2024 Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition

Call for Proposals

CREATE, CONNECT, REFLECT:

Launching Collaborations and (Re)building Community in Our Fields

**Zoom-only week:** Wed., Feb. 28-Fri., Mar. 1

**In-person week (at UofL):** Thurs., Mar. 7-Sat., Mar. 9

**Deadline for Facilitators to Submit Project Proposals:**Sunday, November 26, 11:59 p.m. EST

**Deadline for Participants to Apply to Join a Project:** Sunday, January 7, 11:59 p.m. EST

**Questions?** Email watson@louisville.edu or join and post on our [Slack workspace](https://join.slack.com/t/watson2024pro-yn16319/shared_invite/zt-23fmqm04l-g4SyaMbP9UatixnKfghouQ)

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# What We Are Planning, In Brief

The fourteenth biennial Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition will offer a space for launching collaborative projects and increasing access to participation. Attendees will spend three days working together, either over Zoom or on-site at the University of Louisville; additionally, whatever their chosen modality, attendees will communicate asynchronously over Slack. The conference will also feature a keynote, showcase, reflection on the collaborative process, and social activities (including on Zoom). By the end of the conference, each group will have presented a project deliverable at the showcase and will be free to continue their collaboration thereafter.

The conference team will select 12 projects to launch at the conference. Project descriptions will be published on our website, and applications for participants will be open for one month. Although the number of participants per project is determined by the facilitators, we anticipate around 20 people per project, with around 240 participants total.

For their work in crafting and guiding the project, each facilitation team (of 2 or more people) will receive an honorarium divided among them and paid after the conference. Zoom facilitation teams will receive $1,500; in-person facilitation teams will receive $2,500. (The additional funds are meant to help offset travel and lodging.)

# Contact the Conference Team

Dr. Andrea Olinger, Director

Shayani Almeida, Assistant Director

Steve Shoop, Assistant Director

You may email us at watson@louisville.edu. You are also encouraged to join our Slack workspace to support your proposal development. [(Access the invitation link.)](https://join.slack.com/t/watson2024pro-yn16319/shared_invite/zt-23fmqm04l-g4SyaMbP9UatixnKfghouQ)

# Exigence

From our classrooms to source use in our writing to the feedback we receive from and provide to mentors and peers, our work as writing and rhetoric teacher-scholars is inherently social. Yet there is something uniquely meaningful about creating a shared text, project, or event with others. We might experience this by joining a campaign for a campus union or community group, or by participating in intra-university research initiatives like the WIDE Research Center ([Turner et al., 2017](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0047287517692066)) or the Wearables Research Collaboratory ([Tham et al., 2020](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10572252.2020.1713404)). Rarer, though, are cross-institutional projects that are open to those who share a particular enthusiasm, to those on a similar quest.

And some of the charged possibilities of collaboration that do exist have been stolen or disrupted. The many pandemics afflicting our world have wrought and revealed new and longstanding harms; among these is the fracturing of the professional networks and relationships that should form the bedrock of our work. Although in-person conferences have resumed, few(er) of us, especially graduate students, have the resources—whether of health, time, or funds—to travel to conferences. With fewer occasions to interact with others around our common passions have come reduced opportunities to meet, connect, laugh, commiserate, and collaborate with people from different institutions, parts of the country, and parts of the world.

Recognizing the joys and challenges of collaboration in our field, and the professional ruptures forced or exposed by our current moment, the 2024 Watson Conference seeks to sponsor a number of collaborative projects to which participation can be open and more widely accessible. With this approach, we join other conferences that have, in various ways, reimagined what a conference should be and do, such as Feminisms and Rhetorics 2023 (Robinson, “[Why a Deconference?](https://femrhet2023.cfshrc.org/about/)”) and the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing 2022 (“[Taking Action: Reimagining Just Futures in Technical Communication](https://attw.org/attw-2022-cfp/)”).

The conference is driven not only by a desire to promote connection and community and to support shared work that addresses a pressing issue, but also by a dedication to antiracist and anti-oppressive praxis that will enable humanizing, rather than alienating, working environments. In line with our [commitments to fighting anti-Black racism](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/commitments/watson-and-anti-black-racism), the Watson planning team will incorporate principles of intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care into the conference ([Johnston, Solomon Amorao, & Kim, 2022](https://journals.shareok.org/writersccjournal/article/view/97)) and work toward a “post-White” orientation in conference design, wherein there is “unequivocal regard for ‘non-White’ humanity, particularly ‘Black’ humanity,” “demotion of ‘White’ standing,” and “rejection of post-racial notions” ([Croom, 2022](https://journals.shareok.org/writersccjournal/article/view/90), p. 60). We also commit to supporting project facilitators and participants in doing the same.

