

DES 226 Modern Letterpress Printing

Pino Trogu

Professor, School of Design

www.trogu.com

Syllabus – Spring 2026

BULLETIN DESCRIPTION

Learn typographic principles, terms, and practices through traditional, hands-on typesetting techniques using moveable type. Computer typesetting is used to both plan projects that are then physically composed and printed using a proofing press, as well as to further comprehend typesetting and layout skills. The work done in this course is project-driven, following an iterative process. May be repeated for a total of 6 units. Extra fee required. (Plus-minus letter grade only)

PREREQUISITES

None

FEES

\$15 instructional materials fee.

COURSE ATTRIBUTES

GE 3A: Arts

GE C1: Arts

MISSION STATEMENT

The School of Design serves a diverse cohort of students in the areas of Product Design and Visual Communication Design at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our curricula emphasize design process as a means of problem solving, and our classes help students to build the technical, conceptual, critical, and collaborative skills required in design professions.

CREDIT HOUR CALCULATION

FOR ACTIVITY COURSES

This course is a 3-unit in-person activity course.¹ Typical of the design field, real time direct instruction is 150 minutes (2.5 hours) twice a week. The minimum expectation for out-of-class work (homework) is 150 minutes (2.5 hours) on average per week, but may extend to as much as 4 hours per week.

COURSE GOALS

Introduction to the technique of setting metal type by hand, dating to 1455 in Germany with Gutenberg's invention of printing with movable types. While non-

CLASS HOURS: In-person

Friday 9–11:45 am & 12:30–3:15 pm

Room FA 151 — Class number: 4264

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday 9 am – 12 noon

Room: HUM 248 or Zoom

Email: trogu@sfsu.edu

Web: faculty.sfsu.edu/~trogu

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Western cultures developed parallel advancements in printing, for practical reasons this course will focus on the study of the printed book and letters as they developed in the Western world. Students will experience a process unchanged for four centuries and used commercially into the mid-twentieth century. By experiencing hand composition and letterpress printing, students will connect to larger social issues like the spread of literacy and be able to analyze printed artifacts around them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Hand composition, make-ready, and printing.

Understand and demonstrate hand composition, make-ready, and letterpress printing. Basics of type composition with hand tools: composing stick, type gauge (pica ruler), leading material for line spacing, and galley. Printing on the hand press, proofing the galley, correcting errors, and printing the final proof.

Improve a student's understanding of typography through the underlying typographic architecture made visible by metal type, architecture which is mostly invisible when working with typography on the computer screen.

Understand how letterpress is a very precise and detailed system of text production that includes planning, printing, and press maintenance. Produce printed pieces of high typographic, layout, and printing quality.

2. History of letterpress

Visits to the Frank V. de Bellis Collection and to the Sutro Library at SF State, to view contemporary printed books as well as manuscripts pre-dating the invention of printing with movable type. Learning historical perspective of contemporary texts composed and printed in a wider variety of styles than those from five-hundred years ago.

Learning that “upper-case” letters in the Western alphabet are derived from Roman capitals as those inscribed on the Trajan Column in Rome; while the “lower-case” letters in old-style typefaces, still the best choice for extended reading, are derived from the Neo-Carolingian, humanistic hand-writing style of the first half of the fifteenth century.

3. Typography and reading

Study the development of printing and letterpress as the engine for the spreading of literacy during and after the Italian Renaissance. Students will compose short examples of texts to see how well each typeface serves the goal of “disappearing” with respect to the reader, to facilitate legibility and minimize eye strain. They will learn that under optimal conditions, the physical act of reading is itself subject to very little fatigue, other factors intervening much more quickly to interrupt an otherwise fluid experience.

4. Letterpress and visual communication

Students will learn to compose a line of text and a block of type in a way that is mindful of the physiology and psychology involved in the reading process. Through the direct manipulation of metal letters and other typographic elements, they will create an ideal reading experience for the reader, one where the personality of designers and typefaces are subordinate to the task of reading, toward removing any distraction between the author's text and the reader. The best typography manuals at the turn of the nineteenth century were not only manuals of good typography, but also excellent manuals of good writing and English composition. Composing with the composing stick was often as good and as quick as composing a text in long hand or on a typewriter, often producing original essays straight from the job case to the galley. Thus, students will understand the connection between the handcrafted nature of writing, composing, printing, publishing, and producing a book or other printed arti-

¹ Credit Hour Definition: The SFSU definition of the credit hour aligns with the CSU (12/21/2020 Memo), WSCUC (Credit Hour Policy), and federal law (600.2 and 600.4 rev. 7/12020). University's [Credit Hour Policy S22-299](#).

