

MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION

Resources for Teachers

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CHAPTER 1

Thinking about Multimodality

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WHY MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION?

It is fast becoming a commonplace that digital composing environments are challenging writing, writing instruction, and basic understandings of the different components of the rhetorical situation (writers, readers, texts) to change. Such changes are both significant and far reaching—and they promise to be disruptive for many teachers of English composition. For many such teachers at both the secondary and collegiate levels, the texts that students have produced in response to composition assignments have remained essentially the same for the past 150 years. They consist primarily of words on a page, arranged into paragraphs. This flow of words is only occasionally interrupted by titles, headings, diagrams, or footnotes.

These texts resemble—in many ways—other texts that students have been producing elsewhere in the academy (or in other formal educational settings) in response to more conventional assignments like essay tests, lab reports, and research papers. The information within these is conveyed primarily by two modalities—words and visual elements (e.g., layout, font, font size, white space)—and is often distributed in the medium of print. Importantly, however, these texts do not resemble many of the documents we now see in digital environments that use multiple modalities to convey meaning—moving and still images, sounds, music, color, words, and animations—and that are distributed primarily, albeit not exclusively, via digital media (e.g., computers, computer networks, CDs, DVDs). Although composition theories have evolved to acknowledge and study these new **multimodal** texts (texts that exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound), the formal assignments that many English composition teachers give to students remain alphabetic and primarily produced via some form of print media. And the papers that students submit in response to these conventional assignments have remained essentially the same: 8.5 by 11 inch pages, double-spaced, 1-inch-margins, 12 or 10 inch fonts. Thus, while time march-

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TEXTS

es on *outside* of U.S. secondary and college classrooms, while people on the Internet are exchanging texts composed of still and moving images, animations, sounds, graphics, words, and colors, *inside* many of these classrooms, students are producing essays that look much the same as those produced by their parents and grandparents.

Why the astonishing lack of change in both classroom assignments and student-authored writing? It's been many years since Patricia Sullivan (2001) pointed out that, with computer technologies, writers have more control over the page than they've ever enjoyed. Her claims today suggest that authors could expand that notion of control *beyond* the page, that they could think in increasingly broad ways about texts—not only about pages, words, layout, and design, but also about still and moving visual imagery (photos, photo-editing programs, movie-authoring programs, animation programs) and aural components of communication (music, audio recordings, sounds). Why should composition teachers, researchers, and scholars be interested in taking more advantage of these opportunities?

Agreeing that literacy pedagogy must account for the multiplicity of texts allowed and encouraged by digital technologies, many teacher/scholars and others in fields outside writing studies have articulated compelling arguments for why people concerned with writing and literacy should turn their attention to the cultural shifts in meanings of writing, composing, and texts:

Cindy Selfe (2004) has elsewhere written: "... if our profession continues to focus solely on teaching only alphabetic composition—either online or in print—we run the risk of making composition studies increasingly irrelevant to students engaging in contemporary practices of communicating" (p. 72).

Arguing that "new communications media are reshaping the way we use language," the New London Group (1996) contends that "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" (p. 64).

"To be responsible teachers," Anne Wysocki (2003) maintains, "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" (p. 186).

James Gee (2003), writing about video games and literacy, asserts the importance this way: "People need to be literate in new semiotic domains [by which he means any set of practices which relies on multiple modalities to communicate meanings] throughout their lives. If our modern, global, high-tech and science-driven world does anything, it certainly gives rise to new semiotic domains and transforms old ones at an ever faster rate" (p. 19).

In a world where communication between individuals and groups is both increasingly cross-cultural and digital, teachers of composition are beginning to sense the inadequacy of texts—and composition instruction—that employs only one primary semiotic channel (the alphabetic) to convey meaning. In internationally networked digital environments, texts must be able to carry meaning across geo-political, linguistic, and cultural borders, and so texts must take advantage of multiple semiotic channels. At the same time, however, many composition teachers—raised and educated in the age and the landscapes of print—feel hesitant about the task of designing, implementing, and evaluat-

ing assignments that call for multimodal texts—texts that incorporate words, images, video, and sound. These teachers understand both the possibilities and the challenges posed by a curriculum that accommodates multimodal literacy practices and students who compose texts from video, sound, still images, and animations, as well as from words. It is a difficult situation, and composition instruction is poised on the precipice of the change.

This collection is designed to provide a beginning point for composition teachers who want to make this theoretical shift in their understanding of literacy and develop effective and sound pedagogical approaches in response. This book provides a basic set of resources for teachers who want to experiment with multimodal composition assignments—particularly those that incorporate video and audio production—in their classrooms.

As we've indicated above, the authors represented in this volume argue for the importance of paying attention to multimodal composing. Our reasoning can be summarized in the following list of claims:

- 1 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.**

Whatever profession students hope to enter in the 21st century—game design (Gee, 2003), archeology (Boxer, 2005), science and engineering (Tufte, 1990, 1993, 2001, 2003), the military (D.C. Comics, 2005), the entertainment industry (Daly, 2003), and medicine (Hull, Mikulecky, St. Clair, & Kerka, 2003)—they can expect to read and be asked to help compose multimodal texts of various kinds, texts designed to communicate on multiple semiotic channels, using all available means of creating and conveying meaning. Instructors of composition need to teach students not only how to read and interpret such texts from active and critical perspectives, they also need to teach students how to go *beyond the consumption* of such texts—learning how to *compose* them for a variety of purposes and audiences.

In peer-review workshops or studio sessions (where compositions are viewed or heard and responded to), students are simultaneously put in the familiar position of audience member and the perhaps unfamiliar position of critical responder. Many people have argued for a pedagogical commitment to critical and active response, especially to technologies. Grounded in the knowledge that comes from authoring multimodal compositions themselves, students can constructively respond to audio and visual compositions, developing critical perspectives that will serve them well as citizens who respond to any texts.

- 2 If composition instruction is to remain relevant, the definition of “composition” and “texts” needs to grow and change to reflect peoples’ literacy practices in new digital communication environments.**

Although it may sound like technological determinism to some (i.e., that our professional work and values should take into account changes and developments in communication technologies), the authors of this book believe that it is important to remain in step with the ways in which students, workers, and citizens are communicating, the changing nature of the texts these people produce, and the ways in which such texts are now being used around the world.

The more channels students (and writers generally) have to select from when composing and exchanging meaning, the more resources they have at their disposal for being successful communicators. Aural and video compositions sometimes reveal and articulate meanings students struggle

to articulate with words; audio and visual compositions carry different kinds of meanings that words are not good at capturing. It is the thinking, decision making, and creative problem solving involved in creating meaning through any modality that provide the long-lasting and useful lessons students can carry into multiple communicative situations. In this way, the new composing processes, and problem-solving approaches that students learn when composing with modalities other than words can later serve to illuminate the more familiar composing processes associated with words and vice versa.

Effective technologies often function invisibly in our lives. Think of how visible technologies become when they break down; it's when they are not running invisibly in the background of our work that we become most conscious of them and their roles in our lives. When computers were first introduced to writing instruction, many teachers marveled at how the new writing technologies revealed the processes of writing that over time had become largely invisible to students and teachers of composition. With the new technologies now mediating composition—the web, digital video, digital photography, digital sound—different aspects of composing meaning, of communicating, have been foregrounded in ways that have encouraged many teachers to take note.

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The authoring of compositions that include still images, animations, video, and audio—although intellectually demanding and time consuming—is also engaging.

It is certainly true that one of the challenges of teaching multimodal composition is the learning curve involved for both teachers and students new to thinking about different modalities. This learning curve varies, however, depending on whether or not multimodal composing involves computers (many such projects do not, and we provide sample assignments in Chapters 3 and 9 that are nondigital), the size of the project (a 5-minute original video project or an 8-minute montage of still images set to an audio track), the complexity of the compositional elements (still images, audio, or video downloaded from a web source; still images, video or audio recorded by students, downloaded onto a computer, and edited by students; or a combination of these elements), and the time frame (several smaller projects in one semester or one culminating project worked on throughout the semester). In addition, increasing numbers of students coming into composition classes have experience in multimodal composing that teachers can tap.

