Video Unbound: Have You Vlogged Lately? Infusing Video Technology in the Composition Classroom

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Booth and Spina-Caza argue that because video is so widely used as a communication tool, it should be incorporated into the composition classroom. Guidelines for teaching and writing with video are presented along with suggested resources for basic writing instructors.

Introduction: The Relevance of Video for Basic Composition

Digital video offers an effective and persuasive composition format and can be used effectively in both composition and basic writing courses to extend writing from the page to the screen. We believe that "writing" as a concept for the classroom means more in the 21st century than just using pen and paper, or even word processing software and printer. For a generation of digital natives who have grown up with computers and easily accessible software, "writing" involves media-making as well. Writing with video uses the same critical thinking skillset as writing does on paper, but it extends the process into one that involves multi-modal thinking, and therefore has a greater relevance to students' own lives. Additionally, it encourages students to look at issues outside of the classroom and examine how information is presented in various media formats – including vlogs.

In this essay, we explore what is "new" about video as a writing tool, how digital video is currently being used for projects in composition classes, and why it should be used for creative and collaborative classroom projects within the context of communication and rhetoric. One of the most compelling reasons for using video in the composition or basic writing classroom is its accessibility. Students today have access to camera phones, digital cameras, and webcams, and many are already recording videos and posting them online. After-school programs in video

production and media immersion have proliferated over the past decade, and many schools teach video production techniques to middle school and high school students. Upon entering a college composition classroom, many students have already been exposed to digital video technology. Convenient and affordable for most students, video editing software is commonly pre-loaded on commercial PCs and Macs. For the basic writing student, learning video composition is a necessary "writing" skill for the 21st century, as both an augmentation to and a complement of learning print composition. Although print literacy is not going away any time soon, video literacy is rapidly becoming an important facet of contemporary digital writing. Composition and basic writing students, although at different levels of *print* literacy, have come into school with basically similar *video* literacy needs. That is, both groups have had informal training in video (through what James Paul Gee calls "affinity spaces" of informal learning), and would benefit from formal (educational) training in video writing as a rhetorical and expressive mode of communication.

We first look at video as an old medium remediated through the proliferation of Internet video distribution sites such as *YouTube, Vimeo,* and *Viddler*. Second, we show that video corresponds to some of the varied approaches to composition that Richard Fulkerson identified in "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century": specifically, rhetorical, expressive, and critical/cultural studies (658). Finally, we argue that video belongs in the composition classroom as a pedagogical tool—not only because it is an accessible and popular media form — but also because producing a video requires students to develop strong organizational and writing skills. We are not advocating the elimination of text-bound essays and other forms of written composition. Rather, we are arguing for the acceptance of video as a powerful rhetorical tool in its own right; students can benefit from learning effective ways to express themselves and

to communicate with video compositions. As a learning tool, video offers a relevant parallel to traditional writing; that is, just as writing engages students' critical thinking skills, so too does video. We agree with Kathleen E. Welch, who writes, "Electronic technologies have led to…an awareness or mentalité that now changes literacy but in no way diminishes it" (104). Video can augment writing classes by opening up traditional lessons to more interactive, more emotionally resonant, and more relevant topics. According to Welch, "We need *topoi,* both common and special, in our newly oral/aural/script-based era of electronic rhetoric. We do not need the devolved *topos* of topic-sentence instruction which kills students' interest in language" (105).

Although such *topoi* will naturally become part of our culture through the increased use of video, it is important to both study and identify what these *topoi* are now and explore ways in which these might evolve, while our video culture is still in a young, formative stage. Cynthia Selfe writes, "By adding a focus on visual literacy to our existing focus on alphabetic literacy, we may not only learn to pay more serious attention to the ways in which students are now ordering and making sense of the world through the production and consumption of visual images, but we may also extend the usefulness of composition studies in a changing world" (72). Some of today's common *topoi* that could be addressed using video might include visualizations of beauty, identity, community, or discourses on social justice, globalization, and so forth. Lalithan Vasudevan, Katherine Schultz, and Jennifer Bateman, for example, use autobiographical video projects to have students discuss their own culture. To learn to use video *specifically* and *pointedly* is to understand the direction in which composition studies are headed. In the 21st century, students are increasingly influenced by the media; to be "literate" today means not just learning to write text, but also learning to write video.

