



Syllabus: Engl 4553 Rhetorical Theory & Criticism

Spring 2026 | Midwestern State University | Dr. Coenen

MW 3:30-4:50 PM | PY 205

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Hillary Coenen | Phone: (940) 397-4058 | Email: hillary.coenen@msutexas.edu

Office: BW 203 | [Office hours](#) in person, by phone, or on Zoom at the following times:

Mon: Noon - 2 PM | Tues: 1-2 PM | Wed: Noon - 1 PM | Thurs: 1-2 PM | OR BY APPT

Course Description

This class will overview the history of rhetoric, introduce a range of theories and methodologies in rhetorical studies, and apply concepts and methods from contemporary rhetorical studies. We'll explore the diverse range of contemporary applications of critical rhetorical theories, to understand the significance of observing and learning from the rhetorical practices and philosophies of a variety of communities and identities.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

You may use alternate editions of the textbooks if they are more accessible. Plan to have access to readings during class time.

Required:

- HTR - Herrick. *The History & Theory of Rhetoric*, 6th Ed. Routledge, 2018.
- RC - Foss. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*, 5th ed. Waveland, 2018.

Recommended:

- AM - Eds, Ritchie & Ronald. *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric*. U of Pittsburgh, 2001.
- TRR - Eds, Bizzell & Herzberg. *The Rhetorical Tradition* (Any Edition) Bedford/St. Martins
- TBC - Eds, Moraga & Anzaldua. *This Bridge Called My Back* (Any Edition)

Course Goals

- Acquire understanding of traditional and contemporary rhetorical theory, criticism, and its applications;
- Acquire a deeper understanding of feminist rhetoric, including primary and secondary sources, theories, and methodologies;
- Hone research methods and skills and follow the MLA style guide;
- Gain experience in applying rhetorical theory in a relevant, original project and presenting research to peers.

You cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education: you will do much better to think of being here to claim one. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb 'to claim' is: to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction. 'To receive' is to come into possession of: to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true. The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon."

--Adrienne Rich

Grading System & Policies

Table 1: Points Allocated per Assignment

Assignments	Points	Description
Discussion Leader	250	This task will have two components: Team (Part 1) & Individual (Part 2). Your team will select and analyze a rhetorical artifact, and each presenter will apply a different critical lens. Together, the team will lead a class discussion.
CHOICE Proposal	150	A researched proposal for a project grounded in rhetorical theory, applying and remixing your learning from the DL assignment.
CHOICE Project	250	A research-based original project remixing elements of your DL presentation.
CHOICE Presentation	150	A presentation of a complete CHOICE project.
Learning Logs (4 x 50+ pts)	200+	Throughout the semester, use your Learning Log to document and earn credit for your process and weekly course work.
Total Points	1000	

Table 2: Total Points for Final Grade

Grade	Points
A	895-1000
B	795-894
C	695-794
D	595-694
F	0-594

Acceptable Submission Format and Process

Formal assignments are to be typed and formatted with all sources documented according to MLA style guidelines. Formal papers will be uploaded to the D2L Assignment folder. By enrolling in this class, students expressly grant MSU a “limited right” in all intellectual property created for the purpose of this course. The “limited right” includes but is not limited to the right to reproduce the student’s work product in order to verify originality and authenticity, and for educational purposes.

Note: You may not submit a paper for a grade in this class that has been (or will be) submitted for a grade in another course, unless you obtain both instructors’ explicit written permission in advance.

Revision

You may revise and resubmit any coursework within 2 weeks of receiving feedback and prior to finals week for additional feedback and a new assessment. Grade revisions are negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and all should be preceded by a revision plan with the help of the instructor.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments, defined as work not submitted to the designated site within 2 hours after the deadline, may still be accepted for credit if you consult with me within two business days of the deadline, at the discretion of the instructor. If you anticipate you may have difficulty meeting a deadline, request an extension at least 24 hours in advance. If you have difficulty submitting or are unsure if your submission was successful, email me with your work attached and explain the issue.

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Plagiarism is the use of another's thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument (including text written by a generation system or artificial intelligence tool) in your own work without appropriate documentation (a parenthetical citation at the end and a listing on the Works Cited page)—whether you use that material in a quote, paraphrase, or summary. At the very least, plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment; at worst, the consequence will be an F in the course. Offenders will be reported to the Chair of the Department of English, Humanities, and Philosophy and the Dean of Students. Students have the right to appeal an alleged incident of Academic Dishonesty. Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in [the Student Handbook](#), under Academic Dishonesty Procedure or through [the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Academic Integrity Advice

To avoid penalties or accusations of academic dishonesty, I suggest the following:

- **Ask for help:** As the instructor of this course, I am responsible for teaching you about correct and ethical citation and attribution, and I'm available to assist you. Contact me several days before the assignment is due with a link to the source so that I have time to review the article and meet to discuss your concerns.
- **Don't use AI:** Generally speaking, you are not allowed to use artificial intelligence (AI) engines, software, or artwork generating programs to produce content submitted for grading in this class unless the assignment instructions specifically call for the use of AI. I will provide more information about specific assignments that incorporate AI when the time is appropriate in the course. You may not, however, construe this limited use as permission to use these technologies in any other facet of this course. Use of AI on tasks for which it is not permitted constitutes academic dishonesty.
- **Provide instructor access to all sources used in assignments:** All sources cited in an assignment must be available, accessible online for me, the instructor, to review as I grade your assignments. Save all sources in a Google Folder, then share that Google Folder by pasting the URL into the comment box of your D2L submission. A link to an abstract or to an online database which has a paywall won't work: I need to be able to read the entire article, as do you.
- **Accurately cite sources:** When using the ideas of other published and/or unpublished sources, students must use accepted documentation conventions (MLA). All quoted content must be placed in "quotation marks," and for quoted, paraphrased, or summarized content, the correct source must be cited in the body and in a list of references.

GenAI Policy Details

This course aims to teach ethical research and writing practices, with a focus on the writing process. The use of generative AI is inappropriate for this course. All work submitted for this course is subject to be scanned by plagiarism and AI checkers. If you use AI or other sources without accurate and consistent attributions, you will not receive credit for the assignment, but you will have the opportunity to rewrite the assignment with guidance about proper attribution and citation (on the first occurrence). If this occurs twice in the course, you will receive a grade of "F" for the course.

If you choose to use a generative AI tool for this class, you must include a full transcript of your session(s) with each submission, every prompt you entered and every AI output you received.

- If you turn in an essay that is clearly just AI output pasted into MLA format, you will receive a 0.
- Partial AI use is strongly discouraged in this course. However, I recognize the temptations of new technology, so here is how consequences will work:
 - If your submission appears to be partially AI-generated, or if an originality checker indicates that your response is >30% AI-generated, I will investigate further. If your

response and other evidence cannot demonstrate that the work you submitted is more than 70% original, you won't receive credit for the assignment.

- If you submit work that contains some AI content (<30% AI-generated) but you have been transparent and included the transcript and attributions, there will not be penalties.

This policy is designed to create learning potential, a space for honoring you and your authentic creativity, critical thinking, and written expression. Note that there is no uniform policy on AI use at MSU. Make efforts to understand the policy for each course you take.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Punctual, engaged attendance is crucial to your success in this class and in college. More than two weeks' worth of **unresolved** absences (MWF: 6 classes) will be grounds for the instructor to drop you from the course. Any absences are likely to affect your performance in the course, and it's your responsibility to be present and prepared for class to maximize your learning. If you must miss class for any reason, you may resolve absences by communicating with your instructor. If you must miss multiple sessions for any reason, alert the Dean of Students office so they can verify for instructors.

***Unresolved Absence:** Absences about which you did not communicate to the instructor prior to or within two days of its occurrence.

***Resolved Absence:** Absences about which you email your instructor prior to or within two business days. Emails must explain what actions you will take to stay on track in the course.

Class Communication - Email & GroupMe

Before asking questions via GroupMe or email, check D2L and our course syllabus and schedule. If the answers you seek are not provided, use GroupMe for questions and conversation about class activities, deadlines, and any issues that others in the class may know. This will allow quicker responses and provide helpful reminders for others.

Email is the best way to contact me about your own performance or attendance. Allow 2 business days for email responses. All emails you send for academic purposes should be revised and edited, including a greeting, body paragraph(s), and closing, to meet professional expectations for emails. For all correspondence with your instructors, indicate your full name, course and section number.

University Closure Practices

In the event of university closure for inclement weather conditions or emergency situations, students will be notified through official campus channels (MSU Alert, MSU Safety app, Postmaster emails, and website headers). When any schedule changes occur, I will provide schedule updates and assignment expectations using D2L News announcements, GroupMe, and university emails, and I will also update the Live Class Schedule to reflect changes. For this course, unless a change is posted to the course D2L News, assignments due to be uploaded or posted to D2L during the closure will remain due as scheduled. Students who are unable to complete assignments due during a closure (for example, due to a power outage) will not be penalized, but will be expected to notify the professor of their situation.

Learning with Generosity

As a community, we have diverse bodies, experiences, and needs. Our differences are strengths and we should strive to learn from them. To learn in a safe environment, we must ardently reject language and behaviors that denigrate others based on identity. In this learning space, hate speech, harassment, discrimination, & violence are not tolerated. This course does encourage discussion of difficult topics.

We work through discomfort and create a brave space for learning by showing respect for others and considering diverse perspectives. There is a lot we don't know about each other, and our word choice in discussing social & political issues matters! Ignorance is not an excuse for cruelty or dismissiveness, but we all make mistakes as we learn, so we should be willing to forgive & learn from these situations.

CARE for Class Community

Together, we'll decide what it means to show that we CARE about our own education and that of our classmates. CARE stands for Communicative, Accountable, Respectful, and Engaged.