The collective experiences of the authors represented in this book also indicate that audio and visual compositions are *engaging for students*. Like the majority of Americans, many students are already active consumers of multimodal compositions by virtue of their involvement in playing and even creating digital music, watching television, shooting home videos, and communicating within web spaces. As a result, students often bring to the classroom a great deal of implicit, perhaps previously unarticulated, knowledge about what is involved in composing multimodal texts, and they commonly respond to multimodal assignments with excitement.

For students, such instruction is often refreshing (because it's different from the many other composing instruction experiences they've had), meaningful (because the production of multimodal texts in class resemble many of the real-life texts students encounter in digital spaces), and relevant (students often sense that multimodal approaches to composing will *matter* in their lives outside the classroom). Indeed, the teachers writing for this collection have watched students become so engaged in their compositions that they push themselves beyond the boundaries of the assignments and demonstrate learning that goes well beyond teachers' expectations as they begin to understand how multimodal texts look, act, and function. As James Gee (2003) has speculated about the intense engagement some computer gamers experience, "Wouldn't it be great if kids were willing to put in this much time on task on such challenging material in school and enjoy it so much?" Yes, it would be, and this kind of engagement is marvelous to witness.

Additionally, students engage—sometimes very personally and emotionally—with multimodal compositions as readers/listeners/viewers for their peers' compositions. When was the last time you or anyone in your class was moved to tears by a student composition? Multimodal composition may bring the often neglected third appeal—*pathos*—back into composition classes (which often empha-

size logos and ethos while devaluing pathos as an ethical or intellectual strategy for appealing to an audience). Students authoring multimodal compositions often demonstrate a strong awareness and understanding of how music and images are used as appeals in arguments and, further, how effective these modalities can be in creating and establishing meaning. Maybe classes that draw on such understandings can produce the *driveway effect*, a state of engagement so strong that radio listeners remain in their cars after they've arrived at their destinations to listen to the end of a program. Wouldn't it be great to re-articulate Gee's question, if students experienced that kind of engagement and connectiveness in the peer-response workshops that characterize composition classrooms?

"There was what they call the 'driveway effect,' Mozetich says. People stayed in their cars in their driveways long after they'd arrived home in order not to miss the ending."

—Hugh Fraser (2001)

4 Audio and visual composing requires attention to rhetorical principles of communication. Conventional rhetorical principles such as audience awareness, exigence, organization, correctness, arrangement, and rhetorical appeals are necessary considerations for authors of successful audio and visual compositions. In some ways, many classical rhetorical principles of communication—in which the study of composition is grounded—may be more difficult to ignore in audio and visual compositions. These rhetorical principles of communication—which composition teachers have applied primarily to *literate* communication—also apply, just as appropriately, to multimodal compositions. Teachers less than willing to make such a leap might be encouraged to remember that the rhetorical principles currently used to teach written composition are, themselves, principles translated from the study of oral communication. To include additional oral and visual elements in composition might be seen as a return to rhetoric's historical concerns.

Further, the authors of this book agree with many contemporary scholars and teachers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2003; Hocks, 2003; Kalantzis, Varnava-Skoura, & Cope, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004) that the study of literacy and composing using a full range of visual and aural modalities can teach students new strategies and approaches which can be productively applied to their efforts at composing more traditional written compositions. Thus, the time spent on multimodal composition, far from being a distraction, will enrich the teaching of composition in general. The following chapters provide suggestions for teachers who want to experiment with multimodal compositions and test this hypothesis for themselves—in both small or more extensive ways.

Teaching multimodality is one pathway to accomplishing long-valued pedagogical goals. In *Experience and Education*, first published in 1938, John Dewey outlined a vision for "progressive education," as opposed to education in which "the kind of external imposition which is so common in the traditional school limited rather than promoted the intellectual and moral development of the young" (p. 22). In contrast, Dewey envisioned education as an enterprise involving teachers and students in mutually intellectually satisfying relationships:

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (p. 67)

A student's experiences outside the formal educational setting, in other words, should play a significant role in defining the purpose of the educational enterprise. "A student-centered pedagogy asks students to work within their own cultures and discourses by using experimental forms to

learn actively from one another and to engage with the world around them," reflects Mary Hocks (2003). Like Dewey, she, too, believes that starting with students' experiences is a pathway into literacy instruction:

Visual rhetoric—when understood as the dialogical processes of critique and design in contexts that deconstruct the visual world and the technologies surrounding us—goes much further in helping us teach students the rhetorical and compositional abilities that they can use for years to come. (pp. 214–215)

In this collection, the authors do not argue that digital technologies (such as audio and visual composing) and an emphasis on multimodal composition are going to be a catalyst in revolutionizing writing instruction. Instead, we argue that *opportunities to think and compose multimodally can help us develop an increasingly complex and accurate understanding of writing, composition instruction, and text*. It is only teachers' learning about new approaches to composing and creating meaning through texts that will catalyze changes in composition classrooms.

Before teachers can begin to explore the possibilities of multimodal composition classes, they must reflect on their pedagogical assumptions about writing instruction generally. What is the goal for composition instruction? With what knowledge/experience/skills/strategies do they want students to leave class? Which meaning-making arenas—academic, civic, private—should they consider for classes? If teachers believe that composition instruction should help students develop and fine-tune the meaning-making strategies and skills they bring with them to classrooms; if they believe it important to teach students to be stronger communicators and meaning makers; if they focus instruction on the many communicative genres, approaches, and forms that people communicate with and through, within and outside the university, then they already share many of the theoretical positions informing multimodal composition instruction. Thinking about multimodality often involves teachers in deep, careful thinking about composition instruction and what matters to communicators in the 21st century.

FIVE KEY QUESTIONS

Thoughtful teachers who are seriously considering whether or not they should expand the range of modalities that characterize their composition assignments do face some realistic concerns—as well as many new possibilities. These concerns are frequently focused on some variation—or combination—of the following five questions. We provide some responses here not to suggest definitive answers, but to offer perspectives that teachers can use as they formulate their own increasingly rich understanding of multimodal composing.



When I teach multimodal composing, am I really teaching composition?

This question rests at the heart of many teachers' concerns about multimodal composing, so it's best to address it directly.

The classical basis of composition instruction involves teaching students how to use *all available rhetorical means* of communicating effectively. For oral cultures, this important phrase—all available means—focused on persuasive *oral* presentation; for Aristotle and later rhetoricians, *writing* provided an additional means of persuasive communication; for authors after Gutenberg, print text and images were among the resources that could be put to rhetorical use.

Some English composition teachers might argue:

- Composing with multiple modes takes attention away from writing concerns.
- Multimodal composing is just the newest trendy thing; it won't end up being a sustained concern for writing instruction.
- One semester is barely enough time to teach

At each of these particular points of history, people have expressed sincere concerns about the new technologies of communication and their effects on more conventional forms of literacy. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, Plato has Socrates express the concern that writing weakens the memory and can neither defend itself nor represent truth to others. Indeed, Socrates notes, people are naive if they “believe that words put in writing are something more than what they are” (p. 275). Similarly, in the 16th century, the Church considered the printing press to be a dangerous new communication technology—and one not to be trusted because it supported an increased flow of information to the masses and increasingly vernacular expression (Lea, 1902).

Today, many teachers of English composition worry about the effects of computers and the increasingly vernacular expressions of multimodality that digital environments have encouraged. Multimodality, however, is not limited solely to digital environments; rather, it has been encouraged over a much longer historical period by the advent of various nondigital technologies: engraving, film, photography, recording devices, animation, and television. Indeed, as Sullivan (2001) and Wysocki (2001) have pointed out, print text itself is *already*—at some level—multimodal, as any scholar familiar with Laurence Sterne’s 18th-century novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, can attest. Print, in short, carries visual information as well as alphabetic information. This argument can just as easily be extended to other examples of multimodal communication from William Hogarth’s 18th-century engravings of British life to Ira Glass’ 21st-century essays on National Public Radio.

