THE SEMIOTICS, PRACTICAL APPLICATION, AND ASSESSMENT OF THE MODALITIES

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the influence digital composing spaces, e.g. networked technology, have on composition instruction, student composing practices, and assessment of student work. Recent conversations – Pamela Takayoshi and Brian Huot (2003), Cynthia Selfe (2007), Joddy Murray (2009), and The National Writing Project (2010) – recognize that the presence of technology has given rise to multimodality in composition curricula. Thus, this project first questions what can be considered multimodality by examining where print and digital composing spaces have differences and similarities. Second, whether the multimodal composition process occurs in print or digital composing spaces, the process of multimodality (either instruction or production) relies on Semiotics as a basis for visual interpretation and theory. To showcase this theory in practical application, this project analyzes advertisements for technology to map society’s history with various technological landmarks. Next, this project then considers how multimodality can be used in composition curriculum by exemplifying an Intermediate Writing. However, the presence of multimodality in the classroom raises the question of assessment. As a result, this project utilizes Semiotics in conjunction with theories of discourse as a foundation for assessing multimodal composition projects. Finally, this dissertation provides discussion that speculates on the future direction of composition. This speculation recognizes that the influence multimodality has is not just noticeable in popular composition textbooks. The influence reaches us as members of contemporary society.
To my family: Sarah, Eric, Karen, Brian, and Julia.
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CHAPTER I: BUILDING A DEFINITION OF MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION

“\[I\ get\ the\ news\ I\ need\ on\ the\ weather\ report.\\ I\ can\ gather\ all\ the\ news\ I\ need\ on\ the\ weather\ report.\\]” \quad \textit{The Only Living Boy in New York} by Simon and Garfunkel

The origins of this project stem from a curiosity with a basic daily activity: surfing the Internet. From checking email and headlines with my morning coffee to random entertainment later in the day, browsing the web has become such an integral part of my daily schedule that I have started to feel incomplete without being connected. In my younger days, I was not buying into the emerging internet craze; rather, I had a simple life of only paying attention to the weather reports for my news like the lyrics from Simon and Garfunkel. During these earlier times, I traveled a lot in a classic Volkswagen Bus, but as I settled into a more studious life, my life became more digitized. The combination of links, images, videos, and sounds that had me coming back for more time and time again. In recent years, I have opted to not subscribe to cable television, and I have lived in areas where television reception has been spotty at best; thus, I gather my news from various sites (\textit{NPR.org, MLB.com, ESPN.com, and The New York Times}). Within a few clicks, I am also connected to friends and family via social networking (\textit{facebook} mainly). Additionally, I constantly check my four active email addresses for any personal, academic, or professional messages. As this practice became more common, I found that a combination of these modalities have influenced the ways I perceive teaching instruction, scholarly projects, and personal interests.

Professionally, I incorporate various modalities as teaching aids in the composition classroom, and I notice more and more of my colleagues doing the same. The trend for the incorporation of visuals does stem from a general increase in the accessibility of technology with computers and projectors becoming more of a standard in the classroom. Also, the trend for
visuals is “because students are more comfortable with images than with texts” (Worthington
and Rard 74). The co-authors, Barbara Worthington and Deborah Rard, here, make their
argument toward the inclusion of documentary films as a teaching aid, but their line of thought
brings attention to how many members (students and teachers) of contemporary society process
visual information. They cite Vincent Ruggiero’s findings; “by the age of eighteen the average
tenager has spent 11,000 hours in the classroom and 22,000 hours in front of the television set.
He or she has done perhaps 13,000 school lessons yet has watched more than 750,000
commercials” (qtd in 74).

However, because students are exposed to widespread visual communication, I sense that
in a text-based composition curriculum there are disjointed expectancies between what students
experience in a classroom that utilizes multimodalities for instruction and what is expected of
them in an essay format assignment. Elaine Millard notes in her essay, “Transformative
Pedagogy: Teachers Creating a Literacy of Fusion,” that “the disjunction between the
multimodal world of communication which is available in the wider community and the
conventional print modes of the standard curriculum has resulted in an increasing alienation of
many pupils from what schools have on (sic) offer” (236). While Millard’s argument may be a
call out to revolutionize classroom practices and rethink the text-based essay assignment in
composition classes, this dissertation is not advocating for an immediate abandonment of text-
based composition assignments and is not advocating that all classrooms need to be equipped
with the latest technology for instructors to utilize in hopes of engaging students.

However, the disaffection from Millard points out an evolving debate among scholars.
Jody Shipka in the introduction of her book, Toward a Composition Made Whole, continues the
conversation by stating:
While debates over whether students gain much of anything from exploring different discourse forms and genres is not, technically speaking, new, technological changes—that is, the rate at which the communicative landscape is changing—have fueled discussions about what twenty-first-century students of discourse should know and be able to do. (5)

In other words, “the world of communication has changed and is changing still; and the reasons for that lie in a vast web of intertwined social, economic, and cultural and technological changes” (Kress Multimodality 5). The New London Group in their article, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies,” forward a line of argument that recognizes how “effective citizenship and productive work now require that we interact effectively using multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, community, and national boundaries” (64). Within the classroom and beyond the classroom, the digital landscape that is our horizon will demand literacy that extends beyond just words.

The changing landscape of communication fuels the primary research questions for this dissertation. First, how do scholarly conversations solidify a definition of multimodal composition? In addition, I sense a gap between the theoretical foundations of visual communication and the incorporation of these theories in curriculum. Susan Miller addresses the gap between theory and practice in the opening of her chapter, “Writing Theory: Theory Writing,” from the anthology, Methods and Methodology in Composition Research. Miller states that “‘Theory’ is written by the smart for the smart. ‘Theory’ is too abstract and general to have much to do with actual writing practices that can be investigated with more concrete research methods […]” (62). Thus, a goal for this project is to showcase how the definition of multimodal
composition depends on a theoretical framework can be more than just a collection of examples. Mickey Hess brings forth the argument that

for teachers, one of the greatest benefits of experimenting with multimodal composing – composing audio and video essays as well as alphabetic essays – is the opportunity to re-think what they know about composing: to test, evaluate, and expand the theories of composing they have developed when teaching alphabetic writing and get students to do so as well. (30)

Continuing the line of thought from Miller and Hess, a secondary goal for this project is to bring the abstract concepts of semiotics as outlined by Umberto Eco and Daniel Chandler. In addition to semiotics, the discussion of semiotics will also draw on discussion of how visuals have a grammar by including Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. In essence, how can these theories narrow the gap between theory and practice? In addition to recognizing how the theoretical foundations of semiotics form a definition of multimodal composition, how does a pedagogical approach that embraces visual means of communication and the utilization of technology influence existing notions of teaching composition? What are new boundaries for assignments? What new expectations arise? Is there a possibility of a seamless transition from text-based essay assignments to multimodal composition assignments? What are the connective threads that link text-based writing to a user designed web page? Finally, after implementing multimodal composition into the classroom, how, then, does the incorporation of multimodal composition assignments challenge assessment practices? Additionally, what leading theories of assessment practices can be included with the assessment of multimodal composition?

The discussion in the preceding pages provides an important starting point for contextualizing this project as a whole. However, an additional important starting point is to
recognize leading scholarly conversations that address the various ways multimodality can be defined. As such, the following pages will first, highlight scholarly conversations that provide the broad spectrum of multimodal composition. Second, a definition of multimodal composition is intrinsically based on various boundaries like accessibility and mobility influence the way scholars and compositionists view multimodality. To bring these boundaries into sharper focus, this opening chapter will also showcase examples of multimodality in digital and print based environments. Moving beyond a situated definition of multimodal composition, this chapter will also bring forth conversations that involve a theoretical framework, which builds the foundation for defining multimodal composition. Additionally, the chapter will highlight discussion on the practical implementation of multimodal composition in classroom applications as well as addressing how the presence of multimodal composition influences assessment practices. Finally, this chapter will conclude with some discussion on how I foresee this dissertation contributing to the field.

Defining Multimodal Composition: Scholarly Conversations

Scholarly conversations involved with this area of study have differing views on how to define this concept “because technologies change so quickly” (National Writing Project 6). Continuing their line of speculation, the authors of Because Digital Writing Matters recognize that digital writing is “compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet” (7). Being connected to the Internet, as pointed out here, does increase the number of possibilities with multimodal compositions composed in digital environments. Continuing this line of thought, Kathleen Blake Yancey, points out that “Digital compositions, then, bring us together in new ways and provide us with an
opportunity to form new relationships—through multiple constituents of meaning and arrangement with each other—and perhaps to be more intentional in so doing” (100).

However, the emphasis on the digital environment limits the possibility of multimodality in print based communication. Gunther Kress points out in the opening pages of his book, *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, that meaning in communication is intrinsic on intentions of the composer. He states that in communication several *modes* are always used together, in *modal ensembles*, designed so that each mode has a specific task and function. Such ensembles are based on *designs*, that is, on selections and arrangements of resources for making a specific *message* about a particular issue for a particular audience. *Design* is the process whereby the meanings of a designer (a teacher, a public speaker, but also, much more humbly and in a sense more significantly, participants in everyday interactions) become *messages*. (28)

Anne Wysocki brings this concept into sharper focus in the introduction of *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. She states that we should call ‘new media texts’ those that have been made by composers who are aware of the ranges of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality: such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text – like its composers and readers – doesn’t function independently of how it is made and in what contexts [author’s emphasis]. (15)

If design is based on *selections and arrangements for specific audiences*, as Kress points out and can highlight materiality as Wysocki points out, then the changing digital landscape does bring on a higher demand for compositions intended for digital environments. In other words, “In such a world, many will only dabble, some will dig deeper, and still others will master skills that are
most valued within the community. The community itself, however, provides strong incentives for creative expression and active participation” (Jenkins 6).

Acts of communication are artifacts of rhetorical choices laid out with a goal of communicating information for other users to acquire, and the notion of acquisition here brings on another question of boundary: what is the intended mode of interaction, as in the purpose of the composition. Returning to Wysocki’s argument, “new media texts do not have to be digital [author’s emphasis]; […] new media texts can be made of anything” (15). As a result, interacting with print media and interacting with digital formats bring on different sets of possibilities, limitations, and author and audience expectations. Regardless of the possibilities, limitations, or expectations, multimodal composition can be viewed as something fairly simple: arranging various modes of information with the arrangement based on rhetorical choices by the composer.

Boundaries and Production

Conversely, what the conversation omits is the presence of boundaries with the various methods of multimodal composition. Boundaries, in relation to multimodal composition, have been seen as blurry because of the ways that users consume and produce information; as a result, there has been this unsettled nature toward a definition. Historically, advances in the various ways people process information has been met with resistance. Walter J. Ong proclaims in Orality and Literacy that

Writing, Plato has Socrates say in the Phaedrus, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind. It is a thing, a manufactured product. The same of course is said of computers. Secondly, Plato’s Socrates urges, writing destroys memory. Those who use writing will become forgetful, relying on an external resource for what they lack in internal resources. Writing weakens the mind. (78)
Possibly, despite evidence that visual communication is a large part of society, being open to the possibility of having students use visual or audio aids to accompany written text can be seen as a threat to the importance of writing development. However, “before students can engage with the new participatory culture, they must be able to read and write” (Jenkins 29).

In other words, the composing process could be defined as an activity system, and “an activity system is any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction” (Russell 510). At first, the genre of the writing assignment brings on expectations of certain social conventions: the instructor assigns an essay, the student researches and plans and drafts, the instructor comments and grades, and the cycle occurs again and again. However, the computer as a composing tool allows the possibilities to be realized and allows greater accessibility to various modes of communication. The steps are simple. Instead of writing about an image, the image can now be easily placed within the document, and the placement of the image then creates more possibilities for analytical discussion and a better opportunity for a potential viewer’s interpretation and understanding.

The increasing presence of electronic writing environments bring on many questions of what the act of writing can include because writing is no longer limited to alphabetic text. Alexander Reid states in his book, The Two Virtuals, that “this issue goes beyond the specific context of writing in electronic environments; it becomes a fundamental question of how we understand writing itself” (31). Reid continues to argue how advancements in technology borrow and remediate from technology that precedes it. It is important to note how writing in the electronic age has borrowed and remediated writing on typewriter. Additionally, personal communication in the age of social networking has borrowed from many aspects of communication from letter writing to personal phone calls to verbal interaction. As Jay David
Bolter and Richard Grusin point out in, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, remediation of technology “import[s] earlier media into a digital space in order to critique and refashion them” (53). The common link between these areas of communication occurs on computing devices.

As such, despite being fairly obvious, it is still important to note that the choices users make in different environments expose different messages to different members of communities. While a link shared on a social networking site like *facebook* or *Twitter* shows those community members a small slice of culture that is relevant at the moment, it is the feedback and comments on that link that brings the interpretive meaning into sharper focus. In other words, it is important that students also must acquire a basic understanding of the ways media representations structure our perceptions of the world, the economic and cultural contexts within which mass media is produced and circulated, the motives and goals that shape the media they consume, and alternative practices that operate outside the commercial mainstream. (Jenkins 31)

However, the presence of the influence technology and the computer have on the act of writing and communication, brings on the question of who has access because “clearly, a computer does nothing in the absence of a user” (Jenkins 7).

**Boundaries: Accessibility**

Since technology has become so widespread, there is a lingering question of who has access to digital environments and how does accessibility influence any notion of boundaries established within the various modes of composition. Most of the students at the time of composing this dissertation live in the digital nation and have been connected essentially since they learned to speak and read. Other generations that came before are, considered by many
scholars in the field, visitors or immigrants to digital environments, which could be attributed to
the first wave of personal computing. In other words, “as long as computers remained expensive
and rare, available only to a limited group of experts in large institutions, their remediating
functions were limited” (Bolter and Grusin 66). For example, when the laptop computer became
a small commercial success in the early 1990s, they came equipped with a processor (the beating
heart of a computer) that ran thousands of times slower than laptops on the market 20 - 25 years
later. Also, laptops of the first wave usually cost around $1500 - $2000. Over the two decades
following this first wave, laptops showcased accelerated processing, improved graphics,
expanded memory, and slimmer designs. Additionally, contemporary laptops now have an
average cost of around $600 - $800 depending on how much computing power is included. In
addition to consumers acquiring laptops for personal and professional means, the academic
sector has seen increasing numbers of college students who own a laptop. According to
EDUCAUSE, “a non-profit organization that supports the advancement of technology in higher
education,” “[in 2010, 89% of students said they owned either a laptop or a netbook” (Watters).
However, having relative ease of access to digital environments does not automatically equate to
proficiency of the various digital tools. Additionally, Bolter and Grusin argue that “the computer
could then become a medium because it could enter into the social and economic fabric of
business culture […]” (66) as well as the academic culture. More recently, mobile devices have
been added to the technology fabric as well. A number of my students have snapped a
photograph or two of the white board after a lecture or discussion.

With the widespread availability of personal computers, the changing cultural landscape
has been noticeably influenced by the emerging literacies in digital writing and digital rhetoric.
In other words, the way we produce, distribute, and obtain information occurs more frequently in
digital spaces. DigiRhet.org argues in “Teaching Digital Rhetoric: Community, Critical Engagement, and Application” that “all writing is computer mediated; all writing is digital. Writing today means weaving text, images, sound, and video – working within and across multiple media, often for delivery within and across digital spaces” (240).

Continuing this line of thought, Charles Moran and Anne Herrington open their chapter, “Evaluating Academic Hypertexts” (2002), by mapping the changing landscape that is essentially digital writing. They state, “if we use the internet at all, we are used to reading some sort of hypertext […]. What makes each of these a hypertext are the internal and external links. Students know this territory perhaps better than we do […]” (247). Students at the time of this writing have grown up with a rather wide-spread use and social acceptance of digital writing. This acceptance of digital writing seems to be the foundation of how The National Writing Project defines multimodal composition as being often times made for digital environments.

However, we cannot assume that students in this day and age are all techno-savvy. Stuart A. Selber points out in his book, Multiliteracies for a Digital Age, that an empirical study conducted by Philip Davis brings attention to the notion that “teachers often assume that students already have specific computer skills and thus fail to provide any support or training” (30). Selber continues that another take on this situation is that students often insist on being provided with individual, one-on-one instruction rather than learning the software for themselves. But without the ability to work independently, some teachers argue, students will never learn to scaffold their learning and skills, to expand on their knowledge of a piece of software in either functional or rhetorical ways. So some teachers require their students to learn (or
teach each other) software skills and only rarely provide full-class, direct instruction. (30-1)

Here, the presence of students being able to self-teach computing processes can challenge the accessibility for technology to be used as a classroom resource. Also, the evidence here suggests that instructors may be resistant to provide full-class instruction in fear of turning a writing class into a computer science class.

The resistance to lead full-class instruction of computer programs may stem from the fact that technology progresses at such a rapid pace. Moreover, Gail Hawisher and et al. point out in *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education, 1979-1994* that “English studies has never been quick to adopt new technologies, and computers did not change old habits” (32). Part of the resistance then and now stems from a feeling that “nothing can take the place of a good teacher. However, a good teacher can and does use available resources, and the computer now perhaps consigned to bookkeeping or to drilling or to running regressions-is one such resource” (Nold 273). As such, writing classrooms and writing programs now embrace the use of computers, and students often find that a top requirement for their assignments is that the essay must be typewritten. However, often times, when the essay assignment reaches beyond the text-based genre, the concept is met with resistance. Mickey Hess argues in “Composing Multimodal Assignments” that “given the nature of contemporary media, Western society associates the modalities of video and audio primarily with efforts to entertain an audience rather than with efforts to inform” (31). Yet, members of modern Western society rely on visuals for communication on a daily basis.

Limiting an essay to text-based genres hinders the rhetorical choices a composer can make when arranging information. The resistance now versus then is that technology is
constantly evolving; thus, “not only must the new technology be accessible and useful, it must
demonstrate its trustworthiness as well. So procedures for authentication and reliability must be
developed before the new technology becomes fully accepted” (Baron 117-8). As a result, the
scholarly conversations involved with this area of study have differing views on how to define
this concept “because technologies change so quickly” (National Writing Project 6). On the other
hand, the power of technology eases the ways students and instructors can connect with
experience and information, and possibly, there can be a balance between entertaining and
informing.

**Boundaries: Mobility**

In addition to permanence of software as an influence to the accessibility, the physical
cost of technology also influences the accessibility. Granted, the personal laptop and its increase
in functional power and possibility have allowed students, scholars, and professionals to take
their work on the go. The mobility does come with a price tag that reinforces notions of
accessibility pertaining to incomes and ability to afford the technology. Many scholars,
(Palmquist 2010), (Jenkins 2009), (Prior and Hengst 2010), and (Hawisher et al. 1996)
acknowledge and comment on how writing technology has a long history of influencing literacy
as well as learning environments. However, the presence of portable digital storage devices like
external hard drives and flash drives blur the boundaries of learning environments. As such,
composing in digital environments is no longer limited to campus computer labs, composition
classrooms, or the library. Students and scholars now find themselves composing in any number
of environments like personal, public, and academic spaces. For example, the work conducted
for this chapter and the chapters that follow will have been conducted physically in coffee shops,
my home, computer labs, etc. A number of influential forces have shaped the rhetorical choices made to construct the document.

In essence, the discussion of the computer as a medium and its ability to remediate (Bolter and Grusin 53) also correlates to this notion of blurred boundaries of learning environments. Nicholas C. Burbules notes in his essay, “Meanings of ‘Ubiquitous Learning,’” how “the traditional distinction between form and informal education is blurred once we recognize that physical location is no longer a constraint on where and how people learn” (16). While the argument here may be hinting at a notion of conducting classes in online environments, there is another emphasis that Burbules notes. He argues that “work/play, learning/entertainment, accessing/creating information, public/private are distinctions that conceptually might never have been as clear cut as our usage suggested them to be, but for a host of social and cultural reasons they are becoming increasingly untenable as sharp distinctions today” (17).

However, the concept of blurring the influential forces behind learning as Burbules suggests has been examined before. In the book, *The Rhetoric of Cool: Composition Studies and New Media*, author, Jeff Rice, returns again and again to the notion that “composition studies’ supposed rebirth in 1963 […] when composition studies earns its capital C” (12-3) as the basis for his argument. Later, Rice comments on Wayne Booth’s seminal 1963 essay, “The Rhetorical Stance,” as an argumentative basis for incorporating new media in composition instruction. Rice states that

In this 1963 composition moment, Booth suggests that writing is shaped by forces outside of the writing course. Experience is the focus of Booth’s remarks. We might imagine those ‘unconnected’ experiences Booth alludes to as being cultural: films, books, music,
art, television, and so forth. Our daily interactions with such media shape, implicitly or explicitly, our understandings of rhetorical production. We appropriate from such interactions in order to gather ideas and insight from a variety of issues and situations, and in order to reflect those gatherings in writing. (47)

Digital environments bring these connections of experiences closer. In essence, “changes in popular culture, in the nature of work, in the structure and activities of home or family life, and so on, have brought with them a host of different expectations and ways of thinking about where, how, when, and why learning takes place” (Burbules 17).

Professor Sherry Turkle of MIT proclaims in the concluding moments of the documentary, *Frontline*: “Digital Nation,” that “Technology challenges us to assert our human values […]. Technology isn’t good or bad. It’s powerful, and it’s complicated. Take advantage of what it can do. Learn from what it can do, but also ask what it’s doing to us. We’re going to slowly, slowly find our balance, but it’s going to take time.” I think scholars, instructors, and professionals in the field of composition want to both bless and condemn technology because it surrounds us every day. Students bring it into the classroom, and instructors utilize it in the classroom. Digital environments connect people to information and other people, and Prof. Turkle’s warning is a call to action that members of modern society need to find a balance with our relationship with technology.

The call to action of balancing technology and learning acts as a call for scholars to further study this evolving field. To me, it is important to bring critical thought to the powerful possibilities technology has. As a scholar, I wonder how networked technology has changed the ways we research with accessibility to seemingly endless amounts of information. As an
instructor, I wonder how I can help students think more critically about the ways they use digital sources.

The concepts of accessibility and mobility both influence the boundaries of multimodal composition. However, the mode of production can limit or harden the boundaries of multimodal composition. The following sections of this chapter will showcase examples of artifacts and examine how the mode of production, or intended distribution, highlight these boundaries.

Production: Digital Distribution

Being connected to the Internet, as pointed out here, does increase the number of possibilities with multimodal compositions composed in digital environments. For example, a typical web site home page, a user can find any number of links to recent stories, various subject areas of the site, links to videos, etc. Figure 1 below is a capture from NPR.org’s home page from January 4th, 2011.

![Figure 1: Personal Screen Capture of NPR.org](image)

Noticeably, the links along the top navigation bar (labeled “home,” “news,” “arts & life,” etc.) provide a hub type of feel like a transit center for the information contained within the site. With
a laptop and an internet connection, the amount of information available at the click of a button is unfathomable.

At the time of this project, digital environments have become so mobile that the print industry seems to be experiencing a death rattle. As such, the line of thought by The National Writing Project is not that far-fetched because many users (at any level of comfort or expertise) has the option of common activities like surfing the net, checking email, staying in touch with social networks like Facebook and Twitter, and staying connected with hand-held devices like Blackberry cellphones, iPhones, iPads, laptops etc, and the computing power behind these devices allow for more levels of complexity. The NPR site itself acts as a microcosm in the broader scope of digital information, and this site links together archives of stories through various formats like podcasts, web page articles, links to audio broadcasts, blogs by featured NPR reporters, and other satellite shows who host their own microcosm of links. While the act of navigation through these links is a simple action of a click of the mouse, the complexity lies behind the digital construction of the site. The site as it was on January 4th did not just happen overnight; rather, it was the product of a long line of editors, contributors, web page administrators, and web page designers. Thus, with that much input with the collaboration and the knowledge behind the construction of the site, the boundary for a national news web page can be argued as limitless or as limitless as the mission of NPR can allow.

The NPR.org website can really only exist in a digital environment because site relies on a user’s interaction with the content. In other words, information arranged on the subsequent pages cannot be consumed by a viewer without the viewer interacting with the internal and external links. Software programs that ease the implementation of various modalities, like PowerPoint and Prezi for example, have a similar reliance of digital environments. Despite the
fact that slides from PowerPoint can be printed and screenshots of Prezi can be saved and printed as well, the intended mode of distribution is that of a digital environment especially when a composition in these programs include audio or video files.

Production: Print Media Distribution

Print media can include these same features of internal and external links. A text-based document can include a similar direction that asks readers to visit a web site for more information and can include a list of links where information was obtained much like the previous examples. As a result, potentially eliminating the possibility of print greatly limits the definition set forth by The National Writing Project because the presence of images combined with text is the presence of modalities woven together with a common goal of communicating information. While there are greater possibilities in electronically powered digital environments, “the world of communication is now constituted in ways that make it imperative to highlight the concept of design, rather than of concepts of such as acquisition, or competence, or critique” (Kress Literacy 36-7). Building on the notion of design, Anne Wysocki recognizes that the weave of modalities is not usually limited to on screen environments. In “with eyes that think, and compose, and think: ON VISUAL RHETORIC” from the book, Teaching Writing with Computers,” Wysocki states that “to be responsible teachers, then, we need to help our students (as well as ourselves) learn how different choices in visual arrangement in all texts (on screen and off) encourage different kinds of meaning making and encourage us to take up (overtly or not) various values” (186).

Bringing Wysocki’s concept into a sharper focus, the typical web site home page is not that uncommon from the function of a newspaper front page, which generally includes major headlines accompanied with an image to catch the eye. Thus, an imperative step toward
intuitively understanding a definition of multimodal composition relies on examination of examples that showcase the differences of print and digital delivery. Much like the front page of a newspaper, any combination of image and text could be considered multimodal composition simply based on the presence of two forms of communication working together with one common goal. While most composition takes place in digital environments, i.e. word processing programs, there is an element of composing physically with page, ink, and clippings. Sabrina Ward Harrison has established herself as a visual writer. In the next example (see Fig. 2 on the following page), the elements handwritten prose combined with clipped art and color give this page a feel that would be hard to create solely in a digital environment. Despite tech gadgets like digital writing pads, which include pressure sensitivity, recreating fluid movement of real hand writing is almost impossible to do. However, what is interesting to note here is the fact that this page has been digitally scanned and made available for digital reproduction. In either digital or print based environments, the act of communicating with arranged information is based on rhetorical choices made by the composer and a secondary process: reading by an audience. As such, the opening pages of this chapter do bring up the notion of bringing the abstract concepts of theory closer to practicality when associating the combination of visual and alphabetic communication.
The Semiotics of...

As the title of this project suggests, the definition of multimodal composition is just a framework for the following chapters. As exemplified earlier in this chapter, visuals communicate with members of society in just about every facet of daily life. From personal perspective like decorations, posters, or pictures to a broader audience where advertisements and informational signs in buildings and in traffic have visual communicative functions, which can easily weave together with written communication. However, not all visuals combine with communication seamlessly; thus, it is important to enter scholarly conversations involving

1 (“Sabrina”)
semiotics, which, for the purposes of the dissertation, will lay a ground work for understanding of how visuals work in the realm of communication.

The dissertation draws from Umberto Eco’s concept of signs as summarized in Daniel Chandler’s book, *Semiotics: The Basics*. Here, semiotics “involves the study not only of what we refer to as ‘signs’ in everyday speech, but of anything which ‘stands for’ something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects” (2). Later in the book, Chandler brings forth the argument that “semiotic references to ‘reading’ photographs, films and television lead some to dispute that we need to learn the formal codes of such media, and to argue that the resemblance of their images to observable reality is not merely a matter of cultural convention” (213). Chandler’s insights bring Eco’s abstract concepts closer to reality; as such, various aspects of media, this dissertation will argue, have meanings based on cultural conventions. More specifically, to bring this concept of weaving together various modalities, we need to take note of how Kress and van Leeuwen define visual grammar in their book, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. In their introduction, they outline this concept of “visual grammar” as following:

First of all we would say that it describes a social resource of a particular group, its explicit and implicit knowledge about this resource, and its uses in the practices of that group. Then, second, we would say that it is a quite general grammar, because we need a term that can encompass oil painting as well as magazine layout, the comic strip as well as the scientific diagram. Drawing these two points together, and bearing in mind our social definition of grammar, we would say that ‘our’ grammar is a quite general grammar of contemporary visual design in ‘Western’ cultures, an account of the explicit
and implicit knowledge and practices around a resource, consisting of the elements and rules underlying a culture-specific form of visual communication. (3)

In other words, the composer will need to be aware of intended audience(s) with various forms of composed communication, and in a classroom where multimodal assignments are the central focus, the weaving of various forms of media to create communication will carry certain explicit and implicit knowledge and practices like the boundaries established by the definition of multimodal composition.

The Practical Application of…

Learning in a digital environment has become more and more commonplace in educational institutions of all levels. Frontline’s episode, “Digital Nation” showcases a middle school in the south Bronx, New York that incorporated digital media and technology to enhance the learning environment. A few years before the implementation, the school was at risk with less than 10% of the students meeting the state requirements in math. The principal who instigated the change foresees a future that will require current students to be “fluent in technology.” The school boasts dramatic increases in attendance and test scores because technology entered the learning environment.

The “Digital Nation” documentary continues to showcase this future by examining the IBM headquarters where most of the offices were empty because employees were working from home or on the road. More importantly, many of their meetings occurred in Second Life, a virtual digital environment. The digital horizon for our students will include a professional world that is connected to a global economy, and the connection is digital; thus, when our students transition from their education careers, I believe it is of great interest to include studies and assignments that encourage students to engage with and arrange various modalities in digital environments.
Diane Penrod asserts that “the computer, a maze of wires and circuits in a box, recasts the writing process into something alive and genuine for students” in her book, *Composition in Convergence*. As a result, pedagogical approaches that accept technology as a tool can be open to the possible forms communication can take. With this approach, accountability becomes an issue as well. To expand on the issues with the approach, the dissertation will use my own pedagogy as an example. As such, it is important to briefly define this pedagogy. However, labeling a particular pedagogical approach may come off as limiting the scholarly point of view. On the other hand, many pedagogical approaches overlap boundaries. Expressivism and cultural studies form the basis of my approach to teaching writing. For this approach to blend together, I have to take note of emerging technologies that make up the landscape of media, scholarship, and personal connection. This definition will be unpacked later in the project.

Thus, I draw upon these approaches for my pedagogical approach because I believe that writing instructors do not just teach how to write correctly, but rather, writing instructors lead students to making sound, confident rhetorical choices in the various forms of communication. Thus, this project will draw upon the Christopher Burnham’s concept of Expressivist pedagogy from his essay, “Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice.” More importantly, I utilize this concept by showcasing some practical examples from the curriculum that was used in the Spring 2011 semester, which was my first explorations in administering multimodal assignments. Arguably, there is the risk of being conflicted with two pedagogical approaches; thus, I believe that the relationship between Expressivist pedagogy and cultural studies has an overlap by noticing that we express ourselves with in culture: we comment on our place in culture, we analyze the influence culture has on us, we establish relationships with various communities within the culture. This overlap is noticeable with or without technology; however, the presence of being
connected to culture through digital environments both compliments and challenges boundaries of personal space, communities, and cultures.

Overall, the choice for a multimodal based curriculum within either approach stems from Geoffrey Sirc’s article, “Box-Logic,” in which Sirc poses the questions: “Is the essay still our central genre? Do our students do Web sites? Do we teach html? Email as a genre? Where do we go?” (111). Later, Sirc brings attention to “[Peter] Elbow [who] put the dilemma best, I think: life is long, college short (sic); do we teach life or college? I’m more and more persuaded to err on the side of life in my courses: both the public, cultural lives students live, as well as their own personal lives and expressions” (113). The boundaries between the various facets of daily life are blurring more and more, and a cause of this blurring occurs with digital environments.

