

Integrating Assessment and Instruction: Using Student-Generated Grading Criteria to Evaluate Multimodal Digital Projects

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Abstract

In this article, I explore how we can link assessment to instruction and the multimodal composing process by inviting students to generate the grading criteria for new media assignments, and I show how this approach influenced students' composing and understanding of multimodal texts. I first detail the scaffolding processes I took to help the class learn to construct the evaluative criteria for a digital video project, describing the course curriculum, instructional approaches, and assignments. Then drawing from extended interviews with three learners, I present their perceptions on how the collaborative construction of grading standards affected their learning and comprehension of new media rhetoric. I close with pedagogical recommendations for instructors who teach multimodal digital writing and who seek to integrate the collaborative construction of grading criteria into their classroom. © 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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“...To have effective and productive assessment, assessment that teaches, all stakeholders involved in the assessment must be a part of the entire process. Students can't simply be recipient of assessment. They must be central to the practices in the classroom.”

Asao Inoue

“Much as teachers need to expand their view of learning goals to include more significant learning, they also need to expand their view of feedback and assessment to include more educative assessment.”

L. Dee Fink

1. Introduction

When teaching first-year composition, I aim to help students develop multiliteracies (Anderson, 2008; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; Selber, 2004; New London Group, 1996) by exposing them to and teaching them about different modes of writing—alphabetic, visual, and aural. For one of their final assignments in the course, students produce multimodal projects using video editing software to demonstrate their understanding of the rhetorical functions of sounds, images, and alphabetic texts. While digital video is not an unfamiliar media to learners who watch countless YouTube clips in any given month,¹ they may not be cognizant of the rhetorical operations and effects at work. Brian Huot (2002a)

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¹ In 2010 alone YouTube reported a 137% increase in the number of video uploads on its Web site (Yarow & Angelova, 2010).

observed that learners often have difficulties articulating the rhetorical functions of a text, moving “prematurely and uncritically to an evaluative decision” (p. 177). Teaching how to analyze and compose a multimodal video, hence, helps them become rhetorically aware and critical of a pervasive medium and enables them to see and use technology as a rhetorical tool to enrich their communication. Grading multimodal videos, however, presented a concern in my teaching. What criteria, I wondered, should I use to evaluate² students’ works, given the complexity of multimodal integration? Through their survey research on multimodal writing sponsored by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Daniel Anderson et al. (2006) discovered that writing instructors often feel they have “little help in conceptualizing multimodal assignments” and assessing students’ projects (p. 79).³ Similarly, Elizabeth Murray, Hailey Sheets, and Nicole Williams (2010) found that “a significant number of composition instructors. . . feel uncomfortable assigning multimodal projects in their classrooms due to concerns with assessment” (para. 1).

The assessment of multimodal “texts” is not only a concern of the instructor, however. It is a crucial skill students need to acquire to succeed as writers. Learning to evaluate the effectiveness of a text is an important part of being able to write and read well. According to Huot (2002a), students must be able to evaluate their own texts in order to revise effectively, making assessment a crucial part of composing; it is not discrete from the writing process. Recognizing its significance, Diane Penrod (2005) has identified assessment as one of the proficiencies that instructors must help students master: “Students will [need to] come to know the criteria others use to judge the quality of an electronic text, how an electronic text should be judged within various contexts, and how to secure evidence to measure a text’s value according to different audiences’ contexts and criteria” (p. 62). Given the importance of assessment to instruction and students’ growth as writers and the dilemma that teachers face when grading new media⁴ texts, the evaluation of multimodal projects is an issue that warrants additional research and theorization.

Drawing upon communal assessment practices (Inoue, 2005; Spidell & Thelin, 2006; Leahy, 2002; Shor, 1996), feminist principles (Shiffman, 1997; Royster, 1996), and instructive evaluation (Borton & Huot, 2007; Penrod, 2005; Fink, 2003; Huot, 2002a, 2002b; Soles, 2001), this article presents an “educative,” (Fink, 2003) communal-based approach for teaching and evaluating multimodal video projects: Invite students to draft their own grading criteria. In a scaffolding process that lasted five weeks, students in my course analyzed sample media clips, individually developing and refining evaluation criteria covering a range of rhetorical concepts. Then, in discussion with the class, I consolidated these criteria into one comprehensive document that I used to grade the assignments and that students utilized to help them compose and revise their videos.

In what follows, I detail the scaffolding process I took to help students construct their evaluative criteria, and I examine how the use of student-generated grading criteria impacted students’ learning and understanding of multimodal video composing and digital rhetoric. I begin by describing the course curriculum, pedagogical process, and assignments in depth. Then drawing from extended interviews with three students who were formerly enrolled in my first-year composition class,⁵ none of whom had composed a video before my course, I present their perceptions about the affordances of creating and using student-generated grading criteria. By asking them in detail to reflect on their video composing process and by analyzing their projects and interview reflections, I show the benefits and challenges of such pedagogy. I close with recommendations for instructors who teach multimodal digital composing and who seek to integrate the collaborative construction of grading criteria into their classroom.

2. Current approaches for evaluating multimodal composition

Since the “multimodal turn” in writing studies in the 1990’s, compositionists have proposed disparate methods for assessing multimodal work. I will briefly detail current assessment practices to later demonstrate how mine builds upon and differs from them.

² Similar to Huot (2002a) and Inoue (2005), I use the terms evaluation and assessment interchangeably.

³ Video composing is a frequent assignment in the writing classroom; 73% of the respondents reported having taught and assigned it.

⁴ In this article, I use the terms multimodality and new media interchangeably. My definition of new media is informed by Cynthia Selfe’s (2004): “Texts created primarily in digital environments, composed in multiple media (e.g., film, video, audio, among others), and designed for presentation and exchange in digital venues.”

⁵ The participants I recruited for this study were former students who were not currently enrolled in any courses I taught. With IRB permission, I contacted them via e-mail, and three agreed to an interview. I conducted the interviews face-to-face with a computer handy so we could talk and look at the student’s project together. Pseudonyms are used in this article.

The first evaluative strategy utilizes rubrics and conventions from print genres to evaluate a multimodal text. Murray, Sheets, and Williams (2010) proposed that common categories in print essay rubric such as thesis/focus, organization, development, research, and format/design can be used as criteria to grade multimodal work; they are the features of effective composition across modes and genres. In the context of a digital storytelling project, Meredith Zoetewey and Julie Stagers (2003) suggested that instructors use elements of a narrative essay—chronology, structure, point of view, focus, pacing, dramatic tension, and development—as a framework to grade students’ projects.

However, Madeline Sorapure (2006) and Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004a) cautioned that an over-reliance on print conventions can cause us to “lose the chance to see new values emerging in the new medium” (Sorapure, 2006, p. 1). They urged instructors to use coherence (Yancey, 2004a) and metaphor and metonymy (Sorapure, 2006) as a framework for multimodal assessment instead.

Positing that coherence is the key feature of all effective composition, digital and print, Yancey (2004a) argued that it could be employed as a heuristic for evaluating multimodal projects. This heuristic allows us to assess four issues: “What arrangements are possible? who arranges? what is the intent? what is the fit between the intent and the effect” (Yancey, 2004a, p. 96)? Building upon Yancey’s notion of coherence, Sorapure’s approach focuses on evaluating the relationship between the different modalities in students’ work, using metaphor and metonymy as a guide. Metaphor, Sorapure contended, enables us to observe the meanings behind each mode, and metonymy helps us analyze how the modes connect to one another to cohere the overall argument. In other words, through metaphor and metonymy, one evaluates: What meanings does each modality convey, and how do the modes relate with one another to produce a coherent argument appropriate for the rhetorical situation?

Other scholars (Shipka, 2011, 2009; Odell & Katz, 2009; Borton & Huot, 2007; Ball, 2006; Penrod, 2005⁶) argued for using rhetorically based criteria to grade students’ projects. Doing so, they claimed, can help us integrate assessment with instruction; the assessment criteria come to reinforce rhetorical concepts such as audience, context, purpose, and strategy in multimodal composing. To link instruction and assessment, Lee Odell and Susan Katz (2009) suggested the following approach: evaluate student’s ability to a) integrate given information and multiple media; b) create and fulfill expectations; c) select, use, and encode multimodal elements; and d) present a logical/perceptual relationships among the selected elements. Sonya Borton and Brian Huot (2007) advised similar standards but added that instructors should provide formative assessment (constructive feedback) throughout the students’ composing process. Also they recommended having composers maintain a journal in which they reflect on their rhetorical choices, aims, and composing progress.

Likewise, Jody Shipka (2011, 2009) emphasized the importance of self-assessment and “rhetorical sensitivity” in multimodal evaluation, but her “assessment framework” (her terminology) does not consist of specific criteria. Following the tradition of writer’s reflection (Sommers, 1989; Elbow & Belanoff, 1989; Beaven, 1977), she asks students to submit a “statement of goal and choices” (SOCG) along with their final project, which she then uses to assess their multimodal work. In their SOGC, students define the purpose, context, and audience of their work; detail and justify their rhetorical, material, methodological and technological choices; explain how their selections serve the overall rhetorical goals of the project; and evaluate how the choices made allowed them to accomplish the goals that other combinations of choices would not have (Shipka, 2011, p. 114). By using SOGC, Shipka (2009) sought to avoid “limiting the texts, tools, and practices” of multimodal composing and presented a more a flexible framework that can help us gauge a “work’s purposes, potentials, and [rhetorical] consequences” (p. W364).

