RETHINKING MULTIMODALITY IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: APPLYING THEORIES OF DIGITAL RHETORIC, PROCEDURAL

 RHETORIC, AND ELECTRACY TO MULTIMODAL

ASSIGNMENTS

JENNIFER ANDREA FALCON

Rhetoric and Composition

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| APPROVED: |
|  |
| Beth Brunk-Chavez, Ph.D., Chair |
| Laura Gonzales, Ph.D. |
| William Robertson, Ph.D. |

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| --- |
| Charles Ambler, Ph.D.Dean of the Graduate School |

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, José Franco Sandoval. Grandpa, your devotion to hard work and education will always guide me.

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by

JENNIFER ANDREA FALCON, M.F.A.

DISSERTATION

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## Chapter 1: Digital Multiliteracies and Multimodal Composition in First-Year Composition

The continuous shift in communication and writing practices as a result of new or improved technology has a long history in the field of rhetoric and composition. Whereas once the typewriter, and word processors changed how we wrote, we now have computers, tablets, smartphones and their software that change how we make meaning and communicate it to others. As more communication devices and software become  available, the gap between the kinds of writing people do everyday and kind of writing students do inside the classroom continues to grow. As a result, the first-year composition classroom becomes a space where instructors attempt to build on the writing skills students utilize outside of the classroom in addition to the writing practices that aim to help students transfer their skills to other classes and their professional writing. In first-year composition, where students continue to develop their literacies through writing and meaning-making practices, scholars and instructors approach multimodal composition  as a bridge for developing and building digital multiliteracies. Developing these literacies serves the student both inside and outside the classroom.

 The concept of multimodality refers to the notion that multiple modes of representation, where a mode is defined as “a unit of expression and representation” (Roswell, 2013, p. 3). In The New London Group’s “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” the five modes of communication are visual, linguistic, aural, spatial, and gestural (p. 83 ) and each separate mode is capable of communicating a message on its own. However, when combined, they can communicate a more complex or nuanced message that can appeal to an audience more effectively. Some common examples of multimodal compositions are a video that makes use of sound and text in addition to the moving images to deliver a message or an infographic that combines text and an image to relay information. As an audience we are constantly exposed to multimodal compositions, so much so that we may not recognize them as an example of multimodality. The fact that multimodal compositions can go unnoticed points to how prevalent they are in communication and writing practices.

The National Council of Teachers of English 2005 Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies helps to establish the importance of embracing multimodal literacy practices. The statement points to how the “integration of modes of communication and expression can enhance or transform the meaning of the work beyond illustration or decoration” (Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies, 2005), which helps frame communicating using all available modes of representation  as an important aspect of meaning-making. By drawing attention to the fact that multimodal literacies are “the interplay of meaning-making systems (alphabetic, oral, visual, etc.) that teachers and students should strive to study and produce,” the understanding is that this is already something that instructors teach students to evaluate and create in composition courses. Instructors and students work with and make meaning by mixing modes as both composer and audience member; therefore, multimodal composition is not new, or another concept to teach. It is ingrained in what we teach.

In 2014, the Council of Writing Program Administrators released an updated version of WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition which also addresses multimodality. The statement connects composition to technology by drawing attention to the notion that composition practices are “shaped by the technologies available to them, and digital technologies are changing writers’ relationships to their texts and audiences” (WPA Outcomes Statement For First-Year Composition 3.0). Again we see the idea that newer technology impacts writing practices, but that this is not a new phenomena because technology has always changed communication and writing practices. The statement pushes teachers to include newer writing practices made available by advances in technology and to not think of composing with technology as something separate or different from the regular work of first-year composition students. Multimodal composition then becomes an integral part of first-year composition curriculum as a means to develop digital multiliteracies and incorporate new or newer technology available to us for communicating, making meaning, and writing. This approach to multimodal composition in first-year composition curricula creates an opportunity to also implement scholarship that explores how software, platforms, and devices impact communication and writing practices.

### Definition of Terms

There is no single agreed upon definition of multimodal composition, because multimodal composition can mean or refer to different aspects of meaning-making depending on how you define a mode and if you tie multimodal practices to specific uses of technology to make meaning. If a WPA or first-year composition instructor view multimodality as a means to implement digital technologies in a curriculum, their multimodal assignments would mostly aim to make use of new or newer technology and digital platforms. If their view of multimodality reflects that it isn’t only digital, and therefore it can exist outside digital technologies and still be a useful composing practice, then they may encourage students to embrace materiality when mixing modes.

Scholars such as Lutkewitte (2014) in *Multimodal Composition A Critical Sourcebook* defines multimodal composition as “communication using multiple modes that work purposely to create meaning,” which is a broad definition that does not marry itself to a digital technology. This may be a result of the arguments that oppose the ideas that multimodal composition is new, because as Jason Palmeri (2012) wrote in *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy* “past compositionists responded to the new media of their day” (p. 5) by creating multimedia textbooks in 1970s that were “designed to appeal to the multimodal interests of students who had grown up watching television” (p. 5). The idea that composition instructors react to the technology and media that influences communication habits and experiences of our students may not be new as Palmeri suggests. For this reason, some in the field prefer to use multimedia composition, or new media composition, as it is specific to more current technology and media used to communicate and write. It should also be noted that before multimodal composition was a widely used term in the field of rhetoric and composition, multimedia composition was a commonly used term to describe writing practices using newly available technology. Jim Heid (1991) defined multimedia as “the integration of two or more communications media,” and again we see this type of composition as using more than one type of media or mode to communicate as central focus of the definition. This aspect of the definitions of multimodal composition, multimedia composition, and new media composition point to the process of mixing modes and/or media as the central focus of this type of communication and writing. The field might have long been multimodal or taken into account visual or audio modes used in communication, but the technological developments made in the 1990s and 2000s allowed for more communication mixing modes than ever before.

For this dissertation I chose to use the term multimodal composition, and not multimedia or new media, because multimodal composition is the most often used term in rhetoric and composition scholarship. It is commonly used to describe the composition process by which modes are mixed, arranged, and delivered to communicate and write. To effectively research how multimodal composition is implemented in a first-year composition curriculum I felt it was important not to tie multimodal composition to only digital practices. Multimedia composition and new media composition tend to be tied to composition taking place in only digital spaces. It is possible that a first-year composition curriculum or instructor uses multimedia or new media to compose build digital literacies. However, the terms multimedia and new/newer media tend to be associated with digital only platforms. It is possible to build digital literacies through practices other than teaching multimodal composition, but for the purpose of this dissertation it is important to use a term that does not exclude practices and assignments that are not digital only. The focus of this dissertation is how multimodal assignments are implemented and taught, and if theories and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy are part of programmatic discussions and/or instruction and/or if the inclusion of multimodal composition assignments stems from the necessity of building digital multiliteracies.

The definitions of multimodal composition and multimedia composition above can also fall under the umbrella of digital rhetoric and digital composition. Hess and Davisson in *Theorizing Digital Rhetoric* (2018) define digital rhetoric as “the study of meaning-making, persuasion, or identification as expressed through language, bodies, machines, and texts that are created, circulated, or experiences through or regarding digital technologies” (p. 6). Similarly, digital composition refers to specific practices available to today’s writers through a variety of digital platforms including but not limited to social media networking sites, video and sound editing software, word processor software, and mobile devices (“Digital Composition, Storytelling & Multimodal Literacy: What Is Digital Composition & Digital Literacy?, n.d.”). In using the available technology to compose digitally, it becomes important to also understand not only how to use the technology effectively to communicate and write, but also what it means to use specific technology. This definition of digital composition places the experience of using digital technology as equal importance as the creation and delivery of information. Multimodal composition can fall under digital composition when the modes mixed are done so in digital environments. Mixing modes digitally is to make use of available technologies to deliver a message to an audience. The definition of digital composition above also positions it as part of digital rhetoric. For this reason I view multimodal composition as both under the umbrella of digital rhetoric and digital composition, which is why theories and practices of digital rhetoric should be more present in multimodal practices. However, like multimodal composition there are numerous definitions of digital rhetoric that have changed over time as communication and writing practices did based on technological advancements and developments. A closer look at the changes in definitions of digital rhetoric from the 1990s to present day will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

Procedural Rhetoric is important to conversations and research centered on digital multimodal composition because of the use of computers, software, and digital platforms in composing by mixing modes. In *Persuasive Games* (2007), Ian Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as “a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created (p. 3). For Bogost “procedural rhetoric is the practice of using processes persuasively,” which makes it a good source for WPAs and instructors when developing, implementing, and informing digital multimodal practices.

Finally, according to Sarah Arroyo in *Participatory Composition Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy* (2013) electracy is an apparatus that “impacts all areas of our lives,” because it is “creating a need to invent new practices for living in an electrate world (p. 5). Electracy “creates a need for new theories about writing, reading, and thinking about subjectivity, community and representation” (p. 8) because it is a worldview, as much as it is an aspect of digital literacy. The importance of these terms and concepts will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy can propel multimodal composition beyond simply using the concept of multimodality to broaden the scope of digital literacy. With embracing multimodal literacies, and therefore multimodal composition, comes the responsibility to incorporate concepts and theories found in scholarship in related subfields of rhetoric. A first-year composition curriculum that makes use of digital platforms means it is using the first-year composition classroom as a space to practice theories in subfields of rhetoric, such as digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy, that can lead to a deeper understanding and/or broaden the scope of multimodality for instructors and students. As digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy grow through the work of scholars, I see what can only be described as a widening gap between theory and practice. The work done in these three subfields of rhetoric contribute to a better understanding on our parts of the relationship between technology and the person using it to communicate, write, and deliver messages to an audience. However, the work of these scholars must be thoughtfully connected to and enacted in the composition classroom.
 A first-year composition curriculum with digital multimodal composition assignments makes the first-year composition classroom a space to continue to include subfields of rhetoric, and their respective theories. Scholarly work in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy is abundant, and not only limited to classroom practices. However, the abundance of theories results in a limiting number of scholarly works in application. There exist numerous appeals to scholars to critically address and think about the role of technology in the classroom, its social use and the implications of both in our daily lives and writing. There are various pedagogical practices and assignments that aim to incorporate elements of digital rhetoric and build digital literacies of students in composition classrooms, but do these assignments reflect current scholarship? Does first-year composition curriculum use multimodal or multimedia composition as a means to apply the majority of theoretical work in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy? By researching how WPAs implement multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum, and how instructors approach introducing and assessing multimodal composition assignments in their classrooms, this dissertation aims to better understand when, or if at all, theories in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, electracy shape multimodal composition.

### Literacy and Digital Technology

The intersection of literacy and digital technology represents a vast expanse of study where many scholars address and critique areas of concern in rhetoric and composition, specifically how emerging devices and software may or may not impact writing and writing instruction. The increased usage of technology (software, device, and online platform) in the classroom and in our daily lives changed and continues to change how we communicate. The newfound mobility of technological devices, made possible with the availability of Wi-Fi, introduction of smartphones and tablets, in addition to improved desktop computers and laptops, directly impact our writing practices. This makes it is easy to view new or improved technology as a more recent concern in rhetoric and composition, but the implementation of more, or newer technology in the composition classroom has long been an important area of study in the field. In the early 1990s to the 2000s, concerns rose over technology, and its use in composition classes based on new or different writing practices as a result of developments in technology and its increased integration into our daily lives.

In “The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class” Hawisher and Selfe (1991) express concern over the “new electronic classrooms” (p. 55) and their impact on how writing instructors teach writing. They warn of over reliance on technology and encourage instructors to think carefully and strategically about the integration of technology in the classroom. Their observations of the approaches of instructors teaching in these electronic classrooms leads to a call to “plan carefully and develop the necessary critical perspectives to help us avoid using computers to advance or promote mediocrity in writing instruction” (p. 62). Their warning of over reliance on the ways in which technology is integrated is not uncommon, nor is it only associated with the integration of technology in a classroom. The appeal of a new technology, and/or new approach to a preexisting theory is undeniable. The field must carefully consider the temptation to implement new technology and pedagogy based on specific technological developments without creating a critical eye as to what its impact may be.

The New London Group (1996), in “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” provides an overview for “the changing social environment facing students and teachers” (p. 60). The social environment they recognize as changing is the result of the rise of globalized societies. They push for literacy pedagogy to include the “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (p. 61). The effects and importance of both advancements in technology and the NLG’s changing view of literacy are apparent in Stuart Selber’s (2004) *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age,* and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s address “Made not only words: Composition in a new key” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Selber recognizes the need for changes in curriculum that develop digital multiliteracies, while Yancey draws attention to move away from teaching writing practices of alphabetic text only and move towards including composing using multiple modes. The connection between teaching multiliteracies, digital multiliteracies, modes that represent communication practices, which became more commonly known as multimodal composition and multimedia composition, will be more thoroughly addressed in Chapter 2.

As the field moves away from questioning whether it *should* teach students to compose by mixing modes and not solely relying on alphabetic text to teach writing, the issue becomes *how* to incorporate a multimodal or multimedia assignment. The inclusion of multimodal composition assignments in a first-year composition bring about concerns as to what types of multimodal composition assignments to include in first-year composition curriculum. WPAs and instructors must consider what type of multimodal composition will become part of the curriculum. From how to introduce multimodality as a concept, how to assess the assignment, whether to place emphasis on the process of composing or the final product, introducing the assignment, all with the goal of developing assignments that help to accomplish the learning outcomes of the program, university and/or field of rhetoric and composition.

One such example in which multiliteracies (i.e., multiple modes of representation and diverse linguistic practices), digital multiliteracies (i.e., multiples modes of representation and diverse linguistic practices in digital-only environments), multimodal and/or multimedia composition (i.e., composing by mixing multiple modes of representation using digital software, and/or platforms) come together as a teachable practice in first-year composition curriculum is through the inclusion of an assignment, or series of assignments that aim to develop students’ multiliteracies. These assignments vary from curriculum to curriculum, but the goals remain similar. Students use software, a specific platform, device, or website to compose by mixing modes, or by using something other than alphabetic text only. The composition and delivery of a message depends on utilizing the available technological means. An example of this is the E-Portfolio, which Clarke (2009) writes about in “The Digital Imperative: Making the Case for a 21st-Century Pedagogy,” where she presents digital rhetoric as another literacy students must develop. She points to web 2.0 technologies as a means to access and allow for exploring new ways to encourage authorial control of writing (p. 28). Assignments such as the E-Portfolio are highlighted as a means for “discussions of ownership of digital material” (p. 29). Clarke also describes the composition classroom as an “emerging space for digital rhetoric” and views this as one way to develop students’ literacy in digital rhetoric. Building on Clarke’s idea that the composition classroom is a space to incorporate concepts of digital rhetoric, allows for the opportunity for it to also be a space to include procedural rhetoric and electracy.

With all that to consider it is clear that scholarly research on what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess it are always needed, but can examples from one instructor’s experience of teaching multimodal assignments be recreated in the classrooms of other first-year composition instructors? Are the individual experiences of one instructor enough to answer the call put out by the NLG, Selber, and Yancey? What works in one classroom may not work in another, and if an instructor tries it and is unhappy with the results, does that mean they no longer attempt to incorporate multimodal composition in their curriculum? The large amount of scholarship related to multimodal assignments, and the experiences of instructors as they attempt to implement multimodal composition in their first-year composition courses is vital, but as first-year composition programs become more familiar and at ease with adding multimodal composition to their curriculums, WPAs and first-year composition instructors should look beyond the basics of multimodality. Digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy provide a framework to approach the role of technology in the lives of students inside and outside the classroom. Each provides the student with an opportunity to develop multiliteracies, but also question their relationship with technology (digital rhetoric), explore their role as users of technology (procedural rhetoric), and the participatory nature of composition (electracy).

There are numerous theories and scholarship in these three areas that may be embraced by some composition scholars, but they do not always reach the classroom in practice. Without applying theories of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy, or devoting more scholarship to the application of these theories, curriculum in first-year composition may not approach digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy as areas for students to become literate in working in digital spaces and explore the relationship between the user and the technology. Students, as users of technology, need to understand how the technology can change them, but they also need to know how they can change it. Knowing how to use a platform, software, and device effectively also includes understanding its role beyond completing a task/assignment. To do this students as users of the technology must be able to think critically about the impact of the technology, how using it changes them, and how they change it, and what that means for their communication and writing practices.

