

**INF 385T SPECIAL TOPICS IN INFORMATION SCIENCE:  
LITERACY & MEMORY TECHNOLOGIES**

University of Texas at Austin

Instructor: Dr. Amelia Acker

Spring 2017

**Course Information**

Class day and time: Mondays, 12 pm – 3 pm

Class location UTA 1.212

**Instructor Information**

Instructor: Dr. Amelia Acker

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Office hours: Tuesdays 3 – 4 pm (and by appointment)

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**Teaching Assistant Information**

Assistant: George Royer

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Office hours: by appointment

**Course Summary**

This course introduces students to the history and development of information and communication systems, in particular the transition from oral traditions to literate cultures, and issues of representation and memory in writing systems that have concerned information scholars since the 1960s. In the course we will focus on representation, orality, writing, materiality, and storage technologies as they relate to the transmission of information and memory in oral traditions to cultures of proto-writing, pre-writing, and early writing systems. We will begin with cave paintings, and cover epos and myth, tallying, tokens and emblems, numeracy, syllabaries, graphemes and phonemes, and the alphabet. The course features major conceptions, theories, and models of literacy and memory; including a range of information-related artifacts, agents, contexts, practices, properties, values, and related phenomena.

Writing systems are functional and symbolic technologies that support memory by transmitting and storing information. The earliest proto-writing systems appear in the third millennium BC and contain originary features that relate to the ways we represent, organize, provide access, and preserve information in our systems today. The writing systems that we use now shape our experience of cultural memory in this current moment but also connect us to traditions of people from the past (what Hobart and Schiffman would call earlier “information ages”). How have contemporary understandings of “literacy” been forged by writing systems of the past? How does cultural memory transform with shifts in writing systems? This course provides a foundation for those who seek to understand flow of ideas and cultural memory through time by way of recorded information and writing systems, presenting opportunities for the identification, analysis, and discussion of critical intellectual, social, and technological issues facing information professionals concerned with the past and future of literacy and memory.

## Learning Objectives

Students will have an understanding of the problems and issues that have historically driven the study of literacy and information transmission in oral, pre-literate, and early literacy traditions. The aim of the course is to provide an introduction to the multiple approaches that have been taken up by information, bibliographic, philology, and media scholars in the study of information transmission related to memory, literacy, writing systems, the materiality and storage of information.

## Outcomes

Upon satisfactory completion of the course, you will have developed:

- Skills in the identification, research, clarification, evaluation and critical analysis of different accounts and interpretations of literacy and memory technologies over time
- An understanding and appreciation of differences in information systems in oral, pre-literate, and ancient literacy traditions
- An exhibition report, catalog essay, and display experience for a public audience to experience and engage with literacy and memory technologies

## Readings

No textbook is required for the course, but please purchase or borrow from the UT Library:

- Havelock, E. A. (1986). *The muse learns to write: Reflections on orality and literacy from antiquity to the present*. Yale University Press.
- Ong, W. J. (2013). *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word*. Routledge. Any edition is fine.

There will be 1-4 readings assigned each week. Most of the readings will be available on the course canvas site, unless otherwise noted, in which case they can be accessed through UT Libraries as an e-book. If you have any issues accessing the assigned readings, please inform me as soon as possible.

## Methods

Each week we shall discuss a small set of readings, all of which are required. It is important that everyone comes to class well prepared and having read the material ready to discuss the week's readings. After discussing the readings, 1-2 students will present a reading from that week. We will have a group discussion after the presentations to discuss the use, need, and future possibilities of these ideas. Course participants are expected to be involved in these group discussions. A portion of your grade will be based on your preparation for and participation in the class discussions.

