



### Instructor Information

**Instructor:** Bill Kirkpatrick  
**Office:** 327 Higley, 587-8512  
**Office Hours:** Tues., 11:30-12:30; Wed., 2:30-3:30; or by appointment  
**Email:** kirkpatrickb@denison.edu

### Course Summary

Every time we tell someone that they should go see this movie or not bother watching that show, we are using implicit theories of media criticism. In this class, we will seek to make those theories explicit and then interrogate them: What do we think media texts should do? What should textual criticism do? Where do our notions of "quality" come from? What are the politics of aesthetic judgments? How do cultural taste and social power interrelate? What is the cultural role of media criticism, and what can we learn from a text's critical reception?

### Required Texts: Available at the book store

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard, 1987).  
Fiske, John. *Television Culture* (Routledge, 1988).  
Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Harvard, 1990).  
Wilson, Carl. *Let's Talk About Love* (Continuum [33 1/3 Series], 2007).

### Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Late assignments will be penalized 1/2 grade per day (e.g. B+ to B). Reading responses may not be handed in late for credit.

Reading Responses	35%	Semester Research Paper	40%
Critical Writing Exercises	15%	Class Engagement	10%

### Policies and Expectations

Attendance: Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of the course as well as your own personal achievement. I will be taking attendance daily, and missing class or failing to participate constructively will definitely impact your class engagement grade.

Lateness: Be in your seat and ready to begin class at the scheduled start time. I am much more strict about lateness than absenteeism: I would rather you not come to class at all than interrupt your classmates by showing up late.

Preparation: Always bring that day's readings to class with you. The syllabus will always state clearly what you should read prior to each class, which assignments you should hand in, and what else you must do or bring for a given day. Late assignments will be penalized by a half-grade for each 24 hours of lateness (e.g. from B+ to B). If you know that you will have difficulty completing an assignment on time, let me know before the deadline and I will try to work with you if possible. *Reading responses are due the night before class and will not be accepted if late.*

Written Work: All written work must be typed (double-spaced), spellchecked, and proofread. Failure to run your work through a spellchecker (one more time before printing is a good idea) will automatically result in a 5% deduction from your grade for that assignment. Multiple-page documents must be stapled—I will not accept unstapled work (please note that paper clips and dog-ears are *not* staples).

Grades: All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade. The calculation of your grade will be based on a 1,000-point scale, and the weight of each assignment is listed above. If you are concerned about your grade, come talk to me as early as possible.

In-Class Behavior: You may not eat in class unless you bring enough for everyone (beverages are okay). You may not use computers in class without prior approval. Your cell phone or PDA must be turned off and put away during class. Points will be deducted from your engagement grade if your phone rings, or if I notice you using your cell phone or PDA during class. If you absolutely need to have your phone on during class for some reason, talk to me at the beginning of the semester.

Email Policy: I will regularly use email to send out announcements, changes in the syllabus, reminders about tests or due dates, etc. It is your responsibility to check your email regularly to keep up-to-date with these announcements. I will use the email address you have listed with the university; therefore, please make sure that this is indeed the correct address. I promise to answer all email from students within 24 hours (36 hours on weekends) and will hold you responsible for any announcements made via email within 24 hours of the announced change (36 hours on weekends).

Accessibility and Special Accommodations: It is important that the course be accessible to all students. If you need any alternative accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to be able to participate fully in the course, or if there are any external issues that may affect your work in this course, please contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs. I rely on the Academic Support & Enrichment Center in 102 Doane to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on documentation on file in that office.

Academic Honesty: You may not turn in substantially similar work to two classes without the express consent of *both* instructors. All sources in your written work must be properly cited; if you have any doubts about correct citation, contact the Writing Center or any of the many paper and online guides to academic citation. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated, and students found to have committed plagiarism, ***regardless of whether or not the plagiarism was committed intentionally and knowingly***, will face severe grade penalties and will also be reported to the university to face further academic discipline. You are encouraged to use the resources available in the library system and the Writing Center to guide your research. In addition, I call your attention to Denison's new statement on academic integrity:

"Proposed and developed by Denison students, passed unanimously by DCGA and Denison's faculty, the Code of Academic Integrity requires that instructors notify the Associate Provost of cases of academic dishonesty, and it requires that cases be heard by the Academic Integrity Board. Further, the code makes students responsible for promoting a culture of integrity on campus and acting in instances in which integrity is violated.

"Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity. Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly.

"For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity see <http://www.denison.edu/about/integrity.html>."

### Reading Summaries

Over the course of the semester, for the classes from Sep. 8 through Nov. 17 inclusive, you are required to submit a **total of seven** weekly reading responses. Here are the guidelines for those reading responses:

- Each response must be submitted by 8:00 p.m. on the **Monday night before the class in which those readings will be discussed.**
- Each response may not exceed **400 words.**
- In that 400-word response, you must provide the **central argument of each reading** for that day, at least **one idea or thought about each reading (your "response")**, and a **summary** of how the readings have affected your relationship to media criticism and aesthetics.
- Upload the responses to **Blackboard (under "Assignments") as a .doc attachment.**
- Grading: You will be **required to revise** each response until it receives at least a grade of B. You may continue to revise until it receives an A, but you are not required to.
- If you fail to revise a reading response to the B-level, it will not count as completed, and you will either have to do an additional response for another week or suffer the grade penalty. Another way to look at this is: each reading response is worth 5% of your overall grade, so if you fail to revise one up to a B, it is like taking a 5% penalty for the semester.
- In these summaries, I'm looking for serious effort to understand what the authors are saying, productive engagement with the readings in the context of the class, and careful, correct, and creative writing.

