

INTENSIVE STUDY OF NONFICTION COMICS
EXPLORING THE DIFFERENT PURPOSES OF
AND APPROACHES TO THEIR CREATION AND
APPLICATIONS. SETS THE STAGE FOR
PRODUCTION COURSE FOLLOWING TERM.

NICK SOUSANIS@sfsu.edu HUM 581
STUDENT HRS: M10-11; W11-12 OR APPT
M4-6:45 HUM581/COMICS LAB! (+ZOOM)

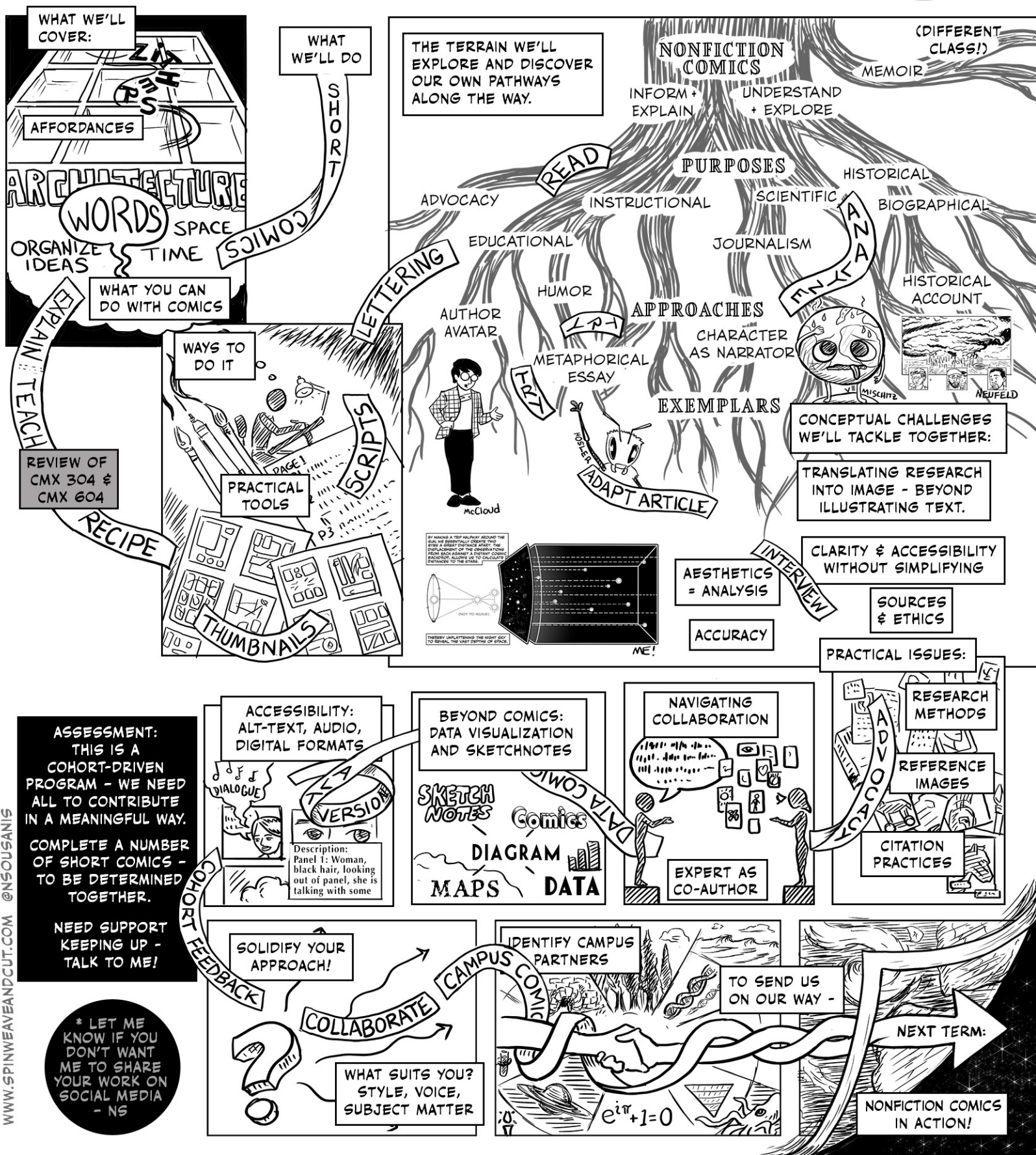


SAN FRANCISCO
STATE UNIVERSITY

CMX 650

The Affordances of Creative
Nonfiction Comics

NOTE: YOUR HEALTH, YOUR
LIVES ALWAYS COME FIRST.
DEADLINES ARE IMPORTANT
BECAUSE THEY KEEP THE
CONVERSATION MOVING,
BUT LIFE IS BIGGER, SO
THINGS ARE FLEXIBLE.
COMMUNICATE AND WE'LL
WORK IT OUT TOGETHER.



San Francisco State University: Liberal Studies
CMX 650 The Affordances of Creative Nonfiction Fall 2023

Class Meetings: M 4:00-6:45 HUM 581 [+ ZOOM]

Instructor: Nick Sousanis sousanis@sfsu.edu Office HUM 581

Student Hours: M 10-11; W 11-12 or by appointment (in-person or Zoom)

A Note about Now: Let me acknowledge to start off, current circumstances aren't quite normal, and our expectations must reflect that. As understanding as I typically am about deadlines and workload, I'm even more so now. Your health, your lives *should always* come first and we can work out solutions for whatever is going on (with a good channel of communication). I want to see the work we do together as helpful to what you are experiencing and not an added burden. This doesn't mean we won't work hard and that it won't be challenging, just that it serves you as something meaningful and relevant to find your own ways into it. Deadlines are important, because they allow us to keep the conversation moving and keep learning from one another, but life is bigger, always, and definitely now, so I'll remain flexible and we'll work it out together.

