

Why media?

CMS.100 Introduction to Media Studies

Today

1:05–1:20 pm

Why should you take this class?

LECTURE

15 m

1:20–1:40 pm

What are we trying to learn?

LECTURE

20 m

1:40–1:45 pm

Break

5 m

1:45–2:05 pm

Class policies

HANDS-ON

20 m

2:05–2:25 pm

Gen AI use

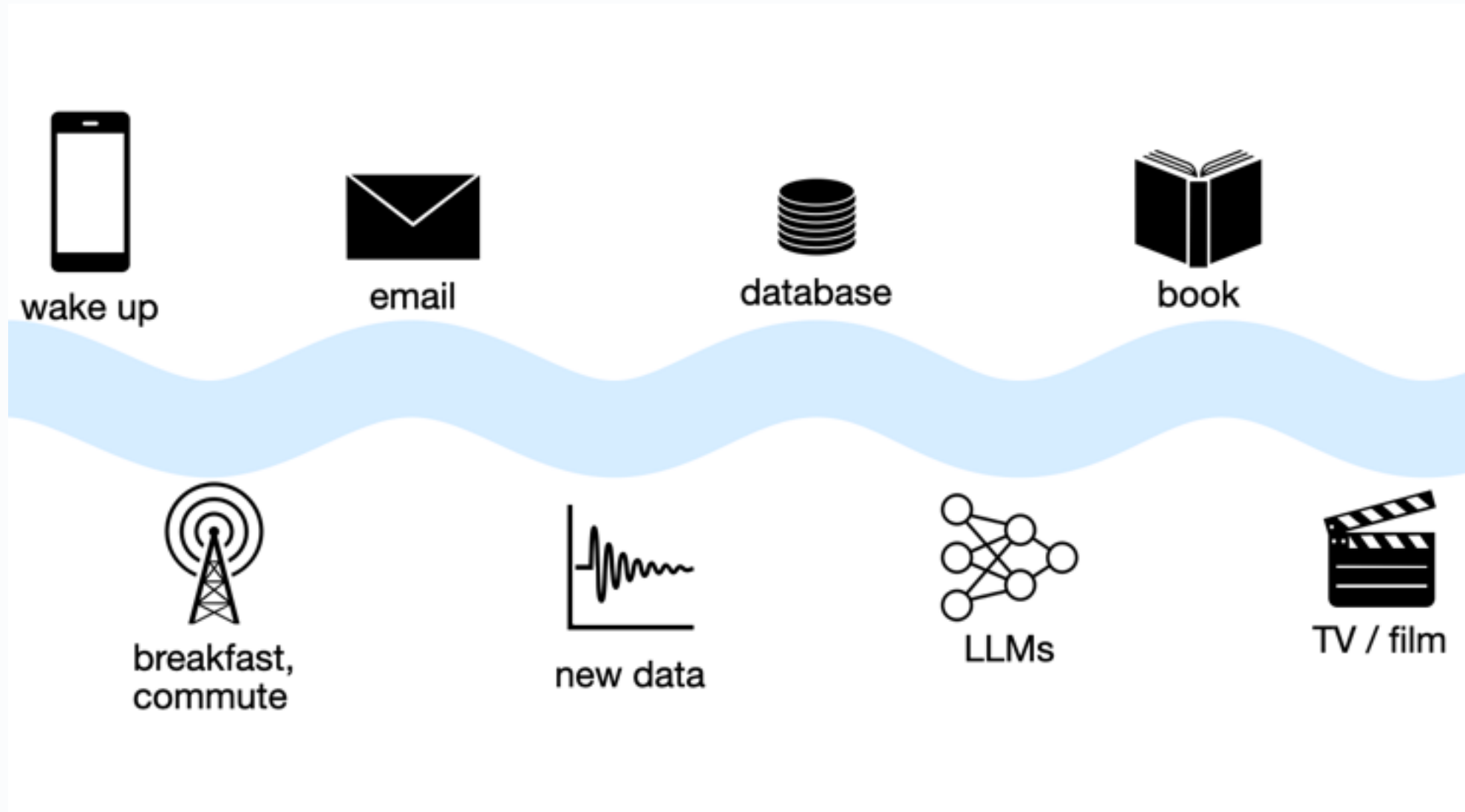
DISCUSSION

20 m

01

Why media? Why this class?

Media is **already** everywhere



Take an inventory...

- 01 How many distinct media formats did you pass through between waking up and sitting down here?
- 02 Which of them did you not notice at the time?



media

— NOUN² —

1923–



media, n.²

The main means of mass communication, esp. newspapers, radio, and television, and (from the later 20th century) content accessed via the internet...