## Assignments

There are 4 assignments for this class, your grade will be based on the following:

- A class presentation of one of the readings in the syllabus, to be presented between weeks 3-11 (15%)
- 5 two-page write-ups featuring an artifact, problem, current event, or information system that engages with the materials from that week's readings (20%)
- A final project exhibition report that presents 5-10 artifacts and justifies the significance of such an exhibition at a particular kind of information institution (25%)
- An exhibition catalog that includes an essay introducing to the exhibit to a general audience and a visual guide of the layout, display, and viewing experience (25%)
- Class attendance, preparation and participation in discussion (15%)

### Formatting your write-ups and reports

Your first and last name, Name of Instructor, Kind of assignment (“Weekly write-up 1”, “Exhibition report”, “Exhibition catalog”), and date should appear in the top left corner of the first page (single spaced). The body of assignment the should be double-spaced, in Times New Roman font, 12 point font, stapled or paper clipped in the top left corner. Assignments are due in hard copy at the beginning of class, late work will not be accepted; assignments are not accepted via email. If you will be missing class, please drop a hard copy off in my mailbox on IS building, floor 5 in advance of the class and email me informing me that it has been dropped off. Term projects (“Exhibition report”, “Exhibition catalog”) should be submitted through email to me at [aacker@ischool.utexas.edu](mailto:aacker@ischool.utexas.edu) and George at [georgewroyer@yahoo.com](mailto:georgewroyer@yahoo.com) with the subject line of the email and the file name of the document should read, {last name}\_exhibition report.docx

### Class presentation

Participants will choose a reading that they would like to evaluate and present to the class. Your evaluation should describe some artifact, thing or system that the reading is explaining. As an information professional, you will build on skills and principles that you have been exposed to in other courses in the program to evaluate the author’s argument, the information and facts provided, the experience of accessing that information, and your interpretation of why these ideas are important to our investigations of literacy and memory technologies. The class presentation should be between 5-7 minutes, you can create a powerpoint, or simply present your ideas verbally. Be creative in describing the artifact or thing or system to course participants, know the pros and cons, imagine different scenarios of use. You should be prepared to field questions from your classmates and provide an opinion about what institutions should provide a tool like this, and what kinds of users would benefit from using it. Credit will be awarded based on your presentation style and your knowledge of the material.

### Final term project: report and exhibition catalog

Participants in the course will be asked to directly experiment with the production of collective memory, by choosing 5 to 10 artifacts and developing a report for why they should be preserved and displayed in an exhibition dealing with the history and present of literacy and memory. The artifacts may consist of anything related to literacy technologies that support human memory of some kind (or any combination), to make an argument about how these things in concert play a significant role in the development of memory, writing, or forgetting. The artifacts may use any of the representation techniques used in a museum setting: material, photographic, multimedia, film, sound recording, or any combination of these mediums.

In addition to the selection and curation the exhibit artifacts, participants will write a report justifying and explaining the theoretical choices made. A portion of the grade will be given over to the production of exhibition itself, and the rest of the credit will cover the report justifying the exhibition. Participants will produce an interim report to indicate their choices and the evolution of the project. The report should be written with a particular information institution in mind that hosts exhibitions (for example a museum, a corporation’s lobby, a professional trade show, a public or university library, a special collections or archive). Participants will thus both research the historical background of a given technology or system, but also experiment with the ways history itself is produced, and represented. Credit will be awarded for creativity, originality, insightfulness, accuracy, and comprehensiveness.

The **first exhibition report is due on April 3, 11:59 p.m. CT** to [aacker@ischool.utexas.edu](mailto:aacker@ischool.utexas.edu) and to George Royer at [georgewroyer@yahoo.com](mailto:georgewroyer@yahoo.com). It should be a 10-page (2,500 word) document that identifies your artifacts, what it signifies to the development of literacy, and the history of its development and use in one or more communities of information. The document should report on the social and technical dimensions of these things and how they shape the ways groups of people communicate, organize, and solve information problems. Make an argument to your institution's leadership (museum board of directors, CEO, head librarian) about why this exhibit is timely, cutting-edge, and worth investing in. This first report should rely on scholarly, primary, and popular sources to support your claims. You may choose to use portions of your weekly write-ups in this first report. Assume that you have no material constraints, you have access to all the artifacts and design support needed to create and implement your exhibition. More details will follow.