Additionally, Cheryl Ball (2006) has proposed a “readerly” strategy for “re-assessing multimodal and new media rubrics” (p. 394). Believing that multimodal theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Manovich, 2002) is too focused on “the material with which a text is composed,” she urged instructors and composers to pay attention to the “rhetorical situations of design” by examining the *how* and *why* of composing: How is a text put together, and why is it constructed that way, for what purpose (pp. 393–394)? These questions, Ball affirmed, help authors and readers focus on the significance of audience, purpose, and context when evaluating or making design decisions. They add a “readerly” component to multimodal analysis that is absent from multimodal theory.

⁶ Penrod’s work, *Composition in Convergence*, focused on large-scale assessment of writing programs in networked environment, rather than on how to assess individual writing project or modality. In it she proposed a fourfold criteria for evaluating the outcomes of writing programs: critical awareness of the audience’s sociocultural/historical context, careful usage and selections of multimodal resources, usage of technology to produce a variety of genres and forms, and possessing rhetorical and technological competence to compose in electronic spaces.

While there are a variety of methods for evaluating multimodal projects, through their survey research, Anderson et al. (2006) learned that the majority of instructors currently use some type of rhetorically based standards to grade multimodal work, often drawing upon the following criteria: an awareness of the rhetorical situation, clear and effective communication, active and thoughtful engagement with the composing process, proficiency in using new technology to communicate a message, the rhetorical impact of the message, design effectiveness, persuasiveness, and the overall effort as reflected in the final product. Some instructors also look for creativity, improvement between drafts, and thorough reflection about the composing process.

Clearly, as a field, we have a range of strategies for evaluating multimodal texts. Yet it is often unclear how a particular evaluative method impacts students' comprehension of multimodality and multimodal composing process. In particular, there has yet to be a study in rhetoric and composition that examines the benefits of using *student-generated* grading criteria to grade *multimodal video compositions*. Scholars of feminist (Shiffman, 1997) and critical pedagogy (Shor, 1996), Expressivism, (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988), and writing assessment (Inoue, 2007; Borton & Huot, 2007; Penrod, 2005; Huot, 2002a; Leahy, 2002; Soles, 2001) have long called for instructors to involve students in grading procedures, but within the context of multimodal writing, we do not yet know how doing so affects students' composing and learning about multiliteracies and digital rhetoric. Although we have evidence that sharing and making the evaluation criteria explicit to learners helped to improve the quality of the end product, the criteria were teacher-generated and were designed for essayistic prompt—not multimodal texts (Wyngaard & Gehrke, 1996; Lamm, 1994; Stoddard & MacArthur, 1993; Hillocks, 1986). Thus, seeking to address the gap in current composition scholarship, particularly computers and writing, my research enables us to expand and evaluate current scholarly calls and approaches for teaching and assessing new media projects. The evaluation approach I employ and the students' perspectives I detail can help us understand how to effectively scaffold, teach, and evaluate multimodal works, as well as learn the digital multimodal composing process of first-year writers.

3. Theories and assumptions informing my pedagogy and assessment

My approach for using student-generated grading criteria to evaluate multimodal video projects is informed by scholarship in instructive evaluation (Borton & Huot, 2007; Penrod, 2005; Fink, 2003; Huot, 2002a, 2002b; White, 1994), communal assessment (Inoue, 2005; Spidell & Thelin, 2006; Leahy, 2002), feminist pedagogy (Shiffman, 1997; Royster, 1996), and inclusionary classroom practices (Shor, 1996). Several theoretical assumptions underlie my pedagogy.

First, following the tradition of “instructive evaluation,” an evaluative approach that aims to teach rather than merely test knowledge (Borton & Huot, 2007; Huot, 2002b), I believe assessment should help improve teaching, writing, and rhetorical understanding. My belief follows the CCCC position statement on assessing writing, which suggested that assessment be integrated with instruction: “Writing assessment is useful primarily as a means for improving teaching and learning. The primary purpose of any assessment should govern its design, its implementation, and the generation and dissemination of its results” (para. 4). Instructors, however, must distinguish between “educative” and “audit-ive” assessment. The former “audit[s] student learning [usually in one shot] as a basis for the grade turned in,” whereas the latter, sometimes called assessment 2.0,⁷ helps students grow as learners through introspection, self-evaluation, clear standards, and frequent constructive feedback (Fink, 2003, p. 82). It is the latter that we must seek to foster in our pedagogy.

Second, following communal assessment practices, I believe that we must engage students to become active creators/contributors of knowledge in our teaching and evaluation; we can learn from them as much as they can from us (Penrod, 2005; Shor, 1996). This belief necessitates that “we begin a discourse of assessment with our students about their writing” (Huot, 2002a, p. 170). My perspective here aligns with Asao Inoue's (2005) “fourth generation evaluation,” an assessment method based on “hermeneutic dialectic” that invites stakeholders to offer input in the grading process and encourages negotiation and consensus making between learners and instructor, leading to more engaged learning and deeper understanding of writing (p. 222). Like contract grading, fourth generation evaluation aims to “strip away the mystification of institutional and cultural power in the everyday grades we give in our writing courses” (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009, p. 249). Through collaborating with students, I also seek to disrupt what Ira

⁷ See Elliott (2008)

Shor (1996) called the “Siberian Syndrome,” pedagogical practices that “order” and “fit” students to “lesser places” and “reenact and reconstitute their marginality” (p. 14). By involving students in the grading process, I want to help them see that their voices matter and can make a difference in *their* learning environment, as well as society at large.

Third, my teaching is guided by feminist principles, particularly by the works of Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996) and Betty Garrison Shiffman (1997). Royster encouraged teachers to actively listen to the voices of the Other, to use them to transform our epistemology and habits. She asked: “How can we teach, engage in research, write about, and talk across boundaries *with* others, instead of for, about, and around them” (p. 38)? “It seems to me that the agreement for inquiry and discovery needs to be deliberately reciprocal,” suggested Royster (p. 34). Following her call, one way to speak *with* rather than for others, to create a “deliberately reciprocal” relationship, is to involve learners in the evaluation process. Feminist pedagogues such as Shiffman have been urging scholars to move “toward a position of inclusionary evaluation” and “open the door for greater participation” in our grading procedures (p. 59). Shiffman called for evaluative practices that will not diminish students’ role as active collaborators of standards and contributors of knowledge. By inviting the class to co-construct the grading criteria, we can come to speak *with* students and use their insights to enrich our understanding about effective assessment practices. “Conversation among students and between the teacher and her students is a constant source of knowledge for both,” noted Shiffman (p. 61). Both parties mutually benefit as a result.

In sum, I work to resist teacher-centered pedagogical and evaluative approaches that posit the instructor as the sole source of knowledge and authority in the classroom. If knowledge derives from dialogism and social-epistemic interaction like Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) and James Berlin (1987) posited, then exchanging, debating, and negotiating grading criteria, and revising them accordingly can strengthen our learning and growth as writers and assessors. Teachers and students can grow from meaningful dialogues with one another through the process of co-constructing grading standards.

4. Preparing students to develop the grading criteria

4.1. Introducing rhetorical viewing

Before exploring how using student-generated grading criteria impacted students’ learning and multimodal composing, I want to first provide some context and background on my pedagogy. My teaching responds to the New London Group’s (1996), Cynthia Selfe’s (2004), Anne Wysocki’s (2004), and Stuart Selber’s (2004) calls to teach writing and multiliteracies in a functional, critical and rhetorical manner, in which students not only become users of technologies and producers of new media “texts” but also questioners of them. I want students to be able to rhetorically *read* and *use* the available means of composing, digital and non-digital, to achieve various communicative purposes and to develop a critical reception toward the various media they encounter in their daily lives through frequent analysis of discourse and composing in a variety of modalities.

Toward that end, the course I taught was a first-year writing class focused on rhetoric, argumentation, and research, including multimodal composing. The five major course units at the time of this study were ethnography, rhetorical analysis, public argument, multimodal remix, and portfolio reflection. Prior to learning about multimodal remix, students spent five weeks in the public argument unit researching and writing an argumentative essay on a public issue for a scholarly audience. Once the essay was completed, they remediated it into a three to four minute multimodal video for a specific audience of their choosing. The project had to include still images, sounds, and alphabetic texts. Actual video footage was optional. The finished product was then shown to the whole class. This remediation assignment was meant to help learners develop multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) and engage with “synaesthesia” (Kress, 2003)—to push their literacy beyond “linguistic design” (New London Group, 1996; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; WIDE, 2005).