What Is New Is Actually Old

What is *new* about online video as a composition tool has less to do with *what it is* or *what it has been* than with *how accessible it is* or *what it can become* now that anyone with access to a digital recording device can make video happen. Digital video is ideally suited as an effective tool for merging images and sounds in the composition of complex and meaningful multimedia messages. As Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman have shown, using multimedia techniques in the classroom helps students to rethink composition as integral to their lives (464). Today, video unbound from traditional distribution channels has found a new niche on the Internet. As a communication medium, Internet video has become a synthesis of both the consumption and the production of moving images, a combination Axel Bruns has coined "produsage." According to Bruns, this form of interaction with the tools of production allows consumers to "become much more actively involved in shaping their own media and network usage" (15). Inexpensive webcams, digital still and video cameras, cell phones, and portable music players that record moving digital images all afford consumers of media the opportunity to become *producers of media*; and, not only can we produce, we can also distribute what we produce as video logs, or vlogs, online. When uploaded to online forums, videos have the potential to be seen by millions. The democratization of media is here. We must now teach students to use video effectively and wisely.

So, what's really *new* about video is not just its accessibility as a potential tool for public discourse, but also the empowerment and responsibility of using such a tool in a meaningful way to speak to others online. Video, like writing, should be brought into the composition classroom.

Fulkerson's Modes of Composition

Writers in composition classes follow certain trajectories through the composition process. In 1979, composition scholar Richard Fulkerson formulated a now-classic set of four paradigms for composition pedagogy ("Four Philosophies"). He modified this position in the 1990s, and again in 2005, each time updating his list to take into account changes in technology and writing practices. In 2005 he reduced his model to three modes of composition. We believe video has the capability of not just fulfilling, but also exemplifying, each of Fulkerson's composition categories ("Composition at the Turn").

For Fulkerson, composition classrooms in the 21st century must take into account different types of writing practices. Writing that emphasizes resistance to underlying social/political ideologies describes a "critical/cultural studies approach" to composition. This form of writing seeks, as he puts it, to liberate the writer from the "dominant discourse" of contemporary culture (660). Examples of critical/culture studies approaches to writing emphasize the author's critical reassessment of discourses, taking into account economics, feminism, and postcolonialism, among other theories. In the composition classroom, students might be asked to make videos that respond to challenging texts. For instance, in a classroom discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students could be encouraged to post their thoughts about connecting 1950s racism to their own experiences. By opening up a forum for the visual representation of these discourses, video provides a powerful and exacting tool for unearthing hidden ideologies and allows students to persuasively examine such discourses in a new way. Further, by allowing other students to comment on the videos (in a moderated and supervised fashion), a dialogue can be established that would be immediately more personal and relevant to students' own experiences, allowing them to critique contemporary issues in their own lives.

A second form of composition Fulkerson describes is "expressive" writing, which places the author's experiences as the focus of the written piece. Expressive writing emphasizes the autobiographical tradition, or the "fostering [of] personal development, in the great Socratean tradition of 'knowing thyself'" (Fulkerson, "Composition at the Turn" 667). Writing of this sort allows students to critically examine their own places in their cultures. Again, video offers a tangible and visible method for this form of expressive writing, most directly through assignments that emphasize vlogging as a form of personal statement. For example, students might be encouraged to post autobiographical videos that depict their favorite out-of-class activities. Such videos would develop connections between students in the classroom and foster critical self-reflection through the act of composing video. As the video-making process is a collaborative one, this type of activity is also one that builds relationships and promotes student interaction in and out of the classroom.

Fulkerson's third form of composition at the core of 21st century composition is "rhetorical" writing. Emphasizing the persuasive power of writing, rhetorical composition has the author use the Aristotealian tropes of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* to construct an argument (670-71). Video offers students a new means to construct an argument with rhetorical power. For example, students might be encouraged to choose a contemporary issue in the news and present an argument for or against the issue. Other students in the class might be encouraged to comment on the video with their own research on the issue. Or, students might be asked to offer counter examples to contemporary news programming, doing original research on a political or social issue.

