

# Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210

Fall 2021—Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed



*Figure 1: My Fall Plans*



*Figure 2: The Delta Variant*

## Table of Contents

Tentative Schedule of All Assignments and Dates	3
Zoom Etiquette	7
About Quizzes	9
Discussion Posts Assignment	11
Some Paper Writing Tips	14
Economy Project	16
Rubric for Economy Project	18
Make Media Better Project	19
Rubric for Make Media Better Project	21
How to Give Feedback	22

**COMS 210**  
**Fall 2021 – Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed**  
**Tentative Schedule**

This schedule is subject to revision throughout the course. Changes will be announced on the announcements tool on MyCourses. Students are responsible for knowing and following the up-to-date schedule.

In general, lectures are on Wednesdays. Fridays are for other stuff like exploring alternatives, assignment descriptions, catch-up, the weekly bullshit, and quizzes.

**I recommend you do the assigned weekly readings for class on  
Tuesday (anytime) or Wednesday (morning) each week.**

**Orientations**

Learning goals: Explain the purpose and operation of the course, familiarize yourself with course routines, requirements and expectations. Explain the main features of media and communication and how they work, and how these differ from common sense understandings of media and communication. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

**1-3 Sep: O hai! You Have a Media Problem.**

Read the syllabus and the course guide for this week.

Wednesday: Intro lecture and intro to the class

Friday: what we learned from Covid, syllabus and course guide Q&A (additional), group exercise: Why Media?

**8-10 Sep: Media are Many Things**

Reading: Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler. *Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Labor, Data and Planetary Resources*. Artificial Intelligence Now, 2018, <https://anatomyof.ai>.

Wednesday: AI lecture and Q&A. **Discussion post due after class.**

Friday: Introduction to bullshit. Alternative approaches to AI.

**15-17 Sep: Communication is Many Things**

Reading: Stuart Hall. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-9*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis. London: Hutchinson, 1980, 128-38.

Recommended:<sup>1</sup>

Stuart Hall, "Reflections upon the Encoding/Decoding Model: An Interview with Stuart Hall."

---

<sup>1</sup> A recommended reading will not be "on the test" but may help you understand the week's material.

*Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*, eds. Jon Cruz and Justin Lewis. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, 252-274 (some relevant sections have been highlighted with blue markings; don't worry about the rest unless you're curious)

Wednesday: Encoding/Decoding lecture and Q&A. **Discussion post due after class.**

Friday: Struggles over meaning exercise; explanation of quiz format and a couple practice questions to get you started.

### **22-24 Sep: Technologies Do Not Act Alone**

**22 Sep:** Ruha Benjamin, "Introduction: The New Jim Code," *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, 1-32. **Discussion post due after class.**

**24 Sep:** Quiz 1 review. **Quiz 1 opens around 2pm (whenever we finish)**

### **Economy Unit**

Learning goals: Explain the main economic principles according to which media systems and institutions work, and with what consequences for whom. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

### **29 Sep-1 October: Media Capitalism 101**

Shoshana Zuboff (2019) "Home or Exile in the Digital Future," *Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: Public Affairs, 1-24.

Robert McChesney (2018). "Between Cambridge and Palo Alto," *Catalyst*, 2, no. 1. <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol2/no1/between-cambridge-and-palo-alto>.

Wednesday: Media Capitalism Lecture and Q&A. **Discussion post due after class.**

Friday: Introducing the Economy Project.

### **6-8 Oct: Labo(u)r, Data**

Lisa Nakamura, "Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture." *American Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2014, pp. 919-41.

Tarleton Gillespie, "The Human Labor of Moderation," *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms: Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018, 111-140.

Wednesday: Labour Lecture and Q&A. **Discussion post due after class.**

Friday: **OMG McGill actually has a fall break this year! On the theory that people are going to try and extend the break and head out on Friday, I am giving you the day off. (The TAs and I are also off.) Yay, us!**

### **13-15 Oct: Woo-hoo!**

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during the term and will be announced in the announcements. 4

Wednesday: OMG McGill actually has a fall break this year! No class.