### Purpose of the Study

Recognizing the gap between theory and application, this dissertation will attempt to research what types of multimodal assignments are included in first-year composition curriculum, how they are implemented, and which theories influence their learning outcomes and/or reasoning for their implementation into first-year composition curriculum. To meet the needs of developing digital multiliteracies and integrating more, or newer, technology in the classroom it is understood that multimodal composition assignments are often part of first-year composition curriculum in an attempt to develop digital multiliteracies and implement technology to reflect current writing practices. As scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy grows their scholarship and theories  should be reflected in multimodal composing practices in first-year composition curriculum and classes to broaden the scope and understanding of what it means to use digital platforms to mix modes in communication and writing practices. This dissertation attempts to answer the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

1.     How, if at all, do digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy and participatory composition influence composition curriculum and approaches to digital literacies in the field of rhetoric and composition?

2.     What types of assignments and platforms allow for an attempt to combine theory and application in the composition classroom?

### Procedures

To better understand how first-year composition programs and instructors integrate multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum, I conducted a qualitative survey. The survey responses yielded a small data set that provided insight as to how each participating university and community college implement multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum. In March of 2017, an online survey was created using Qualtrics Survey Software. The survey link was emailed to WPAs at universities and to the WPA listserv. The survey via Qualtrics was administered for a duration of five months. Potential participants were WPAs, and first-year composition instructors at Research 1 (R1) universities, R2 higher research activity universities, R3 moderate research universities, and community colleges. Surveys were distributed to universities and community college of different research levels in attempt to pull from a diverse group in order to compare and contrast first-year curriculum at different types of research universities.  The surveys provided context and background for each university and first-year composition program.The survey questions attempted to gain knowledge about the ratio of text-only assignments to multimodal or multimedia assignments, what types of multimodal assignments are taught, if curricula are standard and how that impacts a WPA or instructor’s approach to implementing and teaching multimodal composition assignments, and how instructor feedback is provided to the student.

Participants who indicated they would like to continue to be part of the study were considered for an interview based on their responses. Interviews were conducted via telephone, Skype, or email, and in person. Nine interviews were completed, and each lasted a minimum of thirty minutes.The interview questions allowed me to collect information that helps to trace the link between specific theories of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy and what is practiced and included in first-year composition curriculum. During the interview cycle, participants were asked to provide the following documents: first-year composition syllabus, assignment guidelines for first-year composition assignments, and grading rubrics. Grounded theory was used to code and analyze data collected from survey responses and interviews conducted. This lens allows me to analyze assignment guidelines, rubrics, survey and interview responses in an effort to determine which theories influence the multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition courses at participating universities. A survey was used because it allowed me to collect data from WPAs and first-year composition instructors at a wide variety of universities and community colleges. Interviews were conducted to support survey findings, and ask follow-up questions.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is the need to approach first-year composition curriculum inclusion of digital multimodal composition assignments under lens of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy to continue building digital literacies and multiliteracies based on more current scholarship. To use the wealth of knowledge of scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy to improve composition practices in the classroom can only benefit the field of rhetoric and composition and its students.

### Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are the small sample size of WPAs and first-year composition instructors. 58 survey participants do not represent every first-year composition program at universities and community colleges. However, this small sample size and follow-up interviews can draw attention to trends in implementing multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum. A more in depth explanation of my methodology will be discussed in Chapter 3.

### Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 - Digital Multiliteracies and Multimodal Composition in First-Year Composition serves as an introduction to the topic and the specific focus of my research. Chapter 2 - Review of Literature includes the literature review of relevant scholarship on pedagogy, multimodal composition, electracy, procedural rhetoric, and digital rhetoric.This chapter includes a brief trace of the different definitions and understandings of digital rhetoric since the term was first discussed by Richard Lanham in 1992. This review of literature is  essential to the creation of the three categories that I use as a lens for analyzing my data in later chapters. Chapter 3 - Methodology and Findings: Presentation of Data Collected from Surveys and Interviewsdiscusses in detail the study’s methodology, and presents the findings of the survey and interviews. Chapter 4 - Analyzing Common Approaches to Teaching Multimodality in First-Year Compositionis an analysis of data from interview participants. Finally, Chapter 5 - Recommendations for Incorporating Digital Rhetoric, Procedural Rhetoric, and Electracy in Teaching Multimodal Assignments presents recommendations for the field moving forward based on my research findings. Recommendations demonstrate how digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy can be used as framework, and added to the current methods for teaching multimodality in first-year composition curriculums.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Advancements in technology continually change the experiences of using computers, computer software, and digital spaces. This impacts how students learn to make meaning, practice communicating, and experience their discourses. This dissertation aims to fill the gap between a multiliteracies approach to first-year composition curriculum, which often includes multimodal assignments, and/or writing practices that incorporate elements of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. The gap exists as a result of privileging one definition or framework for practice over the others in an attempt to incorporate multiliteracies, multimodal composition, or multimedia composition. It is important to add to the current approach to teaching multimodal composition in first-year composition because as scholarship in related fields grows and evolves, so then should practices associated with them. It is also important to do this so that students leave a first-year composition course better equipped to write and communicate in both academic and professional environments.

### Multiliteracies and Digital Literacies

The New London Group’s 1996 article, “Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” published in the *Harvard Educational Review,* marks an important milestone in the consideration of literacy and literacy pedagogy.Comprised of a group of scholars from various disciplines and around the world, the New London Group not only coined the phrase “multiliteracies,” but also made two significant statements regarding changes in literacy pedagogy in response to the emergence of a globalized society. They first state that the purpose of education is to provide students with knowledge that will allow them to enter and participate in public, community, and economic aspects of life (p. 60). In a more globalized society the knowledge students need to enter these arenas is different than what may be required in educational settings. In order to achieve this educational goal, the new literacy pedagogy must address a “textual multiplicity” (p. 61), because in a globalized society a multitude of linguistic practices accounts for a changing work life; and for students to be able to succeed and/or enter this new work life they must learn and practice  a new literacy to account for the “multiplicity of discourses” (p. 61). It is this approach to the purpose of education that drives their understanding of literacy and its functions.

Multiliteracies and the “metalanguage” students need to gain employment must go beyond alphabetic text and must include “modes of representation much broader than language” (p. 64). The metalanguage needed to reflect these new literacy pedagogy practices is based on their concepts of design, which the New London Group cite as necessary due to the increased role of technology, and incorporation of different types of media in the personal and work lives of students. The New London Group use their concepts of design as a framework for their approach to literacy, which gives room for a curriculum that reflects more closely the writing and communication practices and experiences of students, with close attention given to how students interact within discourse communities. The importance of the New London Group’s approach is changing literacy pedagogy to include different types of literacies beyond traditional alphabetic texts of reading and writing.

The New London Group (hereafter NLG) does not only point to a need for a change in literacy pedagogy, they also provide suggestions for how to guide this change.  More specifically, the NLG’s use of design as the basis for their metalanguage of multiliteracies allows them to answer questions about what students learn in this new literacy pedagogy and how they will learn it. The NLG break up the what and how of their new literacy pedagogy into three categories of design concepts: available designs, designing, and the redesigned. Available designs are made up of the resources used for design, such as grammar and orders of discourse. Orders of discourse can be understood as a “structured set of conventions associated with semiotic activity,” with what the goal of attempting to capture the ways in which different discourses relate to each other (p. 74).  Conventions of design can be found within orders of discourse. These are found in genres, styles, dialects, and so on (p. 75). The NLG describe the Design as reliant upon Available Designs, which are the “modes of meaning” (p. 81), because Design is “the transformation of these modes of meaning” (p. 81). However, Design is never a replication of the available designs. Therefore, Designing is the process by which one “recognizes the iterative nature of meaning-making by drawing on Available Designs to create patterns of meaning” (p. 76). According to the NLG Designing is dependent upon Available Designs, always includes Available Designs, and creates new meaning and use of old materials (p. 76). If a product of Designing is creating new meaning, then the Redesigned can be understood as a “transformed meaning,” (p. 76) which is the result of reproducing Available Designs. The Redesigned is “founded on patterns of meaning,” (p. 76) which are made or created through Designing and Available Designs.

The NLG’s concept of design used here is similar to Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric, as the “available means of persuasion,” but for the NLG, the available means are what a student uses to design or compose a text. I use design and compose interchangeably here because I see similarities between the NLG’s categories Available Designs, Designing, and the Redesigned and composition studies. The NLG’s concepts of design are similar to the writer’s process of making meaning out of and using alphabetic text, modes of communication, and citing sources to support his/her position.

When the NLG states that “classroom teaching and curriculum have to engage with students’ own experiences and discourses” (p. 88), this opens the door for the changes in literacy pedagogy they discuss at the start of their article. The “modes of representation broader than language” (p. 64) are changing, and they will continue to change because the experiences of students will change along with  their relationship to technology. These modes of representation are representational forms that are significant in communication (p. 61).

The concept of representational forms often appears in works that explore multimodal composition, wherein a number of different modes of communication are combined to create a singular message.  The modes of communication, when used together to create meaning and communicate a message, broaden our understanding of literacy and our literacy practices as the NLG called scholars to do. Years later in *Working with Multimodality* (2013) Jennifer Roswell addresses the concept of multimodality as a professional practice. Like the NLG, she refers to *“*modes of representation,” and the mode as a “unit of expression” (p. 3), and these representations and expressions are used to make meaning, and communicate, which falls in line with the NLG’s observation that these modes can be, but are not limited to, images, images with text, interfaces, and other forms used to make and communicate meaning. Roswell’s research includes  a case study that connects producers of multimodal compositions works in their professional careers as a practice that mirrors what students do in first-year composition courses.

The NLG, pointing to a direct correlation between a student building or developing multiliteracies and their ability to successfully enter public, community, and economic sectors creates a space for subsections and approaches to literacy pedagogy to follow. The importance of “Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” is that it allows for the understanding of literacy to now include the teaching of other modes, forms, units of expression which can lead to students developing multiliteracies, using new/different software, questioning their relationship to technology, and practicing composing in non-alphabetic text.

Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola (1999) also call attention to a common understanding of literacy at the time, which focuses on literacy as the ability to read and write. They find that this type of conceptualization of literacy and literacy pedagogy is dependent upon the notion that “if we acquire the basic skills of reading and writing—if we are literate—we have, or will have all the goods the stories bundle together, no matter who or where or when we are” (p. 352). When treating literacy as only the ability to read and write, it leads to what Glenda Hull calls the “intellectual equivalent of all-purpose flour,” by assuming that “once mastered, these skills can and will be used in any context for any purpose” (p. 34). Viewing literacy as a generic skill necessary for  participating or succeeding in a professional or personal setting is problematic for Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola, because they would disagree that everyone has access to certain generic skills that are required for access to specific professional, or academic spaces. Or, that a student acquiring these skills are enough to successfully participate in these spaces. More importantly it also excludes literacy practices that are not solely alphabetic text.

Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola warn that this “all-purpose” approach to literacy will now be transferred to technological literacy. Simplifying literacy as only a skill needed to level the playing field for all does not allow for a broader understanding of factors that impact students’ socioeconomic status, nor do these specific types of literacies take into account the level of access a student might have to software, computers, and devices used to develop technological literacy. Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola see “technological literacy” or “computer literacy” as an attempt to “give others some basic, neutral, context-less set of skills whose acquisition will bring the bearer economic and social goods and privileges” (p. 352). They raise questions about what we want or should want from the pairing together of literacy and technology, because while these types of literacies may be seen as necessary, developing a technological literacy does not equate to transferability to any and all situations and contexts. This literacy or that literacy does not take into account the type of access students must have to enter the public, civic, or professional sectors the NLG references. Therefore, it is unwise to approach these types of literacies and new literacy pedagogies as part of a skillset to gain access or success in personal, professional, and academic settings. Rather, what is needed is an approach to multiliteracies that continues to evolve, and not use multiliteracies or digital multiliteracies as a skill students can build through multimodal composition. Instead what is needed, as this dissertation will argue, is to view multimodal composition as more than composing by mixing modes and to take advantage of scholarship in both rhetoric and writing studies as well as in related fields that can help multimodal composition evolve.

Because the technological or digital space differs from a real space, we need to learn and teach students how to navigate these spaces. In the 1990s, to do this scholars and instructors took on a new view not only of literacy, but of how we interact with, in, and around our literacies. Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola explain this as the ability to see ourselves not as “moving through information, but as moving through it and making and changing conscious constructions of it as we go” (p. 366). They feel this will allow for the shift towards seeing ourselves as participants active in our literacies, which helps to set up literacy as a “process and representations in social spaces” (p. 367) and to combat the view of literacy as a skill obtained in a vacuum where outside factors and influences go unaccounted.

It is important to take notice of Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola’s concerns because while the multiliteracies and metalanguage of the NLG’s new literacy pedagogy does not necessarily point to literacy as only a skill, the NLG does make a strong connection between multiliteracies and entering a new worklife. The connection between the need for multiliteracies to enter worklife speaks to the functionality of multiliteracies and the metalanguage used within them.

 In terms of access, it must also be noted that the NLG does not mention digital only modes of representation; access to computers, software, and digital spaces that allow for this type of communication, composition, and multiliteracy building is of equal concern.  If access to these is needed for students to build multiliteracies and enter the new worklife, then how can those without access enter and succeed in a new worklife? The NLG literacy pedagogy may appear functional, and it certainly can be understood that multiliteracies and the metalanguage that make them up will equate to viable employment, social and public life for students. However, to change literacy pedagogy the NLG must justify a shift in thinking. Taking aim at the preparedness of students to enter the work world helps to strengthen their claim that new literacy pedagogy is not only a necessary but also an urgent issue. Changing literacy pedagogy to prepare students for their work life and social space soften includes changing the writing classroom, and this change tends to come from implementing more or newer technology.

### Rhetoric and Technology

In “The rhetoric of technology and the electronic writing class” Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe (1991) express concern over the “new electronic classrooms” (p. 55) and its impact on how writing instructors teach writing. They warn of the integration of technology in the classroom leading to an overreliance on technology. Their advice to writing instructors is to be aware of the positive *and* negative influences computers may have on the writing classroom. They note that leading up to the time of their publication, there was an overwhelmingly positive depiction of the role of the computer, and technology, in these so-called electronic classrooms. Based on their observations they were surprised by the large amount of time students spent writing in the classrooms using computers, which created a lack of interaction between instructors and students, resulting in fewer conversations about writing.

However, according to Hawisher and Selfe, the large amount time spent writing in class limited the opportunity for the students to discuss writing with their instructors, and they noted there were no “careful two-way discussions of the writing problems students were encountering” (p. 60) as a result of the over reliance on the implemented technology in the classroom. Their observations of the approaches of instructors teaching in these electronic classrooms leads to a call to “plan carefully and develop the necessary critical perspectives to help us avoid using computers to advance or promote mediocrity in writing instruction” (p. 62). Overall their view of computers in writing classrooms is positive, but they point to a lack of critical awareness of the ways in which computers in the writing classroom may change pedagogical practices. This specific weariness of technology integration is not uncommon. The appeal of a new technology, and/or new a approach to a preexisting theory is undeniable. However, the field must carefully consider the temptation to implement a new technology and pedagogy associated with it. When considering its impact there are numerous discussions about defining terms and writing practices to clearly identify specific goals and affordances of adding them to first-year composition curriculum. In 2004 this is explored in the work of Kathleen Blake Yancey and Stuart Selber.

In 2004, Kathleen Blake Yancey and Stuart Selber answer the call of the NLG when they research and write about the concepts of multiliteracies and modes as language representation as a result in shifts in technology and how they impact writing practices in the early 2000s. Both Yancey and Selber recognize a shift in rhetoric and composition as brought on by technological advancements affecting the ways people communicate.  An increased use of computers, computer software, and participation in digital and/or online spaces bring about a demand for theories of digital multiliteracies to be developed (Selber) and for composition instruction to move beyond the realm of alphabetic text only. Modes of representation are revisited in Yancey’s (2004) “Made not only in words: Composition in a new key and the need for multiliteracies to be developed in composition courses are addressed in Selber’s (2004) *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*.