Speaking About "Oral-Aural" Communication

We have been residing in a video culture for more than half a century. This culture, according to W. Lance Haynes, has signaled the return of a "dominant mode of communication fundamentally oral-aural, where relationships among messages are determined not by senders who permanently anchor their words with ink, but by audiences who tie incoming information to the fluxing domain of their own stored experiences" (75). Haynes echoes classical rhetoric scholar Walter Ong, who argues that the rise of electronic media in the 1960s brought with it a return to the oral traditions of rhetoric, which he termed a "secondary orality."

To successfully employ video as a new oral-aural "mode of communication" requires both our acceptance and our understanding of video as an important rhetorical tool. If, as trends indicate, we are becoming more and more reliant on this "oral-aural" mode of communication, it makes sense that we understand and clarify the "whys" and the "hows" of this secondary orality—and why video, by offering the benefits of visual and aural information, can indeed be a dominant medium for this type of communication. Lester Faigley's essay "Beyond Imagination" suggests that we learn how to construct meaning and knowledge with technology, in order to communicate within a variety of media (including video) for different audiences and purposes, to understand the ethical, cultural, environmental, societal implications of technology, and to develop a sense of stewardship and responsibility regarding the use of technology (137). Further, as Welch emphasizes, there is a "need [for] elaborate, complicated, multidisciplinary logos training and practice throughout life. Because of the technological revolutions of the last fifty years, this training must include the oralism of video" (103). This brings us to the question of why it is important for students learn how to speak with video in composition classrooms.

Making the Absent Visible: A Case for Video Composition

Video, in many ways, mirrors the thought process. As described by Hugh Honour and John Fleming, the inherent qualities of video include "its ability to mimic the mind rather than the eye, to reveal patterns of thought and behavior, to expose and dissect social and political realities, to cause us to reflect upon our ways of seeing and understanding the world" (898). Unlike other visual media, video can come closest to writing not only because it can reflect what and how we are thinking, but also because of its immediacy and visibility. It can be recorded and played back instantly or revised and edited later. Digital video is a fluid and malleable communication tool. Unlike words affixed to a page or more traditional forms of broadcast media, digital media can be produced for one purpose and then repurposed for another. Anyone with a camera can capture and edit video anywhere, at anytime, and for a variety of uses. This makes it all the more important that students understand the power of digital video, and with its use the responsibility to employ it in positive and constructive ways.

So ubiquitous is our multimedia culture that in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Henry Jenkins writes of how more than half of all teenagers have

> …their own blogs and podcasts; they are recording their lives on LiveJournal and developing their own profiles on My Space; they are producing their own YouTube videos and Flickr photos; they are writing and posting fan fiction or contributing to Wikipedia; they are mashing up music and modding [modifying] games. Much as engineering students learn by taking apart machines and putting them back together, many of these teens learned how media work by taking their culture apart and remixing

> it…. And they correctly argue that you cannot really understand how these new media work if you don't use them yourself.

Several features put forth in the 2004 "CCCC Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments" for engaging students in writing digitally are particularly relevant to working with video for composition. These include introducing students to the epistemic characteristics of writing with video, providing them with opportunities to apply these skills, promoting hands-on use of digital video recording technologies, engaging them in the critical evaluation of information (information literacy), and asking them to be reflective practitioners of video composition.

As a form of composition, video can encourage self-exploration as well as research into topics outside one's own experience. Video offers opportunities to present arguments and to practice persuasive strategies. And, as Anne Francis Wysocki argues, new media can help teachers connect with their students. Ultimately, we believe that teachers can and should help guide students toward effect and mature use of video as a communication tool.

