# DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING MULTIMODAL CURRICULA AND PROGRAMS

Edited by
J. C. Lee and Santosh Khadka

# Designing and Implementing Multimodal Curricula and Programs

This volume presents a comprehensive overview of multimodal approaches to curriculum and programmatic implementation across a diverse range of teaching environments and across geographic and cultural boundaries. Featuring contributions from scholars within and across the disciplines, the book examines the ways in which new technologies link to expanding definitions of literacy and, building on this, how multimodal approaches might most effectively address the unique opportunities and challenges instructors face in contemporary classrooms and professional development programs. Chapters draw on case studies from both existing scholarship and findings from the authors' own experiences in practice, including examples from writing, rhetoric, and composition courses; open online learning courses; and interdisciplinary faculty training programs. The final section of the book showcases how the conversation might be further extended to address increasingly multilingual classrooms by exploring how multimodality has been implemented in transnational settings. Engaging with key questions at the intersection of programmatic and curricular development and multimodal studies, this book is a fundamental resource for graduate students and scholars in multimodality, rhetoric studies, language education, applied linguistics, and communication studies.

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# Introduction

## Perspectives on Designing and Implementing Multimodal Curricula and Programs

*J. C. Lee and Santosh Khadka*

### Multimodality in the Discipline of Rhetoric and Composition

Rhetoric and composition has grown into a rigorous field of study within a few short generations. What began as a writing requirement for university students developed into a rigorous field of study after undergoing what James Berlin (1987) refers to as a "renaissance" in the 1960s–1980s. Today, the National Council of Teachers of English lists 141 undergraduate majors ("Committee on the Major in Writing and Rhetoric, March 2016"), the Master's Degree Consortium of Writing Studies Specialists includes 179 MA granting institutions (Dunn and Mueller), and the Doctoral Consortium in Rhetoric and Composition lists 79 PhD-granting programs in rhetoric and composition ("Members"). This state of the discipline shows that the professionalization of the field is on the rise, even while the original writing requirement remains intact.

With this growth, the discipline has seen many exciting developments, including the increased interest in multimodal composition, even though multimodal composition is quite a recent phenomenon in the field. In 1996, the New London Group expanded the notion of literacy by proposing what they call a theory of "multiliteracies," (p. 63) which included "Linguistic Meaning, Visual Meaning, Audio Meaning, Gestural Meaning, Spatial Meaning, and the Multimodal patterns of meaning that relate the first five modes of meaning to each other" (p. 65). The group's innovative notion of literacy then was an attempt to respond to the demands of changing workplaces, which increasingly required workers to engage with multiple modes of communication, including the digital (pp. 66–7).

Ever since, multimodal composition has found increasing acceptance both in the classrooms and in the professional world of rhetoric and composition. For instance, Diana George (2002) articulated the need for students and faculty alike to learn to engage critically with the multimodality through visual composition (p. 32). The benefits of this include shifting away from the focus on product and toward the matters of design: "*Design* shifts attention, if only momentarily, from the product to the act of creation" (emphasis in the original, p. 18). Such observations were reflected

in Kathleen Blake Yancey's, 2004 Chair's Address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in which she identified our discipline's current "moment" as one in which we must acknowledge the composition that proliferates outside of academic environments (p. 297). Because this includes multiple modes of communication (not alphabetic text alone), she argued that we must adjust our programs to "fill the glaringly empty spot between first-year composition and graduate education" by developing undergraduate majors in composition and rhetoric (p. 308).

Amid these paradigm shifts in conceptual and programmatic frameworks of rhetoric and composition, a clear gap has emerged in recent days. While the discipline is growing along with the number of faculty members with expertise in rhetorical and composition theories, many universities continue to rely on contingent faculty whose backgrounds vary and whose workloads are often too high to be productive. Cynthia Selfe (2004) remarks upon the challenges that many instructors face, as their own academic training might not have prepared them for creating and teaching visual compositions (p. 71). Elaine Millard (2006) observes a different kind of gap: "The disjunction between the multimodal world of communication which is available in the wider community and the conventional print models of the standard curriculum" (p. 236), which makes it more difficult for students to find their composition classes relevant to their day-to-day lives. Given this gap, Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe (2007) express a larger concern that many writing programs continue to value alphabetic, print texts only as the primary mode of composing within writing classes while ignoring all other possible modes of composing such as visual, spatial, and multimodal, among others (p. 1).