Because I align my scholarly and professional interests with Peter Elbow here, I can recognize how visual acts of communication influence culture. As a result, the importance for having a basic grammar to utilize when viewers interact with multimodal compositions is the foundation for defining a multimodal centered composition course. Over the last few years, scholars and practitioners in the field of composition have speculated whether or not the text-based essay is still the prevalent genre. Arguably, there is importance for teaching the text-based essay because many writing situations will exist beyond the first year composition classroom, and developing text-based literacy will greatly benefit students. However, Danielle DeVoss and et al. propose the question; “in the next decade, what will the term literacy mean, especially within online environments?” (183). The shift from text-based composition to multimodal composition is becoming more and more prevalent in both first year composition programs and advanced composition courses. The shift is meeting a call to action that DeVoss and et al. bring forth. They state that “the U.S. educational system and its teachers must be ready to meet the
needs of students who compose meaning not only with words, but also with digitized bits of video, sound, photographs, still images, words, and animations and to support communications across conventional linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical borders” (183). However, the anticipation of addressing new thoughts on what literacy means still has a gap between scholars who question how feasible transitioning into a multimodal curriculum actually is.

The Assessment of…

Writing is a process that occurs in response to different composing exigencies, and “when we look closely at situated composing, we do not find a smooth easy activity. Writing moves forward (and backward) in fits and starts, with pauses and flurries, discontinuities and conflicts. Situated acts of composing/inscription are themselves complex composites [author’s emphasis]” (Prior 171). As a result of my own approach, I find myself assessing the personal details of students and their interpretations of cultural issues. The task of assessing is not easy when there are goals of students, instructors, and administrators involved with the goals of education. Thus, “developing writing assessment procedures upon epistemological basis that honors local standards, includes a specific context for both the composing and reading of student writing, and allows for the communal interpretation of written communication is an important first step in furnishing a new theoretical umbrella for assessing student writing” (Huot “Toward” 171). The notion of communal interpretation by Brian Huot indicates that student composers should be a part of the assessment practice.

Assessment is not an activity that writing instructors do alone at a desk with thoughts censored by a fear of what students would think if we told them what we really think of their writing. Rather, assessment of composition can be argued as being an extension of the learning process, and the learning process has a foundation of instructor values interacting with student
values. Bob Broad’s call to action of incorporating what we, as instructors, value into assessment practices stems from his Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM) project, which is the basis for his book, *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubric in Teaching and Assessing Writing*. In short, Broad defines DCM as a “streamlined form of qualitative inquiry that yields a detailed, complex, and useful portrait of any writing program’s evaluative dynamics” (13). To build on this concept’s definition, I turn to Kinneavy’s argument on the aim of discourse. In his book, *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse*, Kinneavy states that the “purpose in discourse is all important. The aim of a discourse determines everything else in the process of discourse. ‘What’ is talked about, the oral or written medium which is chosen, the words and grammatical patterns used – all of these are largely determined by the purpose of the discourse” (48). In essence, the purpose of the discourse, then, is the context of the assignment, the classroom, or the program in which the discourse takes place. Returning to Kinneavy, the aim “is partially determined by the cultural context and the situation context in both of which the text of the discourse is a part. This means, of course, that the intent of the author of the text partially determines the aim of the discourse” (49). The author’s intent, here, is a response or interpretation of a given compositional task, and that compositional task is housed within the program’s aim.

With a *theoretical umbrella* that Huot argues as an essential first step toward assessment in the question of a multimodal composition based curriculum’s influence on assessment still remains. Diane Penrod asserts that “one way for composition specialists to consider the changes a writer must make to adapt to new media writing is to first think about the levels of rhetorical sophistication that students need to develop” (31). There is no doubt that alphabetic based writing carries certain audience expectations, and moving beyond this genre is often met with resistance. Part of the apprehension to adapt a multimodal curriculum by composition instructors
may stem from the notion that multimodal compositions “also layer graphics and design into the

text so they can gain an immediate effect” (Penrod 31). The added dimensions of the visual

aspects can challenge a composition instructor’s assessment practice; however, the presence of a

new dynamic should not change the assessment practice of an instructor. Multimodal

compositions are still products of rhetorical choices made by composers. Again, I reiterate the

importance of having an understanding of how visuals can connect with written text as outlined

by Chandler and Kress and van Leeuwen.

Thus, I believe it will be important to identify the connective thread that links an
assessment practice throughout the various levels of complexity. The text-based essay and a
complex web page that employs various links and modalities both center on composer’s intent
and viewer’s interpretation. Rhetorical choices, in this context, are a literate activity, which is not
“intended to evoke a series of steps, but to signal a multidimensional model” (Prior et al.). The

notion here is based on examining the process behind the product of communication; as a result,
the product of communication is an “articulation, like understanding, that comes from within a
cultural position rather than being disengaged from it” (Mailloux 13). Furthermore, “the
rhetorical outcome depends on how different agents reweave their beliefs and practices as a
result of the exchanges. This reweaving constitutes what we call learning” (Mailloux 18), and
assessment practices should acknowledge and reflect on the learning process.

In regards to assessment practices, it is not beneficial to an instructor’s or a student’s goal
of learning to give a good grade to a multimodal composition project that displays some
measurement of learning or understanding. More stakes are involved within the context of a
classroom because the incorporation of a program’s learning outcomes influence the instructor’s
learning outcomes, which influences the students’ learning goals. As a result, there must be a
baseline, a foundation, on which to build expectations for the assignment and the assessment of that assignment. However an assessment practice is formulated, the presence of multimodal composition brings on new challenges. The “visual elements of the hypertext: choice of fonts, page layout, choice of colors” (Moran and Herrington 249) are aspects of a hypertext that add an additional layer of involvement for a potential reader and an evaluator. Kathleen Blake Yancey poses a similar question in her essay, “Looking for sources of coherence in a fragmented world: Notes towards a new assessment design.” She states that “a larger question here is: Do we assess writing in virtual space and writing embodied in a physical document differently?” (90). This debate of evaluating multimodal compositions has been unsettled in recent decades, which possibly stems from the constant change in technology.

However, the ways scholars and students compose compositions, no matter how ephemeral or unsettled technologies may be, still rely on rhetorical choices. In other words, composition assignments need to include, “various ways of accomplishing a given task and anticipate how the choices [made] might impact, positively or otherwise, the work […]” (Shipka 128). As such, the added elements of color, design, image, and/or audio can impact the final product, and multimodal compositions that have these elements for the sake of having these elements may still run the risk of being ineffective with a lack of concern or awareness for a potential viewer.

In regards to my own explorations into the assessment of multimodal compositions in the classroom, I, too, faced a similar question of viewing a piece electronically or physically. Thus, I had to answer Mickey Hess’s call to action to re-think what I knew about assessing composition and establish a set of heuristics to inform the basis of a rubric. Sonya C. Borton and Brian Huot bring forth a set of heuristics in their essay, “Responding and Assessing,” that emphasizes that an
instructor be aware of the “purpose for this assignment, possible audiences,” and be aware of how “media and the composing modalities” [can] help students “identify and address the needs of an authentic audience” (102). Similarly, I left the assessment process open to student input. First, I established a pared version of a rubric that touched on the major purpose of the assignment as well as the learning outcomes of the unit. From there, I wanted student input to gain insight on how they saw their work meeting their academic needs. In addition to gaining insight to their academic needs, I also needed insight on their comfort level with the added elements of design. The goal for this process was to hopefully gain balance in judgment between compositions that had good design but had weaker content and compositions that had strong content but had weaker design.

Concluding Thoughts

While it is evident that the field of multimodal composition is evolving, the changing digital landscape will bring on new opportunities to further scholarly conversations. As a result, my hope is for this dissertation to provide a framework for understanding how various theories influence our perception of multimodal composition. Additionally, apprehensive to adopt new media into pedagogical approaches, instructors can examine the examples in this project as guide for further development. Finally, the chapter abstracts that follow provide a glimpse of the various angles this project will take on.

Chapter Abstracts

As noted earlier in this opening chapter by Susan Miller, theory is an abstract concept; thus, the second chapter will synthesize scholarly conversations involving semiotics with a grammar of visuals. The definition of multimodal composition is intrinsic on an understanding of semiotics as outlined by Umberto Eco and Daniel Chandler. As such, semiotics establishes a
basic understanding of how visuals are a means of interaction and interpretation. Additionally, interaction and interpretation both involve cultural influences. As a result, the grammar of visuals, as noted by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, will provide an anchor, a structure for a potential viewers’ interaction with a visual by noting that visuals communicate information much like language does. Finally, the second chapter will connect semiotics with the essay genre by picking up discussions of activity and genre theory as outlined by David Russell along with James Kinneavy’s discussion on the aims of discourse. The catalyst of connection is noticeable in how computers and technology influence the genre of the essay and the acts of consumption and production of communication.

The third chapter will open with discussion on how my own pedagogy of Expressivist and Cultural studies influences my approach to teaching composition. Picking up on the discussion of how activity and genre theory along with discourse theory from the previous chapter, this chapter will notice how those theories allow for multimodal composition to align with my pedagogical approach. In addition, the chapter will also recognize the set of heuristics used to establish the transition from a text-based curriculum to a multimodal curriculum. Because this dissertation will utilize my own classroom for examples and reflection, establishing this pedagogical context and heuristics is an important baseline for the rest of the chapter. Next, the chapter will utilize the discussion from the previous chapter as a foundation to note how multimodal composition explicitly and implicitly influences classroom application. An important connective thread here will be a focus on author’s intent and audience interpretation. Finally, this chapter will provide an overview of my multimodal course, occurring in the spring of 2011. In addition to the overview, this chapter will conclude with examples from students, from
assignment instructions, and snippets of reflection (from both myself and students). The examples here will provide a transition into the following chapter on assessment.

   Much like the third chapter, the fourth chapter will start with a broad scope, highlighting theoretical approaches to assessment practices as outlined by Brian Huot and Bob Broad. However, the presence of multimodal composition can complicate assessment practices. Arguably, multimodal compositions have various levels of complexities; thus, the chapter will return to Kinneavy’s discussion on discourse theory to note how composer intention and viewer interpretation influence assessment practices. The goal here for the chapter will establish a baseline for applying a potential assessment practice toward multimodal compositions. Again, like chapter three, this chapter will utilize examples from the multimodal course conducted in the Spring of 2011. The assessment practice in this course used a collaborative rubric that was tailored for individual student goals as well as the learning outcomes established in the assignment. These examples will include my feedback as an instructor as well as reflective input from the student composer. The goal of these examples to is to showcase practical application of theory in practice.

   The fifth and final chapter picks up the call to action from professor Sherry Turkle of MIT as mentioned earlier in this opening chapter. Turkle proclaims that we need to “find our balance” with technology by recognizing how powerful and complicated it can be. As such, the concluding chapter has to recognize that this dissertation can only reflect and comment on the communicative landscape at the present time. Means of communication have changed drastically in recent years, which is noticeable in the rise of personal technology, and means of communication will, with no doubt, change drastically in the coming years because computing technology has noticeable trends of being faster, more powerful, more affordable, and opens
users to more and more possibilities. As a result, the computer will continue to challenge notions of composition and have scholars re-examining the essay genre and the act of composing.
CHAPTER II: THE SEMIOTICS OF MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION

“Sign, sign, everywhere a sign
Blockin’ out the scenery, breakin’ my mind
Do this, don’t do that, can’t you read the sign?”
“Signs” by Five Man Electrical Band

The epigraph is a playful way to introduce some of the terminology used throughout the following pages. The song came on the coattails of the political and civil upheaval of the 1960s, and the rest of the lyrics include social commentary about the marginalization of hippies from mainstream America. While the main theme of the lyrics involve the frustrating presence of various “signs,” the underlying theme indicates how culture has used various combinations of visual and textual communication, which provides a broad stroke of how culture has influenced communication and communication has influenced culture.

As such, the widely recognized fact that visuals have been a part of the communicative fabric dating back to cave drawings is an important notion to recognize. Visuals have a system of interpretation, and that interpretation will influence choices made in the arrangement of composition. Because multimodal composition relies on the arrangement of various modes of communication, it is important to have a theoretical framework to contextualize why and how visuals work as communication. The first chapter poses one of the primary research questions that play a part in focusing the project as a whole: how can theories of semiotics and signification narrow the gap between theory and practice? The chapter abstracts that conclude the first chapter echo Susan Miller’s sentiment about the “abstract” nature of theory in relationship to “writing practices” (62). In response to the question and Miller, this chapter bridges the gap between the various scholarly definitions of multimodal composition and implementing a multimodal based curriculum in the classroom.
The aim of bridging the gap between theory and practice in the first section of this chapter includes an overview of semiotic theories by recognizing that communication hinges on cultural values. Returning to the bridge terminology, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen provide a *grammar of visuals* that help unpack the semiotic codes of visual communication. To showcase these unpacked semiotic codes, the next section of the chapter will examine various visual examples. To build on the ubiquitous learning concept from the first chapter, the visual examples will focus on advertisements that showcase how technological advances have greatly influenced the mobility of the work space. The first example shows the origins of computing technology in the workplace. Moving along the brief history of technology, the second advertisement example shows one of the first portable computers. The final example shows the result of technological advancements by including analysis on a contemporary ad for a lightweight laptop. Finally, the chapter will conclude with some criticism of how some scholars view the merging of advertising with the digital landscape as an infiltration. Therefore, the nature of culturally based communication has impacted the trajectory of composition curriculum.

Semiotics of Culturally Based Communication

Before examining examples of visual communication, an overview of semiotics needs to be established to contextualize theoretical frameworks. The study of semiotics is closely related to the various ways communication occurs in culture; in consequence, this first section returns to James Kinneavy’s, *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse*, a scholarly voice this project will utilize again in the assessment of multimodal composition section (Chapter 4). Kinneavy states that the aim of discourse “is partially determined by the cultural context and the situational context in both of which the text of the discourse is a part. This means, of course, that the intent of the author of the text partially determines the aim of the discourse” (49). The succeeding
chapters involve discussion on composed communication that occurs within boundaries of the classroom; however, there needs to be a recognition of the fact that most of the communication that occurs in culture happens outside of the classroom. As such, the culture in which we live heavily influences the inner workings of a classroom; consequently, the project must provide a broad view of culture.

First, many theories of semiotics center on language and how language represents meaning textually. Umberto Eco alludes to this notion in “Between author and text” where he views reading text, which “involves readers, along with their competence in language as a social treasury” (67). Additionally,

I mean by social treasury not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole encyclopedia that the performances of that language have implemented, namely, the cultural conventions that that language has produced and the very history of the previous interpretations of many texts, comprehending the text that the reader is in the course of reading. (Eco “Between author and text” 67-8)

Using only verbal or written language in the scope of semiotics greatly limits the range of semiotics. Building on this notion, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson speculate that “words have fixed meanings. That is, our language expresses the concepts and categories that we think in terms of. To describe reality correctly, we need words whose meanings are clear and precise, words that fit reality” (187). Consequently, widening the spectrum of language to include visual communication opens the possibility of metaphor or myth as Lakoff and Johnson describe. Additionally, they state that “myths provide ways of comprehending experience; they give order to our lives” (185). If we can include all aspects of communication that occur in culture, then we need to recognize that “the whole of culture should be studied as a communicative phenomenon
based on signification systems” (Eco *Theory* 22). Conversely, to start the question of the how and why we can view communication as a cultural process, we need to recognize the cultural values that impose a set of standards for communication. In other words, “this process is made possible by the existence of a code” (Eco *Theory* 8).

Again, the importance of looking beyond language is echoed by Daniel Chandler in *Semiotics: The Basics*: “Exploring semiotic perspectives, we may come to realize that information or meaning is not ‘contained’ in the world or in books, computers or audio-visual media. Meaning is not ‘transmitted’ to us – we actively create it according to complex interplay of codes or conventions of which we are normally unaware” (11). When members of a culture engage with the act of communication by either consuming or producing information, there are cultural values that influence the ways they interpret communication. Hence, if visuals convey aspects of language, visuals, then, are part of a bigger spectrum of language that keeps members of a culture connected. However, we do not live in a civilization that uses textual language exclusively or uses visual means of communication exclusively. We live in a culture that interweaves them.

Eco also postulates that “semiotics studies all cultural processes as *processes of communication*” (*Theory* 8). Additionally, “this process is made possible by the existence of a code” (Eco *Theory* 8). Building on this notion of semiotics, “the semiotic establishment may seem to be a very exclusive club but its concerns are not confined to members. No one with an interest in how things are represented can afford to ignore an approach which focuses on, and problematizes, the process of representation” (Chandler 10). The importance of accepting semiotics as a field of study continues the argument by Umberto Eco. In his essay, “Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language,” Eco states that “semiotics tends to make its categories so
general as to include and define not only natural or formalized languages, but also every form of expression” (4).

Since we communicate with multiple ways of expression, we also have almost unlimited ways to interpret those expressions. Thus, “it is indisputable that human beings think (also) in terms of identity and similarity. In everyday life, however, it is a fact that we generally know how to distinguish between relevant, significant similarities on the one hand and fortuitous, illusory similarities on the other” (Eco “Overinterpreting”48). In other words, our basis of understanding aspects of communication relies on how signs work in relation to semiotics.

Roland Barthes points out in *The Semiotic Challenge*:

And here I must specify at once that I am granting a very strong sense to the word *signify*; we must not confuse *signify* with *communicate*: to *signify* means that objects carry not only information, in which case they would communicate, but also constitute structured systems of signs, *i.e.*, essentially systems of differences, of oppositions and of contrasts.

(180)

For the purposes of analyzing how visuals work as acts of communication, I turn the focus to Joddy Murray who brings this concept into sharper focus:

Non-discursive symbolization is simply a term that accounts for the many other ways humans use symbols to create meaning – methods wholly outside the realm of traditional, word-based, discursive text. […] Non-discursive rhetoric is the study of how these symbol systems persuade, evoke consensus, become epistemological, and organize or employ intended results in human behavior. (12)

Having a term like *non-discursive rhetoric* or *symbolization* does not un-muddy the communicative waters. When we consume information, the process of interpreting signification
happens on a rapid and almost imperceptible level of understanding. The ways communication represent meaning occurs “on three conditions: that it cannot be explained more economically; that it points to a single cause (or a limited class of possible causes) and not to an indeterminate number of dissimilar causes; and that it fits in with the other evidence” (Eco “Overinterpreting” 49). Further, “we now know that the brain routinely goes beyond what is visible in sensory information to construct a complexly emotional and recollection-laden mental representation” (Stafford 42-3).

To externalize this process, we can consider the act of consuming information as an act of reading; “thus every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader’s world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an economic way” (Eco “Overinterpreting” 67-8). As mentioned before, the nature of understanding communication relies on cultural values as well as the set of standards those cultural values provide. Furthermore, when examining visuals as communication, scholars also must recognize that “all perception is necessarily associated with a motor function” (Stafford 35). Stafford also brings forth the question of “should we be thinking perhaps of situational studies rather than of visual or media studies” (35).

Arguably, visual communication has more opportunities for nuanced meaning than textual communication because there is more room for various interpretations; interpretations that extend beyond the basic boundaries of understanding as outlined in the preceding pages. Furthering the understanding of communication, Kress and van Leeuwen recognize that the language of visuals is closely related to the language of verbal communication. They state that “perhaps the most significant borrowing is our overall approach, an ‘attitude’ which assumes that, as a resource for representation, images, like language, will display regularities, which can
be made the subject of relatively formal description” (20). However, the evidence of regularities needs to have a point of origin, and their “approach to communication starts from a social base. In our view the meanings expressed by speakers, writers, printmakers, photographers, designers, painters and sculptors are first and foremost social meanings, even though we acknowledge the effect and importance of individual differences” (Kress and van Leeuwen 20).

Many scholars have hypothesized that the meaning of communication occurs in three different participants: sender, receiver, and message in some cases; composer, viewer, and composition in other cases; author, reader, and text as well. Nonetheless, Umberto Eco points out that

The problem is that, if one perhaps knows what is meant by ‘intention of the reader’, it seems more difficult to define abstractly what is meant by ‘intention of the text’. The text’s intention is not displayed by the textual surface. Or, if it is displayed, it is so in the sense of the purloined letter. One has to decide to ‘see’ it. Thus it is possible to speak of the text’s intention only as the result of a conjecture on the part of the reader. The initiative of the reader basically consists in making a conjecture about the text’s intention. (“Overinterpreting” 64).

To help understand the intention of the text that occurs within the layered meanings, “the place of visual communication in a given society can only be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society and, on the other hand, their uses and valuations” (Kress and van Leeuwen 35). When we examine communication within our own culture, “we know the code already, at least implicitly” (Kress and van Leeuwen 32). Because the process of semiotic understanding happens on a subconscious level, viewers of images often gloss over the layered meanings of visuals like skimming over a
body of text. As a result, analyses draw on assumptions about culture to provide insights about the influences within the semiotic codes of visual communication. As this chapter moves forward, I run the risk of making assumptions. For the following visual analyses, I will assume a United States centric view for cultural values for the visual examples as well as the potential audiences for this work.

The following images used as examples in this chapter have a goal of showcasing theories of semiotics in action. In other words, how do these theories help establish a vocabulary to help viewers interpret and use visual communication? The vocabulary, then, aims to connect the visual communication to cultural analysis. The choice for utilizing advertisements for the examples invites commentary on the nature of advertising. Eliza Williams quotes Daniel Bonner, chief creative officer at AKQA, in the introduction of *This Is Advertising* that “it’s about influencing culture. Because that’s what advertising has always been good at; when it was good it would influence culture. It would change people’s opinions” (qtd. in 7). Looking through artifacts of advertisements from past generations provide insight of the culture of which they were a product.

The first chapter includes discussion on mobility as a factor that influences the definition of multimodal composition. In that section, the mobility of technology blurs the boundaries of the personal, academic, and professional aspects of our lives. The following visual analyses showcase a short history of technology being mobile by examining advertisements for various versions of mobile computers. While one could argue that the writing implement is the most mobile of all writing technologies, discussion on that particular implement could fill the pages of this project. However, it is important to note that digital based technology is the key feature to examine because the conclusion of this chapter has a focus of addressing students who have
more or less grown up with being connected to digital technology. At the time of writing this chapter, most of my traditional students were born in the mid-1990s when internet connections were available for public use. As such, the purposes of analyzing images in this chapter are twofold. (1) Drawing on the theories of semiotics as outlined the preceding pages of the chapter, the analyses will establish key terminology needed for the incorporation of multimodal composition in the classroom. (2) The vocabulary established in semiotic analyses helps connect the visual to larger cultural analyses.

Ubiquitous Technology

Communication is based on experience, and “we get our knowledge of the world by experiencing the objects in it and getting to know what properties the objects have and how these objects are related to one another” (Lakoff and Johnson 186). Because the following ad for the Royal Precision LGP-30 Electronic Computer comes from an era before my time, I cannot directly relate to the culture that produced the ad. However, the semiotic theories established earlier in this chapter provides the foundation to build a vocabulary for a viewer to connect with the overall message of the ad: the introduction of computing technology coming to the workplace in the late 1950s (Figure 3 on the following page).

Claire Harrison in her article, “How Still Images Make Meaning,” postulates that “the meaning of signs is created by people and does not exist separately from them and the life of their social/cultural community” (48). As a result, the key aspects of the ad for the LGP-30 connect viewers to the culture of the 1950s. First, the most prevalent aspect of the image is the choice for a sketch of a man working with the LGP-30 rather than a photograph. Later in Harrison’s article, she argues that “when they [producers of images/media] make a choice to use one sign, they are not using another” (48). During this era of advertising, advertising agencies
Figure 3: “Retro Computer Ads”

2 The text in this ad is available in Appendix A.
and artists had set a convention of using an artist’s rendering rather than photography; thus, this sketch had a conventional appeal to target audiences. However, the text includes emphasis on a target audience of engineers. Moreover, because the scene depicts a work place setting, the sketch also has the feel of an architect’s drawing. The outline of the computer and the man using the computer has more detail than the background, which is common with an architect’s drawing of a building that has the design in stronger prominence than the background. Finally, the lack of background detail invokes thoughts of any workplace for a setting with the presence of engineers, which allows prospective buyers to picture the computer in their work space.

This idea is reinforced by the perspective of the scene, head on at eye level. A different angle would appeal to a different target audience. For example, a bird’s eye view might have more of an appeal to supervisors or bosses of engineering firms, who are commonly referred to as the slang, higher ups. A worm’s eye view would appeal to workers below engineers on the corporate ladder, making the computer seemingly unobtainable or a goal further down the career path. As a result, the eye level view makes the computer obtainable, within the reach of engineers. The strategy here brings the LGP-30 to the foreground; also, the angle of the perspective reinforces the computer being the foreground with the corner of the computer appearing closer to the viewer than the man using the computer.

The second key aspect of the ad is the key words placed just above the product. These buzz words “COMPACT…MOBILE…LOW IN COST…” draw the viewer’s eyes to the ad’s scene. However, it is important to recognize the underlying meanings of these key words. First, the compact design of the LGP-30 was a breakthrough in computing technology at the time. An advertising brochure expands on the compact design of the computer:
It has a large memory capacity yet its general physical configuration offers a new approach in computer design philosophy so that it has been kept small in size.

The LGP-30 has an integrated logical design that utilizes each component for many operations. This results in simplicity of design since fewer components are required and each does useful work most of the time.

However, these details are not explicitly expressed in the ad itself; it is important to contextualize the technological breakthrough. Through a historical lens, the idea of mobility, which will come into the discussion later, expressed in the ad differs greatly from what is considered mobile at the time of writing this chapter. The LGP-30 “weighed 800 pounds, occupied 22 cubic feet, and required a floor area of eight square feet” (Smillie). At the time, this computer was considered mobile because computers that preceded this model were the size of a small room, which made them rather stationary. Modern perceptions of mobile technology recognize the portability of technology that can be used virtually anywhere at any time. The size and weight of the LGP-30 greatly limit the mobility of the computer to the confines of the work space.

Another aspect of the ad worth recognizing is a thread that will run through the next visual examples. The text below the sketch has an emphasis of working faster and being more productive. The text states in bold directly below the image: “helps increase productivity of valuable engineers.” This notion is reinforced in the smaller text below the heading: “With LGP-30, the engineer works his problems himself...saves valuable time in executing preliminary calculations.” Moreover, the sketch of the man working on the computer is the visualization of the text-based communication. The combination of the visual and textual communication provide the viewer with a broad scope of what the computer is, what it can do, and how it will look in a work space. While the text-based communication provides details on the functions and technical
specifications of the product on one hand, on the other hand that communication would lack the impact without the sketch. In a similar vein, a sketch of the man working on the computer alone (without text) would leave too many unanswered questions about the technological breakthrough of the product being advertised and the suggestion of man and machine working together.

To contextualize the larger scope of culture during the 1950s, I turn focus to the computer’s place during the era. At the time of the LGP-30 ad, computers were relatively perceived as unobtainable. Commenting on the first computers of the late 1940s, Alan I. Marcus and Howard P. Segal argue in their book, *Technology in America: A Brief History*, that “all computers – were expensive, monstrous devices that broke easily. Only the military could afford these ponderous machines” (244). However, they also cite the computer’s capabilities being popularized in the early 1950s when the UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer by the Sperry-Rand Company) accurately projected, shortly after the polls had opened, that Dwight D. Eisenhower would win the Presidential election by a large margin of victory (243, 288). Continuing their speculation on the popularization of computing technology, they argue that IBM “targeted colleges and universities, promising them the most modern computers at deeply discounted prices if the institutions would establish computer courses” (288). The intention by IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) was to get customers for life because “students would learn and train on IBM products, and when they graduated into the business world, would demand that their companies adopt similar products” (288). The move by IBM was a clear intention of infiltrating and dominating the business world.

The next key aspect of the ad that connects the viewer to the larger scope of culture values stems from the male figure at the computer and the male-centric language in the text below the image. For the purposes of this chapter, the connection between the male figure and
language is a visual and textual example of how this artifact of communication reflects cultural values prevalent of the time. Within the text below the ad, the male-centric language comes through (author’s emphasis): “Programming most problems right in his office, he can immediately modify equations where necessary, follow his own work to completion. Thus, the engineer handles more assignments, completes them sooner.” The male figure, through a historical semiotic lens, brings forth the argument that “gender roles within the middle-class family underwent a radical transformation as many women were forced out of paid employment and into suburban household management” (Haralovich 90). In a similar line of argument, Haralovich cites how television programming “became the focus of a growing consumer product industry. This summary argues that television programming, in parallel with marketing institutions and government policies, helped reproduce certain gender relations” (90).

Finally, the key phrase, “LOW IN COST…” has a strong appeal to potential viewers during the era, but more importantly, the appeal of cost connects viewers to the scope of cultural values. The notion of money and value is such an important aspect of the work force that the notion is often extended to other non-monetary based concepts like time. Discussion of how time is often monetized could be a project of its own, and for the purposes of this example, the text, “saves valuable time in executing preliminary calculations,” carries implications that the product may, arguably, pay for itself by saving time, which, in turn, saves money. However, the LGP-30 had a hefty price tag even for the budgets of the mid-1950s. Keith Smillie, Professor Emeritus of the University of Alberta, recollects about when the University purchased the LGP-30 in 1957 for $40,000. The US Inflation Calculator by the Coinnews Media Group estimates that a product purchased for $40,000 is equivalent to about $320,000 in 2011. The monetary value, in either generation, is a sizeable investment for a piece of office equipment.
However, through a historical lens, the elements of the low cost appeal connect viewers of this ad to the start of a consumer society. The extension of credit and the introduction of credit cards during the 1950s had a great impact on consumer society, and this “revolution also reflected a profound transformation in attitudes about debt. Prior to World War II, most families owed as little as possible because they were imbued with an ethic that frowned on any indebtedness” (W. Young and N. Young 6). Continuing their commentary about the attitudes of the 1950s American consumer, William and Nancy Young proclaim that “with credit so readily available, people had little reason to deny themselves” (6). In other words, the ad for the LGP-30 “reflects, rather than creates, the material culture in which it occurs” (Fine and Leopold 256). Noting that advertisements reflect the culture, the omission of a price in the ad shows the spendthrift 1950s consumerism.

The idea of profligate consumerism began to take shape during this post war era and steadily progressed in the generations to come. The next example will showcase the result of the extravagant consumerism as well as the result of dramatic improvements to technology. William and Nancy Young, later in their book, *The 1950s*, summarize how the “UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer, 1951) [… ] ushered in the Information Age” (9). Overall, they argue, “people sensed that a profound technological shift was at hand” (10).

The following visual example showcases the next breakthrough in mobile technology. In the 1984, Commodore International Limited released the Executive 64 portable computer. The ad has a similar format to the ad for the LGP-30 with an image prominently displayed and text below the image, which provides a fuller description of the product, and company information below the text. The ad for the Executive 64 extends the mobility concept, but instead of merging the computing space and the work space within an office expressed in the LGP-30 ad, the
computer in question here shows how the boundary between work and personal spaces has blurred as a result of technology being more mobile. On a deeper level of interpretation, a viewer can certainly point out a continued male-dominated work force and society by recognizing the prominent male figures in the previous ad and this next one.

Figure 4: “Who’s Keeping up with Commodore?”
First, the scene for the top image shows the computer in action with a male user who is seemingly in a vacation setting. The key features that indicate the vacation or possible winter getaway setting occur predominately in the foreground. The attire of a swimsuit and open shirt with the presence of a glass of orange juice, or an orange juice based cocktail like a mimosa, extends the idea of a pleasure setting rather than the work place. The background of the image furthers the vacation setting with the tropical vegetation, the two women in bikinis, and the blue of the pool water. These elements evoke a viewer’s thoughts to imagine themselves poolside at a hotel and being able to stay on top of work while away from the office. However, the portable computer in the image is what links the male model to the workplace. As a result, the mobility merges the personal and professional areas of life. The final line of the opening paragraph for the text also reinforces the idea of mobility: “all in an easy to carry case.” The idea here is that the computer is easy to carry like a brief case, which could be an argument that the computer could replace the brief case.