[View entry](#)

1573–



media, variant of medium, n. & adj.

An intermediate agency, instrument, or channel; a means; esp. a means or channel of communication or expression. Frequently in by (also through) the...



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What is media?

Mass communication

The conventional sense: press, broadcast, platforms.

An intermediate agency

An instrument or channel — a thing in the way.

Latin: medium

Simply “middle.” Something that sits between and *does something*.

A medium stands between a sender and a receiver: what does it **do**?

“The media is lying”

What that sentence collapses

OWNERS

- Different holdings, different pressures

INCENTIVES

- Different reasons to publish anything

BUSINESS MODELS

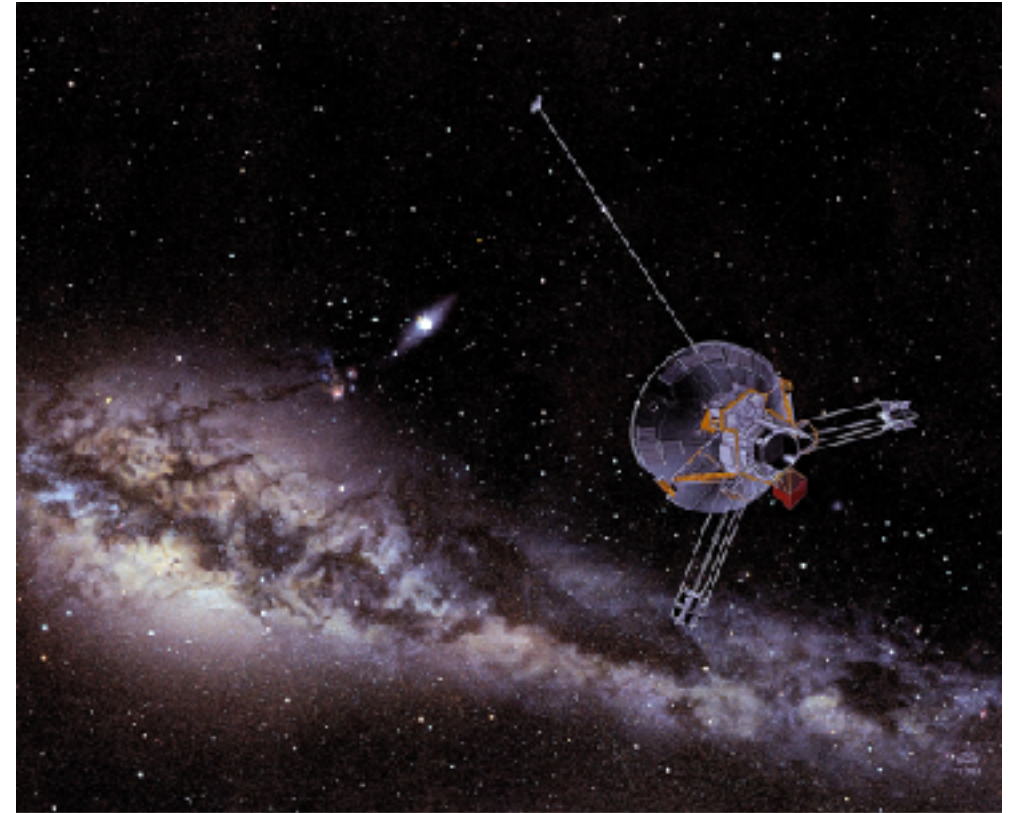
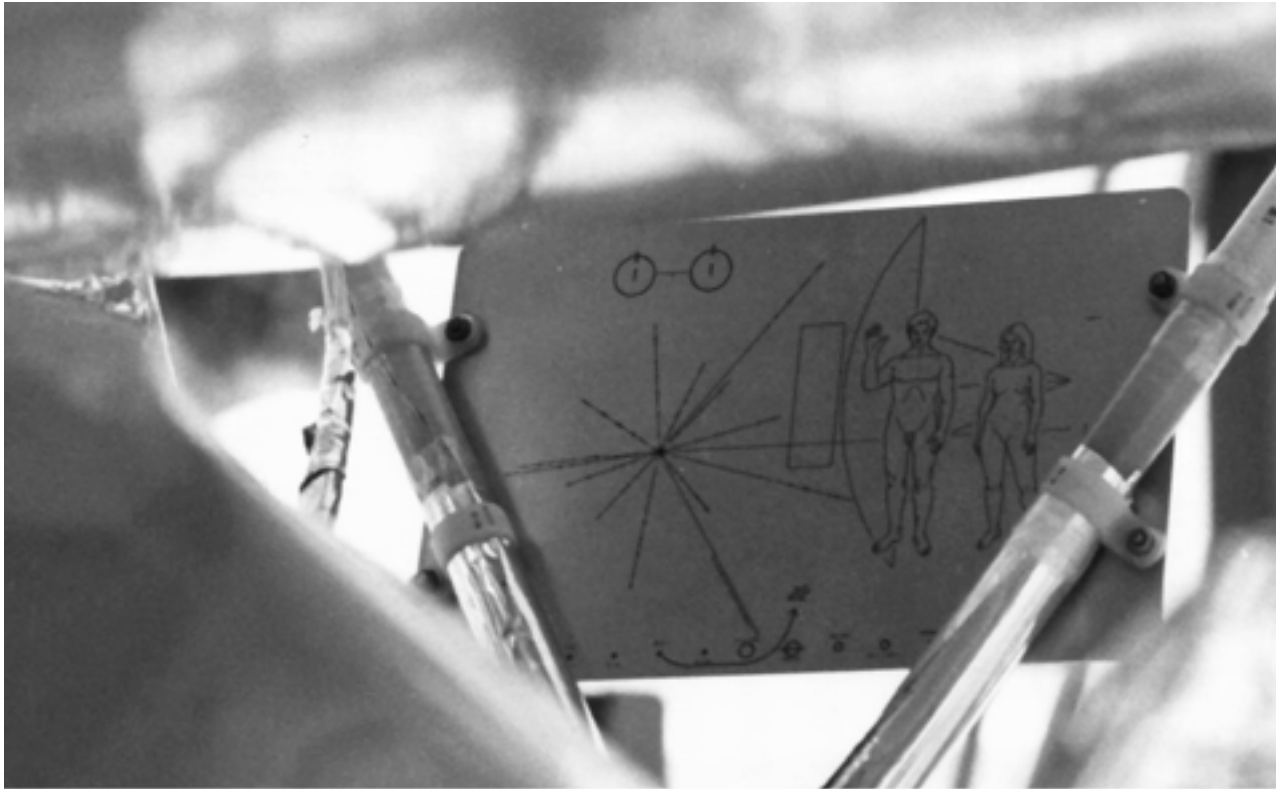
- Subscription, advertising, patron, state