Preparing students to develop the grading criteria for their video projects involved several scaffolding assignments. The first was rhetorical viewing. I explained to the class that they would be watching diverse multimodal video samples on a weekly basis over five weeks. Their objective was to view each video critically and rhetorically by analyzing how images, sounds, alphabetic texts, and digital effects were used to construct and cohere—and in some instances, detract—the argument. We practiced rhetorical viewing together for a week. To guide the viewing, I provided a set of critical analysis questions that led students to pay close attention to rhetorical elements. In addition, because each sample was different, I also developed specific analytical questions for each one (See Appendix A). In one sample

video,⁸ for example, I asked students to examine things such as: Who is the audience? What is the context of the argument? How are images arranged? In what order do they appear? Is there any logic to them? What rhetorical appeals are utilized? What sounds are heard first, next, and afterward, and why are they arranged in that way? What do they like about the clip that they might try to emulate in their own work? Questions like these can help students build critical reception of how multimodal digital rhetoric operates and how it is constructed. In teaching multimodal composing, Mary Hocks (2003) recommended that we engage students in the critique of new media texts before asking them to compose their own projects. By first observing the rhetorical elements that make up a sample text, writers can “come to understand these features by analyzing the visual details” (Hocks, 2003, p. 650). Besides, Huot (2002a) noted that “. . .before students can learn to revise rhetorically, they need to first assess rhetorically” (p. 170). The analysis of sample videos can help students learn and practice rhetorical assessment. Through “informed critique,” students gradually develop “critical literacy,” which enables them to become informed audiences of arguments and rhetorical users of composing technology, characteristics of a multiliterate citizen (Selber, 2004, p. 24–25).⁹

4.2. Bi-weekly rhetorical viewing homework

Once students became familiar with rhetorical viewing, for homework I assigned three to four multimodal clips of disparate qualities on YouTube for them to watch over a period of five weeks. This bi-weekly rhetorical viewing exercise served as the second scaffolding activity to help students construct their criteria and to learn how multimodal elements function. Students watched a range of videos in a variety of genres, some effective, some, rather spectacularly, not. Some were made by amateurs,¹⁰ and some were created by a professional organization such as Barackobama.com.¹¹ I had students view a range of videos so that they could develop familiarity with the multimodal video genre and learn to evaluate the quality of different kinds of clips. Throughout this process, I continued to provide them with a set of analytical questions specifically designed for each video. My scaffolding followed George Hillocks' (1995): Composing well, Hillocks maintained, involves learning and using specific inquiry skills—close observations, evaluation of materials, and interpretation of sample texts. The viewing questions I posed are meant to help students sharpen these abilities by closely observing, interpreting, and evaluating sample materials before composing.

After the viewing, students wrote responses to the analytical questions and shared their analyses in the discussion area of Blackboard (our university's course management system), where they could read and comment on their classmates' observations. At the beginning of the next class, as a warm-up exercise, I asked some students to share what they posted on Blackboard, and occasionally, I had them show an interesting video they found on YouTube, and together we analyzed it as a class. These tasks prepared the class for the next activity in the unit: building collaborative grading criteria.

4.3. Delineating and consolidating the student-generated grading criteria

For the third scaffolding activity, I asked students to design a grading criteria sheet that could be used to assess their work. I provided the following instructions: The criteria must clearly define the features of an effective multimodal digital project, address the usage of various modes (e.g., images, text, sounds) and digital effects (e.g., transitions, timing), specify elements of argument (including criteria for audience, context, use of evidence, etc.), and be thorough and thoughtful (See Appendix B). My guidelines were meant to help students think rhetorically, to take into account the relationship between modes (Odell & Katz, 2009; Sorapure, 2006), the “readerly effects” of design choices (Ball, 2006), synaesthesia (Kress, 2003), coherence (Yancey, 2004), and argument strengths (Borton & Huot, 2007). By encouraging students to think rhetorically, I tried to avoid what Sorapure found to be a common pitfall in novice's multimodal composition: Students incorporated digital effects for the sake of “coolness” without regard to rhetorical purpose.

⁸ Official PETA Video: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIjanhKqVC4>>

⁹ My pedagogy here is informed by Miami's first-year writing curriculum, which stresses rhetorical analysis and close reading. Both are required units in our program.

¹⁰ Racism: A Global Perspective: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVNMRPDIpoA&feature=related>>

¹¹ Make History: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/BarackObamadotcom#p/u/263/9UFzkO5OhKY>>

Once students devised their criteria sheet, I had them use it to evaluate the bi-weekly videos assigned for homework, referencing the standards they have formulated. This was an important step of communal assessment pedagogy (Inoue, 2005). Students must “test” the criteria sheet they created, evaluating its soundness and feasibility and make necessary revision before submitting it to the instructor. This process, Inoue explained, allows students to refine and revise their knowledge about the make-up of an effective text, leading to a more complex understanding about writing conventions and stronger grading criteria. After each student finalized and submitted their refined criteria, I consolidated them into a comprehensive document, eliminating any duplicated criterion and grouping similar points into the same headings. I then provided a draft to the class for feedback, and in a collaborative process, we further revised, expanded, and built upon the document. Once the criteria were finalized, I asked students to use them to evaluate drafts of their own work and each other’s projects.

All in all, the collaborative process I took with my students heeded Penrod’s call for utilizing the “coolness of computer technology” to mediate the “direct heat of evaluation”—that is, to use technologies to generate “inclusive activities that bring together students and instructors under a common purpose”: the advancement of writing competence (p. 137). Through co-constructing and negotiating the grading standards via wikis, online discussion forums and in-class discussion, my students and I turned evaluation into a mutual learning process based upon feminist principles of respect, collaboration, openness, and listening (Shiffman, 1997). Like Shor’s power sharing classroom, students’ ideas were listened to and taken seriously to derive at a democratically agreed upon grading standards. Through the scaffolding processes I took, assessment became integrated with instruction like Inoue (2005), Edward White (1994) and Huot (2002b) advocated. Students came to learn the features of an effective multimodal video by developing, testing, and using the grading criteria they designed; they “learn[ed] to compose by learning to assess” (Borton & Huot, 2007, p. 3). My criteria-generating process reflected the four processes of community-based assessment: The instructor 1) provides the structure and environment for students to learn and synthesize their understanding about good writing into a rubric, 2) revises the rubric from the class’ feedback, 3) encourages students to reflect upon the criteria and compose from the rubric, and 4) uses the collaboratively-generated standards for assessment (Inoue, 2005, p. 221). From this fourfold process, the assessment of writing became a vehicle for enhancing learning, teaching, and composing.

5. What students learned from producing the grading criteria

The three students whom I interviewed during the semester after the class was over, Amy, Brenda, and Jane, unanimously reported that they found the scaffolding exercises to be beneficial. They related that engaging in the bi-weekly rhetorical viewing homework and the analysis discussion activities during class were most helpful to their learning and understanding of multimodality.

Amy, a first-year student majoring in international studies, commented: “By watching other videos and looking at your questions [the viewing guide questions I provided], you’re able to see what you should do and don’t do, so I think this is a very good project to work on to evaluate other clips based on comparing them to each other. You see what you would want in it, what you [would] want in yours.” The rhetorical viewing exercises helped Amy learn the features of an effective multimodal clip. Similarly, seeing what other people had done in their videos allowed Brenda, an education major, to generate the benchmarks for evaluating her own project and others’. She explained: “Everyone watches YouTube videos, and then you’re like that’s dumb; why did they do that? I think the combination of seeing it [YouTube video samples], as far as seeing the annoyance, and then writing, like, don’t do that in your project made me realize how I should build my own.” Likewise, Jane, a first-year student majoring in speech pathology and audiology, shared that rhetorical viewing not only helped her understand how to compose her digital project, it also led her to become more informed about how multimodal elements work: “In making the video part of it, I think it was analyzing the video online [that was most helpful] because you asked us specific questions that made us realize how we were being affected by different things and [recognize] what was being presented, and also just being able to see visual examples of the video helped me understand what to do.”

Collectively, the students’ remarks confirmed the helpfulness of the rhetorical viewing activity and the importance of providing students with a set of critical questions to guide the viewing. Watching the videos appeared to help them become more analytical and informed viewers of digital media and enabled them to inductively develop the standards for their own video assignment. By analyzing/assessing sample projects, they gained an understanding of the functions and make-up of digital multimodal videos, which, as Hocks purported, is a crucial first step of multimodal composing.

Assessment aided invention,¹² hereby demonstrating that assessment needs not remain discrete from teaching and writing like White, Inoue, and Borton and Huot have argued.

After extensive analysis of sample video projects, the grading criteria that students generated indicated that they understood the make-up of effective multimodal rhetoric well. Below I examine the criteria that Amy, Brenda and Jane proposed for visuals, sounds, and alphabetic texts, the three required components of the video project.¹³

5.1. Student-generated criteria for visuals

In their proposed criteria for evaluating visuals, Jane, Amy, and Brenda demonstrated that they recognized images should not merely “decorate” the screen but that they must serve a rhetorical purpose. In her criteria, Jane wrote: “Images should serve as depictions of the argument and clearly and effectively persuade the audience. The argument comes through the picture, and the organization is effective.” Amy, who created her criteria for visuals in the form of questions, proposed the following: “Do the images correlate with the argument being portrayed in the clip? Do the images flow correctly throughout the clip? No random pictures dispersed throughout that have little relation to one another.” Likewise, Brenda shared: “Are the images of good quality? Do they support the topic and make the audience agree with your points”? Taken together, the student-generated criteria for visuals indicated that students understood how images should and could be used to support and articulate arguments. They realized that within this mode “form/content” is inseparable and “impossibly distinct” (Wysocki, 2001, p. 137). They have gained an important insight about visual rhetoric, one which Diana George (2002) called on writing instructors to stress: “. . . Communication and composition absolutely will include the visual, not as attendant to the verbal but as complex communication intricately related to the world around [us]” (p. 32).

