

*Transition from discussion (oral/linguistic modality) to discussions in hypotheses (digital/linguistic discussion) to performing multimodal arguments*

Despite the development of alternative modes of communication, Western society remains ocularcentric in its privileging of textual communication and learning, perhaps because, as Barthes posits, “Language...is the only semiotic system capable of *interpreting* another semiotic system” (179).

I understand multimodal writing/composition/argument as using more than one mode to achieve an intended purpose. These modalities are commonly understood to include “visual, audio, gestural, spatial, or language/linguistic means of creating meaning” (Selfe, 195).

Multimodality involves strategic combinations of these modes—or the hybrid creation of new modes, formats, or genres, most if not all of which are performative, have the potential to perform argument, or have the potential to be translated into performance-based modalities or argument, live or recorded: presentations, installations, dance, musical composition-performance, oral storytelling, gaming, etc.

My interest in multimodality originated in my academic training in education, art and literature in the humanities, literary theory, and interdisciplinarity. In my twenty-five years of teaching, I first assigned multimodal projects as a high school English teacher in the Chicago Public Schools. These assignments were high stakes assignments that paralleled more traditional, formal analytical essays students wrote at the end of every major unit. My thinking at the time was rooted in learning theory that contrasted the analytical mind (left brain) with the creative mind (right brain). A holistic approach in having two equally weighted culminating projects recognized different ways students processed information and demonstrated learning, while also giving students the opportunity to perform in both an analytical and a creative option. Students who didn’t write well could still show analytical deftness and content mastery, or the originality of an interpretation in ways that satisfied the conventional and traditional forms linked to curricular outcomes for their year in school. At the college level, alternative, hybrid, or multi-modal assignments have evolved from being low-stakes creative final projects to high-stakes argument projects equivalent to more traditional and formal writing assignments in the literature and first year writing courses that I taught at the college level.

In my current position teaching expository writing at the University of Oklahoma, reading, writing, and performing argument in more nontraditional genres, texts, and multimodalities have become central to my own pedagogical evolution as a teacher of writing and argument.

Until very recently, I have not theorized this core aspect of my teaching pedagogy—I have simply practiced it.