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# HSTR 300.01: Writing for History

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## HSTR 300 – WRITING IN HISTORY: HISTORY AND IMAGE

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Office hours MWF 1-2 PM, or by appointment, or by accident.



“A picture is worth a thousand words.” Visual representations tell stories, and there are stories behind them; they can be used to tell stories, and those stories can change. The thousand words (or so) can be a “story” in the conventional sense, what we call a “narrative” with a beginning, a middle, and an end, or like the picture itself, it can provide a snapshot of a particular moment in time, describing and analyzing the circumstances surrounding that moment. For that reason, a course that focuses on images is especially suited to be a course that also focuses on writing.

I often tell my classes that the study of history is basically about two things: what happened in the past, and how we know. Survey and lower-division courses are mostly concerned with the first of these, the “what,” but as students pass through the curriculum, they are more and more concerned with the second, the “how.” This course is unusual in that it is disproportionately concerned with “how.” Specifically, we will learn how images, visual representations of different sorts, can lead us to, or divert us from, historical truth, and about the different ways that visual representations can serve as historical evidence.

This course also carries an “intermediate writing” designation, which means that it emphasizes writing across disciplines. You will write three 1500 word essays over the course of the semester. You will rewrite the first essay in response to comments, and you will have the option to rewrite the second essay in response to comments as well. The third essay will be handed in at the end of the final examination period. The topics of your essays will follow the three

themes that we will use in this course to look at images through historical lenses. You are each going to choose three images for the entire class to consider; you will give a class presentation on each of these images.

**Attendance:** The class meets twice a week for eighty minutes. Even if you are not presenting, you should come to class prepared to ask questions and make comments.

**Grades:** The essays and rewrites will count for 60% of the final grade (each essay, including the rewrite where applicable, will count for 20%). Each of your presentations will count for 10%, for a total of 30%. Attendance and participation will count for 10%, which will, however, be forfeited if all assignments are not turned in. In my experience, most students who fail my courses have neglected to turn in major assignments, and most students who fail to turn in major assignments fail the course.

I use the plus/minus grading scale, modified to eliminate the silly grade of "D+," as follows: A, 93-100 points; A-, 90-92; B+, 87-89; B, 83-86; B-, 80-82; C+, 77-79; C, 73-76; C-, 70-72; D, 65-69; D-, 60-64; F, 0-59. Be advised that I will not change grades once they are assigned. Late work not accepted except for reasons which are verifiable and allowed under university regulations. It is your responsibility to present these reasons as soon as possible, to provide documentation if asked, to arrange to make up work, and to do so in a timely fashion. If, due to circumstances beyond your control, you have difficulty meeting course deadlines, the time to speak to me is before the due date, not afterward.

**Drops** require the consent of the instructor after the fifteenth instructional day (1 February). After the forty-fifth instructional day (18 March) and only through the last instructional day (26 April), drops are available only in very specific circumstances and only through petition which must be approved by the instructor, your advisor, and the Dean. Drop petitions will be considered (but not necessarily granted) *only* if accompanied with relevant documentation. I reserve the right to investigate drop petitions.

Every effort will be made to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Requests for accommodation should be made through the office of Disability Services for Students.

**Plagiarism warning.** Plagiarism is the use of anyone's words or ideas as one's own without properly crediting the original source. Students are best served through the maintenance of high academic standards. Plagiarism undermines these standards, and threatens the integrity of the University. Fortunately, in my experience at this institution, intentional plagiarism is ridiculously easy to catch.

In accordance with the Student Conduct Code, any student who commits intentional plagiarism in an essay (including re-writes) will be assigned a failing grade in the course. Academic dishonesty may also result in more serious penalties, including suspension or even expulsion.

In closing, let me encourage all of you, in this class and out of it, to be active participants in your own education. A UM education costs about what you'll pay for a new car, and either one will go a lot further if you drive it yourself!

### Course Schedule

10 January: Course Introduction

**Unit One: Image as Artifact.** What do visual representations tell us about the historical contexts in which they were produced?



15 January

17 January

22 January

24 January

29 January

31 January

5 February

7 February

12 February

14 February

First Essay due 5 PM Friday 15 February

**Unit Two: Image as Record.** In what ways do visual representations record the past, whether or not they were meant to do so?

19 February

21 February

26 February

28 February

5 March

7 March

First Essay rewrite due 5PM Friday 8 March

12 March

14 March



**Unit Three: Image as Memory.** What questions do we need to ask of images created with the intention of representing the past?