There are important similarities and differences in composing a video and a written text. For example, both videos and essays require pre-thought and organization to construct an argument. Whereas composition students may be required to write an outline or a "mind map," video students could be encouraged to storyboard or "pre-film" sequences with action figures or drawings replacing human actors (see Tony Buzan for more about mind-mapping). Both video and essay writing require editing and revision for clarity of thought and correct "grammar." In the language of video, "grammar" refers to the way images and scenes are juxtaposed, just as English grammar describes the relationship of parts of speech. Further, both video and essay

writing ask the writer to think critically about the choices he/she is making when inscribing content. In contrast to traditional essay writing, video writing requires the duality of writing for both the ear and eye. Unless a video argument is meant to be a purely visual one, the text of the video script is first written and then spoken. In almost all instances of digital video production, writing comes first, whether it is in the form of dialogue or clear instructions for visuals that supports the narrative or storyline. In all these instances, the critical thinking involved with video production encourages students to develop multisensory argumentation and rhetorical skills.

Using Video in Class Assignments

The WIDE Research Center Collaborative asserts that "[d]igital writers rely on rhetorically sophisticated combinations of words, motion, interactivity, and visuals to make meaning" (¶11). In this section we will examine some of these combinations and present a method for using videos in class assignments. Specifically, "words" define the way text is used in a video, "motion" looks at the way a video uses movement for effect, "interactivity" is the way a video integrates user contributions, and "visuals" define the way a video looks or encourages looking by students.

Some instructors currently use video for a variety of composition assignments, ranging from explorations in literary studies to variations on documentary styles, including both straightforward, informational type projects and issue-oriented productions addressing social, cultural and/or political concerns. For example, at Kansas State University, Michael Wesch has found great success using short videos to illustrate how new media have changed writing. His video "Web 2.0 ... The Machine is Us/ing Us" has been viewed over 11 million times on YouTube and is currently used in classrooms across the country to help teach different

composition styles (Wesch, "What Is Web 2.0"). "Web 2.0" offers both words and motion to describe the transition from a purely literate culture to an oral-aural culture. In one segment of the video, Wesch illustrates how the erasure of words (via pencil and paper) mirrors the transposition of text on the computer (via Microsoft Word). Through the motion of the text on the computer screen, Wesch demonstrates the flexibility of writing within different media.

Although Wesch's video is an instructor-created video that encourages student criticism of technology, it is instructive in the way it opens up the video medium as a critical tool. Wesch encourages his students to make videos as well, both to talk about issues in technology studies, and to critique and reflect on issues of composing with video (Wesch, "YouTube and You").

Additionally, mixed media scholar Daniel Anderson has offered his students an alternative to traditional essay writing, using interactive and visual elements: the "mashup" video which asks them to comment on an aspect of culture by juxtaposing and layering a variety of media images over audio tracks. A mashup is a composition that creates content from existing texts. Unlike the larger term "remix video," which describes any combination of multiple texts, a mashup is a specific kind of remix video that synthesizes two or more original works to make one argument. In a remix video, the individual works might not be immediately identifiable within the mix, but a mashup highlights each of the "inputs" as well as the final "output" video. By working in this bricolage-style of composing, students not only learn valuable production skills, but also learn the rhetorical power of juxtaposition, argumentation, and critical thinking. For instance, students might be asked to mashup images from a movie trailer with different musical styles to illustrate how the music can inform the genre or style of the film. Students must keep in mind the specific "inputs" (the visuals and the music) but create a new "output" via the

juxtaposition of texts. In this way, students learn important lessons about the interactive functionality of video, and how changing one element can have drastic effects on the visuals as well.

Other potential assignments for using video are often shared among academics, and many are also posted on the Internet to be studied by those of us who teach composition. In this essay, we suggest two of our own ideas that might be good beginning assignments if you have never assigned a video project before. These assignments, described below, do not require more than a digital recorder and simple editing software.

Assignment 1: Designing Digital Arguments or Vlogging for Online Advocacy

A *vlog* is an online video that focuses on an individual who speaks directly to the camera. Vloggers use the intimacy of the camera to opine to the audience and present their own point of view on particular issues. One particular style of vlog, the advocacy vlog, takes as its topic a particular issue about which the vlogger is concerned or passionate. For example, popular vlogger Laci Green uses vlogs to advocate open sexual education for teens. Vlogging came to the public's attention when amateur videos of the December 2004 tsunami began showing up on the Web, according to Michael Rogers of MSNBC.com.