In response to such concerns about monomodal composition programs and inadequate academic preparation of faculty for teaching multimodal composition, the College Composition and Communication (CCC) has recently released a position statement (2016) that calls for the inclusion of multimodality in composition classes:

> As technologies for composing have expanded, "composing" has increasingly referred to a suite of activities in varied modalities. Composers today work with many modalities, including language, layout, still images, other visuals, video, and sound. . . . . Writing instruction should support students as they compose with a variety of modalities and technologies. Because students will, in the wider world, be using word processing for drafting, revision, and editing, incorporating visual components in some compositions, and including links where appropriate, definitions of composing should include these practices; definitions that exclude them are out-of-date and inappropriate.
>
> ("Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing," 2016, Conventions Section)

While scholars and organizations increasingly call for such multimodal composing that builds students' rhetorical skills, the ability of the writing classroom to do so varies a great deal. As Margaret Strain has observed, material influences, such as contingency, shape the discipline, and she notes that there is a gap between the theoretical richness of this discipline of study and its everyday application in the classroom (Strain, 2000, pp. 68–70).

## The Influence of External Variables

One variable that affects composition instructors' preparedness for multimodal instruction is their own education. Kerri Hauman, Stacy Kastner, and Alison Witte discovered a gap in the technology preparation for graduate students within PhD programs in rhetoric and composition (2014) to take up multimodality successfully in their own teaching. This means that many of the composition instructors with graduate work in rhetoric and composition have diverse educational experiences, and for many of them, multimodality may be a new domain to explore, particularly because its implementation in campuses without a devoted undergraduate rhetoric and composition major is still sporadic. Furthermore, many composition instructors arrive in the classroom with specialties other than rhetoric and composition, most notably literature and creative writing. While many facets of literary study and creative writing dovetail with writing instruction, this background is not particularly positioned to provide one with experience on multimodal composing or pedagogies thereof. Therefore, as Douglas Downes and Elizabeth Wardle acknowledge, many of our instructors would benefit from further training in the discipline (2007, p. 575). There is also the reality that theory and practice change with time, quicker still when tied to ever-changing technologies, and so even well-established instructors with rhetoric and composition degrees will find themselves needing resources to support their continued growth amid rapid and recent changes to multimodality's affordances (see Brooks, Yancey, & Zachry, 2002).

Beyond this general need for composition instructors at all levels—teaching assistants, part-time, full-time, or tenured/tenure track—to stay abreast of new and emerging theories and pedagogies, many face an additional external pressure. Even while the field has witnessed the aforementioned developments (i.e., the emergence and popularity of major degrees at the undergraduate/graduate levels, as well as increased disciplinary development and theoretical scholarship), the academy is still faced with a contingency crisis. The majority of composition instructors are contingent faculty, which the Association for American University Professors (AAUP) defines as "adjuncts, postdocs, TAs, non-tenure-track faculty, clinical faculty, part-timers, lecturers, instructors, or nonsenate faculty" ("Issues: Contingent Faculty Positions" n.d.). In the AAUP's *Report on the Employment Status of Instructional Staff* (2011), John Curtis notes that, in 1975, 55.8% of faculty were tenured or tenure track: a number that decreased to 29.2% by 2011

and continues to decrease today (p. 4). John Barnshaw and Samuel Dunietz report a further decrease, listing the overall tenured and tenure-track rates at 26.88 for the 2014–2015 year (2015, p. 10). The material reality of academic environments in the United States has many implications for our classrooms.