Students will describe specific behaviors and practices that correspond with those characteristics:

Principles	Students will...	Professor will...
<i>Communicative</i>		
<i>Accountable</i>		
<i>Respectful</i>		
<i>Engaged</i>		

Campus Resources & Policies

Study Hours and Tutoring Assistance

TASP's Learning Center is located on the first floor of the Moffett Library, and tutors are available for one-on-one sessions Monday-Thursday from 11 AM-7 PM. You don't need an appointment to use these services. Writing tutors will not edit your papers for you, but they will provide support and feedback at every stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to drafting, revising to proofreading. [See TASP's Webpage for more information.](#)

Access to Microsoft 365

All students can download Microsoft Office 365 free of charge using their MSU Texas student email address. To acquire Office 365, [visit MSU's Student Resources.](#)

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Explore resources on [Moffett Library's webpage](#) to learn how to best utilize the library.

University Computer Labs

The University provides four open computer labs with Microsoft Office & internet access.

- Clark Student Center: 24 hours (Mon-Sun)
- Dillard 146: Mon-Thurs 6 AM – 7 PM
- Moffett Library: Mon-Thurs 8AM – 10PM; Fri. 8AM-5PM; Sat 10AM-6PM; Sun 2PM-10PM
- Legacy Hall: 24 hours (Mon-Sun)

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Grade Appeal Process

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#).

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from MSU may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees, and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. However, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans, and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. For information about refunds, refer to [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#).

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make an application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

Important Dates

Last day for term schedule changes: January 23, 2026

Deadline to file for graduation: February 16, 2026

Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" April 29, 2026

Student Emergency Support & Resources

Your well-being and success at MSU are of the utmost importance. The [Student Emergency Support & Resources page](#) features campus and community resources available for students experiencing emergency or extenuating circumstances. Contact student.affairs@msutexas.edu (940-397-7500) for more information.

Overview Schedule

***Note:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. [A more detailed, live version of the schedule is posted on D2L.](#)

HTR = The History and Theory of Rhetoric
(Herrick, 6th)

RC = Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration &
Practice (Foss, 5th)

AM = Available Means: An Anthology of
Women's Rhetoric (Ritchie & Ronald)

DL = Discussion Leader Assignment

CHOICE = CHOICE Assignment

Weeks	Topics/Activities/Assignments	Deadlines in D2L @ 11:59 PM
Week 1: 1/20-1/23	Understanding the Course, Rhetorical Theory	ASAP: BOS Survey ; Join GroupMe
2: 1/26-1/30	Overview of Rhetoric Read: HTR Preface & Ch 1 Overview & AM : Introduction Read: RC Ch 1 The Nature of Rhetorical Criticism Discuss DL Assignment & CHOICE Project	
3: 2/2-2/6	Early History of Rhetoric Read: HTR Ch 4 Aristotle on Rhetoric; TRR Gorgias "Encomium of Helen"; AM Aspasia "Pericles' Funeral Oration" from Plato's Menexenus (1-8) Review: DL Assignment Read: RC Ch 2 Doing Rhetorical Criticism (pp.9-27); RC Ch 3 Neo-Aristotelian Criticism: Genesis of Rhetorical Criticism (pp. 29-36 & 50-57)	
4: 2/9-2/13	Read: HTR Ch 9 Contemp I: Arguments, Audiences, & Advocates; Foss & Griffin "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric" Select and Prepare eJournal Artifact	eJournal 1 Due F 2/13
5: 2/16-2/20	Read: HTR Ch 10 Contemp II: Situation, Story, Display; J.J. Royster "When the First Voice You Hear is not Your Own" Select and Prepare eJournal Artifact	
6: 2/23-2/27	Read: HTR CH 11 Contemp III: Texts, Power, Alternatives; Martinez "A Plea for Counterstory" Royster & Kirsch "Feminist Rhetorical Practices" Select and Prepare eJournal Artifact	DL Sign Up: 2/26 @ 3:10 - Due 3/1 @ 5PM
7: 3/2-3/6	Plan: DL Selection from Anthologies; Read: DL Research Team Workshops: Prepare DL Part 1; Select Critical/Theoretical Lens for Part 2	eJournal 2 (w/ CHOICE Topic Exp.) Due F 3/6
3/9-3/14	SPRING BREAK!	

Weeks	Topics/Activities/Assignments	Deadlines in D2L @ 11:59 PM
8: 3/16-3/20	Revise: DL Draft, Plan CHOICE Proposal Read: Research materials Workshop: Critical Lens for DL	
9: 3/23-3/27	Research CHOICE Project	
10: 3/30-4/1	Write: DL Part 2	
11: 4/6-4/10	Write: CHOICE Proposal Draft Read: DL Selections	DL Posts Due 4/6 @Noon eJournal 3 Due F 4/10
12: 4/13-4/17	Write: CHOICE Proposal Draft Read: DL Selections	
13: 4/20-4/24	Draft CHOICE Projects	Sign up for CHOICE Pres. by Fri. 4/24
14: 4/27-5/1	Workshops	CHOICE Due F 5/1
15: 5/4-5/8	CHOICE Presentations	CHOICE Pres Due M 5/4 @Noon
Finals: 5/9-5/14	Mon. 5/11, 3:30-5:30 PM: CHOICE Presentations	eJournal 4 Due T 5/12