Yancey (2004) in “Made not only words: Composition in a new key” recognized the field of rhetoric and composition to be in a moment of change, whereby scholars could embrace the shift of moving away from alphabetic text only. This moment centers around the opportunity to include multimodal composition in first-year composition courses in an attempt to help students develop multiliteracies.  Yancey states “the screen is the language of the vernacular” (p. 305), and despite this not being a new assessment in 2004, she proclaimed that “we are digital already.” Yancey’s Conference on College Composition and Communication President’s Address both called for and legitimized the inclusion of digital assignments in composition classrooms. Stating that we are “digital already” is similar to the NLG’s assessment that in a globalized society, work life is changing and demands a broadening of literacy pedagogy. Understanding that we are digital calls for us to change our traditional view on literacy and continue to embrace multiliteracies in whatever forms they need to be developed. Yancey believes this is possible by embracing composition that is not only alphabetic but also this call helps to place multimodal composition as a necessary practice in composition classrooms, because students “compose words and images and create audio files on web logs (blogs), in word processors, with video editors and we editors” (p. 298). Multimodal composition  becomes a practice that Yancey views as needed inside the classroom, because of the amount of writing as well as the mixing of modes and genres, that take place outside of school. The internet, and other technological advancements allow for writers of all ages to compose, choose how to deliver their work to an audience via numerous platforms, and continue to interact with an audience. This type of writing may not be considered academic, but it is just as meaningful for developing multiliteracies. Yancy understood that the changes in literacy and technological advancements were tied together, and that these changes push the field toward a changing curriculum.

Stuart Selber (2004) focuses his attention on how composition curriculum can be developed in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. The computer, its software, and the increased usage of technology in the digital age present new issues in literacy pedagogy such as access, determining what students should know and learn, and ultimately how to go about teaching students a new type of literacy. Selber argues, “if students are to become agents of positive change, they will need an education that is comprehensive and truly relevant to a digital age” (p. 234). Here again we see the role of literacy and education as a means to better equip students for the world they currently live in and will enter in their work life.

Again we also see that this education requires students enhance their multiliteracies. To do this Selber defined three types of literacies--functional, critical, and rhetorical-- to  understand the goals of a curriculum that incorporates technology in the classroom. Selber suggests that we must move beyond the functional and critical literacies so that students can develop rhetorical literacies. A functional literacy occurs when a student “resolves technological impasses confidently and strategically” (p. 67). It is akin to developing the necessary skills to use a computer and its accompanying software. There is no questioning of the technology. The goals of Selber’s critical literacy are for students to become “critically literate” about the dangers of computers and “able to recognize and recognize and articulate the ways power circulates in technological contexts” through a heuristic approach that helps students develop a “metadiscourse” within the “parameters of a critical approach to computer literacy: design cultures, use of contexts, institutional forces, and popular representations” (p. 133). All of which essentially leads to students’ awareness of these elements of the computer, and computer software.

Rhetorical literacy concerns itself with design and evaluation of online awareness. It demonstrates students’ ability to be “reflective producers of technology” (p. 182) and earn agency as users and producers of technology, which is important because both critical and rhetorical literacy leads to empowering users of technology. Empowered users of technology can make better choices about what they use, and how they use it to communicate because they are using the computer as a rhetorical device. Essentially, the computer and its numerous software or communicative uses become part of the students’ arsenal of available means to compose/write. Selber’s comprehensive education differs from the traditional approaches associated with alphabetic text because it attempts to empower students as users and help them view computers, software, and digital spaces as rhetorical.

It is no coincidence that following these strong calls to move away from alphabetic text and the increased reliance upon interfaces and digital spaces for communication that there exists a trend in digital rhetoric to focus on specific technological platforms, their affordances and drawbacks. The focus on technology’s role in rhetoric and composition also introduces concerns about the role of technology in composition classes, as previously observed by Hawisher and Selfe in 1991. When implementing more technology in the composition classroom it must be done to the benefit of students, and not place the use of technology over the purpose of the practice it is associated with, and while these concerns are not new they must always be addressed as the field uses technology available to us in an attempt to develop multiliteracies or digital multiliteracies.

### Multimodal Composition

The NLG, Yancey, and Selber point to areas that warrant the attention of first-year composition instructors in an effort to encourage them to implement assignments that reflect the changing the views of literacy in relation to students’ writing practices and use of technology. To do this they ask composition instructors to create assignments, or at the very least embrace assignments that incorporate new or newer meaning making practices available to students by the advances and development in technology.  These advancements and developments directly impact and change communication and meaning making practices, and as such these practices need to be reflected in first-year composition courses.

Their critique presents a unique challenge because the broader view of literacy dictates that curriculum incorporate writing practices that also must reflect the student’s relationship with technology to develop digital multiliteracies. In an effort to develop multiliteracies students must also become empowered users of technology, which results in discussion about how to achieve this difficult task. What does this curriculum look like and what types of assignments allow for a development of multiliteracies as Yancey and Selber ask? What kinds of assignments would broaden the scope of literacy pedagogy as the NLG urges? Does this curriculum include alphabetic only texts? These are important questions to ask when considering how to approach changes in first-year composition curriculum, and are the driving force behind this dissertation.

 Often the curriculum changes implemented add multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition classes as a means to include new media composing practices. There appears to be a correlation drawn between incorporating or embracing the use of current and available technology and multimodal composition. The two, as I see it, are linked in that the reasoning for embracing both has some overlap. Implementing the use of current and available technology, be it new software, platform, or device in a composition classroom to develop multiliteracies/digital multiliteracies is similar in concept to asking students to compose by mixing modes in an effort to embrace changes in communication practices.   In the years since Yancey’s address and Selber’s book, the field has come around to using and including multimodal composing practices. However, there is still much debate about what is multimodal composition; as a result there is no singular, agreed upon definition. Each definition of multimodal composition presents a different approach and perspective on multimodal composing practices. Each definition and view of multimodal composition, and multimodal composing practices attempt to answer in some part the calls of the scholars and questions mentioned above.

Claire Lutkewitte in *Multimodal composition: A critical sourcebook (2013)* defines multimodal composition as “communication using multiple modes that work purposely to create meaning” (p. 2). The inclusion of multimodal composition practices, and multimodal composition assignments in composition classrooms creates various concerns, such as what we need to pay attention to and what to include as multimodal composition. Lutkewitte warns against treating multimodal composition as an “extension of traditional composition,” which means that while some may see us always having been multimodal this does not mean we can transfer what we know about alphabetic text to multimodal composition. By using different modes to compose, and teach composition the conversation shifts towards how we teach these practices.

To avoid becoming complacent with the concepts of multimodal composition, in *On Multimodality* (2014) Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes urge the field to explore “other possibilities for expression, for representation, for communicating, for making knowledge” (p. 7), Rather than placing too much emphasis on one mode, such as video, Alexander and Rhodes suggest that our focus should be on moving towards different types of multimodal composition practices preparing us to move beyond multimodal. Alexander and Rhodes push for the field to “pay attention to specific rhetorical and production capabilities of new and multimedia” or else we risk not fully understanding the benefits and challenges of using multimodal to understand “literacy and communicative possibilities of the 21st century” (p. 5). Here again we see multimodal composition linked to literacy as demanded by advancements in technology that change our communication and meaning making practices. This raises the level of responsibility instructors have in meeting the specific needs of both current and future students.

Alexander and Rhodes (2014) state that the need to successfully build students’ multiliteracies through multimodal composition practices requires/relies on providing students with:

robust vocabulary of textual, visual, and multimodal meaning-making—a vocabulary that should also include the nontraditional, the alternative, the knowledges of the body, and the avant-garde as part of its critical lexicon (p. 71).

Their observation falls in line with their warnings against fluctuating between treating multimodal composition as a process by which the field either continues to teach the traditional essay or to reconfigure it by only seeing multimodal composition “through the lens of the essay” (p. 45). This was a similar concern of Lutkewitte. If we are composing in different modes, then we need to treat them differently than the alphabetic text only version of composition that we are most familiar with. To view multimodal composition through the lens of the essay is to limit our rhetorical understanding of it. To avoid tying multimodal to practices that will prove to not be meaningful or beneficial to students results in multimodal composition practices that help broaden their scope of practices much in the way the NLG saw the need to do so with literacy pedagogy in 1996.

         According to Jennifer Roswell (2013) in *Working with Multimodality* “we are constantly in the flow of multimodality” (p. 1), which manifests itself in the various ways in which we are able to communicate with each other. Jody Shipka explores this in *Toward a composition made whole (2011)* and notes that “one impetus for curricular change has to do with bridging the gap between the numerous and varied communicative practices in which students routinely engage,” which captures the need of the field to not only stay current, but also relevant. However, this reasoning can at times lead to privileging new media and new technologies as a means to achieve pedagogical goals, which can lead to excluding multimodal composition practices that are not digital. The eagerness to incorporate elements of current communication and composition practices in an effort to find a balance between the communication and composing practices of our students inside and outside the classroom can lead the field to embrace certain practices too quickly. Some may argue that the field of rhetoric and composition does not move to embrace these practices as quickly as they should, but there are valid reasons to being critical. As we hope our students will question and fully understand their relationship to technology and any communication and writing practices as a result of a specific technology, then we too must carefully consider how certain technologies and practices associated with them enhance our communicative practices. As Shipka warns, we should not only concern ourselves with the new, because it is possible that the practices we embrace, such as multimodal composition, might be one we’ve long been participating in and teaching. While it is important to look to our past, the current speed at which technology develops, and influences our communication, writing, and how we make meaning it is impossible not to look at the present with a keen eye to the future. To do this we must look back, while looking forward, which means that while we are implementing multimodal, or multimedia assignments in first-year composition curriculum we must also look for ways to incorporate digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. The next section will dive deeper into additional theories that are both beneficial when teaching multimodal composition and reflect more current scholarship.

For Roswell, the benefits of composing in multiple modes allow us to possess a “level of abstraction and universalization that crosses discipline-specific practices” (p. 2). But then, what does it mean to be multimodal? According to Roswell it means, in part, that we producers aware of “how modes work” and how they work together (p. 3). If we are familiar with different types of modes, then literacy pedagogy and/or multimodal pedagogy must reflect our previous knowledge working with or experience these modes. By treating multimodal composers as producers, scholars can look to producers of these texts in professional settings, such as video editor, etc. Producers at this level inform multimodal pedagogy (p. 148) by helping to draw attention to the fact that other modes outside of words/text only are equally important in communication (p. 147). Roswell, much like Alexander and Rhodes wants equal representation and attention given to all modes in an effort to ensure that pedagogical practices go beyond acknowledging the importance of working with multiple modes (p. 148), and actually give every mode “equal value” (p. 148). This approach is slightly different than others in that to give each mode its due value would require focusing on one mode before mixing them together to compose. The affordance of this is a deeper understanding how each individual mode operates and moves rhetorically before combining it with others. The fact that we, as Roswell states, are always multimodal may equate to our limited understanding at a deeper level of what that multimodality actually is, and without thinking about it rhetorically we may overlook the both the positive and negative attributes of each specific mode we use when composing. This approach places the composition classroom as a space to explore familiar and unfamiliar modes in an effort to reach a greater understanding of them so that communicative practices are strengthened through the practice of multimodal composition.

Similarly, J. Elizabeth Clarke (2009) views the composition classroom as a place where composition practices can develop and strengthen literacies of students. In “The digital imperative: Making the case for a 21st-century pedagogy” Clarke adds to the mulitliteracies conversation by acknowledging digital rhetoric as another literacy students must develop and enhance. She uses Lanham’s *The Electric Word* to support the shift towards images and words in writing and points to web 2.0 technologies as a means to access and allow for exploring new ways to encourage authorial control of writing (p. 28). Assignments such as the E-Portfolio are highlighted as a means for “discussions of ownership of digital material” (p. 29). Clarke goes so far as to describe the composition classroom as an “emerging space for digital rhetoric” and views this as one way to develop students’ literacy in digital rhetoric. If students are composing in digital spaces, then they should also be aware of theories and practices in the realm of digital rhetoric, which falls in line directly with the idea that a comprehensive education of multiliteracies must reflect the growth of knowledge in digital rhetoric. It should be noted that within an E-portfolio there are elements of composing by mixing modes, which enhances its appeal as an assignment and practice to be included in first-year composition curriculum because it takes a familiar concept or assignment and moves it into the 21st century.

It is no coincidence that following these strong statements in support of moving away from alphabetic text, and relying upon interfaces and digital spaces for communication that some in digital rhetoric focus more on the technology than the persuasive practices. Clarke’s argument that the composition classroom is a space to incorporate concepts of digital rhetoric also makes it a space to include procedural rhetoric, and electracy. Can a multimodal assignment provide students the opportunity to practice composing in different modes, developing multiliteracies, using new/different software, questioning their relationship to technology, and practicing composing in non-alphabetic text? This is as an important question to ask as any in relation to first-year composition curriculum, because first-year composition curriculum must value new writing practices associated with specific technologies, while still valuing the writing practices of the past. It can be understood that writing and composing has always been multimodal, but when mixing modes in new media, the focus tends to be on newer communication and composition practices. The result of this can be the exclusion of  other types of multimodal composition practices, specifically those that do not require use of digital environments. It is important to remember that it’s possible to teach students to compose by mixing modes that are not digital only.

### Digital Rhetoric

In an attempt to better understand a potential framework for this study the following pages review definitions, similar movements, and areas of concern within digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, electracy, digital literacies, and composition pedagogy from 1991 to 2018. In order to provide insight on scholarship that influenced multimodal composition, this includes more recent scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy as potential theories and practices that can help multimodal composition evolve.

Digital rhetoric, with its various definitions and deeper understandings of the role of technology both in and out of the classroom, often preoccupies itself with theory that is critical and challenging to the ever-changing technological scope of our daily lives. Digital literacies, as a result of advancements in technology and continuous integration in the classroom, concerns itself with developing literacies that are deemed necessary because of the ways in which our daily lives involve interacting with an interface that we must navigate in some meaningful way. The composition classroom, as a result, is often the space that allows for students and instructors to apply specific definitions and approaches to digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy to specific assignments.

 Whereas digital rhetoric theorizes the changing technological scope of our daily lives in communication practices and rhetorical awareness, procedural rhetoric concerns itself with the computational practices of using a computer, or software. Procedural rhetoric, defined by Ian Bogost as “the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures” (p. 3). Procedural Rhetoric is equally as persuasive as verbal and visual forms of communication. Electracy moves onward by addressing the participatory nature of composition as a result of video culture. Scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy provide a framework for new or different concepts to address and incorporate into first-year composition curriculum, because they allow multimodal composition to evolve as a practice to include more current scholarship in related subfields of rhetoric and composition.

In 1993 Richard Lanham coined the term *digital rhetoric* in his book *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts.* While he does not supply a specific definition he introduces the concept of a computer as a “rhetorical device as well as a logical one” in use. He notes that the computer is seen as logical, but not rhetorical. He views the electronic word as a means to electronic expression and as such it fits within the Western Arts & Letters. Lanham attempts not only to legitimize the electronic word, and electronic expressions, but also creates the space for the work that follows under his term of digital rhetoric. He focuses more on the manipulation of text and the results of moving text to the screen from the page, which is understandable given that this piece first appeared in 1992, and again in 1993. This suggests that composition is changing, and with the computer there will be different types of compositions. Equally as important was his view of the computer as a rhetorical device, which allowed for scholarship in digital rhetoric. The scholarship in the field of digital rhetoric varies, and as such several different approaches to the study of digital rhetoric exist resulting in several different working definitions and understandings of digital rhetoric.

In 2005, James P. Zappen attempts to differentiate between traditional and digital rhetoric in “Digital rhetoric: Toward an integrated theory.” He defines digital rhetoric as “traditional rhetorical strategies function and how they are reconfigured in digital” (p. 319). Zappen addresses the difficulty of applying traditional rhetoric to digital media, and sees digital rhetoric as the integration of rhetoric’s 2,000 year old history with constraints and affordances of digital environments (p. 319). This definition helped to legitimize applying traditional rhetoric to the new digital landscape.

Five years later Elizabeth Losh approaches digital rhetoric differently. As a result of developments in technology and an increased reliance and uses of technology in our daily lives, we begin to see definitions of digital rhetoric that attempt to address the shift and implications of digital rhetoric. In Losh’s 2009 book *Virtualpolitik : An electronic history of government media-making in a time of war, scandal, disaster, miscommunication, and mistakes* she provides a comprehensive four-part definition of digital rhetoric:

1.     The conventions of new digital genres that are used for everyday discourse, as well as for special occasions, in average people’s lives.

2.     Public rhetoric, often in the form of political messages from government institutions, which is represented or recorded through digital technology and disseminated via electronic distributed networks.

3.     The emerging scholarly discipline concerned with the rhetorical interpretation of computer-generated media as objects of study.

4.     Mathematical theories of communication from the field of information science, many of which attempt to quantify the amount of uncertainty in a given linguistic exchange or the likely paths through which messages travel. (p. 47 - 48)

This definition encompasses several aspects of scholarship within digital rhetoric. It touches on digital genres as a means of discourse, public rhetoric/political messages distributed through networks, the computer generated media becoming objects of study in their own right, and the use of mathematical theories of communication within information science to gauge linguistic exchanges. The importance of this comprehensive definition is that it details the difference in approach and understanding of what digital rhetoric is, what it can do, and ultimately how it is interdisciplinary.

