

UHON 351: Written Language and Literacy, From Cuneiform to Emoji

Thursdays, 1-3:30 pm
Morris Library 610A

Instructor: Dr. Katherine Martin (martinki@siu.edu)

Office: 3042 Faner Hall

Student visiting (office) hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 1-3 pm in 3042 Faner Hall, or by appointment

Textbook

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required material will be posted on *Perusall*, linked on MyCourses (D2L Brightspace). Because there is no textbook to purchase, access to *Perusall* requires a \$15 fee. This is included via the myTextbooks program through the University Bookstore, but you need to pick up an access code from the bookstore to avoid paying for this separately. If you opt out of the myTextbooks program, you will need to pay the \$15.

About the course

Language is seen as one of the defining characteristics of humans, but language classes typically focus on spoken language and leave written language to the side. However, writing is one of humanity's greatest inventions, and is relatively young, with evidence for writing going back only about 5000 years. In this course we will explore the history, evolution, and sociocultural and educational contexts of written language and literacy, beginning with the invention of writing (likely with cuneiform in Mesopotamia) and traveling all the way to modern digital texts on screens with emoji. A variety of units will cover topics such as the origins and structures of written language; how reading and learning to read work; writing skills and how text construction really works; the sociopolitics of literacy and illiteracy in the education system; and digital reading and writing, including the effects of digital versus physical texts and the use of digital conventions such as emoji. In addition to weekly readings, reflections, and discussion, students will complete a selection of mini-projects for those units that most interest them. Students leave class with a better appreciation for this underappreciated human invention, its development, its deployment in various forms, and the social, political, and educational contexts surrounding it.

Student Learning Outcomes

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

1. Describe the origins and structure of various written language systems
2. Explain the component skills of reading and writing and how they develop
3. Discuss sociopolitical issues related to literacy and written language representation
4. Appraise trends in digital texts and digital language use
5. Summarize and critique primary academic literature related to written language and literacy
6. Reflect on their literacy experiences and their personal relationship to key concepts around written language and literacy

Expectations

As your instructor, you can expect me to:

- Be on-time and prepared for class
- Dedicate class time to learning, discussion, and practice
- Be available via email, office hours, and by appointment to address questions and concerns
- Provide clear deadlines and instructions for all required class activities and assignments
- Grade all assignments equitably
- Be flexible and understanding

As a student, I expect you to:

- Attend class regularly *in-person* and arrive on-time
- Complete the assigned readings *before* class – **completing these readings and actively engaging with them comprises a portion of your class grade**
- Regularly check D2L and *Perusall* for updates, additional resources, and early steps required for assignments
- Minimize distractions, including cell phones, tablets, and laptops, as much as possible during class time
- Ask questions when you do not understand something
- Seek outside help if you need it, as soon as possible
- Participate in class discussions and activities – **active engagement in class comprises a portion of your class grade**
- Act appropriately in class, respect your fellow students, and engage in discussion and collaboration with them throughout the semester
- Be flexible and understanding

Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be based on the following:

- Assigned readings and annotations – 15%
- Active participation and engagement – 15%
- Bi-weekly journals and reflections – 25%
- Article presentation and discussion – 15%
- Unit-based mini-project – 20%
- Final reflection paper – 10%

There will be no curve. The grading scale is as follows:

Grade	Minimum	Maximum
A	93	100
A-	90	92
B+	87	89
B	83	86
B-	80	82
C+	77	79
C	73	76