Friday: No class. It's Tuesday today. See the "makeup days" on the class schedule here: <https://www.mcgill.ca/importantdates/key-dates>

### **20-22 Oct: Data**

Joana Radin, "Digital Natives: How Medical and Indigenous Histories Matter for Big Data." *Osiris* 32 (2017): 43-64.

Wednesday: Data Lecture and Q&A. Discussion post due after class.

Friday: Data resistance.

### **27-29 Oct: Commodities**

Siva Vaidhyanathan, "Introduction," *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity*. New York: NYU Press, 2001, 1-17.

Wednesday: Commodities lecture and Q&A. Discussion post due after class.

28 October, 11:30pm Montreal time: Economy Project due by 11:30pm.

29 Oct: Quiz 2

## **Ecology + Technology**

Learning goals: Explain technological scripts, as well as the components of a technological system. Explain the ecological impact of the manufacture, use, and disposal of media technologies (including things that don't seem "technological" like paper or cotton). Advance a cogent position on how our media system can be improved. Additionally, you should be able to summarize each author's main arguments, distinguish them from arguments that the authors rehearse and dismiss, and provide accurate definitions of the key terms they use.

### **3-5 Nov: Design vs Practice**

Madeleine Akrich, "The De-Description of Technical Objects," in *Shaping Technology, Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe Bijker and J. Law. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, 205-24.

Wednesday: Lecture and Q&A. Discussion post due after class.

Friday: De-description practice; introducing the Make Media Better project.

4 Nov, 11:30pm Montreal time: No-penalty extension deadline for Economy Project.

### **10-12 Nov: Corporations**

Kyle Devine, "Data," *Decomposed: The Political Ecology of Music*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019, 129-164.

Weds: Lecture and Q&A. Discussion post due after class.

Friday: Corporations, PR and the environment.

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during the term and will be announced in the announcements. 5

### **17-19 Nov: Consumers**

Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, "Consumers," *Greening the Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 22-41.

Weds: Lecture and Q&A. **Discussion post due after class.**

Friday: Imagining alternatives.

### **24-26 Nov: Acting**

Suzanne Kite in dialogue with Corey Stover, Melita Stover Janis, and Scott Benesiinaabaandan, "How to Build Anything Ethically." In *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper*, ed. Jason Lewis, 75-84. Honolulu, Hawai'i: The Initiative for Indigenous Futures and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR).

[https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986506/7/Indigenous\\_Protocol\\_and\\_AI\\_2020.pdf](https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986506/7/Indigenous_Protocol_and_AI_2020.pdf)

Erik Olin Wright How to be an Anticapitalist Today <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/>

Wednesday: Lecture and Q&A. **Discussion post due after class.**

Friday: Extra office hours for the Make Media Better Project

**30 Nov 11:30pm Montreal time: Make Media Better Assignment Due.**

### **1-3 Dec: Revisiting, Consolidating**

Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler. *Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Labor, Data and Planetary Resources*. Artificial Intelligence Now, 2018, <https://anatomyof.ai>. (Yes! Read it *again*.) **Discussion post due after class.**

**3 Dec: Quiz 3**

**6 Dec 11:30pm Montreal time: No-penalty extension deadline for Make Media Better Assignment.**

--

**9 Dec: Optional Quiz 4 (covers all units, you will have a 24-hour window to take the quiz).**

## **Zoom Etiquette**

COMS 210—Fall 2021 Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed

These are not normal times. We'll be learning online not because we chose to, but to protect ourselves and others from a deadly virus. The guidelines below will help us approach the online classroom as a space of mutual generosity, playfulness, and intellectual community.

### **Zoom Class Decorum:**

The standard rule is: Don't do anything you wouldn't normally do in a classroom.

Let's start with the positive stuff: listen actively, ask questions when you don't understand, or when you do understand and want to know more; affirm your classmates' ideas when you agree with them or are engaged by them; thank people and acknowledge them. BE KIND, make it the kind of hospitable space you'd like to inhabit.

Now the negatives: In short, don't check your email; talk to friends via phone, apps, or text messaging; play video games; leave the room; surf the web; or interrupt the class in any other way. Don't share a Zoom link with anyone in the same way as you wouldn't bring anyone to a real-life classroom.