The text below the scene strengthens that link to the workplace. The last lines of the text read: “The power to keep up. In the office. At home. Or in your home away from home.” The short fragment sentences puts the emphasis these key aspects: office, home, away from home. The text, like the LGP-30 ad, appeals to a target audience who want to get ahead by including discussion on what is possible with the product. However, the Commodore ad has less emphasis on the technical aspects than the LGP-30 ad. Computers, by this era, have been more successful with improved capabilities and more obtainable by increased production, which significantly lowered costs for consumers; thus, the concept of computing was not as foreign to audiences as it was in the 1950s. The beginning of the text gives a generalized list of what the technical
specifications can actually do: “outstanding graphics, colour, music, and astonishing computing capability.”

Unlike the LGP-30 ad, which targeted engineers as a specific audience, the Commodore Executive 64 ad appeals to the executive type business man with the use of the “you” pronoun in the text below the image and in the slogan, “Keeping up with you” at the bottom of the ad. The appeal, here, is for the business man who is striving to climb the corporate ladder and the executive who is trying to stay toward the top of the ladder. The “you” pronoun along with the eye level angle for the image indicates that the computer is obtainable by the general target audience. Building on the argument from Harrison that was included in the discussion on the LGP-30 ad, a different angle, like the bird’s or worm’s eye views, would change the nature of the message significantly. The idea of the product being obtainable is strengthened with the inclusion of the computer being featured in between the two columns of text. For that image, the angle has the viewer slightly looking down on the computer, indicating that the viewer can reach out for it. Also, having the computer on a smaller scale supports the notion of the computer being mobile and obtainable. Finally, the inclusion of the man from the scene at the bottom of the ad in a suit furthers the idea of how the personal and professional spaces are merging. However, these aspects of the ad also connect viewers to a larger discussion of cultural values. The idea of a male-dominated, and a white male-dominated, work force was introduced with the discussion on the LGP-30 ad, and that is continued with this example. The male being featured prominently in the foreground is the key aspect in the male-centric subtext of the message. Additionally, the slimness and attractiveness (the two-piece bathing suits) of the women in the background can add to the male-centricity. Reinforcing this idea, the women in the background are diminished in importance and
detail. It is important to note that the “you” in the text is gender neutral; however, the male shown in the foreground and again in a suit, provides a subtext that the “you” could, arguably, be aimed toward businessmen.

Looking at the larger scope of 1980s culture, I turn focus to the gender inequality that still existed in the workforce during the era. Despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibited private employers from discriminating on basis of race, gender, or national origin in hiring, promotion practices, or employment conditions, the glass ceiling for women in the workplace during the 1980s was still a concern. Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin in their book, Women and Men at Work, include the following graph:

![Graph: Managerial Employment by Sex and Race, 1970-2000](image)

**Figure 5:** From Women and Men at Work

Around the mid-1980s, women in the workforce had made strides but still trailed white male managers by a few percentage points. While the Civil Rights act prohibited discrimination, that protection wasn’t extended to the ways the business workforce was represented in cultural communication. Building on the Harrison argument, the inclusion of the male extended the male-centric workforce by omitting a businesswoman in the ad. The assumption coming through the visual communication is that “men, as the ‘real’ breadwinners, deserve priority for high-paying jobs” (Padavic and Reskin 42). Additionally, the ad expresses the stereotype of the male
breadwinner of the household, and “stereotypes about who should do what kind of work affect everyone in a society: prospective workers, customers, and the people who hire workers, assign them to jobs, and set their pay” (Padavic and Reskin 43). In a larger scope of civil rights, the ad also sends a message of a white household as a default.

Beyond the issue of the gendered workforce, the ad for the Commodore connects the viewer to the perpetuated popularization of the personal computer that started in the 1950s. Returning to the notion from Fine and Leopold that “advertising more often reflects, rather than creates, the material culture in which it occurs” (256), the key elements of the Commodore ad connects a viewer to how widely accepted technology had become. Bob Batchelor and Scott Stoddart proclaim in their book, The 1980s, that “by the end of the decade, no office was complete without a computerized system, and over 45 million homes owned and operated some form of personal computer” (99). What the computer represented was a status symbol of success, and the yearning for a successful life was the beating heart of 1980s consumerism. In other words, “at the upper reaches of the economic ladder, flashy advertising sold images of success to hungry buyers. Lower down the scale, advertising promised a better life, if only a person bought the right clothes, shoes, cigarettes, beer, or automobile” (Batchelor and Stoddart 39). In the case with the Executive 64 ad, the right computer represents success and a better life.

Appealing to the target audience of upper class, the Commodore ad shows the success in business by being able to work on vacation. To the middle class audience, the commodore shows the better life of having the mobile technology. With either target audience, “creating a buyer’s aspirations led to a deeper connection with the product” (Batchelor and Stoddart 39). The deep connection to technological products intensified the consumer’s demand for advancements to be made with personal technology.
The following visual example, an ad for the Sony Vaio TZ laptop, extends the mobility of technology expressed in the first two examples. This laptop released around 2007 features a growing trend in the laptop industry: lightweight products.

**Figure 6: Sony Vaio Laptop Ad**

Unlike the previous ads, this example has more emphasis on the image/scene with very little text. The result of this strategy includes the hyperbole of the actual product being as light as paper. Without the presence of gale force winds, electronics cannot fly away like paper. Contemporary advertising has had a trend of showcasing the concept of the product rather than the specifications of the product. In this case, the viewer can gain a sense of the ease of mobility expressed within the visual communication. While the image does not explicitly showcase the merging of personal and professional work spaces, the setting is somewhat remote; thus, work

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3 (“Tech”)
can be taken to the outskirts of civilization. The lack of detail for the background does not provide much of a clue here, but the buildings that extend on both sides of the male model do indicate that he is on the outskirts of a small town.

The image itself does include composition that appeals to a potential target audience. In the day and age when the mobility of technology outweighs the importance of actual function and capability, viewers are attracted to the concept of the product. The papers and laptop blowing in the wind have an upward angle and are set against a bright blue sky, which strengthens the concept idea. The simple text, “LIGHTWEIGHT LIKE NO OTHER,” strengthens the argument. Rather than including the technical specifications like the Commodore (to a lesser degree) and the LGP-30 (more so), the two technical specifications given for the computer include the material used for the body: carbon fiber and the actual weight of 1.15 kg (about 2.5 lbs). It is in the opinion of the researcher that the widespread availability of laptops has created a general understanding that the actual technical specifications are somewhat assumed by viewers. At the time of this ad, laptops had a processor range of around 2.00 GHz, about 2 GBs or random access memory (RAM), and around 300 GBs for a hard drive.

A final key aspect of the ad is the choice to have a young-looking male model rather than a female model. The male-centric work force idea expressed in the first two ads extends here. The male, dressed in a suit with a messenger bag, is clearly a professional. On one hand, the actual status of the male is open for interpretation, on the other hand, models often are selected for their fit physique and shown well-groomed and fashionable to give off the impression of success. The plane in the background could be a “puddle hopper” at a small airfield or it could be a private plane belonging to the male in the scene. Without explicit information, the viewer is left to decide for oneself. Regardless of the status of the male in the scene, the inclusion of a male
model reinforces the male-centric work force shown in the first two ads. Additionally the male model connects the viewer to the lingering inequality in the general workforce. The subtext of the male-centric view in the Sony Vaio ad shows that an inequality for genders still exist in the modern workforce. Manuela Barreto, Michelle K. Ryan, and Michael T. Schmitt point out in their chapter, “Introduction: Is the Glass Ceiling Still Relevant in the 21st Century?,” that “women’s participation in work outside of the home has risen dramatically in recent years. In the United States, it rose from 20% to 59% between 1900 and 2005” (4). However, they continue, “women make up less than 16% of corporate officers and less than 15% of members of boards of directors with Fortune 500 companies” (4).

Beyond the issue of gender, the Sony Vaio ad, here, represents a communicative shift in our culture, a shift toward how quickly we process information as well as the continued goal of mobile technology. Eliza Williams notes in the introduction of *This Is Advertising* that “For a long time the aim of an ad agency has been to define the ‘story’ of a brand – how it has developed a certain style and tone that sets it apart from other products that may in fact be otherwise virtually identical” (7). Returning to the notion from Harrison’s argument about the inclusion of “one sign” means the omission of another (48), the Sony ad omits a lot of textual information, which reflects the “concept” model of advertising rather than the story behind the product. However, the ad still has strong roots in defining the story of a brand as Williams argues. The actual laptop functions in very similar ways as other laptops on the market; thus, the story for this particular product is the weight of the laptop. The story being communicated here represents the cultural value of communication showcasing the abstract concept in a quick stroke of information rather than detailed facts. As such, the take away from the ad are the bare essentials: the brand is Sony, the laptop line is Vaio, and lightweight products equals mobility.
Advertising Goes Viral

The expansion of the digital landscape has been driven by the mobility of technology. The Sony Vaio ad provides a mere glimpse into the industry of mobile technology. As a result, the ubiquity of technology has created an almost limitless number of avenues marketing agencies connect with audiences. The landscape of communication has been heavily influenced by digital spaces because more and more people rely on digital spaces for consuming and producing information. Speculating on this trend, Brian Stelter, in his *New York Times* article, “Cord Cutting? Cable Subscriptions Drop Again” states that a decline in cable subscribers during the 2010 fiscal year “is a reference to people who cancel cable and cobble together a low-cost diet of TV via the Internet — is getting a closer look.” Print media is experiencing similar declines. Stephanie Clifford summarizes that “magazines’ newsstand sales plummeted in the last six months of 2009, and subscriptions dropped as well.” These two indicators show that traditional venues for the consumption of information are receding to the growing presence of digital media. As a result, being connected to the Internet provides consumers and advertisers with a myriad of ways to consume and produce information. Stephen Weiswasser of ABC stated in regards to our relationship with the Internet: “you aren't going to turn passive consumers into active trollers on the Internet” (qtd. in Wesch “An Anthropological”). However, according to the website, Internet World Stats, nearly 500,000,000 Americans (just over half the population) are connected to the Internet as of March 2011, and worldwide, there are just over 2 billion people connected (about 30% of the world’s population).

Michael Wesch, an Anthropology instructor at Kansas State University, comments on the media landscape that has emerged in recent years in the video, “An anthropological introduction to YouTube”: the digital channels of communication are an
interesting integrated media scape that we now live in, and at the center of this media
scape is us. As an anthropologist, I think of media as slightly differently than most
people. I don't think of it as content. I don't even think of it as tools of communication. I
think of media as mediating human relationships, and that's important because when
media changes then human relationship changes.

Aligning this concept closer with the nature of advertising, Williams states that advertising
strategies are “developing into a more interactive, game-like experience, with advertisers
encouraging consumers to help shape their brands alongside them, thus engaging on a deeper
level” (7). John Jay, co-executive, creative director, and partner at Wieden + Kennedy, states that
“it is more important to think about the entire brand experience” (qtd. in Williams 6).

Eliza Williams cites the “fake ‘VW Suicide Bomber’ ad of 2005, which played on the
VW Polo Small But Tough campaign” as an origin of sorts “where the customer has the potential
to both infiltrate and interact with brands, to powerful effect” (7). One of the print ads for the
campaign in question showcases a similar hyperbole as the Sony Vaio ad, showing the abstract
concept of the product rather than the technical specifications or product details. The
Volkswagen Polo campaign often showed the abstract concept of the car being tough like in the
image below (see Figure 7)
While this ad deviates from the mobile technology thread from the first examples, the after affects surrounding the campaign mark the transition in how consumers interact with visual communication. Instead of focusing in on how technology is advertised, it is important to examine how technology is used to get viewers to interact with advertising. The “VW Suicide Bomber” parodies the “Small but tough” campaign in a viral video. The video includes a Middle Eastern man dressed in fatigues getting into a VW Polo. When the man arrives at his destination, a street side café in a busy part of a city, the video reveals that the man is a suicide bomber. He presses the button on the detonator, and the camera cuts to an external view of the Polo. Inside the car, viewers see the explosion contained within the car, and the VW Polo remains intact. The final seconds of the fake ad show the VW logo and the slogan: “Polo. Small but tough.” While the ad is a parody of the campaign, it ushered in a new age of interaction that marketing teams

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4 (Duncan)
hope will go viral, and “viral advertising satisfies the core requirement for advertisers in the
digital age: the necessity to get people interested” (Williams 7).

Toyota employed a user generated ad campaign in 2011 that asked owners of their Camry line of cars to share their “Camry stories” via the company website and Facebook. The following figure, a screenshot from the company website, shows the call out for users to add their story.

![Figure 8: The Camry Effect Ad](image)

The closing of the text in the image, “Every story has an effect,” is interesting to note. The effect brings potential customers to an advertising campaign with the voice of actual owners and not the voice of company executives or an advertising agency telling us what to think or feel about the car. The voice of everyday users brings the advertising closer to the common person, which extends the notion of customers and companies existing on a rather similar level.

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5 ("Camry")
Reaching beyond the sole purpose of advertising, Sony Pictures created a contest in support of the 2011 post-apocalyptic, action/thriller film, *Priest*. The contest asked viewers to create their own trailer for the film on the company’s Facebook page. The contest was part of “Sony's ongoing make.believe (pronounced ‘make dot believe’) brand initiative designed to inspire creativity among consumers and engage them with programs centered on the make.believe spirit: ‘Believe that anything you can imagine, you can make real’” (Cochran).

Moving beyond the industry of advertising, social networking has infiltrated the creation of entertainment. In 2011, Toshiba and Intel teamed up with the popular social networking sites, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to create the film, *Inside*. *Inside* [expected 2011 release] is described as a 'social film project' - a movie in which the protagonist engages with the audience via social media” (“Intel/Toshiba”). Director, DJ Caruso will use comments from actual users on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) to help shape the script (“You”). The merging of the financial backing of Toshiba shows how companies are reaching beyond traditional avenues of advertising. In a sense, companies backing films is nothing new within popular culture. Product placement in films and television has been a strategy for companies for decades. What is important to recognize, here, is how the strategy of product placement (in the form of sponsorship in this case) reflects the cultural value of being connected and communicating in digital spaces.

Realizing the persuasive power of social networking sites like Facebook, “Companies have recognized the importance of marketing to this massive group, and they are pulling out all the stops to try to get Facebook users to become ‘fans’ of their corporate page” (Sauter). The basic website of a company is somewhat of a two-way street with the viewer interacting solely with the site. However, “when a user likes a big brand [on Facebook], they are recommending
the product to their friends, an element that isn’t usually visible when visiting a website” (Stott). The result, as Stott argues, “helps to make their friends more likely to buy that product over a competitor’s.” “Liking” a company on Facebook then becomes part of the news feed, putting the company’s message, updates and promotions, on the same level as the status updates from the user’s network for friends. Michael B. Sauter reported in late 2011 that the top 5 companies on Facebook, the companies with the most fans, include 5. McDonald's, 4. Red Bull, 3. Starbucks, 2. Disney, and 1. Coca-Cola.

Additionally, the desire of ad agencies embracing the user directed content within digital spaces of communication reflect how modern culture values content that hits on a deeper level than a narrative. In a sense, advertisers have started to break the proverbial fourth wall whereas narrative about a product or brand still had an imaginary barrier between consumer and composer. Pat Fallon, Chairman of Fallon Worldwide, states that “it’s time to embrace the public as co-marketers of brands. They have tools – easy multi-media editing of content, distribution by e-mail, blogs, pod-casts, etc. – and are ready and willing to join” (312).

However, this new and evolving era of advertising comes with criticism. The consumer culture has been bombarded by advertising strategies, and to help contextualize how this came to be, this chapter turns focus to a turning point in the history of advertising. According to the documentary, Consuming Kids, the modern era of advertising is a direct result of the Federal Trade Commission’s deregulation of advertising, which was approved by the Reagan Administration in 1984. The documentary points out that child spending has increased from $4.2 billion in 1984 to almost $40 billion just two and half decades later, “an 852% increase.” Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Professor of Education at Lesley University theorizes that “deregulation really opened the floodgates for a kind of marketing to children that never existed before the mid-
Accordingly, members of this digital culture need to ask where the line is; whose responsibility is it to regulate the various ways in which communication reaches us? Stuart A. Selber points out in the epilogue of his book, *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, that “if students are to become agents of positive change, they will need an education that is comprehensive and truly relevant to a digital age” (234).

Reflecting this need for change, the National Council of Teachers of English, from 2004, recognizes that “connections to the Internet not only make a range of materials available to writers, they also collapse distances between writers and readers and between generating words and creating designs” (“NCTE Beliefs”). Building on this need, the NCTE argues in the organization’s “Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies” that “the contemporary difference is the ease with which we can combine words, images, sound, color, animation, video, and styles of print in projects so that they are part of our everyday lives and, at least by our youngest generation, often taken for granted.”

The consumption of information is also being taken for granted. Marketers have utilized “new media technologies” to aim their strategies towards children to hook buyers of brands and products for life; their strategies include digitally based entertainment like “advergames,” which use brands and products for the basis of online games (*Consuming Kids*). Additionally, “this new world of advertising as entertainment and entertainment as advertising no longer seems to recognize any boundaries especially with the rise of new media technologies” (*Consuming Kids*). Building on the commentary from Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid?,” about the ways we allow companies “to collect information about us,” the children growing up in this digital culture are being micro targeted by advertising agencies and getting hooked on brand
names and consumerism before they are cognitively aware of how to navigate these digital spaces (Consuming Kids).

Building on the criticism of advertising, Richard Pollay in his article, “The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising,” points to the darker side of consumerism by what advertising does not reveal. He states that “inducing higher levels of consumption requires increasing production levels; however, advertising rarely discusses the consequences of greater production on water, land, and air pollution” (237). Additionally, advertising “reinforces stereotypes and produces idealized images that cultivate a sense of dissatisfaction and lack. Advertising sells its goods by modeling unattainable images and fostering insecurities, anxieties, fears, ambitions, greed, and lust that ultimately generate self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy” (Pollay 237). As discussed with the ad for the Commodore Executive 64, the image of a better life and success carries the visual communication, and that notion echoes in the Sony Vaio ad. Additionally, when advertising strategies share similar space as our friends, like in Facebook news feeds, viewers often overlook what Pollay brings to light.

Concluding Thoughts

The ways our culture consumes and produces information is a direct link to how marketing agencies have infiltrated composing spaces. As such, the various ways of communication have influenced the path of composition curriculums. The “21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework” by the NCTE elaborates on what literacy means in our technological age:

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments,
the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups.

Building on this notion, the NCTE in their “Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies” overviews what the multimodal literacies means for teaching. The statement argues that “readers in electronic environments are able to gain access immediately to a broad range and great depth of information that not 15 years ago would have required long visits to libraries or days of waiting for mailed replies.”

As this project moves into the next chapter, it is important to recognize how the languages of multimodal compositions work in the communication of our culture. Language, either textual or visual, often involve spatial relationships; “we speak in linear order; in a sentence, we say some words earlier and others later. Since speaking is correlated with time and time is metaphorically conceptualized in terms of space, it is natural for us to conceptualize language metaphorically in terms of space” (Lakoff and Johnson 126). Bringing this concept into sharper focus, they utilize the “relationship between form and content” (127). They draw this relationship on “generalizations” that assume that “nouns stands for an object of a certain kind, [and] a verb stands for an action” (128). Because visuals can work as communication, we need to recognize that “pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it. But this is no longer a constitutive difference. Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a lexis” (Barthes Mythologies 110). However, some scholars like George Lakoff and Mark
Johnson could argue that an image of a computer used in an advertisement is just that, an image of a computer. Language is language, and no matter what form communication takes, there are always limitations. They state in their chapter, “The Myths of Objectivism and Subjectivism,” that when examining any system of communication, “there is no fully objective, unconditional, or absolute truth” (185).

In addition to the types of communication cultures utilize, the technology of how communication is created has had a long standing of criticism from the first writing implement to the typewriter to digital writing spaces. In a similar light, the wide-spread popularity of television in the 1980s was believed to be “among the most powerful stimuli on the individual” (Marcus and Segal 327). However, “some argued that contemporary social problems owed their genesis in part to television broadcasts; […] a subsequent committee [of a special national PTA committee] blamed television for the decline in children’s reading skills” (Marcus and Segal 327-8). Nicholas Carr in the article “Is Google making Us Stupid?” alludes to theorist Marshall McLuhan, who “pointed out in the 1960s [that] media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought” (57). Later, Carr argues that “we may well be reading more today [via digital spaces] then we did in the 1970s or 1980s when television was our medium of choice” (58). However, he includes Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University, who worries that “our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged.”

The concluding moments Michael Wesch’s video, “Web 2.0 … The Machine is Us/ing Us,” makes the argument of “rethinking a few things.” The film shows a screen with these words typed out: “We’ll need to rethink a few things.” The cursor highlights the last three words and
shows how malleable language can be by changing the statement to read, “We’ll need to rethink copyright.” From there, the video shows a succession of the last word in the statement being highlighted and changed to the following one at a time: “authorship, identity, ethics, aesthetics, rhetorics, governance, privacy, commerce, love, family, ourselves.” Each word is highlighted and changed as the film concludes. His call to action is not unwarranted here.

As children of the digital age mature, they will need to be aware of “the wide array of literacies they will need in order to participate fully and productively in the technological dimensions of their professional and personal lives” (Selber 234). Later in the epilogue, Selber brings our attention to a call to action that asks us to recognize that “it is certainly the responsibility of writing and communication teachers to help students develop” multiliteracies (235). Echoing Selber, “educationalists need to rethink what will need to be included in the curricula of ‘literacy’, what should be taught under its heading in schools, and consider the new and still changing place of writing as a mode within these new arrangements” (Kress and van Leeuwen 34). This call to action is the foundation for the next chapter that explores how multimodal composition influences pedagogy, and more importantly, addresses the question of why is it important to recognize multimodal curriculum as a form of composition instruction. For me as a scholar, it is an exciting time to be a member of this emerging and evolving digital culture because multimodal composition provides instructors, students, and scholars the tools to employ critical thought on how communication represents our culture.
CHAPTER III: THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE MODALITIES

“Walk across the courtyard, towards the library.
I can hear the insects buzz and the leaves 'neath my feet.
Ramble up the stairwell, into the hall of books
Since we got the interweb, these hardly get used.”
“Librarian” by My Morning Jacket

The lyrics that open this chapter provide social commentary on the fate of the library. While the rest of the lyrics reveal that the song has overtones of inner beauty and how much some people care about their external appearance, the opening stanza, here, evoke thoughts of the changing of the times. As a researcher and educator, I am biased in my speculation that the deaths of the print book and library will never come around. However, modern technology paints us a different picture of foresight. Digital readers like the Kindle and Nook have us thinking differently about books and how we read them: a lack of physical touch with the pages. Mobile technology, to return to the argument of the previous chapter, has us thinking differently about paper work and how to transport information. Despite the advances of technology, the physical book and the brick and mortar library will never go by the way side. Paul Duguid, in “Material Matters: The Past and Futurology of the Book,” poetically states on the lasting relevance of technology: “like an exasperated gardener, we snip triumphantly at the exposed plant, forgetting how extensive established roots can be” (64). The physical presence of the printed book and the book’s appeal to our senses “offer their own deep-rooted and resilient combination of technology and social process” (Duguid 64). The first chapter argues that multimodal composition can exist in any mode of distribution, and technologies merely provide different opportunities for what types of genres can come together.

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical foundations of visual interpretation; as such, this chapter builds on those notions to showcase how multimodal composition can be
implemented in the classroom. However, to showcase the relationship of multimodality and composition instruction, I believe it is important to briefly overview technology’s influence on the composing process. Mike Palmquist states in the conclusion of his essay, “Development of Digital Tools,” that “our ranges of choices about writing tools, genre, and publication medium has grown, as has the size and diversity of our potential audience” (34). Building on this concept, The National Writing Project argues in their collaborative book, *Because Digital Writing Matters*, that composition scholarship and instruction should recognize the need for utilizing modalities in education:

> In other words, the U.S. educational system and its teachers must be ready to meet the needs of students who compose meaning not only with words, but also with digitized bits of video, sound, photographs, still images, words, and animations and to support communications across conventional linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical borders. (183)

While technological advances have eased the process of blending together modalities, incorporating various genres of communication for different audiences are complicated steps to take for composition students. More specifically, the theories of semiotics, outlined in the previous chapter, dictate that the various layers of interpretation create multiple points of connection between the modalities in the composing process. Building on this notion, the research goals of this chapter aim to explore how curriculum and theory can scaffold the composing process while linking monomodal composition to multimodal composition and to explore the pedagogical advantages of both mono- and multimodal composition.

To address these goals, this chapter will first examine the nature of first year composition by examining the transition students go through when entering the college-level learning environment. The examination into first year composition aims to establish that multimodal
composition cannot exist without an understanding of monomodal composition. The curriculum for first year composition, as I argue, should focus on monomodal composition to form a foundation of students’ understanding with rhetorical motives. As a result, multimodal composition aligns closer to the theories, scholarly conversations, and general curriculum associated with Advanced Composition. Second, because composition courses generally require student work to be composed in digital writing environments, the writing environment involves opportunities for composers to engage with various levels of complexity. To help explain this relationship of first year and Advanced Composition, this chapter will draw from genre and activity theories that bring focus on Carolyn R. Miller’s account of genres being stable action and David Russell’s argument on how tools mediate the activity. Next, to showcase the genre and activity theories in action, this chapter will examine my own experience with implementing a multimodal based curriculum with an Intermediate Writing course that I taught at Bowling Green State University during the spring semester of 2011. Examining this particular course allows this project to take a reflective and in depth look at the artifacts created by the students, and the purpose of examining student artifacts is to showcase successful and unsuccessful student interpretation of how to merge and arrange the modalities for the purpose of presenting and creating information. Finally, the reflective examination of student artifacts will highlight the pedagogical advantages of being engaged with multimodal curriculum.

The Modalities of First Year Composition

The history of composition as an area of scholarly debate has asked variations of “What is English?” since the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966 (Harris 1-4). Richard Fulkerson, who has

Footnote 6: Most of the scholarship involving Advanced Composition refers to a sophomore (or 200) level writing course. BGSU has labeled this course English 2070 “Intermediate Writing.” The English Department at BGSU also has a senior level writing course labeled, English 4830 “Advanced Composition.” This detail will be discussed later in the chapter.
mapped the composition field in the decades following the Dartmouth Seminar, notes that during the 1980s scholars had moved away from the abstract questioning of English to a more concrete theoretical line of questioning. Fulkerson summarizes that the goals of composition “were to help students improve their writing and that ‘good writing’ meant writing that was rhetorically effective for audience and situation” (655). Fulkerson also notes that at the time scholars “still disagreed over what sort of pedagogy would best reach the goal – over whether to assign topics, how to assign topics, and what type of topics to assign” (655). Since the 1980s, Fulkerson continues, composition has “diverged again” by recognizing that “the eight ‘approaches’ from 1980 have increased to twelve ‘pedagogies’ in the 2001 collection” (655-6). The diversified field has created multiple access points for scholarly debate about the field as a whole; however, the presence of technologically based composition returns focus to Harris’s account of the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar. James Britton, Dartmouth Seminar attendee, asked, “What do we want students and teachers to be doing?” (5). Britton’s answer “was to define English as that space in the curriculum where students are encouraged to use language in more complex and expressive ways” (Harris 5).

Britton’s question and answer, however, exposes the challenges with the state of first year composition at the turn of the twenty-first Century. Part of the challenge about what first year composition should do for students involves recognition of the transition from post-secondary to higher education students experience. I have noticed with my own students that her answer is fairly obvious. The external influences at work during this transitional period are quite strong. Janet Alsup concludes in the collaborative article, “The Fantasy of the ‘Seamless

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7 Richard Fulkerson’s “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty First Century” lists the 1980 book, *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*, published by the NCTE and the collection, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, edited by Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper and Kurt Schick. Fulkerson uses a table to list the chapters of each collection. To view the list of chapters, refer to Appendix B.
Transition, ” that high school and writing courses are “different classes, taught in different contexts, to students at different cognitive and developmental (not to mention emotional) levels” (131). The social environments of high school and college are, of course, significantly different. Students are in the beginning stages of independence with many students living away from home for the first time. Also, college level education generally has less supervision of student progress.

On the other hand, Peter Kittle and Rochelle Ramay build on the educational differences in their chapter, “Minding the Gaps: Public Genres and Academic Writing.” Standardized testing has been utilized long before the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001; however, the effects of the NCLB are recognized by Kittle and Rochelle as having “an increased prominence of standardized written forms in the public school sphere – a prominence that does not lend itself to effective college-level writing” (100). Citing the “five-paragraph essay” as an example of standardized writing in secondary education, Kittle and Rochelle note that this formula of writing “is clean and clear for the writer to compose and for the teacher to score” (100-1). They argue that the formula does not allow “the writer to consider that someone, besides the teacher, might take an interest in the writer’s ideas” (101).

Because students come from learning environments that often have a narrow focus for the writing, the goals of first year composition do pose challenges for instructors and students. The 2000 “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” includes the following outcomes, which can be arguably seen as a way to push student boundaries:

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
• Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
• Understand how genres shape reading and writing
• Write in several genres

The outcome that poses the larger challenge for students is the focus on *different audiences.* Anticipating various audiences widens the possibilities for the writing, and students find that the writing process used in the narrow “standardized” environment does not transfer into the new writing exigencies.

First year students need to acclimate to the writing exigencies of college, and implementing aspects of multimodality into the curriculum could be seen as taking on too much in a first year writing course. Students are moving from writing environments that utilize formulaic writing assignments, and while some multimodal compositions rely on formulaic templates (like blogs, *PowerPoint* slides, basic web pages with a menu bar, etc), adapting various genres for different audiences tack on layers of critical thought that might be beyond the abilities of many first year writing students. Adapting composition for various academic audiences asks students to assume a point of privilege that they may not have the mental maturity to do so.

David Bartholomae states in his seminal article, “Inventing the University,” that “writers have to ‘build bridges’ between their point of view and the reader’s. They have to anticipate and acknowledge the reader’s assumptions and biases” (628). The building bridges metaphor, here, recognizes that students are trying to situate themselves within a discourse without having the “privilege,” and doing so “becomes more a matter of imitation or parody than a matter of invention and discovery” (Bartholomae 632). However, because students transition into college level writing exigencies during first-year composition, some ways to anticipate the “imitation or parody” trap is “experimenting with multimodal composing” (Hess 30). Mickey Hess continues...
his line of thought by recognizing that multimodal composing “is the opportunity to *re-think* what they know about composing: to test, evaluate, and expand the theories of composing they have developed when teaching alphabetic writing and get students to do so as well” (30). The push to include different literacies in composition is noticeable in the 2005 NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies. The statement argues that “the techniques of acquiring, organizing, evaluating, and creatively using multimodal information should become an increasingly important component of the English/Language Arts classroom.” However, in doing so within the context of first year composition, scholars and instructors should tread carefully. The added layers of visual interpretation muddy the composition waters, and before the composing process can take on these added layers, composers need to acquire the conventions of college level discourse.

