Guide to the final exam
Sat May 20 at 9:15am, location TBA

The exam is designed to contain the equivalent of a second midterm focused on the second half of the course AND two hours' worth of questions which span the whole course.

Part I (1 1/4 hour): short-answer questions (covering the whole course)
-IDs (with some choice): provide brief identification, approximate date and historical significance
-analysis of quotations from assigned readings (with some choice)
-possible analysis of quotations and/or images not assigned (with some choice)

Part II (45min): essay on the second half of the course
This part will be an essay specific to the second half of the course (since the midterm).

Part III (1 hour) This part will appear as is on the exam. That is, you should prepare ONE of the questions below. The point of preparing the questions is to bring in specific examples from your primary source readings and have time to collect your thoughts to manage a large question spanning the whole course.

Write a synthetic essay on ONE of the questions below. Be sure to ground your essay in specific examples, presenting particular historical contexts as evidence for your argument. Show breadth by selecting examples from the full range of the course, with at least one example from each of the two halves of the course (before 1500 and after 1500).

A. Where would you position important moments of change in a history of reading? Are there continuities across these breakpoints? In outlining your own vision for a history of reading, discuss some of the claims made in the existing secondary literature and the kinds of sources on which historians have relied. Add your own critique of this field of study: Do you find some claims or some kinds of sources more convincing than others? Are there sources that you think historians could use more effectively, or that have been ignored so far? Do you tend toward skepticism or optimism about the future of the history of reading? To put it bluntly: is this a field with a big growth potential or is it a hopeless task? What topics do you think particularly need more study?

B. In this class we discussed four different technological "revolutions" that changed the ways texts were (or are) recorded in writing and circulated. Compare and contrast the nature of each of these technological transitions and its historical impact (e.g. on the distribution and control of books, on authorship, readership, book ownership, among other possible themes). Do you feel that one of these developments is more significant than the others? If so, which one and why?

C. Construct a history of authorship from the materials of this course. Do you see the "author-function" (to use Foucault's term) as emerging in a specific time and place and/or as made progressively possible by specific historical circumstances? Or would you claim rather that authorial self-consciousness runs throughout the period covered in this course, although the social and economic position of the author changed over time? Whatever your argument, explain the crucial developments of your account, which should span a broad time period.