C-	70	72
D+	67	69
D	63	66
F	0	62

Assigned Readings & Annotations

For each class session, you will have 1-3 assigned reading(s) that will include selections from a variety of books on reading, literacy, and writing systems, as well as academic journal articles. All readings will be accessible on our course *Perusall* page, linked from our D2L page. You are expected to both complete the assigned reading(s) and demonstrate active engagement with the reading material each week. Your active engagement is determined via an algorithm that considers a combination of the following: high-quality, thoughtful annotations on the reading assignment (both comments and questions); looking at and engaging with the assigned readings multiple times (rather than just sitting down and reading everything at once); completing the reading by moving all the way through to the end of the document and including multiple annotations spread throughout the whole reading; time spent actively engaging with the reading on the *Perusall* site (not just having it open in your browser!); posting annotations that prompt responses from your classmates; upvoting your classmates' annotations; and posting annotations that receipt upvotes from your classmates. Your annotations for each assigned reading will be due by 12:30 pm (half an hour before class starts), though you will receive partial credit for new comments posted up to 12 hours after the deadline. You will also get credit for responding to your classmates' questions and comments for up to two days after the deadline for each reading.

Active Participation & Engagement

This portion of each student's grade is meant to reflect their active engagement in the class over the course of the semester, including their attendance, their active in-class engagement (demonstrated via asking questions and/or sharing their opinions and experiences), their cooperation and collaboration with classmates (in-class and/or online via the group chats on *Perusall*), and their active and quality involvement in activities such as fishbowl discussions, summary writing, group reading, jigsaw teaching, etc. Although much of this grade depends on class attendance, even if a student misses a specific class session they can still earn partial credit for that week by contributing to the group chats on *Perusall*, attending office hours, and emailing substantive course-related questions to the instructor.

Bi-Weekly Reading Journals

Beginning in the third week, students must submit a reading journal to go along with the assigned readings every other week (staggered by last name; see details on D2L). In these journals, students should summarize their understanding of the key points from the readings (between 250 and 500 words), make connections among the readings, respond to two of the set reading reflection questions, and write a (content-based) discussion question of their own related to the material in the reading. These student-written discussion questions should be thought-provoking, not questions with straight-forward factual answers; examples may include asking how a personal experience relates to the material, asking about contradictory experiences or ideas, asking about differences in opinions or viewpoints from the material, etc.

Article Presentation & Discussion

Each student will choose a course topic that interests them and, with the guidance of the instructor, find an original research article related to this topic. They will then summarize this research in a written handout and present about it orally in class. Students will also facilitate a discussion of their chosen article as it relates to the material covered in class (including the assigned readings). Note that articles must be chosen and approved by the instructor at least two weeks prior to the presentation date. A handout draft is due one week before the presentation and revisions should be anticipated.

Unit-Based Mini Project

The semester is divided into five units focusing on different aspects of written language and literacy. Each unit has a unit-specific project associated with it, such as researching and presenting on a writing system not covered in class or creating a video discussing the relative benefits of working with physical texts in reading and writing (full details of each project will be provided as the semester progresses). Students will complete a project for one unit of their choice, with the only restriction being that it must be a unit *other than* the one they present an article for. Projects will typically be due one week following the completion of the unit in class (with the exception of the final unit, which will be due during the last week of class).

Final Reflection Paper

In lieu of an exam, the final paper for this course is designed to serve as a reflection on your experience and learning across this course as a whole. The goal is for you to showcase the development of your own personal understanding of written language and literacy as a result of the material covered in class. The paper prompt will include a series of questions about your learning and development which you will need to address directly in your narrative. Specific guidelines for this assignment will be posted on D2L in the second half of the semester.

Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance is extremely important for your success. In addition to being a major component of the grade category ‘Active Participation & Engagement’ (see above), in-class material will not simply duplicate material from the readings, and class sessions will include extensive discussion, examples, and activities not available in the readings.

Policy on (Generative) Artificial Intelligence (AI)

New and emerging tools based on large language models (LLMs) are now available and widely used by students and professionals alike. These include generative artificial intelligence (AI) services and programs such as Chat GPT, Bard, Elicit, and even generative functions within more established tools such as Grammarly. However, their use is still very much a gray area in terms of acceptability and what limits should be placed on their use. At this point, SIU does not (yet) have a university-wide policy on the use of such tools, but faculty have been encouraged to establish our own policies in the syllabi of our classes.