To help ground the process of acquiring the conventions of college level discourse, composition can be seen through a linguistic lens. This notion is not meant to compare first year writing students as children. Rather, the model of language acquisition can be applied when determining students’ utterances. William O’Grady and Sook Whan Cho highlight on first language acquisition:

> At one time, it was widely believed that children learn language simply by imitating the speech of those around them. This cannot be right, however. Not only do children tend not to repeat the speech of others, but they are typically unable to imitate structures that they have not yet learned. […] [However], children who are exposed to English learn to speak English, those exposed to Navajo learn Navajo, and so forth. (386)

In other words, children learning a language understand more than they can produce. For the writing instructor, it is important to note that students understand more than they are able to
write. Thus, the notion of process is imperative towards developing their writing ability. As noted with Cho and O’Grady, the mere fact that students are submerged in the academic discourse is not enough; they need practice with taking their thoughts from mental conception to the page. While the products of this process might be considered imitation or parody, as Bartholomae argues (632), composition instructors “could be more precise and helpful when they ask students to ‘think,’ ‘argue,’ ‘describe,’ or ‘define’” (635). Bartholomae concludes his essay by recognizing that “students must have a place to begin. They cannot sit through lectures and read textbooks and, as a consequence, write as sociologists or write literary criticism. There must be steps along the way” (645). Like the linguistic lens, being exposed to language or discourse allows for opportunities to learn the conventions, and if having familiarity with the conventions of multimodal composition is an academic or professional goal, then steps must be in place to support the scaffolding process.

Consequently, scholars view the composing process as a series of rhetorical choices the composer makes while navigating various genres, source material, personal experiences, along with insights, opinions, and interpretations. As pointed out in The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing, “a good assignment has to have a purpose. If you ask students to write a meaningless exercise, that is what you will get” (Glenn, Goldthwaite, and Connors 94). Thus, the purpose behind an assignment within any composition course becomes all that much more important in order to get meaningful rhetorical choices from the student. The choices, then, are based on the goals the student wants to accomplish, the goals the instructor hopes are gained by the student composer, and the expectancies an audience brings when viewing the composition. With meaning supporting the assignment, the process of scaffolding the composing process arguably starts within the context of first year composition. My goals as an instructor is to help prepare
students to take the next steps of reaching the final goal of being prepared for the composing exigencies of their academic, professional, and personal lives.

In regards to first-year composition pedagogy, instructors need to have sound rationale based on theory when implementing multimodal composition. Returning to Mickey Hess, “multimodal assignments must also fit within existing systems of pedagogy; teachers will want to consider how – or if – multimodal composing fits their instructional approaches and goals for students” (30). The preceding pages have argued for first-year composition to be primarily based on being monomodal; however, I have based this argument on my own experiences. I can fully recognize that students have grown up with digital literacies, like the discussion included in chapter 2 outlines. Hess continues his commentary on the wide spread use of “video and audio” for communicating, and “students have a great deal of experience in receiving and interpreting such communicative forms – much more than they may have, indeed, in reading and interpreting academic genres” (31).

The Bridge of Advanced Composition

Part of the problem with narrowing down a definition of advanced pedagogy arguably stems from the “problematic term” or “misnomer” as Katherine Adams and John Adams point out in their co-written article, “Advanced Composition: Where Did it Come From? Where Is It Going?” Later, they state that the term “[advanced] may designate course numbers above the freshman level, but the label does not insure that students with advanced skills will take these courses; in fact many students enter advanced classes because they did poorly in freshman English” (3). Building on that notion, I point to Rita Sturm’s, “Advanced Composition, 1980: The State of the Art.” She states:
No two courses are alike, very few courses are clearly one type or another, and no two instructors use exactly the same descriptive terminology. If I have interpreted the course descriptions correctly, most instructors are designing courses I would call "eclectic" for lack of a better label, that is, innovative mixtures of topics and techniques from rhetoric, psychology, journalism, logic, business, and any other field that offers something that can be used to good effect. (40)

As such, I would argue that many universities where an advanced composition course is offered at the sophomore level the course can be a virtual crossroads of student and instructor research interests. The crossroads nature could be argued as both positive and negative. The positive, on one hand, could include discussion on how students and the instructor have freedom to explore various topics. The negative, however, could include discussion on these research interests clashing. Overall, the crossroads hold Advanced Composition away from a solidified definition; thus, many Advanced Composition courses become program specific.

As a result of the crossroads-like atmosphere, a possible universal definition will never fully solidify. However, Michael Carter, in “Teaching Advanced Composition: Why and How,” takes on the argument that advanced composition is just a harder extension of freshman comp where “the lack of definition for advanced composition encouraged teachers simply to incorporate the same format they use in their freshman classes, ‘requiring a harder textbook, more writing, and increased one-on-one attention’” (60). His introduction ends with a speculative question on the possibility of an advanced composition course leading a student to possibly gaining an expertise in writing, but he questions what exactly would the expertise entail?

The answer, referring back to Carter, is no easy task as scholars of writing studies have debated this very notion. First year composition has the foundation of rhetorical motives, and the
professional world graduates will enter has a demand for digital literacies. Thus, Advanced Composition can act as an extension of the scaffolding process, taking what was established in first year composition and adding in the layers of visual interpretation.

With many writing programs at universities, the prerequisite for Advanced Composition is the successful completion of first year composition, and this typical system allows room for the scaffolding framework, much like Bartholomae’s argument of steps needing to be in place (645). Thus, students in Advanced Composition have taken steps to adopting the conventions of academic discourse. Therefore, making rhetorical moves, addressing audiences, and recognizing genres are part of their experience. As a result, those rhetorical moves can be applied to the complexities of connecting text with other modalities.

Most of the scholarship involving Advanced Composition refers to sophomore level writing, Bowling Green State University is a prime example where the course has a framework that allows an instructor to implement a multimodal based curriculum. The Bowling Green State University Course Catalog states that the Intermediate Writing course, English 2070, will: “Work on developing mastery of the rhetorical principles of planning, executing and revising prose. Emphasis on strengthening analytical writing, both expository and argumentative; valuable for writing on the job.” There is, however, a senior level writing course designated as Advanced Composition. The frame, in other words, is adaptable for instructor interpretation. My focus, then, in this context was the use of language as communication. As a foundation for my rationale for the course, I drew from “The Guidelines and Directions for College Courses in Advanced Composition presented by CCC in 1967.” The statement suggests that “Crafts must be mastered, but the goal is understanding how the uses of language define human beings” (267). As a researcher and instructor, I recognize that human beings use both textual and visual
communication to make sense of their work and world. Communication is about connecting to other people and concepts. In a sense, Advanced Composition could be considered, advanced communication that looks to and analyzes the various forms of communication. However, the transitional phase students go through, moving from learning environments that utilize formulaic writing to writing exigencies that address the complexities of academic audiences, has foundations in genre and activity theories.

Genre and Activity Theories: The Foundation of the Bridge

Genre Theory, in relation to composition curriculum, brings focus to how composition courses in most traditional first year composition courses rely on the monomodal-based essay as a genre. The assumption, here, is based on the long history of composition having a relationship with the alphabetic text based essay. While this may be argued as a limited view, the essay assignment has a prevalent place in college education. Thus, the purpose of this section is to recognize that action of assigning the text-based essay but also to acknowledge that other assignments that go beyond this basic format do exist. In other words, the instructor assigns a writing task like an argumentative essay with research to support and develop the thesis of the essay. The essay is often composed in a word processing program with key page layout features like one inch margins, Times New Roman 12-point font, double spaced line spacing, and a heading for important information like student, course, etc. This writing task relies on socially established conventions that can be best described through the genre theory lens. Carolyn R. Miller argues in her seminal article, “Genre as Social Action,” that “rhetorical genres have been defined by similarities in strategies or forms in the discourses, by similarities in audience, by similarities in modes of thinking, by similarities in rhetorical situations” (151). Building on this line of thinking, Catherine F. Schryer, in her chapter, “The Lab vs. the Clinic: Sites of
Competing Genres,” states that “genres are viewed as stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough sites of social and ideological action. This definition builds in a sense of genres as simultaneously diachronic and synchronic. All genres have a complex set of relations with past texts and with other present texts: genres come from somewhere and are transforming into something else” (108). The case of the monomodal essay can be explained as a pathway worn into a patch of grass. While the pathway has a history of use, being used as a shortcut, the point of the pathway is that it exists at the moment of time when it is needed. The monomodal essay exists at moments of time for students and instructors being able to utilize the expected conventions of the essay. In other words, scholars can look at “genre as a verb: We genre our way through social interactions, choosing the correct form in response to each communicative situation that we encounter – and we do so with varying degrees of mastery” (Artemeva 163).

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the first year composition essay begins the scaffolding process. The essay genre comes from a long history of the writing process, and the tools associated with the writing process will transform the essay genre into something else to echo Schryer’s argument. However, before genres can change, the participants within the system need to, as the adage explains, know the rules in order to break the rules.

As such, utilizing the genre of the monomodal based essay should provide students with an opportunity to start developing mastery, or at the very least confidence and familiarity, with making rhetorical choices in response to writing exigencies. However, using the monomodal essay has a limitation in the fact that the writing exigency reoccurs. Patricia L. Dunmire brings attention to the argument on genre theory by noting “that the shared conventions of particular genres stabilize the community’s activities, in part, by enabling the community to accomplish its work more efficiently when faced with temporal pressures and requests for immediate action. In
her words, particular genres ‘may enable the more effective and efficient response to any recurring situation’” (96). When examining communicative activities through the genre theory lens, what comes into question is how the monomodal essay is available and expected in the writing exigency. The act of composing, then, is associated with the verb form of genre, and the recurring situation of the essay stagnates the genre from evolving.

However, the scholarly conversations that involve activity theory help explain how the genre of composing the essay evolves and moves toward multimodal based composition. Expanding on this notion, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin outline the concept of remediation in their book, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. They cite aspects of popular media, novels adapted into film and stories from the Bible depicted in paintings. Further, “the contemporary entertainment industry calls such borrowing ‘repurposing’: to take ‘property’ from one medium and reuse it in another” (44-5). The examples of popular media can be applied to the “repurposing” process of adapting a monomodal based composition as multimodal. However, “with reuse comes a necessary redefinition, but there may be no conscious interplay between media. The interplay happens, if at all, only for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions and can compare them” (Bolter and Grusin 45). To showcase this process through activity theory, we can recognize how text from an artifact can be copied into web pages because the computer as a tool makes that possible. However, as Bolter and Grusin point out, the text must be redefined for the context of the digital space. Additionally, the elements of design and placement will influence that process of redefinition, and the content of the text will influence the decisions made for design. The outcome of this process also involves a repurposed mode of distribution. The various digital composing spaces come with different levels of access controlled by the composer. Blogs, *Prezi* projects, *YouTube* videos, *Voicethread* projects, etc.
have privacy settings, which allow the composer to limit the access. Websites, however, have full access by any user with an internet connection. From a pedagogical standpoint, these different points and levels of access create opportunities for critical thought about how texts work in different environments as well as opportunities for collaborative work among students.

David Russell, building on the argument from Schryer, states that “if the subject perceives conditions as the same or similar, the subject may act in the same way again. That is, typified actions over time are routinized or operationalized – stabilized-for-now in ways that have proven useful in the activity system” (515). The activity system is the various composing exigencies that students face during their academic careers. The scaffolding process begins in the genre of composing an essay, and those rhetorical motives are then routinized in response to similar exigencies. In order for these routinized rhetorical motives to translate into multimodal composition exigencies, the question of how are these routines translatable needs to be examined.

The criticism against multimodal composition stems from the notion that the computer and software as tools are constantly changing and evolving; thus, multimodal composition has not been able to find stabilized-for-now footing. In the dated (1997) but relevant hypertext article, “Rhetorics of the Web: Implications for Teachers of Literacy,” Doug Brent argues that “genres form gradually and in an unstable manner, always being challenged by new situations or new writers who perceive a need to try a different form on for size, either because they perceive a different situation or think that they can provide a better type of response to a situation.” However, the actual computer and the ways a user interacts with a computer have not changed all that much since the introduction of the QWERTY keyboard (of course the touch screen of the iPad indicates a rather dramatic change with user interaction). On most computers, we type, and
that data is stored as binary code. What has changed, though, are the capabilities of computers. As overviewed in chapter two, computers now have more room to store binary code data and faster speeds with improved processors. As a result, the boundaries between the modalities are blurring. Digital composition spaces, in no doubt, can include images, video, sound, etc. However, there are limitations. In word processing programs, video and sound integrating with text has not come together as smoothly as with other composing spaces like PowerPoint, Prezi, Blogs, YouTube, etc., but these composing spaces are generally not associated with composition curricula though not completely ignored. Instructors interested in technology in the classroom, and possibly in response to department or university pressure to do so, have most certainly recognized these digital spaces as useful pedagogical tools; thus, PowerPoint and Prezi have a stigma of being used for presentations, either professional or academic. Mickey Hess argues in “Composing Multimodal Assignments” that “given the nature of contemporary media, Western society associates the modalities of video and audio primarily with efforts to entertain an audience rather than with efforts to inform” (31). For example, YouTube offers ease with uploading video to the Internet, but the digital community of YouTube is crowded. Kansas State University Anthropology Professor, Michael Wesch maintains a channel on YouTube, which showcases his scholarly work. Wesch shares digital space with humorous and nonsensical videos like “Baby Monkey (Going Backwards On A Pig)”. As such, to utilize these other digital composing spaces, the user leaves the familiarity of word processing programs.

The departure from the familiar word processing programs can disconnect the composer from the routinized actions established in monomodal writing exigencies. For example, many composition courses have used blogs for reading responses or public writing, Wikipedia entries

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8 Michael Wesch’s YouTube channel can be found at http://www.youtube.com/user/mwesch. The video, “Baby Monkey (Going Backwards On A Pig),” gained national attention, also referred to as going viral, in late 2010 and early 2011.
for collaborative writing, or the presentation tools Prezi or PowerPoint to assist with visual representations of research and writing. Returning to the stabilized-for-now framework, “a genre is the ongoing use of certain material tools in certain ways that worked once and might work again, a typified tool-mediated response to conditions recognized by participants as recurring” (Russell 515). Russell’s argument, when applied to digital composing spaces, challenges scholars and composition instructors to recognize strategies that worked in word processing programs may not transfer over to other digital composing spaces. How can instruction of paragraph focus relate to elements of color and design in Prezi or PowerPoint? How can argument unity be applied to a video posted on YouTube? How do elements of argument apply to image placement?

However, the transferability depends on the choices made by the composer and the tools selected to enact the composing process. Thoughts can be written down physically with a pen or pencil and then typed and edited in a word processing program. The typed text can be copied and pasted in a blog post, a slide in PowerPoint, or a section in Prezi and edited further. That same piece of physical writing can be scanned, saved as a JPEG, edited in Photoshop, and added to virtually any digitally based composing space. Russell states that “a routine is, etymologically, a path cut through the woods to make the next trip easier. So it is with genres” (515). Genre theory brings scholars to notice the social conventions of the genre like signs in the woods to tell someone which path to take. I have joked that a cover letter for a job application should be written in crayon to set my application apart from the others. While the goal of distinction would certainly be achieved, the social expectation of the cover letter dictates that it should be typed and not in crayon with rhetorical features like addressing the focus of the job and design features like margin spacing, font size and style. A draft of my cover letter can certainly start as written in crayon, but the sign in the woods that says “Cover Letters this way” says that I should take that
crayon version and type it in a word processing program to be edited and designed to fit the audiences’ expectations of a cover letter.

Returning to the insights of Glenn, Goldthwaite, and Connors in their text, *The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing*, the assignment, the purpose behind the composing exigency, will point students down the paths the instructor wants them to take. Additionally, the learning objectives of the composing exigency will also steer students to decide which of the available actions and tools will be efficient to complete the task. Finally, the assignment will also introduce the expectations associated with the composing exigency. An assignment that asks students to incorporate images with a text-based essay needs to be clear on what are the expectations for integration, placement, and scale. Assigning students to compose on a series of slides in *PowerPoint* needs to be clear on the purpose of the slides. As in, are they accompanying an oral presentation, or are they replacing the traditional word processing page? In a similar vein, the same expectations need to be clear with *Prezi* based or website design based assignments.

The discussion on genre and activity theories ground the rationale for my pedagogical approaches, expressivist and cultural studies. These approaches were also the basis for my multimodal Advanced Composition course exemplified in the following pages. As such, my overarching purpose to include genre and activity theories is to help explain the various levels of complexity involved with transitioning from monomodal based composition into multimodal based composition. My teaching experience, preceding this particular course, involved sections of developmental composition and first year composition, and in these courses, I developed and explored an expressivist and cultural studies approach for my pedagogy; thus, before this chapter can examine the course itself, I feel it is important as a researcher to overview the theories behind this blended pedagogical approach.
Cultural Studies

The purpose of providing an overview for a Cultural studies approach to composition pedagogy is not to limit classroom contexts to any one particular pedagogical approach. As a researcher and instructor, I realize that identifying with a particular pedagogical approach over others invites assumptions and debates. The use of Cultural studies for classroom practice is “a rhetorical gesture constituted in a whole set of other rhetorical gestures” (Smith 169). As such, this section on Cultural studies includes the goals of providing a brief definition and overview of the approach.

Diana George and John Trimbur cite the popularization of Cultural studies as a viable pedagogical approach occurred in the “late 1980s and early 1990s” (71). Throughout the co-written chapter, George and Trimbur map the origins of Cultural studies, but it is their overview of classroom practice that brings attention to the beating heart of Cultural Studies’ identity; “In matters of classroom practice, Cultural Studies is no doubt most closely associated with bringing a more deliberate use of popular culture and media studies into the composition course” (81). As such, my use of Cultural studies in the classroom as outlined by George and Trimbur also involves the recognition of how “human development is a cultural process” (Rogoff 3). Barbara Rogoff continues:

As a biological species, humans are defined in terms of our cultural participation. We are prepared by both our cultural and biological heritage to use language and other cultural tools and to learn from each other. Using such means as language and literacy, we can collectively remember events that we have not personally experienced – becoming involved vicariously in other people’s experience over many generations. (3)
Like the advertisements analyzed in the previous chapter, the aspects of popular culture connect people to people by a shared experience. Moreover, aspects of popular culture influence our daily lives, and Marshall Fishwick poses a line of questioning in his book, *Probing Popular Culture: On and Off the Internet*.

How can we digest, let alone evaluate, what confronts us on television, for example? There is good reason for calling it the boob tube. What about the spam that has polluted e-mail, or the endless ads that outweigh and outshine the news in newspapers? Ah, Plato, help us in our new glittering cave. Where does reality really begin? (13)

A cultural studies approach to pedagogy provides instructors and students with the vocabulary to use critical thought when evaluating aspects of popular culture.

However, part of the process with mapping an area of study is challenging trends; thus, I return to “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century” where Fulkerson speculates about “what counts as good writing in a Cultural Studies course” (662). While Fulkerson’s comment acts as a precursor to the next chapter on assessment, what follows in Fulkerson’s line of thought evokes the notion that writing in a Cultural studies classroom may limit a student’s aspiration for a good grade. He states that “the writing in such a course will be judged by how sophisticated or insightful the teacher finds the interpretation of the relevant artifacts to be” (662). A similar argument could be made with multimodal composition where the instructor will evaluate the artifacts based on how well the student has blended together the modalities. Other scholars and instructors have criticized Cultural studies as a way for instructors to push their own ideologies onto the students; as in, what is important for the instructor becomes important for students; however, Fulkerson also warns scholars that “all education becomes equally indoctrinating” (666). Because multimodal composition is close aligned with the use of
computers, we can recognize that “a tool metaphor invariably influences how users think about and work with computers” (Selber 35). Thus, the ways students use the computer in a cultural studies class arguably leads to how the instructor wants the student to use the computer to produce, gather, and interpret information. Later Fulkerson recognizes that “a student who knows his or her instructor’s own political views will probably not choose to oppose them with a grade at stake” (666). The assumption here is that students looking for the reaffirming grade will limit the scope of their thinking to do so.

Expressivist Pedagogy

To reduce the risk of pushing my own ideologies on students with the Cultural studies approach is to combine that approach with expressivist pedagogy. The purpose of this section is to provide a defining overview of expressivist pedagogy. Finally, using this particular approach also has similar concerns and criticisms. In response to these criticisms, the combined use of cultural studies and expressivist pedagogies provides fertile ground for student involvement, free thinking, critical thought, and inquiry-based research.

Composition scholars, over the years, have debated the presence of personal voice in academic settings. However, no matter what pedagogical approach an instructor subscribes to, the rationale needs to be founded on sound theoretical reasoning. Christopher Burnham in his chapter, “Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice,” overviews the expressive pedagogical approach:

Expressivism places the writer in the center, articulates its theory, and develops its pedagogical system by assigning highest value to the writer and her imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior. Expressivist pedagogy employs
freewriting, journal keeping, reflective writing, and small-group dialogic collaborative response to foster a writer’s aesthetic, cognitive, and moral development. (19)

Building on this definition, bell hooks comments in regards to classroom practice; “when everyone in a classroom, including the teachers, shares personal experiences, the uniqueness of each voice is heard” (Teaching Critical 57). As a result, the basis of expressivist evokes a more socially constructed classroom dynamic. Reinforcing this notion, “the postmodern individual is both a single persona and a multiple of selves functioning in various social and cultural capacities” (White and Hellerich 11).

Scholars have concerns over the purpose of using expressivism as a pedagogical approach. Richard Fulkerson states that “many traditional features of academic writing, such as having a clear argumentative thesis and backing it up to convince a reader, are put on the back burner” (666). The disconnection to conventions of academic writing is echoed by Karen Surman Paley in the book I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Person Writing. She includes an email sent to her from Peter Elbow: “I hate the term expressivism. It tends to be used only by people who think it’s a bad thing. And [it] tends to connote that I (or expressivists) are more interested in writing about the self or expressing the self than writing that is trying to be accurate or valid about things outside the self” (10). Jeff Park, an advocate of expressivist writing, even argues that “much personal writing pedagogy ignores the influence of social issues and pressure” (Park 16). To address the concerns regarding the introspective view rather than the external view in writing, the instruction of composition should recognize that Internet and digital composing spaces create many opportunities for writing to be social.

However, James Britton comments on the nature of expressivism in his essay, “Writing to Learn and Learning to Write.” During the composing process, “you have to work in a vacuum
with no feedback. You have to imagine your audience and hold him fully in mind if you are to take his needs into account” (97). While the composing process that centers on the self might occur in a vacuum, “the meaning of self is always within larger social and cultural frameworks” (Park 7). Jeff Park continues this line of argument; “writing is both an individual act and a social construction, influenced by membership within a number of discourse communities. It is within that diverse space that meaning is created” (Park 8).

Anne Frances Wysocki provides a glimpse of how the composing process connects composers to the contextual social:

But we do understand, now, that writing, like literate practices, only exists because it functions, circulates, shifts, and has varying value and weight within complexly articulated social, cultural, political, educational, religious, economic, familial, ecological, artistic, affective, and technological webs; we know that, in our places and times, writing is one of many operations by which we compose and understand ourselves and our identities and our abilities to live and work with others. (Writing New Media 2)

Because we can recognize how literate practices connect composers to the larger scope of community and culture, personal experiences “help us connect to a world beyond the self” (hooks 53). Concluding the argument, hooks states that “what becomes evident is that in the global community life is sustained by stories” (Teaching Critical 53). To reinforce hooks’s argument, I argue that rather than emphasizing the self in writing, the combined approaches, here, gives the composition process opportunities to connect the self to the cultural values that influence decisions made on a daily basis as well as the ways one uses the modalities to connect to the larger scope of community and culture.

Writing Without Chalkboards: Theories in Action
The title of this section heading stems from the title I gave the Advanced Composition course I taught during the spring 2011 semester. The origin of the phrase came from a conversation I had with my brother about a paper I was presenting at an upcoming Watson Conference\(^9\). The paper, “Digital Literacy: Changing the classroom dynamic,” prompted my brother to ask me about teaching multimodal composition. After explaining that I would instruct students to compose essays using the various modalities, he wrote the phrase on the chalkboard that hangs in his kitchen. I told him that I loved the phrase and was going to use for the title of the course. He sent me a picture, taken from his smartphone, of the phrase on the chalkboard, and I had tried to use that image as a thematic decoration for the class blog I set up for the class. The image from my brother did not work after I tried different variations of scaling, cropping, etc. Instead, I found the image below.

![Create What? Image](image-url)

**Figure 9:** "Digital Media Convergence"

The image with the phrase on the chalkboard contradicted the title of the course, but I was hoping for meaning to come out of the contradictory visual message. However, these words on a whiteboard fit the thematic title much more closely because the classroom, in fact, had a whiteboard instead of a chalkboard. Also, my goal for the title and the image was to inspire the students to think of communicating with non-verbal modalities. In regards to planning

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\(^9\) The Watson Conference, held by the University of Louisville, honors distinguished alumnus, Dr. Thomas R. Watson, who “believed in the fundamental importance of a literate citizenry, and of the vital task faced by the liberal arts in educating students to become critical, active, and engaged readers and writers” (“Watson”).
curriculum that utilizes multimodalities and technology based composition, I do believe that I run the risk of pushing my own agenda; however, “the World Wide Web is perhaps our culture’s most influential expression of hypermediacy” (Bolter and Grusin 43). As Bolter and Grusin point out, the influence is noticeable in all facets of communication in which many current members of our culture participate. Expanding on the ideas of hypermediacy from Bolter and Grusin, Stuart A. Selber argues that “in order to evaluate the efficacy of computers, students (as well as teachers and administrators) must be able to understand the ways in which writing and communication activities are organized in online environments” (35). Thus, I grounded the units of the course with Bolter and Grusin’s argument in mind. In the pages that follow, the units of the course will be overviewed to provide insight with the activities and learning objectives for the course. Before I get into the unit overviews, I feel it is important to contextualize the course.

As stated earlier in this chapter, students taking English 2070 need to have successfully completed the first year composition program at BGSU. The course serves as a prerequisite for majors in either Communications or English. The course also serves as fulfilling an elective for any student. The class of about 22 was held in a computer lab equipped with Windows XP, Microsoft Office 2007 (our course utilized the Word and PowerPoint programs), and wired Internet connection with wireless available as well. In addition to these typical features, the computers also had the Adobe Creative Suite 4 installed, and our class utilized the programs, Photoshop and DreamWeaver. The textbook required was Picturing Texts edited by Lester Faigley et al., and readings from the textbook were supplemented with articles in PDF format, video clips on news websites, and audio clips from National Public Radio. As stated in the discussion of the image, I had a class blog set up for students to post and respond to discussion prompts outside of class. The blog posts, then, were used as a springboard for in class discussion.
Grading for the course was determined primarily on the grades for the four units and augmented with participating both in class and outside of class on the blog. The full syllabus has been included in Appendix C.

Unit 1: Analyzing Various Digital Rhetorical Spaces

In this unit, students were asked to monitor their communication during a week and keep a log or record of their various channels of communication: Social networking sites (like Facebook, Myspace, chat rooms, Twitter), emails (family, friends, instructors, etc.), text messaging (noting how language was used in various ways like spelling or abbreviations), blogs (either the blog for this class or a blog kept active that was not part of this class), discussion board forums in BlackBoard for other classes, or verbal interaction. At the end of the week, the data was analyzed and served as a basis for recognizing what choices were made in the communication. The analysis, then, was the foundation of a text-based essay that would connect their personal communication to the larger scope of culture and community. A final requirement for the project asked students to use at least three images in addition to research to support and develop their analysis.

The overarching goal for this unit was to start the scaffolding process, the start of the connection between composition that was primarily text but had the added element of incorporating images. The goals for the composing process of the unit were to help students gain a better understanding of how rhetorical choices influence communication and the rhetorical environment influences rhetorical choices. After analyzing their personal communication, my final objective for them was to take that awareness into the next unit.

Unit 2: Introduce Yourself
In this unit, students constructed a personal narrative that, first, revealed who they are by taking details of their personal lives and connecting them to a larger cultural context. Possible angles covered in the narrative included any of the following: personal interests, hobbies, research interests, family history, beliefs, values, etc. Students constructed this narrative by utilizing the software, *PowerPoint*. The requirements for the project asked students to combine images with about 1000 words of research supported text. For the most part, based on journal entries, students had a working knowledge of *PowerPoint*; thus, the choice for this software was a logical choice for the next level in the scaffolding process. The relationship between text and image needed to be established before taking on the learning curves of *Prezi* or *DreamWeaver*. Integrating audio or video was not required but encouraged. This composition was presented to the class for feedback but not as a presentation with an oral component. The slides, here, replaced the page for the composing space.

The goal for the unit led students to utilize expository composition; however, elements of argument were allowed. By assigning expository composition, the details included in the narrative needed to be chosen with strong rhetorical strategies. Building on the goals from the first unit, what students chose to reveal about them has an effect on a viewing audience. The secondary goals led students to recognize that composing is not limited to plain text. Additionally, students also needed to recognize that balancing image placement, text placement, elements of layout, and aspects of design (like color or animation) has importance in the final product.

**Unit 3: Analyze an Advertisement**

In this unit, students, using *Prezi*, composed a multimodal piece to analyze an advertisement. Because advertisements are part of our daily lives, the unit was designed to bring
students to think critically about the layered meanings of an advertisement’s message. The assignment asked students to consider design, intended audience, pertinent information surrounding the company, where was the ad placed (web page, magazine, television, etc), how the ad related to a viewer personally, what did the ad reveal about cultural values, use of text and image, placement of a celebrity spokesperson, or any various aspect. Like the previous unit, students combined about 1000 words of research supported text with various images, video clips (like a commercial), or audio clips. The only requirement was that students had to make the ad being analyzed the central focus of the project. Additional images were encouraged as a basis for comparing or contrasting. The structure of the project was open to be argumentative or narrative as long as the ideas, insights, and analysis were fully developed and supported.

The goals for the unit were to have students continue the process of balancing the modalities while also incorporating elements of design. A secondary goal was to provide opportunities for easier incorporation of video and audio. While uploading video to a program like PowerPoint is possible, the 2007 version has complicated steps to do so whereas the 2010 version of PowerPoint, which was not available on the computers in our lab, has streamlined that uploading process. However, linking an Internet based video to a project in Prezi or PowerPoint requires an Internet connection; thus, students had to be aware of this limitation. The next and final secondary goal was to have students rethink linear structure of a project. While the flow of a Prezi-based project generally follows the beginning, middle, and end structure, the way pathways could be established allowed the structure to return to points of the project for emphasis or reexamination.

Unit 4: Multimodal Composition
In this final unit, students employed the use of argumentative visual components to support and help develop their own website composition. As discussed in the advertisement unit, there are underlying meanings behind various pieces of media; thus, this unit was designed for students to utilize those underlying meanings for their own purposes. Students were encouraged to consider incorporating famous political photos, contemporary photographs, advertisements, public service announcements, clips from documentaries, clips from interviews or speeches, or audio bites from radio programs. The structure of the composition was to be centered on a debatable topic while choosing a side of the issue to support. However, as with any argumentative composition, students were instructed on addressing both sides of the issue.

The goals for this unit were to have students continue their progress with balancing the modalities: about a 1000 words of research supported text, images, video, or audio. Additionally, this unit also continued the process of anticipating elements of design with colors, font, and layout. However, this unit had a secondary goal of having students be aware of how a website, with internal and external links, does not necessarily have the linear structure like the previous projects. Without explicit instructions that tell the viewer where to start and where to go next, viewers are free to move in and out of the argument’s sections on their own; thus, the sections had to be composed to anticipate this.