# Details

We seek proposals for **collaborative projects that can begin at the conference.** We ask: what work do you want to get started that would benefit from the expertise of others whom you do not or may not yet know?

You might want to gather people who share any of what follows (note that these are simply suggestions; please do not feel limited to any of them):

* **particular language skills**—in order to collaborate on a resource for writers/rhetors/teachers in that language or engage in Multilingual User-Experience work ([Shivers McNair, Gonzales, & Zhyvotovska, 2019](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S8755461518300926))
* **particular artistic skills**—in order to collaborate on a creative project
* **particular technical skills or interests**—in order to design a piece of software, convene a “hackathon,” or strategize collective responses to emerging technologies
* **interests in particular areas of research, teaching, activism, advocacy, or administration**—in order to begin to plan and draft some kind of text or activity, like
	+ policy statements
	+ community projects
	+ edited collections or book manuscripts
	+ journal-issue brainstorming, a journal overhaul, or a journal revival
	+ archival projects, whether physical or digital
	+ big-data analyses or coding projects
	+ cross-institutional research projects (perhaps in the model of groups like the [Citation Project](http://www.citationproject.net/) or the [Writing in the Lifespan Collaborative](https://www.lifespanwriting.org/))
	+ cross-institutional pedagogical resources (perhaps in the model of groups like [the Write to Vote project](https://writetovoteproject.com/))

The purpose of Watson 2024 is to kindle collaborations like these and increase their accessibility to people who might have not heard about them until after they were completed.

If you have an idea for a collaborative project to launch at the conference, please find a co-facilitator and submit a proposal. Once we have accepted proposals, we will post them on our website and open a month-long application window. Participants—whether graduate or undergraduate students, part-time or full-time faculty, retired professors, alt-academics, university staff members, or community members—will be invited to rank their preferred projects and submit a brief bio statement explaining their interest in each one. We will then match participants with projects, aiming to give everyone their first choice.

To maximize accessibility for people who are not able to travel to Louisville, Kentucky, groups will meet either on Zoom only (Wednesday, February 28-Friday, March 1) or in person (with a few hybrid options) at the University of Louisville (Thursday, March 7-Saturday, March 9). Both the Zoom and in-person weeks will include:

* a conference-wide keynote/workshop that offers some take on collaboration (on the first day);
* work time with your group;
* opportunities for individuals to chat with the keynote presenter;
* a showcase where groups will share the work that they have begun (on the final day);
* optional social activities, such as online pub-style trivia

In order to foster connections between the Zoom groups and the in-person groups, who might otherwise not interact during the conference, we have embedded the following structures:

* **a conference-wide Slack workspace for all attendees**, which will include icebreakers and a pet photo contest stretching across the two weeks
* **social activities during the Zoom week** **designed for all attendees,** both Zoom and in-person (e.g., online pub-style trivia)
* **a “buddy system” for deliverable feedback:** 1-2 Zoom projects will be paired with 1-2 in-person projects. On the day of the showcase for Zoom groups (March 1), the in-person project buddies will review the deliverables of their Zoom buddies and share asynchronous responses and feedback on Slack. (In-person attendees are also welcome to attend the Zoom showcase on March 1.) Likewise, on the day of the showcase for in-person groups (March 9), the Zoom project buddies will review the deliverables of their in-person buddies and share asynchronous responses and feedback on Slack.

Facilitation teams (of two or more people) will receive an honorarium divided equally among them. Teams facilitating Zoom projects will receive $1,500; teams facilitating projects that will be in person at the University of Louisville will receive $2,500. (The additional funds are designed to help offset travel and lodging.) Honoraria will be paid after the conference.

# Proposal Selection Criteria

We will select 12 proposals, prioritizing those that do the following:

* **describe a clear, concrete, and exigent collaborative project** that is appropriate for getting started in the time allotted yet has potential for longer-term engagement;
* **center underrepresented and/or under-resourced writers/rhetors or communities** (e.g., in terms of race/ethnicity, language, nationality, gender, sexuality, ability, class, institution type);
* **reflect diversity in facilitators** (e.g., in terms of identities, institutions, nationalities, careers);
* **plan thoughtfully** for intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care ([Johnston et al., 2022](https://journals.shareok.org/writersccjournal/article/view/97)) to nurture a working environment that seeks to eradicate “patterns and barriers [that] are hostile to the humanity of BIPOC conference participants,” as is part [Croom’s (2022)](https://journals.shareok.org/writersccjournal/article/view/90) articulation of post-White conference design (p. 60).