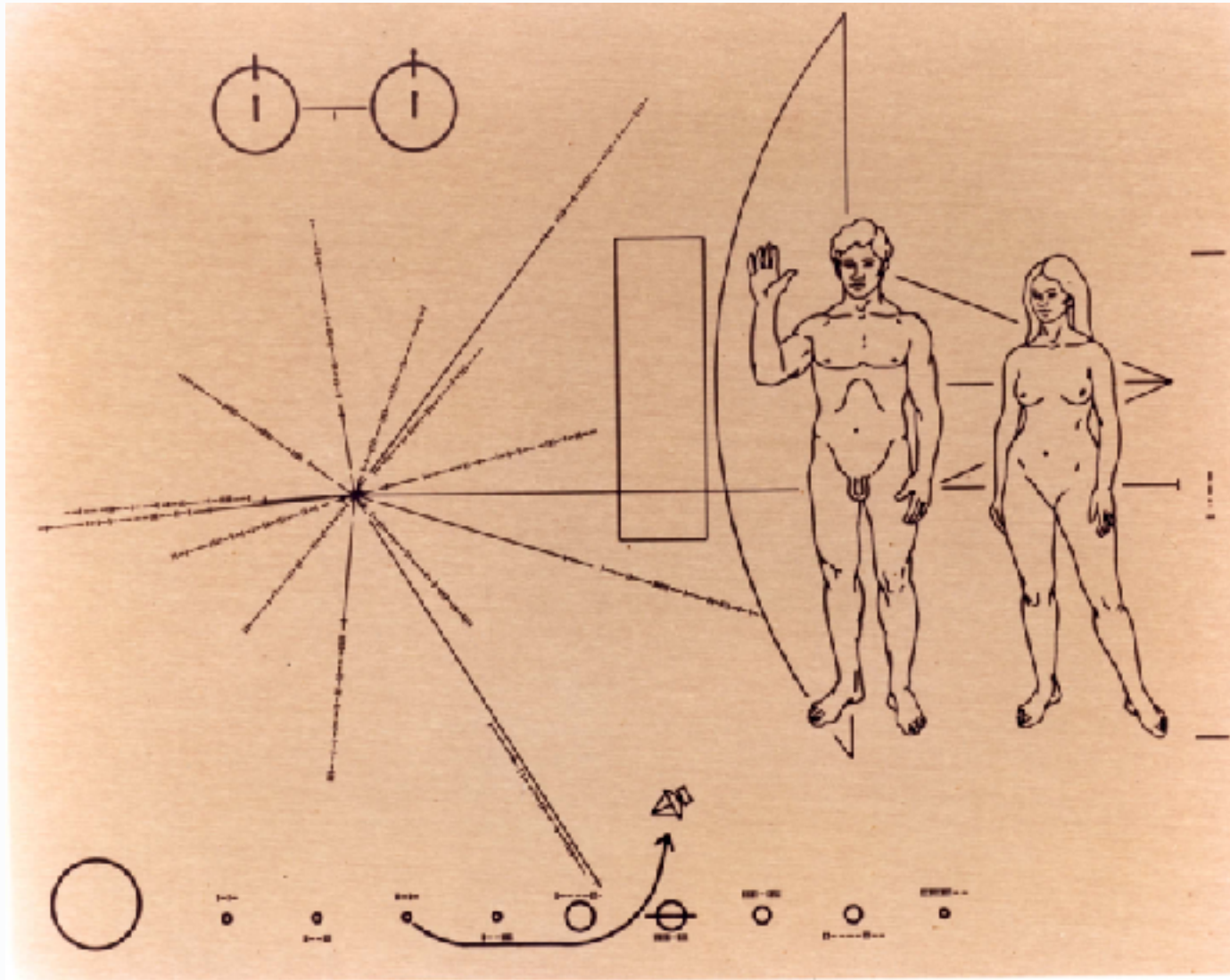
“The medium is the message”