Carolyn Handa’s 2013 book *The Multimediated Rhetoric of the Internet: Digital Fusion*  approaches digital rhetoric as practicing rhetoric in a digital space that incorporates visual and textual elements. Specifically Handa defines digital rhetoric as: “simply (or maybe not so simply) traditional rhetoric applied visually as well as textually. It is not another form of rhetoric. We do not switch from digital to traditional rhetoric. All of the components we are accustomed to discussing in traditional rhetoric, especially having to do with style and arrangement for the purposes of conducting logical, discursive, persuasive arguments, are elements that can occur visually” (p. 18). This definition views digital rhetoric as traditional rhetorical practices in digital spaces. Handa’s inclusion of the visual elements attempts to account for these types elements one can use in a digital space. This is one example of the overlap between visual and digital rhetoric.  Handa’s view of digital rhetoric as rhetoric occurring in a different space tends to keep the field of rhetoric in line with Aristotle’s definition. While definitions need not necessarily break away from rhetoric’s past there does exist an area to address new concerns as a result of advances in technology and our uses of such technology.

Porter in “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric and Human-Computer Interaction.” (2008) addresses the role of delivery in digital rhetoric. He sees digital rhetoric as a field that can reclaim delivery. He argues the importance of delivery to digital rhetoric, by writing that “technical knowledge is integral to digital rhetoric” (p. 220). He points out that this type of knowledge is not mechanical or procedural, but the intersection where knowledge and rhetorical/critical questions meet (Porter, 2008, p. 220). The result of this meeting is the need for what Porter describes as a theory of rhetoric that should “encourage productive thinking about how to communicate with others” (p. 220).  Reclaiming delivery, as it was once a somewhat forgotten canon, is about bringing in useful rhetorical theory in an effort to produce better communicators. As technology develops and becomes increasingly important in our use of it, and reliance on it we too need to become better communicators with it while maintaining the critical awareness to question it. What we see here is that definitions and understandings of digital rhetoric shift what we teach and how we teach. It does not necessarily replace what is previously taught, or associated with composition. In some cases it puts new importance on preexisting ideas. In others it may push us to think of older theories in different or new ways as demanded by its use in a new space.

Doug Eyman in Chapter 1 of *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* (2015) also makes a connection between digital rhetoric and visual rhetoric, based on “the sense that a focus outside of the tradition of written and spoken argument broadens the available opportunities to apply rhetorical theory to new objects of study.” Eyman continues by linking visual and digital rhetoric by writing that “visual rhetoric also draws on theory from art and graphic design as well as psychology (gestalt theory), bringing rhetoric into these spheres even as they contribute to the overall rhetorical methods,” and that since digital rhetoric includes visuals “it can align itself with these fields, as well as other technical fields—such as computer science, game design, and Internet research—that don’t usually take up rhetorical theory.” This approach continues to incorporate and promote interdisciplinary practices. Eyman’s definition of digital rhetoric also accounts for the performance of composing and distributing, using a method of delivery that is not only based on speaking or writing. The implications of digital spaces suggests a reliance on the visuals used and perceived that also find themselves closely related to methods of delivery. This results in the reemergence of the importance of delivery. For composition it means thinking about delivery in different ways, and for teaching composition this means teaching delivery.

More recently Hess and Davisson in *Theorizing Digital Rhetoric* (2018) defines digital rhetoric as “the study of meaning-making, persuasion, or identification as expressed through language, bodies, machines, and texts that are created, circulated, or experiences through or regarding digital technologies” (p. 6). They go on to explain that digital rhetoric does not change rhetoric, rather it “changes the nature of how rhetoric is expressed” (p. 7). The importance of digital rhetoric is not only the ways in which it changes how rhetoric is expressed, but also how it emphasizes the ways in which “technologies constrain, structure, and enable speaking in fundamentally new ways” (p. 6). This definition of digital rhetoric includes how we compose and communicate in digital environments but how communication is delivered, and circulated or shared through and with digital platforms, software, and devices.

### Procedural Rhetoric

While scholars attempt to define digital rhetoric, Ian Bogost argues for the creation of a different branch of rhetoric. In his 2007 book *Persuasive games: The expressive power of videogames* Bogost argues for procedural rhetoric, which he argues is a necessary “theory of procedural rhetoric is needed to make commensurate judgments about the software systems we encounter every day,” and to also to “allow a more sophisticated procedural authorship with both persuasion and expression as its goal” (p. 29). Procedural rhetoric can build procedural literacies, which Michael Mateas (2005) in “Procedural Literacy: Educating the New Media Practitioner” defines procedural literacy as the “ability to read and write processes, to engage procedural representation and aesthetics, to understand the interplay between the culturally-embedded practice of human meaning-making and technology-mediated processes” (p. 101).

As stated earlier in this chapter, Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as “the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures” (p. 3). This definition is closely linked to the procedural computational practices. Bogost views these practices equally as persuasive as verbal and visual forms of communication. However, rather than the persuasion done in alphabetic text or multiple modes with a knowledge of language and images it is achieved as a result of the procedural nature of computer code. The code may appear to us in forms we know, but it is essentially the result of code. Therefore, to compose media within a computer is “the art of using processes persuasively” (p. 3). His work in procedural rhetoric pushes scholars to move beyond the view that the technologies we use are simply tools available to us. Bogost view of procedural rhetoric as the “practice of using processes persuasively,” due to the nature of the digital spaces we compose in, and inhabit, make it impossible to separate any understanding of digital rhetoric from the processes we engage in to accomplish communication. Bogost specifically applies procedural rhetoric to video games, but the concept of persuasion through software, and procedural processes ought be included under the umbrella of digital rhetoric, and as a potential theory to inform pedagogical practices in composition.

### Electracy

As Bogost argues for procedural rhetoric, Sarah Arroyo attempts to shift the focus towards electracy. In Arroyo’s (2013) book *Participatory Composition: Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy* uses Gregory Ulmer’s concept of electracy as shediscusses participatory composition, and the connectedness of students that alters composition classes. Ulmer (2003) in *Internet Invention From Literacy to Electracy* views electracy as “to digital media what literacy is to print” (p. xii). Ulmer views the lack of consensus about teaching new media and an understanding that “new forms require new institutional practices” as the basis for the necessity of electracy. Ulmer believes an education based on electracy is needed to better understand new media practices to participate in a “virtual civic sphere” (p. xiii). Electracy is the literacy needed to better understand the electric media, multimedia, and digital media. It is needed to understand new media practices because theories only related to print literacy can’t simply be applied to the new electric media.

Arroy uses Ulmer’s electracy to explore the connectedness of current online culture that includes what Arroyo labels “video culture” (p. 1), but the concept of electracy is not limited to it, or other forms of communication. Rather, Arroyo uses it as a theoretical framework because for her the concept of electracy goes beyond digital literacy. Electracy includes “civic engagement, community building, and participation” (p. 1). The idea that a specific type of literacy is now needed to enter the civic sector speaks to the increased usage of electric and digital communicative practices. The importance of print and print literacy has not diminished, but that does not mean we can ignore literacies related to more recent practices.

In Arroyo’s work we see a continued desire to create scholarship that reflects current writing practices. If electracy is different than print literacy, then the time for a theory to turn into a practice commonly associated with pedagogy pertaining to literacy and composition is not needed with electracy, because the “notion changes from a theory into a practice to a practicing theory as it is emerging” (p. 104). The approach to how we teach in electracy is different than print literacy, because as Arroyo argues electracy offers us a chance to work with “established forms as well as inventing new ones as they become timely and necessary” (p. 111). This makes electracy important because it attempts to include composition practices as they happen and are needed in real time. This includes, but is not limited to writing outside of the classroom on multiple platforms. Where Shipka notes the desire to bridge the gap between the writing practices of students inside and outside the classroom, Arroyo sees electracy as the bridge we continually try to build with theories and approaches to incorporating writing practices outside of those that include alphabetic text only. If electracy offers us the chance to practice a theory as it is developed, then this approach should find itself as embedded in first-year curriculum as digital rhetoric, and procedural rhetoric.

This review of literature provides an overview of changes in literacy pedagogy as a result of a multiliteracies approach. Implementing a multiliteracies approach to writing, in conjunction with advancements in technology, resulted in the addition of multimodal assignments as part of first-year composition curriculum. This chapter also reviews scholarship directly addressing writing in digital environments by addressing the relationship between rhetoric and technology, which points to a gap between theory and practice. To begin to close that gap, more of the concepts discussed by scholars in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy must be put into practice alongside the digital multimodal assignments intended to develop digital multiliteracies, because scholarship in these fields account for our relationship with technology, and rhetorical choices made within digital platforms and software. In the next chapter I discuss in detail the study’s methodology, and presents the findings of the survey and interviews

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## Chapter 3: Methodology and Findings: Presentation of Data Collected from Surveys and Interviews

In an effort to better understand how digital multimodal composition assignments are implemented in first-year composition curriculum, this study  researches how, if it all, current scholarship and theories in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy inform and/or influence the implementation and teaching of digital multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum. The aim of the study is to research the gap between theory and application. Specifically how, if at all, digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy inform digital multimodal assignments as they are implemented, taught and assessed in first-year composition courses.

I conducted a mixed methods approach to answer the research questions. The mixed methods approach includes an analysis of survey responses, and follow-up interviews with 9 survey participants to answer the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, do digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy influence composition curriculum and approaches to digital literacies in the field of rhetoric and composition?

2.  What types of assignments and platforms allow for an attempt to combine theory and application in the composition classroom?

### Qualitative Research Approach

Abbas Tashakkori and John W. Creswell (2007) in “Editorial: The New Era of Mixed Methods” define a mixed methods research study as “research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study” (p. 4). A mixed methods approach, using an online survey and interviewing participants based on their survey responses, was chosen for this study because it allows me to use both quantitative and qualitative methods in an effort to fully understand and answer the research questions. The intended outcome for using a mixed methods approach is to use the data collected via online survey to gain a better understanding of how universities of different Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education implement multimodal assignments in their first-year composition curriculums.

An online survey created using Qualtrics was emailed to desired participants. These participants include anyone currently teaching a first-year composition course and/or the director of a first-year composition program at universities and community colleges. The survey was administered and remained available to participants for a duration of five months. An online survey was chosen because it allowed me to reach a wider audience over a five month period. This method was selected to collect data about multimodal assignments in first-year composition courses because it provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the approaches to multimodal composition at the programmatic level and in the classroom.

The survey provided context and background for each university, asking for things such as if instructors taught in a standard curriculum, which elements of the curriculum were standard, if rubrics were used to grade, if multimodal assignments were digital, major or minor assignments, and how many multimodal assignments were taught each semester.The survey questions, which are available in Appendix A, are aimed at gaining knowledge about the types of classrooms composition classes are taught in, and the ratio of text-only assignments to multimodal or multimedia assignments. This information provided me the opportunity to analyze how the classroom set up may or may not impact the inclusion of multimodal, video, and sound assignments.

Participants who indicated they would like to continue to be part of the study were considered for an interview based on their responses. Interviews were conducted via telephone from September 19 - 28 of 2017. Nine WPAs and first-year composition instructors participated in follow up interviews. The interviews allowed me to collect detailed information that assisted in researching the link between theories in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy and what is practiced and included in first-year composition curriculum.

During the interview cycle, participants were asked to provide information about how they implement, introduce, and assess multimodal assignments. The data collected was analyzed by finding themes and patterns in both survey responses and interviews. This lens allowed me to analyze multimodal composition assignments, learning outcomes, rubrics, and guiding scholarship and practices as provided to me through interviews in an effort to determine which theories are turned into practice.

### Participants

Potential participants were WPAs, and first-year composition instructors at Research 1 (R1) universities, R2 higher research activity universities, and R3 moderate research universities and community colleges. Surveys were distributed to universities of different research levels and community colleges in attempt to pull from a diverse group, and compare and contrast first-year curriculum at different types of research universities and community colleges with varying goals and student populations. WPAs were selected to as target participants because of their role in developing first-year composition curriculum. First-year composition instructors were selected because of their role as the people who carry out first-year composition program goals and learning outcomes.

### Data Collection Tools

Qualtrics online survey software was used to create the survey distributed to first-year composition instructors and WPAs at universities and community colleges. Beginning in March 2017, links to the survey were sent out in an email to WPAs, to share with first-year composition instructors at their universities and to the WPA listserv. The survey closed on October 23, 2017, with invitations sent out only once.  This provided seven months for participants to participate in the survey. Qualtrics software provides a report of survey responses, including providing data for each question asked in the survey. Responses from both partially and completed surveys are provided in the report. As a result, in chapter 4 I provide additional information on the number of completed surveys, and which questions have a higher number of responses due to the partially completed surveys included in the Qualtrics report. After a thematic analysis of survey responses, nine survey participants were selected to be interviewed. Requests for interviews were sent to participants from in September and October of 2017. Interviews were conducted at the availability of the participants and took place in September and October of 2017. Interviews were conducted via telephone. Permission was granted from each interview participant to record the interview to be transcribed and analyzed after all data was collected for this dissertation study.  Audacity was used to record phone interviews. Interviews were transcribed using oTranscribe, an online transcribing service that does not save transcriptions. Transcripts of interviews, survey responses, and raw data were downloaded and saved to an encrypted external hard drive. I used Nvivo to code the transcribed interviews, which compiled the coded sections to identify themes and patterns.

### Procedures

IRB approval to conduct this study was given on March 6, 2017. To begin the study, the online survey was created. The goal of the survey was to collect data about the curriculum of a university of community college first-year composition program. Specifically, if multimodal assignments are included in their first-year composition curriculum, if the curriculum is standard, how many multimodal assignments are taught, what types of multimodal assignments are taught, and how multimodal projects are assessed. The link to the online survey was sent to WPAs from March 31, 2017 to April 7, 2017. WPAs were identified based on the location of the university in an attempt to collect data from a diverse population. The link to the online survey was sent to the WPA listserv April 11, 2017. The online survey was open for five months, and closed on September 17, 2017. Upon closure of the online survey, responses were analyzed to identify participants for a follow- up interview.

Table 1 Summary of Survey Participants

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of Survey****Participants** | **Number Agreeing to Participate in Survey** | **Number of Surveys****Started** | **Number of Surveys Completed** | **Survey Completion %** |
| 83 | 82 | 76 | 58 | 76.31% |

The online survey drew 83 unique users; meaning 83 participants successfully began the survey by reading about the dissertation study. 82 participants agreed to continue the survey, and 76 of the 82 successfully started the survey. In total, 58 surveys were completed. Survey participants are WPAs, professors, lecturers and graduate student instructors. The survey responses were initially analyzed on September 17, 2017. At this time, survey responses were analyzed to select interview participants. Of the 58 completed survey responses, 21 participants indicated they were willing to be interviewed at a later date and continue to participate in the study.

Table 2 Summary of Survey Participant Demographic

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Answer** | **%** | **Count** |
| Writing Program Administrator | 34.21 | 26 |
| Graduate Instructor | 27.63% | 21 |
| Professor | 21.05 | 16 |
| Lecturer | 17.11% | 13 |
| Total | 100% | 76 |

Interview participants were selected based on their responses. WPAs and instructors were selected to provide a programmatic and classroom perspective on multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum. To avoid data saturation and attempt to collect data from multiple perspectives, survey participants selected for interviews that teach in both standard and nonstandard first-year composition curriculums, teach multimodal composition in first-year composition courses, assess multimodal assignments by using rubrics and not using rubrics.

The survey responses of participants indicated that their first-year composition curriculum included one or more multimodal composition assignments that were major and/or minor assignments, and went through a change in curriculum to include multimodal assignments. Since one of the goals of the study is to research how multimodal assignments were implemented, and what scholars and/or scholarship informs their inclusion, it was important to select survey participants that teach multimodal assignments and/or were part of including multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum.