Student Examples from the Course

To showcase these units in action, the following pages include examples from student work, and the purpose of including these examples is to provide some reflective discussion on how students interpreted the various aspects of the assignment. At the root of the assessment process, I had to recognize the challenges of assessing multimodal compositions. However, Charles Moran and Anne Herrington have established a foundation for assessing multimodal
compositions in their article, “Evaluating Academic Hypertexts.” They argue that mono and multimodal compositions share commonalities: “focus and central claim, constructive thinking, organization / coherence, syntax / style, documentation, and degree of difficulty” (250-1). They also claim that “graphics (fonts, color, presentation) […] is a criterion that applies to hypertext only” (251). Moran and Herrington refer to hypertext as I have referred to multimodal composition. In my experience with the course, the elements of design were, in fact, the toughest to comment upon and the toughest for the students to execute. Thus, the assessment practice used a collaborative effort to address the different comfort levels of students. The rubric for projects started as a basic outline that highlighted my learning outcomes for the unit. The rubric was then presented to the whole class for feedback, suggestions of wording or redistribution of point values. From that stage, the rubrics were individualized with each student to anticipate their own learning goals and needs with the project. For more information regarding the assessment policy for the course, please refer to Appendix C. Finally, confidentiality was an important aspect when selecting excerpts to include in this project; thus, the names of the students are not included in the excerpt or in the discussion about the excerpt, and all examples have student permission. Also, I steered away from using personal photos where the likeness of the composer could be made out by potential audiences of this dissertation. To see a copy of the consent form, refer to Appendix D.

Excerpt #1

The first example (Figure 10) shows a somewhat weak connection between image and text. While the image fits the paragraph thematically, the actual image is not addressed within the
text; as a result, the image is present for the sake of being present, and a reaction to the image was a requirement of the assignment. This first excerpt also showcases my own first interaction with assessing the use of images with text; thus, I had to rely on the requirements of the assignment to base my commentary.

Figure 10: From “Life in the Real World”

The positioning of the cartoon, with the text wrapping around, also evokes an expectation that the image and the text would have stronger connections that would establish the purpose of the image to the audience. The cartoon does evoke humor with the claim of “yesterday’s news tomorrow;” however, the satirical humor could have been explored with more depth. Questions of this recent phenomenon that arise are questions like, how has the rise in Internet news changed the genre of the newspaper? Should the permanence of the newspaper be an aspect to
explore? The Internet can release news to the masses quickly, but how permanent is it? The next example, excerpt 2, showcases a stronger merging of image and text to present information.

Excerpt #2

The image, here, works like an epigraph to set the tone for the essay, much like a famous quote (Figure 11 on the following page). The text addresses the humorous nature of the parody being displayed. While Moran and Herrington argue that the monomodal based essay avoids the difficult area of graphics (251), this student handles the difficulty fairly well. The image does introduce the topic of texting for the essay; however, there are elements of the image that are overlooked, elements that could have added depth to the overall essay. The teen girls in the image do send out a message of texting being possibly more popular with females than males. Based on the argument expressed by Harrison in the previous chapter, we need to recognize that if one element is in an image then another is omitted: the presence of females omits the presence of males (48). This thread could have worked well for the essay because the student concludes the project with analysis of a female relative who was learning to text at a very young age. The student included a concern for what the relative’s concept of language will be as she matures. The concern with the relative could have also been aligned with the humorous tone of the image because small or large kernels of truth are often behind parody and humor.

These first two excerpts, as a whole, were the first steps of merging genres in composition for the students. Both students had confessed in their responses to discussion prompts posted on the class blog that they had only consumed, and not produced, multimodal
The above photo is a tongue-and-cheek parody of motivational posters, which speaks to an obsession overtaking Americans and the world. The photo speaks to the urge people have to communicate with people far away while avoiding those within close proximity. For more than a decade, a debate has raged among linguists, scholars, and others over a certain form of communication that is used by everyone from almost every age group, texting. This communication phenomenon allows anyone with a cell phone (or internet access) the ability to send a message under 160 characters to another phone regardless of service carrier. The same reaction that has been garnered by the texting phenomenon is akin to the one received by the arrival of personal computers. Linguists and experts on writing foresaw doom for the written word should this new technology called the P.C. catch on with mainstream America. Though that prophecy never came to fruition, a new fear of texting does exist and seems more reasonable, at least with what research is available. The popularity of texting also gives rise to a new form of English, “Textese.” Lily Huang, Harvard graduate and Reporting Fellow for Newsweek describes textese as “A nascent dialect of English that subverts letters and numbers to produce ultra-concise words and sentiments” (Huang).

**Figure 11:** From “2 txt or nt 2 txt?: Texting and the English Language”
information. Overall, most students in the class had made similar statements in their response posts; thus, most essays for this unit had images that were not fully addressed within the text. However, the rhetorical choices students made with this added element of visual communication provided the foundation for the next unit. As such, the scaffolding from unit 1 to unit 2 was in place because semi-successful moves in unit 1 were more successful in unit 2. The following examples, excerpts 3 and 4, are slides taken from projects composed in *PowerPoint*. To comment on student projects, I used a digital pen to handwrite comments directly on the slides and also used the comment feature in the program to provide longer notes as well as end notes on their projects.

Excerpt #3

This next excerpt (Figure 12) from the student composition “Should Teenagers Work?” blends personal narrative with the argument of teenage employment.

![Excerpt #3](image)

**Figure 12:** From “Should Teenagers Work?”
While the text to the left of the image has some rhetorical issues that needed attention, the floating quote in particular, the slide is a transitional moment of the composition that moves the viewer from the personal narrative into the heart of the argument. The first half of the project showcased the composer’s personal experience with balancing extracurricular activities with part-time employment during high school, and those slides were accompanied with personal images to fit the context of the text. The use of the stock photo, here, is a subtle way of transitioning, visually, away from the personal and into the larger scope of discussion and analysis. Through the Moran and Herrington framework, here, the student had taken on a fairly high level of difficulty of using text and image to transition the project, and this action also shows the steps in place through Bartholomae’s framework. Overall, the student utilized a template for designing the slides because the composer was not as comfortable with the elements of design. Rather, the composer wanted to focus on the content of the images and text with more depth, and the relationship between the text and image in this particular slide is clearly established with the text under the image. What connects the two blocks of text is thematic. However, the connection between the image and blocks of text could have been made stronger by integrating the source more smoothly.

Excerpt #4

This slide (Figure 13) from the project, “My Inspiration, My Family,” includes discussion on family within the text and uses research to support the personal example; however, the text does not connect with the family portrait. As a result, the context of the image as well as the importance of including a visual example is diminished. Another indicator of the diminished importance of the image is the small scale. Even with viewing the slide in full-screen mode, the details of who is in the image are not clear. Moran and Herrington ask, “Should we give this
author credit for attempting the difficulties of composing in hypertext” (251)? In this example, the course was in the second step of four in the scaffolding process, and this particular student had a similar issue of size, scaling, and placement in the previous unit; thus, this aspect of the

![Inspiration](image.png)

**Figure 13:** From “My Inspiration, My Family”

composing process had been addressed. I can recognize that despite the subtle connection between the image and text, the presence of the image seems like an afterthought rather than strategic planning. Here, the scaffolding process has not fully reached the potential of multimodality; as a result, the composition, despite being composed on a collection of slides, shows rhetorical motives that have not fully translated to the composing space.
Excerpt #5

While not fully showcasing all elements of what the Prezi program can do, the purpose of this next excerpt, a screenshot from the project, is to highlight the blending of textual and visual communication. This example (Figure 14) from the composition, “Gender Stereotypes in Advertisements,” utilizes a commercial for DiGiorno pizza and breadsticks. The student addresses the assumed gender roles briefly in the text on the left, and the commercial does, in fact, showcase the males as the stereotype who watches sports while the female of the house is out shopping.

**Figure 14:** From “Gender Stereotypes in Advertisements”

The text provided by the student only scratches the surface of traditional gender roles within a modern, American household. The female in the commercial is the only one who cares about the cleanliness of the house while the narrative has the males trying to pass the blame of the dirty carpet on a “pizza man” who was never at the house because DiGiorno products are sold in the frozen food section. However, the twist ending of the commercial has the female discovering the box and figuring out that the pizza was not delivered after all. She is then depicted in a position
of power by having two of the males cleaning the carpet while she is shown relaxing and eating a breadstick. Again, through the viewpoints of Moran and Herrington, there is a degree of difficulty to address. The previous two project units had not had the ease of access to merging together video and text like *Prezi* offers, and the video and text do support the overall argument of the composition for the student; however, the student let the example do more of the work for this section of the composition. This rhetorical move is rather similar to a student using a block quote in a monomodal based composition and not fully unpacking the meaning of the block quote.

However, what is important to notice here is that *Prezi* has allowed the composer relative ease of access to combine video and text to support the argument. This particular project uses another commercial as an example, but the ephemeral nature of the Internet poses a potential limitation. The embedded link to the next commercial ended up broken by the user deleting the video on *YouTube* some time during the initial embedding and the project being turned in for a grade. While composers have access to a seemingly unfathomable amount of information, that access more often than not relies on the availability of other users; thus, multimodal compositions are only as stable as the composer’s access to digital media.

Excerpt #6

The final example (Figure 15) is the home page of a student composed website from the fourth and final unit. Because students had to make choices of transition that allowed the viewer to move in and out of the different sections of the argument and still make sense of the argument as a whole, the home page needed to be set up in such a way to allow that type of interaction.
The screenshot showcases the table of contents that allows the viewer to choose their direction. The home page of a web site has a function of introducing the topic to the viewer, and while many websites utilize a template of having a navigation bar along the top of the page to list links to the various sections of the site, the student opted for using the negative space around the iconic red Solo™ cup. The list of links for this student’s web site connects to the rhetorical motive of a thesis statement that forecasts the main points of a composition or like a table of contents.

However, the choice for the white background, according to the student, places more emphasis on the red cup. Additionally, the composer also made the choice to have the title stand

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10 The links around the cup read (on the left, top to bottom) “Personal Perspective,” “Perpetuated Social Norms,” “Academic Interference,” and (on the right, top to bottom) “Risks,” “Counterargument & Conclusion,” and “Works Cited”
out to evoke the seriousness of the topic. However, the composer did not reveal his choice for the
lighter grey font color for the links, which is a downfall for bringing the viewer into the project
because the lack of contrast diminishes the importance of the different subject headings.

The lack of contrast between the text and the background of the main page was not used
in the subsequent pages of the project. The image below (Figure 16) provides an example.

Figure 16: Second From "College Wasted"

Drinking in college is extremely dangerous. College Freshman in particular are blinded by the idea of making more "friends," and having more fun than they have ever had in their life and fail to realize the risks behind heavy alcohol consumption. The list is infinite. As far as health goes, there is the risk of alcohol poisoning and blacking out. Alcohol is also an inhibitor of risky sexual behavior. "In an era in which "hooking-up" has become a dominant theme in social life, alcohol use has taken on a new meaning for meaning for students including drunken sex and intoxicated rape."(Dowdall) Other risks include assault, drunk driving, property damage, vandalism, police involvement, alcohol abuse and dependence, injury, and death.

Here, the student was able to recognize more ease on the viewer by using the lighter gray for the
background and a dark font color. The section heading, “RISKS,” has good contrast as well with
the light gray font against a darker gray background. Being able to recognize how viewers will
interact with the overall design of the project was heavily valued in the assessment practice.

Concluding Thoughts

The preceding pages have highlighted the process of the how to implement multimodal
based curriculum in the context of a composition course; however, the discussion and examples
still leave the debate open; why is multimodal composition an important area of scholarly
interest? The answer is not simple and should never be simple because the complexities of
debate are imperative for the debate to move forward and evolve. Cynthia L. Selfe, Stephanie
Owen Fleischer, and Susan Wright outline some of these complexities in their chapter, “Words,
Audio, and Video: Composing and the Process of Production.” In this chapter, they recognize
that instructors “who assign alphabetic texts deal with students who have acquired a relatively
robust understanding of written English – both from their natural immersion in language
environments and through direct instruction in genres of written language” (17). Additionally,
they recognize that assigning multimodal projects involves student and instructor “understanding
new vocabulary (e.g., framing, ambient sound, title screens, gain); and locating, downloading,
and documenting appropriate video or audio clips from online sources” (17). As such, Pamela
Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe recognize a need for including “multiple modalities”:

> In an increasingly technological world, students need to be experienced and skilled not
> only in reading (consuming) texts employing multiple modalities, but also in composing
> in multiple modalities, if they hope to communicate successfully within the digital
> communication networks that characterize workplaces, schools, civic life, and span
> traditional cultural, national, and geopolitical borders. (3)

Takayoshi and Selfe echo Wysocki’s notion from earlier in this chapter; however, Christina Haas
comments on part of the resistance associated with moving toward incorporating
multimodalities. In her book, *Writing Technologies*, Haas states that “as users and consumers,
people prefer their technologies transparent: They do not like to have to think about the features
of their word processors any more than they like to think about shifting gears in an automobile,
and they prefer to look through a given technology to the task at hand” (25). The claim has
warrant because multimodal composition is often closely associated with elements of media, and
“media are always mixtures of sensory and semiotic elements, and all the so-called visual media are mixed or hybrid formations, combining sound and sight, text and image” (Mitchell 15).

The second chapter refers to Michael Marzenich’s argument that the “brain” is malleable, and our interaction with digital media changes the way the brain functions. As a result, Richard Watson, in the opening of his book, *Future Minds*, claims that “the digital era is chipping away at our ability to concentrate. The quality of our thinking and ultimately of our decisions is suffering” (2-3). However, the digital age of information is upon our society, and if composition instruction is going to continue to prepare students to be citizens of this digital age, then scholars and instructors need to examine the ways mono and multimodal literacies can and should co-exist. Returning to Watson’s warning of becoming too engaged with the digital culture, I want to bring focus to the need for the co-existence. He states, “reading on a computer screen is fast and is suited to foraging for facts. In contrast, reading on paper is reflective and is better suited to trying to understand an overall argument or concept. Both forms of reading – both forms of technology – ought to be able to live alongside each other” (3). His claim here reinforces the scaffolding process outlined in this chapter; the acts of critical thought and reflection exercised in composing with alphabetic texts are skills needed when consuming and producing with various media genres. However, the dangers of being engaged with these forms of media digital spaces, “can encourage thinking that is devoid of context, reflection, and an awareness of the big picture. Similarly, the trend for packaging information in byte-sized chunks means that we are sprinting toward the lowest common denominator” (Watson 6). The concern of being disengaged from critical thought when engaged with digital media is warranted because “we relish the speed of communication that is possible, but it is sometimes forcing us to respond without thinking things
through properly” (Watson 6). As a result, the scaffolding process of mono to multimodal composition becomes that much more important.

The scaffolding process provides opportunities for thinking that has context, reflection, and awareness. While multimodal composition can be produced for print or digital distribution, the general sense of composing at the time of writing this project recognizes that composing occurs in digital environments. Thus, “the computer, a maze of circuits in a box, recasts the writing process into something alive and genuine for students” (Penrod 1). The critical thought behind writing for various audiences, in turn, is the foundation for being engaged with various genres. While The New London Group comment that “literacy pedagogy […] has been a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (9), these forms of language are the ways users connect, reflect, and think critically about the media that influences aspects of our personal, academic, and professional lives. Multimodal composition cannot exist without foundational rules like argument, structure, organization, and rhetorical choices established in composition instruction. Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope argue that “literacy is at the heart of education’s promise. […] Literacy represents a kind of symbolic capital in two senses: as the preeminent form of symbol manipulation that gets things done in modern times and as a symbolic marker of ‘being educated’” (121). Education has a responsibility to educate students to be critical and reflective when they leave the classroom and to have the ability to make informed decisions while engaged with media.

Finally, the presence of engaging with media in curricula brings on the challenge of assessment. Moran and Herrington, to return to their argument, claim that the element of design complicates the assessment practice (251). Sonya C. Borton and Brian Huot assert that
assessment practices of “all composing tasks” need to “be informed both broadly and deeply by a rhetorical understanding of composition” (99). Continuing their argument, they state that “when we help students learn to assess their own compositions and the compositions – the texts – that others create, we are teaching them valuable decision-making skills they can use when producing their own texts” (99). The presence of multimodal compositions should not muddy assessment practice because multimodal compositions are the product of a series of rhetorical choices made by the composer. As such, the assessment practice discussed in the following chapter helps with furthering the assertion made by Borton and Huot: how can instructors help students make sound rhetorical choices?
CHAPTER IV: ASSESSING THE MODALITIES

“Get out your measuring cups, and we'll play a new game
Come to the front of the class, and we'll measure your brain
We'll give you a complex, and we'll give it a name.”
“Measuring Cups” by Andrew Bird

Education systems have a habit of measuring and labeling the abilities of students through assessment practices, but this can be problematic when assessment practices lose focus on a student’s potential, creativity, or individuality. Later in the song exemplified in the epigraph, Bird includes the lyric “Can't have the cream when the crop and the cream are the same.” The indication, here, is that students can be homogenized or put into a lump sum. While I cannot claim to be an expert on interpreting lyrics, the use of the measuring cup imagery and the play on the cream and the crop, to me as a composition scholar, tap into the notions of the standardized testing often used in public education. Standardization can create checks and balances while holding educators responsible; however, standardization also instigates an unrealistic goal of having an entire nation learning the same material. Students are then held to the same measurements regardless of the quality of instructors, amount of funding, or access to print and digital information. Arguments involving standardized testing could fill the pages of this project, and The Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing (2003) by Gail M. Jones, Brett D. Jones, and Tracy Hargrove explores the positive and severe effects of having nationwide standards in public education. Pamela A. Moss argues against standardization in her article “Can There Be Validity Without Reliability?” She states that there are certain intellectual activities that standardized assessments can neither document nor promote; these include encouraging students to find their purposes for reading and writing, encouraging teachers to make informed instructional decisions consistent with
the needs of individual students, and encouraging students and teachers to collaborate in developing criteria and standards to evaluate their work. (84)

Homogenizing curricula among First Year Writing programs may result in similar inauthentic assessment practices associated with standardized secondary education. This threat may be all too real. Reporting on a 2009 workshop at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Scott Jaschik notes that “many college administrators feel that accreditors are breathing down their necks, demanding more and more evidence of student learning.”

However, composition scholars have established assessment theories that foster learning. Bob Broad in the opening chapter of the anthology, *Organic Writing Assessment*, points out the voice of “‘learning culture’ being ‘commonplace,’” and “as educators, we nurture and grow our students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions. We carefully tend the learning environment, and we provide our students with the best resources available to nourish their curiosity, understanding, and active participation in democratic citizenship” (2). Instructors see this concept to life in researching and defining their pedagogical approach, planning syllabi, drafting writing assignments, and planning classroom activities.

Additionally, Broad brings attention to Brian Huot’s 2002 book, *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment*, that includes the “now-familiar list of five features characterizing the newly emerging paradigm in writing assessment […]: site-based, locally controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically-based, and accessible” (4).

What is at the heart of an institution’s grading system is a long history of educators measuring the understanding that students gain from the instruction, and this system of grading will be used by the vast majority of universities for the foreseeable future. However, some
schools like Bennington, Evergreen State, Hampshire College, New College of Florida, and Sarah Lawrence College have replaced the grading system with narratives and summaries instead. What is important to note here is that these institutions listed do in fact adhere to the five characteristics outlined by Huot, but Jaschik also notes that colleges that have moved away from grades show “[…] results in more accountability and better ways for colleges to measure the success not only of students but of its academic programs.” Despite the positive results of these very few institutions, the academic and professional world often relies on the grades. The previous chapter establishes multimodal composition’s place in the curricular landscape as a way to navigate the growing professional demand of multimodal literacies. Thus, the main focus of this chapter is to explore theories of writing assessment and how those theories influence the assessment of multimodal composition.

The five characteristics outlined by Huot are a basis for this chapter that explores the influence of multimodal composition and assessment practices and also as a basis for the assessment practice of my Spring 2011 Intermediate Writing course exemplified in the previous chapters. As such, Peggy O’Neill, Cindy Moore, and Brian Huot, argue in their collaborative book, *A Guide to College Writing Assessment*, that “when policymakers, university administrators, and testing companies – instead of knowledgeable WPAs and faculty members – make decisions about writing assessment, we risk losing the ability to define our own field as well as make decisions about our programs” (4). Because the English Department at Bowling Green State University did not utilize a standardized assessment, I was free to explore my own assessment practice to fit the needs for the particulars of the course.

As a result of being open to formulate my own assessment practice, I was able to explore the use of various literacies in my curriculum. The previous chapter utilizes “Changing the Role
of Schools” by Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope that argues for how instructors can view the various ways students engage with the various literacies. Building on this line of thought, Alanna Frost, Julie A. Myatt, and Stephen Smith highlight in their essay, “Multiple Modes of Production in a College Writing Class,” that “moving away from the word writing [toward composing] allows us to stop privileging print and thus stop limiting our – and our students’—communicative abilities” (182). To echo the point of education’s responsibility from the previous chapter, education also has the responsibility to assess. In other words, “[…] assessment was integrally linked to instruction, arising from learning goals and used to inform teaching” (Herrington, Hodgson, and Moran 204). In the previous chapter, the scaffold process highlights how students can thread literacy through various composing exigencies, and some scholars, myself included, view that higher education has a responsibility to prepare students for life beyond undergraduate studies as students move into graduate programs and careers. As such, any time progress takes place, instructors have a responsibility to evaluate students, which has theories and practices built upon historical concepts, current discussions, and forward thinking ideas.

This responsibility of assessment, assigning value to student work, traces its roots to the widely acknowledged influence Edward L. Thorndike had on the Hillegas Scale of writing merit. Norbert Elliot’s On a Scale: A Social History of Writing Assessment in America, highlights “[…] Thorndike’s announcement in the Journal of Educational Psychology [1911] of his ‘ideal scale for merit in English writing’ was emblematic of a period of scale building in which writing, like handwriting or reading, was a behavior validated by judges” (270). However, Elliot continues, this system of evaluation or distributing scores had “no attempt to explicate the variables of writing, no consideration of modes of discourse or topic, of critically thinking writers and
culturally bound receivers” (270). The association of the scale with writing perpetuated “the concept of writing ability as a unitary skill” (Elliot 272) and has been challenged by arguments in the areas of reliability and validity by Moss’s “Can There Be Validity Without Reliability” (1994) and more recently by Brian Huot’s (Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning (2002). Building on ideas from Huot, Elliot comments that “instructive evaluation would extend the traditional boundaries of formative and summative evaluation and provide ways for writers to become participants in the evaluation process, to become aware of how drafts match desired linguistic and rhetorical targets and how those targets may be attained” (293). The noticeable change in writing assessment theory and practice forms the foundation for the following pages. If scholars and instructors heed Huot’s call to action to challenge writing assessment practices “to create a new future” (191), then this new future must also anticipate multimodal’s influence on the composition landscape.

As such, this chapter will start with a broad scope, highlighting theoretical approaches to assessment practices as outlined by Brian Huot and Bob Broad. However, the presence of multimodal composition can complicate assessment practices. Arguably, multimodal compositions have various levels of complexities; thus, the chapter will return to Kinneavy’s discussion on discourse theory to note how composer intention and viewer interpretation influence assessment practices. The goal here for the chapter will establish a baseline for applying a potential assessment practice toward multimodal compositions. Again, like chapter three, this chapter will utilize examples from the multimodal Intermediate Writing course. The assessment practice in this course used a collaborative rubric that was tailored for individual student goals as well as the learning outcomes established in the assignment. These examples
will include my feedback as an instructor as well as reflective input from the student composer. My goal in using these examples is to showcase practical application of theory in practice.

The Truth Behind Grades

The Intermediate Writing course utilized a locally grown assessment practice; thus, I, as a researcher, feel it is important to briefly overview the complexities of what is writing assessment. First, scholarly conversations involved with writing assessment recognize that many assessment practices have a foundation with theories of discourse like Kinneavy’s *A Theory of Discourse* (1971). Kinneavy proposes that meaning of discourse is based on the combination of intention and interpretation. Similarly, assessment could be viewed as the combination of intention and interpretation but with a question of how students exhibit an understanding of learning outcomes. Second, as a result, this section will connect the theories of discourse with assessment practices and learning outcomes. Finally, this section lays the foundation for how this chapter will explore multimodal composition’s influence on assessment practices.

Peggy O’Neill argues in a 2012 article from the *Journal of Writing Assessment* on the notion that “reliability is an important component of writing assessment that needs to be considered not just in its own right but also as part of the validation process because it addresses consistency and generalizability, among other values” (1). O’Neill’s argument of “reframing reliability” stems from the idea of “developing a better understanding of reliability and then becoming full partners in the discussions – and development – of writing assessment that extend beyond our programs and institutions” (2). However, the notion of reliability needs further explanation. Pamela A. Moss argues that “typically, reliability is operationalized by examining consistency, quantitatively defined, among independent observations or sets of observations that are intended as interchangeable” (83). In a sense, reliability needs to have consistent
interpretation of texts as a framework, and O’Neill argues that “frames usually operate at an unconscious level and are constructed by society” (2). This concept of socially constructed framing is a rather loaded phrase. Like the discussion in the second chapter, interpretation of texts (alphabetic and/or visual) depends on a semiotic-like structure. James Kinneavy states in *A Theory of Discourse* that “basic to all uses of language are a person who encodes a message, the signal (language) which carries the message, the reality to which the message refers, and the decoder (receiver of the message)” (19). Kinneavy represents this basic structure as, in his words, The Communication Triangle (see Figure 17 below) (19):

![Communication Triangle](image)

**Figure 17:** Communication Triangle

However, this take on communication is not as simple as the triangle represents. Kinneavy continues that “these four basic components are actually much more complex” (19). Moreover, “the components become similar to what mathematicians or logicians sometimes call a grammar, the interpreted components are a *language* and this is used for specific purposes” or “different *interpretations* for various *purposes*” (20).

In regards to multimodal composition, this project returns to *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Their argument recognizes that visual communication have a similar filter of grammar that relies on “[…] the elements and
rules underlying a culture-specific form of visual communication” (3). In a very basic sense, words and images can most certainly carry universal meanings in contemporary societies. The image below shows a restroom sign that includes a visual and textual message.

![Restroom Sign](image.png)

**Figure 18: Restroom Sign**

We know, based on the figures, that gender specific restrooms are available, but what is also interesting is the braille at the bottom of the sign, which indicates that the term “restroom” is rather universal even without the visual indicator. On the other hand, the visual message with the figures also works for viewers who are not able to read English or are illiterate. A quick internet search for restroom signs will yield countless results of similar signs and figures. However, not all means of textual and visual communication have a universal message like the image above.

The complication, then, for the purpose of a composition course involves the various interpretations that reflect the original intent of the author (the student encoder) while by the instructor (the decoder) within an educational context (the reality). Ultimately, assessment within this system should aim for coherency of the communication.

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11 (“ADA”)
Coherence within this reality “is a product of many different factors, which combine to make every paragraph, every sentence, and every phrase contribute to the meaning of the whole piece. Coherence in writing is much more difficult to sustain than coherent speech simply because writers have no nonverbal clues to inform them if their message is clear or not” (qtd in Yancey 91). The various comments provided by instructors are the clues of coherence being achieved or missed, but this process of commentary occurs, most often, after the fact, a delayed response. As such, the commentary works as a framework for instruction. To build on this notion, “frames and framing often operate at an unconscious level, drawing on cultural values and creating structures for understanding reality, defining common sense, and producing cultural narratives” (Adler-Kassner and O’Neill 40). Another way to view this framework is that “a coherent composition is created through the relationship of words to words, and words to context” (Yancey 91). Bringing this concept closer to the reality of a classroom, the assignment creates a context, and students interpret this context to produce compositions.

If coherence with composition and assessment is a goal, then we must recognize that “the construction of coherence in U.S. culture, then, tells us much about what we value in writing and, accordingly, much about what we assess” (Yancey 91). However, when coherence is lacking within student writing, what is the responsibility of the instructor? As Flower argues, when the composition makes more sense for the writer, or “Writer-Based prose,” there is a disconnection of coherence for the decoder (19). On the other hand, Flower does argue that this type of composing is “natural” when communicating for the self but is also the source of some of the most common and pervasive problems in academic and professional writing” (19). The responsibility the instructor has should reflect and comment upon how the communication is not connecting within the reality, as in, the message cannot fully be decoded. Similarly, Edward
White argues for “one overriding goal: the student needs to see what works and what does not work in the draft so that revision can take place” (50). However, when revision is not an option, I believe that students can take rhetorical concepts from one composing exigency to another.

However, coherence must stem from within the reality as well. The instructor has the responsibility for creating assignments with clear expectations and learning outcomes. Engagement with the composition process and continued development of critical thinking should be cornerstones of instruction and assessment. In other words, bell hooks notes in her book, *Teaching Community*, about how, at times, “predictable assignments has almost become a norm because of the fixation on degrees rather than education. These students want to know exactly what they must do to acquire the best grade” (130). If assignments become predictable, then assessment can become predictable as well; as a result, the learning process can be viewed as type of assembly line. As an instructor, I ask myself what I can do to make the assignment engaging for students. Additionally, when a student is having trouble coming up with a topic, I always start the conference with questions pertaining to their personal or academic interests. For example, a student of mine, a black male, came to me with a broad topic idea of baseball for an I Believe essay. The student revealed that he played baseball and was hoping to try out for the college team the following academic year. He also revealed that Hank Aaron was his favorite player. At this point, we had to recognize the obvious: Hank Aaron was part of the wave of black baseball players that crossed over from the Negro Leagues to the Major Leagues. This wave, led by Jackie Robinson, paved the way for more equality in not just baseball but professional sports at large. After thinking about this detail for a moment, the student was able to recognize that he had just as much of a right to play baseball as anybody else and that he would make a team or not based on his ability and not his skin color. Having students verbalize their interests like this
can create opportunities for the student to see how something as simple as wanting to play baseball can connect the student to a larger cultural context.

In addition to having meaning behind the assignment, the instructor has the responsibility to have clear meaning behind the commentary provided for supporting an assigned grade. White articulates that “sarcastic or harsh comments will allow the student to displace dissatisfaction with the paper (the teacher’s intention) with dislike of the teacher and thereby short-circuit learning” (50). In other words, the instructor can be argued as an initial encoder by establishing the assignment reality, and a student’s writing is an act of decoding the reality. However, that act of decoding becomes the act of encoding a signal for the instructor to decode.

If coherency of communication is a goal of composition instruction, then assessment needs to have a place within these goals. NCTE’s position statement, “21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework,” from 2013 states that “Assessments need to take into consideration both traditional components and elements that may be different for 21st century student work.” The traditional framework includes elements that align with what Huot argues for in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. These elements focus on the following:

The traditional elements for assessing 21st century student work include relevance and reliability of information used in the work; significance of new information or understandings communicated throughout the process and in the final product; effectiveness of the work in achieving its purpose; impact of the work on the audience; creativity or aesthetics demonstrated in the final product; creativity, initiative, and effectiveness demonstrated in solving problems; efficiency and effectiveness of the
student’s process; and the student’s legal and ethical process and behavior. ("21st Century")

While much of the instruction of multimodal composition include traditional elements of text-based composition, as examined in the previous chapter, the added element of multimodality does, in fact, influence the assessment in courses that utilize the various evolving literacies. The different elements highlighted by NCTE’s 2013 position statement that focus on how “assessment practices of 21st century student learning may need flexibility and responsiveness to situations” to include:

- students’ greater proficiency with tools or formats than the teacher, which may generate outcomes not anticipated in an assessment rubric
- technology glitches beyond students’ control that negatively impact the quality of the final products
- scope of collaboration, in the classroom and globally, leading to a greater need for processes that assess progress and achievement of individuals and groups

Before examining how evolving, or emerging, literacies influence assessment, I believe it is important to examine how theories of assessment have a noticeable foundation on Kinneavy’s theory of discourse. Arguably, “the term writing assessment itself appears to juxtapose mutually exclusive elements – writing, with its susceptibility to debate as to what good writing is, and assessment, with its emphasis on what good measurement requires” (Wolcott and Legg 1). Similar to like Kinneavy’s communication triangle, assessment “offers a systematic structure to engage questions about student learning and the outcomes associated with writing curricula” (Neal 3). Linda Adler-Kassner and Peggy O’Neill point out in the conclusion of their book, Reframing Writing Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning, that assessment often leads to
narratives of preparing students for “career readiness” echoes throughout college curricula and policies (179). One aspect of being ready for life beyond the college classroom is the idea that students need practice with making assessments on materials they produce or consume. Sonya C. Borton and Brian Huot address this idea:

[…] assessment is an important component of learning to compose with rhetorical effectiveness. When we help students learn to assess their own compositions and the compositions – the texts – that others create, we are teaching them valuable decision-making skills they can use when producing their own texts. (99)

Not only are students learning skills for their own composing process, but they are also learning to broaden their critical thinking by utilizing the various modalities. In other words, the assessment process can help with “the increasing diversity in students’ talents, imagination, perspectives, cultures, and lived experiences” (“21st Century”). More specifically, an assessment practice within a multimodal composition based curriculum can lead students to think more critically about how to navigate visual and textual communication.

