentational, and online contexts as demonstrated through project completion and written reflections
- **apply** basic user-centered design and usability testing practices for print and online texts through user testing and revision activities
- **articulate, analyze, and justify** visual and information design choices through written reflections on completed projects

## Assignments and Points

Each assignment in this course offers opportunities to explore your interests and tailor your approach. The assignments are:

- **Redesign of a proposal or report-** 20% The first unit of this class deals with best practices in typography, color, and page and text design. Your redesign project will help you apply these strategies to a sample text with the goal of making it more engaging, usable, and persuasive. You will also test your redesign with other users and offer a reflective justification for your choices and how they adhere to ideas from our readings.
- **Composing Visual Identity and Personal Branding-** 35% This is a multipart project that incorporates research, analysis, and visual composing activities. It begins with historical research on popular political campaigns and their branding and visual rhetoric. Next, you will complete critical analysis of the visual identity of two or more politicians competing in the 2018 midterm elections. Finally, following your research and analysis, you will develop and justify your own personal/political visual identity as if you were running for office in the current election cycle.
- **Infographic/data visualization project and lightening presentation-** 25% Displaying complex information in a way that is both easy to understand and inviting to look at requires a lot of research, planning, trial and error, and creativity. This assignment calls on you to design an infographic or data visualization on the subject or set of data of your choice. Your purpose is to gather information/data and visualize it to tell a story for your readers so that it is more comprehensible, engaging, and persuasive.
- **Reading responses and short assignments-** 10%
- **Participation and classroom engagement-** 10%

## A Note about Office Hours- Use Them

No really, I hold office hours for you and I encourage you to talk with me if you need help or have questions or concerns related to class. You'll be required to conference with me about one of your project drafts during the semester, but feel free to stop by or make an appointment in between.

## Attendance and Participation

This course is run as a combination seminar and workshop. **You are expected to be present and engaged for all class sessions** (except in the case of illness, emergency, or official university-related activity). **Missing more than six classes will negatively impact your final grade.** This is a 500/600 level course that requires both attendance and engaged participation for success.

To do well in this course, you will need to read all assigned material prior to class, respond to assigned writing prompts, and engage in thoughtful discussion with your classmates. Although this does not mean speaking up and contributing deep insights during every class session, it does mean arriving on time, being prepared, asking

questions, and being attentive to the activities at hand. This is likely one of the smallest classes you will have in college, so take advantage of this time and space to build your critical, collaborative, and deliberative skills for group settings, in addition to the content specifics of our course.

In order to explore a breadth of perspectives on rhetoric, we will need to rely on the work and resources each of us brings to this experience. Throughout the semester, we will discuss readings, share collected materials and reading responses, and provide feedback on drafts of one another's work. Your sustained engagement in this process will create a rich learning environment for yourself and your classmates and will help to construct a network of support for your intellectual and professional development.

### Professional Etiquette

My goal is to create a comfortable, inviting environment for all students so learning can take place. To this end, I expect professional and respectful behavior in class. This is a space where we can have different perspectives while remaining mindful of our behavior, language, and tone in all interactions with one another. Behavior that detracts from the culture of respect and professionalism a class such as this requires will not be tolerated. Please do not text or talk on cell phones, use computers for reasons outside of our classwork, or engage in any other behavior that distracts from our work or you will be asked to leave.

### Helpful Resources:

- Writers (and information designers) at any level can benefit from discussing their work-in-progress. **The SDSU Writing Center**, located in LLA 1103 in the Love Library (appointments available at the [Writing Center Online](#)) is a **free resource** where you can find support for the writing assigned for this course. Tutors can help you with your assignments at any stage of the composing process--from brainstorming to revision of in-process drafts. You can expect your session to be collaborative: consider your tutor a writing coach who can offer insight into the specific project you are working on, as well as strategies to help you develop your writing skills overall.
- [The Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) (OWL) offers comprehensive information on research, citation styles, writing specific genres, and much more. The site also includes **free resources related specifically to visual rhetoric and communication design**.
- A complete list of all academic support services is available on the [Academic Success](#) section of the [SDSU Student Affairs](#) website.

### Problems

Please get in touch with me immediately if you experience unforeseen circumstances that will affect your performance in the course. My goal is to help you succeed, but we need to communicate to make that happen.

### Late Work

With the exception of presentations or in-class activities (which cannot be made-up), I will accept late work **only if prior arrangements have been made**. All three major projects must be completed to pass this class.

### Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Ability Success Center at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Ability Success Center as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from Student Ability Success Center.