So, why *is* multimodal composition such a hot issue *right now*—especially if authors have had a long history of using multiple modalities (words, sounds, visual images) to make meaning, and if media technologies have supported such expressions long before the invention of computers and digital environments? One explanation lies in the convergence of *digital production technologies*. As composition scholars have noted (George, 2002; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004), the converging inventions of personal computers and the web; photo manipulation, audio-editing, and video editing applications; and digital recorders (still and video cameras and audio recorders) now make it possible for students in many schools to produce a variety of multimodal texts as well as to consume them.

These converging innovations—and the possibilities they help enable—have not gone unnoticed by professional organizations. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), for example, has encouraged teachers to think in new ways about both the *production* and *reception* of multimodal texts. As early as 1996, for instance, the NCTE passed a resolution entitled “On Viewing and Visually Representing as Forms of Literacy,” which acknowledged the importance of teaching students how to *produce* and *interpret* multimodal texts in print and nonprint contexts:

To participate in a global society, we continue to extend our ways of communicating. Viewing and visually representing (defined in the NCTE/IRA *Standards for the English Language Arts*) are a part of our growing consciousness of how people gather and share information. Teachers and students need to expand their appreciation of the power of print and nonprint texts. Teachers should guide students in constructing meaning through creating and viewing nonprint texts.

And, by 2004, Randy Bomer, then President of the National Council of Teachers of English, had identified multimodal literacy as a key focus of the Council’s attention:

students to write; how can I possibly also teach them audio and video composition?

- I don’t know how to use the technologies to create audio and video compositions; how can I be expected to teach it?
- Audio and visual composing won’t teach students important skills like how to construct correct sentences, consistent rhetorical theses, development or organization.
- Literate composition is superior—intellectually, artistically, historically—to audio and video.

What can NCTE do to advance young people's learning about the multi-modal literacies that are becoming commonplace in a digital environment? How can we create resources that bring the widest possible range of teachers into this conversation? What public policy and public education will prepare the way for the rapid pace of change in these forms of literacy? (personal e-mail communication, October 19, 2004)

By 2005, and the writing of this book, faculty at institutions as diverse as Ohio State, Stanford, the University of Illinois, Michigan State, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Florida Central University, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Georgia Tech, Bowling Green State University, Michigan Tech University, Georgia State University, Kent State University, and the University of Colorado were experimenting with multimodal composition assignments in a variety of courses and curricula.

In each of these cases, organizations, institutions, and individual teachers acknowledge the realities of changing communication practices in which people—in business, science and research contexts, personal correspondence, community work—are increasingly exchanging information in online environments and using a variety of semiotic resources and systems to make meaning as they compose: not only words, but also still and moving images, sound, and color among other modalities. The exigence for changing educational approaches, in other words, has been the recognition that composition instruction must change if it is to remain relevant and fulfill the goal of preparing effective and literate citizens for the 21st century.



Why should English composition faculty teach multimodal composing? Shouldn't we stick to teaching writing and let video production faculty teach video? Art and design faculty teach about visual images? Audio production faculty teach about sound?

As we have pointed out, a central goal of contemporary education within U.S. colleges or universities is the preparation of literate graduates—intelligent citizens who can both *create meaning in texts* and *interpret meaning from texts* within a dynamic and increasingly technological world. No collegiate unit bears the responsibility for achieving this goal more directly than do composition programs.

Historically, composition teachers have met this responsibility by grounding their instruction firmly in rhetorical theory: making sure that all students are taught how to use *all available means* to communicate in productive ways and that they are provided a range of strategies and techniques for reaching different audiences, achieving a variety of purposes, and using accepted genres effectively. The belief is that students can take these basic strategies into any disciplinary arena, build on them in more specialized ways, and put them to good use during the remainder of their collegiate programs.

Today, in a world that communicates increasingly via multimodal texts—web sites that include video clips, scientific texts built around visual data displays, radio commentaries, online reference collections—basic composing strategies have changed. Professionals in every discipline—math, physical education, health and medicine, education, science, engineering, the military—are communicating information via multimodal texts: PowerPoint presentations, video tutorials, data displays and animations, educational web sites, and they are expecting students to understand basic strategies for reading and composing such texts. In this context, basic composition instruction, too, must change in order to provide students an introductory, rhetorically focused introduction to a wider range of semiotic resources.

This situation does not mean that English composition teachers, especially in first-year courses, must now assume the responsibility for providing specialized or advanced instruction in animated data displays, video production, art and design, or audio production. Such advanced work, typically, remains solidly grounded in disciplinary contexts in which knowledge of design, production, and exchange is shaped by specialized expectations. The changing nature of communication does suggest, however, that the teaching of rhetorically based strategies for composition—the responsibility

of introducing students to *all available means* of communicating effectively and productively, including words, images, sound—remains the purview of composition teachers.



When you add a focus on multimodality to a composition class, what do you give up?

One of the main concerns of composition teachers considering the addition of multimodal composition assignments in their courses is that the instruction involved in such projects may take valuable time away from more fundamental instruction on the written word, instruction that many teachers feel is sorely needed among contemporary students.

We, too, would argue that writing is of vital importance to educated citizens. Indeed, it is clear that alphabetic writing—and the ability to express oneself in writing—retains a special and privileged position in the education of contemporary citizens. The fact that alphabetic literacy remains a key responsibility of composition educators is difficult to refute. So, it is not our purpose to suggest that composition teachers should abandon this belief or the practices it suggests. Throughout this book, readers will find that the authors include numerous opportunities for written composition, even within the context of projects that focus on multimodal composition.

The authors of this collection do, however, recognize that other communication modalities—among them, images (moving and still), animations, sound, and color—are *in the process of becoming increasingly important*, especially in a world increasingly global in its reach and increasingly dependent on digital communication networks. We hold that responsible educators will not want to ignore these changes. And we know that in many disciplines, including composition, educators are adapting their instruction to the exigencies of a world characterized by multimodal communication.

We also believe that teaching students to make sound rhetorically based use of video, still images, animations, and sound can actually help them better understand the particular affordances of written language—that such instruction can, moreover, provide students additional and instructive strategies for communicating in writing. For example, teaching students how to compose and focus a 30-second public service announcement (PSA) for radio—and select the right details for inclusion in this audio composition—*also helps teach* them specific strategies for focusing a written essay more tightly and effectively, choosing those details most likely to convey meaning in effective ways to a particular audience, for a particular purpose. In addition, as students engage in composing a script for the audio PSA, they are motivated to engage in meaningful, rhetorically based writing practice. Further, as students work within the rhetorical constraints of such an audio assignment, they learn more about the particular affordances of sound (the ability to convey accent, emotion, music, ambient sounds that characterize a particular location or event) and the constraints of sound (the difficulty audiences have in going back to review complex or difficult passages, to convey change not marked by sound, to communicate some organizational markers like paragraphs). Importantly, students also gain the chance to compare the affordances and constraints of audio with those of alphabetic writing—and, thus, improve their ability to make *informed and conscious choices* about the most effective modality for communicating in particular rhetorical contexts.

In short, whether instructors teach written composition solely or multimodal composition, their job remains essentially the same: to teach students effective, rhetorically based strategies for taking advantage of *all available means* of communicating effectively and productively, to multiple audiences, for different purposes, and using a range of genres.



If I teach multimodal composition will the focus on technology detract in significant ways from a focus on rhetorically based composition instruction? Will I have to become a technology expert?

First, we note that multimodal compositions are *not dependent* on digital media (although digital tools can often help authors who want to engage in multimodal work). In Chapters 3 and 9, we suggest multimodal assignments that students can undertake in nondigital environments.

Second, in cases in which multimodal composition *does* entail the use of digital communication tools and teachers are concerned about the effects of technology on a course, we suggest that teachers start *slowly and small*—designing courses that make multimodal composition an option for *one assignment* during a term or creating assignments that make multimodal responses an option *only* for those students who have access to digital equipment (either their own or borrowed from friends) and some experience in using this equipment. These small experiments can help instructors gauge what kinds of assignments are best adapted to multimodal responses; which tasks are most effective in both providing rhetorical instruction and engaging students' interests; how much (and what kind of) assistance students are likely to need as they compose in multiple modalities; and how the teachers' process-based deadlines, conferences, and feedback need to be modified to meet students' needs in such cases.