In this course, I consider the use of generative AI tools (such as those mentioned above) to be acceptable for *limited, appropriate uses* that assist you in organizing your own ideas and cleaning and clarifying your own writing. For example, using Chat GPT to help you improve an outline (that you have already drafted), help you rephrase an awkward or unclear sentence, or clean up grammatical errors would be acceptable uses. However, you *may not* use AI tools to

generate the primary ideas or content that you submit as part of any assigned work (online posts, reading annotations, reading journals, discussion questions, or any other assignments), unless specifically designated in an individual assignment's guidelines. In other words, it is *not acceptable* to put ideas or content generated by an AI tool directly into your own assigned work. Doing so can be problematic as many of the assignments in this course require reflections and connections to personal experiences that cannot be generated by such AI tools, and such tools also frequently invent content that is *not factually true*. If you do use an AI tool, you must acknowledge that you used it and state how you did so in your assignment submission.

If you have any questions about the use of an LLM-based or AI tool for any of your course work, you should speak to your instructor about it *before* completing and submitting the assigned work. If I suspect that an AI tool has been used without acknowledgement, against the policies of this course, the policy for academic misconduct outlined in the Student Conduct Code will be followed.

Policy Regarding Late Assignments

Late assignments are strongly discouraged as the assignment schedule has been specifically designed to match the course topics, space out requirements, and give students sufficient lead time to complete all aspects of their coursework during the semester. If you find that you are unable to meet a deadline, please contact your instructor about an extension. I am willing to be flexible where needed, but reserve the right to *not* accept late work if students repeatedly take advantage of this flexibility or submit work egregiously late.

Student Visiting (Office) Hours

The best way to reach me to ask questions, talk about class or other issues, or just generally chat, is to come to my office during student visiting hours (also known as office hours). My office hours are listed at the top of this syllabus (and outside my office door in 3042 Faner) and are times during the week that are specifically set aside to meet with students about any issues they would like to discuss. An appointment is *not* needed to meet during student visiting hours, though you are always welcome to let me know that you plan to come. I am also happy to make an appointment to meet outside of my set student visiting hours if they do not work for your schedule. Please email me (see below) to do this.

Email Policy

Email is the best way to reach me. I will make all efforts to respond to emails in a timely fashion, and you should typically be able to expect a response within 48 business hours. However, it is best if you do NOT send emails with lengthy or complicated questions. Please reserve these for student visiting (office) hours.

Please note: I have a young child at home and I typically stop answering email for the day when I leave campus around 4:15 pm. Please plan accordingly if you are emailing about an assignment or other deadline.

Class Recordings Announcement and Policy

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. These recordings may be permitted on a case-by-case basis with prior approval of the instructor.

Cellphone Policy

Using cellphones in class for non-academic purposes is not permitted. Cellphones should be placed on silent and kept in your bag during class. If you use your cellphone inappropriately in class, attention will be brought to the issue and your participation and engagement grade may suffer.

Tablet and Laptop Policy

Using tablets and laptops in class is discouraged unless needed for a specific class activity. Research has consistently demonstrated that you and your fellow classmates learn better *without* laptops in the classroom (see <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>). Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis for reasons related to individual learning needs; please talk to me if you would like to discuss this.

Resources for Students

A variety of resources are available to you as students to help ensure your success at SIUC. They include the following:

- The Counseling Center: <https://shc.siu.edu/counseling/>
- The Clinical Center, which offers psychological assessments, speech and language assessments, and counseling services: <https://clinicalcenter.siu.edu>
- The Office for Access and Accommodations if you need to request any type of accommodation to support your course work: <https://access.siu.edu>
- The Writing Center: <https://write.siu.edu>; you can also contact them by writing to write@siu.edu
- Tutoring (for 100-level and 200-level classes) at the Center for Learning Support Services: <https://clss.siu.edu>; you can also contact them by writing to clss@siu.edu
- The First Saluki Center, with services specifically for first-generation college students: <https://salukicenter.siu.edu>
- The Multicultural Resources Center, with services geared toward Black, Hispanic/Latinx, LGBTQ, and Women on campus: <https://smrc.siu.edu>
- Veteran's Services: <https://veterans.siu.edu>
- The Saluki Food Pantry is free for all students with a valid SIU ID: <https://studentcenter.siu.edu/services/saluki-food-pantry.php>; you can also contact them by writing to foodpantry@siu.edu
- Saluki Cares is a campus program that helps track student success and connects students to the resources they need (for example for housing or food assistance, emergency funds, financial difficulties, grief, illness, difficulty adjusting to a new environment, struggling in courses, etc.); find information or request assistance for you or someone else: <https://salukicare.siu.edu>
- Morris Library: <https://lib.siu.edu>
- Student Rights and Responsibilities: <https://srr.siu.edu>
- Department of Public Safety: <https://dps.siu.edu>
- Safety Awareness (including resources and reporting forms): <https://safe.siu.edu>
- The Center for Teaching Excellence: <https://cte.siu.edu>

- Advising: <https://advisement.siu.edu>

If you find yourself unsure of where to go for help with any specific issue, you are encouraged to contact Rachel Wolters (rachelw@siu.edu), a staff member in the Dean's office for the College of Liberal Arts. Her job involves working to recruit and retain students at SIU and she is there to help you solve any problems you may have!

Course Schedule

Note: This schedule is **tentative**. All efforts will be made to stick to it, but adjustments will inevitably be needed. Changes or additions to the schedule will be announced briefly in class and posted on MyCourses (D2L). It is your responsibility to check D2L regularly.

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings and Deadlines (do <i>before</i> class)
Unit 1: Written Language Systems		
Jan 15	Origins of writing	1. <i>Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems</i> (1989), John DeFrancis, Ch. 1 – Kinds of communication 2. <i>Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems</i> (1989), John DeFrancis, Ch. 2 – What is writing?
Jan 22*	Decipherment and undeciphered scripts	1. <i>Writing from Invention to Decipherment</i> (2024), Ed. Silvia Ferrara, Barbara Montecchi, & Miguel Valerio, Ch. 9 – Deciphering a writing system: Luck, intuition, or method? (Ignasi-Xavier Adiego) 2. <i>Babbel Magazine</i>, 6 lost languages and scripts that have not yet been deciphered (10/7/22)
*Shortened class with a substitute (Dr. Dave Johnson); lecture videos will be posted and must be watched in advance		
Jan 29†	Structure of written languages	1. <i>Second Language Writing Systems</i> (2005), Vivian Cook and Benedetta Bassetti, Ch. 1 – An introduction to researching second language writing systems (pp. 1-28) 2. <i>Writing a Script: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2009), Andrew Robinson, Ch. 5 – How writing systems work
†Shortened class with a substitute (Dr. Joe Wager); lecture videos will be posted and must be watched in advance		
Feb 5	The unique characteristics of English writing	1. <i>Uncovering the Logic of English</i> (2011), Denise Eide, Ch. 1 – The problem of English 2. Joshi, R. M., Treiman, R., Carreker, S., & Moats, L. C. (2008). How words cast their spell. <i>American Educator</i>, 32(4), 6-16. 3. <i>Writing Systems</i> (2015), Geoffrey Sampson, Ch. 13 – English spelling
Unit 2: Literacy and Its Development		
Feb 12	The processes of reading and learning to read	1. <i>Brain Words</i> (2019), J. Richard Gentry and Gene P. Ouellette, Ch. 2 - How the scientific study of reading can inform teaching 2. <i>Brain Words</i> (2019), J. Richard Gentry and Gene P. Ouellette, Ch. 3 – The reading brain
Feb 19	How writing works	1. <i>The Handbook of Writing Research</i> (2015), Ed. Charles A. MacArthur, Steve Graham, & Jill Fitzgerald, Ch. 1 - What do sociocultural studies of writing tell us about learning to write?