## **Counseling**

There are many events and situations that put additional stress on being a student. SDSU has an excellent center for Counseling & Psychological Services (C&PS) that is open to students Monday through Friday from 8am-4:30pm. To set up an initial consultation, call (619) 594-5220. For immediate or emergency help, you are welcome to use San Diego's free 24-hour counseling access line at (800) 479-3339. C&PS on campus also has a "Center for Well-Being" with multiple stations for relaxation if you are feeling stressed during the semester. C&PS is located in the Capulli Center, Room 4401.

## **Academic Honesty**

All work in this course must be original. Plagiarism will result in serious consequences ranging from grade reduction to failure in the class to expulsion from the college. For more information on the university cheating and plagiarism policy, please visit: [http://go.sdsu.edu/student\\_affairs/srr/cheating-plagiarism.aspx](http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/srr/cheating-plagiarism.aspx) SDSU's library also has an excellent tutorial on how to avoid plagiarism.

## **Discrimination and Harassment**

SDSU complies with all federal and state laws regarding discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, medical status, veteran status, and disability. Further, the expectation for our classroom is that it is a safe, collegial space where differences of background and perspective are treated with consideration and respect. Disagreement on some issues is expected as part of the learning process, but should always be expressed within a framework of collegiality.

## **Inclusivity and Identity**

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

## COURSE CALENDAR

This schedule is subject to change based on student needs. Please check Blackboard for the most up-to-date version.

**STWD-** *Storytelling with Data*

**W/D-** *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*

**NDDB-** *The Non-Designer's Design Book*

### Week 1: What is visual and information design?

#### Monday 8/27

- Introductions
- Syllabus and assignments
- Design and technology experience writing activity

#### Wednesday 8/29

- Watch and discuss *Objectified*

### Week 2: Rhetoric, design, and communication

#### Monday 9/3

- **Class Cancelled for Labor Day**

#### Wednesday 9/5

- **Read** Brumberger, Eva. "Visual Communication in the Workplace: A Survey of Practice." **(PDF)**
- Discuss Brumberger and continue discussion of *Objectified*
- Directions for Proposal/Report Redesign Project

### Week 3: Visuals and design as rhetoric

#### Monday 9/10- LAST DAY TO DROP/ADD

- **Read** Kimball, Miles and Hawkins, Ann. "Theories of Design" **(PDF)**
- Activity and discussion
- Use readings to analyze and plan revisions for migraine diaries:
  - [Health Central](#)
  - [National Headache Foundation](#)
  - [The Migraine Trust](#)
  - [WebMD](#)
  - [Botox Medical](#)

#### Wednesday 9/12

- **Read W/D-** chapter 1 "What Are Multimodal Projects"
- Activity and discussion
- Brainstorm/workshop Redesign Project Ideas

### Week 4: Basic design and page layout principles; Report redesign project

#### Monday 9/17

- **Read W/D-** chapter 2 "How Does Rhetoric Work in Multimodal Project"
- **Read NDDB-** pages 10-13
- Activity and discussion
- **DUE-** Document selection for Redesign Project
- Workshop time for drafting Proposal/Report Redesign Project

### Wednesday 9/19

- Read **NDDB**- pages 14-84 (chapters 1-5)
- Activity and discussion
- Workshop time for drafting Proposal/Report Redesign Project

## Week 5: Thinking rhetorically about type, color, and page structure

### Monday 9/24

- Read **NDDB**- pages 151-218 (chapters 9-12)
- Watch [Font Conference](#)
- In-class typography activity

### Wednesday 9/26

- Read **NDDB**- chapter 6 “Design with Color”
- Read Kimball, Miles and Hawkins, Ann. “Pages” (**PDF**)
- Activity and discussion

## Week 6: Working with design assets, finding images, copyright and Creative Commons

### Monday 10/1

- **DUE**- Draft Proposal Redesign
- Peer review of draft redesign project

### Wednesday 10/3

- Read **W/D**- chapter 6 “Working with Multimodal Assets and Sources”
- Read STWD chapter 1 “The Importance of Context”
- Look at Creative Commons, discuss copyright and options for visual content
  - [Vector, Raster, JPG, EPS, PNG: What's the Difference?](#)
  - [Image Cheatsheet](#)
- Look at online design resources and create a Lightbox or Pinterest board for visual brainstorming:
  - [Creative Commons on Flickr](#)
  - [iStockphoto](#)
  - [Stock.xchng](#)
  - [Clipart.com](#)
  - [Getty Images](#)
  - [Acid Fonts](#)
- Workshop time for drafting redesign project

