

ENGL 212: Technology and the Human Future

Winter 2026 – Online Asynchronous

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Course Description

This course explores the dynamic relationship between technology and society, focusing on how emerging innovations reshape our identities, creativity, and ethical responsibilities. Through speculative storytelling, debates, creative projects, and critical analysis, students will examine the promises and perils of AI, automation, and digital transformation. From imagining the world in 2050 to debating the ethical boundaries of technological progress, this course encourages students to think critically, engage creatively, and envision futures that balance innovation with humanity.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze how technological advancements shape, challenge, and redefine what it means to be human
2. Evaluate ethical principles that should guide the development and implementation of transformative technologies
3. Examine how AI and automation influence creativity, labor, and power dynamics in society
4. Apply speculative thinking to current technology trends and their potential implications
5. Conduct research using primary and secondary sources across multiple disciplines
6. Compose arguments in multiple formats and media, adapting writing for different audiences and purposes

Course questions:

1. How do technological advancements shape, challenge, and redefine what it means to be human?
2. What ethical principles should guide the development and implementation of transformative technologies?
3. How does the integration of AI and automation into society influence creativity, labor, and power dynamics?
4. How can speculative thinking about technology help us prepare for and shape the future?

Required Materials

Texts and Media:

- *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* by Karel Čapek (available free online)
- *They Say/I Say*, 6th edition, by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein
- Films: *Her* (available at local libraries or online for rental fee), *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix)
- *Black Mirror* Episodes: "Be Right Back," "Nosedive," "Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too" (Netflix)
- Additional readings available on Canvas

Technology Access:

- Reliable internet connection and computer/laptop for course participation
- Netflix subscription (or temporary access) for required films
- Access to conversational AI platforms such as ChatGPT (free version), Claude, or Gemini
- Cloud storage system (Google Drive, Dropbox, OneDrive) for backup

Digital Literacy Expectations

This is a technology-focused course requiring regular use of various digital platforms. Students are expected to:

- Maintain regular access to Canvas and course materials
- Use cloud storage for all course work
- Troubleshoot basic technical issues independently
- Seek help when technical problems interfere with learning

AI Use Policy

You will regularly use AI tools as part of course assignments. Academic integrity requires:

Transparency: Always document when and how you use AI tools

Original thinking: AI should enhance, not replace, your critical analysis

Proper attribution: Cite AI interactions when they contribute to your work

Academic honesty: Distinguish between AI-generated content and your own ideas

Failure to disclose AI use appropriately will result in reduced grades and potential academic misconduct referrals.

Technical Difficulties

- Computer problems: Not having a working computer is not an excuse for late work. Develop backup plans including campus computer labs, library access, and cloud storage
- Platform outages: When specific platforms are unavailable, alternative assignments will be provided within 24 hours (this is an unlikely scenario). If Canvas is not working and there is an assignment due, please email it to m.
- Internet issues: Use campus WiFi, library access, or mobile hotspots as backup options

Grading

Please see Canvas and/or Course Calendar for due dates

Assignment	Percentage of final grade
Project 1	7%
Project 2	7%
Project 3	7%
Project 4	8%
Weekly project work	36%
TS/IS work	13%
Weekly journals	15%
Other weekly work	7%

Grading scale

↑95%: A

↑90%: A-

↑87%: B+

↑83%: B

↑80%: B-

↑77%: C+

↑73%: C

↑60%: D

0%: F

All grades will be posted on Canvas.

Freebies

Each student will get one “freebie” of the following assignments:

- Weekly Journal Prompt
- TS/IS Exercise
- Weekly Project Work

To use your “freebie,” simply leave a comment in the textbox on the assignment submission page.

A note on the grading scale

SVSU does not assign C-, D+, D- grades. Anything below a 73% will result in a D. Anything below a 60% will result in a F.