Contingent faculty is a term that not only encompasses a wide array of positions but also stands for a group of instructors with a great variety of professional backgrounds. For instance, nontenure track faculty's educational experiences range from those with MA or PhD with backgrounds in literature, creative writing, technical and professional communication, and rhetoric and composition. While most instructors, even full-time and tenured/tenure-track, acknowledge the need for further training and professional development in new and emerging subfields of rhetoric and composition, such as multimodal and digital writing, contingency has added another layer of complication to the existing situation. The CCCC "Task Force on the Preparation of Teachers of Writing" saw this need over 30 years ago when they called for departments to offer professional development opportunities that include intellectual theory and growth for their contingent faculty (1982, p. 446). In 2012, CCCC responded with a Contingent Faculty Travel Fund in an effort to support such professionalization into the field (DelliCarpini, 2012). While there are many hurdles to implementing multimodal curricula across the board, one of the biggest challenges we face today is the degree of preparedness and access of composition faculty to opportunities for professional development toward multimodal composing.

## The Gap We Found

Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe make the argument that there is a real need for multimodality in the 21st century composition classroom, even while our instructors, institutions, and administrators often need convincing to that effect (2008). They acknowledge that, often, the challenge of persuasion falls within the ongoing need to provide support for multimodal composition (p. 91). Support can come in many forms, from on-campus workshops and training to independent study or conference attendance. While many faculty may have professional development opportunities on their campuses, for many others, that's a luxury they can only dream of. The American Federation of Teachers' 2010 findings in "A National Survey of Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty" shows that 14% of faculty surveyed desired more access to training at their institutions, while 10% would like additional funding for conferences and training (p. 154). Independent learning may provide a solution, at least in part, but many instructors lack the resources (namely, time, but money as well) to subscribe to and read a number of leading publications in the field.

Many other sources also discuss similar challenges our discipline faces at this point along with some potential responses. One such key example

is the 2016 Indianapolis Resolution, which advocates, among other things, for further support of our contingent faculty (Cox, Dougherty, Kahn, LaFrance, & Lynch-Biniek, 2016). Amid increasing conversations about contingency (see Jeracki, 2015; Kahn, 2013; LaFrance & Cox, 2017; Lamos, 2016; Sledd, 1991; and Wardle, 2013), the implementation of the resolution continues to face challenges, as Alice Horning (2016) observes when she complicates the recent success of the Indianapolis Resolution. While acknowledging the resolution's intent to support contingent faculty, Horning notes, "From a pedagogical standpoint, the problem with the abuse of contingent faculty hinges to some degree on their lack of time to engage in professional development, an issue that the resolution does not specifically address" (p. 73). Support for all faculty and staff—and particularly for the intellectual and professional development of contingent faculty—varies greatly across institutions.

Ultimately, despite its wide acceptance in the discipline, many campuses have not realized and reaped the benefits of multimodality (Selfe & Selfe, 2008), and, therefore, the more the individual instructors, program coordinators, and administrators advocate for multimodality for composition classrooms, the quicker the institutional attitude toward multimodality could change. Collections like ours that assemble a variety of resources are instrumental in keeping our faculty, writing program, and other academic administrators abreast of the recent scholarship on the newest developments of the field, such as multimodality and digital writing.

## Our Contributions

While putting this collection together, we sought contributions that would respond to gaps in the field while also introducing multimodality to newcomers to this emerging subfield in the discipline of rhetoric and composition so that the new enthusiasts of multimodality would see the potentials and pitfalls of this theoretical and pedagogical approach to teaching composition. Therefore, the chapters that follow cover a wide range of educational settings, including the first-year classroom, online classrooms, and upper-division coursework in the writing and rhetoric major. The contributors navigate a range of circumstances from the classroom to programmatic and curricular opportunities and challenges of multimodality. This collection also features experiences from a range of four-year institutions, both from within and beyond the United States, such as small liberal arts colleges, land-grant schools, and research institutions. The student populations these institutions serve are also equally diverse. Therefore, to present a cohesive work that helps faculties and staffs understand and implement multimodal composition, we decided to move past the theory/practice divide approach that many other collections have taken. Instead, we have divided the collection into three thematic sections: designing the program, the curriculum and the classroom, professional and institutional development for multimodal

instruction, and extending the conversation: implementing multimodality in transnational settings.