5.2. Student-generated criteria for sounds

Students also proposed the criteria for evaluating sounds. Jane wrote: “[Sounds are] helpful to the understanding of the argument. They are relevant to the argument and cut in a manner that makes sense with the pictures. The underlying tone and voice of the message are appropriate and affective.” Amy proposed: “Does the music, if any, match the theme of the argument? If an interview is taking place, is the music muted or softened so that the audience is able to hear the subject being interviewed? Do the sound effects, if any, match the procession of pictures throughout the clip”? Brenda noted: “Is there good sound quality? Does it serve a rhetorical purpose? Does it distract from the theme [message]. Does it help support or clarify your points”? The criteria for sound that Jane, Amy, and Brenda delineated showed that they acknowledged the affordances of sound—how sound (and silence) can affect meanings and persuasion (McKee, 2006). Jane’s and Amy’s criteria, in particular, stressed the importance of the coherence between the visual and aural modalities: how sounds and images could be combined to strengthen a claim.

5.3. Student-generated criteria for alphabetic texts

Furthermore, the participants offered criteria for effective usage of alphabetic texts. Jane proposed: “Text is used effectively in its positioning, font, style, color and content. It gives necessary information about the argument. Text should not be overused but used strategically for emphasis.” Amy suggested: “Is the text readable? Is it able to be seen on the background that is behind it? Is it relevant to the picture or video clip that came before, after, or during it”? Brenda asked: “Does the text serve a purpose? Is it necessary? If it is, is it up long enough for the viewer to read”? Both Amy’s and Brenda’s criteria focused on legibility (usability). Jane’s criteria specifically acknowledged the significance of design, how things such as font choice and alignment could affect meanings, rhetorical issues that Wysocki and Dennis Lynch (2007) and Cheryl Ball and Kristin Arola (2010) encouraged writing instructors to address. In particular, Brenda’s question—is it necessary to use alphabetic text?—evidenced her understanding of synaesthesia; she recognized that

¹² The link between assessment and invention can be traced back to the Romans. In book X of *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian detailed the importance of having students read—assess—sample texts as a method to help rhetors learn how to write oratories. In this sense, the assessment of sample texts is tied to invention.

¹³ There are more components on the consolidated criteria sheet. I chose to only focus on these three because of space limitations.

a claim can be re-mediated through several modalities. Alphabetic text is one mode of expression, but it may not be most efficacious. As a whole, the students' criteria for alphabetic texts revealed that they comprehended multimodal affordances and the importance of strategic and careful usage of language and design for rhetorical purposes.

In sum, each student added important contributions to the grading criteria, making them more thorough and complete than what a single person might have generated. The final criteria the class produced reflected many of the rhetorically-based standards currently used in the field. Students took into account the relationships between the modes (Odell & Katz, 2009; Sorapure, 2006; Yancey, 2004a), how design choices impact meanings and audience's reception of the text (Shipka, 2011; Ball, 2006; Anderson et al., 2006), and how the modes must work to cohere the overall message (Yancey, 2004a). Although differences in the criteria existed, showing different levels of each learner's engagement and understanding of multimodality, what the participants generated revealed that they had learned that visuals, sounds and alphabetic texts can function rhetorically. They recognized how to combine disparate "design resources" (New London Group, 1996) to achieve a communicative purpose, important aims of contemporary multimodal pedagogy in writing studies (Shipka, 2011, 2009; Clark, 2010; Yancey, 2009; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; WIDE, 2005; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004).

6. Students' perspectives on the advantages of using collaboratively generated grading criteria

When asked if student-generated grading criteria should be used in the future, Amy, Jane, and Brenda unanimously replied yes. As they explained, they appreciated the opportunity to be a part of the grading process; they wanted to have a say and would like to know how they will be evaluated up front. Brenda commented:

I think at this level of education, we should have a voice in what we're being graded on because in our whole lives we're always told what to do; you have to do this or else, and when we come to college, we're adults. We have ideas of our own that we wanna share, and sometimes you don't even know how you're gonna be graded and what the teacher wants, and they make it all so mysterious and unknown. Sometimes it's kinda like I have to guess, a guessing game. What do they want? Am I gonna get taken off for this? I just feel like I know more and things are more fair when students can be involved in the process.

Brenda raised an important point that speaks to one of the many benefits of using student-generated criteria: It demystified the grading process. Her comment reinforced Shiffman's (1997) argument that "when we decide together [with students]. . . the requirements for each grade, students are relieved of the burden of second guessing the almighty and all-powerful instructor" (p. 67). Given that students might be new to multimodal composing and that this might be the first time they work with digital media—as was the case with most of my students, including the three participants—the experience can be stressful. Collaborating on the expectations and clarifying them up front could help students understand the objectives of the project and feel more confident about how to proceed. In their study of students' perceptions toward contract grading, Cathy Spidell and William Thelin (2006) noted that students like having the opportunity to offer input about the class. They appreciate "democracy days," moments in which they can voice their perspectives, leading to changes in course procedures (p. 53). Brenda's comments are consistent with this finding.

Jane also appreciated "having a say" in the evaluation process. She added that being able to offer input about grading helped her feel more ownership toward her project. She believes that people are more likely to accept and agree to something in which they have a role in developing, contending:

I feel like when students are able to make their own rubric or criteria, they are more apt to follow it because they made it, so they're like, "well, I made this, so I should follow it because it's my thoughts and what I did." Our whole lives, we've been given rules and rubrics, so I'm not sure that we always pay attention to the minor details when a teacher gives us the rubric.

Jane's comments suggest that inviting students to create the grading criteria may be a way to increase engagement and reduce potential apathy toward an assignment—something that Alan Singer and Michael Pezone (2003) found as a benefit of involving students in the evaluation process. They observed that when students are included, they feel "a greater stake in the satisfactory completion of assignments; and a sense of empowerment because assessment decisions are based on rules that the classroom community has helped to shape" (para. 1.29). Additionally, Amy believed that allowing students to be a part of the grading criteria affects their mentality toward the assignment. "If a teacher handed me something [the criteria]," said Amy, "I'm like okay, I have to do this. This is what she wants, but if I made it up,

then this is what works for me. In terms of mentality, it seems less like I'm being forced to do things." Amy's point implies that by allowing students to have a role in creating the grading criteria, we can help make the project feel less like an imposition or to use Amy's word, a forcing.

7. A teacher's perspective on the affordances and pitfalls of using student-generated grading criteria

7.1. Benefits

I found the student-generated grading criteria process to be advantageous in many ways. First, generating the criteria pushed students to formulate and synthesize their understanding of what makes an effective multimedia clip; it made explicit what is rhetorically important and what should be valued (Inoue, 2005). The grading standards, hence, became less fuzzy for students. Clarity in the evaluation criteria and grading is important, given that students have long wanted more transparency about assessment procedures (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Spidell & Thelin, 2006) and that teachers, despite their best interests, do not always respond to or evaluate student work rhetorically (Huot, 2002a; Connors & Lunsford, 1993¹⁴). As Brenda pointed out, collaborating on the criteria demystified the evaluation process by allowing her to see how she will be evaluated up front, a practice that Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels (1988) recommended: "Ask students to develop these criteria. This makes them more conscious of the important elements and demonstrates that these are not just the whims of English teachers, but aspects of language that we've all internalized from reading, conversation, debates, discussions. . ." (p. 227). Second, the criteria enabled students to evaluate and assess multimodal work using rhetorical criteria and language. Like Inoue and Huot (2002a), I found that students "are ill-equipped to make the kind of evaluative decisions about writing that our pedagogy expects and often enter college composition courses with strict, text-based notions of how to judge writing" (p. 169). They have difficulty articulating specific standards of an effective composition beyond superficial remarks like "it's good" or "interesting." Giving students teacher-generated benchmarks may not be the best way to resolve this concern because benchmarks are often written by/for teachers in a tone and language that may be difficult for students to grasp. The criteria sheet students delineated, however, provided them with precise rhetorical language for evaluating "texts"—one written in their own words, making the standards easier to comprehend. Third, the student-generated criteria offered an indirect method for me to assess students' understanding of multimodality and rhetorical principles and to intervene and correct any misunderstanding that students might have about project outcomes before they began composing. A student in my class, for instance, thought it was crucial for alphabetic texts to accompany every image and screen so that his arguments would be clear. He made that a required criterion. Having read what he submitted, I was able to talk to him about synaesthesia and show him how he might capitalize upon sounds and images to convey his arguments.¹⁵ Fourth, the evaluation criteria could be used to guide revision and peer response. Revision, already a messy process, becomes more challenging without a shared understanding of what makes an effective multimodal text, and often with multimodal composing, peer review is initially less effective because students do not know what to look for or how to evaluate their classmates' work, so having an evaluation criteria sheet can alleviate that concern. Fifth, allowing students to generate the criteria anew each semester prevents our standards from becoming outdated. Because technology is constantly being updated, the criteria we use to assess digital projects should be frequently revised and expanded. Our standards must be "organic" and open to revision. According to Claire Wyatt-Smith and Kay Kimber (2005),

just as multimodality comes to exist through the drawing together of several modes and their modal affordances in dynamic ways to create meaning, then assessment modes and practices should assume complementary dynamic formats. This could mean that any attempt to stabilise an organic, dynamic text in a static criteria or scoring rubrics might be counterproductive. Defining criteria or rubrics by which to evaluate student multimodal performance is, at best, an attempt to pin down a dynamic, potentially magical performance to a static moment in time (at least momentarily). (p. 87)

¹⁴ In their study on teachers' evaluation of student writing, Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford (1993) found that some teachers focused on stylistic issues at the expense of larger rhetorical concerns.

