

UNCOVERING MULTIMODALITY IN COMPOSITION

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mom, Cynthia Kelley Nebel, and to my good friend in the program, Rebecca Rae Jolley.

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## ABSTRACT

Moje points out that “scholars have argued that some media, texts, and literacy practices that get counted as new are actually old, but our attention to them is new” (352), and this is true of multimodality. We are being re-engaged with multimodality because of the rise of technologies that allow writers to blend media in seemingly new ways, but we have known before the digital turn that reading and writing are inherently multimodal processes, we just did not have a phrase to describe the multiple semiotic channels that are used to compose until “multimodality.” Early university compositionists conceptualized writing as multimodal in popular pre-twentieth century textbooks, and we can use this early history to inform our contemporary conceptions and pedagogies on multimodality.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCCC	Conference on College Composition and Communication
FYW	First-Year Writing
WAC	Writing Across the Curriculum

## CHAPTER ONE: HOW NEW IS MULTIMODALITY?

### **The Era of New**

I am a newcomer to composition and rhetoric. As a first time attendee to CCCC, I found the amount of sessions overwhelming. I skimmed session titles in the booklet like a search engine by using my mental keywords: “multimodal,” “digital,” “new media,” “new literacy”. Like many who attend, I went to CCCC to hear about the new happenings in composition and rhetoric so I could take these hot ideas back my institution, and use them in my own teaching and research. Wanting *new* seems to be characteristic of our era, not only in our own field where we are experimenting and theorizing with new technologies in our classrooms— wanting new is a cultural experience in which people line up for new gadgets outside of storefronts and “updating” is constantly required by our digital technologies.

The sort of language use associated with *new* and the perspective that is associated with this usage is seen in the often quoted 2004 CCCC address when Kathleen Yancey told a crowd that “Never before has the proliferation of writings outside of the academy so counterpointed the composition inside” (298). Today, many are now addressing outside and contemporary literacies in our research and teaching. For example, in the latest 2013 CCCC convention, there were 23 sessions with “multimodal” in their session title, description, or in a speaker’s title; 60 with “digital,” 13 for “new literacy,” 9 sessions for “blogs,” and 14 for “social media”. Anyone in attendance likely ran into the language that we associate with outside literacy that has become mostly

related to digital, screen-mediated print. It may be difficult to prove the claim that outside and inside academic literacy practices were at their farthest ends in 2004, but we can see today that our field *is* engaged with what was then considered outside literacy or new media.

A recent book by Jason Palmeri, *Remixing Composition*, reminds us that the phrase “new media” used to mean Polaroid’s, 8mm film, and tape-recorders.

Just as Yancey suggests that emerging digital technologies have resulted in a proliferation of multimodal genres of writing, compositionists in the late 1960s and early 1970s were concerned that the electronic revolution had produced a generation of students who were more interested in in multimedia forms of composing—the film, television program, the comic—than in writing conventional print... from 1967 to 1974, we can uncover numerous compositionists engaging similar concerns and making similar argument to the ones many scholars are making today. (87–88)

Despite similarities, there seems to be something new about the proliferation and creation of new technologies that was unlike the late 1960’s and 1970’s. Online and digital technologies changed how we communicate but there are still similarities. Taking film photos and developing them to show to friends is similar to posting digital photos on Facebook. I do not mean to oversimplify the similarities of technologies, but because something is new does not mean it is *entirely* unlike something old (see Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*).

While our field is constantly after the new, “When we choose what to teach, there's always the allure of the new. But ‘the new’ is a “renaming, a re-focusing”

(Wootten 239). Not until recently have I become skeptical of phrases that make the claim that something is happening like “never before,” or that there is something entirely new without relation to the old. These phrases signify that something which did not exist before now exists. As the field creates or borrows new language to discuss emerging technologies, and how we use, think, and understand them, we may be confusing these new words for entirely new features of language use, and ignore the history that gave rise to these terms.

Jody Shipka voiced similar concerns in *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. She says, “This emphasis on ‘new’ (meaning digital) technologies has led to a tendency to equate terms like *multimodal*, *intertextual*, *multimedia*, or still more broadly speaking, *composition* with the production and consumption of computer-based, digitized, screen-mediated texts” (7–8). The problem with conflating these terms is that we may not recognize that older media *share* many features with newer media. When creating new terms to describe a digital composition, we may not use these terms to discuss older composition or non-digital compositions. Some newer texts showcase certain features more than older texts, but that does not mean the old text is without that feature.

### **Multimodal and “New”**

The term multimodality has become highly associated with new media or “the digital turn” in what is being called New Literacy (Mills, “A Review of the ‘Digital Turn’ in the New Literacy Studies”). Multimodal is used to describe the various semiotic channels of communication, but this term, which composition and rhetoric began using in 1998 (Lauer 231), has a confusing history of use and meaning, mostly because of its popularization as a textual feature associated only with newer texts and composing

processes. Many are recognizing that “these dimensions of textuality (multimodality) are not at all new and are in fact enveloped in the histories of writing systems and technologies” (354), and this is leading us to use the term multimodality as a useful way to describe both older and newer media.

Mills argues that “Contemporary forms of communication require working with multimodal texts, which combine visual, audio, gestural, spatial, or linguistic modes to enrich, modify, and enliven meaning” (250), but some are questioning how contemporary or *new* multimodality is. We do not generally count genres that simply combine pictures with words as new, like in old manuscripts. There are numerous examples of multimodal texts that predate the digital turn. Judith Wootten offers a historical view to understanding multimodality from the example of an old text:

“Multimodal literacy” is another fairly new refocusing, renaming. What about literacy hasn't been multimodal? Like forever? Mary Louise Pratt brought into focus Guaman Poma's 1200 page letter to Philip III of Spain, written in Peru in 1613, in “Arts of the Contact Zone” an address at the Responsibilities for Literacy conference in Pittsburgh wayback in 1990. Guaman Poma included four hundred pages of drawings in that letter entitled *New Chronicle and Good Government*. He used a pastiche of Spanish and Quechua. It was multimodal. (241)

Others in composition and rhetoric argue along the same lines that multimodality is not associated only with the digital turn: “communication has always been a hybrid blending of visual, written, and aural forms” (Hill 109). This is because “whenever

people write or read, watch or make a movie, they are combining words, images, ideas, and other experiences into meaningful relationship” (Costanzo 169).

One genre that has long been of interest because of its use of multimodality is the comic book genre (see Scott McClouds, *Understanding Comics*, and Dale Jacobs, *Marveling at the Man Called Nova*). Jacobs retells the history of comic books as traditional multimodal print. Some may think of multimodality as a reaction, mainly, to the digital world, but Jacobs believes there is much value in “the conversation about multimodal texts and literacy beyond the usual focus on the Internet, film, and television so that we can embrace the complex multimodal literacies involved in reading comics” (201). Children’s’ books have also been scoured for their multimodality by Arizpe and Styles in *Children Reading Pictures*. Both comic books and children’s books predate the digital turn.

These textual examples are “predominantly multimodal” (Mills 250). They rely on color, imagery, and other visual combinations to tell stories. There are children’s books that also incorporate sound having the reader can press a button at certain points in the book to hear a corresponding recording. These texts serve as obvious examples of multimodality because of how much they rely on other media besides the alphabetic, but as Prior et al tells us

multimodality is not some special feature of texts or certain kinds of utterance, and certainly is not a consequence of technologies.

Multimodality has always and everywhere been present as representations are propagated across multiple media and as any situated event is indexically fed by all the modes present, whether they are focalized or

backgrounded. In this sense, all genres are irremediably multimodal.

(“Remediating the Canons” 27)

This is a “boundless” (27) view of texts and it assumes that texts cannot escape their multimodal contexts that they are produced and consumed in. This means that a text draws on and uses multimodalities to communicate, whether or not that text is *predominantly multimodal*. A definition of multimodal texts suggested by C. Selfe in her textbook, *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*, describes multimodal texts as those that “exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound” (1). This definition by Selfe may be more consistent with how instructors understand multimodal texts in their classrooms, but this is a limited view. All texts are multimodal because the language has to be represented with color and layout— materially or digitally. A simple activity to observe this is to consider what you are reading right now. Look at the color of print and the color of the page. Take note of the physical nature of the page or screen.

These are mainly references to texts, but the processes of writing and reading is a multimodal process. Palmeri argues that “even when we are composing a solely alphabetic product, we often are thinking with multiple symbol systems (visual, auditory, gestural)” 44. When writing about something visual, like a particular place, we mentally imagine that place while writing and employ similar cognitive functions as though we are looking at that place in real-time. The reader uses their visual resources to understand our written words and imagine that place. Of course, writing in the alphabetic is a visual mode (print, fonts, layout), but sounds as well as smells and movement can all be called upon to write and read.

