

Each of you is expected to produce a single term paper, (minimum: 2500 words; maximum: no limit), in which you individually analyze a segment of chat from a chat system of your own choosing, using the analytical methodology described in our text (Hutchby, 2001) and in our readings.

That doesn't mean you should neglect the readings or outside sources to enrich your paper.

**In this course, we are concerned with communication as it happens in real life, not as a theoretical assemblage of concepts and theories.** Therefore, the capstone project for this course is a research paper that gives you the opportunity to examine a bit of actual, real, online text messaging between real people.

You can use a log of any actual chat that you or someone you know engages in. This can come from your computer or your smart phone. It should consist of a log of text messages between real people. You can use logs of chat rooms, AIM, iMessage, any SMS log, Facebook chat, etc. The data can be something you collect yourself or you can use some chat logs provided for you on the Course Content page of Blackboard for this course.

The idea here is to take the basic notions of co-presence, affordance, and the procedural organization of interaction and discover them in the actual communicative action people perform in online environments.

Therefore, **this is not your typical library research paper.** Rather than report on what other people might have to say about social interaction, I am interested in seeing if you can **use the material you've learned in this course to do your own, real research using the methods of analysis described in your book.** The focus is on understanding how people in your chat actually use the resources available to them to communicate, address and repair troubles that may emerge, and generally make some kind of sense of each other in your particular chat data.

Though you are not doing a library research paper, you still need to **cite all your sources**, even if they are readings from the course, and provide a bibliography in the APA format. For more information on APA style, consult

<http://flash1r.apa.org/apastyle/basics/>

**Failure to cite your sources and give references is a violation of academic integrity and can result in (1) a failing grade and (2) a VAIR being filed with the Department of Communication and the Dean.**

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In overview, I am asking you to describe, report on and analyze:

- The **data** you are using.
- The **procedures** used by actors to establish co-presence.

- The relevant **affordances** of the chat technology that you can document as relevant in your data.
- The **sense-making procedures** actors use to interpret each others' postings, etc.

Using the data you collect, you are to describe:

1. Procedures used by actors to establish co-presence in the chat.
  - a. What do the actors do?
  - b. What affordances of the system make it possible for actors to establish co-presence?
2. How the technology is used to achieve social interaction and communication.
  - a. How do actors know when communication is happening?
  - b. In what ways do participants make known who the “speaker” is and who the recipients are?
3. The affordances of technology that impact social interaction and communication in the chat.
  - a. How can one actor keep another from posting?
  - b. What happens when an actor gets no response?
4. Some of the sense-making procedures actors use to interpret each others' postings, etc.
  - a. Do all the postings make sense to all the actors?
  - b. What are examples of “unproblematic” exchanges? Why are they unproblematic? What went right?
  - c. What are some examples of problematic postings that participants find difficult to understand?
  - d. How are problems of understanding identified, addressed and managed in chats?

Answering these questions in detail means defining terms as per our readings and showing examples from your chat data that will illustrate the points you need to make. So, for example,

1. Figure out what you think co-presence means **using the readings**.
2. Then, when you look at a chat, ask yourself, “How are the participants establishing co-presence?” For example, saying “They referred to each other by name,” is only part of the story. In fact, using a name does not itself establish co-presence! When we chat or text others, we sometimes use names, sometimes we don't. When you look at a specific chat posting, how does the person posting the message “know” that there is another person who is co-present? What has to

happen to assure co-presence? Use your data and the readings to answer these questions!

3. Show how the example works as evidence of the concept you're describing. For example, this would mean showing me how some particular exchange demonstrates something like co-presence or communication by actually pointing to features of the texts you're using as examples.

I'm asking you to do something you're probably not accustomed to doing: **Examine the "obvious."** We often overlook that which seems obvious without giving it close scrutiny. I am asking you to describe the mechanisms at work by which we do obvious things. It would seem like we shouldn't need to explain what everyone takes for granted, but that is precisely what I am asking you to do in this paper. For example, what do our readings say about "understanding?" How do you know when you've understood what someone writes in a post? Is it just that you've read it? Perhaps what **you** think they're writing about is different from what **they** had in mind. How would you ever know? How would they know what you think? If there is a problem of understanding, how would you ever know, how do such troubles get fixed? Finally, what happens when there is no problem? Do you declare in every post, "Yes I understand what you wrote!"? How do we let others know that we understand them when there is no problem of understanding? We know that understanding is happening all the time. The question is, how do we know that our readers actually understand what we have written? Can you give an example of that? I hope you're getting the sense that the work I'm asking you to do is to **think about** and **reflect on** a specific chat episode you select, rather than report simplistic and easy "answers" that are not necessarily informative with regard to the circumstances people face when engaging in chat. You must show me how each "answer" you offer regarding things like co-presence, understanding, affordances or communication, is actually happening in the chat, by giving examples of co-presence, understanding, social interaction and communication in the chat. That doesn't mean simply cutting and pasting. It means talking about what people are doing when they post a chat message.

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Take the following example:

12:21:31 A: Hey

12:21:45 B: Whassup?

12:21:58 A: Nothin much

This little excerpt is enough to begin to talk about co-presence, about social interaction, about understanding, and about communication! Even this little excerpt displays some of the affordances of the chat system that allow us to make claims about co-presence, social interaction, understanding, and communication. What is going on here? Can you find these concepts in these three lines? How do these particular text postings actually

show co-presence? What about this sequence makes co-presence observable? Use your commonsense and the course materials!

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Here's another excerpt from a chat:

16:14:01 C: John left his keys here

16:14:02 D: John said he lost his keys

16:14:15 D: I'll tell him

What could we say about this excerpt?

Is there communication? What is communication? If you say yes, how do you know? How can we call this communication?

Are there problems? What are the problems? Show me what the problems are.

How are the problems resolved? Does D understand C? Does C understand D? How do you know? Show me in these lines the evidence that suggests C and D understand each other.

What went right and what went wrong in this little exchange?

Are C & D co-present? How do you know? How do *they* know? What evidence is there for your answer? Show me in the actual lines of text how we and they determine they are co-present.

How do the affordances of the system help or screw things up for C and D?

Specific answers to these kinds of questions is what you need to do for your papers.

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Your paper should contain the following sections:

1. Introduction

2. Data and Methods

This is a section in which you tell me about the chat you're using, where it came from, the system it was produced on, and anything else that describes what I will see. The methods portion of the section is about the method of analysis you are going to use. I've recommended using the way Hutchby

analyzes CMC. You should describe that briefly so that when I read your analysis of the chat, I'll have an idea of what you're doing.

### 3. Analysis

This is the section in which you describe what's going on in the data and provide evidence of the phenomena I've asked you to address, and show me how that data you treat as an example actually is an illustration of what you say it is.

### 4. Discussion

Having done the analysis, you're now in a position to tell me about the significance of your findings. What have you learned?

### 5. Bibliography

Look at some of the papers in the unit assignments and you'll see they can serve as templates for you.

Note that you must include a bibliography, and you must cite your sources, not only for quotations, but for paraphrases as well. Plagiarism will not be tolerated.

Papers **MUST** be handed in on time. Submitting after the due date will result in a z