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fact; and they will make critical and creative connections between design, writing, literature, and art history.

5. Typography and society

Students will experience setting type by hand not as a nostalgic return to a by-gone era, but as a lesson on what was a “disruptive technology” at the time of fifteenth century Germany. The types used to print the first Gutenberg bible were cut to mimic the hand-drawn letters of the scribes employed to reproduce important works of the past. Thus, scribes were the first category of workers disrupted by the invention of printing. The new technology allowed for new works to be published by established writers but also by lesser known authors who would self-publish their work. The trade of “type-setting” – from metal type hand-setting to photo-typesetting – established its own union and schools on account of printing being one of the largest industry in the world, with the history of the professions of type composition and printing being integral to a literate society.

6. Typography and the Bay Area

The class will take field trips to typography and letterpress shops in the Bay Area, a region rich with literary history where collaborations between writers, artists, and printers are common. Field trips might include the Letterform Archive, San Francisco Center for the Book, Arion Press, Bancroft Library, the Book Club of California, and the Labor Archives and Research Center at SF State, which includes the papers of the Bay Area Typographical Union (BATU). In the process, students will gain an appreciation for how letterpress and printing were not just mechanical steps in the production cycle of the printed literature of a culture, but an integral part of it, where the compositor and the printer were often also editors that influenced not just the look of books but their content as well.

INSTRUCTION

There will be a few small exercises and readings at the beginning of the semester, followed by a small type compo-

sition and printing exercise, and finally a larger composition and printing assignment (final project). It's important to note that all the work executed in class cannot be done at home. Thus, classroom time and space are sacred and must be respected by all. Students who are disrespectful of the class rules will be asked to leave. Final clean up and type distribution (putting away all the type – the “dead matter” used in one's project) is also a must in order to pass the class. Failure to clean up the shop at the end of the semester or failure to distribute one's dead matter will result in a failing grade for the class (C- and lower). A failing grade in the attendance category will also result in a failing grade for the class as a whole.

PROJECTS & GRADES

The course is divided into six categories:

Quizzes	5%
Small projects	10%
Business card	15%
Final project	35%
Shop clean-up	5%
Attendance	30%
TOTAL 100%	

Details for individual categories and assignments are posted on Canvas.

Students will be evaluated on the quality and craftsmanship of the printed letterpress work, in relation to the quality of the composition work. The following will be considered: correct orthography (no typos); good composition (thin spaces before punctuation, appropriate word spacing, appropriate line spacing, etc.); good printing (no punching – “kiss” impression instead); completeness of work (colophon, names, dates, etc.).

Your printed work will benefit from the collaboration with others in the class. You are encouraged to help others and learn from each other, however you are ultimately responsible for your work and for its completion by the posted deadlines. The final project is due at the end of the semester but remember that you

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must also distribute your dead matter by that time. A sign-up sheet with specific time slots will be posted for the use of the Challenge and Vandercook proofing presses in room 151.

PARTICIPATION

Participation, collaboration, and shop maintenance and organization are expected of all students. The practice of letterpress requires focus and patience, towards long-term results rather than quickly finished products. Students need to exercise self-discipline, use the class time productively and help others in the process.

Be courteous to other students in class and avoid excessive behavior such as uninterrupted loud talking or similar disruptive and distracting activities.

A considerable portion of the class will be devoted to sorting type, distributing type, cataloging, organizing, and also cleaning up thoroughly each week, in part during class but especially towards the end of class. If you have free time or when waiting to get on the press, you are also expected to contribute to the class with the above activities instead of idling and waiting to be asked what to do.

Your cellphone and all other belongings not necessary for the class: backpack, coat, etc, need to be stored away in a specified area of the classroom. The print shop is a shared space that needs to be kept clean and free of distractions. Computer and laptop use is not permitted. Laptops need to be kept stored away at all times except when directly needed for classroom activities.

SHOP CLEAN-UP

There will be a separate, thorough clean up session at the end of the semester to prepare the class for the next semester. This session will take place either on the last day of classes or during exams week. All students will be required to participate in this general activity, which will include distributing type, especially one's compositions, cleaning the press and other tools, and cleaning the cabi-

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nets and other surfaces used during the semester. Failure to participate in this final activity and especially failure to distribute one's own type will result in a grade of C- or lower, "F", or "Incomplete" for the class for the semester.