When selecting proposals, we will seek to maximize diversity across subfields in rhetoric, composition, literacy, and technical/professional communication as well as across project types (e.g., an artistic project, a coding-related project, an edited collection).

# Where and When to Submit Your Proposal

To submit a proposal, please complete the [Facilitator Proposal Template](#_qib8g3aypkka) and upload your file using our [webform](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/2024-watson-conference/proposal-submission-form). The deadline for project proposals is **Sunday, November 26, at 11:59 p.m. EST**.

# Looking for Ideas and/or Co-Facilitators?

We have set up a Slack workspace (access [invitation link](https://join.slack.com/t/watson2024pro-yn16319/shared_invite/zt-23fmqm04l-g4SyaMbP9UatixnKfghouQ)) to reach two groups:

* **Folks who are intrigued by the CFP and would like to brainstorm with others about what they could propose.** (Thanks to Vyshali Manivannan and Ruth Osorio for this idea! They created something similar for potential contributors to their *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics* [special](http://journalofmultimodalrhetorics.com/6-2-issue-intro) [issues](http://journalofmultimodalrhetorics.com/7-1-issue) on Carework and Writing During COVID.)
* **Folks who have a clear project idea but are looking for one or more co-facilitators.** (Each proposal needs at least two co-facilitators; this policy is designed to ensure that if an emergency arises and one of the facilitators cannot participate, the project can still go forward at the Watson Conference.)

If you have questions just for the planning team, you are also welcome to email us at watson@louisville.edu.

# Schedule

Note that the Zoom-only week includes 11 hours of group work time, whereas the in-person week includes 12 hours 15 minutes of group work time. (These allotments include breaks.) The number of work hours on Zoom is slightly lower in recognition of Zoom fatigue.

## Zoom-Only Week

***11 hours allotted to work sessions with your group over 3 days. (Make sure to build in lots of screen breaks!)***

***Also, throughout the week, there will be sign-ups for informal Zoom chats with the keynote***

### Day 1: Wednesday, February 28, 2023

12:00 noon-12:30 p.m. EST: Conference welcome

12:30 p.m.-2:00 p.m. EST: Keynote/workshop on a theme related to collaboration

3:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

8:00 p.m. EST: Optional online social activity, like an online pub-style quiz. (Sign up with a team or let us assign you to one). Open to all conference participants, both Zoom and in-person.

### Day 2: Thursday, February 29, 2023

12:00 noon-5:00 p.m. EST (includes breaks)

8:00 p.m. EST: Optional online social activity. Open to all conference participants, both Zoom and in-person.

### Day 3: Friday, March 1, 2023

12:00 noon-3:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

3:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. EST: Showcase of deliverables; debriefing on the collaborative process and conference. (Note: In-person participants will give asynchronous feedback via Slack on the deliverables of their Zoom “project buddies.” In-person participants are also welcome to attend the Zoom showcase.)

## In-Person Week

***12 hours 15 min allotted to work sessions with your group over 3 days***

### Day 1: Thursday, March 7, 2023

9:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m. EST: Breakfast & conference welcome

9:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m. EST: Keynote/workshop on a theme related to collaboration

11:15 a.m.-1:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

1:00 p.m. EST: Lunch with your group

2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. EST: Work (includes breaks)

Optional social activity: TBD

### Day 2: Friday, March 8, 2023

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. EST: Breakfast & work session (includes breaks)

12:00 p.m. EST: Lunch break

1:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

Optional social activity: TBD

### Day 3: Saturday, March 9, 2023

9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. EST: Breakfast & work session (includes breaks)

10:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m. EST: Showcase of deliverables interspersed with lunch; debriefing on the collaborative process and conference (Note: Zoom participants will give asynchronous feedback via Slack on the deliverables of their in-person “project buddies.”)

# Facilitator Proposal Template

*Please use this form as your template so you don’t miss a section!*

Proposal deadline: Sunday, November 26, 11:59 p.m. EST

Notes:

* You are welcome to submit proposals for multiple collaborative projects, but in order to maximize the number and diversity of facilitators, we may limit acceptances to one per facilitator or group of facilitators. (Also, because all work sessions are concurrent, it will only be humanly possible for you to facilitate one group per week.)
* Your audience for this proposal is the Watson planning team and potential participants. If we accept your proposal, you will have a few days (just under a week) to revise your description before it goes live on our website. (Visit [Timeline for Facilitators](#_ucjgu6b0q58q) for more details.)