Part I, Multimodality in the Classroom, presents a series of cases in which instructors, some quite new to multimodal composition, study multimodal instruction in their own classes and recommend best practices for other interested colleagues and faculty members. In "Braving Multimodality in the College Composition Classroom: An Experiment to Get the Process Started," Dawn Lombardi provides the perspective of an experienced writing instructor whose limited technological literacy initially posed a challenge in integrating multimodal composition into her composition curriculum. In her chapter, she shares the positive experience of her first multimodal composition assignment, encouraging others in her position to venture into multimodal instruction.

In "Transforming Curriculum: Re-seeing Rhetoric Through a Multimodal Lens," Kim Haimes-Korn guides readers through a process of investing more time into multimodal projects, providing assignments and curricular suggestions that would be particularly useful to instructors who are new to multimodal composition and rhetoric. Her co-author, a former student, Kendra Hansen, contributes her perspectives on the multimodal assignment sequence and the lessons she learned upon completing those, thus emphasizing the value of multimodal projects.

In "The Ps of a POOC: Participatory, Professional Points of Presence in an Open Online Course," Daniel Schafer and Paul Muhlhauser discuss the value of integrating Personal Open Online Courses (POOCS) in the writing classroom. While POOCS are similar to Personal Learning Networks in some ways, POOCs have students become experts on a specific topic, sharing that information through an educational online resource of their own creation. As Schafer and Muhlhauser observe, this not only strengthens students' research and composing abilities but also increases their engagement and agency in the learning process.

While all the chapters in this collection are timely, and each contributor advocates for the importance of well-thought-out multimodal projects, Mariana Grohowski's piece, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall: An Argument for Universal Design for Learning (UDL)," discusses the challenges that multimodal tools and designs may bring for students with diverse learning needs and abilities. She argues for Universal Designs for Learning (UDL), a pedagogical approach that grew from disability studies, in order to help campus stakeholders understand why a UDL classroom is valuable and important, particularly at a moment when those protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act have reasons to worry about uneven enforcement of such protections.

The second part of this collection, Professional and Institutional Development for Multimodal Instruction, moves specifically toward wider implementation of multimodality, foregrounding the challenges this presents and discussing the ways in which others have overcome such challenges. In

"Surveying the Available Modes of Persuasion," Rory Lee shares findings from a survey of undergraduate writing and rhetoric majors, which focused on the ways in which multimodality is taught, assessed, and supported at the programmatic, curricular, and individual classroom levels. The findings from her survey indicate that writing and rhetoric major programs increasingly use and support multimodal composition and the technological skills and accoutrements it requires.

In "The Place of Multimodal Curriculum for Instructors, Departments, and Institutions," Alex Gulecoglu provides a perspective that varies from that of Rory Lee. While Lee's work focuses on research-oriented institutions with writing and rhetoric major programs and the resources that accompany them, Gulecoglu focuses on faculty and programs with fewer resources and formal training in multimodal composition. His advocacy of multimodal composition is accompanied by acknowledgment of the impediments that many face, followed by solutions for programmatic change.

Responding to increased interest in multimodal composition among faculty who are often unprepared to design, assign, and assess multimodal projects, Lindsay Ann Sabatino and Brenta Blevins discuss experiences with a university design studio with workshops that help train faculty in multimodal pedagogies. In "Initiating Multimodal Training: Faculty Development for Creating and Assessing Assignments," they review the benefits to faculty across a variety of departments.

Similarly, in "Interdisciplinary Faculty Training Experiences in Multimodal Composition," Sarah Summers, Janie Szabo, and Ella L. Ingram review the implementation of and faculty response to an interdisciplinary, institutional, online cohort program. Volunteer mentors and mentees formed a community of practice (CoP), collaborating to strengthen their technical and pedagogical abilities with the university's Learning Management System (LMS). They find that the CoP empowered faculty and increased engagement with the program. Ultimately, they advocate for institutional support for programs such as these that enhance faculty's ability to design, teach, and assess multimodal composition.

In the following chapter, "Implementing Digital Storytelling Across the Curriculum at a Small Liberal Arts College," Erica Yozell, Crystal Fodrey, and Meg Mikovits detail their work developing digital storytelling throughout humanities disciplines with the help of a grant. They present an account of the process of integrating digital storytelling in a variety of classrooms and examine the degree of risk that instructors took with the design and assessment of multimodal assignments. They find that the degree of risk the instructors took correlated to their comfort with multimodal composition and that different degrees of risk emphasized different learning outcomes.