Table 3 Interview Participants

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Position** | **Last Taught FYC** | **University** | **Location** |
| Interview Participant #1 | WPA | Fall 2017 | Baccalaureate College | Pacific Coast University |
| Interview Participant #2 | WPA | 5 years ago | Doctoral Granting | Midwestern University |
| Interview Participant #3 | Associate Professor | Spring 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Northeast University |
| Interview Participant #4 | Teaching Professor | Fall Quarter 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Pacific/West Coast University |
| Interview Participant #5 | Assistant Professor | Spring 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Texas University |
| Interview Participant #6 | Associate Professor | Spring 2016 | Doctoral Granting | Pacific/West Coast University |
| Interview Participant #7 | Assistant Professor | Fall 2017 | Associate College | Southern Community College |
| Interview Participant #8 | Assistant Professor | Fall 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Midwest University |
| Interview Participant #9 | Lecturer | Fall 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Pacific/West Coast University |

### Thematic Analysis

I used a thematic analysis to analyze the data collected from survey responses and interviews. In “Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria” by Nowell et al (2017) thematic analysis is defined as a “qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions” (p. 2). It is a method of analysis that can be used for “identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting themes found within a data set” (p. 2). Additionally a thematic analysis provides flexibility when coding and identifying themes and patterns which was necessary when analyzing data collected from survey responses and interviews. Survey responses were analyzed to find themes and patterns among responses to questions about the curriculum.

To familiarize myself with the interviews I transcribed them and read them before I began the process of coding. While reading the transcribed interviews I began to identify repeated words and ideas to describe the implementation and teaching of multimodal composition. The repeated words and ideas helped to identify themes in the transcribed interviews. I coded 50 nodes in Nvivo based on interview participants’ responses to interview questions. Many of the codes overlap based on practice and concept. These were narrowed down to the most commonly stated approaches to implementing and teaching multimodal composition in first-year composition. The two most common approaches to teaching multimodal composition was introducing it as part of genre theory, or rhetorical theory, before students remediate a traditional research paper previously written during the semester. I arrived at this understanding of the two common approaches based on interview participants answers when asked how they introduce the concept of multimodality. Instructors commonly mentioned using genre theory to introduce multimodal composition or rhetorical theory, such as the rhetorical situation, to help students understand which modes might best fit the situation.

### Ethical Considerations and Limitations

To maintain the anonymity of survey and interview participants no identifying markers, such as their names and the names of the university were used in this dissertation.Limitations of this study are a result of a small data sample size of all the universities and community colleges that teach first-year composition. This is limiting because any findings are only based on this small sample size.

### Survey and Interview Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which first-year composition programs implement multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition curriculum. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How, if it all, do digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy influence first-year composition curriculum and approaches to digital literacies in the field of rhetoric and composition?

2. What types of assignments and platforms allow for an attempt to combine theory and application in the composition classroom?

At the start of this research study, I believed that there existed a general agreement regarding first-year composition curriculum including multimodal assignments in an effort to build 21st century literacies as a result of new and/or newer technology used in the process of composing and communicating. The NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies published in 2005 defines multimodal literacies and provides an overview of the benefits of multimodal assignments as an integral part of developing student literacies when it states “the use of different modes of expression in student work should be integrated into the overall literacy goals of the curriculum and appropriate for time and resources invested” (NCTE, 2005). Identifying the mixing of modes as an important part of developing literacies, and clearly stating it should part of a student’s literacy goals, helped to put an end to the discussion regarding the inclusion of composing by mixing modes in composition curriculum. The WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (v3.0) released in 2014 presents the practices, research, and theory of composition teachers in postsecondary education. The statement identifies rhetorical knowledge as “the basis of composing” (WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0). It specifically addresses the use of technology and multiple modes under Rhetorical Knowledge and Process, whereby students should be able to “understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences,” and “adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities” (WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0). The specificity of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (V3.0) gives credence to the notion that multimodal pedagogies are accepted among composition instructors and WPAs that multimodal composition and therefore multimodal assignments should not only be part of first-year composition curriculum but that they should also be a regular practice in first-year composition classrooms. The WPA Outcomes Statement does not provide specific information about types of assignments to include in first-year composition curriculum to meet the outcomes; rather it gives an overview of desired outcomes for the students after completion of a composition course.

This study sought to understand better how first-year composition instructors promote the development of students’ digital literacies and integrating multimodal projects into their curriculum. As described above, to research and evaluate multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition, an online survey was distributed to Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) and first-year composition instructors. Question 11 of the online survey asks participants “How many, if any,  assignments require students to create multimodal compositions are part of the FYC curriculum you teach?”

Table 4 Summary of Responses to Survey Question 11

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of Multimodal Assignments in FYC Curriculum** | **Participant Response to Question 11** | **Percentage of Participant Response to Question 11** | **Percentage of FYC Curriculum with 1 or More Multimodal Assignments in FYC Curriculum**  |
| 0 | 12 | 20% | 0% |
| 1 | 21 | 35.00% | 35% |
| 2 | 13 | 21.67% | 21.67% |
| 3 | 6 | 10.00% | 10% |
| 4 or more | 8 | 13.33% | 13.33% |
| Total | 60 | 100% | 80% |

 Responses indicate that 80% of participants teach a first-year composition curriculum that includes at least one multimodal assignment. Of the 48 survey participants with a first-year curriculum that includes at least one multimodal assignment, 27 (45%) teach a first-year composition curriculum that includes two or more multimodal assignments. Compared to the number of instructors who teach composition courses in the U.S., the sample size is small. However, the high percentage of first-year composition curriculums with at least one multimodal assignment indicates multimodal composition is common in first-year composition curriculums.

Table 5 Types of Multimodal Composition Assignments

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of Multimodal Composition Assignments Taught in FYC Curriculum of Survey Participants** | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Website based assignments | 45 | 27.78% |
| Graphic based assignments | 40 | 24.69% |
| Video based assignments | 36 | 22.22% |
| Audio based assignments | 35 | 21.60% |
| None | 6 | 3.70% |
| Total | 162 | 100 |

 Survey responses from the 58 participants that stated the first-year composition curriculum at their institution included at least one multimodal assignment identified a variety of types of assignments that are taught as multimodal. Participants could select more than type of multimodal assignment, which accounts for the number of total responses (162).Website based assignments made up 27.8% of responses, with graphic based assignments as second most common multimodal practice with 24.69%. Video based assignments made up 22.22%, and audio based multimodal assignments made up 21.60% of responses. The multimodal composition assignments as part of their first-year composition curriculum are both major and minor assignments. 21 of 56 total (37.5%) participants answered that the multimodal assignments in their curriculum are major assignments. 6, (10.71%) answered that the multimodal assignments in their curriculum are minor assignments. 20 (51.79%) participants answered that the multimodal composition assignments in their curriculum are a mix of major and minor assignments.

Table 6 Summary of How Instructors Provide Feedback

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of Feedback** | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Written comments | 44 | 20.09% |
| Conference outside of class | 39 | 17.81% |
| In class discussion | 36 | 16.44% |
| Rubric | 34 | 15.53% |
| Comments delivered via course management system | 33 | 15.07% |
| Audio comments | 14 | 6.39% |
| Video Comments | 12 | 5.48% |
| Other | 7 | 3.2% |
| Total | 219 | 100% |

Instructor feedback on the multimodal composition assignments provided to students varied. The most common way feedback was given to students was in the form of written comments. Conferences outside of class and in class discussion followed. 15.07% of responses recorded delivering comments through a course management. Audio comments, and video comments were the lowest used method of providing feedback to students. Participants were allowed to check as many of the different methods they use to deliver feedback to students on multimodal composition assignments.

The survey provided an overview of the frequency and type of multimodal projects taught in first-year composition classes along with the methods used to evaluate them. To better understand how multimodal composition is implemented and taught in first-year composition classes survey participants were then interviewed. Of the 58 participants who completed the online survey, 27 indicated they would continue participating in the study if contacted for a follow-up interview. Of these 27 participants, 10 were selected to participate in a follow-up interview. A total of 9 survey participants accepted interview requests. Interviews took place in September and October of 2017. Interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted approximately twenty minutes. Interview participants answered seven to eight questions depending on their survey responses. Each participant answered questions about when they last taught first-year composition, the scholars and practices that influence their pedagogy, how they assess multimodal assignments, and follow-up questions to their individual survey responses. Due to survey responses demonstrating a high number of first-year composition curriculums including at least one multimodal assignment 8 of the 9 survey participants interviewed taught at least one multimodal composition assignment. A total of 8 out of 9 interview participants taught a first-year composition course within the last year. 7 of the WPAs and instructors interviewed were teaching a first-year composition during the Fall 2017 semester/quarter. The only survey participant interviewed that did not recently teach a first-year composition course is participant #2, a WPA at a Midwestern university who has not taught a first-year composition course in five years. Interviewing WPAs and first-year composition instructors who recently taught a first-year composition course benefits this study because any multimodal assignments or practices they assign to their students reflect their most recent or current approach to multimodality.

### Standard Curriculum in First-Year Composition

In order to understand the extent to which the participants could integrate their own assignments into the first-year composition program, the survey includes a question that prompts participants to identify if they teach in a standard curriculum, and, if so,what elements of their curriculum are standard. I wanted to find out how much control they had over the curriculum and how they worked within the parameters of a standard curriculum, or standard elements in their curriculum. The survey responses of 6 of the interview participants indicated in their survey that they teach in a curriculum they described as standard, but the elements of the curriculum that are standard vary. The table below identifies the standard elements of the first-year composition program as described by interview participants.

Table 7 Interview Participants

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Interview Participant** | **Standard FYC** |
| Interview Participant #1 | Syllabus and Learning Outcomes |
|  Interview Participant #2 | Handbook and Assignment Prompts |
| Interview Participant #3 | E-Portfolio |
| Interview Participant #6 | Learning Outcomes |
| Interview Participant #8 | Handbook |
| Interview Participant #9 | Portfolio/E-Portfolio |

Interview participant #1 is a WPA whose program uses a standard syllabus and learning outcomes that are specific to the needs of their student population. Similarly, interview participant #6 also teaches in a first-year composition program that uses standard learning outcomes but has flexibility in the assignments taught. The instructors at the university interview participant #8 teaches at use the same handbook, but no other element of their curriculum is identified as standard.

Interview participant #2 is a WPA of a program with a curriculum where assignment prompts for textbooks and the syllabus are standard, but these are primarily intended for graduate instructors. Veteran faculty have more freedom and are not expected to follow the assignment prompts. Participant #3 teaches in a first-year composition program where the only standard component is the e-portfolio, which is also part of a university-wide initiative. Students at this university use the same software to publish their work online.  The standard element of the curriculum of the program #9 teaches in is also an end of semester portfolio, which is under the process of becoming an e-portfolio. The standard elements of first-year composition curriculum these six interview participants teach vary, but within their programs exists an opportunity for instructors to implement their own approaches and ideas as to how to achieve their learning outcomes, the e-portfolio, or prompts. This freedom suggests that the standard elements in their program or curriculum do not hinder their approach to multimodality in their classroom.

### Multimodal Composition Assignments in First-Year Composition Curriculum

Every interview participant teaches a multimodal composition assignment. The type of assignment varies by instructor, but 8 of the 9 interview participants teach a first-year composition curriculum that features the multimodal composition as a major assignment. The first-year composition curriculum of participant #7 includes a multimodal assignment that is not a major assignment. Rather, it is  a minor assignment in terms of points that contributes to a larger assignment.

The first-year composition curriculum of 7 of the interview participants includes a multimodal assignment that is first a text heavy written work, which students convert into a multimodal project.  To gain insight into how multimodal composition assignments are taught, and if they are taught guided by concepts explored in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy it is important to know if assignments are remediated text heavy assignments. Table 7 provides the number of multimodal assignments taught by interview participants and whether or not they begin as text heavy assignments.

Table 8 Number of Multimodal Assignments Taught

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Interview Participant** | **Number of Multimodal Assignments Taught** | **Original or Text Heavy/Only First** | **Major/Minor Assignment** |
| Interview Participant #1 | 2 | Original | 1 major1 minor (throughout semester) |
| Interview Participant #2 | 1 | Text Heavy/Only First | Major |
| Interview Participant #3 | 1 | Compilation of assignments (e-portfolio) | Minor |
| Interview Participant #4 | 2 | Text Heavy (Major)Original (Minor) | Minor (WM)Major (G3A) |
| Interview Participant #5 | 1 | Text Heavy/Only First | Major |
| Interview Participant #6 | 1  | Students Choose | Major |
| Interview Participant #7 | 1 | Text Heavy/Only First | Minor (10%), but part of major assignment |
| Interview Participant #8 | 1 | Text Heavy/Only First | Major |
| Interview Participant #9 | 1 | Text Heavy (FYC 2) Original (FYC 1) | Major |

 Students in the first-year composition program at the midwestern university where #2 serves as WPA write an analytical research paper throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, students must participate in a symposium where they present their research. Students present their research by giving a scripted talk while images move behind them on a screen, similar to a TED Talk. This is the multimodal assignment in their curriculum.

Interview participant #2 describes the analytical research assignment as a“ major assignment that is a scaffolded analytical research essay that works through several stages over the course of the semester,” which includes a “secondary related assignment that's multimodal” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). The presentation of their research at the symposium accounts for 30% of the student’s grade, making it a major assignment, but it is not an assignment every student in their program completes.

Interview participant #2 explains this by stating they do have a standard curriculum, but “instructors with significant teaching experiences, or instructors who are faculty members or instructors who are lecturers make informed changes to the way they teach the class. Each section taught by veteran instructors usually “follows through with an assignment, either exactly or much like the symposium. A few don't do it at all, and that's ok with me,” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

Students presenting their research is important to this program, as evidenced by the total percentage points that assignment is worth, but the multimodal element of this assignment is not mandatory in every composition class. By pointing out that full-time faculty members or lecturers, essentially any instructor with a lot of experience is not required to participate and/or include a multimodal assignment in their curriculum suggests that multimodal composition assignments are likely taught by graduate instructors who are also new instructors, because they would not have the freedom to change the curriculum in this first-year composition program. The description of the assignment as alphabetic text first, and then repackaged as a script to be recited with moving images playing in the background makes this a multimodal assignment that is limited to two modes of communication, images and text, assuming text appears on the images on screen behind the student. This format does not support video images, and so this multimodal assignment is similar to a slideshow. More important, since veteran instructors have freedom to not teach a multimodal assignment it is highly likely a number of students in their composition program may take a composition course where they are not required to compose by mixing modes. The WPA at this university understands that this is a possibility, but does not view it as problematic because “it's a very small number of sections where this might happen” and while “they're probably doing something that I would not identify as multimodal” their experience affords them “the kind of discretion to design the course the way they like” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

The community college instructor interviewed (#7) approaches multimodality in a similar way. This instructor’s students must present their research, but they do not present in a symposium. Rather, they create a slideshow using PowerPoint or other similar software and present their work to the class. However, they must create a poster using their slides to be placed on campus where their fellow students and other instructors are encouraged to leave feedback.

Rather than spending class time learning about how to make a PowerPoint presentation students “work on layout,” and think about “how do you organize a poster board” in terms of “from left to right, top to bottom, how do you read them, how do you emphasize one infographic over another, where does the works cited page go”(J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017).This instructor goes on to explain that the end result is students preparing boards to be put up for a week on campus and “the idea is that they're getting feedback from me” and “then they get feedback from the audience -- people who walk by and who put up sticky notes on their boards”(J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017)

This approach to multimodality is based on audience with a focus on showing “the students how wide and varied their audiences is, and how different people have different reactions to what they say” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017). This instructor understands that  this approach to multimodality is dependent on audience participation, but he explicitly uses it to “make the point that if you get no feedback on your board, that's going to tell you something. That you picked a topic that your audience isn't really interested in or your topic is presented in a way that doesn't engage the audience. In the absence of feedback is feedback” *(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017). This multimodal assignment may not allow for the use of sound or video, but it does require students to think about document design, including arrangement and visual representation of information, and audience engagement.

The first-year composition curriculum of interview participant #9 also requires students to turn their research paper into something multimodal. In this first-year composition course students write a research paper with an intended audience of people in their discipline, and then they do what this instructor refers to as a “popularization of that project, in which they put together some sort of either poster, or usually an actual presentation some elements there, adapted tones that they present them to a more popular audience” *(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 21, 2017). Students share their work as part of a first-year composition research festival. This instructor does not dictate which modes students must use, but instead allows students to choose which they feel most comfortable with based on previous knowledge or experience. In this major assignment more attention is given to the process of students rethinking their project by presenting it using different modes. The instructor explains that students often “have a project and then they move on from that project and never think about it again, and they think of the work as kind of fixed and it kind of  having to take a project and transmit it to another mode I think makes them rethink it and use different parts of their brain” *(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 21, 2017).