Third, all teachers have to seek their own level of comfort in digital communication environments. We hope, however, that composition teachers are willing to respect the full range of literacies that students bring to classrooms and build effectively on these literacies, expanding them whenever possible. We also hope that composition teachers serve students as role models in life-long learning—especially with regard to literacy. Teachers who hope to accomplish these goals, we believe, will also accept some level of responsibility for preparing students to communicate in an increasingly global world and one increasingly dependent on networked digital environments.



Does my school have the digital equipment that a composition class might need for multimodal assignments? Can I get access to this equipment?

Each teacher has to answer these questions individually and within the complex and overlapping contexts of their instruction, program, department, institution, and community.

By now, readers should know that multimodal composing tasks are *not dependent* on digital media (even though digital tools can, often, help authors who want to engage in multimodal work). Later in this collection, we suggest multimodal assignments that students can undertake in nondigital environments (see Chapters 3 and 9). So every teacher, we believe, even those who teach in schools that have very little access to computer technology and digital equipment like video cameras and audio recorders, can still modify some assignments to allow a multimodal option.

Those teachers who *do* want to work in digital communication environments need to make an early survey of the local instructional resources to which they have access: computer labs within which classes can be scheduled; campus programs or offices that have digital video or audio equipment for loan; informed personnel who might be persuaded to help with instruction; online tutorials and materials available on the web; students who have access to digital equipment or expertise in using such equipment; or community members willing to help. Teachers might also want to read Chapter 13 in this collection: *Sustaining Multimodal Composition*. In this chapter, Richard Selfe writes about how to form tactical alliances with colleagues, staff, students, other units, and programs in the service of designing not only instructionally effective but also *sustainable* efforts in multimodal composition.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

This book is composed of three major sections. Part One leads instructors through the preliminary stages of theorizing how and why multimodal composition will enter their classrooms, then through

the planning stages of extending composition assignments beyond the limits of conventional print essays—offering two sample assignments (one for an audio essay and the other for a video essay) that will be referenced throughout the book. Part Two offers material that helps turn teachers' attention toward composition processes and pragmatic pedagogical concerns as they begin to construct assignments—focusing on scheduling collaboration, rhetorical thinking, experimentation, response, and assessment. Part Three explores productive approaches to problem solving and trouble shooting, ways to connect with writing centers, and strategies for sustaining multimodal composing efforts.

Within the three primary sections, each chapter is written by a teacher, or a team of teachers, who have personal experience with both conventional and multimodal composing. As a group, this team of authors represents a talented and knowledgeable ensemble. Throughout this book, the pronoun “we” is used to refer to these authors collectively. Our use of this pronoun, we hope, will also imply our solidarity with, and inclusion in, the broader community of multimodal composition teachers and scholars around the world—a group to which we are proud to belong and committed to supporting.

At the end of this book, we have included a series of Appendices, to which we refer throughout; a Glossary, containing technical terms that teachers may run across in the teaching of multimodal composition; a complete list of the resources (print and digital) that we have identified in the various chapters; and a DVD with a number of student essays—both audio and video—that were composed in response to variations in the sample assignments. Also on this DVD are digital copies of all the Appendices for the book. Teachers can use these files when they want to modify the various sample documents to better suit their own classes and situations. *Indeed, we encourage readers to make these changes—experimenting with revisions designed to tailor materials more specifically to their particular needs and those of students within their classes.* We know that none of the assignments, directions, instructions, checklists, and handouts that we have designed for use with the students in our courses, programs, and institutions will be exactly right for use with students in other places; no teachers' digital equipment will be exactly like our own; no hardware and software will work exactly like that we now have in our classrooms. Each teacher and class will have its own set of resources that will need to be accommodated in some way—so *we encourage teachers to revise these materials according to their needs.*

What we hope to accomplish throughout this book is to explain to colleagues *how* and *why* we go about engaging with students, with their efforts to compose meaning, with the technologies they use for this purpose—and why we enjoy it so much—in our own classes and institutions. We hope that colleagues find the processes of reading, experimenting, and composing on the following pages just as engaging and enjoyable and satisfying as we have.

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IMAGES

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The
End

Literacy and Public Transportation, Elizabeth Powell

CHAPTER 2 Words, Audio, and Video: Composing and the Processes of Production

Cynthia L. Selfe
Stephanie Owen Fleischer
Susan Wright

As we have said, this book is designed to help teachers expand the modalities that students draw on for tasks of composing, to go beyond the limits of texts that rely primarily on words, and to explore the affordances—the special capacities—of video, image, and sound.

In this chapter, we compare the basic production processes of each of these modalities. For the purpose of focusing the discussion, we trace these processes as they are often played out by authors working in digital environments—even though neither alphabetic nor multimodal composing, clearly, are limited to digital environments. Later sections of this chapter introduce two sample multimodal assignments (one audio essay and one video essay) that serve as touchstones throughout the book. The student essays that we include on the DVD at the back of this book were composed in response to variations in these two sample assignments. Readers will want to explore this DVD and its contents before completing the chapter. We close this chapter with some information about hardware, software, and digital recording equipment, as well as a few words about the more specialized vocabulary often associated with multimodal composing.

COMPOSING WITH WORDS

Most teachers reading this book are familiar with composing extended alphabetic texts in digital environments—academic essays, reflections, and research papers, among others—and the broadly recursive production processes associated with creating these texts: brainstorming, planning, and taking notes (often in digital environments); citing and documenting copyrighted material; typing a draft (often using a computer keyboard); creating a new document by combining parts of old documents; using an outline or a diagram to create a plan for (or a representation of) an essay; organizing and arranging parts of a text; sharing texts with others and engaging in peer-review (often online); using a word-processing application to revise or edit text; assessing texts, printing texts, and distributing them; and reflecting on texts and the learning that accompanies their production. A basic representation of these broadly recursive processes is represented in Figure 2.1.

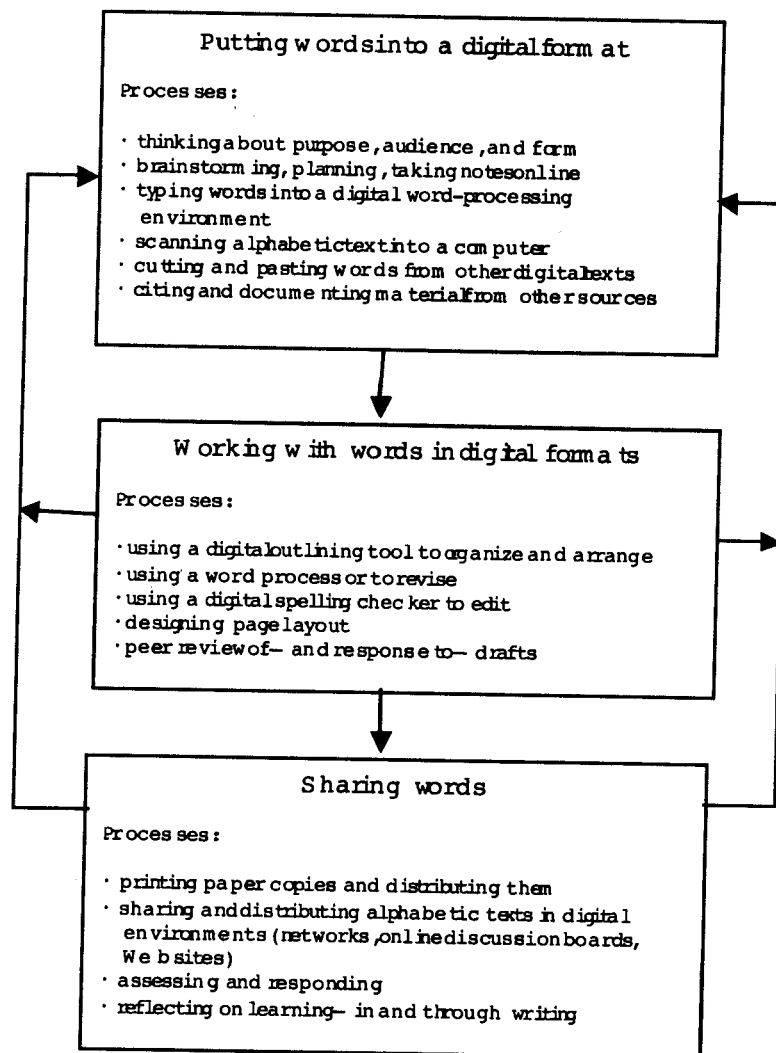


FIGURE 2.1 Composing with words

COMPOSING WITH SOUND

Relatively few composition teachers, however, assign students the task of creating extended audio essays—texts like Sonja Borton’s essay about the role that music has played in her family’s lives over the past three decades, or Daniel Keller’s essay on computers and the challenges they have introduced into our lives. Take a few minutes to listen to these essays—all of which are included on the previously mentioned DVD.