One example of the multimodal nature of reading is how we use sounds mentally to “hear” as we read, or as Elbow describes:

most readers experience some text as giving off more sense of sound—more of the illusion as we read that we are hearing words... when most people encounter a text—a set of words that just sit there silently on the page with no intonation, rhythm, accent, and so forth—they automatically project aurally some speech sounds into the text. (6–7)

In an undergraduate fiction writing course, as a student, I had an instructor with a unique voice that I would enact in my head every time I read fiction. This influenced the rhythm and tone of every line. I tend to read with a voice in my head, and when I am writing, I try to hear the words as I compose them. This experience is nothing new. It is not something that I recognize now that I am studying multimodality. It was always a part of my literacy experience.

The visual representations we create while reading is another multimodal experience. *Vivid* describes a written scene or moment that is especially sensory. Here is an example of vividness from *A Farewell to Arms* by Hemingway: “In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels” (3). While reading this, I create a very clear mental image of a river. The sounds of the river are also present, and later, I hear the “troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching (3). Consider the complex multimodal event here. At once I am visualizing and hearing while also viewing a text, and holding a book. I may oscillate between these activities and drinking coffee or adjusting my back. I may look up

and out of a window while maintaining the sound of boots aided by the repetition of words. I add the sounds of metal clanging and jostling, and on and on... the point here is probably said better by Kress and Van Leeuwen:

the different modes of representation are not held discretely, separately as autonomous domains in the brain, or as autonomous communicational resources in a culture, nor are they deployed discretely, either in representation or in communication; rather, they intermesh and interact at all times. (*Reading Images* 39–40)

I enjoy the phrase “intermesh and interact at all times” because it describes the multimodality of communication and literacy, *and* the dynamic nature of language use that draws so many of us to writing and reading.

Sometimes we get “lost” in this interaction of modes. A simple way to experience this is to write about a place where you have spent a lot of time while using sensory details. I do this writing exercise with my students and ask them to rate how much they feel like they were actually in that place. Their responses range, but students will make remarks like *I forgot I was in class*, or *it was like I was just standing in my old room back home*.

If a writer is aware that their audience is experiencing their text aurally, then certain styles and other features might be made more important to the writer. In my own course, students do a final reading of their writing out-loud to themselves or with a partner to hear for style and grammar. Then, they will mark any areas that *sound* wrong or are difficult to speak. This activity was created with the awareness that reading is in many ways an auditory experience.

The process of writing and the activities before, after, and during writing are multimodal. In my own courses, I see a multimodal composing “chain” (Prior, “Genre”) that I believe fundamentally describes the composing process. For example, I ask students to revise by highlighting parts of their drafts with color to emphasize particular features. They sometimes draw or diagram as a pre-writing or revision activity. They talk to myself and peers face-to-face throughout the process, and they do the physical work of typing, of walking the library, and flipping through books. Here we see multiple modes, visual, oral, gestural, and physical, all being utilized to read and write. This constant switching between modes reveals some of the multimodal practices we use in writing that we may not be aware of or call as such. This concept of a multimodal chain gives us a way to see how writing and reading are shaped by other activities, and how writing and reading shape other activities. Whereas some argue that,

As important as effective reading and writing are, it is no longer realistic to talk about “reading” or “writing” as discrete skills needed for the future workplace. Reading and writing rarely occur in isolation for today's students whose environment is filled with visual, electronic and digital texts that offer facilities for reading, writing, viewing, listening and responding simultaneously. (Walsh 101)

I do not think we ever *treated* reading and writing as discrete skills in our courses, whether or not we recognized the multiple modes students used in their chains of process. A student reads and writes simultaneously during peer-review. Even alone, students read their own work while writing. Students draw and diagram while listening and responding or while trying to come up with something new to write in their draft. New technologies

and the Internet have changed the tools that students use when composing, but having new technology and new media does not mean that communicating and composing did not require the simultaneous literacy practices as described by Walsh as a defining feature of the “future workplace” or “today’s environment”. I have worked with students without computers, and this required taking notes while listening and responding, as well as using multiple texts such as course catalogs, fliers, and brochures, all of which contained images or diagrams for viewing. I imagine workplaces were not completely absent of multiple texts before new media.

Moje points out that “scholars have argued that some media, texts, and literacy practices that get counted as new are actually old, but our attention to them is new” (352), and this is true of multimodality. We are being re-engaged with multimodal communication because of the rise of technologies that allow writers to blend media, but we have known before the digital turn that reading and writing are inherently multimodal processes, we just did not have a phrase to describe the multiple semiotic channels that are used to compose until “multimodality.”

Another example of the confused relationship of multimodality with new media can be seen in Anderson et al’s survey in *Integrating Multimodality into Composition Curricula*, which was meant to get a snapshot of how instructors are teaching multimodal composing across the country in 2005 and what their beliefs about multimodal composing were, but put the terms multimodal and new media together, treating them as similar:

One of the purposes of the survey, indeed, was to find out what respondents meant when they used the terms *multimodal or new media*

(emphasize added) to describe the instruction they provided in Composition classrooms... we believe that because our sample was targeted to respondents who were probably familiar with current multimodal/new media theory, we decided to abstain from defining the terms. (68)

Here we see the two words, “multimodal or new media,” can be read as interchangeable, although I am not entirely sure if this was their purpose. The responses that they received from participants treat multimodality and new media similarly, defining them together and intertwining the significance of multimodality as a defining feature of composition associated only with newer media, not older media. To date, it is unclear how many teachers or programs today are practicing multimodal pedagogy, but Anderson’s survey does give a way to see how teachers are thinking about the relationship of multimodality within composition. One respondent tells us,

While there is no specific statement regarding multimodality in our program statements, we have created specific courses and sections that focus on visual rhetoric and visual argument and have thereby been integrating multimodality into our lexicon in the manner most closely connected with the first and second definitions above [(a) texts that are designed using a combination of words, images, animations, video, audio, etc. and (b) texts that are designed with attention to several/many modes of communication] emphasis on the digital, but not exclusively relegated to such a distinction. (69)

Here the participant recognizes visual rhetoric and composition as dealing with multimodality, although they do not use the phrase *multimodality* to describe their work. This new term is something that the participant's program attends to, but not in name.

By not recognizing the multimodal significance of older texts or literacies, we may not see the potential pedagogical, critical, and research opportunities for traditional composition practices and assignments that are in use today. Associating a feature like multimodality only with non-print, digital texts; instructors might not develop multimodal awareness in our students for using what is arguably the most dominant practice of composition in any college or university FYW classroom or WAC program—alphabetic writing. Using multimodality as a term that splits old and new media can only cause harm to student's conceptions of writing when the practice of writing and reading are multimodal acts.

Limiting our conception of multimodality and partnering it only with screen-mediated composition might also limit the types of multimodal texts that students can make without screens. Shipka argues that,

The tendency to use terms like *multimodal*... as synonyms for digitized products and processes will mean that multimodal, yet-to-be-imagined hybrids that Russel, Wiebe and Robert S. Dornsife (1995) reference... will be (*provided that they have not already been*) severely limited by the texts, tools, and processes associated with digitization. (*Toward a Composition Made Whole* 10)

Shipka later refers to an assignment that has her students write on clothing. The writing is supposed to reflect what the clothing represents to the students. This requires

the use of visual and alphabetic modes, and is done without the use of computers. The final products are multimodal without having to be digital.

In my own courses, students have produced a variety of non-digital multimodal texts. One student wanted to reflect the experience of being a single mother going to college. She cut out long strips of colored paper and wove them together like a patchy tapestry. She wrote quotes from researched sources, including facts and statistics, on colored strips, and used lines from her own writing. Laced together, the strips created a dizzying effect of words and relationships between her experience, the research, and the visual design of the text. Another student wrote a rap song by turning Ethos, Logos, and Pathos into different men asking a woman to go out on a date with them. When performing the rap, he made use of gestural and aural modes.

Another reason why multimodality has been a confused term might be how it came to use as a near-synonym for multimedia. Claire Lauer points out that multimedia and multimodal are often mixed terms (226). In her study, she found that it is common for compositionists to use both terms interchangeably. Media is the material used to communicate. Computers or books are examples of media. Photographs. Pencils. Speakers. Screens. iPods. Cognitive psychologists have referred to the brain as a medium of communication as well (Prior, "From Speech Genres", 30). Lauer points out that "although the terms are often used interchangeably, multimodal has become preferable to multimedia in composition both because it is more theoretically accurate in describing our pedagogies that emphasize the process and design of a text" (231) In other words, compositionists prefer the phrase multimodal because it focuses our attention on the multimodal processes that go into the production and consumption of a text. Multimedia,

on the other hand, focuses mostly on the materials of the text. Multimedia is a great way to describe a text, but it does not describe the multiple ways we use our senses when we encounter a text, or the process of trying to reproduce a sensation. Instead, multimedia only describes the different materials that are used.