		2. Wengelin, Å., Johansson, V. (2023). Investigating writing processes with Keystroke Logging. In O. Kruse et al., <i>Digital Writing Technologies in Higher Education</i> . Springer.
Feb 26	Disorders of reading and writing	1. <i>Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain</i> (2007), Maryanne Wolf, Ch. 7 - Dyslexia's puzzle and the brain's design 2. McCloskey, M., & Rapp, B. Developmental dysgraphia: An overview and framework for research. (2017) <i>Cognitive Neuropsychology</i> , 34(3-4), 65-82.
Unit 3: The Sociopolitics of Literacy		
Mar 5	Literacy and illiteracy in education	1. <i>Language at the Speed of Sight: How We Read, Why So Many Can't, And What Can be Done About It</i> (2017), Mark Seidenberg, Ch. 10 – How well does America read? 2. <i>Language at the Speed of Sight: How We Read, Why So Many Can't, And What Can be Done About It</i> (2017), Mark Seidenberg, Ch. 11 – The two cultures of science and education
Mar 12	No class – Spring Break	--
Mar 19	Literacy in minoritized populations	1. <i>Writing Beyond Writing: Lessons from Endangered Alphabets</i> (2024), Tim Brookes, Ch. 4 – Linguistic rights, human rights 2. Marback, R. (2001). Ebonics: Theorizing in public our attitudes toward literacy. <i>College Composition & Communication</i> , 53(1), 11-32. 3. Johnson, K. P., Graves, S. L., Jr., Jones, M. A., Jr., Phillips, S., & Jacobs, M. (2023). Understanding African American vernacular English and reading achievement: Implications for the science of reading. <i>School Psychology</i> , 38(1), 7-14.
Unit 4: Our Changing Reading Habits		
Mar 26	Digital vs. physical texts for reading	1. <i>The Revenge of Analog</i> (2016), David Sax, Ch. 5 – The revenge of print 2. <i>Skim, Dive, Surface: Teaching Digital Reading</i> (2021), Jenae Cohn, Ch. 2 – The held book
Apr 2	Digital vs. physical texts for writing	1. NPR, “Why writing by hand beats typing for thinking and learning” (5/11/24) 2. <i>The Revenge of Analog</i> (2016), David Sax, Ch. 2 – The revenge of paper
Apr 9	Reading extensively in the curriculum	1. <i>Reader, Come Home</i> (2018), Maryanne Wolf, Letter 3 - Deep Reading, Is It Endangered? 2. <i>How We Read Now: Strategic Choices for Print, Screen, & Audio</i> (2021), Naomi S. Baron, Ch. 3 - Print reading: A gold standard?
Apr 16	Reading extensively for leisure	1. <i>The Guardian</i> , “Report finds ‘shocking and dispiriting’ fall in children reading for pleasure” (11/5/24)

		2. <i>The Atlantic</i> , “The elite college students who can’t read books” (10/1/24)
Unit 5: Other Forms of Notation		
Apr 23	Modern writing: emoji and emoticons	1. <i>Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language</i> (2019), Gretchen McCullough, Ch. 5 - Emoji and other internet gestures 2. Lebduska, L. (2015) "Emoji, emoji, what for art thou?," <i>Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion</i>: No. 12, 6.
Apr 30	Other notation systems and storage	1. Selections from <i>The World's Writing Systems</i> (1989), Ed. Peter T. Daniels, William Bright, Part XII – Secondary notation systems 2. <i>Skim, Dive, Surface: Teaching Digital Reading</i> (2021), Jenae Cohn, Ch. 9 – The ethical implications of digital reading: grappling with digital archiving, readerly privacy, and evidence of our reading
Exam Week	No class – Exam Week	No reading. Final Reflection Paper due.