Audio texts like these use the modality of sound as a primary semiotic channel. Composing these texts involves a series of broadly recursive production processes that—in some ways—resemble those involved in more conventional alphabetic composing: brainstorming and planning audio essays (often in writing or using a planning diagram); finding, citing, documenting, and requesting permission for copyrighted audio material to include in a text; putting sound into a digital format (recording original material or downloading copyrighted material); selecting, arranging, and organizing audio segments; engaging in peer review, revising, and editing of audio texts; experimenting with versions and drafts of audio texts; and assessing, sharing, distributing, and reflecting on audio texts (often using writing). These processes are represented in Figure 2.2.

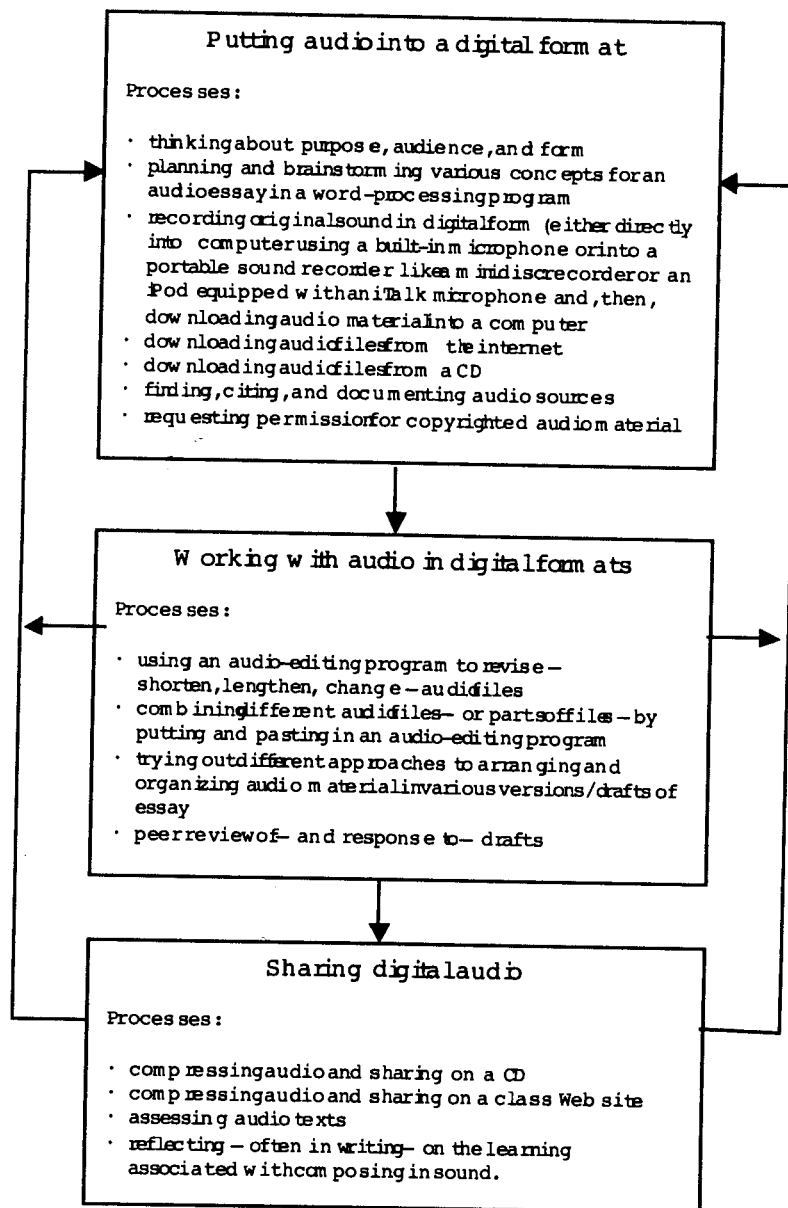


FIGURE 2.2 Composing with sound

COMPOSING WITH VIDEO

English composition teachers also often underutilize video as a composing modality. Few teachers, for example, assign students the task of creating video essays—texts like Elizabeth Powell's essay about the literacies her mother practiced on the bus as she was growing up in Nashville, a video text composed almost entirely of still photographic images, or Kara Alexander's essay about the literacy environment of one child. Readers may want to take a few minutes to view these video essays—which are included on the DVD.

Video texts like these use the modalities of moving and still images and sound as primary semiotic channels. Composing these texts involves a series of production processes that—in some ways—

resemble those involved in more conventional alphabetic composing and sound essays: brainstorming and planning (often in writing or using a planning diagram); finding, citing, documenting, and requesting permission for copyrighted video and audio material to include in a video document; putting video and sound into a digital format (recording original material or downloading copyrighted material); selecting, arranging, and organizing video segments and the accompanying audio tracks; engaging in peer review, revising, and editing of video documents; experimenting with versions and drafts of video texts; and assessing, sharing, distributing, and reflecting on video texts (often using writing) that are represented in Figure 2.3.

