

## What is the *value* of multimodal or alternative approaches to writing & argument?

- Encourages greater student engagement and participation
- Often invite/encourage collaboration at various stages of the writing process
- Overall rhetorical awareness.
- Multimodality is important to sequencing and scaffolding
- Part of a methodology that facilitates the crossing of cognitive thresholds related to higher order thinking and understanding
  - *Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* identified by Linda Adler-Kassler and Elizabeth Wardle
  - *Conceptual Affordances*: available cognitive moves students make when composing that ultimately lead to discoveries or meaning making (align multimodal assignments with goals/objectives).
- Interdisciplinary--interdisciplinarity
- Reminder that principles/features, practice/process/delivery, and forms of “argument” are not discipline specific: argument as cognitive activity important across disciplines
- Builds semiotic bridges: Bridging semiotic channels (George Cusack); complexity of the multimodal argument is the relationship between *two* modes (Karen Shriver):
  - Repetition of Key Ideas (Reiteration)
  - Complementary: content differs across 2+ modes, both are necessary to the meaning
  - Supplementary: content is different in written/visual modes (two different modes) but one mode dominates the other, "providing the main ideas, while the other reinforces, elaborates, or explains how to interpret the other"
  - Juxtapositional: Key ideas are created by a "clash" in different content (words/visuals). Both modes must be viewed simultaneously for meaning to be achieved (*also within an assignment*)
  - Stage-setting (*signposting*): content is different in verbal and visual modes and one mode "forecasts the other mode's content, theme, etc.
- Performativity--performative language functions as a form of social action and has the effect of change (applied to argument).
- Performativity—performing argument is/as an act of empowerment: following Lyotard, writing in *The Postmodern Condition*, “performativity is the defining mode of legitimation of postmodern knowledge and social bonds, that is power.” Postmodern knowledge must do something. If we can read, understand, and use different modes of argument performance, not only can we more effectively persuade (or *do* other thing), we can also recognize modes of argument that mediate or act upon us as consumers and citizens in societies that remains, for the most part, predominately ocularcentric.

## Challenges?

- Multimodal argument should not be a mere "add-on" or "enhancement" to a more traditionally composed/written argument
- Multimodal texts are complex—not cute little creative projects
- Don't often give students a "choice" about the modes within which they can work.
- How do we craft argument beyond words on the printed page? How do we bridge the agency multimodal arguments encourage & student understanding of argumentation?
- Instructors must create realistic expectations that are communicated to students in assignment description and instructions, and in evaluation rubrics that *translate argument strategies into what seems like unconventional, multimodal forms/genres in the writing classroom, but that echo forms/genres that exist outside of the classroom.*
- *Diverse modes of argument and the technologies and affordances necessary to produce them contribute to student's rhetorical awareness and abilities—go beyond functional use of technology.*
- *Similar to construction and performance (in writing studies) of traditional mono-modal oral or written argument, multimodal argument should be process-based and completed in stages (brainstorming/invention, drafting, revision, editing) that are collaborative and include: proposals, mock-ups, peer workshops, and performance which can incorporate interpretations that translate the argument into orality, invites discussion and audience response, and offer additional insight for evaluation.*
- *Translation + Transfer: Expository Writing Program: Elements of the Essay: Motive – Thesis – Keyterms – Analysis – Style - Sources / Evidence – Audience Assumptions – Style - Structure (structural moves) – Stitching/Orienting*
- Multimodal assignments are often accompanied by a "Rhetorical Statement" or "self-analysis essay" that explains or describes the argument and the rhetorical situation of the work in linguistic/alphabetic textual composition
- *My projects include an oral presentation (understood as a translation of and supplement to the performance of the multimodal argument?)*

***How do we evaluate multimodal or alternative approaches to writing & argument?  
What would the metric of evaluation (rubric) look like?***

- Oral Performance
- Rhetorical Statement
- Reflection
- Reader (Audience) Response

## Conclusions

- Overreliance on visual mode OR multimodality limited to a dyadic structure
- From Emily Howell, David Reinking, Rebecca Kaminski, “Writing as Creative Design: Constructing Multimodal Arguments in a Multiliteracies Framework.” *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, Volume 16, Number 1: May 2015.
- “The diverse affordances of digital tools, the multimodal genres they have birthed, and the expansive audiences they have generated offer engaging new avenues for creative expression that might be seamlessly merged with conventional forms of writing.” (4)
  - *But, this is the very thing I/we have to convince my/our colleagues of...*”
  - *The problem/complication for writing teachers: valuing traditional goals of writing, while embracing digital (or multimodal) forms of expression?*
- From Emily Howell, Tracy Butler, David Reinking, “Multimodal Arguments, Technology, and Social Issues: A Formative Experiment” (2014) *Presentations*.
  - “ ‘unanticipated outcomes’ using multimodality to teach argument include: engagement, completion of assignments, and freedom of expression (among others common in student evaluations). Changes in the learning environment included “expanded conception of argument” and ‘transfer of knowledge.’”
  - “Multimodal arguments expand students’ concept of and engagement in argument”; however, “transfer of learning from understanding the concept of argument to writing arguments is difficult and needs further research. “
- Many studies of multimodality focus on digital technologies that are either visual or that privilege the visual (alphabetic, pictorial, gestural—and their performatives) over other modes, such as sound, orality (which is an element of the linguistic mode).