## Week 7: Visual identity and branding in politics

### Monday 10/8

- Read “Citizen Typography and Political Brands in the 2016 US Presidential Election Campaign” (**PDF**)
- Discuss reading
- In class political logo and branding scavenger hunt
- Directions for Composing Visual Identity and Personal Branding project
- **DUE**- Final Proposal Redesign project

### Wednesday 10/12

- Read **W/D**- chapter 3 “Why Is Genre Important in Multimodal Projects?”
- In class genre analysis of historical and contemporary political branding and identity

## Week 8: Visual identity and branding in politics

### Monday 10/15

- **Research and Read**- Find your own article on political branding, read, and be ready to discuss in class
- Share and discuss political branding articles
- Compile class bibliography and annotations on historical visual identity and branding in politics
- Discuss annotations and themes

### Wednesday 10/17

- **Read W/D**- chapter 4 “How Do You Start a Multimodal Project?”
- Visual Identity Project – workshop day
- Find and select contemporary political identity/branding for project

## Week 9: Iterative design processes and lifecycles

### Monday 10/22

- Class cancelled for individual/team conferences with instructor
- **DUE**- Project Proposal and Outline

### Wednesday 10/24

- Visual Identity/Branding project workshop day- bring all materials to class

## Week 10: Project drafting workshop and peer review

### Monday 10/29

- **DUE**- DRAFT Visual Identity/Branding project

### Wednesday 10/31

- **Read STWD** chapter 5 “Think Like a Designer”
- Discuss reading
- Workshop time for finalizing Visual Identity/Branding project

## Week 11: Visualizing data and research findings for a lay audience

### Monday 11/5

- **DUE**- FINAL Visual Identity/Branding project
- Visual Identity/Branding project presentations

### Wednesday 11/7

- **Read** “[The Anatomy of a Winning Infographic](#)” (PDF)
- **Read STWD** chapter 4 “Focus Your Audience’s Attention”
- **Read STWD** chapter 3 “Clutter Is Your Enemy”
- Directions for Infographic/Data Visualization Project
- Designing Infographics with [Piktochart](#)
- In class:
  - Create an account at Piktochart
  - Watch five short (1 minute each) [tutorial videos on Piktochart's YouTube channel](#)

## Week 12: Visualizing data and research findings for a professional audience

### Monday 11/12- **Class cancelled for Veterans’ Day**

### Wednesday 11/14

- **Read STWD** chapter 2 “Choosing an Effective Visual”
- **Read STWD** chapter 6 “Dissecting Model Visuals”
- **Read STWD** chapter 7 “Lessons in Storytelling”

- **Discuss** using narrative to make sense of data- "[Upgrade Your Jail Cell- for a Price](#)"
- In class workshop time on draft Infographic/Data Visualization Project

## Thanksgiving Week

**Monday 11/19- Work on your own- class not meeting today**

- **Read:** "[Infographics Are the Communication Paradigm of the Future](#)"
- **Read:** "[Seven Design Tips for Making Great Infographics](#)"
- **Read:** "[8 Types of Infographics & Which One to Use When](#)"

**Wednesday 11/21- Class cancelled for Thanksgiving**

## Week 13: Infographic/Data visualization project

**Monday 11/26**

- **Read** *STWD* chapter 8 "Pulling It All Together"

**Wednesday 11/28**

- Read *W/D* chapter 5 "How Do You Design and Revise with Multiple Audiences"
- **DUE** DRAFT Infographic/Data Visualization DUE
- Peer feedback and workshopping of project drafts

## Week 14: Visual design in presentations

**Monday 12/3**

- **Read** *STWD* chapter 9 "Case Studies"
- **Read** *STWD* chapter 10 "Final Thoughts"
- In class workshop time for Infographic/Data Visualization project

**Wednesday 12/5**

- **Read** "[10 Tips for Designing Presentations That Don't Suck: Pt.1 AND Pt.2](#)"
- **Read** "[Four Alternatives to PowerPoint for Your Next Presentation](#)"
- Designing presentations- PowerPoint, KeyNote, Google Docs, Prezi, and slideboom
- In class workshop time on presentations

## Week 15: Student presentations of data visualization projects

**Monday 12/10**

- **DUE-** Presentations

**Wednesday 12/12**

- **DUE-** Presentations

## Finals Week

**Friday 12/14**

- **DUE by 5pm-** Final Infographic/Data Visualization and written reflection