Rarely does public language have so much impact on our lives, or suffer so much, as in a presidential campaign. Accordingly, the 2000 presidential elections provides ideal material with which to exercise critical reading and writing abilities. This course is structured in the belief that we best develop these abilities with a variety of texts, frequent writing on those texts, and regular revision of that writing. As a composition class, our focus will be on the language in which the presidential election is discussed, by the candidates and by the press. Rather than debating the issues ourselves, we will use the public arguments about those issues to work on rhetoric, logic, and the construction of arguments in your own writing.

The bulk of our regular readings will come from *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, and *The Weekly Standard*, which collectively cover a broad range of the political spectrum (you will subscribe at student rates to all three publications). We will generally begin each week with the *Times* and end with the other periodicals. We will take at least one of the televised debates as an assignment, and we will probably have several guest speakers. Throughout the semester, I will also encourage you to bring in material from other sources. Because this class depends on the course of the election, however, the syllabus is flexible and will evolve over the semester in response to the election (I’ve left two days blank below to leave space for this). We may, for example, decide to skip the magazines or *The New York Times* for a week so that we can spend more time focusing on a particular issue or event or on campaign autobiographies. Because this is a composition class, the syllabus may also change in response to the writing that you produce. Regardless, you can count on a consistent amount of reading, and you will receive fair advance notice of all changes to the syllabus.

To provide further context for the election, I have placed a collection of articles from various on-line sources in our LearnLink conference and I expect you to use these to familiarize yourself with the course of the campaign thus far. I have also placed on reserve at Woodruff Library a wide variety of readings from the candidates’ autobiographies and from influential coverage of past campaigns by writers like Theodore White and Hunter S. Thompson. You will each do one 5 minute presentation on a different one of these sources (alternately, you may propose your own source), so that by the time you begin researching your final essay you will all have encountered a sampling of available materials.

The writing component of this course will take several forms, all emphasizing revision as a necessary habit. Throughout the semester, you will post weekly 1-page entries on LearnLink, which will count towards your participation grade. Each of the three short (5 page) essays for this course requires that you take a different approach to the rhetoric at hand: analyzing different journalistic arguments, comparing a candidate’s self-presentation to the coverage he receives in the press, and tracking the shifts in a candidate’s positions or in his coverage across the campaign. You will revise each essay at least once. Finally, after the election, you will begin a 10-page research essay, which may revise and expand an earlier essay if you choose.

**Particulars**

**Essays:** I have given a topic for each essay on the schedule below. These topics, though, are only suggested, and will probably change depending on the course of the campaign’s events.
Provided that it meets the broad course criteria, and provided that you get prior approval from me, you are always encouraged to develop your own topics.

The final grades for each short essay will reflect the original as well as the revision. Your research essay will have four stages, each of which will determine a percentage of the grade for the project, progressing from a proposal with a bibliography (15%) to an outline (25%) to an essay (30%) to a revision (30%). Details for each assignment are given with their due date below.

All submitted work must be on time and printed in a 12-point font like Times or Palatino. I will not accept late work. Additionally, because your grades for the first three essays will reflect both the original and the revision, you need to save all copies of your essays – I cannot respond to your revisions unless I can compare the drafts.

**Journals:** By 8 p.m. on Sunday evenings, you will post a 1-page/300 word response to the week’s material on our LearnLink conference (see below). It can address your own questions or those of the other students. This work will help you generate essay ideas, keep on top of the reading, and prepare for discussion of the materials.

**LearnLink:** In addition to providing a space for your journals and your questions, our conference on LearnLink will serve as a notice board where I will post this syllabus (and all changes to it), assignment details, announcements, etc. We will also use this space to share links and other materials we find on-line. Just as importantly, the conference provides a means for extending discussion outside of class time. You are encouraged to read the other postings – this conference should be interactive, not static.

**Participation:** As a very significant portion of your grade, this reflects your class discussion, LearnLink postings, and several peer editing exercises, where you will exchange your essays with other students. Because it is not a lecture but a seminar where we work on the readings and on your writing together, this course succeeds only if everyone contributes.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend all classes. After two absences you will lose 3% from your final grade for each further unexcused absence. If extraordinary circumstances arise, contact me as soon as possible.