¹⁵ The student was invited to participate in this study but did not respond.

Having each class construct the criteria with us anew each semester can help ensure that our evaluation instrument will remain dynamic, organic, and current with changes in digital media.

Finally, as a whole, the criteria that the class generated were more complex than what I would have developed on my own. In some cases, “students now come to technology-infused composition classes with far more expertise and experience in computer literacy than a number of their instructors” (Penrod, 2005, p. 50), so soliciting their feedback can help enrich our ever-evolving understanding and learning of technology and literacies.

Although building collaborative grading criteria offered many pedagogical benefits, I recognize that many viable methods for evaluating multimodal projects exist. Granted, as teachers we can create the grading standards ourselves and not involve students at all. To do so, however, would mitigate some of the benefits discussed above—particularly our ability to assess students’ understanding of multimodality, as well as the chance to correct any misunderstanding they might have before they compose their project. More importantly, as Yancey (2009, 2004b), Penrod, and Selfe acknowledged, instructors are not always the first to know and master new technologies. Often students’ self-sponsored digital composing outside the classroom allows them to gain hands-on knowledge regarding new media before we come to learn it, so unless we involve students in the assessment of digital projects, our grading standards may leave much to be desired, which is something Amy pointed out: “Sometimes I am better at using technology than some teachers. I know the tricks and moves and can teach them to my friends. There are things that I can share.” She further added: “And if your audience is a group of students like my age, then it’s good for you to make the criteria yourself because you know what your friends would like, and I don’t think adults always know that. You’re able to see coming from the perspective of the students, what works for us, what kinda things we like.” Amy’s claim echoes Selfe’s argument in “Students Who Teach Us: A Case Study of a New Media Text Designer”: “Students. . .are often the first to experiment with new kinds of texts, to discover new literacy values and practices. They are also the first to understand the functions new media texts fulfill in their lives” (p. 57). Therefore, I agree with Penrod’s assertion that writing assessment must now “extend beyond the instructors’ knowledge bases, because there are students who have greater knowledge in some topic areas and perhaps an even greater knowledge in technical ability” (p. 124). Indeed, as Amy astutely pointed out, we have as much to learn from students as they have from us, and through collaborating on the grading criteria, both parties could gain and learn from one another. In addition, teachers who are novices to teaching and doing multimodal digital composition may not initially have the expertise or feel comfortable creating assessment standards. This was my situation when I began this study, but through collaborating with the class, I was able to learn (and grow) alongside my students. Moreover, after studying students’ perceptions toward assessment, contract grades in particular, Spidell and Thelin arrived at the following conclusion: “Each pattern of student response seems to point to the need for further democratization of the classroom and for strategies to deal with destructive habits from students so silenced by unilateral authority. . .” (p. 54). I believe involving students in the grading process is one way to help address this challenge. Instructors who have done inclusive assessment practices (Inoue, 2005; Leahy, 2002; Singer & Pezone, 2003) and shared classroom authority with students (Shor, 1996) have reported better student engagement, participation, deeper thinking, and rhetorical awareness—things I also discovered with my own students and will later detail.

7.2. Challenges in using student-generated grading criteria

However, before detailing student gains, I want to acknowledge that the methods I am advocating are not without challenges. Consolidating the criteria that each student generated was time consuming. I had to read each item one-by-one and synthesize it into a comprehensive and coherent document.¹⁶ In doing so, I had to evaluate each benchmark to ensure it was clear, fair and well developed, and I had to clarify/add additional information to certain points. I realize that this consolidation process could be strenuous for instructors who teach multiple classes, so rather than having each student individually develop the criteria, they might consider putting students into small groups and have each group collaboratively delineate the standards instead. Alternatively, they might assign one evaluative category (e.g. arrangement, design, persuasiveness, etc.) to each group, rather than having students individually construct complete benchmarks for every category.

¹⁶ I had students generate their criteria and post them onto the discussion area of Blackboard. To consolidate them I had to open up each individual student’s post and cut/paste each entry onto a separate Microsoft Word document, which required much labor. In the future, I am planning to have students post their ideas onto a wiki or Google Doc. This method will enable easier consolidation.

Another concern arose after I consolidated the criteria. Through the consolidation process, I combined, eliminated or altered some of the students' contributions, and this led one person to question whether I disregarded her suggestion and whether I felt her work was satisfactory. She e-mailed to inquire why her criteria were not included in the finalized sheet, and this helped me learn one important insight: When students generate the criteria, they want their contributions to be used, and they see what I put onto the final consolidated criteria sheet as validations of and complements on their ideas. Thus, when their contributions are amended, they might feel their work was inferior or that their voice was disregarded. It is important to assure students that all of their contributions will be valued and considered—but also help them understand that, through the consolidation process, their ideas might be reworded or combined with other benchmarks. It is pivotal to make this explicit to the class. Otherwise, students might feel demoralized and mistakenly think that their contributions are not valued.

One way to prevent this potential misunderstanding is to involve the whole class in the consolidation process. The teacher could ask students to read all criteria for homework and note similarities and differences in what they and their classmates had created. As a class or in small groups, students could work together to consolidate the criteria. A draft would then be posted onto a wiki for students to comment on and provide further feedback.

Furthermore, not all students might take the criteria making process seriously, a point that Brenda raised in her interview: "If the students didn't take the class seriously, then they're gonna be like 'oh, dumb criteria, another busy work,' but I think if the student does take the class seriously and does care about their work, then they will care about what they're putting forward." Brenda's comment illustrates the importance of encouraging students to see criteria building as important work and to recognize that what they offer is significant. (I provide some suggestions on how to ensure this in the conclusion.) The evaluation criteria are meaningful and complete only if students take the time to think about them. But despite some of these resolvable challenges, developing/using student-generated grading criteria provided many pedagogical benefits that outweighed the drawbacks, as I had previously demonstrated.

8. How students utilized the criteria

Once all of the criteria were finalized and distributed, students then used them to compose their video. In this section, I provide an overview of each participant's video, and I explore how each student used the criteria to compose her video project. I distributed the consolidated criteria sheet to the class and asked them to use it to self-assess their own and their classmates' projects during the revision stage, stressing that this was what I would employ to grade their works. Interestingly, however, students utilized the consolidated criteria differently. Some used them contrary to my expectations, but in the end, each of them gained something as a result.

8.1. Use of the consolidated criteria as a roadmap for addressing audience

Amy's video argued that the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) is problematic for Catholic hospitals, as she believes it would require them to offer abortions to patients as a condition for receiving federal funding. She wanted to persuade her audience, Catholics, to support the Church's fight against FOCA. In composing her video, Amy used the consolidated criteria as a guide to ensure that her arguments would be clear. She specifically focused on clarity, one of the categories of the criteria: "I remember looking at it [the consolidated criteria] and seeing being evaluated on something like is this really clear? Will people understand this? I might understand it because I made it, but did it really make sense coming from another perspective?" Thus, the consolidated criteria became a tool that helped Amy attain clarity. Analyzing clarity, in turn, led her to think about audience:

If I didn't have this [the consolidated criteria], I would not really think about it [the audience], just kinda put the pictures together, but after I looked at this [the consolidated criteria], it was like okay, would I understand it if I didn't know what the subject was? Would people support my arguments and get it? Can I impact them? So I used the sheet to help me strategize my message and get to the audience.

Amy's usage of "get to the audience" is noteworthy. It indicates that she had thought about her aim and purpose in detail (to solicit support for the Catholic Church). In sum, Amy's remarks reveal that the criteria sheet led her to think about the "readerly" (Ball, 2006) aspect of multimodal composing in which she considered how her rhetorical choices would impact her audience and purpose. It aided productive thinking about effective composing, a praxis that Huot, Borton and Huot, and Odell and Katz urged. Grading standards, they claimed, should not only serve as benchmarks

for summative evaluation but also function as a generative guide for writers (Odell & Katz, 2009). Assessment can then become linked to instruction and students' composing process (Huot, 2002b; Borton & Huot, 2007). Through this practice, grading criteria are not an exclusive instrument of the teacher used solely for the purpose of grading but also for learning and writing as in Amy's situation.

8.2. Use of the consolidated criteria as a heuristic

Jane's video aimed to raise awareness about autism and the needs of autistic children. It argued that autism is neither a disability nor a tragedy and that we must work together to avoid representing it as such. Until that change of perspective can be achieved, she contended, people with autism will continue to be marginalized. In making her video, she employed the consolidated criteria to help her invent and conceptualize the content. She began her video composing process by printing out the consolidated criteria sheet and using it to help her develop the details of her project. Without it, she claimed, she would not know how to begin: "If you would just say get started, I would have been so disorganized. I feel I wouldn't be able to rhetorically drive it [the video]." Using the consolidated criteria allowed her to simplify and organize her project into concrete steps:

I feel [in] making our own grading criteria, I honestly do feel that was really helpful because it enabled me to break down what I would do in my video before I even really organized my thoughts and that helped me organize what I was going to do. And it enabled me to better think about what I would put in place, breaking it down into images, sounds, transitions, texts.