Multimedia can describe texts that combine digital video and print, like on a webpage. These types of texts draw our attention to multimodality because, as the audience of these texts, we use different senses when we read, watch, and listen to these texts. Gunther Kress said, “the multimodality of written texts, has by and large, been ignored, whether in educational contexts, in linguistic theorizing or in popular common sense. Today, in the age of ‘multimedia,’ it can suddenly be perceived again” (*Reading Images* 39). Texts have always been multimodal, even written alphabetic texts, but Kress is pointing out that we did not “perceive” or focus on multimodality until multimedia.

### **Historicizing Multimodality**

Our ability and interest in perceiving multimodality seems to be growing stronger as scholars notice the multimodal history of reading and writing. Recent work has uncovered some of the history of multimodal research and pedagogies in composition and rhetoric.

Palmeri makes the case that process researchers from the 1970’s and 80’s “conceptualized alphabetic writing as a deeply multimodal thinking process that share affinities with other forms of composing (visual, musical, spatial, gestural)” (25), and focuses on the process research of Emig from the 1970’s that “draws upon and contributes to *interdisciplinary* research on creative composing across modalities” (26). Emig defined composition as “the selection and ordering of elements” (66), which is a

definition that does not limit itself to writing alone. Although Emig is credited for advancing writing process research, she used research on the “creative process” from a variety of arts to develop her understanding of what the writing process is.

By defining multimodal as a feature of all texts and composing processes, it can be used to describe both older and newer media; books, webpages, video games. It draws attention the various communicative and sensory resources that we employ in reading, writing, viewing, and playing. In rhetoric and composition, the focus that the term multimodal brings on the various ways we write and read has been helpful when trying to describe newer media and literacy practices because of the various combinations that newer media allows (like combining print with videos), but this does not mean we cannot also use this term to describe more traditional texts and practices. The strength of taking a multimodal view is that it can be applied when composing or analyzing any text, therefore crossing the old and new, making this a useful concept for students who are constantly navigating between media. I see multimodality as a unifying term, one that crosses the lines between what is old and new. A historical understanding of multimodality shows how the transition from old to new is continuous rather than revolutionary.

Although the term ‘new media’ is popularly used in reference to contemporary technologies such as digital video, blogs, and social networking sites ... the study of new media should not be confined to the contemporary digital moment alone—that we can better understand new(er) digital media if we contextualize them in relation to old(er) media. (Palmeri 89)

Multimodality allows us to do just this: contextualize the new with the old through a shared feature.

Cynthia Selfe, with Pamela Takayoshi, tell us they encounter questions about their pedagogies such as “why should English composition faculty teach multimodal composing? Shouldn’t we stick to teaching writing and let video production faculty teach video? Art and design faculty teach about visual images? Audio production faculty teach about sound” (8). These sorts of questions show how courses are designed around certain media. Selfe’s response is that our composition classes should include these various elements because of their relationship to composing, especially when texts are not always based on single types of media. Hesse argues that we need to address whether or not we should focus on either writing or rhetoric and differentiates between, what he sees as: composition-as-writing or composition-as-rhetoric. “In composition-as-rhetoric, a wordless cartoon or a minor-key melody may be an acceptable target discourse. In composition-as-writing, they would not (though an intermingling of word and image in some fuzzy ratio and relationship would)” (2)

Multimodality gets caught up in these arguments when it becomes associated with texts that are other than alphabetic or traditional, but as we have seen, multimodality can be addressed without the need for teaching texts that are non-alphabetic.

### **A Peek Ahead...**

Following in the footsteps of others who have historicized multimodality to show a relationship between older and newer media, I turn our focus on teaching and how multimodal awareness was a part of early college writing instruction. In the following chapter, I offer a history of multimodal instruction in composition shown through college

composition textbooks from 1865–1897. These textbooks reveal the ways that multimodality was addressed in the textbooks, the language the authors used that relates to multimodality. This historical approach will strengthen the bridge between how we conceptualize writing today in the era of new, and how we conceptualized writing in the past.

The third and final chapter offers pedagogical approaches and assignments that address multimodality, particularly with alphabetic writing. This third chapter draws from the insights of contemporary multimodal scholars, and from the old textbooks. My hope is that these assignments will help students to see the multimodal connections between composing processes, and to use their multimodal awareness to write and read.

## CHAPTER TWO: MULTIMODAL WRITING PEDAGOGY: 1865–1897

Chapter 1 showed a growing body of research that describes the history of composition as having been interested in multimodality, at least since the 1960's (Palmeri, *Remixing Composition*). Palmeri may have focused on the 60's and 70's because in these two decades there were advancements in audio and visual recording, and the beginnings of personal computers. These communicative technologies and their growing use prompted instructors to consider their potential applications in composition courses just as instructors today try to use new technology pedagogically. Instead of looking at our multimodal history through the lens of technology, multimodality can be traced through our history with the assumption that writing and reading are inherently multimodal processes.

### **History through Textbooks**

I chose textbooks as my primary source for uncovering our multimodal past for a number of reasons. Textbooks today are not always indicative of actual classroom practices, but it is common for me (and I guess, common for many other teachers of writing) to take a textbook and adapt the lessons or assignments to my course, the learning outcomes of the programs, or other constraints. My classroom practices are affected by the numerous assignments, approaches, and viewpoints that I have taken from textbooks, either wholesale or piecemeal.

I am interested in understanding how early instructors conceptualized multimodality. What language did they use that relates to multimodality? What features of multimodality did they focus on? What similarities between influential textbooks, concerning multimodality, are there? If multimodality has always been a part of writing as Kress, Shipka, Prior, Wootten, and many other have argued, then I wonder, has it always been a part of our history of writing instruction?

To answer these questions, I examined the period 1865–1897 when textbook authors and composition courses began focusing on written discourse instead of oral discourse, and when composition became professionalized through the establishment of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in 1883. Four of the textbook authors I chose; Barrett Wendell, Alexander Bain, John Genung, and Adam Hill, “were the first genuine rhetoricians to deal completely with the theoretical problems posed by the shift from oral to written discourse” (Connors 83). Connor adds:

Blair had begun the adaptation, but his books were “treatisy”—arid and hard to teach. In Hill, Genung, and Wendell, who used many of Bain’s ideas more successfully than he did, we have the first attempts at a modern written rhetoric, the first rhetoric of the century to really go beyond the orally based theories of earlier rhetoric. (83)

The focus on writing that was happening during this time has set writing at the forefront of composition courses ever since. At these early stages of establishing writing focused courses, was multimodality important?

These authors also saw the first mass-printings of textbooks in composition: Bain’s *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1866), Hill’s *Principles of Rhetoric* (1878),

Genung's *Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (1886), and Wendell's *English Composition* (1893). Connor tells us,

These four textbooks are crucial to the development of composition in America for several reasons. First was their sheer popularity. Bain was in print from 1866 through 1910. Hill from 1878 through 1923. Genung from 1886 through 1914. Wendell from 1891 through 1918. These books went through printing after printing, and these were not the small printings of a thousand copies that had characterized the imprints earlier in the century, but great steam-driven mass productions of tens and twenty thousand copies. (82)

These authors, at the founding of writing focused courses, exerted a lot of influence from these texts that we will be examining for multimodality. If they were so popular, and if we find multimodality, then we might assume that multimodality was being discussed and addressed at a scale larger than just at these authors' colleges. Their influence on composition continued well into later decades and contributed to what Berlin called current-traditional rhetoric:

Bain, Hill, Genung, Wendell were among their most popular authors, and these four authors created the most popular forms of Postwar and Consolidation composition-rhetoric—rhetorical theory that would, adapted into Modern composition-rhetoric, shape American writing instruction through the 1960's. (Connors 83)

Of Bain, James Murphy writes, "Many characteristics of early twentieth-century composition classes can be traced directly to his influence" (196), and of Wendell and

Genung, Sharon Crowley argues “Harvard was one of the founding centers of what has since come to be termed as current-traditional rhetoric, particularly through the textbooks of Adams Sherman Hill and Barrett Wendell (although those of Amherest’s John Franklin Genung were popular as well)” (237). Connors also argues that, “John Genung... was arguably the most serious rhetorical thinker of the fin de siècle (end of the century)...his 1886 textbook *Practical Elements of Rhetoric* was extremely influential” (182) and Wendell’s textbook, “did the non-Harvard world the dubious favor of packaging and marketing that subjectivity as current-traditional rhetoric, which continued to discipline composition teachers and their students for much of the twentieth century” (216).