Interview participant #8 teaches in a program that uses the same handbook, but does not have any other standard requirements. This instructor follows a similar pattern of requiring students to remediate a text heavy paper. Students in part one of a first-year composition courses write a persuasive essay and upon completion of the text heavy assignment they create a video or infographic based on their work. In the second composition class students “write a research paper and then in the last week” and turn that into “either a poster or a video or any other kind of visual representation of their topic” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 28, 2017). Students choose the type of visual they’d like to create and do so  based on their audience. The research paper is for an academic audience, but the visual is to be presented to the class, and so the audience is now their peers. Framing the multimodal assignment around audience requires the students to think about “the best way to present your information that would be appealing to your audience,” and after students make the decision about the best way to present their information, they must explain to their instructor why they chose the mode they did in an effort to justify their rhetorical choices.

Interview participant #4 teaches in a first-year composition program with no standard elements. This instructor teaches two major multimodal assignments and developed assignments as part of a WPA grant with other scholars at different institutions. For the first multimodal assignment, this instructor explains that

Students create their own theory of writing which means that they think about which key terms and concepts have been most influential to their writing practice and writing caveats and they talk about why these particular terms and how they are going to take them up in their future writing classes. So, we have some informal writing that takes the place of what I call discovery. They also do some word mapping. They also do some digital illustrations of their key words. So, they have total choice there. And then they sort of brainstorm and write a draft that is sort of text heavy and then they transform it into whatever genre that they want. And the multimodality in that assignment is optional (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

The other multimodal assignment in this first-year composition class is one part of a three-part assignment. Students write a 8- to 10-page inquiry-based research paper, and then they “create this composition in three genres. And one of them has to be print based, or text based as opposed to print based. Their second one has to be multimodal, and their third one has to be audio or visual or audio/visual” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). This assignment was born out of the instructor’s desire to see students compose in different genres in addition to learning about them, and using multiple modes to achieve this.

The first-year composition program of interview participant #5 has a set of learning outcomes that need to be met, but no other element of the curriculum is standard. This instructor follows the trend of basing the multimodal composition assignment on research paper students write. In this instructor’s class, students create a public document based on their research paper and choose modes to use based on the best way to reach the audience. This instructor approaches this multimodal assignment “in terms of a very broadly defined rhetorical situation that they're entering to and then make their decisions based on the context, audience, constraints, whatever they have available to them, and sometimes that involves writing something that isn't strictly like an academic text” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017). The public document element to this multimodal assignment makes it similar to the symposium of interview participant #2, but with the added goal of their work serving the public.

Interview participant #6 last taught first-year composition in the Spring of 2016. The first-year composition program at this university is currently undergoing changes in curriculum and learning outcomes. This department also teaches public speaking and combines writing and public speaking in the classes. The first-year composition courses do not follow a standard curriculum, and the current learning outcomes do not include multimodal composition. The new learning outcomes include digital composition, which is understood to include multimodal composition, but does not specifically multimodal composition. This instructor provides multimodal options for students in the public speaking class. Specifically, this instructor allows students to compose by mixing modes to help them present arguments if they are not yet succeeding in their writing classes at the level they should be, and/or they have prior knowledge or skill in mixing modes.  This instructor has always suggested to students that they have “multimodal options and I try to support them and designing something that would match their interests and skills rather than having it be an assignment they have to produce” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 12, 2017). In the Spring 2016 first-year composition course this instructor taught a shareable assignment, where students had to “translate their sort of research essay work into something that would be more easily shared,” with a goal to have students compose something “that somebody would share as if they could on social media” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 12, 2017). Again we see is the approach where students write a more traditional research paper and then repurpose it to meet the specific assignment guidelines and goals.

Interview participant #3 last taught first-year composition in the Spring of 2017. The first-year composition program at this university has one standard element. Each student must create an e-portfolio, and this is the multimodal aspect of their first-year composition curriculum. This is part of a university-wide program that encourages students to upload their work. Students use Digication, a platform designed by an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). This platform is described as a “bit more friendly to visuals and video than it is to text,” and “in order for it to look like a website” students must “post pictures, and videos” so that “their E-portfolio does begin to look like more than just a kind of archive” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). As students post more one their e-portfolio “it begins to look more like multimedia website over time,” which should also include a section for each course they are enrolled. However, not every section of a course is included. The e-portfolio “tends to fill up with their essays, and those essays are often entirely text,” which the program would like to change in the future, so that if students post in their e-portfolio the posts would “be multimodal compositions and so we're moving more and more in that direction” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). There are no specific requirements for students to make their E-porftolio multimodal by adding multimedia to it, or remediating their text heavy assignments to something more multimodal. The e-portfolio itself does not have specific learning outcomes or guidelines, rather it acts as a “showcase for work that has its own learning outcomes” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). It’s unclear how much, if at all, students compose by mixing modes.

### Assessment

 In order to gain a well-rounded view of each instructor’s approach to multimodality a question was asked about how they assess multimodal projects in first-year composition. The focus on either process or product provides insight on what the instructors value when teaching multimodal assignments.

Table 8 Assessment Focus

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interview Participant** | **Assessment Focus (Product or Process)** | **Uses Rubric** |
| Interview Participant #1 | Process (drafts) Product through reflection | Yes |
| Interview Participant #2 | Product | Yes |
| Interview Participant #3 | Product (For Completion Only) | No |
| Interview Participant #4 | Product | Yes |
| Interview Participant #5 | Process  through reflection | Yes |
| Interview Participant #6 | Process | Yes |
| Interview Participant #7 | Product | Yes |
| Interview Participant #8 | Product through reflection | No |
| Interview Participant #9 | Product (text more than design) | Yes |

A total of 7 out of 9 interview participants use a rubric to assess multimodal composition assignments. Four instructors who use a rubric for assessment teach a multimodal composition assignment that requires students to write a reflection. The reflection assignment serves as a guide for instructors when grading. Interview participant #5 uses the student reflection as a way for students to “explain or explain to me how to assess it. So in a lot of ways they're reflection on that project tells me a lot more about the project than the product itself” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017). Interview participant #6 uses a similar approach by assessing the metacognitive piece of writing and if students “made a good faith effort” on the multimodal piece they received full credit. The general approach to grading the multimodal projects appears to center around the understanding that a student may not have the skills or knowledge to compose by mixing modes; therefore, emphasis is placed on what they tried compose and why that was the best rhetorical choice as opposed to only assessing the final product. Interview participant #1 assigns points for the process and product with 70% of the final grade on the final product, and 30% of their grade is their process. This instructor’s main focus is for students to produce a multimodal composition that honors the “practices inside that genre convention” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017).  Other interview participants grade for completion, as is the case with the e-portfolio that students at the university interview participant #3 teaches at, where students receive 5% of the course grade for posting their assignments to their e-portfolio. Other instructors focus on only the final product as a means to assess the elements of the multimodal composition students created they feel are most important. Interview participant #7 assesses “organization,” “content,” and “if it's visually appealing, that's nice, but it's not the primary function,” because as this instructor explains students “have to think about ways to draw your audience in” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017).

### Introducing Multimodal Practices

In addition to learning about what multimodal projects are assigned and how they are assessed, I wanted to also understand how multimodal projects were introduced to students. How the multimodal assignments are introduced to students tells us how instructors prioritize elements of the assignment. It also provides additional information about which theories or practices are used when students first encounter multimodal assignments in first-year composition classes. Table 8 provides information for how multimodal composition assignments are introduced in first-year composition courses by interview participants, and what it used to introduce multimodal assignments. The instructors interviewed often use prompts, multimodal guides or handbooks, assignment sheets (guidelines), examples of multimodal compositions, software instruction, genre theory, and/or a discussion of the rhetorical situation.

Table 9 How Multimodal Composition is Introduced

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Instructor** | **How Multimodal Comp Introduced** | **Multimodal Assignment Shared/Made Public** |
| Interview Participant #1 | Genre, Audience, “rhetorical agility” | No |
| Interview Participant #2 | Prompts for the various parts of assignment. | Yes |
| Interview Participant #3 | Instruction on using platform | Yes |
| Interview Participant #4 | Students read understanding and Composing MultimodalTexts,Handouts, examples.  | Unclear |
| Interview Participant #5 | Introduced during discussion of rhetorical situations. | Yes |
| Interview Participant #6 | Look at different examples | Yes |
| Interview Participant #7 | assignment sheets, layout sheets to help them figure out what slides go on the board | Yes |
| Interview Participant #8 | Examples of videos, infographics, examples of the genre and mode.  | Yes |
| Interview Participant #9 | Cheryl Ball textAnalysis of examplesthat use images, film, sound,  | Unclear |

 Interview participant #1 introduces multimodal composition through the study of genre, audience, and “rhetorical agility.” Interview participant #5 introduces multimodal composition when discussing the rhetorical situation in his first-year composition class. Interview participant #7 focuses on arrangement and audience by asking his students to address the best way to present their content in a way that is engaging for their audience. Instructors use the examples and assignment sheets as a means to both introduce the specific guidelines of the assignment and provide students with multimodal texts to analyze so a discussion can occur on what works and doesn’t work for specific purposes and audiences. A majority of instructors intend for the multimodal projects their students compose to be shared or made public either through presenting their work or posting a hard or digital copy publically. One instructor was not clear about whether the multimodal project was shared with a public audience or their classmates, or composed with the idea that it would function as a publically shared piece. This component of the multimodal assignments included in their curriculum speaks to their desire to have students view the project as attempting to achieve a goal, whatever goal the student sets, and not something that is only submitted for a grade.
 The most commonly used texts are *Understanding and Composing Multimodal Projects* (2013**)** by Dánielle Nicole DeVoss and *Writer/Designer A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (2014)by Kristin L. Arola, Jennifer Sheppard, Cheryl E. Ball. DeVoss’ *Understanding and Composing Multimodal Projects* briefly defines multimodal composition in the introduction. More attention is given to how to “read” a text,  before moving on to sections based on each mode of communication. Each section begins with a brief discussion of genre related to specific modes. For example, the sections on text, sound, static images, moving images and multimodal texts all begin with a quick run through of guiding questions for discussion, before diving deeper into the features, purpose, audience and meaning of each mode in specific genres. The design of the multimodal composition project is presented as deciding the information that need be the emphasis of and arranging modes in a way that best does achieves this. *Writer/Designer* takes a different approach by beginning with an introduction to multimodal projects by defining modes and using the New London Group’s modes of communication to create their own diagram. This guide provides more information for the student about multimodal projects and makes use of technical communication practices such as creating a team contract, writing a project proposal, and evaluating the multimodal project as a stakeholder. This is not a surprise considering the title links the practices of a writer and a document designer. Both the guide and handbook provide important information for the instructor and student about multimodal composition. Using one of these textbooks over the other would likely be a decision based on preference and/or how the instructor wishes to introduce multimodal composition.

Interview participant #4 uses the DeVoss handbook, and #9 uses *Writer/Designer*, which demonstrates that their approach to teaching multimodality plays a factor in which text they use in their first-year composition class. Students in interview participant #4’s class read the DeVoss book and then look at examples of multimodal compositions, such as an infographic “because I think they're really easy in class genre analysis text that students can understand, absorb, think about and it's complex about for us to have a deep rhetorical discussion about it,” which when comparing that model of instruction to the arrangement of the DeVoss book it is logical that this instructor would introduce a multimodal assignment in this way. Interview participant #9 uses *Writer/Designer* in her class. Students in this class first look at examples of multimodal texts, and collectively analyze these examples before they “come up with criteria for what we think the different modes works for them.” Reviewing the affordances of specific modes could easily follow reading *Writer/Designer* as this guide includes a section on the “Analyzing Multimodal Projects,” which addresses audience, purpose, design choices, writing and designing rhetorically. There is obvious overlap between the two texts given they address the same topic. Additionally, similarity between these two texts indicate the approach to teaching multimodal composition does not often go beyond reviewing modes of communication in relationship with the intended audience.

### Pedagogy and Practices

 The WPAs and instructors interviewed for this study provided information about pedagogical practices that influence what they teach and also discussed how they teach multimodal projects. Each interview participant discussed several different practices and pedagogies and while there are similarities in their approach and learning goals for their students, they each approach multimodality differently. The learning outcomes for their multimodal assignments, how they assess these assignments, and their reasoning for teaching the multimodal assignments the way they do are ultimately related to their approach to rhetoric and writing. For this reason, the answers provided by interview participants about what practices and scholars or specific scholarship that influence their pedagogy for first-year composition gave insight on how they view, and ultimately implement multimodal practices within the first-year composition curriculum they teach.

For example, interview participant #1 stated that she uses basic rhetorical theory to try and “make sure that students understand of the different kinds of speech, of audience adaptation, purpose going back to the Sophists” in addition to “Bitzer and the rhetorical situation,” because  the focus is always on having students develop rhetorical skills for transfer” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). When this WPA teaches a first-year composition course her approach to multimodality is a direct result of the attempt she makes to try and help students “understand the best and most effective kinds of writing depending on situation, the audience and the purpose that you're currently in,” and this is evident in the multimodal assignments she teaches. The multimodal assignment in her first-year composition course require students to use genre theory to think about different modes and what each mode does for their audience and purpose.

Interview participant #5 wants students to reflect on the writing they do outside of the classroom so that they will “identify what are their rhetorical moves they're doing well, and then use that to sculpt a framework for their own academic writing” with the ultimate goal of students seeing “the potential areas of strength and transfer” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017). This instructor also uses social justice pedagogy, which is evident in how this instructor wants to students to learn to “think about how they can impact a positive change on that real world event through their emerging disciplinary expertise” through their writing, and understanding of rhetorical situations (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017), This instructor wants students to “approach this in terms of a very broadly defined rhetorical situation” that students enter and “then make their decisions based on the context, audience, constraints, whatever they have available to them, and sometimes that involves writing something that isn't strictly like an academic text,” and this is evident in the public document students create in this first-year composition course, which is the multimodal assignment in the curriculum.

Interview participant #4 also teaches with a focus on transfer in addition to network theory, genre, creating an “orientation of equity in student learning outcomes” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017) by teaching students how to use rubric. To promote metacognition this instructor wants students to “spend time thinking about how they made their choices and why they made their choices” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).  By thinking about genre, this instructor states that students have an advantage when they begin discussing multimodality because “it's not something necessarily foreign to them. They've started thinking about it and learned some key terms to analyze text and understand them,” so much so that when students begin to view “categories of genre, features, purpose and audience, and meaning” where students can then“directly apply them to multimodal text”(J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). Students will then use what they learned through analyzing multimodal compositions to guide their choices when they begin to compose by mixing modes. This instructor places importance on metacognition and using a rubric as a teaching tool, which is evident in how multimodal composition is introduced in this first-year composition class.

### Conclusion

The WPAs and first-year composition instructors interviewed reveal that the composition practices and scholarship in the field also influences how they then teach multimodal composition. Therefore, they do not cite scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy as influencing their approach to teaching multimodality. Each had a favorable view of multimodal composition, and while how they introduce, teach, and grade it differ, no WPA or first-year composition instructor viewed multimodal assignments as a means to introduce concepts and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy. Students in their classes don’t have to create a digital only multimodal composition, because some instructors want students to use what will best help them be effective in reaching their audience. This allows students the freedom to decide what will work best in reaching their audience, and/or compose by mixing modes in environments that are not digital only. However, most of the multimodal assignments included in their first-year composition curriculum are digital. The elements of their curriculum that are standard may influence the types of multimodal assignments they teach, but they possess the freedom to introduce multimodality in any way they choose. Ultimately, how they introduce these assignments and what they assess provides insight into the current state of multimodality in first-year composition. While a small sample size the survey responses and interviews reveal that multimodal assignments are common in first-year composition courses, it also demonstrates that the teaching of them may not have evolved at the same rate as related scholarship.

It is understood that scholarship in digital rhetoric and procedural rhetoric may not address multimodality. However, practices in these subfields of rhetoric can be applied to multimodal composition. The WPAs and instructors did not directly link multimodality to a specific technology, but each multimodal assignment uses digital platforms or software to mix modes. For this reason electracy also can fit within their curriculums because it “creates a need for new theories about writing, reading, and thinking about subjectivity, community and representation” (p. 5).

The findings in this chapter provide specific information about how multimodal assignments are implemented and taught in first-year composition programs. Survey responses and interviews with WPAs and first-year composition instructors identified similar approaches in implementing multimodal assignments, teaching the concept of multimodality, and assessing multimodal assignments. These similarities indicate some uniformity in teaching multimodality in first-year composition courses. Many of the multimodal assignments described by WPAs and first-year composition instructors interviewed for this dissertation require students to compose by mixing modes in digital environments. However, the interview participants do not explicitly state they use digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy in how they teach multimodal assignments. In the next chapter I analyze data collected from interviews on how multimodal composition assignments are taught in first-year composition courses. This analysis of interview data leads to identifying two common approaches for teaching multimodality, which provides a framework that can serve as a starting point for adding theories and concepts in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy to multimodal composition assignments.