Course Policies

Participation

Because this is an asynchronous online course, regular participation is essential. You are expected to:

- Log in to Canvas at least every 48 hours
- Complete weekly activities by posted deadlines
- Respond thoughtfully to discussion prompts and peer work

Late Work Policy

No late work will be accepted without prior arrangement. If you anticipate difficulties meeting a deadline:

- Contact the instructor at least 48 hours in advance
- Provide specific information about the circumstances
- Be prepared to submit work early if you know conflicts exist

Emergency exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis with appropriate documentation.

Communication Expectations

- **Email response time:** I will respond to emails within 24-48 hours during weekdays
- **Professional communication:** Use clear subject lines, proper grammar, and respectful tone
- **Technical issues:** Contact IT support first, then email me if problems persist

Accessibility and non-discrimination clause

Students who need accommodation are encouraged to meet with the instructor or contact the SVSU Office of Accessibility Resources and Accommodations (phone: 989-964-4168). SVSU does not discriminate based on race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, physical impairment, disability, or veteran status in the provision of education, employment, and other services.

A note about self-care

I am conscious of your educational experiences over the last several years, and if there is any way I can support you in our learning environment, please let me know. I'm here to help!

A note about myself:

In September 2024, I was diagnosed with Bell's palsy, which is facial paralysis. Half of my face is (mostly) immobile causing my speech to be frequently slurred, my eye unable to blink, some hearing loss, and frequent pain and fatigue. There might be moments in class where I need to take breaks to rest my face. It shouldn't interfere with our learning environment, but I want to give you a heads up! (Plus, you'll probably notice my paralysis and I wanted to get ahead of it!)

Self-disclosure

You are under no obligation to self-disclose personal information about which you do not feel comfortable.

Academic integrity policy

According to the SVSU Student Handbook, "Academic integrity is undermined whenever one is dishonest in the pursuit of knowledge. Dishonesty takes many forms, including cheating, plagiarism, and other activities for undermining the educational process and will be reported to the Academic Conduct Board for further sanctions. Forms of plagiarism include directly transcribing (copying) without quotation and attribution, summarizing without attribution, paraphrasing or patchwork paraphrasing without attribution, patching electronic materials (including pictures, graphs, and/or charts) without attribution. I reserve the right to use Turn It In. In ENGL 212, deliberate plagiarism or cheating in any form will result in the grade of zero (0) for the entire assignment.

The full Academic Integrity Policy can be found here:

<http://www.svsu.edu/studentconductprograms/policies/academicintegritypolicy/>

Even though we are using AI regularly this semester, please note that passing off anything written by AI as your own writing is considered plagiarism. To avoid this scenario, you need to indicate what is your writing and what is produced by AI.

Writing Center information

One of the many advantages of this University is the Writing Center. You are strongly encouraged to meet with a tutor to discuss your writing. Once I know the Writing Center hours, I'll pass them along.

Classroom community and respect

Our classroom is a community of learners sharing personal experiences and developing ideas together. We commit to:

- Respectful engagement with diverse perspectives and experiences
- Constructive feedback that supports each other's growth
- Inclusive participation that welcomes all voices
- Confidentiality regarding personal stories shared in class

- Growth mindset that sees challenges as learning opportunities

This syllabus is a contract between instructor and students. Changes may be made with appropriate notice. Students are responsible for staying informed about course requirements and deadlines.

Semester Calendar

TS/IS = They Say/I Say (our textbook)

Week 1: Tuesday, January 13 – Monday, January 19

Theme: Digital Foundations

Major Learning Goals:

- Establish personal technology baseline
- Introduce course themes and community expectations
- Begin developing critical technology awareness

Current Project Phase: Your Origin Story (Technology Autobiography)

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. Project 1 Overview

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 1: “They Say: Starting with What Others Are Saying”

Due This Week (all due Monday, January 19):

1. Project 1 work: Technology Autobiography (500 words)
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 2, Chapter 1
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: What's one question about technology's role in your life that you want to explore more deeply this semester? (300 words minimum)
4. Introduce yourself discussion forum