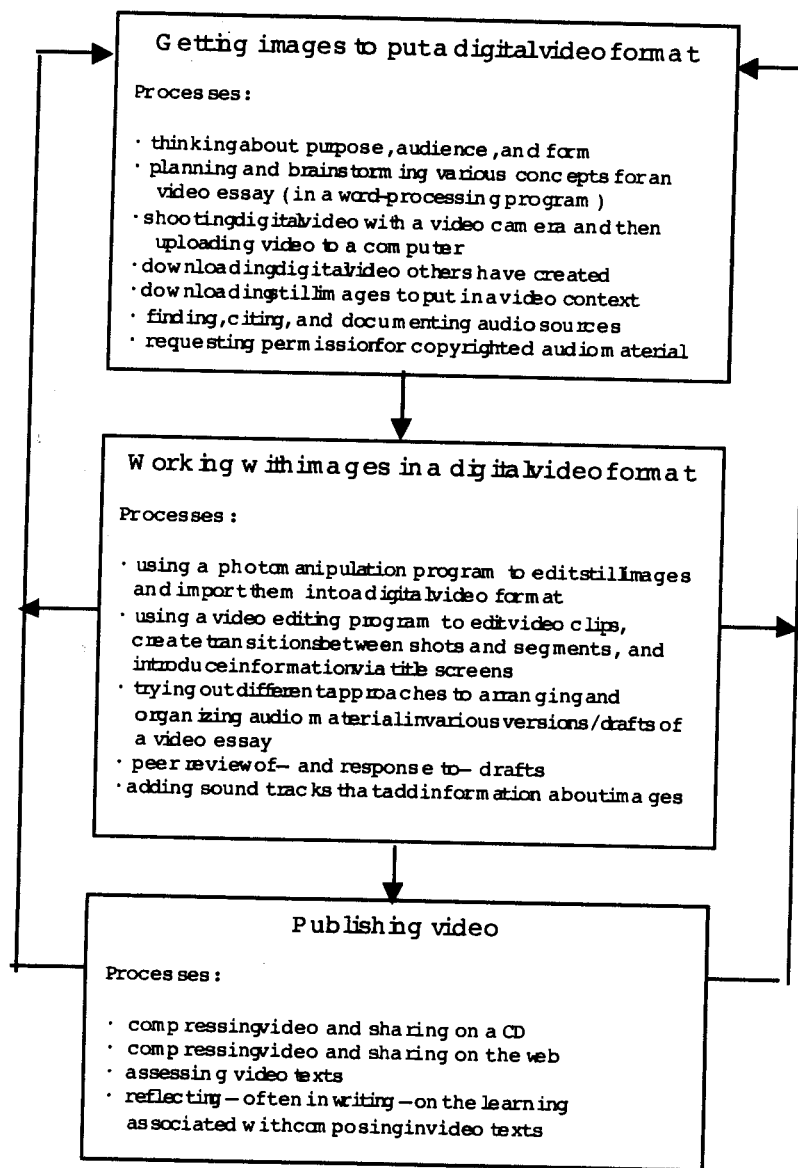


FIGURE 2.3 Composing with video

THE SPECIAL CHALLENGES OF TEACHING WITH AUDIO AND VIDEO

As this chapter has indicated, in some ways, teaching students to compose multimodal texts that contain video, still images, or audio is much like teaching them how to compose more conventional alphabetic texts: teachers must challenge students to take on a task that involves thinking about purpose and audience and exploring a topic; gathering materials and resources, documenting and citing sources; organizing elements around a theme; composing; selecting the appropriate semiotic channel in which to convey pieces of information; revising and editing material; sharing the results of composing in some format so that others can enjoy and respond to texts; and assessing and reflecting on texts. Teachers and students are both used to dealing with these tasks as they compose essays with words, therefore such tasks pose a series of familiar challenges.

It is also true, however, that teaching students to compose audio or video essays also poses new and unfamiliar challenges to many teachers and students. For instance, teachers who assign only alphabetic essays can anticipate that students have considerable experience choosing topics for written essays. In contrast, teachers assigning multimodal compositions must help students think about, choose, and focus on topics that take advantage of the particular capabilities of sound, video, or still images—what we will call their *affordances*.

Similarly, teachers who assign only alphabetic essays can anticipate working with students who have a basic familiarity with composing word texts and considerable experience locating alphabetic materials in libraries, downloading them from the web, and documenting sources (although students' skills often need to develop and refine these tasks). In contrast, teachers who assign multimodal essays will encounter many students who need considerable help using digital equipment (audio recorders, video cameras, microphones, still cameras, and computers with video and audio capabilities); understanding new vocabulary (e.g., framing, ambient sound, title screens, gain); and locating, downloading, and documenting appropriate video or audio clips from online sources.

Further, teachers who assign alphabetic essays can anticipate students who understand the various ways in which texts can be saved, shared, and distributed. Many students, for instance, have experience with printing or photocopying their essays and distributing them within a peer-review group, attaching a digital copy of their papers to e-mail messages, and publishing essays on web sites or in blogs. Teachers who assign multimodal essays, however, will encounter students who are less familiar with the constraints associated with storing large video and audio files and processes of compressing these memory-intensive files so that they can be shared via various digital channels.

In addition, teachers 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—and who can put this knowledge to work in their alphabetic compositions. In contrast, teachers who assign audio and video essays may well be dealing with students who—although they have been immersed in media-rich environments—may not have had any *direct* instruction in the genres of multimodal composing or the compositional elements that make up such genres (e.g., shots, segments, frames, transitions, fades, soundtracks).

Finally, teachers who assign alphabetic essays can generally count on their students being familiar with, and having access to, some common forms of writing technology: pencils, pens, computers and word-processing programs. Teachers who assign multimodal composing, on the other hand, may encounter students who have only a limited knowledge of, and access to, those technologies associated with multimodal composing within digital environments: digital video and still cameras, digital sound recorders, photo-manipulation software, or audio- and video-editing software.

These differences, which represent only some of the distinctions between teaching conventional written essays and multimodal composing, are represented in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1
THE SPECIAL CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AUDIO AND VIDEO ESSAYS.

TEACHING STUDENTS TO COMPOSE WITH WORDS	TEACHING STUDENTS TO COMPOSE WITH IMAGES AND SOUND
Students have considerable experience choosing topics for written essays—although their skills need developing and refining.	Students may need to learn how to think about, choose, and focus on topics in ways that take advantage of the particular affordances of sound, video, and still images.
Students have a basic familiarity with composing their own word texts, locating alphabetic materials in libraries, downloading materials from the web, and documenting sources (although both need development and refinement in these tasks).	Students may need a great deal of help operating digital equipment (audio recorders, video cameras, still cameras, and computers with video and audio capabilities). Students may also need help understanding new vocabulary (e.g., framing, ambient sound, title screens, gain); locating, downloading, and documenting appropriate video or audio clips from online sources.
Students generally know how to save, print, and photocopy their alphabetic essays, and how to share them in digital environments.	Students may need help in saving large audio and video files and <i>compressing</i> final drafts of their texts to a manageable size so that they can be shared in environments.
Students have acquired a great deal of semiotic, syntactic, and grammatical understanding of English and can put this knowledge to work in writing alphabetic essays.	Students may have little understanding of, or instruction in, the semiotic, syntactic, or grammatical understanding of elements that make up sound or video essays.
Students are generally familiar with, and have access to, some common forms of writing technology: pencils, pens, or computers and word-processing programs.	Students may have only a limited knowledge of, and access to, those technologies associated with multimodal composing within digital environments: digital video and still cameras, digital sound recorders, photo-manipulation software, or audio- and video-editing software.

Subsequent sections and chapters of this book will help teachers respond to these special challenges.

TWO SAMPLE MULTIMODAL ASSIGNMENTS

To help teachers think about assignments that call for multimodal composition, we offer the following two sample assignments. These sample assignments are also referred to in subsequent chapters and are reproduced in Appendices 1 and 2 at the end of this book.

- an audio autobiography that asks students to explore the role of sound in their lives and the notion that they are literate users of sound (sample assignment #1)
- a video biography that asks students to explore some aspect of a family member's or friend's literacy practices and values (sample assignment #2)

These two assignments were originally conceived for a first-year composition course that focused on the theme of literacy and was later modified for a range of advanced composition courses, undergraduate teacher-education courses, and graduate courses on the study of literacy. Attached to each assignment is an evaluation rubric consisting of assessment items the teacher considered essential to the composition. These rubrics serve at least three major purposes:

- First, because they are handed out along with the assignment itself, they provide students with a clear understanding of the criteria on which their final audio and video projects will be assessed.
- Second, while students are in the process of working on multimodal compositions, the rubrics provide students with a guide for both informal feedback sessions among peers and the more formal studio-review sessions discussed in Chapter 8: Responding and Assessing and Chapter 9: More about Reading, Responding, and Revising.
- Third, the rubrics are designed to be used by teachers to assess students' final products. In this role, they provide a common point of reference for all members of the composition classroom.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #1 AUDIO AUTOBIOGRAPHY: SOUND AND LITERACY

DIRECTIONS

Compose an audio essay that explores the role of sound in your own personal literacy history and that will help class members gain a broader understanding of your literacy practices and values.

This project should not simply record and reproduce sounds. Rather, it should use sound to tell a story, make meaning about, create some commentary on, offer some insight into your literacy practices and values. Most importantly, it should help listeners reflect on what they are hearing. Your essay can take the form of a sound portrait, soundscape, audio documentary, or sound reflection.

Other than these requirements, the assignment is wide open—and purposefully so! I want you to exercise your own creativity in the service of teaching us all something about literacy.

In class, we will listen to the audio essays below to explore sound. Listen to them yourself as well.

- **sound portrait:** an audio essay that focuses on some aspect of a person's life. It is often biographical.

"Willie Young Rabbit Hunter" (sound portrait, 1:37)
<http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/rabbit_hunter/>

"Reggie Jones, Lifeguard" (sound portrait, 3:45)
<<http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/lifeguard/>>

- **audio documentary:** an audio essay that records the sounds of an important event or time in history when something momentous is happening, some change is taking place, or some trend/pattern is observed in society.

"Woolworth's Lunch-Counter Waitress" (audio documentary about the original civil rights sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter, 4:58)
<http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/lunch-counter_waitress/>

"Street Dogs" (audio documentary about dogs who live with street people, 12:06)
<<http://www.transom.org/shows/2001/200108.shows.streetdogs.perrywarga.html>>

- **soundscape:** an audio on-location essay that tries to portray the aural nature, spirit, or essence of a particular place.