A multipart, multimodal assignment that lends itself to composing video requires students to create a vlog that advocates a personal stance on a cause they strongly believe in. Students would submit this video to an existing website or develop their own site, depending on skill levels. In our experience, it is fairly easy to set up a course blog that can accommodate video uploads using *Blogger, Tumblr, Wordpress*, or similar sites. Course blogs created specifically for media intensive writing or communication classes are very effective teaching tools, and many of

these can either be open to the public for viewing or restricted for viewing only by the instructor and students enrolled in the course.

Several web-based advocacy groups invite public participation and discourse using video. One of the premiere sites is "Darfurian Voices," a project of *24 Hours for Darfur*, an organization specializing in research on the conflict in Darfur, Sudan. Using a combination of video testimony and public opinion research, the website documents and broadcasts the views of Darfurian refugees on issues of peace, justice, and reconciliation. The group's strategy is to use vlogs to harness the power of online video. According to the group's YouTube site, viewers can:

> Learn about the situation from expert videos. Watch testimony from Darfurians. View appeals from people around the world. Record a message for your representatives right in your browser, or upload a video file. And email any video message directly to world leaders.

As part of this assignment, students can research and evaluate the efficacy of the advocacy vlog prior to making their own vlogs. Students will also write a video script and tape their own opinion vlog about one aspect of the situation in Darfur (or elsewhere) they feel strongly about. Student videos can be written as calls to action, presenting ideas about how to help victims of genocide or raise awareness of genocide. For this assignment, students might also be asked to conduct news or documentary-style interviews with people in their lives to discover how "aware" their local community is of instances of genocide around the world, and specifically what has been happening in the Sudan region of Africa.

When the vlogs are completed, students are asked to comment on each other's videos, and identify the different forms of persuasion used to convey their different messages. Another effective way to connect a video assignment to a written assignment is to tie these together as

part of a whole project. We have found attaching written assignments on either side of the a video assignment is an effective way of reinforcing a student's understanding of the differences between composing for print or the screen, and the different skills required for doing both effectively. This recursive process becomes richer when different modalities are integrated, thereby extending the value of an assignment by asking students to think about the medium they are employing.

For example, students can write critical analyses of their videos within the comment sections of the blog where the video is uploaded. The purpose of this is twofold: first, it allows students a chance to write text online rather than on paper; and second, it gives students skills that can help them view videos online through a more critical or analytical lens. By evaluating their work in the "safe space" of the classroom, students can become more informed consumers of online video outside of the classroom. Producing advocacy vlogs in a composition class that emphasizes a critical/cultural studies approach can empower students to challenge the hegemonic discourses that prevail in the mainstream media. Typically a collaborative process, video production can also be viewed as a powerful, dialectic means of socially constructing knowledge. There are a number of other possibilities for using digital video as a rhetorical tool in a composition course – advocacy vlogs are but one possibility.

Once created, videos can be uploaded to a class blog or website created specifically for a course, recorded to a DVD or saved on a USB drive for classroom viewing. Free video sharing websites such as YouTube also offer channels for video uploads. Instructors can focus class content on how different argumentative styles might be best suited to a video or visual treatment. Students can be a great resource for ideas about what types of videos they would like to produce. They should be asked what experiences they have had with multimedia projects and to share,

when and if they can or choose to, some of the things they may have already created using new media technology. (For additional sample assignments, see *Appendix 1*.)