### 1. Title:

### 2. Facilitator information:

For each facilitator (your group needs at least two), include a paragraph with the following information:

* Name:
* Pronouns:
* Affiliation:
* Email address:
* Bio statement/background (What expertise do you bring to this project?)

### **3. Primary Contact**:

### 4. Description (please include a Works Cited):

What are the purpose and goals of this collaboration? Who are the intended audiences? Why is this collaboration important to start? Why now?

### 5. Annotated schedule:

What will you do when you are together? Please consult the [schedule](#_ki6kpi377q9r) for the number of hours per day you have together. Zoom-only facilitators, make sure to build in lots of screen breaks. (Note that Zoom-only groups meet for slightly fewer hours than in-person groups because of the additional intensity of meeting on screen.)

### 6. Modality:

Please indicate one preference.

1. Zoom (Feb 28-Mar 1)
2. In-person (Mar 7-9) [Note: [Question 15](#_zzvbchdpa95) asks if you are interested in a hybrid option]

### 7. Number of participants:

Please estimate the minimum and maximum numbers of participants that would make sense for your group. (For budgeting purposes, we are estimating 20 people per group for a total of around 240 participants, but your project might require more or fewer people, which is perfectly fine.)

### **8.** Participant **background:**

Are you looking for participants with certain kinds of skills (e.g., language, artistic, technical skills), roles, backgrounds, interests, or identities?

### 9. Preparation:

Would participants need to read, do, and/or bring anything in advance? (As the [Timeline for Facilitators](#_ucjgu6b0q58q) indicates, they would be informed of their group a little over a month in advance of the conference’s start.)

### 10. Final-day deliverable:

What deliverable would your group share with the whole conference on the last day? It can be very rough—we recognize that these collaborations are only just beginning—but there should be at least something that your group could present.

### 11. How will participants get credit?

Will participants be coauthors who could list a publication on their CV? Will they be credited in some other way? Please explain their role in the project and how credit will work.

### 12. What happens after the conference?

How will the project develop after the conference? What opportunities for further collaboration will participants have?

### 13. Working and learning environment:

What strategies might you use to foster an inclusive, accessible, “post-White” (Croom, 2022) environment founded in collective accountability and radical care (Johnston et al., 2022)? Feel free to make use of the [2021 Watson Conference Commitments](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/history-and-conference-archive/conference-archive/past-conferences/2021-watson-conference/2021-watson-conference-commitments) in your planning. (We will revise them slightly for 2024.)

### 14. (IN-PERSON PROPOSALS ONLY) Space and material needs:

Are there any particular requirements you have for space or materials that the conference planning team might be able to help you with?

### 15. (OPTIONAL FOR IN-PERSON PROPOSALS) Your interest in piloting a hybrid option:

We are happy to select 1-2 groups to pilot a hybrid option; one facilitator would also need to be remote in order to be more accessible to the online participants. If you are interested in this option, please answer the following questions:

* What has been your experience leading and/or participating in hybrid meetings? What strategies have made them more or less successful?
* What technologies would you want to use? How/when would you connect the in-person and online participants?
* Which facilitator would be remote (whether in their Louisville hotel room or back home)?

For some context, two common ways of organizing a hybrid meeting are the following:

1. Everyone who is in person is also connected to Zoom on their own device, but only one person in the room is connected to the audio. Because everyone has their own Zoom square, those on Zoom and in-person are level.
2. A camera and mic that are connected to Zoom capture the video and audio of in-person participants. The in-person view of the room takes up 1-2 Zoom squares, so to speak.

At UofL, bandwidth limitations make option #1 challenging. Option #2, however, is possible for us to execute for 1-2 groups using a 4K camera and omnidirectional mic that we provide. (Some of the better devices, like those from [Owl Labs](https://owllabs.com/), exceed what we can afford.) However, we also recognize that there are other ways to connect remote participants with in-person participants, including through speakerphone, through asynchronous interactions on Slack, or through other means. If you are interested in a hybrid option, we encourage you to be creative and think about which combination of technologies would be the most effective, meaningful, and sustainable for your project.

To select groups for the hybrid pilot, we would give priority to themes or topics that aren’t represented in the Zoom-only week. That way, people who are unable to travel to Louisville have a few more options of projects they could participate in.

### 16. (OPTIONAL) Questions for the organizers:

Please feel free to ask any questions here.