Week 2: Tuesday, January 20 – Monday, January 26

Theme: The Algorithm Audit

Major Learning Goals:

- Understand how algorithms shape daily experience
- Practice systematic observation and data collection
- Begin research skills for Project 1

Current Project Phase: Begin Algorithm Audit (Becoming a Data Detective)

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix)

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 2: “Her Point Is: The Art of Summarizing”
2. “Technopanics Throughout History” infographic (on Canvas)

Due This Week:

Due Thursday, January 22:

1. Mid-week check-in discussion: Share one surprising algorithmic encounter from your audit

Due Monday, January 26:

2. Project 1 work: All documentation from Algorithm Audit
3. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 2
4. Weekly Journal Prompt: After watching *The Social Dilemma*, reflect on one specific technology habit you want to examine more closely this semester. What questions do you have about how this technology affects you or society? (250 words minimum)

Week 3: Tuesday, January 27 – Monday, February 2

Theme: Historical Context and Research Skills

Major Learning Goals:

- Contextualize current technology concerns historically
- Develop research strategies for academic sources
- Practice source evaluation and integration

Current Project Phase: The Research Phase (Finding Your Tribe of Thinkers)

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update

Reading:

1. “The AI Technopanic and Its Effects”: <https://abundance.institute/articles/the-ai-technopanic-and-its-effects>
2. “The Sisyphean Cycle of Technology Panics”: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/1745691620919372>
3. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 3: “As He Himself Puts It: The Art of Quoting”

Due This Week (all due Monday, February 2)

1. Project 1 work: Research log
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 3
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: How do historical technology panics compare to current AI concerns? Use specific examples from the readings. (250 words minimum)

Week 4: Tuesday, February 3 – Monday, February 9

Theme: Digital Identity Arguments

Major Learning Goals:

- Complete first major project
- Practice peer review and collaborative learning
- Synthesize personal experience with research

Current Project Phase: Putting It All Together (Your Digital Self-Portrait)

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update

Reading:

2. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 4: “Yes/No/OK, But: Three Ways to Respond”
3. Privacy Not Included (<https://www.mozillafoundation.org/en/privacynotincluded/>)

Due This Week (all due Monday, February 9):

1. Project 1: Your Digital Self-Portrait
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 3, Chapter 4
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: As we transition to exploring AI relationships next week, what assumptions do you have about artificial intelligence that you think might be worth questioning?

Looking Ahead: Begin watching *Her* over the weekend to prepare for Week 5.

Week 5: Tuesday, February 10 – Monday, February 16

Theme: From Personal to Interpersonal

Major Learning Goals:

- Transition from personal technology analysis to AI relationships
- Begin sustained AI interaction experiment
- Practice addressing counterarguments

Current Project Phase: Project 2 Overview

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. Project 2 Overview
3. “AI companions are changing people’s lives but what are the risks?”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgLVX4z19wg>
4. *Her* (stop around 25-30 minute mark—about when Theodore sets-up his OS1)

Reading:

They Say/I Say Chapter 6: “Skeptics May Object: Planting a Naysayer in Your Text”

Due This Week:

Due Friday, February 13:

1. Transition discussion: How does personal tech use connect to AI relationships? (100 words minimum)

Due Monday, February 16

2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 2, Chapter 6
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: Based on *Her* film introduction, what are your initial thoughts about AI companionship? What concerns or possibilities do you see? (250 words minimum)

Week 6: Tuesday, February 17 – Monday, February 23

Theme: AI Companions and Emotional Bonds

Major Learning Goals:

- Analyze AI’s role in intimate relationships
 - Begin systematic AI interaction documentation
 - Explore ethical dimensions of AI companionship
- Current Project Phase:** Project 2 First Contact (Your AI Interaction Experiment)

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. *Her* (finish watching)

Reading:

1. Whitehead: “The App Becoming Your Best Friend”
2. Mcbane: “Can Robots be Our Friends?”
3. Laken: “COVID-19 Has Made Americans Lonelier Than Ever”
4. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 5: “And Yet: Distinguishing What You Say from What They Say”

Due This Week

Thursday, February 19

1. *Her* film discussion forum post

Monday, February 13

1. Project 2 Work: Five conversation transcripts
2. *Her* discussion forum responses due
3. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 2, Chapter 5

4. Weekly Journal Prompt: Compare the AI relationship in *Her* to your initial AI interaction experiences. What seems realistic versus fantastical about the film's portrayal? (300 words minimum)

Week 7: Tuesday, February 24 – Monday, March 2

Theme: The Uncanny Valley of Human-AI Interaction

Major Learning Goals:

- Continue AI interaction experiment
- Develop interview skills for primary research
- Analyze patterns in human-AI communication

Current Project Phase: The Research Detective Phase

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. *Black Mirror* "Be Right Back" (Netflix)
3. "What is the Turing Test?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXMLF54AUwU>

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 9: "As a Result: Connecting the Parts"
2. "What is the Turing Test": <https://oecs.mit.edu/pub/uli3iiu9/release/2>
3. "Artificial Consciousness": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_consciousness
4. "To People Who Think AI Might become Conscious": <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0k3700zljjo>

Due This Week (All due Monday, March 2):

1. Project 2 work: List of sources
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 2, Chapter 9
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: Analyze your AI interaction experience so far. What surprises you about conversing with AI? When does it feel most/least human-like? (250 words minimum)

Week 8: Tuesday, March 3 – Monday, March 9

Spring Break!

Week 9: Tuesday, March 10 – Monday, March 16

Theme: Human-AI Boundaries and Primary Research

Major Learning Goals:

- Complete AI interaction experiment
- Conduct interviews or comparative platform analysis
- Practice research synthesis and analysis

Current Project Phase: Primary Research Adventure

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update

Reading:

2. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 10: "You Mean I Can Just Say It That Way?": Academic Writing Doesn't Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice"

Due This Week (all due Monday, March 16):

1. Project 2 work: Responses to analysis questions
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 10

3. Weekly Journal Prompt: What did your primary research (interviews or platform comparison) reveal that you didn't expect? How does this connect to course themes? (300 words minimum)
4. Research findings discussion: Share one interesting discovery from your primary research

Week 10: Tuesday, March 17 – Monday, March 23

Theme: Connection and Isolation

Major Learning Goals:

- Complete AI relationship investigation project
- Examine broader social implications of AI technology
- Practice peer review and revision

Current Project Phase: Synthesis and Storytelling

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. *Black Mirror* "Nosedive" (Netflix)

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 11: "But Don't Get Me Wrong: The Art of Metacommentary"
2. "How Algorithms Change the Way We Think": <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-art-of-critical-thinking/202304/how-algorithms-change-how-we-think>
3. "How Have Social Media Algorithms Changed the Ways We Interact?": <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp8e4p4z97eo>
4. "Social Media Algorithms Have Hijacked Social Learning": <https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/social-media-algorithms-have-hijacked-social-learning>

Due This Week (all due Monday, March 23):

1. Project 2: AI Relationship Investigation
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 11
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: Connect the themes from "Nosedive" to your AI relationship research. How do different types of AI technology shape human behavior and social interaction? (250 words minimum)

Week 11: Tuesday, March 24 – Monday, March 30

Theme: Social Technology and Power

Major Learning Goals:

- Transition to consciousness and creativity themes
- Understand technology's role in social hierarchies

Current Project Phase: Project 3 Overview

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. Project 3 Overview

Reading:

1. "If it wasn't created by a human artist, is it still art?": <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/08/is-art-generated-by-artificial-intelligence-real-art/>

Due This Week (all due Monday, March 30):

1. Weekly Journal Prompt: As we transition from AI relationships to AI creativity, what questions do you have about machine consciousness and creativity? (250 words minimum)

Week 12: Tuesday, March 31 – Monday, April 6

Theme: What Makes a Mind?

