

## EN 103: The Self in the Digital Age

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**Description:** During the past two decades, the Internet has reshaped the way we live. But is the Internet also changing the way we think, about both ourselves and the world around us? And, if it is, should we be worried about these changes? Examining a variety of texts, including some emergent scientific and cultural criticism of the digital age, we will discuss whether or not our economic, educational, and social lives are better off as a result of these shifts. We will also hear guest lectures from relevant experts on this subject and watch one or two films. As part of this experiment, students and the instructor **will unplug entirely from the Internet for a two-week duration during the term.** No email. No Facebook. No going online at all. We will write (the old fashioned way – in a notebook) about this experience and whether or not it changes our daily thought routines. During this time, we will engage in classroom practices (reading aloud, brief periods of silent meditation and reflection, etc.) designed to alter (and perhaps improve) the way we process information. Our writing assignments will constitute various rhetorical analyses of the issues in play.

### Texts:

Rhetoric & Reader - *Elements of Argument*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. by Annette Rottenberg  
Reference – *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker

Lanier, Joran – *You Are Not A Gadget*

Carr, Nicholas – *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*

Thoreau, Henry David – *Walden*

Bachelder, Chris – *Bear v. Shark*

*The New York Times*

& other handouts/articles

### Units:

Unit 1: Who are we online? Students will write an expository essay that examines how they think of themselves online versus how they think of themselves in the “real” world. (1000 words)

Unit 2: Rhetorical analysis. Looking at articles in leading periodicals, students will select an article that either defends or attacks our online culture and critique the rhetoric that the author uses, primarily using the Toulmin model. Students may also select a chapter from one of our texts (by Lanier or Carr) and critique the rhetoric there. To practice these skills, we'll critique the rhetoric of the film “The Social Network.” (1000 words)

Unit 3: Deprivation. For two weeks, we will unplug entirely from the Internet and write every day about our experiences. How does being away from our online selves change the way we process information, the way we identify with others, or the way we move experientially through a single day? These journal entries will be revised into a more traditional essay. (1000 words)

Unit 4: Compromise. Students will be asked to do research to find two articles, one of which defends and one of which attacks some element of our digital culture or our digital personae. We'll examine a few essays that attempt to find a middle ground on these issues. (1000 words)

Unit 5: Research and development. Students will identify a problem related to our digital identities and attempt to develop a solution to this problem through in-depth database-oriented research in the library. (1500 words)

Unit 6: Revision. Students will revisit one of their early essays, now that their thoughts on the digital culture and their critical thinking skills have both been refined, and decide whether or not their critiques were justified. They will practice revision skills in order to continue to improve their rhetorical tactics. (1000 words)