Assignment 2: Mashups for Teaching about Copyright and Plagiarism

One of the major concerns of the digital age is the illegal copying and distribution of copyrighted intellectual property. Students are aware of the problem from the start of their college experience: many colleges now allow a portion of orientation to focus on illegal downloading in the dormitories. At the same time, in our composition classrooms, we examine issues of plagiarism and academic integrity to better facilitate citations, ethical writing, and citizenship. For 21st century digital natives—many of today's freshman students have never known a world without the World Wide Web—issues of intellectual property are at best ignored, or more often, flouted (Park 474–6). What we have found in our classrooms, however, is that by using video projects that ask students to create and then steal original works, students learn first hand about piracy, copyright, and intellectual property. Since today's digital culture makes digital piracy easy and convenient, we find that students often forget that copyright existed originally to protect the rights of the author of a work (see Lessig). We ask students to create video projects which we then have *other* students remix. Students learn that taking someone else's content can have emotional consequences as well as financial.

Specifically, in our classes students were encouraged to experiment with creating mashup music videos as way of fostering an understanding of the different ways copyright is conceived in the digital age. First, students were encouraged to find clips of movies and television shows, recut them in the editing program of their choice, and set them to music from their MP3 collections. In the process of planning these videos, students were asked to think about the process of timing, juxtaposition, montage, and textual meaning. They were asked to "put

themselves" into the video. If this lesson is coupled with a discussion or written assignment about film theory's auteur theory, students could be encouraged to be their own auteur. As they edited clips and music, written journal entries asked them to talk about the process of writing video in this way. They were asked to discuss their reasons for including particular clips or music, and the personal connections they might have had with the musical clips. Special emphasis was placed on forms of editing expertise they were gaining as well as the intensive work that goes into video editing. For example, one student used clips from the television show *Firefly* as well as the sequel film *Serenity* and mashed up the images with a song by My Chemical Romance to discuss the larger influence of the fan community's efforts to "save" the show from cancellation.

By the end of the first phase of the project, students learned that editing videos and music was a far more labor-intensive process than they first realized. Editing videos not only gave the students the opportunity to learn practical knowledge of how to work the program and how to write with video, but also led them to re-evaluate the efforts of professional editors and video composers. Students learned that they become emotionally attached to their own videos and the meanings they have "put" into them.

The next stage of the project involved asking students to trade videos with someone, and them to have their work re-edited and subverted to change its intended meaning. By remixing someone else's remixed videos, students were able to work on their editing skills, and by having their own video remixed, students seemed to understand how artists might feel about having their own work taken. Additionally, for (the inevitable) students who felt that it was fair game for others to make use of their work, the class had a productive discussion about the changing nature of copyright in the 21st century, and how sampling as a musical art form, video editing as a

mashup of elements, and copyright as a concept and practical application may be in need of government revision. Through written assignments about this project, students were able to translate that knowledge and passion into the idea of academic integrity as well, seeing how plagiarism mirrors the stealing of copyrighted material. Just as plagiarism sees students "taking" the work of others and "remixing" it with their own work, so too does remixing others' videos. By acknowledging the difficulties and the level of craftsmanship in video writing, students were able to see also the work that goes into crafting a textual, as well as a visual, argument.

A "Collaborative" Conclusion

We are moving in the right direction if we can create opportunities for students to write, compose, remix, mashup and/or produce multimedia projects. We do not need to justify to students the importance of working in a variety of media—many of them have beat us there and are already experimenting with and creating with any number of existing multimedia tools. What composition classes can offer students are ways to deploy these tools for meaningful human interaction and communication.

As we have demonstrated, both of these assignments can be used to explore Fulkerson's modes of composition ("Composition at the Turn"). The advocacy vlog assignment allows students to emphasize the expressive nature of video through the use of personal narratives, as well as to use video to make rhetorical arguments advocating for a cause such as 24 Hours for Darfur. In a course that takes a critical/culture studies approach to composition, this assignment provides students with the opportunity to "talk back to," or challenge, dominant media discourse. The mashup assignment also enables students to use critical/culture studies methodologies to

rethink the dominant discourse of copyright and plagiarism. Ultimately, video offered both of us the opportunity to explore issues in composition in new, relevant, and exciting ways.