Jane explained that the consolidated criteria sheet helped her understand how to proceed and how to meet the expectations of the assignment. It fostered invention and served as a compass that oriented and guided her video composing process. Here Jane engaged in "instructive evaluation" in which the assessment instrument helped her learn to compose in a new genre, one that was digital and multimodal (Borton & Huot, 2007, p. 2).

Originally, I intended the consolidated criteria to serve only at the revision stage as a revision checklist, but Jane had repurposed and used it as an invention tool and a planning guide—something I now realize I should have encouraged for all students, and something I will certainly do in the future. Jane's repurposing of the consolidated criteria sheet made me realize that it could be used in more than one way—as a heuristic, a planning guide, a revision checklist, a list of standards to achieve, and a peer review sheet. It can function as a multi-purpose document that students could use throughout different stages of the multimodal composing process. According to Odell and Katz, grading criteria and standards should be "generative"; this is one of the hallmarks of effective assessment (p. W200). Thus, as instructors, we need to be flexible and encourage students to adapt the criteria in ways that would be most "generative" and helpful to them.

9. Multimodal composing and student learning about rhetoric and writing

Clearly, creating and using the evaluation criteria proved beneficial for students as they worked on their multimodal projects. But as a teacher watching and helping students as they were immersed in their composing processes, I found myself wondering whether they were actually learning the rhetoric and writing goals that I (and the program) had for them. To put it bluntly, in the end, what did students learn about rhetoric and writing, and how did the evaluation criteria aid in that learning? To answer these questions, I analyzed the quality of Jane's and Brenda's video projects and report their perspectives about their learning.

9.1. Rhetoric "can come in all shapes and sizes."

Aimed to raise awareness about autism and to counteract negative perceptions of autism for an audience of mostly white Americans, Jane's video consisted of music, visuals, video clips, and voiceovers. Her work opened with jovial and cheerful music in order to dissociate autism from somber and tragic connotations. Her music selection disrupted the notion that autism is a tragic and depressing subject. Toward the end of her video, she incorporated an uplifting song, "The Climb" by Mylie Cyrus, which sang a message of perseverance and optimism: "There's always gonna be another mountain/ I'm always gonna wanna make it move/. . .The struggles I'm facing/ The chances I'm taking/ Sometimes might knock me down/ But no I'm not breaking." This song conveyed a hopeful message, ending the video



Figure 1. Strategic Usage of Visual and Text in Jane's Video.

on a positive note. It helped articulate Jane's vision and goal for the future of autism. The music that Jane selected reinforced the arguments she aimed to articulate: People with autism should not be stigmatized.

In addition, Jane strategically used voiceovers to communicate an important argument at the end of her clip: We should not try to make autistic children become a part of the "normal," "able body" world but rather we should enter into theirs. To articulate this claim, she used two narrating voices: that of a man and a woman. A female voice (her own) uttered: "Because in the end, it won't be about them becoming a part of our world," and then a male voice spoke: "It's about us becoming a part of theirs." Jane's usage of two voices evoked the notions of cooperation, unity, and solidarity, important themes that underlie her clip. Her video suggested that through cooperation, unity, and solidarity, we could defeat the stigmatization of autism.

Besides sounds, Jane also effectively used visuals to convey and support her message. She carefully chose her pictures to ensure that they would not trivialize autism or make it seem like a depressing matter. None of the images Jane incorporated depicted autistic children as "abnormal." The children in her video appeared to be living a typical lifestyle, but when she wanted to arouse pathos and to show that social stigmatization causes autistic children to experience frustrations, depression, and alienation, Jane included pictures of lonely, devastated, and isolated children, and words describing these emotions were gradually spelled out letter by letter over each image in red (See Figure 1). Jane clarified why she made that move:

Jane: I wanted to make my points clear and to make them stand out so I put in words to reinforce the emotions so people would feel them. I think putting it over the picture have an impact. If you don't have pictures, just words, you don't get the same emotions. With them together, it makes people pay attention. Things are clearer.

Chanon: Why red alphabets?

Jane: I feel red is a bold color. I don't necessarily think of it as a happy or a bad color, but it's bold. So it made what I wanna say stick out more and kinda burn into your mind, and it makes people think about love, and that's what I want people to feel for the children. I didn't want it [typography] to be official because I kinda want people to see that this is about children. That's my focus.

These comments revealed Jane's ability to combine and capitalize upon the affordances of several modalities: visual and alphabetic texts. They also showed that Jane recognized how color and typeface can play an important rhetorical function. Her moves were well thought out and strategic.

If we were to analyze how Jane's video matched up with the grading criteria she helped devise, it is, for the most part, successful. Some of the criteria specified that sounds should match the theme, mood, and content of the argument, enhance the thesis, and be incorporated in a manner that aligns with the images, message, and author's objective; images should rhetorically express and strengthen the argument in a meaningful way; and texts should be used effectively in positioning, font, style, color and content. Jane's video appeared to meet these criteria, reflecting an understanding of coherence (Yancey, 2004a), "between modes thinking" (Sorapure, 2006), and rhetorical situation (Odell & Katz, 2009; Anderson et al., 2006). Jane's usage of the criteria early on in her composing process appeared to be beneficial for her project.

At the same time, however, certain aspects of her video needed improvement. The volume level, in particular, required adjustment. Though audible, some voiceovers were louder than others, creating disparity. Also, transitions were missing in a few places where she switched from still pictures to moving video shots; this caused certain segments of her project to appear choppy and difficult to follow. Just as a quotation should not be dropped into an essay without a signal phrase and some context, a transition before a video clip from a documentary would have made for a smoother integration into the rest of Jane's video. The inserted clip appeared out of place and confusing to follow. These shortcomings affected the clarity of Jane's project, something her classmates and I noted when reviewing her project with the consolidated criteria.

Overall, composing this multimodal project and developing the criteria with which to evaluate Jane's own and others' work expanded her understanding of rhetoric:

[From] this project, I learn it [rhetoric] can come in all shapes and sizes, that it doesn't have to be written, that it doesn't really have to be blatant to affect you. It can be subtle; it can be in the tone of it; it can be in the font structure; it's just amazing how much you don't realize that you can be affected like that, and writing, just that writing is so versatile that we turn papers into videos. We turn our thoughts into visuals. Writing's more than just words, so writing is versatile.

Jane's remarks reveal that composing a multimodal video enabled her to develop critical reception of texts, and it broadened her understanding of what constitutes rhetoric and writing. That she now sees that rhetoric needs not be "blatant" to be effective suggests that she had become a more critical and informed reader of "texts." Her last remark—"writing's more than just words"—is noteworthy. It shows that she has learned to read, compose—and think beyond alphabetic discourse. That is, she is now able to recognize and use disparate modalities as available means of persuasion, showing she has developed multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). In the end, Jane appears to understand an important lesson about new media composition, the idea that "[d]igital writing environments make it difficult to separate words from visual [and sounds] or privilege one over another. Interactive digital texts can blend words and visuals, talk and text. . ." (Hocks, 2003, pp. 629–630). Of note is how her work attempted to re-design "social futures" by *critiquing* common (mis)conceptions of disability. According to Gunther Kress (1999), critique, which occurs when existing forms and social relations are "subjected to distanced analytical scrutiny," and design, which denotes the shaping of the futures "through deliberative deployment or representational resources in the designer's interest" (pp. 66, 77), must go hand-in-hand in multiliteracies pedagogy. Jane's project and reflection show her ability to do both. Jane was able to engage in what the New London Group called "critical framing" and "transform practice" (p. 35): She critically examined (mis)conception about disability in contemporary culture before using multimodal resources to foster social transformation, to negate misgivings about autistic children.

9.2. "The way people are communicating is revolutionizing what can be rhetoric."

Targeting female college students, Brenda's satiric video argued against sorority membership. Organized into two parts, the first section presented a glamorous, fantasy-like image of Greek life, one that would be negated in the next section, which exposed the drawbacks of sorority culture. The song "Stupid Girl" by Pink, which ridiculed the measures some women would go through to be attractive and popular, played in the background throughout the clip.¹⁷

Brenda's video contained several strengths. Her two-part organization, fantasy/reality, made her arguments clear and easy to follow, and satire served as her principal rhetorical strategy. She created satire through careful selection and integration of music and images. As "Stupid Girl" played in the background, a series of pictures of wild Greek life parties were exhibited. The song's lyrics continuously repeated the line "stupid girls" throughout the clip, articulating the argument that one should not join a sorority. It is an unwise decision. The song made those social activities seem pointless, superfluous, and ridiculous. Music was the principal medium that Brenda used to assert her argument. It articulated, reinforced, and cohered her message, playing a pivotal rhetorical function in the video. Brenda's strategic music choice revealed her understanding about the rhetorical function of sounds—"sound matters" (McKee, 2006). Her usage of music in conjunction with images suggests that she comprehended the concept of "sound envelope" well, a recognition that

¹⁷ I feel Brenda's usage of "Stupid Girls" fell under fair use because she was repurposing it to make a critique about sorority life.

sounds is not a fixed, isolated mode, nor should it be considered in isolation. . . Sound and all the elements of sound play crucial roles in such important areas as setting the mood, building atmosphere, carrying the narrative, directing attention, and enveloping themes in multimodal works. (McKee, 2006, p. 352)

Further, Brenda’s video exhibited rhetorical usage of colors. In part one, in which she painted a fantasy picture of Greek life, she used white text and pink background to delineate a fun, jovial image of sorority, but in the section in which she presented the “dark side” of sorority, she switched to black. She explained why she made that move:

With the pink and the black, I was trying to show the difference between the reality of sororities compared with the perceived idea that a lot of people have, so I kinda tried to show that as far as transitioning the colors. Black is a more serious, depressing color. It worked with my message so like it went from fun feeling, fun color to seriousness, from fantasy to unpleasant reality.