Finally, Part III of this collection, Extending the Conversation: Implementing Multimodality in Multilingual and International Classrooms, features chapters that move beyond what many readers in the United States envision of the writing classroom, exploring composition instruction for multilingual

learners, both within and beyond the confines of the United States. In "Is the Language of Comics Universal?: Using Comics to Teach Multimodal and Material Rhetoric in a Transnational Context," Aaron Kashtan foregrounds how comics instruction sponsors students' critical literacy and multimodal composition abilities. Discussing the affordances and challenges of teaching in diverse classrooms that increasingly include many international students, Kashtan shares his experiences teaching different student populations through comics theory and helping students consider comics and their own compositions.

In the next chapter in the section, "Mode-Switching: Multimodal Pedagogy in the Multilingual Composition Classroom," Bethany Monea and Juliana Pybus note the alarming absence of multimodal composition in our writing instruction for multilingual and international students. Through a mixed-method study, combining surveys and qualitative analysis of international students' projects, they examine the ways in which multimodal assignments require generic and cultural conformity, and then recommend practices that can help students compose in and for increasingly diverse communicative landscapes.

Following that, in "The Potential and Pitfalls of Multimodality in English Composition Pedagogy," Anna Grigoryan presents her experiences with multimodal instruction in two very different cultural settings: Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates. After reviewing cultural, institutional, and logistical aspects that influence students' performance with multimodal composing in different countries, Grigoryan advocates for the use of critical media literacy to strengthen students' multimodal composing skills.

Along similar lines, in "Multimodal Composition in a First-Year Writing Course in a Colombian University," Karen López-Gil and Violeta Molina-Natera, explore a Spanish language, first-year writing class in Colombia in which students use their vernacular communication to move toward more academic communicative action. The authors detail their assignments and assessments, and not only students' products but also their increased motivation as they collaborate on websites while strengthening their abilities to compose multimodally.

Finally, in "Listen Carefully and You Will Hear: Using Creative Multimodal Assessments to Promote Student Expression," Maha Bali and Hoda Mostafa, discuss multimodality in a course beyond the writing classroom called Creative Thinking and Problem Solving, which they co-taught at the American University in Cairo. They recount their experiences with and assessments of such multimodal activities as developing alternate curriculum vitae and podcasting, and share their observations of the students' measurable learnings along the way.

## Our Goals

Even as early as 2002, George identified the problem that would persist as composition instructors work to integrate multimodality into the

composition classroom: that moving toward multimodal curricula requires "time and money and equipment and training" and that campus's ability to negotiate these logistics varies widely (George, 2002, p. 32). The challenges to implementing multimodality in writing classrooms still exist. This collection aims to support interested parties in integrating multimodal compositions in their teaching practices: whether through drastic redesign of their curriculum or through small steps of updating an existing assignment, giving it a multimodal edge or experimenting with a new multimodal assignment.

This book has potential to serve as a valuable resource that may be particularly useful to those who are new to multimodality and would like to self-educate. We hope that the multiple chapters in the book provide guidance, inspiration, and models, not only to composition instructors but also to administrators and program directors who would like to gain insight and support implementation of multimodal composition in their own units or institutions. We also believe that the collection will prompt readers to reflect on the larger role of multimodal composition in their classrooms, programs, departments, and universities, particularly because the volume includes multiple cases and models of course, and program development initiatives and support systems, which can benefit not only the faculty and administrators but also, ultimately, students of all demographics. Administrators in various capacities (writing program administrators, department chairs, deans, etc.) may get ideas and inspirations from those cases and initiatives, and take some concrete steps to encourage their students and faculty to transition gradually toward multimodal instruction. They may also review and adapt models that could work for their own institutions. Our ultimate hope is to inspire both faculty and administrators to take some proactive approaches to adopt and implement multimodal composition pedagogies and practices in their classrooms and institutions in an attempt to prepare students for the complex composition and communication challenges of the 21st-century world.