When designing assignments that use video as a composition tool, we are also designing many opportunities for collaborations as well. Instructors can work collaboratively with students to come up with new ways to explore the composition process using video. Writing for print and the screen can become an iterative process that allows students to enact multiple skill sets and work both individually and collectively. Alternatively, students can write papers about using video technology for composing arguments, and then use video to make arguments using rhetorical strategies that are most effective for the screen. Students can also work together to create collaborative discourse communities in online vlogs. The possibilities for social-interactive/constructive learning and knowledge building using video in the composition classroom are unlimited (Bandura; Lave and Wenger; Vygotsky).

"Walter J. Ong," writes Barbara Warnick in her conclusion to *Rhetoric Online*, "welcomed the advent of electronic communication and, with it, the emergence of second orality with its emphasis on communal experience, participation, and immediacy of expression" (127). So do we. To mashup Warnick with a line from Kathleen Welch, we believe video is "a thrilling extension of literacy," one that has implications for a reassessment of the composition classroom (157). What we mean is not that video should replace the traditional essay, but that through careful consideration of video as a composition tool, important concepts in composition—like critical thinking, point of view articulation, and research skills—can be highlighted in different media, with more immediate and more relevant application to students' own lives.

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Appendix 1: Sample Assignments[1]

The first assignment is designed to get students thinking and writing about new media writing spaces including blogs, wikis, online video sites, and other Internet applications. The second assignment details what is involved in composing a video essay. The third assignment is a written evaluation of the video essays. The assignments are intended to be recursive and both reinforce traditional composition skills and introduce students to new ways to think and write rhetorically using new media applications. Please note the assignments listed here appear in abbreviated form due to space considerations.

Assignment 1:

Action 1: Rhetorical Analysis of Web Writing Spaces

For this text-based assignment, students will be asked to choose a specific web application and analyze it as either a digital writing tool or a multimodal writing space. The purpose of this project is twofold: 1) to gain a critical understanding of how Internet technology and new media applications impact the way we conceive of digital literacy; and 2) to research online resources that may be useful for the video argument they will be composing collaboratively with their peers.

Students will write a five-page (not including screen shots) academic argument about how the rhetorical uses of the technology affect contemporary communication. They will provide an overview of the application, including an explanation of its audience, intended uses, actual uses, and their analysis will argue why it is important to consider how the application changes or engages how we conceptualize and perform the tasks of writing, thinking, and literacy.

Individual Grades:

Students will be evaluated individually. Papers will be evaluated on the rhetorical sophistication of the argument, the inclusion of persuasive evidence for the main claim, and the organization of the material in a persuasive and elegant way. The essays will integrate visual and written content, as students will need to include screen shots of the application they write about. Essays will be evaluated for both overall and sentence level coherence and clarity with evidence of good mechanics, clear punctuation, and overall style.

[11] The sample assignments that appear here were adapted for this article by Lillian Spina-Caza from assignments

Students will also be asked to prepare and present a short (two-minute) Power Point presentation featuring the web application they have analyzed to their classmates and will be evaluated on how well they describe the application and its uses, and how it changes the way we write and think.

Sample applications:

Flickr

YouTube

Vimeo

Revver

MTV U

Blogger

Twitter

Delicious

Technorati

LinkedIn

Facebook

Tabblo

Notefish

Cite-u-like

Stumble

DIY

WikiHow

Assignment 2:

The Video Argument

Students will work collaboratively in groups of three or four to generate a short video argument (no more than three- to five-minutes) about the impact of technology on society. Students may find it interesting to investigate how technology affects, changes, or reconfigures contemporary constructions of community, identity, culture, property, business practices, public and private, authorship, ownership, and/or "geography."

The main requirements for this assignment are:

1) Students will make an argument and contribute their own voices to the public sphere concerning an important issue;

2) Students will address some aspect of technology's impact;

3) Students will focus on an argument that can be made most effectively through video which engages multiple modes (text, visuals, sounds, timing);

4) Group members must contribute equally to the production of the video argument, though different members may take on different roles in the project (writer, director/camera person, editor, narrator or interviewer, sound, etc.);

5) Group members will brainstorm and draft a work plan to which they will commit as a collaborative contract and students will be graded upon how well they met the terms of their contract.