"The Streets of a Holy Hindu City," by Alex Chadwick
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4980828>>

"The Sound of the World Cup," by Smily Harris
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5543566>>

Now, create your own audio project—on some aspect of literacy. It should be about 5 minutes in its final edited form—but this criterion is flexible and provided only so that you have some idea about my expectations.

Your audio project should have the following characteristics:

- The project should employ the affordances (capabilities) of the medium and mode(s) in effective rhetorical ways.
- The project should lend insight to our study of literacy, information value to our discussion of literacy issues/themes.
- The project should have some meaningful connection with your own literacy practices or values.

For this assignment, you may need to do quite a bit of writing: taking notes, making outlines, writing a script, reflecting on your draft for completed essays.

For this assignment, you will need to record some sound on digital sound recording equipment. See me to check out a digital audio recorder and microphone. You will need time to learn how to work with this equipment. We will practice with the minidisc recorder in class. You will also need to buy a set of inexpensive headphones.

Finally, you will need to edit the sound you record, cutting out the parts that you don't need, re-arranging the parts that you do need, and changing the volume or gain of your audio file. For this purpose, you will be using the program called Audacity. Documentation on Audacity is available at <<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/docs1.1/contents.html>>. **SAVE OFTEN—AUDACITY IS A FREWARE PROGRAM AND CAN PROVE UNSTABLE WITH LARGER FILES.**

HINTS FOR SUCCESS

- Make sure to plan for your sound project. Writing will help you here and you should hand in all the written materials that support your project. For example, be sure to keep a written production log of the time you spend on your project. Here is a sample entry for that log:

27 November 2006

9:40-11:00 In class, spent 40 minutes uploading audio and 40 minutes editing audio according to plan. PLAN FOR NEXT SESSION: Continue to edit audio.

Other written documentation will also come in handy. Careful written documentation will help your teacher understand how much work you have put into your project. Here are some suggestions for the documentation you should be keeping:

- storyboard your audio essay or write a scene-by-scene outline
- write out interview questions beforehand and share them with the person(s) you are interviewing.
- make a list of sounds/people/activities you need to record
- record citations for the audio clips you download from the web
- write a reflection on a draft
- Make sure you know how to use your recording equipment! Read the documentation that comes along with the digital sound recorders!
 - always wear isolating headphones so that you can hear what you are recording
 - whenever possible, connect the audio recorder to a power source with an adapter; batteries fail at the worst possible times.
 - make sure you are not recording sounds (e.g., air conditioning hum, a lawn mower going by, a nearby source of electrical power, ambient noise in a room) that will obscure or contaminate the sounds you want to capture
- Schedule more time than you think you need for editing with Audacity—it always takes much much longer than the original recording!! Before you begin editing, be sure to go through the Audacity tutorial on the SourceForge web site <<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/>> or the Audacity overview at the Transom web site <http://www.transom.org/tools/editing_mixing/200404.audacity.html>.
- Before you edit—draw a visual plan of how you want the essay to be structured—what anecdotes go where, where you are going to include soundmark, signal sound, keynote sounds, silence, music, narration, etc. Identify when and where you are going to layer these sounds to create a rich texture for your project.
- Make sure to provide some kind of focused reflective frame for your audio project—some way of helping listeners understand what they are hearing, why it is significant, and what you are trying to convey about your subject. (Read the excerpt from Abel and Glass, *Radio: An Illustrated Guide*.)
- Select/edit/winnow! Make sure your sound composition is tightly and effectively composed. Cut everything that doesn't directly contribute to your intended message. (Read *Radio: An Illustrated Guide*.)
- Make sure your sound project effectively takes advantage of the specific affordances (capabilities) of the medium. What can sound capture best (e.g., tone, emotion, accent)? What escapes the affordances of sound (e.g., a wink, a hand gesture, a facial expression).
- SAVE OFTEN, SAVE OFTEN, SAVE OFTEN!!!
- BACK UP YOUR WORK, BACK UP YOUR WORK, BACK UP YOUR WORK!!!
- See the attached evaluation sheet for the criteria on which this assignment will be graded.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #2 VIDEO BIOGRAPHY: LITERACY VALUES AND PRACTICES

DIRECTIONS

Compose a video text about literacy (using Video Studio, I-Movie or some similar software that you have access to) that provides an insightful representation of the literacy issues/themes we have identified thus far in this course.

In your video, combine still images, video, music, written words, narration, and/or sound to compose a narrative documentary. You can use one or more of the following focus ideas:

- an individual's or group's interesting or unusual literacy practices/values
- an interesting or unusual place in which this individual practices, or values literacy
- an individual who practices an interesting or unusual literacy that represents a larger trend
- a person that practices an interesting or unusual kind/type/genre of literacy

Your literacy video text should have the following characteristics:

- Some video or still images, some narration or voice over, and some music that adds significant information about the topic.
- Information that is valuable to our class discussion of literacy issues/themes.
- A **title screen** for your video.
- A **credit screen** that include full citations for video clips, images, music that you download and use.

The project should employ the affordances (capabilities) of the media you are using in effective rhetorical ways. It should be characterized by careful design that helps to convey meaning. The project should be both instructive and creative.

The project should do more than simply depict a literacy practice/value/issue/place/event/genre—it should help readers/viewers reflect on/gain insight into the subject of the video.

For this assignment, you will probably need to do several of the following tasks:

- **Record some video** (use a digital video camera).
- **Use some digitized images** (shoot your own video or download video clips from a collection on the web).
- **Use some music, and sound/narration/voice over** (use a digital sound recorder to capture sound and or download music/sound from the Internet). This will involve cutting out the parts that you don't need, re-arranging the parts that you do need, and layering these semiotic elements in Video Studio. You may also need to edit your sound using Audacity.
- **Write supporting materials and documents.**

If you don't have access to your own digital camera, see me to check out a digital video camera or a digital still camera. I can also help you check out a digital audio recorder and microphone. You will need time to learn how to work these pieces of equipment, so plan ahead to read the documentation.

You will also need to buy a set of inexpensive headphones.

I will demonstrate in class how to use digital cameras and edit video at various times, but you can also follow the directions for using Video Studio at <<http://www.ulead.com/learning/vs.htm>> and those I have written in the Downloading Sound and Images handout.

Want to see some sample student-made videos? Look at some of the examples on the DVD at the end of this book.

The chapters that follow talk more about these two sample assignments and provide suggestions for teachers who want to try out similar tasks in their classes. We also provide readers with additional, nondigital variations of these assignments (see Appendix 3 and Chapter 9, Figure 9.1).

We also encourage teachers to modify these two assignments or invent entirely new multimodal composing tasks that suit the needs of their particular classrooms and student populations. For example, teachers may want to consider the following suggestions:

Collaborative projects: Teachers may want to design multimodal assignments that require students to work in groups of 2-3. As we note in Chapters 4 and 7, collaboration can help stretch scarce resources (e.g., digital video cameras and audio recorders), spread out the workload of composing in new modalities, and provide students with important emotional support.

Sequencing assignments in different modalities: Some teachers may want to sequence assignments so that they call on different modalities (words, audio, and video) and build on one another. For example, students could begin with an *initial* assignment that involves writing a conventional alphabetic essay in which they reflect on their own literacy practices and values. For a *second* assignment, students could then compose an audio essay focused more specifically on the literacy values their parents or grandparents passed along to them. Then, for a *third* assignment, students might digitally scan snapshots (or video footage of themselves as children) to create a *video essay* about their family's literacy values—one that builds on the insights of the original alphabetic essay (Assignment #1) and uses the audio essay (Assignment #2) as a soundtrack for the video essay (Assignment #3).

Writing about audio and video projects: Some teachers may want to assign an audio or video essay and then have students complete several pieces of alphabetic writing in, around, and about this assignment. For example, students could be asked to write conceptual descriptions of their audio or video projects, scripts for their audio or video projects, progress memos about their essays addressed to teachers, or reflections on their projects after they are done.

Audio and video as an individual alternative: Teachers may want to start slowly with work in audio and video—allowing only one student or a small group of students who already have experience in digital recording to try composing an audio or video alternative to one conventional alphabetic assignment during a term.