I am also including Quackenbos, who first printed his textbook, *Advanced Course in Composition and Rhetoric*, in 1854. His textbook addresses both writing and speech to show how writing instruction was treated, multimodally, when it was taught alongside speaking. This book will tell us if there were precursors to multimodality before writing became the main focus of composition courses.

Pearson will also be examined. He is a relatively unknown textbook author, and his book *Freshman Composition* (1897), did not receive the attention that the previously mentioned authors attracted. I am including this book to see if multimodality at this time was also being considered by someone who was not a “celebrity,” or if multimodality was more important to those who were driving composition through their high selling textbooks.

Researching about these textbooks led me to some potential breadcrumbs. For example, James Murphy wrote of Hill, Wendell, and Genug that they believed that “the

basis of reliable knowledge is in sense perception” (237). Multimodality is concerned with how we use our senses to communicate, and how texts affect our senses. Sharon Crowley also tells us that Wendell thought his textbooks and daily theme writing “enhanced students’ perception of their surroundings” (93). We will see later that this means, for Wendell, is to teach students to become strong observers of what they see and hear.

### **Textbook Criticism**

Textbooks, though not entirely indicative of what instruction students were given in any composition course, give students and teachers access to views about how composition should be taught. At extremes, teachers may rely heavily on a textbook for their source of instruction, and they may structure the course around a textbook. Perhaps at the weakest; textbooks might be used as supplementary material to be used at the discretion of the student.

I cannot make any absolute claim that I know what was going on in composition classes during this time period (1865–1897) by looking at textbooks alone, Robert Connors argues that “Before 1930, the teaching of rhetoric and writing in American colleges went forward with no important influence from journals at all. During the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, composition theory and pedagogy were overwhelmingly shaped by one great force: text-books” (178) This claim tells us that textbooks exerted influence on the teaching of writing, perhaps more than they do today. By looking at these textbooks, we can see what ideas influenced early composition instruction. “Composition textbooks as they developed between 1820 and the present have always responded to the preferences of the teachers cast up by the culture, meeting

their perceived needs and recreating these and other needs in later teachers shaped by the texts” (Connors 178).

Stephen North claims that little can be known about actual classroom practices when we examine textbooks (73–74). Without examining syllabi, course notes, or student notes, I cannot say that what I find in these textbooks were put to use, but I can speculate that at some level they may have been used, and more importantly, I can say that our field was very likely interested in the matters that are found in these textbooks, especially if these matters are repeated through different texts, these texts were highly popular, and they contributed to important theoretical approaches to writing instruction.

Barrett Wendell’s, *English Composition* was at first a series of lectures given at Harvard and later made into a textbook and might give us a more direct idea of what was being taught in this instructor’s composition classroom, and any tracings of multimodal concerns might be directly counted in our history in terms of actual classroom lecture. A teacher who uses this textbook ultimately decides what to teach, and they may skip over any multimodality lessons, the student who has the textbook has access to those conversations about multimodality.

Some of the textbook authors we will be examining gave students activities and exercises for students to complete. Henry Pearson, for example, argued the point that “a student learns to write as a boy learns to swim, — by doing it. In these days nobody would attempt to teach composition by mere theorizing, any more than one would attempt to teach swimming on dry land” (ix) and gave themes for students to write built from lessons and examples in *English Composition* (1897).

### Finding Multimodality through Textbooks: 1865–1897

Near the opening of Barrett Wendell's *English Composition* (1891), Wendell discusses the multimodal relationship between the alphabet and sound (of course, at this time, Wendell would not use the phrase *multimodal*): "each of these marks is a symbol which stands for one of a limited number of articulate sounds" (12). This is not exceptionally interesting to point out. I remember practicing the alphabet and learning to make the sound for each letter in the alphabet in kindergarten. What Wendell does from this basic assumption, that I see as attending to multimodality, is build a case for the differences between writing and speaking that he wants his students to think about when dealing with the writing:

We may well consider the difference that always exists between the words we ourselves speak and those we write. Closely similar, written language and spoken are yet inevitably different. Whoever says habitually, 'He does not,' or, 'I will not,' talks not like a human being, but like a prig ; whoever habitually writes, 'He doesn't,' or, 'I won't,' writes with something like vulgarity. (16)

Wendell is illustrating that writing, though representing sounds, is not meant to represent speech. Of course, writers have tried to represent speech more directly by manipulating grammar as in the famous example of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. In Wendell's academic world, and our own, there are conventions, social or institutional, that govern what is appropriate style and grammar in writing and speech. Wendell goes on to discuss other differences in speech and writing while recognizing the *sounds* of written words.

Wendell also discusses the physicality of a text and how, when we write, we should consider the visual appearance of the text because it affects the way we read:

The principle of Mass, you will remember, — the principle which governs the outward form of every composition, — is that the chief parts of every composition should be so placed as readily to catch the eye. *Now, what catches the eye is obviously not the immaterial idea a word stands for, but the material symbol of the idea,* (emphasis added)— the actual black marks to which good use has in course of time come to attach such subtle and varied significance. In these groups of visible marks that compose style certain parts are more conspicuous than others. Broadly speaking, the most readily visible parts of a given composition are the beginning and the end. Run your eye over a printed page; you will find it arrested by every period, more still by every one of those breaks which mark the division of paragraphs. (32–33)

This, like most of his discussions addressing multimodality, is addressing style. Style can describe language choice and the way a composition is arranged. Wendell asks the reader to consider the readers' physical experience with space, with word-placement, and ultimately with how their eyes operate while reading. Wendell tells us that it is the physical nature of the composition that “catches the eye” and not the ideas, making the physical considerations of reading important if we are after the attention of our readers. Here, grammar is seen as a way to control reading, not only as a way to write correctly. The visual appearance of a written text is controlled to master the same effects that someone would use an image in a blog post—to draw attention and emphasize. We can

also imagine the use of breaks or shorter paragraphs in order to give the eyes “rest” between longer paragraphs, or shortening sentences after lengthy sentences in the same sort of purpose as we would insert an image or a short video clip to break up the monotony and rhythm of a text.

In a multimodal approach to print, periods have a stronger purpose than to close a clause. A multimodal approach to print reminds us that, “A writer who is careful so to mass his compositions as to put in places that catch the eye words which stand for ideas that he wants us to keep in mind, will find his work surprisingly more effective than that of a perhaps cleverer man who puts down his words in the order in which they occur to him” (Wendell 34). Emphasis, (or *force*), is an important theme to Wendell and this can be achieved, more readily in his view, with controlling style. Some may balk at any oversimplification of the placement of ideas or words in a sentence or the use of punctuation as a way direct our readers focus, but the purpose of emphasizing in written texts by controlling the physical appearance of the text is the same sort of thinking that we want our students to use when they design a website or some other digital or physical project that uses color and arrangement to emphasize.

Henry Pearson in his 1897 textbook *Freshman Composition* also describes the experience of a reader, but this time, the imaginary reader is going through a newspaper. This is meant to illustrate the importance of directing the eyes, and how readers direct themselves:

Any reader's experience with the daily paper illustrates the value of the principle of Emphasis. His eye glances over the page for striking headlines, he begins to read, and continues or not according to the interest

for him of the first five or six lines. When he reaches the editorial page he begins an article which promises well, in all probability skims over the middle of it, and really reads the closing sentences, trusting to find in them the gist of the subject. On still another page he may find a column which starts out as news ; but a quick glance at the last lines shows him that he has escaped reading a thinly disguised advertisement of X 's Magic Hair Restorer, or some other quack nostrum. In each of these instances the first and the last lines have been the two places to which the reader naturally turned first; and in each instance he found there the statements that the several writers had been most desirous of making emphatic. (39–40)

In the first chapter, I argued that writing and reading require us to use multimodal semiotic resources when we produce and experience texts. Constructing a mental image or sound through writing is multimodal. Wendell argues for the use of concrete and specific language when we are trying to construct highly detailed images to better communicate. Interestingly, Wendell seems to have enjoyed asking people to describe what comes to mind when he would say a word or phrase:

Repeat to yourself the words, 'a black horse,' and see what image arises in your mind: once for all, it will be a black horse, mane, tail, and hide. Then say to yourself, 'a horse,'— the English equivalent of the French 'un cheval' : unless your experience and habit of mind be different from that of everybody I have carefully examined on this point, the image that will form itself in your mind will have a bay hide. Hereabouts, at any rate, the typical horse is a bay. Now add to the words, 'a horse,' or 'un cheval,' the

adjective 'black,' or 'noir,' and see what happens: you have to destroy your bay image before you finally possess yourself of the proper black one. (87)