### Critical Writing Exercises

Six times over the course of the semester, I will assign critical writing exercises that will ask you to engage in media criticism yourself. The topics and approaches will be given with each assignment, and you are required to complete **five of these six** exercises. Here are the guidelines for these assignments:

- Each critical writing exercise must be submitted on Blackboard by 8:00 p.m. on the **Wednesday night after the class in which the exercise was assigned.**
- Each exercise may not exceed **250 words.**
- Your goal in each exercise will be to adopt a particular aesthetic stance (not necessarily your own) and critique a piece of media from that perspective.
- Upload the responses to **Blackboard (under "Assignments") as a .doc attachment.**
- Grading: You will be **required to revise** each exercise until it receives at least a grade of B. You may continue to revise until it receives an A, but you are not required to.
- If you fail to revise an exercise to the B-level, it will not count as completed, and you will either have to do the sixth response or suffer the grade penalty. Another way to look at this is: each critical writing exercise is worth 3% of your overall grade, so if you fail to revise one up to a B, it is like taking a 3% penalty for the semester.
- In these exercises, I'm looking for serious effort to employ a given aesthetic framework, sophisticated analysis of the piece of media in question, and careful, correct, and creative writing.

### Semester Research Paper

Over the course of the semester, you will be working on an original research paper analyzing the politics of aesthetics in contemporary or historical setting. This semester paper will be discussed separately.

## Daily Schedule

Readings should be completed by that day's class, and you should come prepared to discuss them. Those that are not from the textbook are marked as either on electronic reserve (e-res, password = "celine") or on Blackboard (BB).

**Full citations for all articles will be available on Blackboard.**

*Every single thing on this syllabus is subject to change, so check your email or Blackboard for announcements and keep on your toes.*

### PART 1 – AESTHETICS

Sep. 1	<b>Criticism vs. History</b>		
Sep. 8	<b>The Enlightenment</b>	<u>Read:</u>	David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (BB) Immanuel Kant, Excerpt from <i>Critique of Judgment</i> (e-res) Matthew Arnold, <i>Culture and Anarchy</i> , pp. 28-74 (e-res)
		<u>Prepare:</u>	Area of aesthetic interest for your research paper (e.g. music, film, fashion, architecture, television, painting, dance, literature, etc.)
Sep. 15	<b>Early Responses to 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Mass Communication</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Adolf Hitler, Excerpt from <i>Mein Kampf</i> (e-res) Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industries: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (e-res) Christopher Hitchens, "Hemingway's Libidinous Feast" (BB)
Sep. 22	<b>Cultural Hierarchy</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Lawrence Levine, <i>Highbrow/Lowbrow</i> , pp. 11-82 Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, Excerpt from <i>The Politics and Poetics of Transgression</i> (e-res)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Three Research Paper Topic Ideas
Sep. 29	<b>The Social Construction of Taste</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Pierre Bourdieu, <i>Distinction</i> , pp. 11-114
Oct. 6	<b>Realism, Authenticity, Authorship</b>	<u>Read:</u>	John Fiske, <i>Television Culture</i> , pp. 21-47 Hugh Barker & Yuval Taylor, excerpts from <i>Faking It</i> (e-res) Andrew Sarris, "Notes on a Theory of Auteurs" (e-res)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Annotated bibliography with three secondary sources
Oct. 13	<b>Despised Culture: Trash and Kitsch</b>	<u>Read:</u>	John Fiske, <i>Television Culture</i> , pp. 240-264 Robert C. Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Revised and expanded annotated bibliography with one additional secondary source and three primary sources
Oct. 20	<b>FALL STUDY BREAK—NO CLASS TODAY</b>		
Oct. 27	<b>Summary</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Carl Wilson, <i>Let's Talk About Love</i> (All, but chapters 4-6 are optional)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Rough Thesis Statement

## **PART 2 – CASE STUDIES**

- Nov. 3      **Case Study #1  
Women in Rock**                      Read:      Norma Coates, "Teenieboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotosques" (e-res)  
Turn In:      Literature review
- Nov. 10     **Case Study #2  
Fame and Hyperreality**              Read:      Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" (e-res)  
Jeffrey Sconce, "A Vacancy at the Paris Hilton" (e-res)  
Turn In:      Outline of body
- Nov. 17     **Case Study #3  
Aesthetics in Media Studies  
After Bourdieu**                      Read:      Jason Mittell, "LOST in a Great Story" (e-res)  
Roger Ebert, "I'm a Proud Brainiac" (BB)

### **THANKSGIVING BREAK, NOV. 22-NOV. 29**

- Dec. 1      **Case Study #4  
Populism and Art**                      Read:      John Fiske, *Television Culture*, pp. 309-319  
Tom Wolfe, excerpt from *From Bauhaus to  
Our House* (e-res)  
Gene Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast" (BB)
- Dec. 8      **Writing Workshop  
\*Meet in Higley 327\***                      Turn In:      Introduction, revised thesis statement, revised lit review,  
revised outline of body, and annotated bibliography
- Dec. 15     **Research Presentations**                      Prepare:      10-minute presentation of your research project

**Final revised paper due no later than:**      Thursday, Dec. 20, 5:00 p.m.