Major Learning Goals:

- Explore philosophical questions about consciousness
- Begin AI art creation and experimentation
- Analyze *R.U.R.* and its contemporary relevance

Current Project Phase: Your Creative Collaboration Begins

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update

Read:

1. *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* by Karel Čapek
2. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 8: "Why We Care: 'So What?' and 'Who Cares?'"

Due This Week:

Due by Thursday, April 2:

1. *R.U.R.* discussion forum: How do Čapek's robots compare to current AI? (150 words) responses due

Due by Monday, April 6

1. Project 3 work: 2-3 images for Project 3
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 8
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: After experimenting with AI art creation, reflect on the creative process. Do you feel like an artist, collaborator, or something else? What does this suggest about creativity? (300 words minimum)
4. Respond to two peers' *R.U.R.* discussion forum posts

Week 13: Tuesday, April 7 – Monday, April 13

Theme: Creative Machines and Human Artists

Major Learning Goals:

- Complete AI art creation and gallery participation
- Analyze the relationship between consciousness and creativity
- Practice academic discussion participation

Current Project Phase: The Philosophy Deep Dive and Gallery Walk

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. *AlphaGo* documentary

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 13: "I Take Your Point: Entering Class Discussions"

Due This Week:

Due by Thursday, April 9

1. Project 3 work: Artworks to class gallery with artist statements

Due Monday, April 13

2. Project 3 work: Gallery analysis: Analyze 3-4 peer artworks with constructive commentary
3. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 13
4. Weekly Journal Prompt: After viewing peer artworks in the gallery, what do you notice about how different people approach AI creativity? What does this suggest about human creativity and consciousness? (250 words minimum)

Week 14: Tuesday, April 14 – Monday, April 20

Theme: Art, Consciousness, and Future Thinking

Major Learning Goals:

- Complete consciousness exploration project
- Begin thinking about speculative futures
- Synthesize philosophical research with creative experience

Current Project Phase: Weaving Together Art, Mind, and Meaning

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update
2. Project 4 Overview

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 14: “What’s Your Evidence?: Incorporating Sources”
2. “Postcards from the Future”: <https://www.virajvjoshi.com/postcards-from-the-future>
3. “World building methods for Speculative Design and Fiction”: <https://medium.com/world-building-methods-for-speculative-design-and-fiction-7212e2725840>

Due This Week (all due by Monday, April 20):

1. Project 3: Creative Consciousness Exploration
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 1, Chapter 14
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: How has creating art with AI changed your perspective on consciousness and creativity? What questions do you still have? (250 words minimum)

Week 15: Tuesday, April 21 – Monday, April 27

Theme: Envisioning 2050

Major Learning Goals:

- Apply course learning to speculative thinking
- Research current technology trends for extrapolation
- Begin final portfolio project

Current Project Phase: Your Journey to 2050

Viewing:

1. Weekly Update

Reading:

1. *They Say/I Say* Chapter 7: “In My Experience: Using Personal Stories to Energize Your Argument”

Due This Week

Due Thursday, April 23

1. Scenario sharing discussion: Post brief summary of your 2050 vision
2. Project 4 work: 750-word scenario
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: Based on everything you've learned this semester, what aspect of technology's future most concerns or excites you? Why? (300 words minimum)

Due Monday, April 27

1. Project 4 work: 500-word analysis
2. TS/IS Exercise: Complete exercise 2, Chapter 7
3. Weekly Journal Prompt: As you reflect on your semester learning, what has changed most about how you think about technology and its role in human life? (300 words minimum)

Week 16: Tuesday, April 28 – Saturday, May 2

Theme: Synthesis and Presentation

Major Learning Goals:

- Complete final portfolio project
- Present learning journey and future vision
- Reflect on semester growth and future engagement

Due This Week (all due Saturday, May 2):

1. Project 4: Future Action Portfolio
2. Course evaluations