Keep your mic muted unless you are called on. We welcome your face on camera, and we especially welcome pet Zoombombing. If you do not want to have your camera on, please choose a profile picture so we are not looking at a bunch of empty squares.

Discussion guidelines are the same as an in-person class. Do not interrupt class by veering off topic. For instance, if we are discussing an assigned reading, don't blurt out a question about an assignment. The same goes for the chat.

### **Participation on Zoom:**

When you wish to talk, use the "raise hand" feature on Zoom and unmute yourself once you're invited to speak. Don't unmute yourself while the professor or other classmates are talking. Instead, use the chat box to make comments or ask questions. While reading, watching, and listening in class, take notes on what's significant and warrants further discussion.

When you are finished speaking, finish with "and that's my thought" or "and that's my question." That way, everyone else knows you are done and we will minimize interruptions.

### **Zoom fatigue**

Zoom fatigue is real. Scholars argue that that being on a video call requires more focus than a face-to-face conversation. Another main cause of Zoom fatigue is sound. Basically, because our computers don't let us hear our own voices, we tend to yell at them.

We can mitigate Zoom fatigue by taking breaks, limiting our screen time, and switching to other media.

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during the term and will be announced in the announcements. 7

For this class, we have elected to use the full time, on the assumption that students will have other offline activities this term. However, we will install frequent breaks.

**Troubleshooting:**

If you lose internet connectivity during class, don't panic. Just reboot your computer, and/or your router. Classes will be recorded so you can always catch up after.

## About Quizzes

COMS 210—Fall 2021 Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed

**Purpose:** Quizzes give you a compelling reason to keep up with the material, and make sure you know it before moving on to the next section of the course.

For this reason, we test for comprehension, not recognition.

### How Quizzes Work:

Quizzes will go “live” on a Friday at the end of a unit for 24 hours. Each quiz will be timed, and you will have to complete the quiz within the allotted time. You will be able to go back and change your answers, but the quiz will not tell you the right answer since others might be taking the quiz after you. Please come visit the prof in office hours to go over your quiz if you’d like to.

### What’s On the Quiz:

All the required readings, and all the lectures and discussions from a given unit. Additionally, we may ask one or two questions from previous units.

### What We Recommend:

Study for quizzes like you would any other quiz. You might want to create a study sheet or guide so you don’t have to look everything up. Make sure you can define terms, make sure you understand authors’ main arguments, and make sure you understand the difference between those arguments and other positions authors consider, as well as the positions advanced by other authors.

### How We Write Questions:

The question should address an important concept, fact or example covered in lecture or readings. We don’t want to test on trivialities. The question should have a single, clear, correct answer. Concepts, arguments, positions, implications are important. Names and dates are less important.

The question stem (which is the question part of the question) should do most of the work, most of the time. Most of the ideas in the question should be contained in the stem, so that students can easily compare the different answers and judge for themselves. A good question stem always explicitly attributes ideas to a source, either an author by last name (“According to Hall,”) or the lecture (“According to lecture.”).

Some sources for wrong answers:

- an argument the author rehearses and then dismisses
- a claim that is the opposite of what the author argues
- a claim made by a different author on a related topic
- a true statement from the reading, but one irrelevant to the question

### Why it works this way:

In the humanities and interpretive social sciences, our currency is ideas and debate, as well as historical and cultural materials. Therefore, it is important to understand who made what argument, how it relates to other arguments that author made, and how that author's line or argument relates to what others have said on the same issue.

**Our tests are not tests of logic or of your opinion. They simply test your comprehension of the materials.** You therefore could *disagree* with a correct answer. This is a feature, not a bug.

### The anatomy of a question (this is an old question for a reading I didn't assign this year):

According to lecture (and Peters), what motivates the drive toward communication?

- a. Miscommunication.
- b. The drive for profit.
- c. Encoding and decoding.
- d. Cute puppies.

The question stem begins with "according to" and clearly attributes the idea.

"A" is correct. As the Peters essay states, "miscommunication is the scandal that motivates the very concept communication in the first place." (Peters, p. 6). Also the lecture refers to the technical and therapeutic discourses of communication, where communication is both the problem and the solution. The prof's Jean Charest and Twitter example illustrated this point.