Many studies have been conducted on how well students do in adult life after graduating with a degree versus dropping out, and the long-running, social commentary NPR program, This American Life, takes a closer look at this very subject in the September 2012 episode, “Back to School.” Host, Ira Glass, interviews University of Chicago professor, James Heckman, who finds that students with “GEDs are performing slightly better than dropouts who didn't go on and take the GED, people who really dropped out of high school, but nowhere near as well as high school graduates. And that was in terms of performance in earnings, performance in occupation.” However, later in the episode, Glass comments that students who passed the GED test were assumed to have comparable cognitive skills as those who graduated with a degree. Heckman
provides the insight, and the basis of his research, that those with a GED were “dropping out of virtually everything they start” (Glass). What Heckman focuses on is what cannot be measured in these cognitive-based tests: “social skills” (Glass). Glass candidly states, “If you can't manage to follow the rules and do what's assigned and keep your ass in a chair for four years of high school, of course you might be somebody who has trouble applying yourself later in life.” Of course, it makes perfect sense that these non-cognitive skills acquired by going through an educational system are just as important, if not more important, than having the cognitive skills. The scaffolding process in the previous chapter alludes to this by recognizing the building of skills and transference of learning from one exigency to another.

In the context of a composition course, “too often the writing assessments we use to make decisions about students and programs do not adequately account for writing as engaged, rhetorical literacy events that occur within complex social contexts and relationships” (Neal 6). As such, the practice of writing assessment could be viewed as a gate-keeping type of system. A student who does well on one assignment should have obtained the objectives needed to have a solid start to the next assignment. Revisiting the basics of activity theory help flesh out these ideas where one action working well in a situation becomes routinized and utilized again in a similar situation. Building on this idea, Edward M. White argues in Assigning, Responding, Evaluating that “writers (like all learners) improve when they can internalize evaluation – when they can themselves see what needs to be changed and how to make those changes” (50). Backing up White’s argument are items from NCTE’s position on assessment that recognizes

- that the processes of learning and doing are as important as the quality of the final product
• students’ self-evaluation and reflection on process and product integrated into the learning process and contributing to students’ continued growth

• ability of students, parents, and teachers to examine growth over time in authentic ways

At the root of writing as an activity and “according to contemporary linguistic theory, everyone has the capacity to communicate with others. People build on this capacity by learning how to communicate effectively – that is how to formulate language using the conventions of communities where communication circulates within distinct contexts” (Adler-Kassner and O’Neill 58-9). Instructors, then, have “the authority to structure the syllabus, make assignments, and evaluate student writing” (White 55). In essence, the instructor is creating the reality for the channels of communication or the signals from coders.

Monkey Wrench: The Multimodal Influence

However, the presence of multimodal composition is like a monkey wrench in curricula and assessment practices. The Wolcott and Legg co-authored book, *An Overview of Writing Assessment: Theory, Research, and Practice*, claims that “by understanding the complexities of writing assessment, teachers might increasingly be able to influence the directions such assessments take in the future” (2). Similarly, “we are still trying to figure out where new-media writing fits within the framework of our curricula. It may be fine when individual teachers and students experiment with new technologies, but […] what] would we have to give up in order to include it, and what would be lost?” (Neal 2-3). Because the future landscape of composition will, arguably, continue to make more and more room for multimodality, scholars and instructors concerned with assessment practices are at the forefront of establishing an assessment practice for multimodal compositions.
Scholars have debated on multimodal composition’s influence in recent years, pointing out specifically the added element of design as one of the biggest challenges instructors face when assessing the multimodal work of students. As such, this section will examine the similarities of assessing monomodal and multimodal composition by drawing from the theories of discourse and definition of assessment practices established earlier in this chapter. However, as stated, the differences between assessing mono- and multi-modal composition projects is similar to the differences between these two areas of composition as a whole. Thus, assessment practices of multimodal composition cannot overcome the challenges and apprehensions without first recognizing these differences.

The similarities between mono- and multimodal composition stem from the process of composing. The NCTE “Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies” of 2005 states that “all modes of communication are codependent. Each affects the nature of the content of the other and the overall rhetorical impact of the communication event itself.” As pointed out earlier in this chapter, assessment practices can rely on Kinneavy’s theory of discourse, the intention of the composer and the interpretation of the receiver. Simply put, if an instructor assigns a monomodal based assignment, the students will produce monomodally. Of course, if the instructor assigns a multimodal assignment, the students will produce multimodally. In either composing exigency, the product is a process of planning, drafting, revising, editing, etc.

The heart of the composing process in academic settings is how “writers explore and generate ideas, shape their writing for particular audiences and purposes, and work to craft language to convey meaning” (National Writing Project 21). The act of composing relies on various writing technologies. Christina Haas points out that “the implements of writing – pens, pencils, keyboards – have mass, as do written products. Even pixeled screen images, although
they may not seem material in the same was as do marks chiseled on a clay tablet, depend upon several kinds of material apparatus both for creating and for perception and use” (4). The points made in The National Writing Project’s Because Digital Writing Matters and by Hass tap into a discussion of writing as technology that has evolved by scholars. As the previous sections point out, the act of assessing these products is an act of measurement or interpretation. However, no matter what form the student product takes on, there is an endless spiral of interpretation. Students interpret instructions to produce an artifact; the instructor interprets those artifacts in the act of assessment; the student interprets the instructor’s assessments and moves on to the next composing task like another assignment or revising the graded artifact.

When focusing on how assessments of mono- or multimodal composition can be different or shared threads, it is important to recognize the similarities. The co-authored essay by Charles Moran and Anne Herrington, “Evaluating Academic Hypertexts,” while a bit dated (2003) at the time of writing this project, includes discussion on how “both the traditional and the hypertext essays were recognizably arguments” (249). A scan across typical composition programs at universities across the nation will show that the argumentative essay is generally the preferred genre for the courses; thus, we can assume that multimodal compositions in similar contexts will also be argumentative in nature. Moran and Herrington assert that “the criteria that we ordinarily use in judging academic essays in this genre seemed to apply across the media” (249). They list that the areas of “Focus and Central Claim,” ‘Evidence of Constructive Thinking,’ ‘Organization / Coherence,’ ‘Documentation,’ ‘Syntax / Style,’ and ‘Grammar / Proofreading’ (249)” as the common threads of assessment practice. As such, this list of assessment areas was the foundation of the assessment practice for my Advanced Composition course. Through the Moran and Herrington framework, I had a foundation of assessment areas that could work for mono- or
multimodal projects. Each composition unit had students compose argumentative, research-based projects. Because each unit increased with multimodality, I needed a thread of assessment to work through each unit but also be adaptable to the variants. The following points will discuss only the assessment areas that made up the foundation:

- “Assignment requirements and mechanics” was included to assign points for meeting the required word count length, using proper MLA / APA conventions, including the minimum research requirement of 5 sources, and displaying control over the written text.
- “Content / Research: This area of the rubric looked for thought provoking ideas or creativity in the analysis as well as urging the students to use good, credible sources to support their analysis.
- "Logic of the essay / Text:" This section focused on the overall organization of their projects: how well the main points were articulated and thought out.

The goal, here, was to establish an assessment practice that motivated students to meet the learning objectives for the course, which listed on the syllabus were as follows:

- Develop an understanding of composition processes in various digital spaces.
- Create an awareness of the available means for presentation by utilizing various software programs.
- Practice composing texts in multiple formats for multiple purposes.
- Explore a variety of technologies and spaces where rhetorical choices are made.
- Understand the importance and place of writing in your future career.
- Broaden an awareness to the power of language’s ability to shape perception and identity.
- Practice and further develop critical thinking and reading skills.
While these common areas of assessment and learning objectives did motivate students to continue the development of their composing processes, the added element of multimodality, of course, did complicate the assessment practice. As I began to speculate on how I would start to evaluate student’s choices for images, color, layout, font, etc., I had to realize my own limitations. My educational background does include some study in art and art history, but that does not entitle me to claim expertise. Conversely, semiotic frameworks do allow me, as an interpreter of messages, to have a working system for that interpretation.

In her article, “Looking for Sources of Coherence in a Fragmented World: Notes Toward a New Assessment Design,” Kathleen Blake Yancey argues that the concept of “new composition – text that is created on the screen and that in ‘finished’ form is also mediated by the screen” brings on a “need to invent a language that allows us to speak to these new values” (89). In other words, “without a new language, we will be held hostage to the values informing print, values worth preserving for that medium, to be sure, but values incongruent with those informing the digital” (89-90). Later, Yancey focuses on these differences:

The distinction between print and digital textualities rides a fine line. Print seems unable to offer the seemingly infinite opportunity to arrange and re-arrange text: That is, to compose it, and (then) to (re)compose it again – even now, in the age of word-processing software (or beyond it), when, admittedly, print is somewhat hybrid. Often composed in the digital environment, text loses fluidity when it becomes fixed as the page. And the reverse is true: The fact that something is created for and delivered on the screen doesn’t make it unlike print. In other words, even though a text is produced in a digital environment and appears on the screen, it can remediate print. (Yancey 90)
To build on Yancey’s point, PDF (Portable Digital Files), which can be created in simple word processing programs, have that rigidity of print texts where the reader usually cannot change the content. However, the content of PDFs can intersect in multimodal ways: image and text. In some advanced software programs, like *Adobe Acrobat*, PDFs can include embedded sound and video. However, these programs are often expensive and don’t translate with many platforms very well. As the previous chapters point out, multimodal composition can exist in both print and digital environments; thus, “assessment criteria should be developed with an eye toward both instruction and evaluation” (Borton and Huot 103). Again, the Kinneavy framework of communication helps to define the contextual reality for the message. It is the responsibility of the instructor to use evaluation for instruction.

Borton and Huot point out later in their chapter in *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* that “as students compose complex multimodal texts they often forget that an audience may lack the same experiences and understandings that they, themselves, have developed. When this situation does occur, and students create author-centered texts that ignore the needs of readers, revision can become a tedious and time-consuming process” (104). The insight here echoes Flower’s take on writer-based prose when the communication makes more sense for the composer than for the viewer.

To finalize this section and before moving into examples that show these theories in action, I draw from Borton and Huot again. They argue that “an important assessment criteria for a multimodal text might be whether a student has taken advantage of the specific affordances, or capabilities, of each modality in a way that helps to achieve the text’s purpose of increase its overall effectiveness with a specific audience” (103). As an instructor, my goals were to push students to take advantage of the modalities available to their composing process for the major
writing units; however, the instruction also helped them to make informed decisions to use those modalities with purpose. How would an image further the message in a text-based essay; how would background color add effect to their project in Prezi; how important of a role would scaling play for an image included in a PowerPoint slide; how necessary would an external link be if it were included in their website project? These questions were not easily answered, and students had to make these decisions based on “specific instructional goals and a contextual understanding of other rhetorical constraints and possibilities having to do with purpose, audience, content, genre, circulation, and organization, as well” (Borton and Huot 103).

To assess student choices in their projects, I utilized a class-specific designed rubric to help carry out the feedback for students in the first three units. These rubrics have been included in appendices E – G. The process of drafting and finalizing the rubrics for the course included student input on what would be included in the content areas for grading. To have a foundation, I started with the learning objectives of each unit and provide this working draft to the students to include their interpretation and input on the key areas. From there, each rubric was tailored to student specific needs. I took a couple of moments during class to meet with each student to see if anything needed rewording or changing. To my surprise, almost every student said that the rubric was fine as it was after being tailored by the whole class. For the second and third units, I discovered that a couple of students were concerned about point distribution because of their unfamiliarity with the design aspect of a project. They wanted their written word to carry more of the grading weight; however, the design and layout elements of the projects still had significant value to the overall grade even after individual students redistributed points.

The process of having student input with the rubrics enabled the rubric to have some transparency with the assessment process. As such, instructors and scholars have debated on the
merit of rubrics for assessment throughout the decades, and Maja Wilson, in her aptly titled chapter “My Trouble with Rubrics,” picks up on how rubrics can be somewhat enticing “[…] with their appearance of simplicity and objectivity” (2). In Wilson’s words, rubrics “promise” to “help us clarify our goals and guide students through the difficult and complex task of writing” (2). Through this type of framework, I believe scholars might often associate rubrics with terms like rigid or checklist. In some cases like a department-wide rubric, I understand the goal of having consistency in assessment and how the assessment matches department-wide learning outcomes. On a bigger, national scale, rubrics are used to hold students to standards that may or may not be applicable to context specific learning. Regardless of a potential stance on rubrics, as a scholar and instructor, my goal was to have the rubric be fluid and flexible for the course specific and unit specific learning outcomes. Additionally, as stated earlier, the rubrics needed to handle the increasing modalities with the course following the pathway of the first unit being a text-based essay with images, the second unit being more visual with the narratives composed in PowerPoint, the third unit being an analysis composed in Prezi, and the final unit being an argument presented as a website.

However, the fourth and last unit did not use a rubric for assessment and feedback. Instead, a narrative summary of about a 100-150 words was given to students. The narrative included discussion on the content, design, and function of the websites, and I did meet with each student to gauge a sense of what their goals were for the project, which gave me a starting point for my feedback.

Student Examples: Assessment in Motion

To borrow the terms from Kinneavy’s theory of discourse, each unit project became the reality for the signal between the coder and decoder, and each rubric assisted with the direction
of the signal and the interpretation of the signal. The Kinneavy framework is equally important when examining and discussing excerpts from student work. In this first example (Figure 19), the aim of the course is noticeable with how the student handled merging the image with the text.

**Figure 19:** From “Communication and Technology”

Addressing the content of the image and how it related to the subject matter of the essay project was one of the primary goals and served as a foundation for the scaffolding process for the course. Here, the screenshot gives an example of how this particular student connects to various people through a cellular device. This student did well in the content area labeled, “Use of images.” The image, then, added a layer of critical thought displayed by the coder. However, when the student writes about how the phone “plays a very large role” that alludes to having a constant need to have the access of communication mobile, the student then connects the message of the image to critical thought. The student chose an image that showcases the hub of communication with various email services. Later in the project, the student writes about how the
phone was a crossroads of personal, professional, and academic communication, and the
discovery made by the student was a realization of how constant the connection to
communication actually is.

From an assessment standpoint, the project showed strength in how the student used
research, images, and personal detail to scaffold analysis of choices made in communication. The
student was able to recognize how communication, at varying levels of importance, was
processed through the phone. At the personal end of a spectrum, the student described a little
spat with a significant other that occurred through text message. The student remarked on how
the send/reply format allowed for thoughtfulness to be applied to messages and that differed
from having a face-to-face argument where emotions and tensions would have run higher. As a
result, the little spat stayed relatively small based on the way one each could breathe and process
the information before making a response, which kept the interaction relatively informal.

At the professional end of the spectrum, the student confessed and analyzed the process
of firing an employee by leaving a voice mail. At the time of the course, the student was a
manager of a sandwich shop that is part of a nation-wide chain. The student recalled that leaving
a voice mail for such a serious matter was not ideal, but the student did explain how the
employee had missed a few shifts of work and could not be reached to discuss the matter either
over the phone or face-to-face. The student used this incident to establish a link between personal
detail and analysis by recognizing that without technology, the employee was able to save the
embarrassment of coming in to work a shift of a job the employee no longer had. However, the
student was able to recognize the sensitivity of the situation and wanted to have the personal
touch with relaying the news by wanting to meet face-to-face primarily and talking over the
phone as a backup option.
As a decoder of the message in the assessment process, I was able to recognize the levels of critical thought applied to the analysis. The student clearly met the course objectives by reflecting on how rhetorical choices were made in different communicative exigencies that occurred through a mobile device. In the conclusion of the project, the student discussed the following:

This provides me the escape to hide behind my cell phone, but it also that I am less empathetic towards other people. Finally, even though I recognize that some of the values that I have because of this easy way of communicating, I still feel that a cell phone with numerous features is something that I need in order to stay on top of all of the responsibilities that I have.

As an instructor, I was able to commend these connections made in the project in the commentary on the rubric. However, the issue of assigning points to a project is an act of measurement; as in, how well a decoder is able to receive a message encoded by a student (Kinneavy 19). For the purposes of the course, the encoded message needed to meet the course objectives in order to achieve a favorable grade. The goal of the assessment for this first unit was to help students scaffold the process of merging text and image while recognizing the influence each modality has on one another. Returning to Borton and Huot, and their argument on “assessment criteria” of multimodal texts that have “taken advantage of specific affordances” to help a project reach purpose within a context (103), enables Kinneavy’s theory apply to an assessment practice. As such, the assessment process, for this unit, needed to measure the effectiveness of how students utilized the modalities to establish the start of the scaffold for the succeeding units. While the connection of image and text provided the basis of a stronger grade, the lack of properly citing the image did weaken the grade. Part of incorporating research into
compositions is the acknowledgement of source material by adhering to the conventions of MLA style.

However, the assessment practice for this unit also needed to highlight the ineffectiveness in a project. Essentially, grades provide a type of foundation for the student to build upon in future composing exigencies; thus, a student who may receive a weak grade needs commentary from the instructor to supplement the weak foundation. In this next example, the student incorporated an image that fit thematically, but the connection between the image’s content and the aim of the essay was on an implied level and not concrete like in other projects.

because he is on the phone. How is it that we can become so consumed in a place of technology that we completely block out the world around us?

![Image: A bride and groom in a car.](Figure 1: Jupiter Images)

Another major player in the technological field is computers and use of internet. Over the past two decades, the use of computers has grown so rapidly that people are not aware of their power. Some may think that their use of a simple computer couldn’t possibly affect

**Figure 20:** From “Technology, Friend or Foe”

While the intention, thematically speaking, is similar to the previous example, the viewer might find that the image almost interrupts the flow of the text. However, this practice of having an
image or video to add content is seen in many different areas of news and scholarly writing. Thus, I believe it can be quite easy to keep the connection on an abstract level. However, on the other hand, I would argue that a practice like this could be considered writer-based composition like Flower’s take on writer-based prose.

To expand on Flower’s argument, the goal of having images incorporated with writing, for this course, was to have students think critically about how an image’s message can add to the writing. Unlike the strong display of critical thinking in the first example (Figure 19), we see a weaker (or more abstract) connection of image and text that showcases, as I mention in the commentary on the rubric, a missed opportunity for the student to synthesize personal examples, research, and insights to the elements of the image’s message. In the image of the newlyweds (Figure 20), there is an obvious message of technology interrupting a situation that often carries celebratory notions. In the text (truncated by the screenshot) preceding and succeeding the image, the student overlooked the opportunity to add research to pair with image interpretation or personal details, which limit the potential levels of richness the critical thought can have. For a more full view of the project excerpt, refer to Appendix H. As such, ambiguity clouds how the overall message can be received and interpreted by a decoder. The ambiguity resulted in a less than favorable grade for the student despite the presence of an attempt to properly cite the source of the image.

At either end of the spectrum, the students needed to have the practice, reflection, and input about the merging of modalities before moving into the next unit, which brought on additional layers of possibilities. In this second unit, students were to use their work with incorporating images with their writing to compose a personal narrative with the software, PowerPoint. The assessment of the first unit had an aim of rewarding good work and providing
direction for students who did not quite meet the objectives. The student who composed the first example (Figure 19), embraced the format of using slides with more opportunities with design and modalities. For example, the next screenshot (Figure 21) shows a combination of text, image, and sound.

![Figure 21: From “Through the years: To work or not to work?”](image)

While the slide (intended to be seen without the oral speaking component) does create a thematic connection between the modalities, the connection between these modalities reverted to that abstract level instead of the concrete like the previous project. Alice Cooper’s “School’s Out” accompanies the paraphrased research on summer employment for teenagers and the image of a cartoon sun. What is lacking is that solid connection between the modalities, which could be the
opportunity for insight and critical thinking. As a receiver of the message from a sender, I struggle to find the thread that connects these modalities. In the lower, left-hand corner, I typed a message to the student about how these elements did have that abstract connection but there is not much concreteness to them. Because this was a narrative project, I wondered what personal details or thought process brought these modalities together.

This example uses a template slide design included with the software program, and the template used in all slides and seemed to function merely as a way to keep the layout consistent. The blue corner (lower left) did not really distract from the content matter, but it also did not really add to the content either. The white space that dominates the slides serves as a space for text and images to receive more focus or attention from a potential viewer. The student later reflected that the choice for the blue and white template was based on how the slide was reminiscent of summer skies, which fit the theme of the project.

What is interesting to note is that neither the image nor the audio used in this example were cited; however, the research was properly cited. In text-based research writing, composition instructors often include instruction on strategies to incorporate source material: paraphrasing, summarizing, or directly quoting. In this digital environment, most students overlooked how source integration strategies can help highlight the connection(s) between the merged modalities. While this example was assessed fairly well in the “Media and Design” area of the rubric, the project’s grade suffered in the “Content / Research” area. My comment to this student raised ethical concerns about copyrights and subtle forms of plagiarism. Maja Wilson argues that using rubrics might shift our focus on finding errors, and “we often miss potential” (30). The example had potential of ethically and smoothly balancing the modalities; thus, my commentary focused
on how the connective threads could be strengthened in a revision of the project or anticipated in
the next unit.

Before moving into examples from the third unit, it is important to recognize how the
assessment practice had different levels of access for me as an instructor. With the first unit,
feedback was handwritten comments both on the hard copy of the essay (in the margins) and on
the rubric. On the other hand, this first unit provided two ways for me to provide the feedback:
handwritten or electronically. With a digital copy of their essays, I had the option of using the
comment feature that is popular in word processing programs like *Microsoft Office Word*. For
this first unit, I wanted a more hands on approach because I knew that my access to physically
interact with a text was going to diminish in the later units. Additionally, this process reinforced
the idea that multimodal composition does not need to be limited to digital environments as
outlined in the opening chapter of this project.

With the second unit replacing the page with slides in the program, *PowerPoint*, I had
some basic options for providing feedback: (1) leave comments on the slide by choosing the
“Click to add notes” option that is just below each slide, (2) choose a print option that allows
room for notes next to the slides, (3) insert comments from the options, or (4) use a digital pen to
digitally write directly on the slides. I opted for using the digital pen\textsuperscript{12} to insert digital,
handwritten comments and inserted comments. The Bamboo pen provided the opportunity to
draw arrows to point out specifics of slides as well as leave short comments. To return the
marked up projects to the students, I used a flash drive and went around the computer lab
classroom to transfer the file to each student. The screenshot (Figure 22) on the next page is an
example of a slide with digitally written comments.

\textsuperscript{12} I used the *Bamboo Pen*, model CTL460, produced by the Wacom Technology Corporation.
However, with using the digital pen, I found difficulty in keeping my penmanship legible with writing out lengthy notes; thus, digitally written comments were kept to short comments like in the example, and longer notes were typed and a circle was drawn around the inserted comment (see Figures 21 and 22). I would also include an arrow attached to the drawn circle to point out which part of the slide the comment referred to. This combination provided the hands on feel of a printed text while staying in a digital environment.

The third unit limited my hands on access for feedback. Because Prezi users have an account, I wanted to respect student privacy. At the time of the class, Prezi did not have a collaborative share feature, which would allow me access to their projects and be able to provide typed commentary directly in their projects; however, this feature became available after the completion of the course. If I were able to enter their projects and provide commentary directly, I would be limited to using the font scheme picked out for the project, and the commentary, then,
would be part of their project. In any future use of the project, the composer would need to edit out my commentary. In a text-based essay or a collection of slides in *PowerPoint*, various versions could be saved: one with feedback and one without.

By the third unit, students started taking bold directions with their rhetorical choices. The following example (Figure 23) showcases an image with simple insight used as a transition.

![Figure 23: From “The Truth About Banned Advertisements”](image)

Here, the student uses a Public Service Announcement (PSA) ad from the World Wildlife Federation (WWF) to raise the student’s concern of advertising going too far to carry out a message. In the project, the student introduced the image in text preceding the image. The student writes: “The following image taps into the horrors of 9/11 with commercial airliners aimed at the New York City skyline. In the succeeding text, the student acknowledged to imposing the Violence? Text personally on the image and used the word, *violence* to springboard discussion and analysis. The student writes: “Even though the image does not include the
fireballs from explosions or the rubble of fallen buildings, the implication is there with the planes and our collective memory of the 9/11 tragedy.”

The decision to have an image act like a transitional paragraph indicated that the student embraced the opportunities multimodality can offer while respecting how the program functions where viewers follow along a pathway set by the composer. This interaction does somewhat resemble a website with forward and back navigation options, but jumping from point to point at the viewer’s digression is not an option. In this particular project (Figure 23), the viewer moves from a section of text to the image and then to text again. The viewer’s attention focuses on each section. As a result of the student embracing the modalities and their influence on one another, the student received favorable grades in the “Content / Research” and “Media / Design” portions of the rubric. My comments highlighted how the blend of text, images, and video worked well with the pacing and overall structure.

However, not all of the students were able to fully grasp the rhetorical purpose of design. In the next examples (Figures 24 and 25), the student utilized the format of *Prezi* well, but as a viewer, I was left wondering to what effect.

**Figure 24:** First From “Advertising”
In the image above, the pathway of the program shows one of the major thematic elements of the project well by having the heavy, large font. In the next stop of the pathway, the view is zoomed in on some text placed just above the “u” of the word *influence*.

![Figure 25: Second From “Advertising”](image)

The text carries out some insight with the major line of argument for the project, but the choice to have it so small that the viewer can barely sense it in the previous stop on the pathway is a bit puzzling. Here, the student did not have much explanation on the decision to do this other than exploring what *Prezi* had to offer.

Other instances of students not exploring the possibilities of multimodality were like this next example (Figure 26).

![Figure 26: From “Should Television Commercials be Banned?”](image)
A few projects like this example showed lack of balance of the modalities by composing a text-heavy project. This particular example had the viewer stop on a series of text chunks. As a result, the project missed opportunities to showcase, visually, what is being discussed in the text. The example (Figure 26) discusses commercials without including an example to help support the insight.

Furthering the design flaws of this project, the contrast between the background and text is problematic. The dark text on a dark background creates a difficult reading environment for a potential viewer. Thus, as an instructor, I had to interpret the intention of the student composer. On one hand, I could sense an attempt for some rich colors, but on the other, I had to recognize the difficulty as well.

The final common questionable choice made by students was to include an external link to more information about their topics. This choice, while understandable to include in a digital environment, would divert the viewer’s attention to information outside of the project. Links in the Prezi format do not have the option of opening in a new tab or window. Instead, the external page would take over the browser, taking the viewer away from the project. In these instances, the links were placed within text and without instruction for the viewer like the next example (Figure 27).

![Figure 27: From “Carl’s Jr. Commercial”](image)
Offering an external link could be argued as the composer asking the viewer to connect with another source of information, a potential form of development but also of digression. However, being connected to other sources, like a suggestions for further reading list, is not necessarily a bad decision. The feedback to these students pointed out the fact that viewers would leave their project and possibly never return because viewing the project would most likely occur in a web environment, and I suggested that saving these links for a section at the end of the project might have been a better decision.

The assessment of the third unit intended to scaffold how students weaved together the modalities before moving into the final unit: create an argument for a webpage. Up to this point, the assessment highlighted and questioned how students recognized the way images, audio, or video can influence the rhetorical choices made within a project. In other words, the NCTE-WPA White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities, from 2008, states that "Writing assessment should place priority on the improvement of teaching and learning.

Writing assessment responds to student, teacher, institutional, and other stakeholder needs." The White Paper also argues that students’ use of language should “incorporate meaningfully the multiple values and ways of expressing knowledge [emphasis in original].” While the White Paper arguably focuses in on text-based composition, the theories of Semiotics aligned with Kress and Van Leeuwen’s visual grammar indicates that visual and other modalities have a language that can merge with and influence text-based grammar and language. As such, the final unit had a goal for students to showcase their culmination of learning by weaving together the textual and design aspects of a project.

This process became an important learning opportunity for students as they began work on their websites for the fourth and final unit of the course, which had an aim of bringing
together these elements of balancing the modalities. However, the previous projects all utilized a linear type of format where the viewer entered the project at the beginning and followed along to the end whether it was starting at page 1 of an essay or the first slide of a narrative or the start of the Prezi pathway. The website, more often than not, uses a non-linear format where the viewer can choose what section of the project to examine based on the internal links and curiosity.

In the final unit, the opportunity to provide feedback directly onto the page was possible by opening the files in DreamWeaver; however, my choice to provide a narrative summary, which would point to specifics of the site, was based on the decision to interact with their sites more like a viewer than as an instructor. What did complicate the summative feedback was the presence of a point value for their final grade. Because I did not have content areas with assigned point values, I awarded the top point value for the letter grade. For example, an “A” would get 40 out of 40 and a “B” would receive 35 out of 40. To see an example of feedback for a student website, refer to Appendix I.

Students labeled their links as sections of the project, which can impose a sense of logical order with labeling the links with terms like “introduction” or “conclusion.” Another way to impose logical order would be to number the sections like in the next example (Figure 28). In this example, the numbered list includes transitional topic sentences that act like an abstract of each section. While I, as a viewer, appreciated the imposed order for the project, I did have issue with the overall design. The frames (the sections of content) all have negative space that somewhat diminish the content of each frame. On one hand, a viewer can keep focus on the topic sentence that describes each section. On the other hand, the negative space brings focus to the gray background. Thus, the background becomes a dominant feature of the homepage, which may distance the impact of the content from the viewer.
Figure 28: From “Prisons”

With imposing order or leaving order up to the viewer, the importance of transition
became a focus for students, and most students opted to have less order imposed on their sections
with most students just labeling the introduction, conclusion, and works cited. On the other hand,
with self-directed navigation, the navigation of the website became as important as the process of
balancing the modalities. As such, the common flaw with the websites was an omission of
internal links on the pages beyond the home or index page. As a result, the viewer would be on a
page with no real direction on where to go next in the project. Of course, clicking on the “back”
button in a browser is a simple solution to this omission, but this solution was regarded as a lack
of transition in the feedback provided for the students.

The goal of this final unit was for students to showcase a culmination of balancing the
modalities, and my feedback reflected how successfully or unsuccessfully this aspect came
through in the final project. This final example (Figure 29) showcases a home page that brings together these elements of design and function fairly well.

Figure 29: From “Untitled”

The attempt to have text within the MTV logo was an innovative way to showcase an introduction or abstract for the entire project despite some minor errors with contrast. The student reflected during some in-class workshops that the intention was to have emphasis on the logo because it is the basis of the study for the project. Subsequent pages in this site utilized a basic image and text split with the images acting almost like a heading title for each section. The feedback to this student reflected on how innovative design could have been carried throughout
the rest of the projects on not just with the home page. A viewer, after seeing this home page, might expect a similar layout. Overall, the student fared well with the grade by incorporating good research to accompany some good decisions with the layout.