This exercise in imagination was meant to illustrate how words create images in our minds. This is no more revelatory today than it was in the 1890's, but there is a very real purpose for bringing up this point that Wendell returns to: if we want to better control the image our readers' envision, we need to be aware of our descriptors. Word choice becomes a multimodal consideration if we are focusing on how our language use relies on sensory meaning making. Henry Pearson also discusses the importance of "specific" words for eliciting other experiences:

Every definite word has the power to make in the mind of the reader a complete picture. The idea is not a vague form with a shadowy outline, but is well defined, filled in with detail, and stands out clearly. The difference in the images created by the words boat and iron steam yacht illustrates this. The first word calls up the notion of an indefinite something, whose chief quality is that it floats ; the second expression brings to mind, in all probability, the remembrance of some large yacht as the reader once saw it; and all the circumstances of its appearance then— the color and the lines of the hull, the rake of the masts, the glitter of the brass-work, the club flag and the private signal— come back to him and form a picture complete and full of detail. It is plain enough, then, that the greater the number of definite words in a theme, the more fully and accurately will the reader see the writer's ideas. (124)

Alexander Bain, author of the textbook *English and Rhetoric* (1890), names this sort of writing as “picturesque” writing (277) and gives us an example of how even a word used to describe a sound might also associate an image in the reader, making a complex multimodal experience by combining the physical act of reading, the material of the words and page, and mental imagery and sounds:

In our search for the select circumstances that are preeminently suggestive of a concrete picture, we cannot fail to note the adjunct of sound or noise. An object of sight that gives forth a sound, is powerfully recalled by the mention of the sound: so close is the incorporation of sights and sounds in our mind. The roar of the sea gives us at once the picture of the billows breaking on the shore. The singing of the skylark in the heavens inevitably recalls the fluttering of its wings. (274)

This example is telling of how one mode can enact other modes through association. When we hear a hooting noise from outside, we imagine an owl. We may associate the image of a cat when we read “meow”. Readers also generate mental images, sounds, and smells while reading words that do not always describe such. For example, the word *happiness* might bring up a variety of different sensations to a reader. Wendell tries to explain this experience of attaching other experiences to print:

A considerable number of sane human beings, it appears, attach to each letter of the alphabet a distinct color, probably an unconscious reminiscence of the illuminated alphabets of infancy. For my own part, I found that the word man suggested pretty distinctly a figure with a clumsy hat and a chin-beard, poising himself rather unsteadily on his left leg. I

subsequently discovered the original of the image in a copy of Mother Goose, familiar to me at the age of two or three. (69)

This is Wendell's attempt to understand how we form these imagistic attachments with words and letters, and a multimodal approach to language might ask our students to be aware of the sensory associations they have with words and letters. We already do this in children's education. Like the illuminated alphabets that Wendell refers to, I remember activities from youth that made concrete connections between a word and what it represented. In my second grade class, I matched words with textures; smooth with a river stone, rough with sand, and soft with a feather. Building associations is fundamental to language learning, and a multimodal approach asks us to examine these experiences of association.

What do these textbook authors see as the purpose of addressing multimodality? Wendell cares about the ability to give the reader a clear and direct image of whatever it is the writer was imagining. To show this, he gives us different ways that writing can go from general to specific and how that shapes the images and sounds of the reader, as in the example of the black horse earlier.

Bain, along with clarity, has two more reasons to add:

The most usual design of picturesque description is to cater to our emotions. Incidentally, it is useful for adding to our knowledge, — as in Geographical and Historical delineations, and in the graphic illustration of scientific truth. (277)

From experience, I know that when I am engaged with a highly descriptive moment in a piece of writing, either as a reader or writer, I tend to feel more. This

emotional engagement might simply be a consequence of more heavily employing multimodality, and why this strategy of using the “picturesque” for affective purposes is useful.

By “graphic illustration of scientific truth” I am assuming that Bain refers to situations that demand specific descriptions to describe a certain process, or to describe an observation. At this time, cameras were not as common or practical for use in documentation as they are today. The need to be highly descriptive in writing in various situations was important, and still is arguably today despite the rise in cameras and image-sharing. It is common in my courses for students to ask me if they are allowed to include images in their essays. Given the class or situation, students might not have this option today to rely on an image to describe for them what they must try to do with language.

In the textbook, *Advanced Course in Composition and Rhetoric* (1865) by G.P. Quackenbos, sound is important to writing: “The second particular on which the Harmony of a sentence depends, is the proper arrangement of its parts. However well-chosen the words may be, or however euphonious in themselves, if they are unskillfully arranged the music of the sentence is lost” (301). In this section, Quackenbos focuses on the aesthetics of harmony in relation to sound and writing, and tries to build lessons based on this idea of harmony. He discusses how word-choice and punctuation create certain aesthetic effects:

The first thing requiring attention in the arrangement of sentences, is that the parts be disposed in such a way as to be easily read. What the organs of speech find no difficulty in uttering, will, as a general rule, afford

pleasure to the ear. In the progress of a sentence, the voice naturally rests at the close of each member; and these pauses should be so distributed as neither to exhaust the breath by their distance from each other, nor to require constant cessations of voice by the frequency of their recurrence. (302)

Here we have an attempt to describe writing through another activity, speech, requiring the “ear” and “breath” to write. Quackenbos continues to use sound as a way to arrange sentences for different aesthetic effects. He argues that the highest harmony comes when the writer is able to write with the “adaptation of sound to sense” (304) such as using words that sound like waves and breezes to depict an ocean.

As I search and read these textbooks, I am continually surprised to find advice and approaches that I only recently heard. I was personally surprised to run into this tip that I got from a Writing Center colleague and now use with my students to help with style and grammar: “In revising, each sentence should be read aloud slowly and distinctly, that the ear may aid the eye in detecting faults” (Quackenbos 334). This simple tip illustrates the use of different modes to compose by using the eyes and ears while reading out-loud. This boring example might not be as interesting to scholars today compared to the multimodal experiences of reading a blog, but nevertheless, in 1865, composition scholars were clearly using a multimodal technique to enhance a written composition.

In another textbook, Genung, in 1893, tells us that developing our hearing is the best way to develop our writing style: “The readiest training for this quality of style is to subject one's work constantly to the test of reading aloud. Prose characterized by beauty

requires a discipline of the ear, as truly as does music or poetry” (*Practical Rhetoric* 24). Already we have the roots of reading out-loud as a multimodal composing process to “test” what we have written to make sure the style is agreeable. When Quackenbos and Genung discuss style and grammar, they frequently ask the reader to consider sounds because of the strong multimodal link between reading print and hearing.

Genung argues that “The most potent stimulus and aid to original production is the keen and intelligent use of the eyes and ears. In a sense all the activities of authorship are reducible to this” (226–227), thereby uniting the process of writing with the other activities of listening and seeing. This textbook, which was meant for a course on writing *and* speaking, emphasizes the sensitivity to other modes as a key to developing as writer. The passage continues:

For just as one person may be listless and insensible to what is in the world about him while another is keenly alive to every sight and sound, so one in the same manner gathers little or nothing from a printed page, while to another it is luminous with suggestion. It is not the eye, but the mind behind the eye, the observing faculty and tendency, that makes the difference. This observing faculty it is, ‘the harvest of a quiet eye,’ that makes the world worth infinitely more to its possessor than it is to the listless. Whatever, therefore, quickens and develops this faculty has signal value for all the operations of literary invention. (227)

Here, the ability to write and read is connected with the ability to be sensitive to multiple modes. The “eye behind the eye” references the mental development of understanding and experiencing these sensations. A good writer, in this sense, is able to

fully immerse themselves in their multimodal environment (in sound and sight) because there is a connection between being able to immerse oneself multimodally and their ability to read and write. Genung says that the writer must be a “universal” (228) observer. Unlike the painter who relies primarily on their vision, the writer can describe all things under observation and so they must be sensitive to all things.

Like Genung, Bain also compares writing to painting:

Action is, by pre-eminence, suited to our faculty of conceiving through language ; and there is the widest scope for a picturesque choice of the phases of activity. Moreover, action is what rouses us; it is the great stimulant of our passions and emotions. Hence, narrative is more exciting than description: a story stirs the blood beyond the power of a painting.

(271–272)

At the time, video was not so easily to come by. Writing, in Bain’s belief, was the dominant medium for representing action. This shows how writing was relied on, perhaps more-so than today, as a way to communicate other experiences that we can now more easily show, sometimes, through the use of other media: video, images, sound clips.