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**Part I**

# Multimodality in the Classroom

# 1 Braving Multimodality in the College Composition Classroom

## An Experiment to Get the Process Started

*Dawn Lombardi*

> I offer a focused definition of new media as texts that juxtapose semiotic modes in new and aesthetically pleasing ways, and in doing so, break away from print traditions so that written text is not the primary rhetorical means.
>
> —Cheryl Ball (2004, p. 403)

## Introduction

It is odd that I find myself writing on multimodality, considering I just completed my first multimodal assignment with my students five months ago. Previously, I had never heard the word "multimodal." I am one of the older writing instructors at my institution—51 as of this writing—and I consider myself only *semi*-computer savvy. But I found myself in a new composition classroom fully equipped with laptops for student use and thought there must be more that we can do with this technology than simple word processing. At about the same time, my son, a high school sophomore, came to me with an English class essay assignment the likes of which I had never seen. I remember thinking that his teacher must be very progressive to assign such an essay. Surely, she is fresh out of college and a Google Docs/Flash Player/ Photoshop whiz, none of which I can claim to be. As we sifted through his assignment, I noticed that the essay required components that lay outside of the standard formal essay that I was accustomed. It required other forms of media besides printed text; instead, it used various modes to create meaning. The idea both fascinated and perplexed me. Adding pictures and audio and hyperlinks to an essay? How does one go about creating such an essay? Where does the writing occur? And, finally, how is his teacher going to grade such a thing?!

I did not realize it then, but what I was seeing for the first time was a multimodal essay assignment, a project that teachers of English and other disciplines have been assigning in their classrooms for the past two decades. These teachers know that our students were raised in a technological age and do practically *everything* electronically. They also realize that if we are to prepare them to become members of the writing public and to negotiate life, and to provide a successful environment for learning and creating

meaning, we must provide multimodal assignment opportunities in our classrooms. In her 2004 address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Kathleen Blake Yancey called for change regarding composing processes in the composition classroom. "Composition in a new key," she said, requires instructors to consider the question, "What *is* writing, really?" (2004b, p. 298). It obviously includes print, but composing is no longer only about the medium used. It is also about technology.

Many instructors have answered Yancey's call for change. However, there are those of us who find change difficult. In fact, a change in praxis and pedagogy can be downright unnerving. And it is not just a change in how, why, or what we teach. It is a change in viewing the simple printed text as a thing of the past; it is the realization that a progressive classroom with a dynamic learning environment requires us to learn new skills to teach what we have always taught; it is a metacognitive assignment turned around on us, the instructors, where some of us now must come to grips with the idea that we do not know all that we thought we knew about teaching composition; and it is the fear of braving a new frontier where we will make mistakes and blunders, perhaps even embarrass ourselves.

So how do instructors like me go about contemporizing our college writing classrooms? How do we hop on the digital media bandwagon with our peers? We know that our students are light years ahead of many of us in the technological arena, so how are we to teach them when we barely understand it ourselves? The first step is to realize the importance of what I mentioned earlier: a progressive classroom with a dynamic learning environment. It requires us to learn new skills to teach what we have always taught, and currently that is considerably more than reading and writing. Elizabeth Daley, dean of the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts declares, "No longer can students be considered truly educated by mastering reading and writing alone. The ability to negotiate through life by combining words with pictures, audio, and video to express thoughts, will be the mark of the educated student" (as cited in Yancey, 2004b, p. 305). Selfe and Hawisher (2004) make a compelling argument when they say, "If our profession continues to focus solely on teaching only alphabetic composition—either online or in print—we run the risk of making composition studies increasingly irrelevant to students engaging in contemporary practices of communication" (p. 72). It is our job to educate our students. We ask them to learn new content, to strive for excellence, to think outside of the box. If we ask that of our students, then we must be willing to do it ourselves. With this realization, I ventured to experiment.

## The Experiment

I like to call the assignment that I re-created for my students "the Experiment" because, in essence, it was. It was also fascinating, educational, unnerving, complex—but it was something I never tried before in my classroom.

I had several different options for designing it; I had choices to make for implementing and assessing it; I also had no certainty of its results. I knew that it would benefit my students by providing options for them to create meaning through various media, and that was good enough for me. I sent an e-mail to my son's teacher, asking her permission to use the assignment. She wholeheartedly agreed and graciously offered her assistance if I needed it.