Throughout these units, the goal of the assessment was not to assign a grade for the sake of assigning a grade. Rather, as Willa Wolcott and Sue M. Legg conclude, “scores are simply symbolic shortcuts – in much the same way that letter grades are – for the ideal narrative evaluations of students’ writing” (179). Linda Adler-Kassner and Peggy O’Neill continue this thought by asserting that “according to contemporary composition theory, there is no universal definition of ‘good writing’ (64). In multimodal composition contexts, definitions of good composing cannot exist either by this logic. Thus, as an instructor, my feedback sought potential for student learning by incorporating Kinneavy’s theory of discourse (the course is the reality for communication), O’Neill’s argument on societal determined frameworks of interpretation, and Yancey’s arguments on coherent composition.

Concluding the Assessment Process

The various platforms these projects used raised issues of concern and intrigue for me as an instructor with my first venture into incorporating and assessing multimodal composition. Chris W. Gallagher echoes much of the scholarship used throughout this chapter in the introduction of his CCC article, “Being There: (Re)Making the Assessment Scene.” He asserts that “writing assessment should be site-based, locally controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically based, accessible, and theoretically consistent” (450-1). Later, his conclusion echoes one of the overarching goals of this chapter; “we – faculty and students – are in a position to improve teaching and learning in meaningful ways: being there counts” (468). As in, what are the goals for the course and what students need to get out of the course should matter for the curricula.
My personal choice to incorporate multimodality to my pedagogy is, in many ways, an answer to Gallagher’s argument. Expanding on this line of thought, this chapter specifically and the project as a whole recognize the strong and evolving influence technology has on education. As a result, “technological contexts have moved toward the center of disciplinary conversations and encourage people to think expansively and sometimes untraditionally about their practices and perspectives” (Selber 1). Because Digital Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Online and Multimedia Environments, by the National Writing Project, brings a context to Selber’s take on expansive thinking; “much has changed in the landscape of what it means to ‘write’ and to ‘be a writer’ since 2003” when the organization’s first book, Because Writing Matters, was published.

As showcased in the student excerpts and commentary about the assessment of the projects, this chapter outlined what similarities and influences the modalities have on composition pedagogy. As an instructor, I recognize this need for looking toward the future of the composition landscape. Michael R. Neal argues that “most would acknowledge that texts and technologies are evolving faster than our teaching of writing […] Systemically, though, we are still trying to figure out where new-media fits within the framework of our curricula” (2). As a scholar and active instructor, I would like to argue that even implementing multimodality into our curricula is often on shaky footing because of the ephemeral nature of technology. Thus, the purpose of the next and final chapter is to look toward the future of composition. How has the field embraced the shifting ways we think about what writing can entail? As the field approaches new horizons, we must remember to rely on theoretical approaches to steady our footing.

Additionally, the concluding chapter of this project will again draw from the steady and adaptable theoretical approaches that have informed much of the preceding discussions. In other
words, I believe we as instructors and researchers can start asking ourselves where in composition can we find the influence of Kress and van Leeuwen’s grammar of images? Where in composition can we find Kinneavy’s theory of discourse? To answer these questions, the majority of the final chapter will examine current and commonly used textbooks in First Year Composition programs where I have taught. Additionally, the final chapter will include some discussion on the textbook, *Picturing Texts*, which I used for my multimodal composition based Intermediate Writing course. The purpose for including an overview of textbooks in this final chapter here is to provide some discussion on how the field is embracing the modalities.

However, as much as the field may be embracing the modalities, there are still limitations with both instruction and conventions. Thus, the discussion needs to recognize what rules the Modern Language Association (MLA) has in place for utilizing the modalities. Looking over the recent updates with the MLA conventions in recent past shows the inclusion of citation rules for more digital based sources. As such, the influence of research occurring in digital spaces with digital based sources is becoming recognized as rather commonplace. Based on the major theoretical approaches for this project, Kinneavy’s theory of discourse, Kress’s and van Leeuwen’s take on reading images, National Writing Project’s take on multimodality, and Sherry Turkle’s concern over the effects of technology and the Internet, in conjunction with the overview of textbooks, the final chapter will conclude with discussion on what the future of composition will bring. This concluding discussion will evoke the scholarly debated that focuses on whether or not technological influences have harmful effects with the various ways we think, learn, and communicate.
CHAPTER V: LOOKING FORWARD

“Like a shipwrecked mariner adrift on an unknown sea
Clinging to the wreckage of the lost ship Fantasy
I'm a castaway, stranded in a desolate land
I can see the footprints in the virtual sand

Net boy, net girl
Send your signal 'round the world
Let your fingers walk and talk
And set you free

Net boy, net girl
Send your impulse 'round the world
Put your message in a modem
And throw it in the Cyber Sea.”

“Virtuality” by Rush

The lyrics opening this final chapter are the vision that progressive rock band, Rush, saw at the cusp of the networked, digital revolution. The song from 1996 foresees connection through modems and fiber optic cables as a form of liberation. At the time of release, the band had not experienced the dot com bubble inflate and burst and may not have been able to fully comprehend just how deeply networked digital technology was going to impact society. However, their play on a message in a bottle does allude to the sheer vastness technology can have. Almost two decades later, society has seen internet business recover from the burst but has also seen email almost bankrupt the United States Postal Service. A few lines later in the song, the imagery paints an accurate picture of how technological hardware will evolve: “I can save the universe in a grain of sand / I can hold the future in my virtual hand.” While these lines are a turning point for the song, turning it from progressive visions to love interests, the imagery shows the trend of how increasing capacity has come in decreased, physical size. In other words, digital worlds are shrinking, and virtual worlds can fit in the palm of our hands.
The goal to have each chapter open with lyrics helps establish a controlling theme for the chapter and establishes a thread that connects the various sections of this project. One common, threaded theme is how Popular Culture can reflect a generation’s vision of being at a crossroads of an information age or revolution. The first chapter evokes freedom of information by recognizing a connection to the natural world. The second chapter recognizes how our daily landscape can be crowded with signs and information. The third chapter raises thoughts on how the library is a dying art. The fourth chapter expresses concern for assessment practices. As history tells us, what is current and popular is just a summit point for further progression, and it is this progress that will have tremendous impact on the how, what, and why involved with education. This is not, however, a moment for me as a researcher to make a claim for the members of our field to get on board or get left behind. On the other hand, as a researcher with a genuine and active interest with how technology overlaps with education, I feel compelled to predict what will be the next waves of technological advances. In the spirit of the Rush lyrics and drawing on discussions in the preceding pages, I see a future where education will rely heavily on networked digital technology. With an increased presence of hybrid courses that utilize digital and physical spaces, face-to-face classes being replaced by online classrooms, and massive open online courses (MOOCs), the ways students engage with learning environments and materials will continue to include digital formats. The recent rise in popularity of the touch interface has education at a crossroads where students and instructors have the opportunity to explore the possibilities of SmartBoards and tablets.

The increasing presence and accessibility of technology echoes Sherry Turkle’s proclamation of warning and respect for technology. More importantly, Turkle claims that “we’re going to slowly, slowly find our balance, but it’s going to take time” (“Digital Nation”).
This call out from Turkle has been a guiding notion for this project as a whole; thus, this final chapter addresses this concern. Technology is part of education, and the computer has and will continue to challenge how scholars, instructors, and students view the essay genre and how the act of composing takes place. As such, this concluding chapter will first examine several current composition textbooks, bringing attention to how the field of college composition shows balance between the modalities. Next, the examination of textbooks will also include some discussion on how style handbooks, like The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition), are incorporating visual communication. Moving beyond the examination of the textbooks, this dissertation will conclude with a call out to scholars to continue the contributions to this evolving field of multimodal composition. Because technology will continue to influence the instruction of composition and the types of projects students will compose, the composition field will need to carry on the conversation to anticipate what’s on the horizon.

The Influence of Textbooks

The discussion of textbooks brings attention to how these educational tools help to create the learning environment for students. However, these environments are heavily influenced by a particular program. Bob Broad, in *What We Really Value*, argues that “rhetoric and composition teaches and researches what educators generally accept as the preeminent intellectual skills of the university: critical and creative thinking, as well as interpretation, revision, and negotiation of texts and of the knowledge those texts are used to create” (3). While much of Broad’s book involves the relationship between rubrics and writing assessment, his concept can be extended to textbooks. In other words, “textbooks not only shape the content of the course, but more important, shape students and teachers by constructing and disciplining specific subject positions for them to occupy” (Lockhart 18). The wide use of textbooks to help shape and develop
composition curricula does not occur without criticism. Jay Jordan argues that “the sustained preoccupation with culture that is evident across publishers’ exhibition tables and in their catalogs meets a sustained reliance on textbooks as aids to (if not replacements for) pedagogical innovation” (W465).

The field of college-level composition has drawn from and adapted from every theoretical and pedagogical approach imaginable to create a library of textbooks that, arguably, has saturated the market, and mapping the field through the sheer amount of textbook options could be a project unto itself. Thus, this opening section will examine textbooks that have been established as fairly common in the field of composition. These include *The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing Short Ninth Edition* (2010), *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum Eleventh Edition* (2001), *Writing Today Brief Second Edition* (2013), *Writing in a Visual Age* (2006), and *Picturing Texts* (2004). As an instructor, I believe it is a responsibility of mine to examine what are the underlying theoretical approaches that inform instructional materials. Additionally, it is equally important to recognize and question how the textbook can be viewed as an extension of what the program values and how the program views composition.

**St. Martin’s Guide to Writing Short Ninth Edition**

The *St. Martin’s Guide* is set up in a way that I would consider as a fairly typical take on composition writing with a primary focus on text-based writing. The introduction includes discussion on a direct relationship between writing and critical thinking. This edition proclaims that act of writing “influences and changes the way you think and learn, enhances your chances of success, contributes to your personal development, and strengthens your relationships with other people” (1). This introductory material can be viewed as rather Socratic for its emphasis on life beyond the classroom and how what is learned in the classroom can influence one’s position.
in life. However, there is also a rather strong focus on the self with the phrase *personal development* and the use of the second person point of view. Edward M. White makes an interesting and relatable claim in the opening chapter of his book, *Assigning, Responding, and Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide*. White comments on the difficulties that can be present when writing instructors “devise writing assignments,” which include a need “[…] to stimulate our students’ creativity and convince them to learn what we teach” (1). Instructors, like what’s exemplified in the textbook and from White, have a responsibility to prepare students for what comes next. First-year composition programs have the responsibility to prepare students for writing in upper level courses and beyond.

The introductory material of the textbook includes commentary on the types of text-based writing students will do in courses outside of composition as well as the professional world. Axelrod and Cooper state that “students who learn to write for different readers and purposes do well in courses throughout the curriculum. […] Eventually, you will need to use writing to advance your career by writing persuasive application letters for jobs or graduate school admission” (3). This section clearly has an assumption that text-based writing will continue to exist as a genre in many areas of life. However, as evidence throughout this project has indicated, life outside of the classroom will demand members of society to navigate various modalities. Much of the content for the *St. Martin’s Guide to Writing* has a focus on the text-based modality with some instruction on web-based research. The focus on the text-based modality arguably can be the foundation to build the multimodal scaffold as argued in the third chapter of this project. Concepts of structure, argument, focus, and transition with a text like this can be established before these concepts can be remediated into multimodal compositions. Scholars will debate
whether this discussion is a matter of learning to crawl before walking because as long as the essay exists in college writing classes, there will be a need to teach text-based writing.

Additionally, textbooks like the *St. Martin’s Guide* that have a heavy hand with text-based composition will keep the text-based essay as a genre but does feature how to navigate various modalities for research, which echoes Jason Palmeri’s concept of composition being multimodal regardless of format. In his concluding chapter, he states that “it makes sense for composition teachers to engage students in informal auditory and visual composing activities as a way to help them invent and revise alphabetic texts” (149). In the section, “Using the Web for Research,” Axelrod and Cooper instruct students on the value of web-based research but also warn students that “search engines can be unreliable, and you man not find the best available resources” (749). Guiding students through web-based research puts an emphasis on student composers to continue consuming the various modalities instead of producing with the various modalities.

While texts like the *St. Martin’s Guide* that have an emphasis on the text-based essay leave little room for including multimodal composition, Palmeri argues that composition has a long history of being multimodal. He cites that “compositionists in the late 1960s and early 1970s were concerned that the electronic revolution had produced a generation of students who were more interested in multimedia forms of composing – the film, the television program, the comic – than in writing conventional print texts” (87-8). In many ways, this true with today’s students, but the list can be updated to indicate that students are, arguably, more concerned with gathering information from the Internet. As a result, while the production of composition is text-based, the textbook brings students attention to thinking critically about various sources. Regardless of what shape the composition course will take, an instructor’s goal should be to
guide “students on how to locate and evaluate assertions in published and student texts and how to handle their own assertions and support in their own texts” (Olson 9). The third chapter argues for scaffolding of composition projects through the various levels of multimodal composition, and establishing critical thought with the text-based essay can be a strong foundation.

What is interesting to note is how the sections and lessons within the book are set-up. Images are used to supplement a point of discussion; however, when the book instructs students to write, there is no instruction of how to include images to help supplement a point of discussion. This gap between what can be done in composition and what is expected of students in the course establishes a hierarchy of multimodal composition being better fit for those with expertise in design and layout. However, I am not saying that instructors should only use text-based materials to teach text-based composition, but recognizing the difference between the various composition exigencies can provide an opportunity for discussion among classes on expectations within various exigencies. For example, instructors can engage students with discussion prompts on contexts and audiences, such as, why are images appropriate for a textbook? Or, when would images be appropriate in an essay?

Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum

The Writing and Reading textbook echoes a similar structure of consuming the various modalities to produce text-based composition and is often used in the second semester of a two semester First-year composition program. In the introductory material, the section, “A Note to the Student,” sets up the hypothetical situation for the student:

Your sociology professor asks you to write a paper on attitudes toward the homeless population of an urban area near your campus. You are expected to consult books,
articles, Web sites, and other online sources on the subject, and you are encouraged to conduct surveys and interviews.

Your professor is making a number of assumptions about your capabilities. Among them:

- that you can research and assess the value of relevant sources;
- that you can comprehend college-level material, both print and electronic; […]

(xxx)

The excerpt, here, assumes what is learned in the previous semester of composition: selecting sources. The opening chapter of the *Writing and Reading* text includes discussion on how to write critically about sources; however, there is more emphasis on analyzing text-based sources.

In addition to analyzing sources, *Writing and Reading* focuses on synthesizing sources. The introductory material to the chapter, “Explanatory Synthesis,” Behrens and Rosen explain to students that synthesis “is a written discussion that draws on two or more sources. It follows that your ability to write syntheses depends on your ability to infer relationships among sources – essays, articles, fiction, and also nonwritten sources such as lectures, interview, visual media, and observations” (91). After this brief allusion to utilizing the modalities, the chapters on synthesis do not include explicit instruction or guidance on synthesizing with the modalities. The fact that it is present in the overview but not present in the content sends a message that synthesizing the modalities is not a primary concern for first year composition.

Like the *St. Martin’s Guide*, the *Writing and Reading* text places emphasis on the text-based essay “as an essential component of multimodal compositions” (Reiss and Young 167). The text, as an extension of values, brings attention to how “writing instruction has historically been as much about ‘the selves we want our students to be’ as the writing we want them to
produce” (Lockhart 18). However, various writing programs will influence the types of writing that can be done within the context of the course either by dictating the types of textbooks used or the methods of assessment. In a specific context like Bowling Green State’s General Studies Writing Program (GSW\textsuperscript{13}), a department-wide portfolio assessment is used at the end of both the first and second semester. The portfolios students submit are hard copy and distributed relatively evenly among the full-time faculty and graduate assistants\textsuperscript{14}. The nature of having a hard copy portfolio clearly indicates that GSW values text-based composition as a cornerstone to their learning objective of critical thinking development. However, assignments based on the instruction from the \textit{St. Martin’s Guide} and \textit{Writing and Reading} textbooks can include some level of multimodality: text and image. However, more intricate and expansive uses of multimodality do not work.

The portfolio assessment process in GSW involves, as previously mentioned, a print version of student work. At the end of the semester, all student portfolios deemed appropriate by individual instructors are collected and evenly distributed to other instructors for evaluation. No instructor will have their own students’ work. At this stage in the process, if the outside instructor feels that the portfolio is not up to passing level, the portfolio moves on to a second reader for a final assessment. Essentially, each portfolio needs the best of three votes for the student to pass the course. Grades for the first semester are on a Pass / Non-Pass structure, and grades for the second semester are based on the letter system of A, B, and C, and students with a non-passing portfolio (via the assessment process or by being not submitted to the assessment process) are given the Non-Pass grade.

\textsuperscript{13} BGSU’s General Studies Writing program is its own department that does not operate under the English Department.

\textsuperscript{14} Full-time GSW faculty are non-tenure track with a 4/4 course load, and graduate assistants have a 1/2 course load.
This system has many moving parts, and including multimodalities in the composition has limitations. Snippets of audio or video embedded into composition pieces within this system cannot be used for obvious reasons, but images can work with relative ease. Thus, instructors with an interest of having students explore a simple form of multimodal composition can implement this into the curriculum with these texts. The *St. Martin’s Guide* has writing units that have a range of different writing genres or purposes, and each writing unit can easily include students using images within the text. The *Writing and Reading* text has an emphasis on synthesizing sources in writing, which can include the use of an image as a source and text-based sources to support analysis of the image.

While working multimodal composition into curricula where it can work is an option for most composition courses, the instructor cannot fully escape the reality created by the tools used for the learning environment nor can the instructor escape program objectives as a reality of classroom instruction. As in, the emphases of a textbook becomes part of the environmental make up for the course, and returning to Kinneavy’s theory of discourse, the textbook has a hand in creating the reality for the coded communication. Thus, students will assume what is expected of them based on what makes up the learning environment. If a textbook utilizes readings and commentary, the student will expect to read and write, and if a textbook emphasizes the text-based essay as a genre, students will expect to compose in this modality.

*Writing Today Brief Second Edition*

While textbooks like the *St. Martin’s Guide* and *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum* place emphasis on text-based composition as a foundation to scaffold into multimodal composition, *Writing Today* focus remains on text-based writing, but the textbook allows for more flexibility of multimodal composition based curricula. The preface for the
Writing Today reinforces this idea of how instructors can be more open to multimodal composition based curriculum. The preface opens with three basic assumptions:

First, we believe students want to learn writing skills that will help them succeed in college and in their careers. Second, students need a writing guide that presents information clearly, simply, and in a way that is easy to reference. Third, writing instructors prefer a teaching tool that is both practical and flexible, allowing them to adapt its content to their own pedagogical approaches and teaching styles. (xv)

The major portions of the text include instruction and commentary on various writing genres as well as various composing contexts. However, most of the focus within these sections is on text-based writing. Despite this focus, there are small sections on designing pages for contexts other than traditional MLA text-based format and designing visual aids for presentations. Thus, there is some attention on composition exigencies outside of the widely assumed norm of text-based composition.

This 2013 text is a testament of how visual elements influence and challenge our notions of what is the essay genre and what can be included within the essay genre. However, my question on whether multimodal composition is entirely appropriate for first year composition remains. Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington outline that “reports such as the American Diploma Project’s (ADP) Ready or Not” and the “Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)” raise concerns many employers have over the weak writing and communication skills graduates have. As a result, instructors of compositing need to remember what is at the heart of composition: communication. Despite Erik Ellis arguing that “an undue emphasis on the primacy of print literacy can be misleading” (39), text-based composition plays an important role when building a scaffold into multimodal composition. For example, Jay David Bolter and Richard
Grusin “call the representation of one medium in another remediation, and we will argue that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media” (45). Their claims, arguably, echo activity and genre theories where typified responses to situations are recycled and remediated while progressing through the various levels of multimodal composition exigencies.

For example, the Writing Today textbook moves students through various genres of primarily text-based writing assignments; however, there is a presence of using images within the writing in these chapters. Thus, the connective thread of building the multimodal scaffold is in place for instructors and students. While Ellis argues that placing importance or priority on text-based composition can be misleading, through the Bolter and Grusin remediation framework, we can see how students will think critically about using the various modalities as research before producing these types of modalities. The text’s format establishes a connection between text-based and visually-based languages.

In the chapter that overviews design, authors Johnson-Sheehan and Pain, echo Kress and van Leeuwen’s take on visual rhetoric. As a basic principal, the chapter informs students that “your readers will subconsciously search for visual relationships among items on the page. […] If a picture, for example, is vertically aligned with a caption, list, or block of text on a page, readers will naturally assume that they go together” (377). In this instance, the textbook clearly establishes a need for coherency between the modalities. In other words, images added to an essay without a bridge of rhetoric are just images next to text. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that “communication requires that participants make their messages maximally understandable in a particular context” (13). Thus, composition courses and assignments instructors create are the contexts, or the realities of the messages to borrow from Kinneavy, in which communicative expectations are established and carried out. What this textbook tool brings to the learning
environment allows for the instructor to utilize lessons in multimodality without a need to supplement the curriculum unlike the previous textbooks discussed in the preceding pages. Thus, the reality, returning to the Kinneavy filter, can create a space where the languages of text and images can merge. Thus, this textbooks is an opportunity for a program to place value on the text-based essay while recognizing the changing views on this genre.

Writing in a Visual Age

If the learning environment is shaped and established by the educational tools we use, then the learning environment can arguably be seen as an extension of how the program values composition. Thus, *Writing in a Visual Age* represents how a program can embrace utilizing the modalities in composition. The introduction to the text clearly reflects how the genre of the essay has been challenged and questioned in recent years.

New technologies have transformed our understanding of what it means to compose. The design, formatting, graphing, and illustration tools available in the average word processor were unthinkable just a few years ago, and the options available for Web documents or Power-Point presentations are even more impressive. Not surprisingly, this ability to use visuals and design to create effective documents is rapidly turning into a requirement: both in college courses and in the real world, most writers today are expected to work with more than just words. And so the writing course is heroically expanding to develop writers who are not just literate but visually literate. (Odell and Katz V)

In addition to a different view of the essay genre, the introduction recognizes the importance for visual literacy beyond the classroom. While the introduction examines composing exigencies outside the composition classroom, the textbook still has a primary focus of the text-based essay.
The chapters included in “Part 1: Writing Assignments” overview “Profiles,” “Reports,” “Position Papers,” “Evaluations,” “Proposals,” and “Instructions.” The layout of these sections is much more text heavy with readings, commentary, analysis, and discussion prompts. However, throughout these sections, there is a noticeable increased presence of utilizing visual rhetoric. Each section has instruction on adding images in with the writing.

The final section, “Instructions,” has the strongest presence of blending images and writing. Additionally, this section has the strongest language addressing the need to merge visual and textual rhetoric. Odell and Katz state the following in the sub-section, “Visual Information in Context.”

As you’ll see in the Reading to Write section, visual elements must be more than mere decorations – and especially with instructions, where the emphasis is on ‘reading to do’ rather than ‘reading to understand.’ Writers of instructions may use a range of visual elements in order to accomplish a wide range of purposes. As always, you should choose visual elements that are appropriate for your audience, the subject you’re explaining, and the purposes you’re trying to accomplish. (414)

This section echoes Kress and van Leeuwen’s grammar of visuals; visuals have obvious and underlying levels of interpretation (3). This section of the textbook utilizes how the obvious levels of image interpretation can and should make connections to the writing; thus, the grammar of written text merges with the grammar of visual rhetoric. In the context of providing visuals to accompany written instructions, the use of the modalities has a clear need and purpose for a strong relationship. Thus, students composing instructions have a clear goal in mind when merging the modalities.
What is interesting to note, however, is the fact that this section appears after the textbook’s sections that are heavier handed with text-based writing and immediately before the textbook moves into more discussion and instruction on composing with modalities. As a result, the textbook moves students through a series of compositing activities that takes on an increasing amount of multimodality. Thus, the textbook respects the essay as a genre but also recognizes that “today there is an expectation that writers will produce documents that incorporate a wide range of visual features or that writers will ‘write visually’” (Odell and Katz 479). Being able to move through various composing exigencies returns the discussion to Bolter and Grusin’s discussions on remediation: “one medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium” (45). However, many concepts of the textbook are remediated with an interactive CD-ROM that accompanies the textbook. Bolter and Grusin argue that “the digital medium wants to erase itself, so that the viewer stands in the same relationship to the content as she would if she were confronting the original medium” (45). However, they also recognize that “the computer always intervenes and makes its presence felt in some way” (45-6).

In arguable recognition of the difference of print and digital based spaces, Cheryl E. Ball and Kristin L. Arola, composers of the CD-ROM, *9 Visual Exercises* (2004), outline their goals of the interactive instruction and exercises in the introduction of the CD-ROM:

There are things you can't do in a book. You can't manipulate images. You can't change colors, drag pictures around to make your own visual argument, or watch a movie. We created this CD-ROM because it makes sense to introduce the fundamentals of visual composition in the medium – and we hope it helps you read and write about *all* kinds of texts.
The contents of the CD-ROM is very much like a textbook, but the level of interactivity evokes the discussions of how viewers can read images and establish a grammar of visual rhetoric based on the arguments by Kress and van Leeuwen. The following image, shows how each section is set up.

![Image of CD-ROM content](image_url)

**Figure 30**: First From *IX Visual Exercises*\(^{15}\)

Each major section split up into subsections. The first, “Definitions,” provides some contextual information for the section’s particular lesson. Next, the “Analysis” section guides students through the lesson with prompts for critical thought. Finally, the “Assignment” section asks

\(^{15}\) (Ball and Arola)
students to respond to thought provoking questions based on the lesson with an option for saving and/or emailing the response (see Figure 31).

![Assignment Questions](image)

**Figure 31:** Second From IX Visual Exercises\(^6\)

The structure here for the students brings focus back to one of the key arguments from Kress and van Leeuwen: “language and visual communication express meanings belonging to and structured by cultures in the one society […]. Not everything that can be realized in language can also be realized by means of images, or vice versa” (19). Various meanings of images need a language to establish a bridge between visual and textual rhetoric. The next example shows an example of how explicit and implicit details can feed into an overall message or meaning of visual communication.

\(^6\)(Ball and Arola)
In Figure 32, the authors provide focus on a key element for the image. The words, *EARTH DAY*, spray painted on a trash can, is one of the key explicit details of the image’s message. On the other hand, the presence of this detail evokes many possible options for implicit meanings. Viewers can make the argument for a positive message about Earth Day or a rather negative message. Either way, the implicit message needs to rely on the explicit details. Thus, an exercise like this establishes that need for a grammar of interpretation that is supported by the language of the visual.

However, what is at the core of images is the fact that they are a representation. Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* echoes these ideas in the concluding essay of her book. Sontag states

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17 (Ball and Arola)
that “images are indeed able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (154). While most of Sontag’s discussion involves photography, she does allude to other mediums, like paintings, as well, and as a scholar of visual communication, I would argue that this sense holds true communication that utilizes moving images or audio. The ways consumers of information (textual and/or visual) have various experiential reactions is why there is a need for languages to bridge the two spectrums. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue in *Metaphors We Live By* “that truth is always relative to a conceptual system, that any human conceptual system is mostly metaphorical in nature, and that, therefore, there is no fully objective, unconditional, or absolute truth” (185). As a result, there are levels of interpretation that provide a basis for rich argumentative discussion.

The guided instruction of interpreting images in both the textbook and the CD-ROM show that the composition field can blur the seams between modalities by recognizing the various ways they can interact; however, composers need language to be able to move in and out of modalities. Thus, this discussion returns to one of the central concepts of this project: Kinneavy’s theory of discourse. Essentially, composition can be viewed as a collection of different intentions that are focused to an end goal of a message. Composers rely on critical thought to construct insights or opinions on a topic by using various sources to ground those critical thoughts. The fact that this has both elements: digital and hard copy seems to anticipate accessibility for various users. The CD-ROM does have system requirements that are fairly universal. As in, the disc does not require advanced video graphics processors, computing
processors, or much memory (hard-drive or RAM), or internet connection. Thus, these lessons can be worked through as long as there is sufficient power for the computer.

Picturing Texts

The final textbook overviewed for this chapter discussion is one I used for Intermediate Writing course in Spring 2011. This text, while not having an accompanying interactive CD-ROM, has a lot of emphasis on visual analysis and utilizing visual analysis within writing. The introduction of the text clearly establishes a need for instruction with visual communication. Lester Faigley et al. state that “before personal computers, we interacted with images largely as consumers” (4). The authors recognize that networked technology has drastically changed this way of thinking. We now have more opportunity to be producers of visual communication.

Throughout the text, the authors encourage students to view, react, respond, and discuss what messages images can convey. Each chapter includes analytical discussion on example images that focus on what Kress and van Leeuwen argue for: a grammar of visual communication. The discussions on the images include key components as composition, layout, medium, color, lighting, etc.

However, what these discussions include that is not a part of the instruction found within Writing in a Visual Age and 9 Visual Exercises are prompts of historical, cultural, and social contexts. Faigley et al. state that “all texts are created at a time, in a place, and sometimes in response to specific events or feelings” (108). One example the authors use to help explain context is the “Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima” photograph from World War II (Figure 33). The authors allude to how communication, visual or written, is a product of these certain contexts. In regards to the actual photo, the authors challenge a viewer’s assumption about the image; “because most of us do not know the details of the event depicted, the image has come to
be understood as a generalized reference to Americans at war, perhaps to heroism or to the horrors of war” (108). In other words, the communication of visuals can also help shape perception of these contexts. While “exploring semiotic perspectives, we may come to realize that information or meaning is not ‘contained’ in the world or in books, computers or audiovisual media. Meaning is not ‘transmitted’ to us – we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions” (Chandler 11). Thus, we can rely on Kinneavy’s take on the Communication Triangle where “basic to all uses of language are a person who encodes a message, the signal (language) which carries the message, the reality to which the message refers, and the decoder (receiver of the message)” (19). Additionally, this communicative reality draws from social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Figure 33: *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*[^18]

Style and Convention

[^18]: (Rosenthal)
As the field of composition evolves, it will be harder and harder for instructors to ignore the various modalities available for research or teaching, and students will continue to turn to digital environments for a good portion of their research. Thus, it is important to notice guidelines research writing handbooks have in place for the modalities. Currently, The Modern Language Association (MLA) has formatting and citation rules for the incorporation of audio, video, digital, and web-based sources. These can be incorporated into the writing like text-based sources; thus, giving these modalities equal footing as other text-based sources. However, the MLA handbook comes up short on the use of images by not being clear with how to integrate and cite image sources.

According to MLA format guidelines, images placed within the text need to be labeled with a type of parenthetical citation, but this parenthetical citation has slightly different content than in-text citations. Bibliographic information should be given underneath the image, and if enough information is present, there is no need for it to be included in the works cited list. This particular rule puts the image separate from the rest of the sources. The image, of course, is different than text surrounding the image, but the visual grammar argument by Kress and van Leeuwen challenges this style. If language of visuals can merge with the text-based grammar, then one could conclude that images can be part of the composition.

As an instructor of composition, I believe it is important for students to utilize various types of sources for research to broaden their research methods. Students should be able to examine videos like documentaries, audio like sound recordings, and images like advertisements or photo journalism in their research. At times, I sense that students come into college with a preconceived notion that research typically limits itself to print-based sources from the library stacks or articles from academic databases subscribed to by the school. Thus, research is often
viewed by the students as a required element for the composed essay and not as a chance to continue and develop lines of inquiry or as a chance to explore various genres of research methods like visual images, digital files, audio, and videos.

The *OWL at Purdue* website outlines the goals of research-based composing by stating that “writers who properly use MLA also build their credibility by demonstrating accountability to their source material.” Composers use research not to diminish their insights but to build credibility. Additionally, being able to incorporate modalities with composing can broaden the ways composition can guide students to think more critically about the world they are part of. The various texts and their underlying theories clearly establish a shift in how instructors and scholars view composition, and MLA has a primary focus on the text-based essay as a genre. The limitations noticed here with MLA is also noticeable in other style manuals. Thus, if Composition is going to continue to evolve to embrace emerging/various modalities, we need a rule book that understands writing as including digital work.