B is wrong because Peters doesn't really talk about the profit motive (though it's a great wrong answer because later in the term, several other authors will discuss it).

C refers to concepts in the Hall reading.

D is *hilarious*. But it also has a serious purpose in this case. It illustrates how multiple-choice exams aren't tests of opinion. In *your* life, cute puppies may drive you to communicate (and therefore the example may be experientially true), they weren't mentioned in the Peters reading or the lecture on it as a reason for communication.

## **Discussion Post Assignment**

COMS 210—Fall 2021 Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed

**Discussion Posts:** [10%] By 6pm (Montreal time) Wednesday of most weeks, you will make a post in the relevant class discussion board on MyCourses (each week has a different board). The post should discuss something from the lecture or readings. Responses can be a question about something you don't understand, a request for information, a challenge to a point made in the readings, or a response to another student's post (but it must substantially engage with the readings or lecture). Another option will be to write a multiple-choice question. Responses will be graded pass (1)/fail (0) and your two lowest marks will be dropped.

### **Dates Due:**

Discussion posts are due by Wednesdays after lectures, 6pm Montreal time. If you need to submit later because of class or work, we will not mark down submissions received any time on Wednesday. You do not need to email us for an extension. Specific due dates are listed above.

**Your discussion post must address the reading and/or lecture for that week.** If you submit a question on a lecture or reading not assigned for the given week, it will not earn credit.

1. You could submit a question on the lecture or reading from the week. It could be something you don't understand, or it could be something you want to know more about.
2. You could engage with something an author said or something I said in lecture.
3. You could respond to something another student wrote.
4. You could write a multiple-choice question on the lecture or the reading.
5. Once a term, you could submit something to the Ask Me Anything board for credit (additional submissions are welcome but will not be given credit).

### **Where and what to submit:**

You should make a post on the week's discussion board. Your post should have a title, and ideally you will simply paste in text into the body of the post. However, you may attach a .doc, .docx, or .pdf if you are having trouble pasting.

### **How to ask a question:**

Questions are short written responses intended to ensure that students engage with the readings and lecture (we know you have to prioritize!), and so we can know what people are focusing on, and where they might be stuck.

Questions are supposed to be short. 3-4 sentences is sufficient as long as you can demonstrate you've read and thought about the piece, and/or listened thoughtfully to the lecture. Nothing over approximately 150 words.

Here are some of the topics you might cover in your questions, depending on how well you feel you understood the material:

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during 11 the term and will be announced in the announcements.

→Were there any topics in particular that confused you? *What about them was confusing?* References to specific page numbers, or terms in the lecture, would be helpful. It's normal to be confused. Even your prof often has questions on a first reading of something. Contrary to a common anxiety, questions actually make you look smart—even basic ones.

→Did you find anything (an argument, a concept, a detail, an example) particularly interesting or exciting? Is there something you would like to hear more about? Or are there questions it raised for you? References to specific page numbers, or terms in the lecture, would be helpful.

### **An example of a question:**

On page 23 of the Stuart Hall reading, he's talking about images of sweaters. I get what he means by denotative meaning, but what is he saying about connotative meaning? It seems to be about interpretation, but then is it just *any* interpretation? His examples of connotation don't seem to have much to do with one another; why are they important?"

Bam: 71 words.

### **Want to try your hand at writing a multiple choice question? Here is the recipe:**

Your question should consist of a question stem and 4 possible answers (only one of which is correct), with the correct answer clearly indicated. For more on multiple choice, please also see the "About Quizzes" chapter immediately above this one.

1. The question should address an important concept, fact or example covered in lecture or readings. We don't want to test on trivialities. The question should have a single, clear, correct answer.
2. The question stem should do most of the work, most of the time. Most of the ideas in the question should be contained in the stem, so that students can easily compare the different answers and judge for themselves. A good question stem always explicitly attributes ideas to a source, either an author by last name ("According to Hall,") or the lecture ("According to lecture.").

The answers should all be roughly of the same length. Shorter is better, but over a quiz I intentionally vary the length

The right answer should be clearly right. For the purposes of the assignment, always make the right answer option A. If we use your question, we will scramble the answers.