The course will be in person, but to continue to take care of each other may mean masking in indoor spaces, and we'll do our best with ventilation/filtration. If you're sick – please stay home and take care of yourself. I will be streaming the class on zoom and recording it, so even if you can't make it, you can tune in live or watch when you can to access what we did, and all the instructions and resources will be available on Canvas. The key in all of this is to reach out and let me know what's going on and what you need. As a teacher, I see my role as being there *to support you in where you are going*. With that said, on with what we'll do together...

Course Summary: Intensive study of nonfiction comics exploring the different purposes of and approaches to their creation and applications. Types of nonfiction comics explored include: historical, scientific, educational, biographical, informational, explanatory, instructional, and advocacy. Close analysis of nonfiction comics done in parallel with intensive practice, in which short nonfiction comics are produced. Specific topics include exploring research methods for comics, navigating artist-researcher collaborations, comics compositional theory, and best practices for communicating scientific and educational ideas.

This sets the stage for CMX 675 “The Lab: Nonfiction Comics in Action” in spring semester. That's part two of this cohort-driven program, a production lab in which the cohort produces comics for publication in collaboration with campus partners. We'll be finding our potential partners over the term.

A rough overview of what we'll cover:

- Affordances, theory review
 - We ask, what can you do with comics?
 - Composition, grid, architecture, simultaneity, image-text, zithers, ...
 - Our concern: How to organize ideas!
- Tools/Practical Concerns
 - How To Do It!
 - Thumbnails, layout, script work
- Analytical work
 - Visual annotations on nonfiction exemplars
 - Break down a composition, creator's choices, techniques
- What are Nonfiction Comics?
 - Types/Purposes of nonfiction:
 - Inform/Explain & Explore/Understand
 - Historical, scientific, educational, biographical, informational, explanatory, instructional, advocacy, journalism
 - Look at examples
 - Approaches: author avatar, character as narrator, narrative, humor, metaphorical essays, historical accounts, ...