Group Grades:

1. Each student will craft a storyboard as part of the brainstorming process. Students will be evaluated based on a storyboard of no less than 10 pages;

2. Students will be evaluated based on the role they played in the making of the video and whether they fulfilled the terms of the group contract;

3. Students will be evaluated on the final video project based on the following criteria:

   (1) the rhetorical sophistication of their argument, (2) the effective incorporation of research (in the form of quotes, interviews, statistics, images), citation of materials in the form of video credits, and (3) the synergistic application of different media for the video composition (images, narration, sound, timing, text, etc.).

Individual Grades:

- Students will also work individually to compose a short essay of two or three pages reflecting on the differences of composing in text and in digital media. Each student will make an argument about how different media impact the way they craft and shape an argument, and reflect on parts of the process they found most challenging, enlightening, or rewarding. They may choose to compare the composing process of their initial essay to that of the collaboratively authored storyboard and video composition.

Assignment 3:

Rhetorical Analysis of Group Video Essay

In a written, five-page essay, students will craft an analysis of another group's video, identifying the video's argument and evaluating the rhetorical strengths and weaknesses of its appeals and use of multiple media. The purpose of this assignment is twofold. On the one hand, it will help students hone and refine analytical and writing skills. On the other, through the process of composing an individual essay, students will be providing detailed and nuanced peer feedback to their colleagues. Here are some guidelines that can assist students in writing critical analyses:

1. ***Describe the video you've chosen to examine***

Your audience for this paper includes your peers and the instructors for this course. Even though we have already seen the video you're going to analyze, you should take some time to explain

what type of video it is, its purpose, its target audience, and what means of persuasion it employs to achieve its effect.

2. *Make a Specific Evaluative Claim*

Be sure that you are making an evaluative judgment about the video. Have you clearly stated whether or not you think it is successful or in need of improvement? Ask yourself: Is your argument about the quality of the video's argument and composition? Here is where most students trip up. They fail to think about the video's relative success for its intended audience. I like to call this the "so what factor" and your paper should be able to answer this question.

In other words, you should be able to talk about why the video's composition has consequences in terms of its overall rhetorical purpose. You should be able to connect the argument you're making about its overall success back to what the video is trying to do in the world.

3. *State Criteria for your Evaluation*

By what criteria will you be judging the video? You might think about how the video uses ethos, pathos, or logos, or appeals to audience values. You should lay out the specific elements you're using in your written argument. It's okay if you don't talk about all of them, it would be hard for one paper to do that, but you should have a nuanced and careful analysis of the video in terms of the criteria you select.

4. *Examine Your Claim using your Criteria*

After you've put forth your claim and your criteria, give evidence from the video itself that supports your argument. You should describe particular shots, scenes, sounds, etc. and explain how they either help or hinder the intended purpose of the video. It is not enough to simply mention this or that scene -- you will need to do the interpretive work to explain how a particular scene or montage of images helps to develop the point you are making about it. You will incorporate screen shots into your essay to make or support your argument. The screen shots should be appropriately placed, labeled, and mentioned at an appropriate point in your text.

5. *Consider Alternative Views*

Remember that an argument is something with which others can disagree. You should consider those who might disagree with your claims or criteria and address or answer the questions of someone who might oppose your argument or viewpoint.

Appendix 2: Vlog and Video Composing Resources

Vlog Resources

(http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/05/01/BUGK7IHGO81.DTL).

Directory of Vlogs: Mefeedia.com

Host for video clips: Blip.tv

Host for video and multimedia clips: OurMedia.org

Vlog Tutorial: Freevlog.org

Vlog Information: Videoblogging.info

Other Online Video Resources

Academic video essays: http://www.audiovisualthinking.org/

Activist Video: http://www.activistvideo.org

Digital Video Guru: http://www.dvguru.com

MTV U: http://www.mtvu.com/

MTV U Activism: http://www.mtvu.com/category/activism/

Online Video Guide: http://www.ovguide.com/

REELSEO: http://www.reelseo.com/list-video-sharing-websites/

Tutorial for iMovie: http://desktopvideo.about.com/od/imovievideotutorials/

Tutorial for Windows Movie Maker: http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/default.mspx

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