### **Summary of Findings**

From just these five textbooks, we can see that multimodality was discussed with students and teachers via textbooks in pre-twentieth century composition classes. That multimodality was discussed in some way or another is not entirely surprising for those who believe composing is an inherently multimodal process. What might be more surprising is just how important it was, especially in Wendell’s 1891 text *English Composition*. I was most surprised by the amount of space textbooks dedicated to

descriptive writing which required, for them, the use and development of multiple senses, and how often they emphasized hearing the text. I had expected to find that the authors might discuss the use of imagery. I was also surprised when they told students to read their essays out-loud as a way to hear the style and grammar. In general these authors mostly concerned themselves with how inner semiotics are translated to outer semiotics, like creating an image in a reader's mind through writing. These findings relate to Prior's argument that "fundamentally, every text, every utterance, is multimodal as it must involve a mix of inner and outer semiotics" ("From Speech Genres" 24). Each of these textbooks discussed the ways that writing and reading affect the reader, multimodally, and how to control texts to utilize inner multimodal experiences.

Drawing on my analysis of these influential textbooks, I offer the following findings which support the assertion that multimodality has long been a concern of Composition.

### Finding #1

Pre-twentieth century compositionists concerned themselves with sound. They asked students to attend to the sounds of paragraphs and sentences when read out-loud to hear how a reader might hear their writing in in the reader's head. To teach sound awareness, aside from reading out-loud, the authors gave examples of poetry and prose that they thought fit certain aesthetic qualities related to music and orations. Such a lesson about sound might be as follows from Bain's *English and Rhetoric*:

The sound of a sentence, apart from its meaning, may also be improved by  
Balance. The mind feels pleasure in the perception of symmetry in any

object; and so the ear is pleased by the sound of successive clauses corresponding to each other in form and in length. (72)

These authors would agree with Elbow who says, "most readers experience some text as giving off more sense of sound—more of the illusion as we read that we are hearing words" (6). Although most of the authors simply stated that writing is the use of arbitrary marks to represent a sound, Wendell compared the differences between speaking and writing to show that we do not always write as we speak, and we do not always speak as we write.

### Finding #2

Pre-twentieth century compositions cared about the physical act of reading, and visual rhetoric. Most of the authors discussed grammar as a way to guide the reader such as Pearson wrote, "A mark of punctuation in the middle of a sentence forms a resting-place for the eye" (111). Wendell discussed the arrangement of prose, and argued that it's not ideas that grab the eyes of the reader, but the actual written physical marks. Pearson asked students to consider how someone might read a newspaper, the description resembling how someone might read a website by jumping around and reading what only catches their attention. Quackenbos tells us that the eyes cannot always catch mistakes, which is why students should read out-loud when revising. Wendell discusses what he calls the Mass or outward appearance of a text and how the use of style, such as headings and paragraphing, is useful for readers' eyes. This finding addresses both the physical and visual features of a text and the visual process of reading. They would agree with

Stephen Bernhardt who says “The physical fact of the text, with its spatial appearance on the page, requires visual apprehension: a text can be seen, must be seen” (66).

### Finding #3

All of the textbook writers discussed descriptive writing, and how descriptions are used to create images and sounds for the reader through writing. This multimodal approach concerns itself with the inner semiotics and senses as experienced mentally. Wendell argued that the need to develop the ability to describe is for clarity of communication. Bain argued that, along with representational purposes, description is used for emotional purposes. Writing and reading description, to these compositionists, was multimodal— requiring the control of word choice, mostly, to create numerous inner sensory experiences such as seeing and hearing. Palmeri tells us that “if writing about a remembered place, the writer might perceive sensory (visual, auditory, olfactory) images of that place” (32). These perceived sensory semiotics are then translated, through description, and represented as alphabetic writing. All of these textbook authors addressed descriptive writing as the way to translate from inner to outer semiotics.

### Finding #4

Developing sensory awareness and use is also addressed in these early textbooks. “For multimodality scholars the senses are *associated* (emphasis added) with what are referred to as ‘modes’” (Pink, 262), and these textbook authors encouraged students to develop their senses. Genung tells us that a writer should be a “universal” observer and to use sensory observation for use in invention, which is reminiscent of Donald Murray who

argues, “all the writer’s senses help the writer become aware of information that may become raw material for a piece of writing” (52). Quackenbos addressed the need for a writer to develop “taste” by experiencing and examining different arts. All of the above authors compared writing to the sensory experiences of either composing or observing other art forms like painting, sculpture and architecture. Sharon Crowley also tells us that Wendell thought his textbooks and daily theme writing “enhanced students’ perception of their surroundings” (93). As Gunther Kress said of multimodality,

it makes it possible to link the means of representation with the bodyliness of humans: not only in the physiology of sound and hearing, of sight and seeing, of touch and feeling, of taste and tasting, but also in the fact that humans make meaning through all of these means and the fact that all these are linked and make meaning together. (*Multimodality* 83)

Developing *sense*-awareness is linked to developing our multimodal awareness, and these textbook authors make this association between sensitivity and making meaning again and again.

### **Multimodal Pedagogy Is Embedded in the History of Composition**

These findings show that compositionists from 1865 to 1897 treated writing and reading as multimodal processes, and encouraged students to develop multimodal strategies for reading and writing. They also examined the multimodal nature of texts. Unlike multimodal scholars today, they did not teach composing beyond writing (aside from speaking as in *Composition and Rhetoric*), but they did compare writing to different arts showing their differences and similarities. These insights about our history of multimodality inform writing instruction in general. It is easy to look at the table of

contents of these books and see that large sections are devoted to style and grammar, but to these writers, style and grammar was more complicated than writing *correctly*. To them, style requires sensitivity to how writing is read and *heard*. Style addressed the issue of how does writing translate to images and other experiences so that the reader can *see* or *feel* exactly what the writer wishes them to. Before digitization, compositionists did not have the option of putting other media to their texts as easily as we do today. Being able to describe a scene or sound was necessary for these writers and for writers today who cannot embed a video or image into their text.

Palmeri tells us that, “we should value and build upon our multimodal heritage” (111). In the next chapter, I will take these findings and use them to inform multimodal writing assignments that were created either by me or from other scholars. Like the compositionists from 1865–1897, these assignments will focus on the multimodality of alphabetic writing, and they build on the idea that writing is inherently multimodal.

### CHAPTER THREE: PEDAGOGY FOR MULTIMODAL COMPOSING

A multimodal approach to composition focuses on the multiple ways writing and reading rely on various semiotic resources and channels. In the first chapter, I argued that alphabetic writing is always multimodal. In the second chapter, I showed that pre-twentieth century composition textbooks teach writing as multimodal. In this chapter, I build from the understanding of multimodality expressed in the first chapter and our multimodal heritage from the second chapter to create a pedagogical approach with assignments that address the multimodal nature of alphabetic writing.

One of the goals of a multimodal pedagogy in a FYW class should be to develop our students' awareness to recognize and manipulate the complex relationships between the different modes we use and experience through writing and reading whether they are made through outer or inner semiotic means. Students might not become masters of multimodal composing, but they should be able to make connections between the multimodal nature of composing and their processes of writing and reading. They might rhetorically use their multimodal awareness to construct affective texts or examine the relationships between multimodality and the ways that social forces tell us about these modes. Students should connect writing and reading to the body—the physical labor of production and consumption of texts, and recognize that what they write also affects their readers bodily. A multimodal understanding of language focuses on the connections between what is written, and how we react through our senses. As Gunther Kress said of multimodality,

it makes it possible to link the means of representation with the bodyliness of humans: not only in the physiology of sound and hearing, of sight and seeing, of touch and feeling, of taste and tasting, but also in the fact that humans make meaning through all of these means and the fact that all these are linked and make meaning together. (*Multimodality* 83)

Multimodality is not just a feature of the technology or texts we use. It is personal, it is bodily. To be multimodally aware is to also be aware of our senses, what affects them and how can we use them to aid in composing. Our pedagogies must work against this view that multimodality is only a feature of texts, or that some communication practices are multimodal and not others. Shipka voiced this concern that

[the] tendency to label as multimodal certain texts or artifacts, whether they are digitally based or comprised of a mix of analog components, works to facilitate a text-dependent or textually overdetermined conception of multimodality, thereby limiting potentials for considering the scope, complexity and pervasiveness of multimodal *practice* (emphasis added). (12)

I argued in Chapter 1 that all texts are multimodal and all writing and reading practices are multimodal, but there seems to be a limited amount of research about teaching students to recognize and manipulate the multimodal nature of alphabetic writing. Instead, some pedagogies focus on the production or analysis of only what is considered New Media: blogs, websites, podcasts, videos, video games, etc. In Selfe's book *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*, she describes multimodal texts as those that "exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images,

animations, color, words, music and sound” (1). This type of viewpoint of multimodality, that it is a feature only of texts that include multiple *media*, works against any aim to teach students that alphabetic texts do more than contain fixed black marks. These black marks have shapes and colors, and the medium they are written on have visual and physical properties. Aside from font, they can be arranged spatially in many ways (see Wysocki, *The Multiple Media of Texts: How Onscreen and Paper texts Incorporate Words, Images, and Other Media*”).