CLASS COMMUNICATIONS

Email is the preferred mode of communication outside class. Students are required to check their SF State email address. Note that you cannot forward your SF State email to a personal email address. Messages to students will also be sent via Announcements in Canvas. Install the Canvas Student app in your devices so that you can receive those announcements in a timely manner.

PROJECTS & GRADES

Final grades will be based on:

Comprehension and understanding of concepts covered in the course.

Quality of work during semester.

Complete assignments by the due dates.

LETTER GRADES & POINTS

A	100-96
A-	92
B+	88
B	84
B-	80
C+	76
C	72
C-	68
D+	64
D	60
F	59-0

The grading scale is evenly spaced: there are ten possible letter grades (D- is not included) plus F. Each letter has a range of 4 points, evenly spaced from 100 to 60 (from A to D); F ranges from 59 to 0.

- A. Performance of the student has been of the highest level, showing sustained excellence in meeting course responsibilities and personal potential.
- B. Performance of the student has been good, though not of the highest level.
- C. Performance of the student has been

Table 1. Possible grades for each assignment. Points and corresponding letter grades, rounded to the nearest decimal.

Letter/points	10	20	30	50	100
A	9.6	19.2	28.8	48	96
A-	9.2	18.4	27.6	46	92
B+	8.8	17.6	26.4	44	88
B	8.4	16.8	25.2	42	84
B-	8.0	16.0	24.0	40	80
C+	7.6	15.2	22.8	38	76
C	7.2	14.4	21.6	36	72
C-	6.8	13.6	20.4	34	68
D+	6.4	12.8	19.2	32	64
D	6.0	12.0	18.0	30	60
F	<6	<12	<18	<30	<60

Late points (15%) 1.5 3.0 4.5 7.5 15

adequate, satisfactorily meeting the course requirements.

- D. Performance of the student has been less than adequate.
- F. Performance of the student has been such that course requirements have not been met.

SFSU grading policy
bulletin.sfsu.edu/policies-procedures/grading/#gradingpolicy

REQUIRED TOOLS & SUPPLIES

Paper and other supplies for the course projects, including inks and cleaning supplies, will be provided in class.

REQUIRED BOOK

Jost Hochuli
Detail in Typography

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Frank Romano
Pocket Pal

Warren Chappell
A Short History of the Printed Word
(1970 edition only)

REQUIRED TOOLS

Printer's apron
Pica ruler (line gauge)

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

Loupe (x5 min.)
Bone folder

SELECTED BOOKSTORE

William Stout Architectural Books
804 Montgomery St, San Francisco
stoutbooks.com

GRADING AND CATEGORIES

Unless otherwise noted, points for individual assignments are 10 points for preliminary steps and 100 points for final deliverables. Please see the separate assignment schedule for the percentage each assignment contributes to the overall grade of 100 percent.

PASSING GRADE

A grade of "C" or higher is required to pass the class for it to count towards the elective section in the DPR (Degree Progress Report) of students in the School of Design. There is no CR/NC option (only plus or minus letter grade).

GRADES ON CANVAS

On Canvas you can check your grade for individual assignments, for each category, and for the overall course grade. An empty grade in any assignment does not affect your overall grade.

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LATE WORK

Project deadlines are listed in the assignments sheet and in Canvas. If a project is late, the grade will automatically drop by 15% in the week in which it is due, and an additional 15% for each week missed thereafter, calculated after all the other criteria have been taken into account. See Table 1 above for specific points and corresponding letter grades. If you have questions about how you are doing in the class or disagree with a given grade, email me or schedule an appointment with me to discuss your progress.

ATTENDANCE

As the course is all day on Fridays, for the purposes of attendance a “class” will refer to both morning and afternoon sessions, but as separate class periods, or separate “absences”, if applicable. Thus, a class can be either the morning session or the afternoon session. For example, missing two classes could refer to having missed the morning session on one day and the afternoon session on another separate day. Missing both morning and afternoon sessions on the same day means missing two classes. It is very important that you attend each class. You are expected to attend all class sessions in full and on time.

ATTENDANCE GRADE

Attendance in every class meeting is mandatory. This category is worth 30% of the total class grade. A grade of C (72/100) is required to pass this category and necessary to pass the course.

A grade lower than C in this category will also result in an automatic final registrar grade of C- or lower in the course, overriding a possible higher overall grade in Canvas.

There are 15 all-day Friday course days in the semester, for a total of 30 “class” meetings (AM & PM), plus one final Friday course day during exam week which will be used for cleaning the shop and distributing the type. Attendance points will be deducted, if applicable, beginning

in the first week of classes.