A good exam question tests for comprehension, not recognition. A bad exam question can be answered simply by recognition (where the right answer is something you've seen or heard before and the wrong answers are obviously wrong).

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during 12 the term and will be announced in the announcements.

**Evaluation:**

Responses will be graded pass (1)/fail (0) and your two lowest marks will be dropped. A passing response shows serious engagement with the course. A failing one does not (or is not submitted).

**Feedback:**

No additional feedback is provided on the discussion post, however students are strongly encouraged to meet with a TA if they are trying hard and not scoring well on the assignment.

## Some Paper Writing Tips

COMS 210—Fall 2021 Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed

0. Revised papers *always* read better than first drafts. There are no exceptions to this rule. Deciding on your topic early, writing a “bad” first draft, and leaving time for substantial revision is probably the best thing you can do for your essay grade. Revision is the key to success. Everything you read for this class has been revised many times before it reached you.

1. Speaking of office hours, come see your prof and TA. We can help with everything from brainstorming to organization. We do not, however, copyedit, proofread or offer preliminary grades.

2. Make sure you do everything the assignment tells you to do. Students often lose points simply for not doing everything on the assignment sheet.

3. Don't just tell us, show us: explain your thinking in clear detail. Remember that we can only grade you based upon what you put in your paper. We can't guess what you're thinking.

4. Use specific concepts from the readings (and the lecture if you wish). Directly citing material from lecture and readings will help you connect the ideas in your paper to the ideas we've discussed in class. Also, be specific in your claims. For instance, rather than using a big term like "society," find a more specific term to use.

5. Don't let quotes “speak for themselves.” When you cite something, be sure to tell us what it means and how it links up with your argument. Don't just drop a name or a concept.

6. Use a recognized citation style: APA, MLA, or Chicago (Chicago with footnotes is the prof's favorite, for what it's worth).

You can now view most of the Chicago Manual of Style online if you are logged in from campus or using a VPN if off campus:

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/home.html>

There are also many online guides to source citation. For instance, try

<https://library.duke.edu/research/citing/>

7. If you cite a lecture, you can just cite it thus: (Lecture 8 September). If you're using notes instead of parentheticals, just put the list it as "Lecture 8 September " in your notes.

8. Check out the wonderful resources at the Purdue Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.purdue.edu>

9. Once you have your paper written, look at each paragraph and ask yourself "so what?" Think about why this might matter to someone who's not enrolled in the course. Put the answer in as the topic sentence of your paragraph and adjust the rest of the paragraph accordingly.

10. A simple way to proofread your paper: read it out loud to yourself. If a sentence sounds

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during 14  
the term and will be announced in the announcements.

funny, it probably needs to be reworded or rewritten. Some students will make the mistake of trying to sound “academic” by putting in too much passive voice or using words without looking them up—both these techniques make your paper harder to read, not easier.

11. Often the best ideas in first drafts come at the end of paragraphs. During revision, put your most important ideas at the top of each paragraph; use the rest of the paragraph to back up your assertion.

12. Remember that fulfilling the minimal requirements for the paper will result in a C grade. Doing a decent job gets you a B grade. If you want to go for an "A", you need to go above and beyond meeting the requirements of the assignment.

13. If you have fun with this assignment, it's more likely that we'll enjoy reading it. This is a bigger deal than you might think.

14. You can use the Writing Centre for paper help as well. Appointments are required, so plan ahead. <https://www.mcgill.ca/mwc/>

15. The Arts Undergrad Society also has an essay centre. [www.ausmcgill.com/en/aus-essay-centre/](http://www.ausmcgill.com/en/aus-essay-centre/)

Email: [aus.essay.centre@gmail.com](mailto:aus.essay.centre@gmail.com)

**The Economy Project (25% of semester grade)**  
COMS 210—Fall 2021 Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed

**Purpose:** For you to 1) demonstrate an understanding of key concepts from the readings and lectures for the first two sections of the course; 2) to apply those concepts to something in the real world, 3) to spur discussion of and reflection on concepts in the course, and 4) to foster collective ownership of the learning process (and, give you a chance to get to know some of your classmates).

