

Carleton University
Fall 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English Language and Literature

ENGL 4135
Studies in Publishing

Prerequisites: fourth year standing

Prof. Robin Norris
Master Printer: Larry Thompson

Office: Dunton Tower 1919
Robin.Norris@carleton.ca
Office hours by appointment

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course description

This experiential learning course immerses students in the practical arts and histories of book production. The class will be held in the MacOdrum Library Book Arts Lab, where students will work collaboratively with the Master Printer, lab staff, the professor, and their classmates. In Fall 2026, advanced students in English will explore the publication history of tarot cards, from the Cary Sheet made possible by the new technology of the printing press to the afterlife of the Rider-Waite-Smith deck in the public domain. Students will engage in a range of activities representative of the pillars of the book arts, including bookbinding, calligraphy and mark making, papermaking and decoration, typesetting, woodcuts and relief printing, and/or letterpress printing.

Learning outcomes

Students will explore publication in its art historical, cultural, and technological contexts. Students will think about the deck of cards as printed artifact, question the impacts of antiquarianism, and appreciate the multiple parties involved in the creation of text/meaning. Students will evaluate academic, reliable, and unreliable resources when conducting historical research, which includes the use of resources that are not easily accessible online (e.g., scholarly journals and printed books, interlibrary loan). Students will also learn to differentiate between analytical and holistic approaches to understanding; to articulate initial assumptions, curiosity, and questions; to grow more comfortable with experimentation; and to reflect on their learning processes, with an emphasis on process goals.

Texts

MacOdrum Library will provide most of the materials needed to complete the course free of charge. Students should budget \$50 for additional costs. Brightspace will house required

readings, websites, and videos, as well as additional resources.

Evaluation

Collaborative research project and presentation	25%
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Reflective writing	25%
Attendance, interactions, and involvement	25%

Time in the book arts lab is a privilege. Student demand for book arts courses far exceeds capacity, and instructors work as a team to make these classes possible. Most students find these classes enjoyable and even therapeutic, but this is not a bird course. While it is extremely unlikely for a student to earn an F in an experiential learning course because students are unlikely fail an experience, it is equally unlikely for a student to ace an experience. This means that A+ grades are atypical in an experiential learning course. However, there have been a frustrating number of grade complaints from students who would have given themselves an A+ or an A when the grade they earned was an A or A-. If a mark of A+ is a high priority for you, then you should choose another course. If you are likely to complain about an A- grade, then you should choose another course. No one “loses marks” in this class; everyone starts from zero and earns their grade.

Here are some of the expectations for this course that you should be aware of:

You are expected to be fully invested in our classes. Students are expected to attend every class meeting in its entirety (not to leave early and not to arrive late, despite OCTranspo). This includes the first class meeting, when health and safety training and paperwork are completed. Absences due to work or to other classes are not excused. However, students are expected to stay home if unwell for any reason. Students must email in advance to notify us of absences or late arrivals. If you are late or absent, especially if you are MIA, this will have a significant impact on your mark. Students are expected to be responsible and respectful whether working collaboratively or independently during class and during open lab hours. This includes interacting with all demographics in the class (e.g., graduate/undergraduate) and learning all classmates' names. To keep us safe and productive, students are expected to ask questions when anything (content or process) is unclear. We will treat the lab as a screen-free space. Students are expected to pursue opportunities to learn and to bring their learning into our discussions. This includes exploring/reading/viewing relevant materials on Brightspace on your own time.