

# Course Outline: Technologies of Communication: A History of Reading from the Codex to the Kindle

## DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

*Note for students: This short course outline is provided for planning purposes only. Course information is tentative and subject to change; the final course syllabus will be available by the first day of classes.*

### Course Code

AH/HIST 4230 6.0 [cross-listed as AP/EN 4480] Technologies of Communication: A History of Reading from the Codex to the Kindle

### Course Description

We are all readers, but we rarely stop to analyze the objects that we read. Books and digital readers are far more than simply vehicles for transmitting text. These technologies of communication shape our everyday experience, but also offer lenses into the past and the future. This course surveys key scholarship from the “history of the book,” a field that has something to offer historians of any period.

This course explores the history of books and their readers from Antiquity to the present, with a strong emphasis on the early modern book as a material object. In taking a hands-on approach to reading and the technologies that have made it possible, we will investigate questions of intellectual property, literacy, print production, the author and his or her audience, and “the future of the book.”

### Course Delivery

Delivery Mode: SEMR

Course meetings will take place Tuesdays 11:30am-2:20pm. Many weeks we will have the privilege of meeting in the reading room of York’s Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections. Throughout the year we will make several other excursions to nearby archives and rare books collections. Regular in-person attendance is essential, but a zoom link can be provided in exceptional circumstances (e.g. extreme weather, illness).

Students will take turns leading in-class discussions, and over the course of the year they will write methodologically informed research papers drawing upon primary sources in local collections. Students are prohibited from using any form of generative AI in this course.

## Course Materials

All readings will be provided via eClass. Sample readings:

- Eisenstein, Elizabeth and Adrian Johns. "How revolutionary was the print revolution?: *AHR* Forum." *American Historical Review* 107.1 (February 2002): 84-128.
- Flint, Kate. "Reading Practices" in *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford UP, 1993), 187-249, selections.
- Gissing, George. *New Grub Street* (1891). Selections.
- Roper, G. "Faris al-Shidyah and the Transition from Scribal to Print Culture in the Middle East." *The Book in the Islamic World*. ed. G. Atiyeh. (SUNY Press, 1995), 209-232.

## Tentative Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
Participation and reading responses	20%	In-person and Online	All year
Discussion leader	10%	In-person	One course meeting
Two Written Assignments (4-5 pp. each)	20%	Take-home	Nov. 3, Dec. 1, 2026
Research essay (6 stages)	50%	Take-home with in-person peer review session	Feb. 9, Mar. 23, 2027
	<b>100%</b>		