**Deadline:** 28 October 2021, 11:30pm Montreal time; no-grade-penalty late submission deadline is 4 November, 11:30pm. After the deadline, we will no longer discuss papers in progress, but students can submit up to a week late with no penalty. Submit it under “assignments” in MyCourses.

**This project may be done individually or in groups of up to 3 people; it is entirely up to you.** If you submit a group project, the requirements are exactly the same (length, rubric, etc.) except you will all will receive a grade for a single submission. Since group work is optional, we will not solve problems in groups. Keep your own backup of everything in case someone gets sick or something goes wrong.

**What you are analyzing:** you will be applying concepts from the course to a media artifact from 2021. Your “artifact” could be a specific object like someone’s phone or video game controller, or a media text (an episode of a TV show, a TikTok video, a song, a game), or it could be a specific event, like a sporting event. We will explain this further in class, and provide a nonexclusive pre-approved list of artifacts, but are encouraged to choose others. We strongly recommend checking with your prof or TA to be sure your chosen artifact is specific enough and will work for the course.

**Your task:** write a paper of about 3 pages (800 words—it may be a little shorter or longer, we’re not keeping a tight count).

**Step 1:** Your paper should answer one or more of the following questions: at what stages (and how) is money made in the making and circulation of your media artifact (or at what stages are people trying and failing to make money)? What kinds of labour, paid and unpaid, are involved in making and circulating it? Are there efforts on the part of the makers to conceal or devalue the labour involved? Who does the work vs. who makes the money? What aspects of your artifact are treated as commodities, and what aspects are not? Are there aspects of your artifact that are designed to reduce the possibility of market competition?

**Step 2:** Once you have developed a hypothesis about the economics of your artifact, explain why it matters. Answer one of these questions: do the economic aspects of your artifact enhance or reduce inequality? In what ways? If the artifact was made for profit, how might it be different if it were not-for-profit? If it was made not-for-profit, how would it be different if it was made for profit? Or is the salient economic issue big business vs. small business?

Your Extremely Complete Guide to COMS 210 – revised 7 Sep; revisions may appear during 16 the term and will be announced in the announcements.

**Step 3:** Apply a concept from the readings or lectures from the first two units to an aspect of the media artifact. Explain how the artifact elucidates the idea from the readings or lectures, or how the idea from the readings or lecture explains something important about the artifact. The concept here should match up well with the kinds of questions you address in Step 1. Another way to think about it is: what would your author say about the artifact, and what would you say back to them in reply? Note: if you can't seem to find a good connection between your artifact and the lectures and readings, that's a sign it's not a good artifact.

**Step 4:** Great, now: so what? You're explaining the project to someone not in the class—a parent, a friend, a pet who has magically acquired the power of language. Why does any of this matter? What do we know that we didn't before, or what questions should we be asking about media that we weren't asking before? Your answer to this question is something like a thesis statement, and ideally, once you have it, you can use it to structure the whole paper (note: we do not actually need formal thesis statements in the paper!).

**Papers should ideally be written in an integrative fashion: the first three steps can be done at once, and the writing should reflect a good presentation of your ideas, rather than the order in which you did your work. The discussions in each step can build on, develop, and reinforce the others.**

Pages should be numbered, and your name should appear in the upper right-hand corner. It should be 12-point font (just don't pick anything too weird), and 1" margins. You can use any known citation style. The paper will be submitted via the assignment page in MyCourses.

**You are welcome to submit in a medium other than writing (video, audio recording, etc.).** The criteria for the assignment are the same regardless of medium, so a video project or infographic will be evaluated according to the same criteria as a written project. We recommend you come see one of us if you're planning to do something other than a written paper. We love creative proposals as long as they're also do-able.

**Evaluation and Feedback:** projects will be graded according to a rubric and earn a score between 0-100%. We will share the rubric with you beforehand. For more extended comments and suggestions for doing better next time, please come see the person who graded your project (their initials will be on the rubric). We are happy to talk with you about your writing!