- Look beyond comics for additional skills:
 - Data visualization/storytelling
 - Diagrams & Mapping
 - Sketchnotes
- Research methods/Concerns:
 - Translating research into image – beyond illustrating text
 - “Aesthetics equals analysis”
 - Emphasis on clarity and accessibility – without simplifying/dumbing down
 - What to leave in and what you can leave out for further reading
 - Sources, ethics
 - Getting it “right” vs. simplifying
 - Accuracy vs. Invention
- Practical Challenges:
 - Reference images
 - Citation practices
 - A lot to ask of a comics artist - how to balance it all
 - Why do comics work in some situations?
 - Accessibility across language barriers (see grass roots comics)
 - To bridge other kinds of communication barriers
 - How to be accessible/clear - but not dumbed down!
 - Navigating Collaboration
 - Expert as co-author
 - Practical – thumbnails, scripts, proposals
 - Accessibility
 - Audio description, alt-text, web/phone formats
- Assessment:
 - This is a cohort-driven program – we need all to contribute to class in a meaningful way
 - Complete a number of short comics – to be determined together.
 - Struggling to keep up? Talk to me - production-gearred course, so we have to make work
- Where all this leads!
 - Identify your preferred ways of working
 - What suits you?
 - Style, voice, subject matter
 - Identify Campus Partners (clients)
 - We’ll meet potential partners over the term. Explore who you might fit well with and who is interested in our work
 - We’ll know what a nonfiction comic is and how want to do it going forward – see part 2!

Potential Activities/Mini-projects

- How household thing works (i.e. toilet, etc) WEEK 1
- Recipe, Teach something
- Campus visits/1 page comic: global museum, herbarium, greenhouse, etc.
- Interview – 1 page comic with prof or someone on campus (staff/janitorial)
- Advocacy comic
- Minicomic for distribution
- Collaborative comic by cohort (let’s talk about this)
- Try – unusual perspective, Wordless explainer?
- Regular in-class, improv warmups
- Analysis/annotation activities
- Script work
- Rework scientific/research article in comics

- Educational materials
- Historical comic (campus)
- Collaborative improv - start in one student's voice/approach, continued by another/others
- Student-invented project! Give me your ideas for prompts!

Note: I frequently share examples of what we do in class on my educational website/social media. Please let me know if you *do not* want me to share any of your images.

Canvas: We will be using Canvas for this class. You can find resources and assistance online at the office of Academic Technology. You are automatically enrolled in Canvas for all of your courses registered at SFSU. *Academic Technology* website: <http://at.sfsu.edu> Canvas log-in page: <https://canvas.sfsu.edu/canvas>

Course Policies

Classroom approach: I consider learning as acquiring the tools to follow one's own curiosity, and thus teaching means providing a framework, establishing an environment for participants to explore and thrive. Rather than being out in front, I see my role as accompanying students on a journey we all make together. As a class, we all come from different backgrounds and offer distinct vantage points – we want to draw on all of them – to expand the possibilities for what we can all learn as we each find our own way. Hence, **Class participation** is essential! We learn in community, gain from each other's perspective. Let's be here, on time, and respect one another's point of view and discover what we can learn together. Class thrives on interaction, improvisational collaboration, so it's best if everyone is in attendance and on time. That said, in regards to my note at top – things can go awry. The main thing is to keep me posted on what's going on if you can't join in regularly – we can work with anything from a point of communication.

Late Assignments: Again, as above, I'd like to see deadlines observed or clear communication about missing them if necessary – conversations grow best when we're working together. But understanding, flexibility, and grace are essential now more than ever – so keep me updated as you can, and we can make it work.

Contact and Feedback: You are encouraged to visit me during student hours or make an appointment to discuss class, raise questions, or just check in. When emailing me, please use your "sfsu.edu" account when possible and put "CMX 650" and topic in the subject line so I am sure to address it more quickly.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in LCA will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email dprc@sfsu.edu.

University Policy on Sexual Harassment & Violence: SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; [SAFE Place website http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)

Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; [Counseling and Psychological Services Center website http://psyservs.sfsu.edu](http://psyservs.sfsu.edu)

For more information on your rights and available resources see: [Title IX at SF State http://titleix.sfsu.edu](http://titleix.sfsu.edu)