**NOTE:** We invite you to share your facilitation team’s access needs anonymously in this [Google Form](https://forms.gle/34cPFdcdiNBWwJqaA). Once we select the 12 projects, we will contact the facilitators personally to learn their specific access needs.

# Timeline for Facilitators

**Sunday, November 26:** Deadline for you to submit your collaborative project proposal

**Monday, December 4:** Proposals selected. We will reach out to you about possible minor revisions to your proposal before we post them on our website. We will also ask you for photos and image descriptions for our website.

**Monday, December 11:** Applications open

* To apply, potential participants will be asked to rank the projects they are interested in and to provide a bio statement that describes their relevant interests/skills. We will also ask about their access needs. We will aim to give every participant their first choice.

**Sunday, January 7:** Deadline for applications

* Once we put applicants into groups, we will share with you a tentative list of participants and their bio statements and access needs. We will ask you to confirm the list before January 14.

**Tuesday, January 16:** Applicants are notified of the group they are in.

* Since all groups are concurrent, a person will be able to join only ONE Zoom group (Feb 28-Mar 1) and ONE in-person group (Mar 7-9). We assume that most people will only participate in one week’s events, but there may be some people who have the energy and availability to participate both weeks.

**Wed., January 31:** Deadline for all participants to accept their group selections and register.

**Wed., February 28-Fri., March 1**: Watson 2024 on Zoom

**Thurs., March 7-Sat., March 9:** Watson 2024 at University of Louisville

# Watson Conference History

The Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition is a biennial event hosted by the University of Louisville English Department and funded by the [Thomas R. Watson Endowment](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/history). Begun in 1996, the conference is now approaching its fourteenth run; the most recent (2021) conference, held April 21-23 over Zoom, was titled “Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present”; it was preceded by three days of workshops (April 14-16) for graduate students on topics related to writing, research, and professionalization.

At the 2021 conference, we strove to interrogate existing academic conference policies and practices and reimagine them to foster antiracism in how conferences are conceived, organized, and staged. (The [Fall 2022 issue](https://journals.shareok.org/writersccjournal/issue/view/4) of *Writers: Craft and Context* features essays that emerged from presentations at the conference.) The conference theme issued from a series of compounding harms committed by a Watson invitee in 2018 and Watson organizers in 2018 and 2020. In our statement “[Watson and Anti-Black Racism](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/commitments/watson-and-anti-black-racism),” we narrate the events and reflect on how the Watson Conference has perpetuated white supremacy. Specifically, we recount a racist incident at the 2018 conference and its aftermath in 2020, and we analyze and apologize for the harms we inflicted. We then articulate commitments to fighting anti-Black racism at the 2021 conference and all subsequent Watson events.

“[Watson Conference 2021: Racial Equity and Inclusion at the Conference](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/2021-program/2021-report-and-remarks)” responds to the commitment to publish “**a public post-conference report** that discusses the lessons we have learned from the mini-conference, makes recommendations for future Watson conferences, and revises our commitments to future Watson conferences as needed” (“Watson and Anti-Black Racism”). Although there are a number of audiences for the report, one is future Watson Conference attendees, who may be interested in how we are working to live up to our commitments and in the lessons we’ve learned from the 2021 event.

# Facilitator Expenses

After the conference, Zoom and in-person facilitation teams will receive honoraria of $1,500 and $2,500, respectively, divided equally among the facilitators. The additional amount given to in-person teams is meant to help offset the costs of travel and lodging.

|  | **Zoom facilitators**  | **In-person facilitators** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Registration** | Free | Free |
| **Travel** | N/A | Must pay for yourself |
| **Lodging** | N/A | Must pay for yourself |
| **Meals** | N/A | Breakfasts and lunches will be provided on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday; all other meals must be paid for yourself |

# Access Notes

* We invite you to note your (i.e., facilitators’) access needs to our [anonymous Google form](https://forms.gle/6hK9oFRpb3UsCcsN9). Once we select the 12 proposals, we will contact you personally to find out your specific access needs (e.g., CART, ASL, lactation room).
* Participants will be asked to identify access needs and potential barriers to their participation during the application process.
* An access guide will be posted in late 2023/early 2024.
* Registration costs are still being determined, but we are working to keep costs low. Zoom registration will be very low. Registration is free to facilitators.
* In-person week:
	+ There will be a hotel room block(s) and a shuttle bus to transport guests from the hotel to the University of Louisville.
	+ The conference will be held at various buildings at the University of Louisville. Breakfasts and lunches will be served. Attendees will be asked about dietary preferences.
	+ There will be a quiet room.
	+ We are exploring COVID safety protocols and will share more information in early 2024.