## Economy Project Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Who's grading? \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>A (85)</b>	<b>B (70)</b>	<b>C (55)</b>	<b>D (40)</b>
<b>Use of Course Material</b>	Applies course material in a really thoughtful or original manner, gets to fundamental intellectual issues in the question.	Clearly uses at least one major idea from one of the designated readings or lectures and uses it correctly. Shows that you know your stuff.	Clearly uses course material but incorrectly or in a cursory fashion (for instance, merely mentions something without using it).	Doesn't show any significant engagement with course material. Or major errors with more than one concept or lots of small or repeated errors.
<b>Quality of Answer</b>	Particularly original, thorough, insightful or cogent answer.	Fulfills the assignment satisfactorily. Answers one or more of the questions well; ideally in an integrated fashion.	Addresses the assignment, but not fully or not in a manner appropriate to the assignment. Claims are unclear, undersupported or underdeveloped.	Does not fulfill a major component of the assignment or otherwise fails to respond to the questions.
<b>Quality of Writing (Multimedia materials will be judged on an analogous basis.)</b>	Easy and fun to read. Really well written.	Readable, concise, and clear. Could have one or two small improvements.	Problems with clarity, presentation, language use or proofreading.	Not appropriate for university-level writing; problems in more than two areas or major problems in one.

**Extra Credit Justification:**

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Your total score is the average of your three category scores. Up to 5 points extra credit can be given for something cool students do that we don't anticipate in the rubric above, based on the grader's discretion. Extra credit is only for "above and beyond." Truly exceptional papers will be considered for scores of 95 or 100.

**The Make Media Better Project (25% of semester grade)**  
COMS 210—Fall 2021 Covid Edition Mark ][ #getvaxxed

**Purpose:** For you to 1) demonstrate an understanding of key concepts from the readings and lectures for the third section of the course; 2) to apply those concepts to something in the real world, 3) to spur discussion of and reflection on concepts in the course, and 4) to foster collective ownership of the learning process (and, give you a chance to get to know some of your classmates).

**Deadline:** 30 November 2021, 11:30pm Montreal time; no-grade-penalty late submission deadline is 6 December 2021, 11:30pm Montreal time. After the deadline, we will no longer discuss papers in progress, but students can submit up to a week late with no penalty. Submit it under “assignments” in MyCourses.

**This project may be done individually or in groups of up to 3 people;** same as the economy project.

**What You Will Be Analyzing:** A problem with a particular technology, practice, or system. Based on what you learned in this class, what is one thing you (individually or collectively) can do to make media better? Make it as concrete as possible: is there a law or policy the government could enact? If so, how would you get them to do that? Is there something specific that an organization of people could do collectively? Is there a campaign you would launch? A new tool or technique? A redesign of something? A rule or best practice that companies should follow? A design principle? An environmental or process test they should have to pass? Is there something you personally want to do in your life? Don't try to fix or change everything. Make it *just one thing*. But also: think collectively. Changing just yourself isn't going to fix the world.

**Your task:** write a paper of about 3 pages (800 words—it may be a little shorter or longer, we're not keeping a tight count).

**Step 1:** Identify the register at which you will intervene and the problem. Are you going to try to change the way something is done? Reduce the carbon footprint of some practice or technology? Stop a company from collecting data in a certain way? What are you writing against? What do you want to change?

**Step 2:** Explain your proposed change, action or solution. How does it mitigate, resolve, challenge, or transform the problem you've identified? Why is it a particularly good or attractive solution? What obstacles might you encounter? What would you do about them?

**Step 3:** Apply a concept from the readings or lectures. Explain how your solution or proposed plan of action elucidates and build on the idea from the readings or lectures, or how the idea from the readings or lecture explains something important about what you're doing. The concept here should match up well with the kinds of questions you address in Steps 1 and 2. Another way to think about it is: what would your author say about what you're proposing, and

what would you say back to them in reply? Note: if you can't seem to find a good connection between your idea and the lectures and readings, that's a sign it's not a good choice for the paper.

**Step 4:** Great, now: so what? You're explaining the project to someone not in the class—a parent, a friend, a pet who has magically acquired the power of language. Why does any of this matter? Some ways to answer this question could include: how does your proposal fit in with broader problems or other attempts to transform our media environment for the better? What do we know that we didn't before, or what questions should we be asking about media that we weren't asking before. Your answer to this question is something like a thesis statement, and ideally, once you have it, you can use it to structure the whole paper (note: we do not actually need formal thesis statements in the paper!).