## Chapter 4: Analysis of Common Approaches to Teaching Multimodal Assignments in First-Year Composition

While multimodality is not limited to digital-only compositions, the concept of multimodality became more predominant as technology advanced across communication as well as in the writing classroom. Due to the high usage of technology such as writing and programming software, digital platforms, mobile phones, and tablets in everyday life, students encounter multimodal compositions and engage in reading them more often. For this reason, multimodality and technology usage often go hand in hand. That is not to say that all multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculums are a result of a push to incorporate more technology in the composition classroom. However, due to the connection between multimodal composition practices and technology, it is possible that multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition curriculums are a result of attempts to incorporate more technology in the classroom to reflect the writing practices of students outside the classroom. As a result, multimodality may not be evolving as rapidly as other subfields of rhetoric and composition. To explain, if including multimodality as a practice in first-year composition is only implemented as a means to include more technology in the classroom, then it will not become a fully developed practice that intentionally develops and builds the digital multiliteracies of students. Multimodal composition is more than using specific digital platforms and software to compose. The practice is more important than the platform, but if the practice of composing by mixing modes is only viewed as a means to include more technology in the classroom, then multimodal composition will not evolve in a nuanced and productive manner. Rather, it will be subject, and ultimately stagnant, to whatever is the next new technology. It is detrimental to the growth of multimodality to include it for the sake of using more or newer technology.

The purpose of this dissertation was to research how, if at all, theories, concepts and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy informed the implementation and teaching of multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum. As previously described in this dissertation, digital rhetoric scholarship addresses how we compose and communicate in digital environments, and how communication is delivered and circulated or shared through and with digital platforms, software, and devices. Procedural rhetoric helps to better understand the processes we engage in to accomplish communication in digital environments.The concept of elecrtracy provides first-year composition the opportunity to  approach multimodality as a means to promote participatory composition, which can be through civic or community engagement, and ultimately helps students to address their audience as a community they are writing to from within.

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, these three were chosen as a framework for this study for two reasons. The first reason is the abundance of scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy likely results in difficulty of putting all of the associated theories into practice. Aside from the number of scholarly work in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy there also exists difficulty in turning theories and concepts into assignments. It is also difficult to make room to introduce concepts from these three subfields of rhetoric in first-year composition curriculum. In order to apply theories and concepts from digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy first-year composition curriculum needs to apply them to pre existing assignments and practices in first-year composition classes. The importance of applying theories and/or a lens from digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy, is devoting more scholarship to the application of these theories in first-year composition courses.  Secondly, digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy were chosen as a framework for this study because of their ability to help students to become literate in working in digital spaces while also exploring the relationship between the user of technology and the technology itself by including practices and assignments to think critically about the impact of the technology, how using it changes them, and how they change technology by using it, and ultimately what that means for their communication and writing practices.

This study is relevant to the field of rhetoric and composition because multimodal composition assignments are often part of first-year composition curriculum. However, adding a multimodal composition assignment to a first-year composition curriculum should not be where this practice ends. I recognize that there exists debates about the definition of  multimodal composition, and whether and how to include multimodal composition assignments is on-going. However, based on the survey data collected for this dissertation, multimodal composition assignments are a common occurrence in first-year curriculum. To answer the research questions, I analyzed data from an online survey and conducted follow-up interviews with nine survey participants. A thematic analysis of the data collected provided identifiable patterns and themes for implementing and teaching multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum.  The guiding scholarship and practices that influence multimodality varies, with some instructors using multiliteracies or digital multiliteracies, and digital literacy in addition to work in digital composition as a framework for how they implement and teach multimodal composition. This in of itself is not problematic. However, as noted earlier, as the composition studies works through these concepts and puts them into practice, the field runs the risk of not continuing to do research in that area as diligently as when it was a new or newer concept. Now that multimodal composition is part of first-year composition curriculum, scholars may view the work as done, as if validating the practice by including it in first-year composition courses is enough. Simply put, because the practice is accepted, multimodal composition may not garner the attention it once did when it was a newer concept, which in turn means the field does not continually research methods to improve the practice.

Adding multimodal assignments to first-year composition curriculum did not end the debate on its role in  developing students’ multiliteracies, which the New London Group identified as necessary for students to enter and participate in public, community, and economic aspects of life (p. 60). However, to avoid the multimodal assignment becoming a stagnant practice, it must be taught from an additional lens. As I will argue in this chapter, implementing and teaching it based on genre theory, or multiliteracies, does not provide students the opportunity to compose by mixing modes and think critically about the role of technology in their composition and communication process.  As multimodality becomes more widely added to first-year composition, the questions about how and why it is in first-year composition must also continue. For this reason, and because of the unquestionable link between multimodality and technology usage, I researched first-year composition curriculums that include multimodal assignments to determine if the program’s and instructor’s approach to multimodal composition reflects current scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy.

### Review and Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings

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As illustrated in the diagram above, the previous chapter examined the research findings regarding multimodal assignments according to the subtopics identified in the rectangles.  In first-year composition I sought to first label the curriculum as either standard, where all first-year composition courses teach the same assignments, and/or use the same rubrics, and/or follow the same learning outcomes, or a nonstandard curriculum in which  instructors have freedom to design the course. This helped me to understand if an instructor’s approach to multimodality was determined by the first-year composition program they teach in. Specifically, if assignments, learning outcomes, and rubrics, are provided for instructors, would they approach teaching multimodality as something built into the course, or as something they need to continue to develop for and with students through instruction. For instructors with the freedom to design a course as they see fit, it was important to know this in order to determine if they look to scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and/or electracy to teach multimodal composition. I then reviewed how these assignments are implemented by either the WPA or first-year composition instructor in the first-year composition classroom. To do this I asked interview participants how they introduce multimodal assignments, and found that they introduce the assignment by discussing genres, use multimodal guides or handbooks, assignment guidelines, examples of multimodal compositions, software instruction, genre theory, and/or a discussion of the rhetorical situation.  However, the most often used method to introduce multimodal composition assignments were genre theory and rhetorical theory.

Next, I presented information on how WPAs and instructors assess multimodal assignments. Understanding how the projects were assessed was important to the study because it enabled me to identify if the final product was valued more than the practice. Additionally, data on assessment provided insight as to what instructors valued when assessing assignments. For example, if assessment was done through reflection, then this suggests the practice was more important than the product, and it was up to the student to determine what they did, and why these rhetorical choices demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of composing by mixing modes. If an instructor places high point value on a final product, then this suggests the instructor values the execution of composing by mixing modes as indicative of the knowledge the student possesses. Finally, what scholars, scholarship, and practices guide their approach to multimodality were identified. This provided me with several opportunities to determine the role, if any, digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy plays in how they teach multimodal composition assignments.

In reviewing survey data, 96.3 % of survey responses indicated that the multimodal assignments taught in first-year composition courses were digital, meaning that they involved or included digital multimodal compositions, which further supports the need for multimodal composition in first-year composition to also include theories and practices from scholarship that directly addresses composing in and through digital environments. The interviews provided more information about how multimodal assignments were taught in first-year composition classrooms. My analysis indicated that the WPAs and instructors interviewed use a either a rhetoric-based approach or genre theory to inform how they  implemented, taught, and assessed multimodal composition assignments. Each approach is similar. Each first scaffold the assignment. Students research a topic and write a research paper, or some other type of informative paper. They have a topic to write about, and researched information, which provides students with content for their multimodal assignment. It also positions students as experts on their topic. Next, the students must share the information with an audience. The two approaches become differentiated in how students decide to remediate their research paper. In the genre theory approach, students will select a genre first, and then remediate their paper based on the expectations and constraints of that particular genre. For example, interview participant #1 teaches multimodality with a genre theory approach. Students in her first-year composition course must respond to a “message from the media that they were upset with, or that they wanted to push back against” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). The students must select an audience to direct their argument to, and then “choose something that would appeal to that demographic of people given their knowledge base,”  (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017) which leads them to selecting an appropriate genre for that audience. What they choose to compose will vary, but as interview participant #1 explains, the assignment is “more along the lines of the writing inside that genre, and whatever mode that happens to be in,” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017) which means the genre comes before students think about the modes they use to compose. How they compose by mixing modes is based on their interpretation of the genre, and not the specific affordances or constraints of the modes themselves.

In a rhetoric-based approach, students make their assignment multimodal by choosing the type of modes they’d like to use to compose first. This decision is based on the situation students are writing in, and in this example a student may elect to create a video, slideshow, or graphic to present and share information, but not necessarily begin with studying a specific genre associated with the modes used to create these types of multimodal compositions. For example, interview participant #6 describes a student who was visually oriented and worked best by communicating using visual representations of her research. According to interview participant #6, this student began by choosing a mode that matched the visual nature of her topic, and then arranged it based on the information she collected during the research assignment. If this student had chosen to create a video as the multimodal composition, then they would first think about the modes used to do this, and about which modes will be used to effectively communicate with their audience. They wouldn’t start with a specific genre of videos.

There is obvious overlap with these two approaches, and it is understood that depending on how you view rhetorical theory and genre theory, as either separate entities or almost indistinguishable, these two approaches appear almost identical. Each approach then moves on to how a student shares their multimodal composition, which varies from instructor to instructor. Students may be required to present it to their class, present their work as part of a student showcase, or share the multimodal assignment with their intended audience. In the next sections, I will describe in more detail the differences and similarities of two of the common approaches to teaching multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum

### Approach 1: Genre Theory

 Genre theory was the most commonly cited approach and influence to teaching multimodality in the curriculums of the WPAs and instructors interviewed. In *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (2010)Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff observe that “challenging the idea that genres are simple categorizations of text types and offering instead an understanding of genre that connects kinds of texts to kinds of social actions,” (p. 3). Therefore, genres and writing find themselves linked as students study and learn how to respond and act within the parameters of genres. Bawarshi and Reiff argue teaching genre provides “a rich analytical tool for studying academic, workspace, and public systems of activity” (p. 104), which is similar to the multiliteracies approach of the New London Group whereby teaching multiliteracies helps better prepare students for both an academic and future work life. The introduction of composing by mixing modes under the lens of genre theory is appropriate for analyzing the rhetorical situation first-year composition students find themselves composing in, but does not require them to think about the full implication of their usage of technology in doing so. Identifying constraints as dictated by the genre and audience expectations does not allow for students to also address how using technology changes the way in which they compose their message. Rather, the focus is on which modes they use and why they selected them in an attempt to effectively communicate with their audience. Below is visual representation of this approach to teaching multimodal composition in first-year composition classes based on genre theory.

 When multimodal composition in first-year composition classes is taught through the lens of genre theory, students use different modes to compose with a singular focus of staying within the constraints of the genre and utilizing the affordances of the genre. More importantly, the modes are chosen for them as they fulfill the expectations associated with the genre. As a practice this can be effective and requires students to think critically about which genre works best for what they’d like to achieve, but it only scratches the surface of what is possible with multimodal composition. Students may not also be addressing the affordances and constraints of specific modes, and how they can be shared and circulated digitally. The genre theory also does not allow multimodal composition to evolve as students begin to become more experienced in composing by mixing modes. If multimodal composition only focuses on what you do, how you arrange, organize, and choose to deliver information then it’s primary function is taught as practice focused on creating a product. There is not as much attention give to the process of composing by mixing modes, and how that process influences their method for sharing their work.

### Approach 2: Rhetorical theory

Rhetorical theory, not surprisingly, was a dominant influence on the approach of interview participants. The survey and interview data indicates digital rhetoric as one way to address communication as a collaborative effort between the composer/writer and the technology. However, the rhetorical theory model does not necessarily account for this relationship as it focuses on using technology as digital tools to compose and deliver information. In the rhetorical theory approach attention is given to the rhetorical situation students enter and write in above all else. This, like the genre theory approach, is not a bad approach, but given that more can be done when teaching multimodal composition to continue to develop and enhance digital literacies based on more current research and practices, it is a somewhat incomplete approach

In the rhetorical theory graphic below we see similar steps as in the genre theory approach. In this approach to teaching multimodality students select the modes they think will work best for effectively communicating and delivering information to their audience, whereas in the genre theory approach the genre they choose dictates the modes they will use to compose. The difference is subtle, but no less important. As stated earlier in this chapter, first students research a topic, and present that information in a traditional informative essay. After students write their research paper they begin working on remediating it. The content of their multimodal assignment has been written and organized because it is taken directly from their research. This process will vary depending on the assignment guidelines given by the instructor, but the student will then share their research with a non-expert or with a nonacademic audience.

In the rhetorical theory approach students must think about modes of communication first, and then select the modes they will compose with. Students must think about how to remediate their research as different modes and arrange these modes to compose and share their information. Primarily, they are required to prepare their information to be shared with a specific audience in mind and select the modes that best help them achieve their purpose, which may lead them towards a discussion about genres and audience, but it is not the starting point for selecting modes to use, nor does it guide their writing process from the beginning. Sharing the multimodal composition may require them to publically share it, or it may be composed with the intention of sharing it without actually doing so. The rhetorical theory approach allows for an easy inclusion of digital rhetoric concepts. Specifically, those that account for the role and/or purpose of the technology used to communicate and deliver information.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 below demonstrate how multimodal composition assignments are taught in first-year composition.

Figure 2 Genre Theory Approach             Figure 3 Rhetorical Theory Approach



Again, each approach begins with taking content from a previously completed alphabetic text assignment. Students either select a genre or modes they think will work best for remediated their alphabetic text assignment, depending on which approach their instructor uses.These approaches are effective for introducing and teaching multimodal composition, but can be improved upon. Recommendations for how to add to this current model for introducing and teaching multimodal composition will be discussed in the following chapter.

### Conclusion

Data collected from interviews point to an absence of digital rhetoric practices in the implementation and teaching of multimodal composition assignments in the first-year composition curriculum of interview participants. Interview participants named multimodal scholarship, or work in multiliteracies and digital literacies as guiding concepts for how they implement and teach multimodal composition, but did not mention digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. When asked to name scholars or practices that guide their pedagogy when teaching first-year composition, none of the nine interview participants listed digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy among their influences. It was expected that procedural rhetoric and electracy would not be among the influences of interview participants, because procedural rhetoric is often most closely associated with video game theory or game theory. Electracy, while known and studied, also finds itself less cited than more predominant work in composition studies. However, these are not fringe subfields of rhetoric, and interview responses indicate that some of the concepts of these three of fall in line with how interview participants introduce multimodality, and/or their learning outcomes for multimodal composition assignments. This is important because it suggests the importance and wide reaching influence of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy, which further supports the inclusion of teaching multimodal composition guided by three concepts and their practices.

When composing with different modes in digital spaces we have the opportunity to question and critique the uses of these modes for the types of communication and writing in a digital networked space. If digital rhetoric addresses our communicative efforts in digital spaces, then it is unlikely we ever escape the realm of digital rhetoric in our daily lives and writing. For this very reason, digital rhetoric practices need to be part of first-year composition curriculum, and the multimodal composition assignment in first-year composition provides students with the opportunity to explore these concepts inside and outside their composition classroom. If developments and advancements in technology are responsible for constant interaction with digital spaces and interfaces, then specific assignments in composition classrooms need to reflect these occurrences and experiences, as the New London Group recognized in 1996. As a result of society becoming more globalized, the New London Group called for a change in literacy pedagogy.

 Digital rhetoric, as subfield of rhetoric, continues to grow as evidenced by the expanding definitions mentioned in Chapter 2. No longer is digital rhetoric thought upon as simply rhetorical practices in a digital environment, and yet multimodality in the curriculums of interview participants does not take advantage of putting theories of digital rhetoric into practice. For example, interview participant #4 listed network theory as part of her pedagogy, which has a clear connection to digital rhetoric, and can thus be applied to teaching multimodal composition. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Hess and Davisson’s (2018) definition of rhetoric includes the circulation and experience of digital technologies, which accounts for networked writing in digital spaces. Network theory opens up conversation on how the writer uses digital tools to compose and be active in the digital network. The use of digital software, platforms, and devices to compose fall under the scope of digital rhetoric practice, but without learning outcomes that speak to this specifically and exemplify the full scope of digital rhetoric in first-year composition, students are not receiving the 21st century education needed to effectively write and communicate by building digital multiliteracies.