The **exhibition catalog is due May 1, 11:59 p.m. CT** to [aacker@ischool.utexas.edu](mailto:aacker@ischool.utexas.edu) and to George Royer at [georgewroyer@yahoo.com](mailto:georgewroyer@yahoo.com). It should incorporate comments from the first report and include a new section on the artifact's exhibition in a museum space. This section should describe the museum audience/participant's encounter with the exhibit and what they are likely to learn as they move through the space. The exhibition should include layout, artifact description, materials that would appear next to or near the display. If museum participants are encouraged to use their own devices to experience or interact with the exhibit, detailed descriptions of how this interaction should be provided. More details will follow.

An **in-class presentation on the final day of class** will be a 5-7 minute overview of your term project. You should communicate the highlights of your final report and museum exhibition in an engaging and thought-provoking matter. A few minutes at the end of presentations will be reserved for feedback and critique.

### Grading Scale

This class employs a plus/minus grading system. For more information on this system, please consult the University's *General Information Catalog*. Below is the grade scale the University employs and which will be used in this class:

Meets major requirement		Does not meet requirement	
Grade	Points	Grade	Points
A	≥93.00	C-	70.00-72.99
A-	90.00-92.99	D+	67.00-69.99
B+	87.00-89.99	D	63.00-66.99
B	83.00-86.99	D-	60.00-62.99
B-	80.00-82.99	F	<60.00
C+	77.00-79.99		
C	73.00-76.99		

### COURSE POLICIES

**Instructor Communication:** E-mail is the official mode of communication for the university and the most reliable means of contact for me. It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with "INF 385T." *Do not use the messaging facilities in Canvas; these messages do not arrive in*

*my e-mail in-box*. Please allow a 24-hour window for email responses and plan accordingly. Please limit emails to 5 sentences or less. If your query about a reading or an assignment for the class takes more than 5 sentences to express, please come see me face to face in office hours. If you do not receive a sufficient answer to a question in more than one follow-up email (that is, a total of 2 personal emails from me) about the same question, please come meet with me. If you cannot make office hours, please email me to arrange an appointment. These policies are based on my belief in the sanctity and value of high-bandwidth communication (that is, face to face conversations).

**Classroom Etiquette:** Please come on time to class prepared, bringing soft or hard copies of readings for reference; bring appropriate tools for writing and note taking. Bring personal machines powered up, or plug them in before class begins, silence phones. Small snacks and drinks are welcome but meals are not.

**Habits of mind:** Respect for others; imagination; wonder; willingness to try and fail in front of others; empathy for others—in the past, present and future. I will discuss what I mean by habits of mind on the first day and throughout the course.

**Copyright Notice:** These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials.

**Statement on Classroom Recording:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

**On original work:** cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If an assignment turned in for credit is found to have been plagiarized, you will receive a grade of 0 points and a formal reprimand in your student file. You will be subject to the University's disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course.

**Late assignments:** I do not accept late assignments. Students who anticipate difficulties with completing assignments on time should consult with the instructor as soon as possible so that alternate solutions can be discussed. When negotiated in advance, arrangements can often be made.

**Attendance:** Attendance is not taken. You do not need to inform me of absences, nor do you need to "make up" anything if you are absent. While participation is an important part of your grade, and attendance is important, there are no specific requirements for mandatory attendance.

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## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

**Religious holy days:** A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence:** All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/help/utmail/1564>

**Documented Disability Statement:** You will need to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office so the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities (SSB 4.104, 471-6259). Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471- 4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. If you plan to make use of specialized services through SSD please inform me before the second class meeting. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

**Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL):** If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

**Emergency Evacuation Policy:** Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

**Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Judicial Services web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>

**University of Texas Core Values and Honor Code:** The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. As a student of the University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.