—— Marshall McLuhan Understanding Media, 1964

Pioneer Plaque (1972–1973)

First mission to Jupiter





What is the message? Who is the receiver?

Why should you take this class?

BECAUSE

You will build these things

- Computational photography
- Models in research

BECAUSE

Science is always in the media

- What is the public narrative?

BECAUSE

Criticism is part of understanding context

- What is happening?
How does that
change what you do?

Some of what we will cover

Early modern books

Indexes, bibliographies, commonplace books — the first information overload.

Search and retrieval

What is findable, what is hidden, how knowledge is organized.

The content economy

The engine of the internet, and who it pays.

Hidden infrastructure

Cables, data centers, the physical internet.

Platform governance

Who sets the rules, and how they are enforced.

Telephones and fandoms

Older networks, and the audiences that reorganize them.

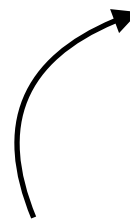
02

What are we trying to learn?

What does a critic do?

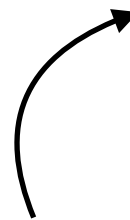
critical approaches to media

critical theory
& the Frankfurt School

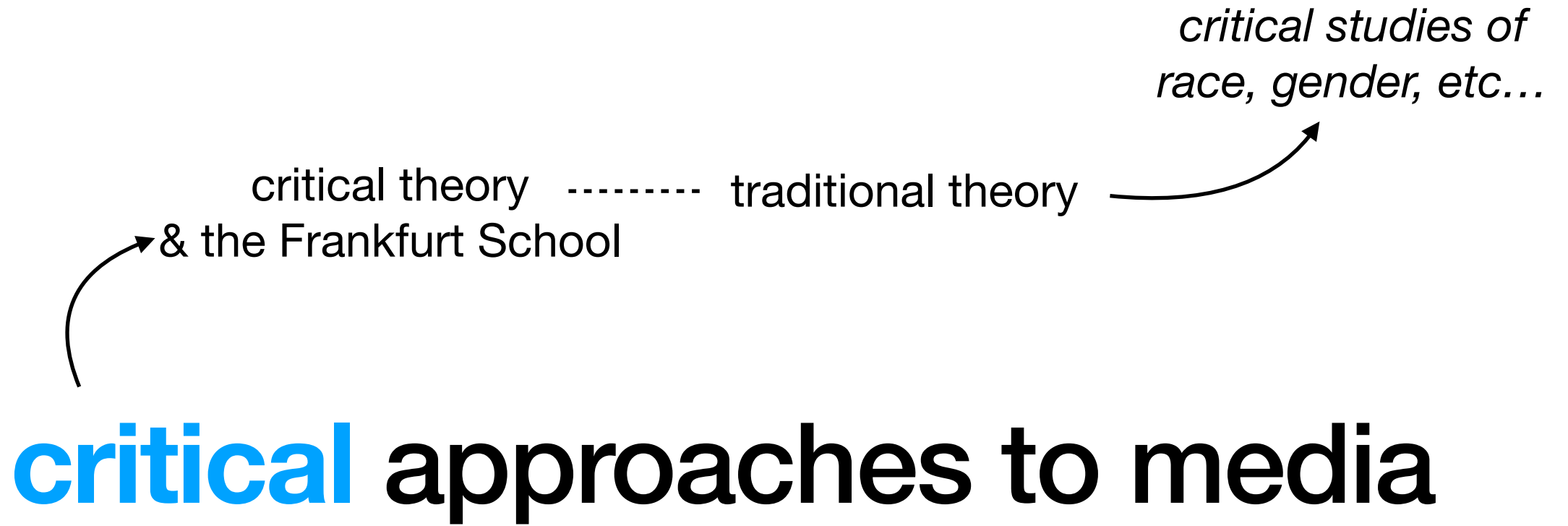


critical approaches to media

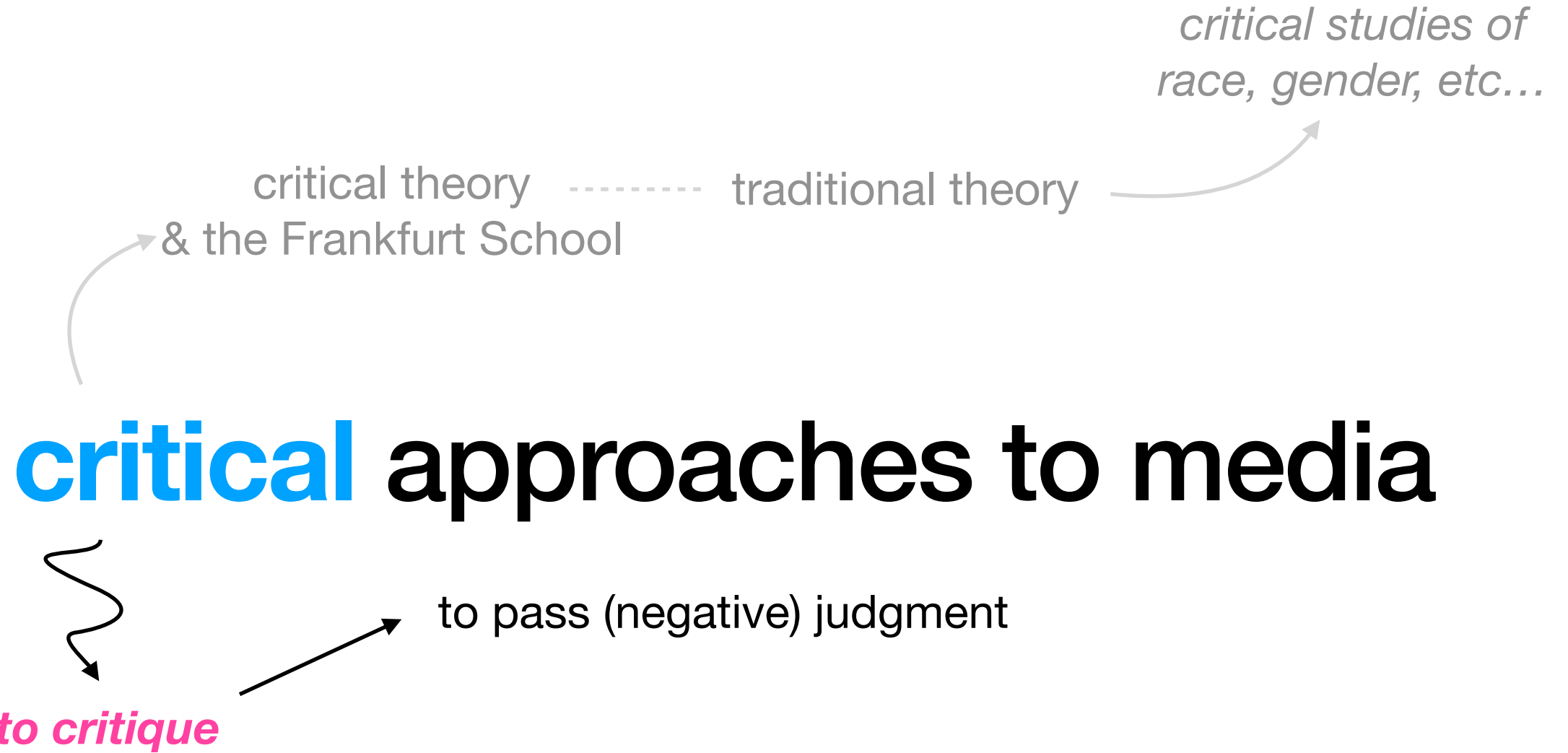
critical theory **traditional** theory
& the Frankfurt School