The common approaches to teaching multimodal composition are based on genre theory or rhetorical theory as a framework for how students remediate a previously written research paper, which provides students with content and positions them as experts with knowledge and information to share. These approaches are effective, but do not help evolve the practice of composing by mixing modes. More importantly this is not the only way to teach multimodal composition. This model can work without students writing a research paper first. The same steps can be used, with students researching a topic, then organizing the collected information based on their purpose. At this point the next step would be composing that information by mixing modes. This allows for students to begin to think of how to share or present their information in multiple moods sooner than if they write a text heavy paper first. In this scenario the text heavy paper does not have to be written, only to be composed again with multiple modes. Students can begin selecting modes to use as they research their topic. In the next chapter I will explore teaching multimodal composition using digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy.

## Chapter 5: Recommendations for Incorporating Digital Rhetoric, Procedural Rhetoric, and Electracy in Teaching Digital Multimodal Assignments

This study set out to research if digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy were used as a framework for implementing and teaching digital multimodal composition in first-year composition courses. Interviews with WPAs and first-year composition instructors revealed that these three were not used as a framework for implementing or teaching multimodal composition. However, these three could easily be added to the models WPAs and instructors used when introducing and teaching multimodal composition.

In the previous chapter, data collected from interviews identified two common models for teaching multimodal composition in first-year composition classes. The approach used by first-year composition instructors was to introduce either genre theory or rhetorical theory when introducing and teaching multimodality to students. Each model begins with students using content from a research paper and remediating it. From there they differ by either having students choose either a genre or modes to compose. Building on the current models of remediating a research paper, and using either genre theory or rhetorical theory to teach multimodal composition, I added dominant concepts and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy to demonstrate how applying these three to the model can push multimodal composition forward. Adding any combination of the three allows for the meaning-making practice of mixing modes to reflect more current scholarship in rhetoric and composition, which demonstrates an opportunity for these theories and practices to not only be introduced in a first-year composition class, but to also bridge the gap between theory and practice. In this chapter I will discuss how and why first-year instructors can use digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy as a framework for teaching multimodal composition.

The next three models are based on the genre theory and rhetorical theory approach discussed in previous chapters. This model is a combination of both approaches, which begin with an alphabetic text assignment that must be shared with a non expert audience as is the case with the genre theory and rhetorical theory approach. Moving to the right students will either choose a genre or modes to compose based on the approach their instructor uses. After students complete their multimodal composition they share it, either in the form of a presentation or in a digital network. In the previous models this signals the completion of the assignment. In the the graphics below I add theories and concepts from digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy to the previously discussed common approaches to teaching multimodal composition.

Adding Digital Rhetoric



### Applying Digital Rhetoric

At the point when students either choose a genre to compose in, or modes to use, there is an opportunity to bring in concepts and areas of study in digital rhetoric. As students begin to think about how they will design and arrange their multimodal composition, there can be a discussion about the differences between amateur and professional multimodal compositions. A discussion about the differences between amateur and professional multimodal compositions can be centered around analyzing what makes a multimodal composition appear to be professionally made, and analyze the elements make it appear to be amateur. This can also lead to a discussion about how appearing professionally made can impact credibility, and start a conversation about the role of software or platform knowledge in creating credibility. Such a discussion directly addresses what Hess and Davisson observe as the ways in which digital rhetoric “changes the nature of how rhetoric is expressed (p. 7),” and they add to this by noting that any study of digital rhetoric “examines the nature of meaning-making, identification, and persuasion in the context of advocacy, deliberation, argumentation or aesthetic performance” (p. 7). The graphic above, influenced by Hess and Davisson’s definition of digital rhetoric, accounts for how information is both shared and experienced in multimodal compositions, and pushes the genre theory/remediation model of the multimodal assignment to include more discussions and practices of digital rhetoric. Applying a digital rhetoric lens draws students’ attention towards how writers use Web 2.0 platforms to reach their audience. Writers experience how composing by mixing modes broadens the “understanding the scope and power of digital technology in our daily lives” (Hess and Davisson, p. 11). By addressing the necessary knowledge and skill set in using specific platforms and software students can better understand their own digital literacies. This lens can also push students to think more critically about what is needed to create a multimodal composition of the quality level they often experience when reading or sharing information in digital networks.

For this reason the model above includes how to share the multimodal composition as a starting point for a discussion of the rhetorical choices made in selecting a platform or software used when sharing a multimodal composition. This enables students to view the technology used not as a tool, but as part of their composition process, and provides them with an opportunity to explain their rhetorical choices. The selection of a specific platform or software used to share the multimodal composition also implies students must think about the digital network their writing will enter, and why the platform and software they choose is the best rhetorical choice. Again, when adding this to their composition process students are required to make decisions about the design and overall look of their multimodal work. Are they writing to an audience that expects a polished and professional product? Is it understood that their status as a student gives them room to present and share information that is indicative of their skill level? How does their skill level and experience using platforms and software to compose by mixing modes impact the appearance of their multimodal composition, and as a result their ethos? In the model above students use design to express their knowledge and understanding of arrangement and delivery. It is understood that students will have a varying level of skill using platforms and software available to them, but as reflection is still a common practice in first-year composition courses it can also be used here.

It is possible a first-year composition instructor may be concerned about students that don’t possess the knowledge of digital platforms and software to compose by mixing modes at a level that visually captures their understanding of arrangement and delivery. That is to say, the final product appears more amateur than it does a polished piece. If a student can express through reflection what they intended to compose and identify where and why they had difficulties doing so by making connections between the technology they used and the final product, then they’ve engaged in a discussion about their relationship with technology, and how they intended to use it to communicate and deliver information based on their rhetorical choices. This approach to teaching multimodal composition values the practice of multimodal composition as a practice that begins a conversation about digital rhetoric and concepts that scholarship in digital rhetoric address and need to be put into practice.

### Applying Procedural Rhetoric

Adding Procedural Rhetoric



The illustration above, starting from left to right, demonstrates how procedural rhetoric can also be added to the common assignment model of using genre theory or rhetorical theory to guide the teaching of multimodal assignments in first-year composition. Procedural rhetoric concepts can be added to the composition process at the point when students exhibit software or platform knowledge. Procedural rhetoric attempts to build on existing procedural literacies. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Michael Mateas (2005) in “Procedural Literacy: Educating the New Media Practitioner” defines procedural literacy as the “ability to read and write processes, to engage procedural representation and aesthetics, to understand the interplay between the culturally-embedded practice of human meaning-making and technology-mediated processes” (p. 101). Bogost (2007) in *Persuasive Games* adds to Mateas’ definition of procedural literacy by stating that it is not “just a practice of technical-mastery, but one of technical-cultural mastery” (p. 245). This addition is important for exploring the impact of our relationship with technology by specifically addressing how we use technology and when we use technology to communicate and deliver information. Practices in procedural rhetoric exemplify our knowledge of the technology we use, and how we use it to effectively communicate by adhering to cultural norms in digital environments/communities. (appropriate usage of technology based on community practices?)

 In this model you see process, authorship rules, and enacting code added to software/platform knowledge. Enacting code can by using code as part of the composing process and delivery of information, if the platform used to deliver requires users to use code to do so. I categorize procedural rhetoric as a subfield of digital rhetoric, because procedural rhetoric concerns itself not with modes specifically, but with “the authorship rules of behavior,” (Bogost, p. 29) which are authored in code, and making “commensurate judgements about the software systems we encounter in everyday” (Bogost, p. 29) with the ultimate goal of allowing a “more sophisticated procedural authorship with both persuasion and expression” (Bogost, p. 29). However, the same concepts of authorship and judgement of software can be applied to multimodal composition.

As a student mulls over the advantages of their multimodal composition appearing to look more professional than amateur, an important distinction to be made by students as a multimodal composition that has a more polished, or professional look, may add credibility, where a student, or amateur, composition may not have that built in credibility based on appearance. In addition to how the appearance of a multimodal composition may impact credibility, they must choose a platform or software they feel will work best for their purpose. Up to this point the rhetorical moves made are based on audience, genre constraints and affordances. Assessing the platforms and software to use addresses their own skill set and knowledge of these platforms and software programs. In choosing one platform or software above another requires students to think through the steps of using one over the other demonstrates their understanding of how each works. This cannot be understated in attempting to build digital multiliteracies and think critically about the role of technology and practices using a specific technology in writing and communication. The process of using their chosen platform or software opens up discussion about authorship and what Bogost identifies as “rules of behavior” (Bogost, p. 29) within a system. Working within the system does not require students to code, rather they enact the code through constructing models for their alphabetic text. The benefit of including these concepts in implementing and teaching multimodal composition is to introduce students to think more critically about how what they use to communicate works. In viewing the platforms and softwares as a system they need to navigate through a series of processes, students interact and understand the systems that make up the technology they use. Class discussion and/or prompts that guide student reflection can address these concepts of procedural rhetoric throughout the composition process and at the completion of a multimodal assignment.

### Applying Electracy and Participatory Composition

Adding Electracy and Participatory Composition Rhetoric



In this illustration, the concept of electracy and participatory composition are added to the network section of the above model. Ulmer (2009) describes electracy as a “social machine” (Ulmer, Introduction: Electracy), which creates new “values and purposes for writing, conceptualizing identity, and forming community” (Arroyo, p. 8).  The community here exists inside a digital network which survives and thrives by user participation. Participatory composition pushes students to address how their multimodal practices will be shared, and move through the community that is their audience. This builds on Bogost’s “technical-cultural mastery” of procedural literacy as discussed in the previous section. According to Arroyo (2013) “participatory composition requires rapid remixing of identity formation, technical savvy, rhetorical skills and participation in networks” (p. 23), which further demonstrates the rhetorical knowledge and moves a student would need to make and demonstrate for their multimodal composition to be circulated in the digital network. Arroyo (2013) adds to this by stating that “technologies exist to create networks and not remain in one platform” (p. 21), which provides a new angle on sharing a multimodal composition. Specifically, if the multimodal composition is to be shared, and enter the community it must also be composed to be shared across multiple platforms to promote participation. Taking into account the expectations and participatory norms of the community. Electracy and participatory composition reflect the practices of students most commonly used outside of the classroom due to its similarities to composing in social networking sites. This allows instructors to build on the knowledge students possess in writing outside of the classroom, which can create an environment where students feel the knowledge and skills they bring to the class are valued.

The above models can enhance multimodality in first-year composition classrooms by adding to popular approaches of using genre theory or rhetorical theory to implementing and teaching multimodal assignments. However, I can identify where these three theories and their practices add to multimodal composition, but suggestions are not enough to push the evolution of multimodal meaning-making practices. Part of the difficulty in putting theories into practice is understanding how to do so in a way that instructors and students can understand. Adding these theories will be similar to the way teaching multimodality was once a newer practice for first-year composition instructors. While adding all three would round out multimodality in current technology and uses, it is understood it would be incredibly difficult to introduce all three in addition to multimodality in one semester, or a year-long composition sequence. A first-year composition instructor can use one of these three as an additional framework for teaching multimodality, or a combination of the three, to begin to introduce theories and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and/or electracy. As each of the three can be added to teaching multimodal compositions the first-year composition instructors must choose which is most appropriate for the assignment. To do this WPAs and/or instructors more familiar with digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy can lead professional development meetings aimed at introducing these two current first-year composition instructors. This can include recommended readings and providing instructors with examples as to how to include one of the three as part of teaching multimodality. In attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and put these theories into practice in a first-year composition course instructors, can’t just depend on major assignments to do the heavy lifting. Much like the writing process or a rhetoric based approach to writing is continually revisited throughout a semester, the same must be done for multimodality in a first-year composition curriculum.

### Low-Stakes Multimodal Assignments in First-Year Composition

 Often in curriculum that includes a multimodal project, students are asked to complete a multimodal composition as part of a major assignment, or students may be required to complete minor multimodal assignments throughout the course in an effort to slowly build students up to a larger, or longer, project. This is certainly a pedagogical strategy that serves a purpose, but minor multimodal assignments can lack the complexity of communicating and delivering information needed to complete a major multimodal assignment. Using only minor multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum may not develop the multiliteracies of the student in the way instructors hopes. A major multimodal assignment can pull focus from the practice, and prioritize the final product because of the pressure placed on students to compose a multimodal project that meets multiple requirements. Additionally, it is not uncommon that we make assumptions about the skill and comfort level of first-year composition students because of the notion that they are of a generation that came of age with this technology available to them. However, the fact that certain technologies were available for use by the public does not mean that students learned how to use them, or had access to them, and used them to compose by mixing modes. To focus more on the process of composing by mixing modes instructors may want to incorporate low-stakes multimodal assignments in throughout the semester as a practice that leads up to a larger multimodal project.

Interview data suggested that often times first-year composition instructors assess the final product or the process. To assess the process credit is given as students submit drafts, through reflection either while they are composing their multimodal projects, or at the completion of their multimodal projects. The role of metacognition through reflective practices is vital to the success of implementing these theories in first-year composition, and can be used to incorporate multimodal practices throughout the semester. For example, if a first-year composition instructor requires students to write reflections after completing a major assignment, students can practice composing by mixing modes by using multiple modes to complete their reflection assignment. Using low-stakes multimodal assignments to complement major assignments throughout a semester provides students with more opportunities to compose by mixing modes, thus building their digital multiliteracies and providing instructors with ample opportunities to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### Conclusion

The necessity offirst-year composition instructors incorporating practices influenced by theories and concepts of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy in teaching multimodal composition is a result of the relationship between multimodal composition and the technology used to compose by mixing modes. The field of rhetoric and composition should continually be in pursuit of evolving multimodal composition, so it does not become a stagnant practice. While not every multimodal composition is digital only, a high percentage of what is taught as multimodal composition is dependent on digital platforms, software, and devices. This relationship requires first-year composition to incorporate theories and practices that continue to develop digital literacies, or digital multiliteracies. These practices must specifically speak to building a critical awareness and understanding of technology used to write and communicate with an audience by incorporating the theories and concepts found in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. The high percentage number of first-year composition programs that include multimodal composition as part of their curriculums indicates that it is a practice that is deemed important for students in first-year composition courses, which further supports my recommendation that it is a practice that needs to be continually studied and improved upon. Its connection to new and newer technology opens it up to more recent scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. Therefore, making the first-year composition classroom a space where both instructors and students can introduce practices influenced by the work of scholars in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy.

 One way to provide instructors with information as to what types of discussions and practices students should participate in while in a first-year composition classroom regarding multimodal composition can come from updating the learning outcomes of multimodal assignments. Updating learning outcomes for multimodal assignments to include outcomes specific to writing in digital networks, circulating content in digital networks, writing with a system and associated procedures, which are only a few of the main concepts discussed in the scholarship of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy, can provide instructors with a guide for how to implement and teach multimodal assignments influenced by scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. Professional development can also provide first-year composition instructors with the opportunity to see how other instructors use these three to teach multimodal composition.

 The difficulty, however, is not providing evidence as to why a lens from any of these three should be incorporated when teaching multimodal composition but how to do it. It can be a decision made by individual instructors, but the risk of this is that not all instructors will change how they teach multimodal composition. At the programmatic level it can be difficult to expect instructors to change their pedagogical practices, especially if digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy are not subfields of rhetoric they are familiar with. However, it is important to remember that not very long ago the idea of teaching multimodal composition felt foreign to first-year composition instructors, because they were not as familiar with the practice and the technology used to compose by mixing modes. This hesitancy over time lessened, and as data collected for this study suggests a high percentage of first-year composition curriculums include multimodal assignments, which means the field should be open to improving a popular practice for meaning making in first-year composition curriculum.

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## Appendix

**Interview Questions**

The following interview questions were asked to each interview participant. The remaining interview questions were based on individual responses to the survey questions.

1. Are you currently teaching a first-year composition course?
2. If yes, how many? If no, when was the last time you taught a first-year composition course?
3. What practices or scholars influence your pedagogy when you're teaching FYC?

## Vita

Jennifer Falcon earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from The Ohio State University in 2008. In 2013 she received a Masters in Fine Arts degree in Poetry from the University of Texas at El Paso. In 2014 she entered the doctoral program in Rhetoric and Composition at The University of Texas at El Paso.

Jennifer Falcon was the recipient of the Rhetoric and Writing Studies Nuestra Gente Award in 2017. While pursuing her degree she served as the Assistant Director of the Rhetoric and Writing Studies Graduate program from 2015 – 2017. In the 2017-2018 academic year she served as Assistant Director of the Rhetoric and Writing Studies-Undergraduate Program.

 Jennifer presented her research at numerous academic conferences, including Cultural Rhetorics, South Central Modern Language Association, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication Midwest Summer Conference. She presented research posters at the Computers and Writing Conference and the Digital Praxis Poster Session at the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

Permanent address: 509 N. Orah Ave

 Montebello, CA, 90640

This dissertation was typed by Jennifer A. Falcon.