*The Columbia Guide to Online Style Second Edition* by Janice R. Walker and Todd Taylor is the start of providing the field with standards. The preface establishes their goals. Walker and Taylor state that the book “attempts to achieve the apparently impossible: to provide an authoritative guide to the world of online writing and publishing, a world that continues to morph at such a rate that establishing standards may seem impossible or even deplorable” (xvii). Later, they argue that “new media will lead to a radical disruption of the conventions and traditions of print publication” (xvii). As a researcher, I can only wonder what is next.

Are We There Yet?
As the field evolves and embraces the influence of the modalities, I echo Sherry Turkle again to remind us if we are prepared for what technology and modalities can do to us as scholars, students, and instructors. The presence and influence is noticeable; thus, we can recognize how many textbooks and curricula have questioned and challenged our idea of the essay genre. As scholars, we need to ask what will this do to education. Moreover, the education system exists in the tangled web of an information revolution. It is commonly regarded that we experience unprecedented speed and availability of news, information, and connectivity. However, Nicholas Carr builds on Turkle’s warning that has echoed throughout this project. Carr, inspired by Marshal McLuhan, proclaims that the ways media and information is distributed and consumed not only “supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought” (The Shallows 6). Carr’s book, The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains, is an expansion on his highly regarded article, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Carr speculates that our current society is “at an important juncture in our intellectual and cultural history, a moment of transition between two very different modes of thinking. […] Calm, focused, undistracted, the linear mind is being pushed aside by a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts – the faster, the better” (The Swallows 10).

I can agree with scholars and social commentators like Turkle and Carr that this age of digitized and networked information affords tremendous opportunity to collaborate, create, and have access with a tremendous amount of information, but I cannot ignore Carr’s claim of what we might be losing. Maryanne Wolf and Mint Barzillai build on this concern in their article, "The Importance of Deep Reading," that "a culture can be judged, in Aristotle's view, according to how it pursues three lives: the life of activity and productivity, the life of enjoyment, and the
life of contemplation” (33). If we, as a society, value this rapid-fire pace of information, then education will see drastic shifts in the ways educators of all levels will have students engage with materials. On one hand, we can celebrate the use of technology and the modalities for pushing boundaries of critical thinking and traditional norms, but on the other hand, newer forms of technology raises one of the essential concerns for this project: how can multimodal composition help the pursuit of contemplation?

The presence of technology, as argued by scholars like William Powers, challenges our pursuit of contemplation. Powers argues that “although we think of our screens as productivity tools, they actually undermine the serial focus that’s the essence of true productivity. And the faster and more intense our connectedness becomes, the further we move away from that ideal. Digital busyness is the enemy of depth” (16-7). The presence of a computer screen can bring on many options even if the user is not connected to the internet. The second chapter raises the notion of blurring the boundaries of our lives through technology: the personal computer as a hub of personal, professional, and scholarly activity. Thus, users of technology are constantly faced with an array of choices especially while engaged with Internet-based research.

Building on this notion, Barry Schwartz’s book, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*, his argument on the act of shopping and how shoppers, in general, are less inclined to be satisfied with their purchases when faced with a large array of options. More specifically, he cites scientific studies that conclude that “a large array of options may discourage consumers because it forces an increase in the effort that goes into making a decision. So consumers decide not to decide, and don’t buy the product. Or if they do, the effort that decision requires detracts from the enjoyment derived from the results” (18-20). In the classroom, I often use shopping as an analogy for research. With research, a composer has an idea in mind for a project much like
shopping for a list of ingredients for a dinner party or a list of materials needed for a project, and final selections happen at the store based on cost, availability, or quality of the items needed. What databases a composer will use to conduct research is like where a person will go shopping; however, this digital age of information has made the amount of options for researching extremely vast.

Researching in different databases will yield vastly different results. Typing a basic term like “zombies” into a Google search will bring up just over 120,000,000 results in just under half a second. The same key term for a search in the database Academic Search Complete will yield just over 1100 results in various sources like academic journals, newspapers, magazines, and book reviews. While the collection of results was virtually effortless, being able to narrow the search to what a researcher would need is where the effort takes place. Using filters and additional key terms can eliminate a large number of unwanted results. Even after narrowing down the results, I can only wonder if the theory of more options equaling less satisfaction is a cause of contemporary society’s shortening ability to have linear thought. Thus, if there is less reader satisfaction is apparent with a selected resource, it would make sense that engagement with the material would be difficult to foster.

Wolf and Barzillai, later in their article, call out for education to take responsibility to foster an application of deep reading strategies with online or digital materials. They argue that “aspects of reading—from basic decoding skills to higher-level comprehension skills—need to be explicitly taught” (36). In a similar train of thought, The National Writing Project’s book, Because Digital Writing Matters, argues that the digital revolution “isn’t about the tools, but rather how the tools are used” (20). Thus, instructors of composition have a responsibility to not

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19 This statistic is based on a search conducted in August of 2013.
only explore options and utilize tools for learning, but also have sound theory informing their decisions. Reiss and Young argue that there needs to be “not only innovative ways of combining and composing texts but rhetorical and multimodal ways of thinking about form and content, genre and purpose” (165). James E. Porter, in his essay, “Rhetoric in (as) a Digital Economy,” overviews that composing includes the important aspect of “[...] figuring out where and how to deliver the message (through what technological means)” (175). However, the context of the composition course (the learning environment) will establish the where and how to create composed communication. This concept brings the discussion to a central aim for this project as a whole: where and how can multimodal composition fit in with curricula?

Concluding Thoughts

We’ve been there; we’ve always been here. While much of the discussion woven through these chapters suggests that scholars and instructors need not ignore the importance of text-based writing, other sections of the discussion has advocated for the benefits of multimodal composition. Communication is the heart of composition; however, how this communication is composed depends on the learning environment. Reiss and Young argue that “language alone may not always represent best our students’ thinking and understanding” (169). Thus, composition, as I have argued, can and will turn toward networked technology to help establish multimodal-based learning environments for students to develop the critical thinking skills they need to be successful in college courses and their professional lives. However, an increasing presence and reliance on technology raises a central concern for this project: what are the effects?

William Powers echoes Sherry Turkle and Nicholas Carr. In his aptly titled chapter, “Busy, Very Busy,” he argues that “when you’re scrambling all the time, that’s what your inner
life becomes: scrambled. What are we doing this to ourselves? Do we really want a world in which everyone is staring at screens all the time, keeping one another busy? Is there a better way?” However, claims from scholars like Williams and Carr may be limited based on how little science knows about the ways the brain functions. Marc Prensky in his book, Brian Gain: Technology and the Quest for Digital Wisdom, argues “that our brain’s power is growing externally, though a new symbiosis with our technology. Because of this new symbiosis, the human mind, that is, the brain we use every day, is gaining rapidly in power and ability” (1). While the presence of technology and composition is not a newly developed concern, the increased reliance on technology in pedagogy most certainly can be a concern. Jason Palmeri comments on how the presence of technology tampered with the comfort levels of his own teaching. He states, “when I first started teaching composition in a computer-lab environment, I was a bit nervous about the hulking machines lurking in my classroom. I worried that I didn’t have the technical and pedagogical skills that I needed to integrate these computers in a meaningful way” (116). As an instructor, I cannot expect my students to think critically about utilizing technology or modalities for their compositions or research when I am uncomfortable doing the same.

The preceding pages of this chapter have threaded a discussion on a society’s pursuit of a life of contemplation, and the overarching goal of this project raises awareness that composition that utilizes the modalities and technology can and will help our pursuit of contemplation. Composition instruction will continue to lead students toward this goal because “thanks to computers and the Internet, students have an opportunity to make meaning and demonstrate their intellectual growth in multiple modalities” (Reiss and Young 169). However, we need balance. Multimodality commonly involves technology; thus, “it is not simply a matter of ‘integrating
technology’ into the school day, but rather a matter of uncovering the most powerful uses of technology to accomplish learning goals for specific students” (National Writing Project 29). This is our responsibility to our students.

To help define this responsibility, this chapter returns to Geoffrey Sirc’s article, “Box-Logic,” in which Sirc poses the questions: “Is the essay still our central genre? Do our students do Web sites? Do we teach html? Email as a genre? Where do we go?” (111). This project has demonstrated where we can go: the essay can be a central genre, but we should branch out from there. The field of composition will continue to embrace technology and digital composing, and the decision of what types of composing to include in curricula is our right to do so. The National Writing Project argues that “composing still depends on phases of planning, reflecting, drafting, and revising, and writers still produce texts for audiences” (23). However, Merrill J. Davies makes an alarming observation in his essay, “Making the Leap from High School to College Writing,” that high school curricula are shifting focus away from teaching composition to students, and “those in charge of curricula should work toward putting composition back in the curriculum as a separate course” (127). While organizations like The National Writing Project recognize the process of multimodal composition, I am left to wonder if placing more emphasis on multimodality will push the text-based essay to the brink of extinction. Thus, future generations of “digital natives” may be missing opportunities to develop. To recognize the importance of the essay genre, this project has discussed the ways the essay is a foundation for multimodal composition, which can scaffold critical thinking throughout the various levels of complexities.

Can instructors expect students to be able to plan and design a multimodal project like a web page or a brochure or a flyer or a digital presentation without having much experience with
developing an appreciation and familiarity with common page layout features in typical word processing programs? Or, is this more of a question of expecting students to be aware of typified conventions for the expectancies of various formats and genres. As an instructor, I have to confess that my first formal text-based essay of the semester for a first year composition course has more emphasis on following formatting rules than actual content of an essay. I explain to my students that how information is presented to an audience matters.

However, the question of whether to teach multimodal composition or not resonates. The answer is whether or not multimodal composition aligns with the values of a particular program. Brian Huot’s 2002 book, (Re)Articulating Writing Assessment, argues that writing assessment should be […]: site-based, locally controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically-based, and accessible” (4). These concepts can extend to curricula as well because “going to college offers the opportunity to ascend different ladders altogether: to develop new skills, interests, goals, and relationships in unfamiliar educational environments” (Hjortshoj vii). In the process of developing throughout college, students define themselves “in and through our available media” (Bolter and Grusin 231). Later they argue that “we always understand a particular medium in relation to other past and present media” (231).

As pointed out in the previous paragraph, higher education is often a winding journey that leads students through many various types of learning environments. Within these multiple, reimagined learning environments, students will need to think critically when consuming and producing in the modalities. This project showcases how instructors can lead students to engage with these modalities. Thus, no matter what path the field of composition chooses, no matter what innovations future waves of technology will bring us, no matter what forms composed communication will take, the field of future students, instructors, and scholars will need to keep
focus on how society defines media as much as it defines us. Our created learning environments have to recognize changing trends but also respect the long history of how communication has evolved.
WORKS CITED


Ellis, Erik. "Back to the Future? The Pedagogical Promise of the (Multimedia) Essay."


"Prisons: how they've become the new substitute for mental hospitals." 5 May 2011.

*DreamWeaver* File.


"Through the years: To work or not to work?" 14 Mar. 2011. *PowerPoint* File.


"You Call the Shots in Upcoming Facebook/Twitter/YouTube Horror Film."


American Popular Culture Through History.
APPENDIX A: TEXT FROM FIGURE 3

Text from below the image in “Royal Precision LGP-30 Electronic Computer” ad reads as follows:

helps increase productivity of valuable engineers

The result of 20 years' experience in the design of electronic computers, the low-cost LGP-30 brings complete high-speed computation directly to the engineer's desk.

Increases engineering capacity. With LGP-30, the engineer works his problems himself...saves valuable time in executing preliminary calculations. Programming most problems right in his office, he can immediately modify equations where necessary, follow his own work to completion. Thus, the engineer handles more assignments, completes them sooner.

Greatest computer value in today's market. LGP-30 is the largest-capacity stored program computer in its field, offers speed and memory equal to computers many times its size and cost. Remarkably small initial investment is combined with low operating and maintenance costs.

Nation-wide sales and service. Detailed analysis of your requirements is available through Royal McBee's nation-wide staff of trained applications engineers.

Outstanding features of LGP-30

• Operates from regular wall outlet (110 volts AC).
• No expensive installation...no external air conditioning.
• Unusually large "memory" -- 4096.
• Complements central computing facility.
• Enters and reports numerical or alphabetical information by punched paper tape or keyboard.
• High-speed operation...finger-tip control.
• Lowest cost ever for a "complete" computer.
• Nation-wide sales and service.

For further information, write Royal McBee Corporation, Data Processing Equipment Division, Port Chester N.Y.
APPENDIX B: LIST OF CHAPTERS

The following is outlined in Richard Fulkerson’s “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century”:

**Two Views of the Composition Landscape**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timothy Donovan and Ben McClelland, eds.</th>
<th>Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick, eds.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. “Writing as Process,” Don Murray
6. “Basic Writing,” Harvey Wiener
10. “Expressivist Pedagogy,” Christopher Burnham
12. “Collaborative Pedagogy,” Rebecca Moore Howard
13. “Cultural Studies and Composition,” Diana George and John Trimbur
16. “Community-Service Pedagogy,” Laura Julier
18. “Writing Center Pedagogy,” Eric Hobson
English 2070: Intermediate Writing:
Teaching Writing without Chalkboards…
Spring Semester 2011
Meeting: Tuesdays / Thursdays 1.00 – 2.15 pm
Location: East Hall #115

Course Description:

The BGSU catalogue describes this course as follows: “Work on developing mastery of the rhetorical principles of planning, executing and revising prose. Emphasis on strengthening analytical writing, both expository and argumentative; valuable for writing on the job.” In addition to the course catalog, we will also analyze the various facets of communication that occur on a daily basis. Moreover, we will utilize various aspects of media and design for making rhetorical choices in compositions.

Reading material used for the class:

*Picturing Texts*, eds. Faigley, Lester and et al.
This course will utilize the following chapters:

- 1: “Picturing Texts”
- 3: “Making Lives Visible”
- 6: “Picturing Argument”
- 7: “Designing Texts”
- Some additional readings will come from outside sources selected by the instructor.
- In addition to readings, other sources used for class discussion will come from various media forms; thus, we will interact with those in lieu of “reading.”

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to

- Develop an understanding of composition processes in various digital spaces.
- Create an awareness of the available means for presentation by utilizing various software programs.
- Practice composing texts in multiple formats for multiple purposes.
- Explore a variety of technologies and spaces where rhetorical choices are made.
- Understand the importance and place of writing in your future career.
- Broaden an awareness as to the power of language to shape perception and identity.
- Practice and further develop critical thinking and reading skills.

Course Assignments:
This course is divided into 4 major units (details below). Each of these 4 major units will focus on a major project, and these major projects will make up the majority of the course grade (see the “Grading” section for more details). However, there will also be ongoing responsibilities that will help with the invention, planning, and composing of the major projects. The ongoing responsibilities will include posting questions and responses to our class blog and maintaining a “reflective journal” that may be collected at any time.

**Ongoing Responsibilities:**

✓ **Class blog:**
Our class blog will be a communal space where we will post thought provoking questions based on our readings and interactions and responses from other students. During the semester, we will rotate who will post questions based on the readings, and the rest of the class will respond to those questions. These blog entries will be used as a springboard for our in class discussion. When responding to questions, there is no hard length requirement, but thoughtfulness that utilizes specific examples and critical thinking is a must. Timely completion is the grade for this responsibility.

✓ **Reflective Journal:**
Utilizing technology and creating multimodal compositions may be something completely new to some of you or it might be something that you’ve experimented with in other classes. Either way, it will be important to keep stock of progression with the assignments, readings, and interactions. As in, describe the process and how it may differ or align with other projects you’ve completed or are in the process of completing. This journal can take any format you wish as long as it can be easily collected by me when asked for. I can suggest keeping a *Word* document, a collection of *PowerPoint* slides, a series of audio recordings, or a series of video recordings (like recording yourself on a web cam). There is no hard length or format requirement for this journal, and like the blog entries, thoughtfulness and critical thinking is a must. Constant maintenance of this journal will be key because they can be collected at any time without prior notice. However, you are more than welcome to submit a section of your journal or the entire journal for some feedback from me.

The 4 Major Units:

- Analyzing the various spaces of rhetorical choices
- Introduce yourself
- Analyze an ad
- Multimodal argument

✓ **Unit 1: Analyzing various digital rhetorical spaces:**
This unit asks us to monitor communication during a week. During this observation week, students will keep a log or record of their various channels of communication, and these channels can include any of the following: Social networking sites (like Facebook, Myspace, chat rooms, Twitter), emails (family, friends, instructors, etc.), text messaging (noting how language is used in various ways like spelling or abbreviations), blogs (either the blog for this class or a blog kept
active that is not part of this class), discussion board forums in BlackBoard for other classes, and/or any other arena of digital communication (comments made to an online article, reviews left on Netflix or Rotten Tomatoes, product reviews left on online shopping sites, etc.). At the end of the week, compile the data and start analyzing the findings. Think about the digital space in which the communication was being made, who was involved, what choices were made in that digital space, what perception others involved had about the choices made. The end product will have two key features: an in-class presentation of the findings and an analysis of the data (more details on this will be given out in class).

For the presentation form, students are welcome to utilize any of the available software to construct the presentation. The presentation must include at least one screenshot. However, students are also encouraged to incorporate other images, video clips, sound bites, transcriptions, etc. to help accompany the presentation. The analysis portion of the unit will be primarily text-based; however, the writing must include some visual elements to accompany the writing.

Goals for this unit:
- To gain a better understanding of how rhetorical choices influence communication.
- To gain a better understanding of how the rhetorical environment influences rhetorical choices.
- To start understanding how images can accompany composition.

Unit 2: Introduce Yourself:
In this unit, students will construct a personal narrative that, first off, reveals who they are. Possible angles to cover in the narrative could include any of the following: personal interests, hobbies, research interests, family history, beliefs, values, etc. Students are free to construct this narrative by utilizing any of the available software (Word, PowerPoint, DreamWeaver, etc); however, PowerPoint will be the main software used for demonstration purposes. The narrative should be predominately visual with the overall composition; however, there will be a need to accompany the personal narrative with a written component. Students are also encouraged to experiment with incorporating other forms of media: video clips, sound bites, etc. This composition will be presented to the class for feedback. In addition to presenting this to the class, all students must have at least one person outside of this class interact with the composition and provide some feedback. The outside participant may be a friend, a relative, a friend from a different school, etc.

Goals of this assignment:
- Tell the audience who you are by utilizing expository composition.
- Begin to understand that composition is not limited to plain text.
- Begin learning about anticipating balance between image and text.
- Start to understand how rhetorical choices influence the final project.
- To start the realization that compositions are not limited to the boundaries of the classroom.

Unit 3: Analyze an advertisement:
In this unit, students will compose a multimodal piece that analyzes an advertisement. We deal and interact with advertisements on a daily basis; thus, this unit is designed to bring students closer to revealing what an advertisement is actually saying. Important aspects to possibly include in the analysis could include the following aspects: design, intended audience, pertinent information surrounding the company, where is the ad placed (web page, magazine, television, etc), how the ad relates to a viewer personally, what does the ad reveal about cultural values, use
of text and image, placement of a celebrity spokesperson, or any various aspect. Again, students are free to utilize any of the available software to compose the analysis. The analysis must include various aspects of media to help support and develop the composition. Ideas include comparing and / or contrasting the ad to another ad (either contemporary or historical), the inclusion of still and / or moving images (like screenshots, video clips, etc.), the inclusion of sound bites (for example, it might be a neat idea to bring together your own focus group). This analysis can be narrative or argumentative in nature as long as the ideas are developed and supported.

Goals for this unit:
- To gain more practice with critical thinking about the media world around us.
- To continue utilizing rhetorical choices based on balancing various types of media.
- To continue analyzing the rhetorical choices behind forms of persuasive communication.

Unit 4: Arguing Multimodally:
In this unit, students will employ the use of argumentative visual components to support and help develop their own argumentative composition. As discussed in the advertisement unit, there are underlying meanings behind the various pieces of media; thus, this unit is designed for students to utilize those underlying meanings for their own purposes. Ideas to include could incorporate famous political photos, contemporary photographs, advertisements, public service announcements, clips from documentaries, clips from interviews or speeches, or audio bites from radio programs and such. The student should, then, pick a debatable topic, choose a side and argue for or against that side while presenting a well-rounded and well supported multimodal composition. Another option for supporting and developing the argument is with the employment of personal voice. A major goal here is to stand behind an argument with confidence. For this project, we will be composing a web page to present the composition.

Goals for the unit:
- To continue utilizing rhetorical choices when weaving together various forms of media.
- To continue analyzing the various underlying meanings behind various forms of media.
- To continue analyzing an awareness of the composer’s intended audience.

Grading:

Grading for this course will be based on the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Area</th>
<th>Worth:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Units (40 pts each)</td>
<td>160 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog entries and Journal</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading scale:
- A = 200 – 180 points
- B = 179 – 160 points
- C = 159 – 140 points
- D = 139 – 120 points
Each major project will have a grading rubric that will be defined by a combination of whole class, instructor, and individual student input. As in, I, as an instructor, have certain goals for each unit known as learning outcomes; however, since multimodal composition is going to be new to some of you in the class, I would like to have input on what goals you have as students for each unit. Additionally, I will be talking with each student individually to see what goals you have for composing the project. Therefore, I will initiate the rubric, present it to the class for open discussion, adapt the rubric based on input from the students, and make some adjustments based on feedback for each student.

**Classroom Conduct and Policies:**

**Attendance:**
Since this course is designed to be an interactive workshop, attendance is mandatory; however, I fully realize that illnesses and life do sometimes interfere with a student’s ability to attend class. As a result, you are allowed to miss up to three classes with no penalty to your grade. However, to be excused from class, you MUST notify me regarding your absence (ideally, you will notify me before missing class). Having more than three absences will result in a small penalty and you must meet with me to discuss your standing in the class. Having excessive absences (excused or not) will result in a failing grade.

**Late work:**
Projects and assignments are due at the respective due dates and times; however, and again, I realize that life does interfere with tentative due dates. As a result, if you know you will have a complication with a due date, you must notify me to make arrangements for turning in your work. Late work without prior arrangements will not be accepted, and a zero will be recorded for that assignment. Be proactive and plan ahead with all due dates pertaining to the major units and blog entries. If I collect journals during a class where you are absent, I will notify you by email, and you must submit your journal within the time requested in the email notification.

**Classroom conduct:**
While we will be utilizing various aspects of technology, please be respectful and silence your cell phones during class time. Also, texting during class is strongly discouraged. Moreover, we will have times when it will be appropriate to surf the net and login to social networking sites (like Facebook and Myspace); however, interacting with these sites during studio reviews or classroom discussions can have negative consequences with your participation points. Please remove ear buds or headphones during communal class time out of respect for other class members. During personal studio time where students are allowed to work on their projects, personal music (ear buds or headphones) is perfectly acceptable. Lastly, we will be engaging in class wide discussions on various readings and interactions that can cover controversial subjects; thus, it is imperative for all of us to keep in mind that the classroom is a venue for open discussion and thought. Show respect for others in the class by considering all views and opinions.

**Personal and Review Studio sessions:**
At various times during our projects, we will have time devoted to personal work and peer review sessions. During personal work time, it is your time to plan, draft, research, experiment, storyboard, etc. During peer review studio sessions, we will devote time for students to receive feedback from other members of the class on our in progress projects. These sessions are designed for students to ask specific questions on their projects. When giving feedback, it is important to be honest, positive and yet critical. We are here to help support each other during the composing process.

**Academic Honesty:**
Please refer to BGSU’s Student Handbook for information regarding BGSU’s academic honesty policies. These policies and penalties apply to our class, as well as to all other classes at BGSU. If you are found in violation of the academic honesty policies, I will immediately recommend that you be withdrawn from the course and assigned a grade of “WF.” Cheating is not worth the risk. You are an intelligent person capable of submitting original material, and I expect nothing less.

**(Dis)Abilities Statement:**
We all have limitations and styles of learning that may be different from others. If you are a student with a concern about how this class is taught or the environment please see me as soon as possible so that I may make any changes that are necessary. Feel free to see me before/after class, during office hours, or contact me initially through e-mail. If you have a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), you should register with the appropriate office, Disability Services at (419) 372-8495, 413 South Hall.

**Contacting others in the class or the instructor:**
I would like to encourage of the students in the class to be free to contact one another via email or the class blog when questions, comments, suggestions, and or concerns may come up during the course of our class. In addition to contacting each other, please feel free to make an appointment with me or drop by during my office hours with any questions, comments, suggestions, and or concerns that may come up. My official office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays between 12.00 and 1.00 pm or by appointment. Quick note, I do live close to campus and can easily arrange an appointment that fits your schedule.

**The writing center:**
The writing center is a wonderful service for students in need of support during any stage of the composting process. Please visit their web page for details on their hours, location, and policies.

**The Library:**
The library reference desk is another support system for students in need of support while conduction any type of research. Please visit the library web page for details on their hours, services, and policies.
APPENDIX D: ENGLISH 2070 CONSENT FORM

Overview:
Kent Lenz, Ph.D. candidate of the Rhetoric and Writing program at Bowling Green State University would like to request permission for the use of student work in the future dissertation project, which will be drafted during the summer of 2011 and during the 2011-2012 academic school year. The nature of including student work in such a project will showcase the work as an example of multimodal composition. The scope of the dissertation project will define multimodal composition, lay theoretical frameworks for the definition. Additionally, the project will provide classroom application of multimodal composition and showcase assessment practices.

Confidentiality and Risks:
My goal as a scholar is to protect your identity by any means possible. Any student giving consent to use their work as an example will have their name removed from or blurred in the example. However, since some of the projects in the course (English 2070, Intermediate Writing, Spring of 2011) does involve personal voice and personal details, I cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality.

Distribution of the Dissertation:
The dissertation will be published by Bowling Green State University in both bound format as well as digital copy. Both versions will be housed through the Jerome Library, and both versions will be available through the Ohio-Link library system.

Perspective Audiences of the Dissertation:
Mostly, the dissertation will have a small audience that will consist of future Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing students here at BGSU as well as potential employers of Kent Lenz. However, this dissertation project could be used in future publishing opportunities. If student work is used in these potential future opportunities, the names will remain removed or blurred.

Consent and Permission:
Please initial next to the following to allow Kent Lenz to use any part of the project (You may allow permission to all, just some, or none). If you do not wish to have any of the work used, please leave this form blank:

___ Unit 1: Analyzing Communication (Text-based essay with images)
___ Unit 2: Personal Narrative (PowerPoint slides)
___ Unit 3: Ad analysis (Prezi presentation)
___ Unit 4: Visual Argument (Web site project)
___ Reflective journal entries
___ Blog Posts

____________________________________  ____________________________  __________
Signature     Printed name      Date
APPENDIX E: INTERMEDIATE WRITING UNIT 1 RUBRIC

Project author:___________________________

Project is worth 40 points
- 40-36 = A
- 35-32 = B
- 31-28 = C (Below a C: See me)

/5 pts: Assignment requirements and mechanics:
Following assignment directions and including all required elements of the assignment:
- 1500-2000 words, MLA page format, 3-4 images, 5 sources
Style / Grammar / MLA conventions:
- Does the writing display good control over the language?
Comments:

/10 pts: Content / Research:
- Thought provoking ideas in the essay? Creativity?
- Incorporates good sources that are relevant to the topic?
- Various communications examined?
Comments:

/10 pts: Use of images:
- Displays careful thought on balance and unity.
- Images accompany the essay rather than distract.
Comments:

/10-15 pts: Logic of the essay (See option below):
- Main points are articulated.
- Main points are organized and thought out.
Comments:

/0-5 pts: Oral / visual component of project (See option above):
- One slide that accompanies the project.
- 2-3 minute discussion that clearly explains the project.
Comments:

Holistic comments on back side ➔
Overall comments:

Total __/40:
## APPENDIX F: INTERMEDIATE WRITING UNIT 2 RUBRIC

### Unit 2 Rubric: Visual narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>40-36 = A</th>
<th>35-32 = B</th>
<th>31-28 = C (Below a C: See me)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>/5 pts: Assignment requirements:</strong></th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Approximately 1000 words of text that displays good control of grammar and flow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Title screen and table of contents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use of 4-5 sources as research with proper MLA citations and works cited slide.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Slide that lists sources of images / media used in project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>/10 pts: Text:</strong></th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Text shows logical progression and good voice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Text shows a relationship with the incorporated media of the project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>/10 pts: Content / Research:</strong></th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Overall content stays consistent throughout the project (narrative/argument or narrative/expository.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research is incorporated smoothly and is relevant to topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>/15 pts: Media and design:</strong></th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Design is considerate of format and content of project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Design displays creativity / sound rhetorical choices with visual aspects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Font choices (like size, contrast, color, placement, etc.) are consistent and considerate of a viewer’s interaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Images / media also have consistent choices with aspects like placement, scaling, timing, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holistic comments on back side =>
Overall comments:

Total / 40 = .
APPENDIX G: INTERMEDIATE WRITING UNIT 3 RUBRIC

Unit 3 Project Composer:

**(10pts) Requirements:**
- Minimum 5 sources (other than the ad itself).
- Include a visual example of the ad in the project.
- Include a Works Cited list at the end of the project.
- Include a link to where you found the image / video of the ad.

*Comments:*

**(20pts) Content / Research:**
- The sources (5 minimum) are relevant to the analysis.
- The content of the discussion utilizes specific examples of the ad to help ground the analysis.
- The research is integrated smoothly and effectively.
- Overall, the analysis of the ad needs to draw conclusions from the specific examples and the research; however, the discussion can remain primarily analytical in nature or it can take an argumentative stance.

*Comments:*

**(10 pts) Media / Design:**
- Color and font choices match the tone of the project.
- Composer embraces the features of the Prezi program.
- Final product shows an awareness of potential viewers.

*Comments:*
APPENDIX H: STUDENT PROJECT EXCERPT

Not only can cell phones hurt people communication and grammar skills, it also hurts their sense of awareness. People get so consumed in their phone calls or texts that they quit paying attention to the world around them. Examples of this can be clearly noted by people who walk into telephone poles while they are texting or even worse, people who wreck their cars while trying to text someone. We become so enveloped in these items that we ignore all of the people around us, such as the image below of a man who is ignoring his newlywed wife because he is on the phone. How is it that we can become so consumed in a piece of technology that we completely block out the world around us?

Figure 2: Jupiter Images

Another major player in the technological field is computers and use of internet. Over the past two decades, the use of computers has grown so rapidly that people are not aware of their power. Some may think that their use of a simple computer couldn’t possibly affect anyone
other than themselves but in reality, they are capable of hurting a lot of people. With the ease of use and its cheap cost, millions of people of every age group are able to get onto the internet and use it for anything that they want. Unfortunately, this unmonitored behavior has escalated into a number of problems which includes cyber bullying.
APPENDIX I: INTERMEDIATE WRITING UNIT 4 FEEDBACK

Student (name removed for privacy),

What I appreciate about the content of the text in the site is how much the voice has changed from the original paper. That shows good evidence of revision, especially since the original paper relies heavily on vague pronouns like “many people,” “some people,” and “they.” The pronoun usage in the web site is better. There were some good opportunities in the web page for you to have included a bit more media like maybe finding a clip from one or both of the shows mentioned. That aside, I do also appreciate how you’ve been able to incorporate more research to help develop the content as well. I think doing this helped the voice in the writing develop as well.

(Extra Credit Feedback):
I like the image you selected, and there is some good discussion on the abstract meaning behind the billboard. However, there was some confusion with the instructions, which called for you to find an image that you consider iconic, not ironic. Regardless, your discussion on the image being ironic works for me.

Unit 4 project grade = B
Extra credit = +4 to attendance / participation
Final course grade = A

Kent
PS: Don’t forget all the web site links are posted on our blog in “The Final Post.”