

Assessing Multimodal Student Work
Derek Van Ittersum and Jason W. Ellis

0: Review the requirements and objectives of the course.

Refer to the up-to-date *Instructor's Manual College Writing I & II* produced by the Kent State Writing Program for course descriptions, objectives, and goals. Each class must meet the minimal requirements, but we can endeavor to exceed them. Multimodal assignments can be implemented in College Writing I and II, but only College Writing II specifically mentioned multimodal assignments in the course description. However, providing multimodal opportunities for students in College Writing I better prepares them for that mode of composition in the Tier II course as well as their other classes. I have included Tier I and II descriptions below along with page numbers in the *Instructor's Guide* for objectives and class design worksheets.

Tier I – College Writing I

11011 3 credit hours

The study and practice of academic writing, including an introduction to rhetorical principles, the writing process, critical reading, research, and technology.

Most new students take 11011, College Writing I, in one of their first two semesters. By theme and practice, these courses link with the FYE at Kent State University Campuses.

See pages 11-15 of the *Guide* for the Tier 1 objectives and design worksheet.

Tier II – College Writing II

21011 3 credit hours

Provides a continuation of college-level writing instruction and experiences, with emphasis on research and inquiry, culminating in a lengthy written and/or multimodal project.

Prerequisite: Completion of ENG 11002 or ENG 11011 with a C- or better and completion of 24 hours of course work.

These courses mix (about 50/50) subject matter and writing practice. As English courses, they should prepare students for upper-division work. As university-wide courses, they should prepare students for their majors.

The Tier II worksheet in the *Guide* on pages 49-57 is very useful if you have not designed a themed writing course with a multimodal component.

1: Eat your own dog food.

It's possible, and probably even common, to assign writing tasks that you have never done. Because we are familiar with many kinds of writing and adept at it, we can gauge how difficult the task will be and how much effort will be required to complete the task.

For multimodal assignments, if you do not have the same level of familiarity, it will be possible to assign tasks that are more difficult or time-consuming than you anticipate.

For example, I created a short movie based on an assignment from a course called Writing with Video (exercise 2: motif). I spent 4 hours, at least, creating a one-minute movie--and this is only

counting the "technical" work of filming and editing. More hours were spent inventing ideas and revising them throughout the composing process. Not only did I learn about the kinds of work necessary to complete such a task, I had a lot of fun and generated a lot of enthusiasm for teaching the assignment. Don't dismiss these latter aspects!

2. Formative vs. Summative Assessment

We might think that our younger students have a lot of experience with media creation and will not need much guidance for multimodal assignments. However, not all students have such experience and very few students have put their skills to the kinds of multimodal composing tasks they will be asked to complete for a College Writing course. Therefore, it is important to give guidance throughout the unit. In other words, in addition to assessing their work when they turn in a final project (summative), you'll want to assess students' work throughout the process (formative). This means more than just workshoping a rough draft (although this, too, is important)--it means assessing their progress learning technical skills, assessing their application of those skills to the assignment, assessing their plans for the project, and assessing their execution of those plans.

Adopting a "process" approach to the assignment can facilitate this kind of formative assessment. To begin with, you can assign short technical assignments that teach students how to use the software or hardware involved in the assignment. Then, you might ask them to evaluate a sample multimodal text and explain how it may have been created and how they would assess it given the assignment criteria. Next, students can create a storyboard that sketches out the final project and/or sketches their plans for completing it. Finally, students could show drafts or in progress creations for workshops. You might also assign a progress journal, in which students document their process (for their own reflective purposes and to give you an idea of where to guide instruction).

Additionally, you might ask students to turn in a reflective statement along with their multimodal project--one that explains their process for designing and creating their project and discusses their sense of the project's effect on their intended audience. This kind of text will make visible, to some extent, aspects of the students' work that is possible to intuit just by viewing the finished project.

3. Sample Criteria

Borton and Huot: Sample Formative Assessment criteria

The composition conveys a specific purpose.

The composition identifies a specific audience—either explicitly or implicitly.

The composition employs a tone consistent with the designated purpose and audience.

The composition is organized around an appropriate controlling idea. This idea is clear to readers/viewers/listeners.

The composition uses transitions to guide the audience effectively from one set of ideas to another.

The composition synthesizes relevant information from research efforts with composer's own ideas and arguments—in a way that increases the rhetorical effectiveness of the whole.

The composition uses detailed description, examples, sound, music, color, and/or word choice to convey ideas in an effective and appropriate way to the audience.

**The list will vary depending on the context of each assignment.

Source:

Borton, Sonya C., Brian Huot. "Responding and Assessing. Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers. Ed. Cynthia L. Selfe. Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc., 2007. 99-111.