**Conferences:** You will each have at least four scheduled individual conferences with me, one after the first draft of each essay, as indicated below. We will use these conferences to discuss the draft at hand as well as the progress of your writing over the semester.

**Citation:** All citations should follow the MLA format, as presented in the *St. Martin’s Handbook*. We will go over this format in class.

**Plagiarism:** This class will operate under Emory College’s definition of plagiarism:

“A writer’s facts, ideas, and phraseology should be regarded as his or her property. Any person who uses a writer’s ideas or phraseology without giving due credit is guilty of plagiarism.”
In accordance with Emory regulations, if I suspect plagiarism, I am obliged to hand the matter over to the Dean’s office. The penalties range from no credit for the assignment to expulsion. We will discuss plagiarism at length during the semester.

**Emory Writing Center:** The Writing Center is a valuable resource for all students, and I urge you to use it. To make an appointment, go by the Center at 205A Callaway North and sign up on the schedule. You can also call the Center at 727-0886 to reserve time. Be aware that they are very busy around midterms and at the end of the semester. If you need to cancel your appointment, let them know so they can make your time available to another student. When you come for your meeting, bring a typed draft of your essay and a pen and paper for taking notes.

**Grades:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essays: (3 @ 15% each)</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Essay</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
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**Texts:**

Required subscriptions:

- *The Nation* (www.thenation.com)

(details of the academic subscriptions will be discussed in class)

Required purchase:


Suggested purchase:

- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ’72* (“Author’s Note,” “September,” “October,” “November,” and “December”).
- Jules Abels, *The Degeneration of Our Presidential Election: A History and Analysis of an American Institution in Trouble* (Ch. 2-4, Ch. 12).
and Ch. 15: “Television as a Political Institution”).
Robin Lakoff, *The Language War*.
Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ’72* (“Author’s Note,” “September,” “October,” “November,” and “December”).
Hunter S. Thompson, *Better Than Sex: Confessions of a Political Junkie* (Ch. 4, 6, 10)

**Schedule:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F 9/1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 9/4</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| W 9/6 | Reading: Handout, and browse Selected Articles on LearnLink  
*SMH* Ch.1 (Writing, Reading, and Research), Ch. 48 (Understanding Disciplinary Discourse) |
| F 9/8 | Reading: selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*  
*SMH* Ch. 2 (Considering Rhetorical Situations) |
| M 9/11 | Reading: selections from *The New York Times*  
*SMH* Ch. 3 (Exploring, Planning, and Drafting) |
| W 9/13 | Reading: Selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard* |
| F 9/15 | Library Tour: Meet at Woodruff Circulation Desk.  
**Essay 1 Due:** By now, you should all be thinking about who you want to see elected. For this first essay, though, you will need to write a serious, credible defense of one of the candidates you do *not* want to see elected. The purpose of a devil’s advocate assignment like this is to help you think clearly and critically about positions you do not hold yourself, something you have to do if you are going to think clearly and critically about the positions that you *do* hold. As with the rest of your essays for this course, you will have to narrow your topic, perhaps by focusing on one issue or one aspect of the candidate in question. We will discuss this assignment, and some of the different ways you can approach it in class. |
| M 9/18 | Reading: selections from *The New York Times*  
Peer Reviews of Essay 1 |
| W 9/20 | **Individual Conferences** |
| F 9/22 | Reading: selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*  
*SMH* Ch. 4 (Revising and Editing) |
| M 9/25 | Reading: selections from *The New York Times*  
*SMH* Ch. 5 (Thinking Critically: Constructing and Analyzing Arguments)  
**Revision 1 Due** |
| W 9/27 | Reading: selections from candidate autobiographies |
| F 9/29 | Reading: selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard* |
| M 10/2 | Reading: selections from *The New York Times* |
| W 10/4 | Reading: selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*  
*SMH* Ch. 19 (Constructing Effective Sentences) |
Documentary: *Fred Tuttle is the Man With a Plan*

**Essay 2 Due:** Now that we’ve read the self-presentations of the various candidates, and press coverage from across the political spectrum, some of the differences – in rhetoric, in arguments, in politics – should be growing more apparent. For this essay, choose one candidate and choose one periodical. How does the candidate’s self-presentation differ from the coverage offered in the periodical you have chosen? Construct your own argument about how the specific candidate and the press relate to each other here. More so than in your first essay, you will have to be careful to limit the scope of your argument. Rather than trying to cover all of the differences, you will need to focus on one or two fundamental points.

