

# mass communication and media literacy

**Course #:** COMM-110  
**Instructor:** adam wadenius  
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**Office Hours:** By email or appointment  
**Semester:** Fall 2018  
**Day & Time:** Tu/Th, 9:40 am – 11:00 am  
**Building:** Learning Resources #053

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## course description

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the history, structure, and function of the Mass Media, including print, broadcast, visual, and digital forms. In an effort to increase media literacy and become more informed and discerning media consumers, we will be studying a diverse array of media texts including films, television shows, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, music videos, audio recordings, social media, and the Internet. Particular attention throughout the course will be paid to mass communication issues relating to diverse political, cultural, and social communities.

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## student learning outcomes

- ~ Critically assess the history, structure, and function of various mass communication forms.
- ~ Demonstrate oral and written competence of the evolution of mass media as a result of emerging technologies, cultural conditions, and human ingenuity.
- ~ Trace the influences of mass media forms on major cultural practices and social formations.
- ~ Identify examples of how mass media affects contemporary social, political, and cultural climates.
- ~ Classify the various types of mass communication in terms of their underlying technologies, artists and innovators, industry structure, and consumers.

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## course requirements

**Class Lectures & Screenings:** You are responsible for attending the class lecture every week. It is incumbent upon you to be prepared, and you should come to class each session having read the reading assignment posted on the schedule. Please email me if you know you cannot make it to section on a given day. There is no talking/discussion during the films, audio recordings, or clips. I will dismiss you from the course if you become a disruption during the lectures. Your enrollment in this class is your responsibility, and it is incumbent upon you to double-check your enrollment status periodically throughout the semester, as I do not maintain my rosters after the census has been processed. If at any time you decide that you do not wish to continue with the course, it is your responsibility to drop, as I do not take it upon myself to drop anyone from the course.

I encourage you to use your personal computer, iPad, or other learning tool during class time if you are using it appropriately (viewing class slides, taking notes), however, be sure to turn off any noisemaking functions on those and any other electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, etc. Please keep the brightness levels on all LED screens at low intensity. There is no food allowed in class at any time (drinks are okay). Copies of all the lectures are available on the course website for download and review. If you require any additional accommodations such as a note taker, testing services, captions, or special chairs/desks, please speak with me personally, or provide the proper authorization letter from the Disability Resources Department.

**Discussion & Participation:** You are expected to be actively involved in the class discussions, as your participation is key to your success in this course. My goal is to aid in the development of your critical/analytical skills, and I expect everyone to maintain an open mind, and take a creative approach to the material. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints. At times throughout the semester we will be breaking the class into smaller groups to discuss specific issues in media culture. As part of your participation grade, you will be required to give one in-class presentation at some point during the semester on the discussion topic for the week.

**Contemporary Culture Quiz:** There will be one short-answer quiz this semester, due by the time class starts on the assigned date. The quiz will assess your comprehension of the *Contemporary Media Culture* section, and consists of three short-answer questions that will ask you to watch and analyze specific clips. No late quizzes will be accepted. I do not accept physical papers, so please email your quiz to me at [adam@apwadenius.com](mailto:adam@apwadenius.com). All emergency situations leading to late quizzes will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There will be no opportunity for making-up a missed quiz. You are required to visit the course website to view the quiz questions and the clips, as there are additional writing and formatting guidelines for you to review.

**Media Representation Essay:** You will be required to write one 1000-1250 word essay this semester, due by the time class starts on the assigned date. No late papers will be accepted. I do not accept physical papers, so please email your essay to me at [adam@apwadenius.com](mailto:adam@apwadenius.com). All emergency situations leading to late papers will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There will be no opportunity for re-writes after grading, as good writing skills are a must in this course. Each of the essay questions, as well as an example of an *A* paper are located on the course website. It is required that you visit the website to view the example paper, as it details additional guidelines for writing successfully in this course.

**Media Analysis Project:** You will complete one media project this semester, which will critically observe and analyze an aspect of the mass media. See the course website for a detailed description of the assignment, and an example of an *A* project.

**\*\* NOTE \*\*** *Plagiarism and other issues concerning academic integrity will not be tolerated, and are grounds for an automatic failure in the course. Acknowledge all reading and research sources with appropriate footnotes and bibliography.* Keep all copies of your quizzes and notes until you have received a final grade for this class.

assessments

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Discussion and In-class Participation (140 pts.)	A = 375	B- = 319	D+ = 267
Contemporary Culture Quiz (60 pts.)	A- = 359	C+ = 307	D = 255
Infotainment Essay (100 pts.)	B+ = 347	C = 295	D- = 239
Media Analysis Project (100 pts.)	B = 335	C- = 279	F = 227

texts & materials

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***Required***

1. All materials posted on the course website @ [www.apwadenius.com](http://www.apwadenius.com).
2. All audio/video materials screened in class as well as any excerpt screened during the lectures.