critical approaches to media







*critical studies of
race, gender, etc...*

critical theory traditional theory
& the Frankfurt School

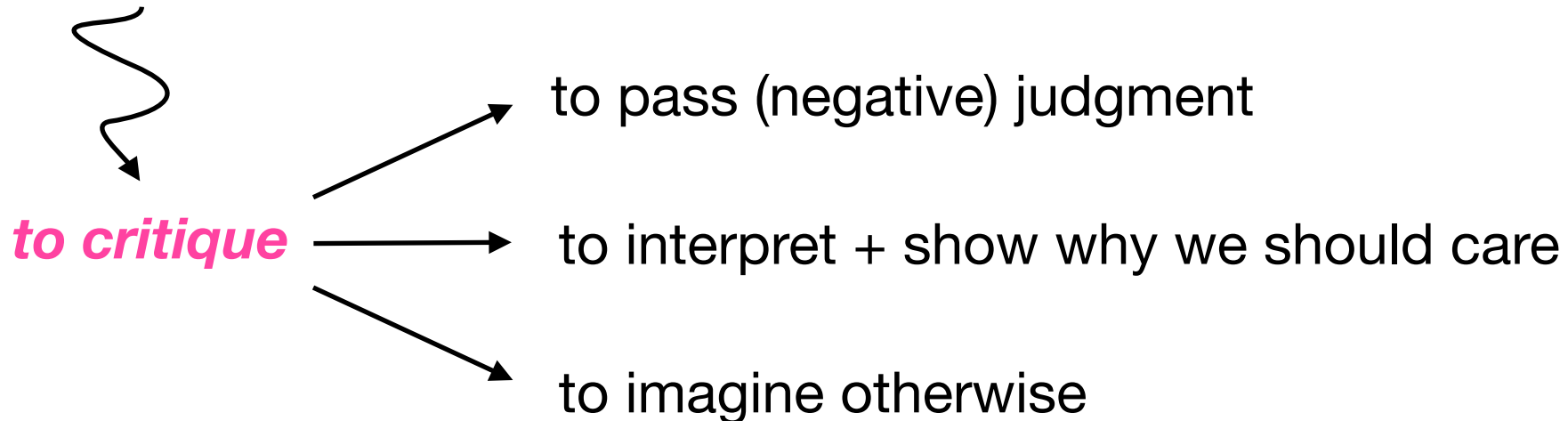
critical approaches to media

to critique → to pass (negative) judgment
→ to interpret + show why we should care

*critical studies of
race, gender, etc...*

critical theory traditional theory
& the Frankfurt School

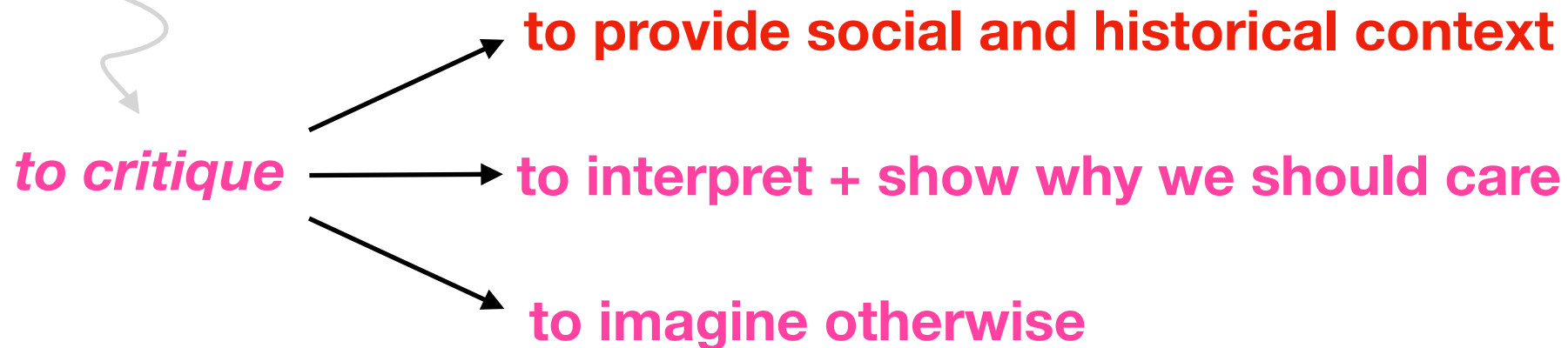
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critical approaches to media





Sara M. Watson
Independent tech critic

“Criticism leaves room for **interpretation, analysis, assessment, and more systematic inquiry**. Popular criticism seeks to question established and unexamined knowledge — the assumptions and positions taken for granted.”