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**M 10/9 Reading:** selections from *The New York Times*

**Peer Reviews of Essay 2**

**W 10/11 Individual Conferences**

**F 10/13 Reading:** selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*

*SMH* Ch. 22-23 (Varying Sentence Structure, Creating Memorable Prose)

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**M 10/16 Reading:** selections from *The New York Times*

**Revision 2 Due**

**W 10/18 Reading:** TBA

**F 10/20 Reading:** selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*

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**M 10/23 Reading:** selections from *The New York Times*

**W 10/25 Reading:** selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*

*SMH* Ch. 40-41 (Becoming a Researcher, Conducting Research)

**F 10/27 Guest Lecturer:** J.P. Eggers, political consultant

**Essay 3 Due:** As we approach the election, how have the press and the candidates changed their language? Choose either a single candidate or a single periodical, and compare two or more points in the campaign where, for whatever reason, they have shifted their arguments. This will require that you read very critically as you build your argument about how and why your chosen subject has (or has not) changed tack.

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**M 10/30 Reading:** selections from *The New York Times*

*SMH* Ch. 42 (Using Sources) and Ch. 44 (MLA Documentation)

**Peer Reviews of Essay 3**

**W 11/1 Individual Conferences**

**F 11/3 Reading:** selections from *The Nation* and *The Weekly Standard*

*SMH* Ch. 43 (Writing A Research Essay)

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**M 11/6 Reading:** selections from *The New York Times*

**Revision 3 Due**

**W 11/8 Reading:** Election post-mortem

**Research Proposal Due:** Hand in a 1-page proposal of your plan. Treat this as a formal piece of writing: style, spelling, grammar, etc. will all count as usual. At this stage, you will probably benefit by writing out what your *SMH* describes as an “explicit thesis
statement” (609). This proposal should also include the following information: your general topic, how you plan to narrow that topic, and what you think your conclusion will be. This is not binding: if your research changes your position on something, then you have to work that into your essay. In fact, good research should shape your understanding of your subject, rather than just confirming what you already think.

Attach a bibliography, with a minimum of five (5) sources. For each source, provide a full citation according to the MLA guidelines as explained on pages 631-645 of your St. Martin’s Handbook and as discussed in class. Also, give a two-sentence description of what each source offers your research.

F 11/10 Reading: selections from The New York Times
   Peer Review of Proposals

M 11/13 Reading: selections from The New York Times
   Outlining

W 11/15 Reading: TBA

F 11/17 Reading: selections from The Nation and The Weekly Standard
   **Research Outline Due:** Hand in a formal, full-sentence outline, as discussed in class. Before the outline itself, place your thesis statement at the top of the page. For instructions on how to arrange an outline like this, see your St. Martin’s Handbook pages 46-48. For an example of a formal, full-sentence outline, see pages 647-649 of the same book. Your outline should be 4 pages in length, not including the bibliography, which must list 10 separate works, at least 1 of which must come from a scholarly journal.

M 11/20 Reading: selections from The New York Times

W 11/22 Reading: selections from The Nation and The Weekly Standard

F 11/24 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

M 11/27 Guest Speaker: Vincent Keenan, on-line democracy advocate with www.publius.org

W 11/29 Reading: selections from The New York Times
   **Research Essay Due**

F 12/1 Reading: selections from The Nation and The Weekly Standard

M 12/4 **Individual Conferences**

W 12/6 Reading: selections from The New York Times

F 12/8 Reading: selections from The Nation and The Weekly Standard

M 12/11 LAST DAY
   **Final Draft of Research Essay DUE**