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## **COURSE AT A GLANCE**

<b>Week, Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Note or Deadline</b>
<b>Week 1, January 16</b>	MLK holiday	No class
<b>Week 2, January 23</b>	Introduction	Watch <i>Cave of Forgotten Dreams</i>
<b>Week 3, January 30</b>	Oral Traditions	Class presentations
<b>Week 4, February 6</b>	Symbols, Signs, Speech	Class presentations
<b>Week 5, February 13</b>	Clay & social organization	Class presentations
<b>Week 6, February 20</b>	Tokens, Lists, and Accounting	Class presentations
<b>Week 7, February 28</b>	Logographs and cuneiform	Class presentations
<b>Week 8, March 6</b>	Measurement	Class presentations
<b>Week 9, March 13</b>	Spring break	
<b>Week 10, March 20</b>	Greek Alphabet	Class presentations
<b>Week 11, March 27</b>	Socrates and Plato	Class presentations
<b>Week 12, April 3</b>	Memory	Class presentations
<b>Week 13, April 10</b>	Field trip	Exhibition report due*
<b>Week 14, April 19</b>	Consciousness	Class presentations
<b>Week 15, April 24</b>	Alphabetic literacy	Class presentations
<b>Week 16, May 1</b>	Presentations	Exhibition catalog due*

\* Denotes an assignment due date.

## **READING SCHEDULE**

*These readings represent current plans and objectives for the course. However, as we move through the term these plans may need to change to enhance the learning objectives. Such changes will be communicated clearly and should be expected.*

**Week 1, January 16: MLK holiday, no class.**

**Week 2, January 23: Introduction to the course, texts, and policies.**

Please watch Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010). Available for rent on Amazon Prime, Netflix, at the UT Fine Arts Library circulation desk ([DVD 11338](#)), or on [Youtube](#). The documentary is 130 minutes and features the oldest known cave paintings from the Paleolithic-era in France's Chauvet Cave.

**Week 3, January 30: Oral Traditions and commemoration**

- Hobart, M.E. and Schiffman, Z.S. (1998). "Orality and the Problem of Memory," *Information Ages: Literacy, Numeracy and the Computer Revolution*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 11-31.  
Available as a PDF from course website.
- Ong, W. J. (2013). "Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 3," *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word*. Routledge, pp. 1-76.  
Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.

#### **Week 4, February 6: Symbols, Signs, and Speech**

- Hockett, C. F. (1960). The Origin of Speech. *Scientific American*, 203, 88-96. Available as a PDF from course website.
- Coulmas, F. (2002). "Chapter 1. What is writing?" Writing Systems. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-17. Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.
- Coulmas, F. (2002). "Chapter 2. The basic options: meaning and sound," Writing Systems. Cambridge University Press, pp. 18-37. Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.

#### **Week 5, February 13: Clay Media and social organization**

- Fischer, S. R. (2004). "From notches to tablets," History of Writing. Reaktion Books, pp. 11-33. Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.
- Schmandt-Besserat, D. (1986). The Origins of Writing An Archaeologist's Perspective. *Written Communication*, 3(1), 31-45. Available as a PDF from course website
- Schmandt-Besserat, D. (1991). "The earliest precursor of writing" in The Origins of Writing, pp. 27-41. Retrieved from [http://en.finaly.org/index.php/The\\_earliest\\_precursor\\_of\\_writing](http://en.finaly.org/index.php/The_earliest_precursor_of_writing)
- Schmandt-Besserat, D. (1991). "Plain and complex tokens" in The Origins of Writing, pp. 27-41. Retrieved from [http://en.finaly.org/index.php/Two\\_precursors\\_of\\_writing:\\_plain\\_and\\_complex\\_tokens](http://en.finaly.org/index.php/Two_precursors_of_writing:_plain_and_complex_tokens)

