

**Course:** *DMED 540: Visual Storytelling (3 credits)*

**Term:** Summer 2025

**Delivery Method:** In Person

**Instructor:** Dr. Rachel Ralph

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*Acknowledgement of Coast Salish Peoples and Land*

We respectfully acknowledge the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our campus resides.

### Course Description

In this course, you will practice how to use imagery to tell compelling stories and narrate ideas. Using contemporary and historical frameworks, explorations of story structures and narrative storytelling techniques will lead you towards production of multi-platform digital artifacts. At the end of this course, you will be able to think critically about the ethical and moral considerations of global and inclusive visual storytelling.

### Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

- Recognize and demonstrate a variety of storytelling methods and structures.
- Describe and choose the appropriate fundamentals of visual storytelling and story structure.
- Demonstrate various media communication techniques, including but not limited to image, text, sound, and video.
- Concept, design, edit, and produce stories, images, storyboards, short videos, AI and self-created interactive stories.

### Format of the course

This course adopts a flipped classroom model to maximize interactive learning and hands-on experience. Homework/prep will be assigned ahead of each class. It may include readings, films, series, writing, designing, etc. Details will be posted on canvas. In this approach, traditional lecture content is delivered outside of class time through various online resources, allowing in-class time to be dedicated to engaging activities, discussions, and practical application of concepts. It is expected that students will work on their assignments outside of class time. Classes will run **Tuesdays 4-7pm**.

### Required Readings

Selected materials (readings, podcasts, films, series, YouTube, etc.) will be posted into Canvas. Some cost may be associated with purchasing of course materials.

*Caution: This course involves content in films, series, games, books, and other media that may include mature themes. Viewer discretion is advised, and students are encouraged to be mindful of individual sensitivities. Any concerns regarding specific content can be discussed confidentially with the instructor. Please approach the material with respect for diverse perspectives and engage in open dialogue during class discussions and use your own discretion or voluntary decision-making power to decide to watch. If needed, you can access <https://www.sfu.ca/students/health/graduate-students.html> for additional support.*

## Schedule\*

Week	Topic	Assignments
<b>Story Structure</b>		
1 MAY 13	Introduction – Linear Storytelling	
2 MAY 20	Non-Linear Storytelling	Viewing Reflection Group 1
<b>Still</b>		
3 MAY 27	Scripts and Storyboards	Viewing Reflection Group 2
4 JUNE 3	Photography and Graphic Novels	Viewing Reflection Group 3 <b>Storyboards (Due 11:59pm)</b>
<b>Methods and Style</b>		
5 JUNE 10	Visual Elements	Viewing Reflection Group 4
6 JUNE 17	Field Trip (location TBD)	Viewing Reflection Group 5
7 JUNE 24	Visual AI & Audio Design	<b>Animatic (Due 11:59pm)</b>
8 JULY 1	NO CLASS (catch up on films/series)	
<b>Interactive Stories</b>		
9 JULY 8	Interactive Storytelling and Story Critique	
10 JULY 15		
11 JULY 22	Interactive Storytelling and Story Critique	
12 JULY 29	Interactive Story Prototype Day	<b>Interactive Story Prototype (Due 3:59pm)</b>
13 AUG 5	Final reflection	<b>Supplemental Materials (Due: 3:59pm)</b>

\*May be adapted as needed

*Due dates: Assignments granted an extension beyond the due date will have no extended comments; assignments handed in late without prior permission will be returned with a grade only, no comments, and 2% per day late, including weekends (i.e., 4% for Saturday and Sunday), deducted from the grade assigned to your paper. Assignments submitted after the assignment has been returned to the rest of the class will not normally be accepted.*

## Assignments (assignment details will be posted to canvas)

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
<b>Viewing Reflection</b> (pairs)	Ongoing	15
<b>Storyboard</b> (pairs/individual)	Week 4 (11:59pm)	15
<b>Animatic</b> (pairs/individual)	Week 7 (11:59pm)	15
<b>Interactive Story Prototype</b> (pairs/individual)	Week 12 (3:59pm)	30
<b>Supplemental Materials</b> (individual)	Week 13(3:59pm)	25

## Assignments in detail

Detailed rubrics will be posted to Canvas.

### 1. Viewing Reflection

In pairs, you will be responsible for leading the class through an experiential reflection activity based on one of the films provided. You will create a 30 minute in-class activity to lead the class through and moderate any activity or discussion.

**What to submit:** One page lesson plan, deck, references, handouts, etc., and division of teamwork. AI is allowed – please include in your list of references.

**Group 1:** *Last Night in Soho* (2021)

**Group 4:** *Moulin Rouge* (2001)

**Group 2:** *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (2004)

**Group 5:** *Parasite* (2019)

**Group 3:** *Spiderman: Across the Spiderverse* (2023)

### 2. Storyboard

Based on one of the stories you created in the class, you will create a storyboard to pitch this story. You do not need to be a great artist – *sketches are more than acceptable*. No AI allowed. Digital or non-digital storyboards are acceptable (scan non-digital storyboards to upload to Canvas). Templates will be available on Canvas.