SOME NOTES ABOUT SOFTWARE, HARDWARE, EQUIPMENT

As we have noted, multimodal assignments can be done in both digital and nondigital environments. Chapters 3 and 9 provide examples of multimodal assignments that can be completed in *nondigital* environments. The *digital* audio and video assignments in this book can be completed on various computer platforms (Mac or PC), and they are designed to be completed with very inexpensive computer programs and a minimum of video or audio equipment.

For example, to record material for an audio essay, students can use computers that have built-in microphones and sound cards, or a digital minidisc recorder and microphone (and then download the recorded material to computer for editing), or an iPod and a Griffin iTalk Voice Recorder (and then download recorded material to computers for editing). Similarly, if students don't have access to a video camera, they can compose a video essay using still photographic images that they download from the web.

Some software, hardware, and recording equipment will be necessary, however, for multimodal assignments that are designed to be completed in digital environments.

To record audio and video, for instance, teachers or students will need some access to digital recording devices. Depending on the assignment, a class might need to find access to still cameras that take digital photographs (unless students download all still images from the web), video cameras that capture digital video and have a microphone input jack (unless students download all video clips from the web), or digital audio recording devices with a microphone input jack, such as a mini-disc recorder or some other digital audio recorder attachment (unless students download all audio clips from the web).

The compatibility of recording devices, editing programs, and computers can be a challenge in the multimodal classroom. Video camera manufacturers, in particular, have improved their interface with computers in recent years. So, for example, the video on older, nondigital cameras (e.g., 8mm, Hi8, and VHS) are not always immediately compatible with computers and video editing software. In contrast, video on newer, digital cameras (e.g., miniDV, digital 8) is quite easy to download. The compatibility issue will prove especially important for teachers who allow students to use their own video cameras for multimodal composing. Teachers should check the documentation for all video and audio recorders to make sure that the files gathered on recording devices can be downloaded to computers and used by the audio- and video-editing software applications. Recording formats are not necessarily readable in all editing programs.

After video or audio is recorded in a digital form it generally has to be downloaded to a computer so that students can edit the material they have collected—separating key information from the unnecessary information, arranging and organizing segments, adding transitions and music. Most up-to-date computers will handle audio and video editing, but, as composition faculty know, schools don't *always* offer such up-to-date equipment and composition teachers don't *always* have access to such equipment when it *is* available. Hence, teachers will want to find access to personal computers with processors fast enough to handle audio and video work (2 gigahertz or faster); audio and video cards (so they can process the necessary media files); drives that can read and write DVDs and/or DVDs (so that audio and video files can be compressed and saved on these more portable media); sufficient random-access memory (RAM) to handle audio and video editing (at least 1 gigabyte); local hard drives with sufficient capacity to store large video and audio files (250 gigabytes recommended, unless students have individual jump drives for this purpose); USB and/or firewire ports for connecting cameras, recorders, portable hard drives; headphones jacks, built-in microphones, and speakers (so that students can record sound and hear their projects without bothering others around them); and easy-to-learn software programs for editing audio and video (for instance, Audacity or Garageband for audio work, Movie Maker or iMovie for video work).

Finally, depending on the assignment, teachers or students will need access to some peripheral equipment: microphones (cartiod or hypercartiod, see p. 27) that plug into digital recording devices; headphones that plug into computers so that students can hear sound as they edit; and, possibly, personal jump drives (also known as flash memory) or portable hard drives large enough to accommodate students' video and audio projects.

These suggestions are summarized in Figure 2.4, and readers are encouraged to talk to the technical support staff at their own institution about the available technology in advance of implementing multimodal assignments. More advice about the importance of making these connections between faculty and staff are detailed in Chapter 12: Sustaining Multimodal Composition.

A WORD ON TECHNICAL VOCABULARY FOR MULTIMODAL COMPOSING

Each teacher who reads this book will have to decide how deeply into the specialized vocabulary of audio and video production a composition class should delve. For those teachers who find terminology useful in conceiving production strategies and techniques, we provide a glossary at the end of this book that contains many of the key terms used in the chapters that follow.

In general, however, our goal is to keep the specialized technical vocabulary of audio and video production to a minimum. Teachers of English composition should not have to become audio or video specialists in order to design effective multimodal assignments or undertake explorations of such assignments with students. When we do introduce more technical terms in the chapters that follow, we have tried to define them in context as well as in the glossary.

COMPUTER HARDWARE

- Personal computers with the following items
 - processor speed 2 gigahertz or faster
 - sound and video cards
 - drives that can read and write CDs and/or DVDs
 - at least 1 gigabyte of RAM
 - 250 gigabyte hard drives (or individual jump drives for students)
 - USB and/or firewire ports
 - microphone input jack

COMPUTER SOFTWARE

- video-editing software (inexpensive programs like i-Movie, VideoStudio, Movie Maker)
- sound-editing software (freeware programs like Audacity or inexpensive programs like GarageBand)

PERIPHERAL EQUIPMENT

- microphones that hook up to both video cameras and audio-recording devices.
- isolating headphones to monitor sound recording
- personal jump drives

PORTABLE RECORDING EQUIPMENT

- digital video cameras (which can be shared by students) and cables needed to download video to computer
- digital still-photography cameras (which can be shared by students) and the cables needed to download photographs to a computer
- digital audio recording devices (for instance, minidisc recorders and microphones, or other digital audio recorder attachments, or laptop computers and microphones) and the cables needed to download audio to a computer

N.B. Many video cameras and laptop computers have built-in microphones that will record sound. However, because most of these microphones are omni-directional, they pick up *all* the sound in a location, not simply the targeted sound. In addition, these built-in microphones are often of poor quality and, thus, produce muddy or distorted sound. If at all possible, use a good quality microphone that can be plugged into recording devices and *aimed* at the targeted sound. These microphones are known as *cardioid* or *hypercardioid* depending on their pattern of pickup:

A *cardioid* mic is sensitive to audio input from the front of the mic. It also has good sensitivity on the sides (at 90°, 6 decibels less than the front), and good rejection of sound from the rear (180°). The pick-up pattern of these mics is like a heart (hence, the term "cardioid"). cardioid mics are good in eliminating a narrow source of sound directly to the rear of the mic and focusing on one source of sound in front of the mic.

A *hypercardioid* mic is also sensitive to audio input from the front of the mic. They differ from cardioid mics in that their point of least sensitivity is from 150°-160° and 200°-210° (not directly behind the microphone as in a cardioid pattern). hypercardioid microphones are used to eliminate a wider pattern of sound sources in the rear of the mic and to focus on a sound source located in the front of the mic.

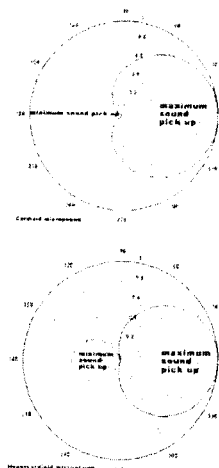


FIGURE 2.4 Digital hardware, software, and equipment for multimodal composing

CONCLUSION

Our five primary goals in this chapter were the following:

- provide an overview of the general processes associated with creating alphabetic, audio, and video compositions
- show how these processes are similar to and different from each other
- identify some of the special challenges associated with multimodal composing
- offer two sample assignments that might be used in a multimodal composition classroom
- identify some of the basic computer hardware, software, and recording equipment that teachers and students will need for creating multimodal compositions

We hope that teachers, after reading the "Get Ready" section of this book, have learned more about why some scholars consider multimodality so important a concept for composition classrooms and why they encourage teachers to integrate multimodality into their own assignment sequences. We hope, as well, that readers have formulated an increasingly clear picture of how multimodal assignments might fit into their own classrooms, composition curricula, and institutional contexts.

Subsequent chapters in the "Get Set" section that follows will help teachers design and schedule effective multimodal assignments (including assignment variations that can be done without digital composing environments), encourage students' collaborative efforts on such projects, think rhetorically about multimodal assignments, retain an experimental frame of mind about such assignments, and formulate effective response and assessment practices in connection with such assignments.

REFERENCE

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