

MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION:

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS BY: PAMELA TAKAYOSHI & CYNTHIA SELFE

Subject	Overview
<p>English 614:</p> <p>Digital Rhetorics</p> <hr/> <p>Prepared By</p> <p>Phyllis Lehman</p> <hr/> <p>Chapter 1:</p> <p>Thinking About Modality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ English composition has remained static for the past 150 years. We write alphabetic words on a page that become sentences which become paragraphs that are arranged into headings and chapters that become fuller works. With the advent and proliferation of new technology, all that seems to be changing from the grass roots up.✚ People, and especially young people, are consuming technology in various formats ranging from static videos and films to hyperlinked texts and interactive websites. They are increasingly being expected to be able to manipulate these formats in their private lives – and they are eager to do so.✚ Teachers need to be nimble enough to prepare them to both enter and impact the changing world around them if they are to become productive citizens. Further, true and dedicated teachers will wholeheartedly embrace this enthusiasm and seek out the avenues which so engage and fascinate the students of today. In that way, no one is “working”; we are all just having fun!

Great Resource for teachers and students:

[Multimodal Composition: Resources for Faculty and Students](http://libguides.consortiumlibrary.org/content.php?pid=539707&sid=4439256)

[Provides guidance in developing teaching modules that utilize multimodal projects in fostering rhetorical understanding of composition.](http://libguides.consortiumlibrary.org/content.php?pid=539707&sid=4439256)

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“It’s a matter of providing students all the tools they need to make meaning and then teaching them how to choose from among those tools to make meaning effectively.”

- Dr. Cynthia Selfe, Humanities Distinguished Professor, Department of English, Ohio State University:
“Multimodal and Digital Writing In the Disciplines.”



Goal	Support
Teachers need to incorporate assignments that call for multimodal texts – “that incorporate words, images, video, and sound.” ⁽³⁾	1. The world is increasingly technological and students are already consuming text in multiple modalities as well as composing in them. We need to help them communicate successfully in term of work, school, civic life and cross cultural and geopolitical borders. We need to help them enter and operate in the 21 st century and to compose in any form of texts in order to respond to whatever comes their way.
	2. Literacy instruction needs to adapt to reflect the literacy practices of the world today. The more channels and avenues of communication open to the students/citizen today, the more potential they have for being successful communicators. Audio and video pieces enable us to communicate meaning more effectively rather than struggling with the written word. The danger is of being muted entirely. The new methods of composing also foster problem solving skills for a wider swath of citizenry.
	3. All these new modalities are ENGAGING! Students often pick up these new methods of communication on their own initiative. They are excited to work on them in their own time and when assigned projects, through themselves into it whole hog coming up with deeper learning and much higher quality product than even they could have imagined. They have the ‘driveway effect’. These new modalities are by their very nature inspiring, the very goal of pedagogues.
	4. Audio and visual composing employ the same rhetorical principles as the written word. In fact, rhetoric has its roots in the oral tradition and was adapted to the written word much later in history. These methods are not ‘distractions’ from the traditional, but rather a return to it.
	5. Teaching multimodality brings us back to long held pedagogical principles. It is in fact a “student-centered pedagogy” (5) where visual rhetoric helps teach students skills they will need in future years (p.6). Multimodality also helps us understand communication in a much richer and more sophisticated fashion.

Food For Thought	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ <i>What, if any, are the advantages of digital vs. non-digital modalities in classroom teaching?</i> ✚ <i>Are there drawbacks to including multimodal platforms as assignments in writing instruction?</i> ✚ <i>“Let the (film/computer/art/etc.) department teach technology. I don’t have time and I just want to teach students the mechanics of writing.” Do you agree or disagree?</i> ✚ <i>Honestly, doesn’t essentially teaching things two or more different ways eat up valuable classroom instruction time?</i> ✚ <i>Is it worthwhile to explore multimodal forms of learning such as tone of voice and body language which are so subjective in a writing class?</i>

Rationale from Experts	
Selfe	➤ Without it, composition instruction may become irrelevant.
London Group	➤ We must learn multiple “languages” for cross cultural communication.
Wysocki	➤ We can learn different meanings from portrayals in different modalities.
Gee	➤ We need to be conversant in different semiotic domains as they arise throughout life.

Key Questions

1. When I teach multimodal composing, am I really teaching composition?	a. The classical underpinnings of composition instruction means teaching student to use all available rhetorical means of communicating effectively whether they be oral, written or visual. The NCTE has made it a priority to expand students' appreciation for print and non-print texts.
	b. Even before digital came on the scene, there was the printing press, engraving, photography, film recording devices and animation that all were new frontiers of communication and expression.
	c. In this case, the revolution is coming from the bottom up with the proliferation, ubiquity and enthusiasm for all that is digital.
2. Why should English composition faculty teach multimodal composing? What of the video production, art/design and audio production faculty?	a. Creating and interpreting meaning from texts falls within the purview of the English department. They need to be able to use all means available through a range of strategies and techniques in order to reach wide and varied audiences.
	b. Composing strategies now include PowerPoint presentations, video tutorials, alternative methods for data presentation, educational websites and engagingly presented information.
3. What will I have to give up to focus on multimodality in a composition class?	a. You don't give up anything because all these modalities include a written component whether it be a script for a video PSA or copy for an attention getting website. You teach strategies for communication in a wide range of genres that mostly begin at the point of pen to paper.
4. Will a focus on technology detract from rhetorically based composition instruction and will I have to become a technology expert?	a. Most important to remember is that multimodality is not necessarily digital. Alternatives to the written word occur in non-digital formats such as art and reading aloud.
	b. Begin your journey into this world SLOWLY. Small assignments for both the teacher and the student enable everyone to acclimate fully and stress free.
	c. As you continue, scaffolding takes place for both you and the student in a technological sense.
5. Does my school have the digital equipment necessary or can I get access to it otherwise?	a. Again, multimodality is not dependent on digital technology.
	b. The book has many non-digital assignments.
	c. Do research in your area and district about any new technology you would like to incorporate.

Digital Rhetorics

Rhetoric and the Multimodal

- ✚ Rhetoric is naturally inherent in multimodality in that it is the art of persuasion using the method of communication preferred by your audience.
- ✚ Colloquially speaking, it is going where the action is while using the language of those you want to reach.
- ✚ As such, it is a platform where ethos, pathos and logos must be intrinsic to whatever you are trying to communicate.

For Best Assimilation:

The Five Canons of Rhetoric Come into Play:

There is no shortage of relevance to rhetoric to digital literacy.

- ✚ **Arrangement or Organization** of the argument or information.
- ✚ **Invention** or the process of deliberating what is known and what pieces of knowledge to include.
- ✚ **Style** of writing or figures of speech to employ when conveying your message.
- ✚ **Memory** or accessing what to actually say.
- ✚ **Delivery** or the final presentation to the given audience which is ever increasingly important in the digital age.

Reference:

Dr. Cynthia Selfe. "Multimodal and Digital Writing In the Disciplines." Online Video Clip. *YouTube*. 13 Sept. 2013. Wed. 2 Feb. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIsvVG5p8DI>

Selfe, Cynthia. *Multimodal Composition*, Ed. Pamela Takayoshi. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2007. Print.