— *Towards A Constructive Technology Criticism*
(2016: 19–20)

Media studies uses a diversity of methods

Archival and museum research

Early modern books

Ethnography of firms and workers

Content moderation, data training

Computational and audit methods

Algorithmic ranking, social media

Close formal analysis

Images and film

Production, consumption, interpretation!

Learn how to learn

What works for you? How do you read?

After this course you will be able to

DESCRIBE

The role of media

- Analog, digital, and otherwise
- Persuading, informing, entertaining, socializing

ANALYSE

Institutions and industries

- Organizational, financial and regulatory complexity

EVALUATE

Technological change

- What are its implications?

Reading, writing, speaking

READING

30 pages, at most

- In class and at home
- Quizzes on take-home reading

WRITING

5,000+ words

- One round of revision
- Check-ins and peer review

SPEAKING

Once per class

- First draft and oral peer review

Check-ins are graded for **effort and engagement**, not correctness.

5 minutes

WHERE WE ARE

0–15

Why should you take this class?

15–35

What are we trying to learn?

35–40

Break

40–60

**Class policies and
Gen AI use** ← up next

03

Class policies

Guidelines for Gen AI and classroom discussion

The short version

LATE WORK

No penalty, no comments

- Come to office hours instead

ACCESS

No documentation needed

- For accommodations or for absences

RECORDING

No social media

- Notes only, and not for public use

Attendance: speak once per class!

Where the points come from

25 pts

ATTENDANCE

One per class session.

30 + pts

CHECK-INS AND QUIZZES

About 20, graded ✓+ /
✓ / ✓-.

5 stages

FINAL PROJECT

1 slide pitch, first draft,
peer review, self-reflection,
final draft & video

No penalty, but no comments

✗ LATE

No grade penalty. No written comments either — the window for feedback has closed.

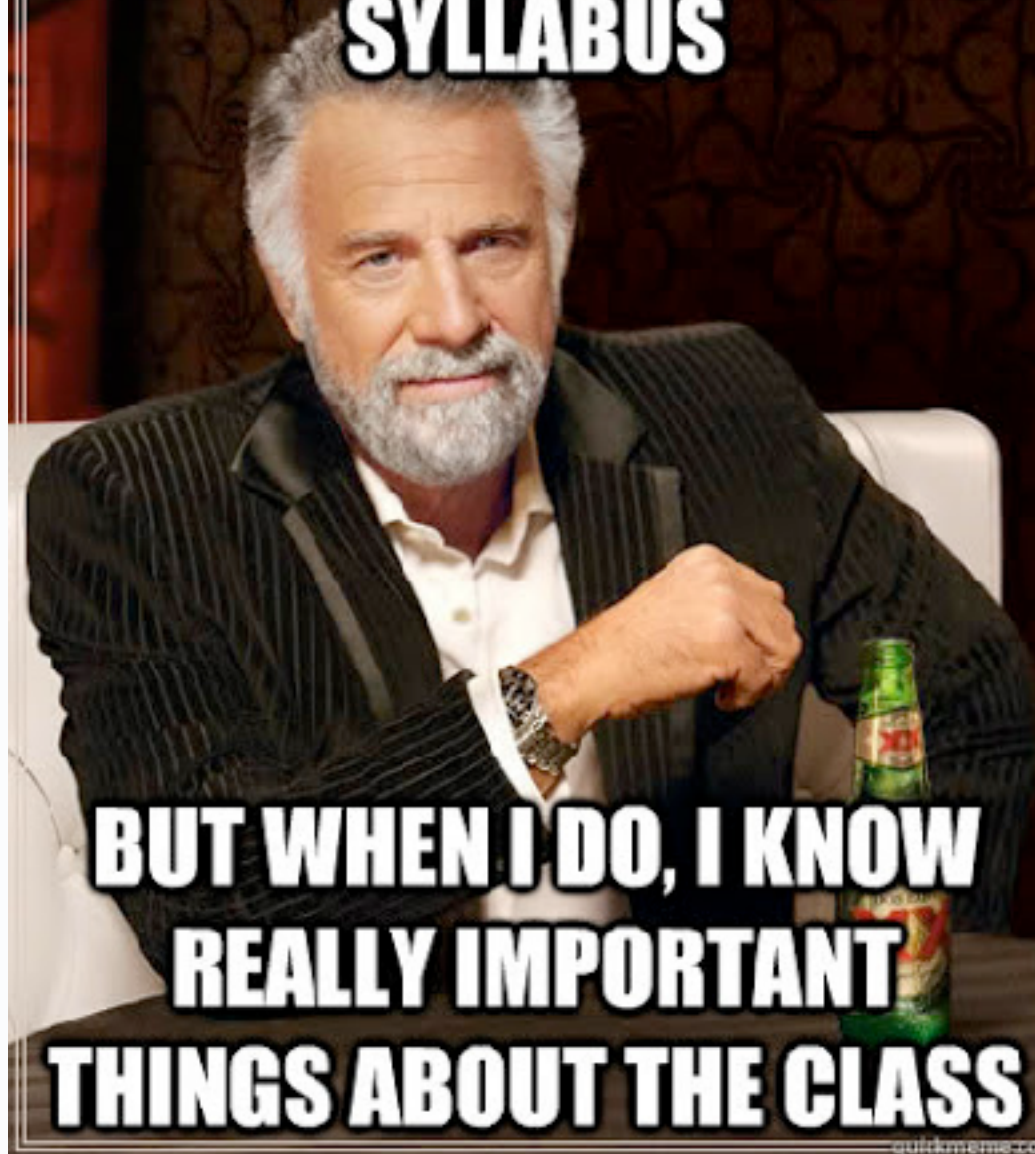
Office hours instead: we talk the assignment through.