19 March

21 March

Second Essay due 5 PM Friday 22 March

**Spring Break**

2 April

4 April

9 April

11 April

16 April

18 April

Second Essay rewrite due 5PM Friday 19 April

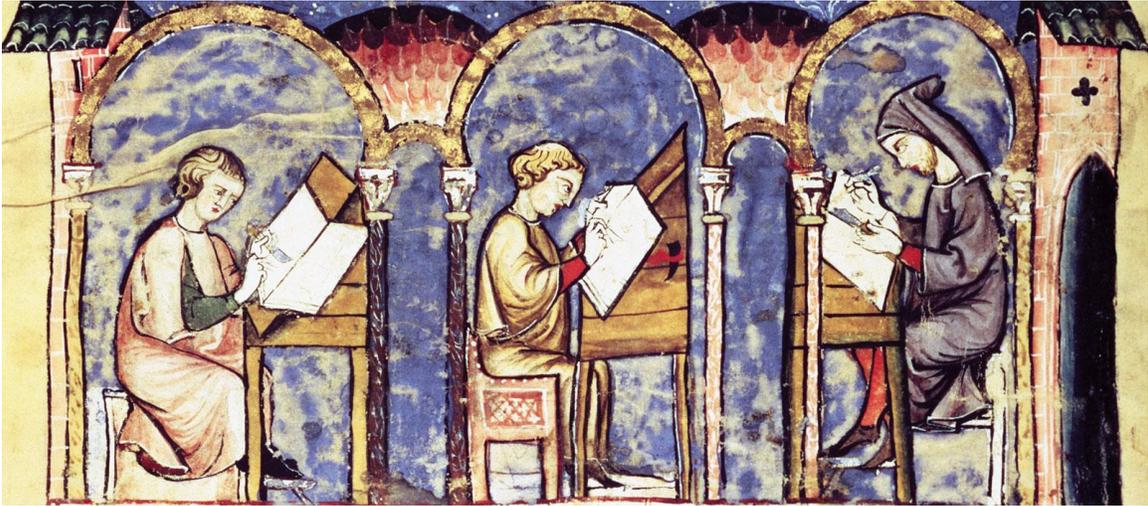
23 April

25 April

Final Essay due 5PM Friday 3 May



## Guidelines for Essays



The essays are to be 1500 words in length; they should be typed and double-spaced with standard fonts and margins. You will be handing them in electronically, sending them to me as an MS Word e-mail attachment. It would be a good idea to configure your e-mail settings to request a receipt from me. The essays will be graded according to three sets of criteria:

Sources: Have appropriate, authoritative sources been selected? Are these sources quoted or paraphrased properly and effectively, and are they cited correctly, using University of Chicago format?

Composition: Is the essay written in complete sentences? Are these correctly and effectively punctuated? Is the essay written in an appropriate voice?

Argument: Is there a clearly stated thesis, and is that thesis contestable? Is the essay organized in a way that advances an argument effectively? Is evidence used effectively?

A common and very useful format for essays like these is the five paragraph model. The first paragraph introduces the topic, explain its historical context, and concludes with a thesis statement with three elements or points, each of which is explained in the next three paragraphs. The final, concluding paragraph addresses the historical significance of the topic.

Again, remember that plagiarism is nasty stuff, and you don't want to get any on you. Intentional plagiarism will result in course failure; inadvertent plagiarism is grounds for assignment failure.



## Guidelines for Presentations



During your presentations, you should be as concerned to ask questions, and elicit questions from other students, as you are about answering them. Yes, you should do a good bit of the talking, but your goal should be starting a conversation about the image you have chosen and the issues that it raises.

Tell us about the image you have chosen. What do we need to know about it, and why is it important that we know?

Who produced the image? When was the image produced? Where was it produced? What does the image depict?

What does the image tell us about the historical context in which it was produced? What specific historical information might it relate? If the image was created with the intention of representing a historical episode or period, why was it important for this history to be remembered in this way?

**Syllabus images, in order of appearance:**

East German border guard escaping to West Berlin, 1961

Lucas Cranach, *The Ill-Matched Couple*

Canaletto (Antonio Canal), *Whitehall and the Privy Garden from Richmond House*

William Frederick Yeames, *And When did You Last See Your Father?*

Medieval scriptorium, from a manuscript in the Escorial, Madrid

Johann Zoffany, *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, detail

(These descriptions are incomplete, on purpose.)

Notice from the UM Writing Committee: “***This course requires an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university’s writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following Writing Learning Outcomes:***

- ***Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose***
- ***Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing***
- ***Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts***
- ***Revise written work based on constructive feedback***
- ***Find, evaluate, and use information effectively***
- ***Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (largely style conventions like APA or MLA)***
- ***Demonstrate appropriate English language usage***

***This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university.”***