**What to submit:** Thumbnail sketches, notes (composition, transitions, special effects, sound, title tracks – text, background colour, placement & size of graphic, fonts – colour, size, type, proposed dialogue/ narration, etc.), and division of teamwork.

*Recommended:* Toon Boom Storyboard software <https://www.toonboom.com/products/storyboard-pro>

### 3. Animatic

In this assignment, you will build upon the previously created storyboard (*Toon Boom Storyboard*) as a rough draft to help you refine the timing, action, and overall storytelling.

**What to submit:** Full animatic video and division of teamwork.

### 4. Interactive Story Prototype

Create an interactive story *prototype*. Use all the elements you have learned in class (*affinity, contrast, colour, image, graphics, text, sound, music, setting, costume, mood, tone, immersion, interactivity, story structure, etc.*). The story can be fantastical or realistic. Make an interactive story that you will *eventually* want on your portfolio (partially completed/prototype level (maybe some low-fi, some mid, some-high).)

**What to submit:** All assets (art, story/script, sketches, storyboards, etc.), source files, references, download link of your prototype, a screen recording of the full story, list of references (AI is allowed please cite), and division of teamwork.

### 5. Supplemental materials

*Individually*, you must submit a document reflecting on the interactive story prototype you created. Reflect on all elements discussed across the course (*ex. affinity, contrast, colour, image, graphics, text, sound, music, setting, costume, mood, tone, immersion, interactivity, story structure, etc.*). You can write this as a document or put it into a table for each category (examples will be posted on canvas).

**What to submit:** A document/PDF (written as a list or table) including screen shots and how you used the elements listed above.

### Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance is expected of students in all their classes (including participation, group work, tutorials, seminars, online etc.). Students who are unavoidably absent due to illness or disability should notify their instructors of their situation.

- Students are expected to attend every class on the schedule and be fully present. While sickness is sometimes inevitable, understand that due to the experiential nature of the material, *classes cannot be made up*.
- Lateness also informs grading. Classes start punctually every week according to the schedule. Instructions will not be repeated, nor will it be tolerated if a latecomer bothers another student for instructions. If arriving later than half an hour into a class, a student may be marked as absent. <https://www.sfu.ca/students/enrolment-services/policies-and-procedures/academic-concessions.html>

### Grading Profile

A+	95-100	Exemplary expectations
A	90-94	Exceeding expectations
A-	85-89	Meet expectations
B+	80-84	Approaching expectations
B	75-79	
B-	70-74	Below expectations
C	60-69	Far below expectations
F	0 – 59	Fail (Students must retake the course).

A student in a master's or doctoral program must maintain a CGPA of 3.0. Under no circumstances will a student whose CGPA is below 3.0, be awarded a graduate degree. <https://www.sfu.ca/students/advising-resources/calculators/gpa-calculator.html>

### Laptops & Cell Phones

The use of laptops and cell phones during class is at the discretion of the instructor. *Please respect your classmates and instructors and refrain from text messages, social media, games and videos during class and workshop times.* Please note you should always bring pen and paper to class.

### Written & Spoken English

English is the official language of the school, and all communication (written and spoken) is expected to be conducted in English. SFU and the MDM Program provide a wide range of free language support for those who need and it's up to each learner to seek that support.

### Accommodations

The university accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let your instructor know in advance, preferably the first week of class, if you will require any accommodations on these grounds.

The Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) will make every effort to assist students with disabilities so that they achieve their educational goals. <https://www.sfu.ca/students/accessible-learning/establishing-accommodations/accommodation.html>

### Academic Integrity: Your Work, Your Success

SFU's Academic Integrity website <http://www.sfu.ca/students/academicintegrity.html> is filled with information on what is meant by academic dishonesty, where you can find resources to help with your studies and the consequences of cheating. Each student is responsible for their conduct as it affects the university community. Academic

dishonesty, in whatever form, is ultimately destructive of the values of the university. Furthermore, it is unfair and discouraging to the majority of students who pursue their studies honestly. Scholarly integrity is required of all members of the university. <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html>

*Inappropriate use of technology in coursework*

If you are using generative AI to produce content that will be part of your graded work in the course, you must be transparent about the tools that you use. Undeclared use of the tool/technology will be considered a violation of the academic integrity policy. Be aware that any tool used will require you to evaluate the output for accuracies and be responsible for making the appropriate corrections.

**Graduate Studies Notes**

Important dates and deadlines for graduate students are found here: [http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/current/important\\_dates/guidelines.html](http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/current/important_dates/guidelines.html).