As I said earlier, like many older college writing instructors, I consider myself only s*emi*-computer savvy. I know my way around Word and Google Docs. I have become acquainted with two different university learning platforms. I have created PowerPoints (but not Prezis). I now respond electronically to students' essays, all of my grading is digitized, and for the first time, I am tracking attendance online. What I *can* do digitally is a much shorter list than what I *cannot*, and yet I decided to give this multimodal/multigenre assignment a try.

The following pages narrate the assignment—from introducing it to students to its conclusion and assessment. I provide details, humbly including my successes and stumbles, and ask that readers bear in mind that I was unaware of something called "multimodality" when I implemented this assignment. (Now, of course, I am a big fan). Here I walk through the steps of the assignment, noting those places where I now feel changes could be made for a better experience for both the instructor and the students. The figures include my assignment slides along with one student's essay to serve as a fine example of the types of multimodal essays my students created.

## The Introduction

When I first introduced the assignment to my students, I prefaced my lecture with a caveat with which they were already familiar: I am a bit "electronically challenged." I politely informed them that, although I wanted to try a new assignment idea with them, there was the possibility that I might need *their* help at some point with the technology they used to create it. They agreed without hesitation. Next, I explained to them, with Freire's idea of critical pedagogy in mind, that I wanted their permission to try a new assignment with them. It was an experiment, so to speak, involving the use of their computers to write an essay, but their essay was going to have more than just prose. It would have several parts—not necessarily several pages but several *parts*. These parts would incorporate various things such as moving and still images, audio recordings or soundbites, colorful graphs, maps, posters, and many different genres that they were going to create in between their written texts to help create meaning. The assignment required them to be creative and allowed for innumerable topics and story lines.

Then I asked if anyone considered himself or herself to be *creative?* I asked this because I realize that not all students feel that they are particularly clever or innovative. In a general education course such as first-year composition, we get all majors and types of students, not just the creative

writers. I did not want to instill panic in those students before I got the assignment off the ground. Thankfully, 17 out of 19 students raised their hands. I asked the two students who did not raise their hands why they felt they were not creative, and their answers were not surprising. They both said they did not "like creative writing." I assured them that, because they were in control of the story line and topic of their essays, they would not find the assignment too painful. As members of a community of writers in the classroom, they would have the creative input of the entire class if they got into a bind. That appeased them, and so I proceeded to lay the groundwork. Here is the foundation of the assignment that I presented to the class:

> Pretend that you are your current age and gender, but you are living in another historical time period. It can be any place that you choose, but it must have a critical social issue that you will research, define, explore, and analyze. You can be either a participant in or an observer of this critical issue. You will produce a PowerPoint essay in which you create a fictitious story about yourself: your name, your heritage, your family and friends, your occupation, your hometown, etc., and anything else you choose to write about concerning the place and time in which you live. You will create original documents that may or may not have text such as photographs, audio recordings, map, charts, and graphs. You must do some research to incorporate factual information about the time period and the critical issue, but the story line you create about your life will be fiction.

I will be honest and say that there were mixed responses to the assignment. Some faces in the room lit up; I could see the creative juices beginning to flow. Others, however, groaned a bit at the idea of creating something with components and "parts." One student actually asked, "Can't we just write a *normal* paper?" I looked at her with wide eyes and asked, "Seriously? Why would you choose to write a plain old essay when you can create something really cool using all of the technology you have at your fingertips?" She replied, "Because it sounds like a lot of work!" I believe I gave a little lecture about how *all* writing is work and that all things worthwhile take effort. This chapter was going to change the way they looked at the composing process—and it did. That student, by the way, turned out to be one of the biggest fans of the assignment. She did not create the best essay, but the effort she put into it showed her that she had more creativity than she initially thought. That was a great lesson in itself.