Of course, these textual features do more when read. As Wendell wrote a century before Selfe,

In themselves, these black marks are nothing but black marks more or less regular in appearance... whoever knows an alphabet, however, as all of us know the twenty-six letters that compose written English, sees in these black marks, not the marks themselves, but the ideas they stand for. (11)

Wendell continued to describe the visual and aural nature of texts, showing that alphabetic texts already exceed the alphabetic, and our reading and writing of these black marks is an extremely multimodal process. We should teach that “multimodality is a routine dimension of language use” (Prior, “From Speech Genres 27), as opposed to teaching multimodality as a dimension of specific texts or language practices.

The following assignments specifically address the multimodal nature of alphabetic writing, sometimes by employing other non-alphabetic genres and different mediums, but always in relation to alphabetic writing. Because multimodality is always a feature of language use, pedagogy could address multimodality not only with these specific assignments, but in any assignment or communicative situation. These

assignments are ways to focus on the multimodal nature of writing and reading. They will also be related to the assignments or discussions by our represented textbook authors who wrote about multimodality (although they never called it that) to show that we can “build upon our multimodal heritage” (Palmeri 111).

### **Assignment #1: Multimodally Representing a Word**

This first assignment is adapted from one mentioned in Shipka’s “A Multimodal Task-Based Framework for Composing” (280–281), in which a student takes the word *scare* and shows his research on the word with a history and multiple definitions on the computer. The reader is then guided through a series of scary stories, and while the reader reads, the software tries to scare the viewer by doing creepy things like taking control of the program, having scary images appear, and frightening sounds play. The student translated the word from the original alphabetic form into a visual and aural experience to intensify what someone might imagine or feel, multimodally, when they read the word *scary*. Asking students to create a multimodal representation of a word challenges them to make explicit connections between inner and outer representations.

This assignment gets students to think about what a word represents visually and aurally, and then come up with a way to textually represent those representations through different media. This activity lets the student multimodally represent more of the word, and they might develop a more complex relationship to that word. By making a multimodal representation, the student has to consider the word in multiple ways, deepening their initial associations. What does the word mean to the student? What do they see, feel, or hear when they read the word? How can they represent these inner experiences through different outer modes?

This assignment can be used in a variety of contexts in a first-year composition classroom as our students are constantly immersed in language-use in our own courses. Choosing a word is almost as important as what they do with the word. Ultimately, student should find the task of multimodally representing the word as an extension of what occurs to them when they think about the word, and to show how complex the word is to them (making, I hope, for more complex associations).

This assignment might be done after a student writes a draft of an essay and picks a reoccurring word from that draft. This word could be particularly important to their draft. They could do this by selecting their own draft, or by putting their draft into a “word cloud”. Programs like Wordle visually represent the frequency of words that are most used in a given text. Words that are more frequently used will show up in larger fonts than lesser used words. The words will be arranged in one of their many visually appealing collage forms while omitting words like “the,” and “and”. I have used Wordle in the past as a reflective exercise. Students copy-and-paste their essay, print out the word cloud, and then write about the phrases that appear most. This multimodal representation assignment, if done with a student-text, works as another way to have students deepen their connections to the language they use in their text.

Once the students have selected a word, ask them to freewrite about what images, sounds, and other feelings they associate with the word. Have them describe these associations. Then ask how they might represent these associations textually, through the use of outer modes. Their final project should represent that word through different modes: visually, aurally, or physically, either in a combination or as a series. The example above is visual because of the use of writing and images. It was aural because of

the use of scary sounds, and it was physical because the program would take away the user control and require the user to have to restart the computer to gain complete control back.

By moving the meaning across modes, students are *transducting*. Transducting “names the process of moving meaning-material from one mode to another—from *speech* to *image*, from *writing* to *film* (Kress, “Multimodality” 125). In this assignment, students are transducting from a single written word to other forms. Students will be confronted with the problem of moving meaning across modes, a complex task that requires students to see how meaning expressed in one mode might be more difficult, simpler, or just different from mode-to-mode. Kress argues, “there is a need to ask seriously how meaning realized in one mode can be newly articulated as meaning in the new mode(s)” (125). Students should do just this in a reflection—to articulate how they transducted meaning from a word to their new media and if they think that the meaning changed in any way. How is the meaning of their original inner experience now being represented? Students might also construct and examine their animation rhetorically by addressing considerations about audience, purpose, and genre, and how these intersect with their multimodal text.

### **Assignment #2: Transducting and Circulation**

This assignment is a personal favorite, and it might be because it is adapted from a party game. Like Assignment #1, this requires students to transduct, but unlike Assignment #1, this requires transduction from peer-to-peer, drawing on the ways in which meaning is potentially stable or changed through transduction *and* circulation.

Arrange students into odd numbered groups (minimum of 5 students to a group) and hand out the corresponding number of cards to each student (for example, for a group of 5 give 5 cards to *each* student). Each student will write a sentence on their card. Then they will give that sentence and the stack of cards to the person sitting next to them. The next person will read the sentence, draw a picture on the next card, and hand the stack to the next person. The next student will see the picture, and try to write what they think is the original sentence based on the picture without looking at the original sentence. The next person will draw a picture of the sentence, and so on until the original person gets their stack of cards back and can compare their original sentence to the final sentence.

I have each student share the the original and the final sentences. Then I ask at least two groups to share one stack of cards. I like to have one group that came close to the original sentence, and a group that was far from it, although it is always more likely, in my experience, that the final sentence is close to the original. Each student responsible for the image or sentence in a stack of cards will try to tell the class what their process was for responding to the card. By having each student describe their process of transducting, they are also revealing how the original meaning circulated in the group. Circulation is typically used to describe how texts are transformed from context-to-context, genre-to-genre, and medium-to-medium (see Yancey 312–316). The groups reflection should show how multimodality plays a role in the way texts are transformed by having students actively participate in creating and circulating texts.

### **Assignment #3: Multimodal Observations**

Genung argued “the most potent stimulus and aid to original production is the keen and intelligent use of the eyes and ears” (227), and Donald Murray, writing about one-hundred years later, says “all the writer’s senses help the writer become aware of information that may become raw material for a piece of writing” (52), and “it is important that we move out from that which is within us to what we see, feel, hear, smell, taste of the world around us” (49). This next exercise is somewhat adapted from a writing teacher I had as an undergraduate, Elizabeth Smith, who had me do numerous observation writing exercises while riding campus busses, walking to the Snake River, sitting at the university outdoor amphitheater and watching people at the Student University Building.

I allow my students to collage their writing in this assignment. A collage essay is a collection of parts, of writing, that are mashed and juxtaposed together. I use this genre because students are able to choose non-linear forms of arrangement, have more freedom with the visual look of their writing because they can break their sentences or paragraphs when their attention roves to a different subject, or they can arrange the collage for a specific effect. To start, explain collage essaying. Then give students a blank piece of paper and walk to some area on campus (a student art gallery, the quad, the river). Have them write down what they focus on and to break their sentence or paragraph whenever there is a break in their focus. They are instructed to write only what they feel, see, and experience through their senses, including any inner sensations, and they are allowed to write wherever and however on the paper.

This exercise is meant to develop the somatic awareness of our students.

Fleckenstein describes somatic literacy as concerning “how we construct and participate

in the world through our bodies and how we know the world as bodies positioned in specific sites” (79). What changes us (or does not) when we move from the classroom to some other place, and how can we communicate and complicate that experience with writing? Fleckenstein notes that “through somatic literacy, students conceptualize meaning as multi-sensual and as sited, incorporating into writing-reading the sensuality and positionality necessary for our physical existence within the world” (80).

Students use highly descriptive words to discuss the place, their position in that place, and what they feel. They vary in their focus—some choose a single object, while most tend to choose different objects and sensations, and some try to write about as many different sensations as they can. Occasionally, a student will draw map or diagram with chunks of words, or try to write about an object, like a tree, while arranging their writing into a tree.

I give students ten to fifteen minutes to write as much as they can about what they observe, and then I have students write or discuss, reflectively, about their process of observation. What did they notice first, second... what particularly struck them and what did it make them feel and think? The goal is to practice description, of course, but to also examine the relationships between how we feel, observe, imagine, and write.

Donald Murray said that “schools often overlook one of the writer’s primary sources of information: observation” (67), and he tells writers to develop their awareness through observing the world they live in, by paying attention in common places like at school or the supermarket. Murray has a similar activity where students are told to “make yourself a camera that is recording what it sees”, and to “just write down the specific details” (50). A multimodal approach to observation might also challenge writers to

observe both the details in the trees and concrete, and the way it reminds us of an image from their neighborhood. It is using our senses to experience the world, and observing those re-creations of other experiences just as a cloudy grey sky in Boise might remind me of a walk in Seattle.