✓ ON TIME

Thorough in-line comments on an editable file, in a block of time set aside for reading your work.

Reply in the document, then email so it is seen.

**I DON'T ALWAYS READ THE
SYLLABUS**

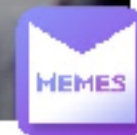


**BUT WHEN I DO, I KNOW
REALLY IMPORTANT
THINGS ABOUT THE CLASS**

Faculty when students read the syllabus



14e_ther



[Home](#)[Calendar](#)[Assignments](#)[How this class works](#)[Generative AI](#)[Course policies](#)[Community guidelines](#)[Resources](#)[Acknowledgements](#)

Introduction to Media Studies

CMS.100 · Fall 2026 · Wednesdays and Fridays

This course offers an overview of the social, cultural, political, and economic impact of mediated communication on modern culture. Media covered include the printed word, film, the internet, and digital technologies.

IMPORTANT

All course materials live here. Please check this site regularly: slides are posted here and the readings are subject to change. You will never get more reading than is listed on the [calendar](#); readings may be swapped for something of equivalent length or less. Always refer to this site — not a paper copy — for the most up-to-date readings and guidelines.

Learning objectives

After successfully completing the course, you will be able to:

- 1 Describe the role of media (analog, digital, and otherwise) in persuading, informing, entertaining, and socializing individuals and groups
- 2 Explain how we use and make meaning with media as part of everyday experience
- 3 Analyze the structure of media institutions / industries and differing systems of organization, funding, and regulation
- 4 Evaluate the implications of technological change and the interactions between humans and technologies

You will also apply these concepts to sharpen your writing and presentation skills, where you will critically analyze and assess the social and political implications of media and technology. Alongside smaller writing assignments, students will also produce a final project that reflects original data collection, research, and analysis.

05

Generative AI

Outright bans are ineffective and misguided...

But moving all writing into class is not the answer either.
Timed writing measures fluency under pressure, not
quality of thought.

Where this class stands

THE COSTS

- IP theft
- Environmental degradation

THE USES

- Menial, already-thought-through work
- A patient interlocutor

THE POSITION

- Neither inevitable nor ignorable

Gen AI is not a calculator but multiplication tables are still worth knowing!

MIT B2 — limited Gen AI use

x NOT ALLOWED

Producing full or substantial solutions to an assignment.

✓ ALLOWED

Support for learning, brainstorming, editing, debugging, and generating explanations.

Each assignment defines what “support” means for that assignment.

An analog classroom

No electronics

No laptops or tablets.

Carbonless notebooks

Reading responses / first drafts and no spyware

Hard copies of readings

In-class copies provided; take-home capped at 30 pages.

Check-ins

Open or closed book quizzes in rotating format

Two ways to take this class

With selected AI support

Each assignment names the stages where support is allowed.

Conscientious objector

A version of every assignment that is 0% AI.

Commitments

I will disclose my own AI use in class

Website creation, dates, etc.

I will never put your writing into an AI model

Similarly, I will never put your writing through any “AI detection” software.

All comments will be written 100% manually

There will be no summarization, no “check this essay for major weaknesses,” etc.

Gen AI skills will not be evaluated in this class.

No significant advantage to using it and it is entirely possible to do this entire class without AI

Four things to do

MIT Google account

Everything is shared to that address only!

A carbonless notebook

Please buy one before next class

Accommodations

Email as soon as possible — no documentation needed

Syllabus quiz!!

Read through the entire thing!

Pick a track

- 01 Would you like to use AI in this class, or take the 0% version?
- 02 What would you want it for *specifically in this class*?
- 03 What would you rather learn to do without it?

Don't forget to write your name!!!