#### **Week 6, February 20: Tokens, Lists, and Accounting**

- Schmandt-Besserat, D. (2008). "Reckoning before writing" retrieved from [http://en.finaly.org/index.php/Reckoning\\_before\\_writing](http://en.finaly.org/index.php/Reckoning_before_writing)
- Hobart, M.E. and Schiffman, Z.S. (1998). "Early Literacy and List Making," Information Ages: Literacy, Numeracy and the Computer Revolution. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 32-51. Available as a PDF from course website
- Schmandt-Besserat, Denise. "Tokens and writing: the cognitive development." *SCRIPTA* 1 (2009): 145-154. Available as a PDF from course website.
- Malafouris, L. (2010), "Grasping the concept of number: How did the sapiens mind move beyond approximation," The archaeology of measurement: comprehending heaven, earth and time in ancient societies, pp. 35-41. Available as a PDF from course website.

#### **Week 7, February 28: Logographs and cuneiform**

- Fischer, S. R. (2004). "Talking art," History of Writing. Reaktion Books, pp. 34-67. Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.
- Coulmas, F. (1989). "4. Sacred Characters: The Theocratic Script of Egypt." *The writing systems of the world*. B. Blackwell. Available as a PDF from course website.
- Coulmas, F. (1989). "5. From Word to Syllable I: Cuneiform Writing." *The writing systems of the world*. B. Blackwell. Available as a PDF from course website.



### **Week 8, March 6: Measurement and idea transmission**

- Urton, G. (2010). "Recording measure(ment)s in the Inka khipu," in *The archaeology of measurement: comprehending heaven, earth and time in ancient societies*, pp. 54-68.
- Mihcailidou, A. (2010). "Measuring by weight in the Late Bronze Age Aegean: The people behind the measuring tools" in *The archaeology of measurement: comprehending heaven, earth and time in ancient societies*, pp. 71-87.
- Selected reading on the concept of time and calendars. READING TBD\* class choice of a reading on Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica, or Inca Empire.

### **Week 9, March 13: Spring class cancelled**

### **Week 10, March 20: Greek alphabet**

- Abram, D. (2008). *Animism and the Alphabet. The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. Vintage, pp. 93 –
- Selected texts from Drucker. TBD\*
- Fischer, S. R. (2004). "From Alpha to Omega," *History of Writing*. Reaktion Books, pp. 121-165. Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.

### **Week 11, March 27: Socrates and Plato**

- Havelock, E. A. (1966). Pre-literacy and the Pre-socratics. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 13(1), 44-67.
- Nehamas, A., & Woodruff, P. (1995). *Plato: Phaedrus—Translated, with Introduction and Notes*. Nehamas & P. Woodruff, Indianapolis: Hackett.

### **Week 12, April 3: Effects of literacy on memory**

- Havelock, E. A. (1986). *The muse learns to write: Reflections on orality and literacy from antiquity to the present*. Yale University Press. (Please purchase or borrow book).
- Yates, Frances A. (1969). "The art of memory in Greece memory and the soul," *The Art of Memory*. (1969): 331-333. Available as a PDF from course website

### **Week 13, April 10: Exhibition report due: Field trip**

- No readings assigned this week.

### **Week 14, April 19: Effects of literacy on consciousness**

- Ong, W. J. (2013). "Chapter 4 Writing restructures consciousness," *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word*. Routledge, pp. 77-114. Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.

- Ong, W. J. (2013). "Chapter 6 Oral memory, the story line and characterization," *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word*. Routledge, pp. 136-152.  
Available as UT electronic resource and eBook.
- Millar, L. (2006). Touchstones: considering the relationship between memory and archives. *Archivaria*, 61(61).  
Available as a PDF from course website

### **Week 15, April 24: Alphabetic literacy**

- Hobart, M.E. and Schiffman, Z.S. (1998). "Alphabetic literacy and the Science of Classification," *Information Ages: Literacy, Numeracy and the Computer Revolution*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 62-76.  
Available as a PDF from course website
- Goody, J., & Watt, I. (1963). The consequences of literacy. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 5(3), 304-345.  
Available as a PDF from course website

### **Week 16, May 1: Presentations**

Final reports due.