

What is a book? A simple question, maybe, that turns out to be interesting and complex. We all know what a book is; books are commonplace objects we use all the time.

Think more deeply: a book is a kind of time machine. Words written long ago and far away can be read today because those words were preserved in books. A book is also an experience--you activate it by reading, and you are transported to another world, real or imagined.

What is a book today? Is an e-book still a book? Can websites be books? What about mobile apps? Today, books have exploded into many forms, and we are in a renaissance of new modes of reading and writing. More humans have greater access to books and information today than at any previous time in history. Most of us carry a digital publishing platform in our pocket in the form a smartphone.

What happens when we view the book as a technology? What can we learn about reading, writing, literacy, and communication by looking at the book as a technology? How can we use these lessons to help us to become more effective, ethical, and engaged communicators today and in the future?

These questions form the starting point for *The Technology of the Book*, a course that seeks to explore how books have been made and used throughout history and to consider how digital books and other technologies are changing reading and writing today. Our goal in this course is to look in new ways at books, and to learn how they are created, manufactured, distributed, and experienced.

My name is Michael Greer, and I'd like to welcome you to the course. For the next fifteen weeks, we will work together to explore the past, present, and future of the book, one of the most powerful technologies in human history.

Take a moment to reflect on your own journey and how you came to be in this course. Because you are in a university course in a department of rhetoric and writing, we can probably assume that reading and writing have already played an important role in your life. The first

assignment for the course is a literacy self-portrait that will allow you to share some of your own experiences with reading and writing.

Consider, too, that this course is entirely online. The environment that we are in at this very moment is made possible not only by technologies like writing and the alphabet, but also by newer technologies like hypertext, the Internet, and web-based learning platforms. In this digital space, we are coming together as a learning community in a way that became possible only very recently. An online course like this would have been unimaginable even a few decades ago. Compared to the long history of the printed book, digital texts and online environments like this are in their infancy.

To get started, follow the links below. I look forward to working and learning with you. Once again, welcome to The Technology of the Book!