It is important to note here that I have always let my students choose the topics on which they write formal essays in my classroom. The assignment may have a general theme, such as the historical one I describe here, with guidelines and parameters so the students know what is expected of them. However, I give students a lot of room to initiate, experiment, explore, design, and develop their ideas. My belief that students produce their best writing when given the opportunity to choose the topic is steeped

in research (see Hayes & Flower, 1986; Applebee, 1982; Britton, 1975; Shaughnessy, 1977) as well as in my own experiences throughout the years as a student, teacher, and writer. We all write best when we are interested in the topic.

## The Multimodal Assignment Components

The multimodal assignment is divided into six parts or components—Prospectus, Prologue, Original Works, Repetends, Notes Page, and Works Cited. A seventh component, Research, was included in the original assignment, and I incorporated it in my lesson, but I now regret that decision. This is one "stumble" that I would change. A lesson on research should be completed *before* the students begin this assignment, if they have not already learned about scholarly research. The students will explore a particular time period and a relevant critical issue associated within that time period, and they must have the ability to locate reliable sources of information before beginning their research.

## The Prospectus

A Prospectus is a document describing the major features of a proposed work (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). It is the first component of this assignment, and I asked the students to complete it and get my approval before they continued. The Prospectus serves two purposes: (1) it provides an organizational strategy, an initial framework for the students to begin outlining, creating, and designing their assignment and (2) it allows me to see the students' plan of action before they get too far into the research and find that their chosen topic or critical issue is not really what they wanted or thought it was going to be, is too broad or too narrow a topic, etc.

A document that defines the scope of your multimodal composition:

- *150-200 words*
- *Typed*
- *double-spaced*
- *Times New Roman*
- *12 pt. font*

- The Prospectus is submitted and approved before the research and composing begins

**Prospectus**

*Figure 1.1* Prospectus Part I

- What is your topic or theme?
- What is the historical significance or critical issue?
- Why does it interest you?
- From whose point of view will you be writing?
- Who is your audience?
- What resources do you plan to use?

## Prospectus
(cont'd)

Your prospectus should answer these questions

*Figure 1.2*  Prospectus Part II

I initially assigned the Prospectus as the first slides of the PowerPoint, but here, again, I stumbled. The Prospectus serves as a design element. It should be viewed as such, as a separate part of the assignment rather than a beginning or introduction to the essay. This is where the student describes the essay's topic and theme, and defines a fictional character, point of view, historic time period, and critical issue. The second component of this assignment, the Prologue, has much of the same information as the Prospectus, but it serves as an introduction. When coupled in the PowerPoint, they become redundant sources of information. Therefore, I now think it is best to assign the Prospectus as a separate essay first as a means for students to generate ideas and to get their thoughts down and organized, and second as a means to check that their design is in line with the objectives and parameters of the assignment. I would give it a length requirement, perhaps one page or 200–250 words, and respond to it before the student spends time on research or begins creating their PowerPoint. The students can then take the Prospectus and use it as their guiding source of information for writing the Prologue.

## The Prologue

A Prologue is an introductory speech or scene that describes the theme of or precedes the first act of a play (see Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5). The information provided here "tells" the student's story that the PowerPoint "shows" through various modes and genres. Here is where the student's story begins. The Prologue describes the fictional main character of the story, family and friends, occupation, place and time in which he/she lives, historical significance of that time and place, and critical issue. The student has already generated these ideas in the Prospectus but will take those ideas and create a story line. The Prologue will have multiple slides, perhaps with background scenes, wallpaper, moving objects, or animation.

- It is easiest to write your prologue AFTER you have finished writing your original works.
- The Prologue tells your reader how to "read" the paper. This component is <u>VERY IMPORTANT</u>! If you are not clear in the prologue, your reader will be lost.

**Prologue (cont'd)**

*Figure 1.3* Prologue Part I

- You must explain whose perspective you are writing from in this portion (ex: wife of a soldier) and give a brief background of the story.
- Use the information generated in your Prospectus to write the Prologue. Look at the example multimodal essays provided for depth of information and clarity.

**Prologue (cont'd)**

*Figure 1.4* Prologue Part II

- A Prologue is an introductory speech that describes the theme of a play or precedes the first act. The information provided here "tells" the story that your PowerPoint will "show" through various modes that you will both create in Original Works and find on the Internet for your Repetends.

**Prologue**

*Figure 1.5* Prologue Part III