Like Jane, Brenda’s usage of color was strategic. She used pink to attract attention and create a light, fun feeling for her target audience of first-year female students. Afterward, she utilized black to create emphasis and give force to her argument. According to Erik Peterson’s (2009) “Color Psychology in Logo Design,” black is often used in graphic design to convey authority. The usage of black in the latter part of the video added a sense of seriousness to Brenda’s argument. She understood an important concept in design: how colors not only add emphasis but also convey meanings and impact perceptions (Ball & Arola, 2010). As a whole, Brenda’s video capitalized upon the affordances of several modalities—visuals, texts, and sounds—using them to cohere her argument. Each modality related to one another, creating convergence: the use and combination of different media to communicate similar points and goals (Penrod, 2005). Brenda recognized that the affordance of multimedia lies not in one particular element but in the integrated use of multiple modalities to achieve a rhetorical purpose. Her project demonstrated “between mode thinking,” a careful consideration of the usage and relationship of different modalities to cohere the thesis (Sorapure, 2006). Her work articulated the central argument against sorority membership through several modalities in a coherent manner.

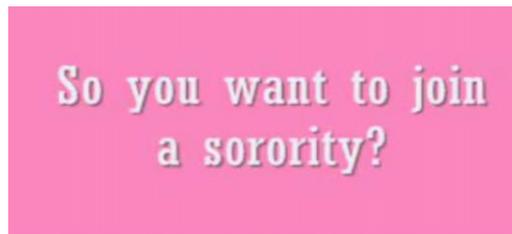


Figure 2. Brenda’s Strategic Usage of Pink Background.

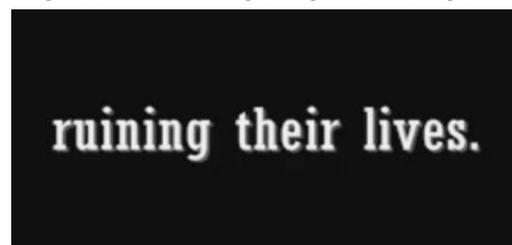


Figure 3. Brenda’s Strategic Usage of Black Background.

Brenda’s project met many of the criteria that she and her classmates co-created. The criteria for sound stated that it should be used to enhance and drive the argument, fulfill a rhetorical purpose, and flow with the content of the video. Brenda was able to achieve these goals through her careful usage of music. “Stupid Girls” fit nicely with the pictures she selected. Additionally, according to the grading criteria for images, pictures should “visually depict, clarify, and support the argument and enhance persuasion,” and they should “enrich the author’s stance.” Brenda’s work satisfied these objectives. She revealed that these criteria provided a roadmap that helped her improve the quality of her video, relating: “I was able to take these things [the consolidated criteria] and set goals for myself. They gave me a map to follow to make sure that I’ll do a good project and made me think about what kind of standards I should have for my own work and others.”

Despite the strength of Brenda's project, her classmates and I, using the collaborative criteria, offered her a number of suggestions for revision, particular in her use of evidence to support claims. Her reasons for why women should not join sororities required additional backing to be persuasive. She claimed that sorority life leads to social exclusion but did not provide evidence to substantiate how or why. Her research paper, which she remediated into this video, contained several strong sets of evidence, but in the essay-to-video remediation process, the data, warrant, and backings, to use Toulminian terms, were omitted. As a result of class feedback, Brenda realized that, just like a traditional print-based academic essay, good multimodal arguments must contain strong lines of reasoning. Otherwise, the arguments are merely claims that remain unconvincing.

When explaining what she gained overall from the project, Brenda described learning how important rhetoric is:

At first, when you asked what is rhetoric, I had thought about old Greek stuff, so now I realized that rhetoric is more modern than I had thought it was and also that rhetoric is changing, and *the way people are communicating is revolutionizing what can be rhetoric*, the way people speak, write, and do online stuff. It definitely helped me realize where rhetoric is now. People are communicating via YouTube and other video uploading websites, so making a video rhetoric is an important skill to learn and know. I think it's important that English classes teach about it. It's something we should do in all writing classes.

The realization that rhetoric can be digital and multimodal led Brenda to especially appreciate learning multimodal digital composing.

Like Jane and Brenda's projects, all of the students' videos had various strengths and weaknesses. Although creating and using student-generated criteria did not necessarily lead to a flawless multimodal composition, the presence of the shortcomings did not mean that students had failed to learn about rhetoric and multimodality. And I am convinced that the student projects were far stronger because of the time students spent analyzing and writing about their own and others' videos. The students' insightful reflections confirm Penrod's assertion that "linking writing assessment technologies with computer-based composition can lead to some very powerful student learning about language and rhetoric" (p. 139). The criteria students generated aided in their composing of and understanding about the significance and relevance of multimodal rhetoric. The students had a moment of what Yancey (1998) called "reflection-in-action," the public or private act of reviewing, projecting, thinking about, and revising one's composition that lead to a deeper comprehension about writing, one's composing experiences, and literacy practices. Using the student-generated grading criteria created a "digital mirror" that gave Jane and Brenda "an opportunity to become aware of their processes of learning and composing, to make connections between new and familiar experiences and information, to experiment and try out new ideas and approaches," and recognize how "modality shapes [and creates] meaning" (Journet et al., 2008, para. 2).

In the end, from constructing the grading criteria and completing the videos, Jane and Brenda (and their classmates) were able to analyze the rhetorical functions of multimodal elements, and they were able to utilize the affordances of various modalities and technology to construct an argument for social change. They could use, critically analyze, and produce digital media, acquiring what Selber called functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies—but most notably, they have come to see rhetoric as relevant and important for daily life.

10. Conclusion: Implications and suggestions for teaching multimodal composition

Each day we encounter numerous types of media that attempt to influence us in some way. Teaching writing in the 21st century, therefore, requires going beyond a logocentric pedagogy so that our learners can learn to read and write through a variety of modalities and acquire multiliteracies (Clark, 2010; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; Selber, 2004; New London Group, 1996). A multimodal digital project can help us achieve that objective, but in the end, it requires a heuristic and grading, and this provokes several pragmatic questions: What might we provide to guide students through the composing process, and what standards should be used to evaluate multimodal works? This article has offered an approach: Work with students to have them generate the evaluation criteria. Through this dialogic process, students and instructors come to grow and learn from one another as a result. Assessment must function as a part of—not apart from—teaching and composing (CCCC, 2009; Inoue, 2005; Huot, 2002b, White, 1994). In my work as a teacher-researcher, I discovered that collaborating on the evaluation criteria with students is a way to link assessment to instruction and to students' recursive multimodal composing processes. This approach, I learned, offered many pedagogical advantages for both the learners and the instructor. The most important one, I believe, was that in the

end, students became more informed and critical readers and authors of digital multimodal rhetoric. This is especially important because, as Selber noted, “if students are to become agents of positive change, they will need an education that is comprehensive and truly relevant to a digital age in which much of the instructional agenda seems to be little more than indoctrination into value systems of dominate computer culture” (p. 234).

The multimodal assessment method I presented in this article can be used to generate the evaluation criteria for other kinds of composition—audio, visual, etc. What I have argued have several important implications for instructors who might be interested in incorporating multimodal video composing or other types of new media assignments into their pedagogy:

1. *Frequent rhetorical viewing and analysis exercises are crucial to students’ learning and understanding of video composing.*

Jane, Amy, and Brenda unanimously confirmed that the bi-weekly rhetorical viewing assignment was most helpful in learning how to compose a multimodal video. Rhetorically analyzing sample video projects on a weekly basis over five weeks acquainted them with the multimodal genre, trained them to become critical audiences of digital media, and helped them see examples of effective (and ineffective) multimodal arguments, enabling them to learn to compose their own projects and develop the standards that could be used to evaluate their work. The students’ confirmation reaffirms Huot’s (2002a) and Hocks’ call to involve writers in the critique of sample works before they begin composing new media projects; like Huot (2002a) explained, before students can write rhetorically, they must learn to assess rhetorically. Assessment can aid invention. Through frequent analysis of sample works, students come to better understand their composing options, as well as become rhetorically informed evaluators and audiences of multimodal arguments.