***Recommended***

1. Media Essentials 2, by Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

*Please remember that if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or any of the course materials that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, the course website, or by placing a note for me in my box in the department office.*

~ *Contemporary Media Culture* ~

**week #1 ~ (Aug. 21<sup>st</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>) ~ intro to mass communication and media literacy**

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Reading: "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture," by Douglas Kellner  
Discussion: The Cultural Approach to Media Studies

**week #2 ~ (Aug. 28<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup>) ~ semiotics and making meaning**

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Reading: "Semiotics For Beginners," by Daniel Chandler  
Discussion: Interpreting Popular Texts

**week #3 ~ (Sep. 4<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>) ~ postmodernity and the postmodern subject**

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Reading: "In Search of the Postmodern," by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner  
Discussion: Critiquing Postmodern Culture

**week #4 ~ (Sep. 11<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>) ~ analyzing popular music videos**

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Reading: "Ways of Thinking About Music Video (and Post-modernism)," by Peter Wollen  
Discussion: High and Low Art in Music Video Representation

**week #5 ~ (Sep. 18<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>) ~ advertising and commodity culture**

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Reading: "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture," by Sut Jhally  
Screening: *Mad Men*, Season 1 - Episode 1, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"  
Discussion: American Capitalism and the "Good Life"

~ *News Media & Media Representations* ~

**week #6 ~ (Sep. 25<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup>) ~ newspapers and ethical journalism**

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Reading: "Ch. 2: The Emergence of the Mass Press," by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach  
Discussion: Objectivity, Bias, and Storytelling in Newspapers

**\*\* *Contemporary Culture Quiz due* \*\***

**week #7 ~ (Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>) ~ the news/entertainment divide**

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Reading: "Infotainment's Appeals and Consequences," by Andrew O'Connor  
Discussion: Antagonisms and Contradictions in Infotainment

**week #8 ~ (Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>) ~ books and magazines**

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Reading: "Typographic America" and "The Typographic Mind," by Neil Postman  
Discussion: Debating Race, Censorship, and Celebrity Culture in Publishing

**\*\* Culture Quiz feedback due \*\***

**week #9 ~ (Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>) ~ classical Hollywood vs. art cinema narratives**

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Reading: "Narrative Structure: Television Stories," by Jeremy G. Butler  
"Art Cinema," by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith  
Discussion: The Convergence of Art and Mainstream Cinema

**week #10 ~ (Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>) ~ the "post-network" television era**

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Reading: "Understanding Television at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era," by Amanda D. Lotz  
Screening: *Orange Is the New Black*, Season 1 - Episode 3, "Lesbian Request Denied"  
Discussion: American Culture in Phenomenal Television

~ *Constructing Reality in Media* ~

**week #11 ~ (Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> & Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>) ~ golden age radio and the rise of television**

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Reading: "Ch. 4: The Establishment of the Broadcast Media," by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach  
Screening: *War of the Worlds*, by Orson Welles (1938)  
*I Love Lucy*, Season 2 - Episode 1, "Job Switching"  
Discussion: Fiction and Non-Fiction Media Narratives

**week #12 ~ (Nov. 6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>) ~ video games and violence**

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Reading: "The Stories We Tell," by George Gerbner  
Screening: *The Mean World Syndrome*, dir. Jeremy Earp (2010)  
Discussion: Digital Culture and Violent Virtual Spaces

**\*\* Infotainment Essay due \*\***

**week #13 ~ (Nov. 13<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>) ~ the Internet and connectivity**

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Reading: "Strange Days: Pop Culture and Mass Media in the Digital Age," by David Grazian  
Screening: *We Live In Public*, dir. Ondi Timoner (2009)  
Discussion: Social Networking and the Ideal Public Self

**week #14 ~ (Nov. 20<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup>) ~ no class**

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**\*\* Thanksgiving recess \*\***

**week #15 ~ (Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>) ~ reality TV and “real” life**

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Reading: “Reality TV in the Digital Era: A Paradox in Visual Culture?” by Arlid Fetveit

Screening: *Flavor Of Love*, Episode 8 - “Family Flavors”

Discussion: Assuming Away Humanity in Reality Television

**\*\* *Infotainment Essay feedback due* \*\***

**week #16 ~ (Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>) ~ final class sessions**

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**\*\* *Media Analysis Project due* \*\***