**NOTE:** You could conceivably also begin with step 3, where the author identifies a problem or issue, or where you were inspired by an activist, artistic, or political action that we covered. From there steps 1 and 2 might be even easier.

**Papers should ideally be written in an integrative fashion: the first three steps can be done at once, and the writing should reflect a good presentation of your ideas, rather than the order in which you did your work. The discussions in each step can build on, develop, and reinforce the others.**

Pages should be numbered, and your name should appear in the upper right-hand corner. It should be 12-point font (just don't pick anything too weird), and 1" margins. You can use any known citation style. The paper will be submitted via the assignment page in MyCourses.

**You are welcome to submit in a medium other than writing (video, audio recording, etc.).** The criteria for the assignment are the same regardless of medium, so a video project or infographic will be evaluated according to the same criteria as a written project. We recommend you come see one of us if you're planning to do something other than a written paper. We love creative proposals as long as they're also do-able.

**Evaluation and Feedback:** projects will be graded according to a rubric and earn a score between 0-100%. We will share the rubric with you beforehand. For more extended comments and suggestions for doing better next time, please come see the person who graded your project (their initials will be on the rubric). We are happy to talk with you about your writing!

## Make Media Better Project Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Who's grading? \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>A (85)</b>	<b>B (70)</b>	<b>C (55)</b>	<b>D (40)</b>
<b>Use of Course Material</b>	Applies course material in a really thoughtful or original manner, gets to fundamental intellectual issues in the question.	Clearly uses at least one major idea from one of the designated readings or lectures and uses it correctly. Shows that you know your stuff.	Clearly uses course material but incorrectly or in a cursory fashion (for instance, merely mentions something without using it).	Doesn't show any significant engagement with course material. Or major errors with more than one concept or lots of small or repeated errors.
<b>Quality of Answer</b>	Particularly original, thorough, insightful or cogent answer.	Fulfills the assignment satisfactorily. Answers one or more of the questions well; ideally in an integrated fashion.	Addresses the assignment, but not fully or not in a manner appropriate to the assignment. Claims are unclear, undersupported or underdeveloped.	Does not fulfill a major component of the assignment or otherwise fails to respond to the questions.
<b>Quality of Writing (Multimedia materials will be judged on an analogous basis.)</b>	Easy and fun to read. Really well written.	Readable, concise, and clear. Could have one or two small improvements.	Problems with clarity, presentation, language use or proofreading.	Not appropriate for university-level writing; problems in more than two areas or major problems in one.

### Extra Credit Justification:

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Your total score is the average of your three category scores. Up to 5 points extra credit can be given for something cool students do that we don't anticipate in the rubric above, based on the grader's discretion. Extra credit is only for "above and beyond." Truly exceptional papers will be considered for scores of 95 or 100.

## Peer Feedback Form

We will provide a mechanism for peer feedback on drafts of papers, for those who want that. (We strongly encourage you to write a draft and get peer feedback.)

The goal of feedback is to help your peers get better at the kind of thinking we are encouraging for this course, and for you to talk with one another about the ideas in the course. Below is a set of questions for you to answer in no more than a few sentences each (and sometimes one sentence will do).

1. In your own words, what is the author's main claim?
2. How far did you have to get into the paper (video, infographic, audio recording) to understand their claim?
3. What evidence do they use to support their claim?
4. What was most compelling or persuasive about their paper (or video, or infographic, or audio recording)? For instance, are there things covered that you would find particularly interesting to discuss with the author if you were talking together in person?
5. Are there parts of the paper (or video, infographic, audio recording) that could be revised to more effectively advance or support its claim about the artifact or intervention? Please be concrete in your suggestions.

### Pitfalls to avoid when giving feedback:

Remember you're trying to help the author accomplish what they want to accomplish. You're not trying to get them to write the paper you want them to write. You also don't need to agree with what they are writing to help them improve their argument (though it's good for groups to discuss points on which they disagree). It's also possible to give too much feedback. Focus on what's most important.