#### **Assignment #4: Detail Immersion**

This next assignment is a place-based writing activity, but here we are focusing on how writing about a place or reading about a place can be a multimodal experience. Palmeri tells us when “writing about a remembered place, the writer might perceive sensory (visual, auditory, olfactory) images of that place” (32). This activity can also fuel a discussion about how to recreate experiences.

Ask students to recall a place where they have spent a lot of time. This could be a bedroom where they grew up, or where they live today. Then ask them to try to describe this place with as much detail as possible. At 10 minutes, ask the class to rate, from 1–10, how much they felt like they were actually in that place; 1 being they were fully aware they were sitting at a desk in a writing class, and 10 being they completely forgot they were in their desk, and felt they were in the place they were writing about. Then, students give their writing to a partner, and their partner rates the essay (without seeing the writer’s rating). Collect their scores, and anonymously write the two scores for each essay together so everyone can see them, and ask the class if they see a correlation between how immersive and sensory of an experience it was for the writer to write about the place and for the reader to experience their writing. In other words, did their use of description enhance the feeling that they were right there, in their peers’ childhood living room? In my experience, students tend to agree that the two (amount and quality of detail

and sensory immersion) are related. Then we follow with a discussion about being able to recreate these places through writing and reading.

The textbook authors argued that specific, concrete language, clarity; control of the point-of-view; and an enumeration of details, are necessary to immerse a reader in an image or other representation. Pearson gives us an example of the type of language use students should consider:

The especial value of specific language lies in the fact every definite word has the power to make in the mind of the reader a complete picture. The idea is not a vague form with a shadowy outline, but is well defined, filled in with detail, and stands out clearly. The difference in the images created by the words boat and iron steam yacht illustrates this. The first word calls up the notion of an indefinite something, whose chief quality is that it floats; the second expression brings to mind, in all probability, the remembrance of some large yacht as the reader once saw it; and all the circumstances of its appearance then — the color and the lines of the hull, the rake of the masts, the glitter of the brass-work, the club flag and the private signal — come back to him and form a picture complete and full of detail. It is plain enough, then, that the greater the number of definite words in a theme, the more fully and accurately will the reader see the writer's ideas. (123)

This place-based is a creative assignment, but being able to describe is important in technical and research genres just as it is important in personal and creative genres. Bain made a distinction between using details for the purpose of emotional affect, and for

knowledge (270). An example of an emotional affect would be the charged imagery of a riot in progress in which the feeling of being in the riot is important. Examples of descriptions of knowledge are the place, people, and events. Students of mine have researched and wrote about car design, bicycle design, tortilla making, and sewing, all of which required a high use of description. My students have used detail writing to persuade readers, to relate experiences, to give accurate and precise information, and to generally engage their audience by manipulating the multimodal possibilities of writing.

#### **Assignment #5: Surface Writing**

This assignment, taken from Jody Shipka, asks students to write on a material object. They write about what the object represents or means to them. In essence, they are using language to describe their associations with the material, and to make connections between the thing and what is represented by the thing. This is multimodal because the items they choose to write on are always physical and visual. For one example, Shipka's student writes on ballet pointe shoes and describes the physical work and pain of learning to do pointe ("Toward" 3). This is what the student sees and feels when she sees the shoes, and writing on them makes explicit the inner physical associations she has with the shoes to readers.

#### **Assignment #6: Multimodal Process Comparison**

In this activity, students research a creative process and compare it, multimodally, to writing. The textbook authors compared writing to other composing processes; painting, architecture, music, sculpting, speaking. Comparing writing to other processes is something we still do in composition, at least, metaphorically (see Halley “Walk, Talk, Cook, Eat: A Guide to Using Sources”).

Contemporary compositionists argue that students should be encouraged to see the similarities between composing with different arts so they can approach a new situation with different media or genres, and be able to draw on transferable knowledge and apply it to that situation. Palmeri says that

rather than teaching students to see alphabetic writing as entirely separate from all other forms of composing, we might instead engage students in collaboratively investigating the interrelation of alphabetic writing and other arts forms. ... in many cases, students already come to our courses with some previous experience with nonalphabetic forms of communication (for example, taking a drawing class, shooting digital images, writing songs, making YouTube videos), but they tend to see these multimodal composing activities as wholly unrelated to the work of the writing class. (48)

Ask students to research a creative process and compare that process to writing. This could include any number of creative processes like photography or cooking, music composition, graphic design, website or app making, architectural or engineering related processes (such as landscaping or technology designing), and business presentations. I prefer to let my students choose the process they want to research and compare to writing

because they may already have experience with another process, or they may be interested in a process for some other reason (maybe they have always wanted to learn photography?). They might research a process that relates to a major or career.

Students might be asked to try out the process they are researching, do interviews, watch YouTube clips, read tutorials, and read any relevant research. One of my students researched home cheese making and decided to craft his own cheeses (which he had never done before). Multimodally, he discussed the importance of taste and fresh, high-quality ingredients, such as local goat and cow milk, and the connections between the final taste of his cheese and organic, ethically driven food production. He also talked about the complex physical work that is required. Another student researched sewing and fashion design and compared, visually, clothing she re-made from thrift stores, and the interaction between visual appeal, cost, labor, and branding, as well as the visual and physical work she had to do to recreate the designs. In these two examples, the students showed complex interactions between our senses and the things we produce or consume.

Students might also compare similar features between the products of writing and whatever process they choose to examine. Another student of mine researched graffiti and compared the differences in purpose and style between an academic essay and street tagging. In many ways, he was examining style. Barrett Wendell believed that examining style, which he defined as “the expression of thought or emotion” (4) can be understood through developing an understanding of multiple arts. He argued that studying style

brings us face to face with an obvious trait which the art we are considering shares with all the other arts of expression, — painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and indeed those humbler arts, not

commonly recognized as fine, where the workman conceives something not yet in existence (a machine, a flower-pot, a sauce) and proceeds, by collaboration of brain and hand, to give it material existence. (4)

With this assignment, students might start to draw such connections between reading and writing with different media and modes.

### **Assignment #7: Inner Images Search**

Palmeri has his students search online for images that relate to topics the student is writing about (44): “Just as in alphabetic freewriting, the goal is to quickly generate a wide variety of material without pausing to critically judge or evaluate” (44–45). Palmeri then has students share and write reflectively about the images they found.

In a similar activity, ask students to consider their topic and write down, with as much visual detail as they can, imagery that they associate with their topic. For example, a student might be writing a research report about zombies in American culture. They might remember specific scenes from movies. Just like in Palmeri’s activity, students could be asked to share their writing and why they think they made those associations between their visual descriptions and their topics. What were the key associations they had between the topic and their images? In my experience, students find use for their freewrite by including it in later work on their topic.

### **Summary: Bringing Multimodality into Awareness**

Some of these assignments might be new for readers, like Assignment #1, which has students multimodally represent a word through the use of any media they choose. Other assignments, such as Assignment #3: Multimodal Observations, seems like a

common writing exercise in detail writing and observation. The common feature of all of these assignments is that they put a flashlight on a feature of communication that was always a part of the process of reading and writing, but until now, we did not have a phrase that referred to the various semiotic channels and resources of communication that students use when they communicate, read, listen, or engage in inner semiotic activity. Multimodality is a “renaming, a re-focusing” (Wooten 239), and these assignments focus our students’ attention on these multiple ways of communication.

After doing any of these assignments, students should recognize (if they had not already), that composing *requires* multimodal processes. Students today might have more access than ever to an ever-growing array of media that they can communicate with, and multimodality can “suddenly be perceived again” (Kress, Reading 39). But we cannot only teach students that texts which “exceed the alphabetic” (Selfe 1) are multimodal. We must also teach students to recognize that the alphabetic multimodal.

Some of these assignments directly compare the differences between ways of composing, especially Assignment #6: Multimodal Process Comparison, but we can always ask our students to consider how to represent an image with words, why and when they would do so, or we might challenge students to rely on alphabetic writing to make a reader feel like they are in a specific place, looking at a specific sight (Assignment #4: Detail Immersion).

Scholars today and in the past (at least since 1854) have been trying to address the following questions, and they are questions we should challenge our students with; how do we experience a text through our senses and how do we compose a text so that our readers experience it multimodally beyond seeing black marks on a page? How is

composing always multimodal and what are the multimodal similarities and differences between different composing processes? How do we represent the various inner and outer semiotics through writing or other mediums? Is it possible to transfer multimodal awareness from one task to another, and more importantly, is it useful?

What we do know is that writing and reading are always multimodal and that this fact is reflected in our history of composition. We also know from this thesis, and the work of Palmeri, that contextualizing the present changes in communication with the past is a powerful way to understand these changes.

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