2. *Evaluation criteria need to be flexible, adaptable, and perpetually open to revision because they must frequently be updated to remain dynamic and current.*

As a novice instructor to multimodality, when I first generated the grading criteria, I asked students to think about the following issues as they constructed their multimodal arguments: images, sounds, transitions, alphabetic texts, clarity, persuasiveness, and arrangement. I asked them to develop the benchmarks for each of these topics (categories), and at that time, I felt those were sufficient. However, what my students and I soon realized is that, depending on the class focus, more categories could be included. Instructors should add/amend the categories as they see fit, and they might also ask students to propose additional ones. Listening to students’ input and revising our grading criteria accordingly can not only help strengthen standards for the project, but as Inoue noted, also lead to new insights and learning about writing. In the future, from what I have learned from my students’ feedback and this study, I plan to add the following categories: logos, design, and fair use. Thinking about these issues would further strengthen students’ projects. Logos could help prevent logical fallacies and improve the persuasive quality of the arguments. In thinking about logos, instructors might acquaint students with Toulmin’s elements of argumentation and encourage them to use his theory as a framework to test the strength and persuasive quality of their rhetoric. Adding a category for design would force students to consider how strategic uses of artistic elements such as typography, coloration, contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity can create rhetorical effects (Ball & Arola, 2010). The category of fair use could help students avoid copyright infringement, which would allow them to circulate the videos beyond the classroom. This is especially crucial in the age of much (illegal) filesharing (DeVoss & Porter, 2006). Understanding fair use can help students learn to legally incorporate and respect other people’s labor and creativity, hereby fostering what Danielle DeVoss and James Porter (2006) called “digital ethics.” Most importantly, as Wyatt-Kimber and Smith and Penrod advised, the criteria sheet should be generated anew with each class so that they are always current with the ever-changing writing technologies and literacy practices, as well as specific to each instructional objective and context.

3. *Encourage reflection throughout the process not just in a final reflective essay accompanying the final project.*

Hearing students’ insightful comments about what they gained from the multimodal video unit led me to recognize that I needed to ask students to extensively reflect orally and in writing about their multimodal composing process throughout the course of the project and after the submission of their final product. Reflection, Yancey (1998) argued, is a powerful mode of knowledge making. It can lead to rich insights about one’s writing and learning,

as evident in the student interviews. To encourage extensive reflection in the future, following Borton and Huot's call, I will ask students to maintain a video composing blog in which they detail their composing process and the rhetorical decisions they made or plan to make. These blogs might be in the form a double-entry notebook (Berthoff, 1981), where on the left side students maintain a running list of things they did (or decided not to do) in the video, and on the right side they justify their reasoning and purpose. Given that digital technology can function as "digital mirrors" (Journet et al., 2008), we might allow students to maintain their reflection in a variety of medium—blogs, audio narratives, written journals, or whatever best suits their learning style. In the future, I plan to ask students to turn in their reflections on a weekly basis so that I can provide them with formative feedback and encouragement throughout the composing process.

In addition, following Shipka's (2011) call for using SOGC, I will continue to ask students to submit a reflective essay with their final project in which they detail their "goals and choices," specifically addressing the project's purpose, rhetorical moves, and the strengths (and limitations). Thus, besides engaging in "reflection-in-action," students must also engage in "reflection-in-presentation," "the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variable of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience, and the associated texts" (Yancey, 1998, p. 14). Reading student reflections and blogs can help us better evaluate students' learning and understand to the rhetorical decisions and thinking behind their projects, information that cannot be obtained from the final videos alone. More importantly, however, sustained reflection helps them gain rhetorical sensitivity (Shipka, 2011), better understand their composing process and literacy practices (Journet et al., 2008; Sommers, 1989; Elbow & Belanoff, 1989), and internalize [good] standards for writing (Katz, 1989).

4. *Motivate students to carefully consider and construct their criteria.*

As Brenda pointed out, some students might not recognize the significance of the criteria they are proposing; however, we can encourage them to do so through three measures: 1) Emphasize that what they generate will impact how they will be graded. Students should understand that they now have a say in the grading process and what they contribute does and will matter to their grade because we might incorporate their suggestions. 2) Give feedback on the criteria they proposed. Doing so will encourage students to take the assignment seriously and push them to refine their thoughts and contributions. 3) Grade the proposed criteria for clarity, thoughtfulness, and thoroughness. This could motivate learners to perceive criteria building as a high-stakes exercise that will require thoughtful engagement and careful considerations.

5. *Be flexible about how students might repurpose the criteria.*

This study has taught me several lessons. Just because students did not use the criteria in the way I intended did not mean they were negligent or off-track. Jane's case clearly demonstrated the opposite. She repurposed the criteria and used them as an invention guide, opening up new possibilities for how the consolidated criteria sheet could be employed. I now see that student-generated criteria can function as a heuristic, as well as a revision checklist, a set of standards to achieve, or a peer review sheet. It has multi-purposes. Previously, I told students not to worry about grading standards until the revision phase because I thought that paying attention to benchmarks in the beginning might overwhelm them; however, Jane's remarks helped me realize that providing the grading criteria to students early on in the project, a practice that Zemelman and Daniels and Richard Leahy (2002) encouraged and a point Jane noted, can help them feel more grounded and clear, as well as better understand how to approach the assignment. Just as there is not one way to write, there is no single, right way to use the criteria. According to Odell and Katz, grading criteria for multimodal projects should be generative and generalizable. That is, they should help generate thinking about effective writing in more than one way. We should not predetermine or stipulate how students might utilize them, though we might make recommendations. I will now offer the consolidated criteria early on in the unit and encourage students to use and repurpose them during any stage and in any way that might be most beneficial to them.

Teaching and learning multimodal composing are complex endeavors, but if instructors ask students to collaborate and generate the criteria for evaluating multimodal projects, the process can provide many benefits for both students and instructors. As Inoue argued: "If our purpose for assessing and evaluating student writing is to help students learn—if assessment is inherently a learning practice—then the teacher shouldn't control all of the process" (p. 203).

By involving students in assessment, they gain a sense of ownership over their projects and become stronger evaluators and authors of multimodal composition, and instructors have more specific guidance for the challenging task of teaching and evaluating new media assignments. Through the collaborative process of generating evaluation criteria, our pedagogy becomes student-centered, and learners come to acquire multimodal literacies and rhetorical sensibility that are essential for “reading,” composing—and succeeding in the 21st century.

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Appendix A. Sample Rhetorical Viewing Questions

Clip I: As you watch the clip from the Humane Society of the United States, pay attention to the following:

1. How are the images arranged? In what order do they appear? Is there any logic to them?
2. What makes the clip memorable and why?
3. What sounds do you hear first, next, and afterward? Why do you think they are put in that order?
4. How are quotations used; why?
5. How is ethos utilized?
6. What do you like about this clip that you might try to emulate in your own work?
7. Is there anything that you dislike? Identify them and provide your reasons.

Clip II: As you watch the PETA clip, pay attention to the following:

1. How does the author balance between logos and pathos? Be specific. Does s/he use interviews, factual descriptions, etc.?
2. Why do you think the clip doesn't contain music like other ones? In other words, why is silence used?
3. Listen to the voice of the narrator. Each voice has a distinctive style, and each one provokes different reactions. How would you describe the narrator's pitch and tone? What effects does his voice create?
4. What colors are present in the clip? What rhetorical purposes do they accomplish?
5. Is there anything missing in the clip that you might add? What might you incorporate to make it more effective, if any?

Clip III: As you watch the clip about racial discrimination, please watch it 3 times and pay attention to the following:

First round: pay attention to how the arguments are conveyed—through images, quotations, sounds? Observe how colorations are used. What are their functions? Also, read the texts that are provided. How do they enhance or detract the mood of the clip?

Second round: pay attention to the Ken Burns effects—that is, how images pan, focus, zoom from one area to another (e.g. begin in the middle and then zoom out). What effects do they create? Additionally, listen to the music provided. How does it correspond/sync (or does not) with the images? What reactions are evoked?

Third round: think about how the images are organized. Do you see any coherent theme in their ordering? What do you see first, second, third, last? How does the sequence enhance or detract the clip's effectiveness?

Appendix B. Instructions for Creating the Grading Criteria for Your Multimodal Clip

Part I Develop the criteria that should be utilized to grade the multimedia clip you're composing. They must be clear and specific, and they must demonstrate your rhetorical understanding of new media. Before developing them,

please review the ones I've used to previously evaluate your autoethnography, rhetorical analysis, and argumentative essays. Use them as models.¹⁸ Your criteria must address the following categories:

- Images
- Sounds
- Transitions (screen transitions)
- Alphabetic texts
- Clarity
- Persuasiveness
- Arrangement (sequence)

For each category, specify what needs to be met. Make a list of at least 3 things. For instance, under images, what are some of the things you would look for? Under sounds, what might be some important things we need to listen for when we grade? Please avoid vague statements such as the images are good; the clip looks nice, etc. Specify what you mean by good and nice. Do you mean the sound syncs nicely with the visuals in the clip, or they are appropriate for the mood and the argument?

Post your finished work in the discussion area of Blackboard and randomly comment on 4 of your classmates' criteria. Depending upon the kind of feedback you receive on your criteria, you may need to further revise them. If revision is necessary, revise and re-post your work by the date on the course calendar.

You will be evaluated for specificity, thoroughness, and thoughtfulness.

Part II You'll become the teacher! Watch the clips that are assigned for homework, and grade them using the criteria you developed. (If revision to your criteria is necessary, wait to do this part until you have them revised.) In a separate discussion forum on Blackboard, post the grade that you think each clip deserves. Then use your criteria to justify why it should receive that grade. Also explain where each clip falls short and what it does well.

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¹⁸ Previously, students have written three essays: autoethnography, rhetorical analysis and argumentation. They were given a separate grading criteria sheet for each project.

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