Sorapure: Composition of Modes

"Rather than assessing individual modes in a multimodal work, I suggest an assessment strategy that focuses on the effectiveness with which modes such as image, text, and sound are brought together or, literally, composed. Moreover, I propose that we draw on our familiarity with rhetorical tropes--and specifically with the tropes of metaphor and metonymy--to provide us with a language with which to talk to our students about the effectiveness of their work."

"Metaphor designates a relation based on substitution; in a multimodal work, one mode can metaphorically represent or stand in for another, as when an animation of a word dynamically represents its meaning. It is a relation based on similarity between elements in different modes.

Metonymy designates a relation based on combination; modes can be metonymically related when they are linked by an association, as when lines from a poem are combined with a melody from a song. It is a relation based on contiguity between elements in different modes."

Source:

Sorapure, Madeleine. "Between Modes: Assessing Students' New Media Compositions." Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy 10.2 (2006). Web.

Kostelnick & Roberts: Visual Language

Arrangement – "the organization of visual elements so that readers can see their structure"

Emphasis – making certain parts more prominent than others by changing its size, shape and color.

Clarity – helps the reader to "decode the message, to understand it quickly and completely"

Conciseness – "generating designs that are appropriately succinct to a particular situation"

Tone – tone reveals the designer's attitude towards the subject matter

Ethos – earning the trust of the person receiving the message.

Source:

Kostelnick, Charles, David D. Roberts, and Sam Dragga. Designing Visual Language: Strategies For Professional Communicators. Longman, 1997. Print.

Odell and Katz: Four Conceptual Processes

Moving from given information to new

Creating and fulfilling expectations

Selecting and encoding

Identifying logical / perceptual relationships

Source:

Odell, Lee, and Susan M. Katz. "Yes, a T-Shirt!": Assessing Visual Composition In the 'Writing' Class." College Composition and Communication 61.1 (2009) : W216. Print.

Williams: CRAP

Contrast

Repetition

Alignment

Proximity

Source:

Williams, Robin. *Non-Designer's Design Book, The*. 3rd ed. Peachpit Press, 2008. Print.

User-generated

You might share some of these criteria with the class, then work with the students to develop a set of criteria specific to the assignment.

4. Planning

Good planning on your part is the key to helping students create successful multimodal projects. This planning starts by thinking through the goals and objectives of the entire unit. Goals for a traditional essay might not translate as easily to a multimodal assignment as one might think.

For example, for a traditional essay we may not care much about students' awareness of the effect of the visual design of the text on readers--we simply stipulate the appropriate font and margins. For a multimodal assignment, though, we may decide that the main goal is having students develop the ability to describe the way different modes interact to communicate a message multimodally and the ability to compose texts that represent their awareness of these interactive possibilities. Clearly, one would assess projects developed with these goals in mind differently than projects in a course where the goals were more oriented toward demonstrating some other skill set.

Borton & Huot offer a heuristic for helping to define one's goals and shape assignments accordingly:

What is the teacher's rhetorical purpose for this assignment?

Does the assignment allow students to choose a purpose authentic to their own interests?

Experiences? Can students effectively articulate and address the purpose?

How will the media and the composing modalities specified for this assignment help students identify and address the needs of an authentic purpose for their compositions?

What is the teacher's understanding of the possible audiences for this assignment?

What options does the assignment allow students for identifying an authentic audience within the context of their lives and experiences?

How will the media and the composing modalities specified for this assignment help students identify and address the needs of an authentic audience for their compositions?

How do the assessment criteria for this assignment—both formative and summative—address the composition's purpose and audience in rhetorically informed ways? Have students been involved in identifying these assessment criteria? Do they have opportunities for using such criteria in both formative and summative contexts?

How do the assessment criteria for this assignment—both formative and summative—address the composition’s organization in rhetorically informed ways? Its tone? Its focus? Its use of sound, color, and image—both still and moving? Have students been involved in identifying the assessment criteria? Do they have opportunities for using such criteria in both formative and summative contexts?

**Questions will vary depending on the context of each assignment.

Source:

Borton, Sonya C., Brian Huot. "Responding and Assessing. *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*. Ed. Cynthia L. Selfe. Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc., 2007. 99-111.

5. Assessing your own work

Finally, once the unit is over, it's time to assess your own work. Did the students struggle with the assignment? What aspects specifically? How will you revise the instruction or the assignment itself to account for their difficulties?

The *Guide*'s worksheets for Tier I and II are also helpful for revising your course after you have had a chance to reflect on what has worked and what did not work as well as you had hoped.