Attendance points: 100 pts
Each absence = 4 pts
Each tardy or leave-early = 1 pt

Failing the attendance category means missing more than 7 meetings (28 points), or missing more than the equivalent combination of absences, tardies, and leave-early, resulting in a grade of C- (less than 72/100) or lower for the category.

Attendance is taken at start of class. Tardy means arriving after roll has been taken. If you arrive after roll is taken, it's your responsibility to alert me so that you are only marked late and not absent. Leave-early means leaving class before the scheduled end of the class. If you need to leave early for any compelling reason please ask in advance. If you arrive to class half hour after roll is taken, then 2 points will be deducted. If you leave class half hour before the end of class, 2 points will also be deducted.

Excused absences include being sick or other major events involving serious circumstances that prevent you from coming to class. The instructor reserves the right to accept or reject the “seriousness” of the circumstances as described by the student. You must email me in advance or as soon as possible if you know you can't come to class because you feel sick that day or because of major events as described above.

NO CELLPHONE USE IN CLASS

Cellphone use is not permitted in the classroom during the official class time. At the start of class or upon arrival if late, you are required to place your phone in your assigned space in the cabinet set up for this purpose.

If you need to login to Canvas, please do so prior to the start of class using the Duo authentication app or other method. I recommend that you also get a physical token as an alternative authentication method. You can request one here:

its.sfsu.edu/service/mfa

With a physical token you don't need your phone to login. This will also work when traveling abroad and have no access to your US number.

You can use your phone during the regular morning break, lunch break, or afternoon break, but only outside the classroom. Step outside the classroom any time you are to use your phone – no exceptions! If needed, a digital camera will be available for you to take pictures of course related work.

If you need to consult online class materials during regular class time, use your laptop instead or a tablet if you have one. However, other non-course related activities such as texting, internet surfing, and other social media personal activities are also not permitted on laptops or other electronic devices. Phone or improper laptop usage during class time as described above will affect your attendance grade as follows:

One point will be subtracted from the attendance category for each instance of phone usage and each laptop usage not directly related to classroom work.

Please note that the phone and laptop policy above applies to the entirety of Room 151, including the full front area with regular desks as well as the full back area where the “stone” and the printing presses are located.

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Classes will meet during the time listed in the university's bulletin: Fridays from 9:00 to 11:45 am and from 12:30 to 3:15 pm. The final project will be due during Finals Week on Friday, May 22, 2026, officially from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm. However, if students have no conflicts, from 9:00 am to 3:15 pm to match the regular class time. Students will be notified of any changes in advance.

The weekly schedule for the course will be posted on Canvas. If the schedule changes during the semester to accommodate emerging circumstances, the students will again be notified.

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CLASSROOM STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONALISM

The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained. Differences of viewpoint or concerns should be expressed in such ways that students and faculty are encouraged to learn and reason with clarity and compassion, to share opinions and perspectives without losing their identities, and to develop an understanding of their community. Students whose conduct disrupts the learning process will be asked to leave the classroom.

Design is a professional discipline, and students should behave professionally in class. Use of laptops, cellphones or other electronic devices is not permitted at any time during class.

NO EATING OR DRINKING IN CLASS (WATER OK)

No food or drinks of any kind except water are to be consumed in the classroom at any time, including during lunch time between the morning and afternoon classes. Students who eat or drink during class will be asked to leave. Please be respectful of your fellow students and the teacher to ensure that we keep a clean and welcoming environment. Similar to the cellphone policy, I will subtract 1 point from the attendance category for each instance of eating or drinking in the classroom as described above.

Similar to the phone and laptop policy, the eating and drinking policy above also applies to the entirety of Room 151.

DISABILITY POLICY

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process.

The DPRC is located in the Student Services Building and can be reached at:

Telephone: (415) 338-2472
Videophone: (415) 335-7210

Email: dprc@sfsu.edu
Website: access.sfsu.edu

STUDENT DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form on this website, where more information on Title IX can also be found: titleix.sfsu.edu

Email: vpsaem@sfsu.edu

Telephone: (415) 338-2032

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact instead:

The SAFE Place: (415) 338-2208

dos.sfsu.edu/safeplace

Counseling and Psychological Services

Center: (415) 338-2208

psyserve.sfsu.edu/

OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

The Academic Senate Policy on the Observance of Religious Holidays (S09-212) indicates that "The faculty of San Francisco State University shall accommodate students wishing to observe religious holidays when such observances require students to be absent from class activities..." The following is a link to an Interfaith Calendar, which lists "Primary sacred times for world religions":

interfaith-calendar.org

Complete details regarding this Policy, including implementation, can be found on the Academic Senate website:

[Observance of Religious and Cultural Holidays, S19-2J2](http://observance-of-religious-and-cultural-holidays-s19-2j2)

COVID-19 SAFETY INFORMATION

[COVID-19 Positive Exposure](http://covid-19-positive-exposure)

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HONOR PLEDGE

Please read the Honor Pledge at the end of this syllabus. Sign a copy of the last page during the first week of instruction to acknowledge that you have read the syllabus and confirm that you will honor the pledge throughout the course.

CHEATING & PLAGIARISM

Cheating is the actual or attempted practice of fraudulent or deceptive acts for the purpose of improving one's grade or obtaining course credit; such acts also include assisting another to do so. Typically such acts occur in relation to examinations. However, it is the intent of this definition that the term "cheating" not be limited to examination situations only, but that it include any and all actions by a student that are intended to gain an unearned academic advantage by fraudulent or deceptive means.

Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating which consists of the misuse of the published and/or unpublished works of others by misrepresenting the materials (i.e. their intellectual property) so used as one's own work. Penalties for cheating and plagiarism range from a zero or F on a particular assignment, through an F for the course, to expulsion from the university. For more information on the University's policy regarding cheating and plagiarism, refer to the University Catalog (Policies and Regulations).

Information about the College of Liberal & Creative Arts policy and procedures regarding plagiarism can be found at the following URL:

ica.sfsu.edu/plagiarism-resources

Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts, Published by the College Art Association:

best-practices-fair-use-visual-arts.pdf

Other fair use links:

fairuse.stanford.edu/overview

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fair_use

CANVAS SUPPORT

canvas.sfsu.edu/

Email: at@sfsu.edu

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Telephone: (415) 405-5555
Room LIB 80, J. Paul Leonard Library.
Office Hours: 8am to 8pm Monday through Thursday; 8am-5pm Friday

DROPPING CLASS AND WITHDRAWING

Through the third week of classes, students may drop a class or faculty may drop students “who do not attend the first class meeting or do not meet the course criteria” as specified in the Bulletin. Afterwards, please be aware that a WU (unauthorized withdrawal) grade is counted as an F for GPA purposes. To avoid a WU grade, you are encouraged to drop before the end of the third week if you think you will not be able to “meet the course criteria.”

In Spring 2026, the student drop deadline is Monday, February 16, 2026.

Important: Please also note that:

“(...) faculty are authorized to instructor-drop students who do not meet the course prerequisites or who do not participate at all during the drop period (i.e. not attending or handing in assignments, or otherwise indicating the intent to take the course.)”

From “Dropping and Withdrawing”, under “Drop (weeks 1 to 3 of instruction)”.

registrar.sfsu.edu/withdrawal

In Spring 2026, faculty can instructor-drop students until Wednesday, February 11, 2026.

From the beginning of the fourth week through the twelfth week of instruction, withdrawal from a course will be permissible, for serious and compelling reasons, by consulting the faculty member teaching the course. The student must complete a “Petition for Withdrawal from Course or University” and submit the petition to the instructor for a decision. Such approved withdrawals will result in a “W” grade, which does not affect your GPA. The full university rules regarding withdrawals can be found at:

registrar.sfsu.edu/withdrawal

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HONOR PLEDGE

I pledge on my honor that I will complete all the assignments in this course in full honesty and without the improper help from others. In addition, I pledge to be honest with regards to the attendance policy, and request absences to be excused only if they are truly due to sickness or other serious circumstances as described in the attendance policy above, and I accept responsibility for any other unexcused absence and its resulting point deductions.

In regards to course work, I pledge that all work submitted will be my original work and that, if approved by the instructor, all external contributions will be properly acknowledged and cited. I also pledge to not use Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs or websites to automatically create any drawings, renderings, or other two- or three-dimensional artifacts that could be used towards the completion of assignments in this course. I will consult with the instructor in advance for clarification that might be needed for a particular assignment with regards to the processes above, and to determine what is acceptable, and what is not, regarding the use of technologies, including AI, to complete the deliverables required in the course.

I pledge to follow the above processes and be honest about my work in this course throughout the semester.

I have read the syllabus and the honor pledge above.

Signature _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

A printed copy of this page will be available in class on the first day of instruction, for you to sign and date and give back to the instructor.