

Writing Spaces

Assignments & Activities Archive

Multimodal FAQ Assignment

Mary Laughlin

This assignment is a selection from the *Writing Spaces* Assignment and Activity Archive, an open access companion resource to the *Writing Spaces* open textbook series.

To access additional selections, visit: <http://writingspaces.org/aaa>.

Assignment and activity selections © 2024 by the respective authors. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) and is subject to the *Writing Spaces* Terms of Use. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, email info@creativecommons.org, or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. To view the *Writing Spaces* Terms of Use, visit <http://writingspaces.org/terms-of-use>.

All rights reserved. For permission to reprint, please contact the author(s) of the individual articles, who are the respective copyright owners.

Multimodal FAQ Assignment

Mary Laughlin

Overview

This assignment reflects my ongoing attempts to build transfer-oriented reflective opportunities into first-year writing projects. It was inspired in part by pedagogical advice in John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas*; specifically, his emphasis on giving students opportunities to consider purpose and audience. For example, Bean suggests an imagined "naïve audience," wherein "the student plays the role of expert relative to the assigned audience" (42). In this assignment, students assume the role of a peer mentor in a hypothetical-for-the-project scenario: they must design an FAQ-style presentation (frequently asked questions) to inform new students about first-year writing. Essentially, this assignment calls for students to explicate content from the course they have almost finished for students who have yet to start. The assignment sequence prioritizes multimodal composing, rhetorical decision-making, and reflection on disciplinary content.

Students create slides and an accompanying script for the presentation. Topics can be stipulated to match the learning goals and content of the course itself. My current FYC classes center goals and learning outcomes related to genre, rhetoric, and process; to match, students' presentations must address genre, rhetorical situation, and source usage. To compose their slides and script, students must reflect on their own conceptual understanding of course content to generate questions and responses. Ideally, this metacognitive work will help them to articulate their own writing values moving forward.

The hypothetical scenario of the presentation requires meaningful consideration of audience, exigence, genre expectations, and constraints; for example, the incoming student audience will likely know far less than the presenters, who will have to scaffold their own content in a way that's appropriate for novices. Successful

presentation materials will additionally demonstrate understanding of effective multimodal design and the importance of modes other than the alpha-numeric / linguistic.

To note: the assignment does not require an actual live presentation (though certainly that could be an adaptation). As detailed in the assignment instructions, there are actually two audiences to compose for: attendees of the new student presentation event, and the faculty leaders reviewing the proposed materials, who originally wanted a presentation about generative AI, not first-year writing.

Time Commitment

3 weeks (ideally at the end of the term)

Materials

Students will need access to presentation software and time to practice with it. Assignment scaffolding should include a centralized resource for digital composing that includes a list of open-access or freely usable image databases; also, online slide templates, genre models of other presentations, and links to any free presentation software the institution provides for students.

Assignment or Activity Process

- Students explore the term “multimodal” and consider multiple modes of communication. Assigned readings (discussed in class) include Melanie Gagich’s “An Introduction to and Strategies for Multimodal Composing” and threshold concept 2.4: “All Writing is Multimodal” from the *Naming What We Know* collection.
- Students are presented with the following (hypothetical) rhetorical situation, which can be customized depending on the institution and course:

You are a member of a student peer mentoring group. Every year, the group delivers a presentation to incoming students

and their families during an in-person campus orientation event. Faculty leaders typically assign a topic to your group, who must then conduct research, write a script, and design accompanying slides using presentation software.

This year, your group wants to pick a topic: an FAQ-style presentation (frequently asked questions) about first-year writing at [institution]. You sense that incoming students have questions about writing and [class], the required first-year writing class. You think it would be helpful to address questions up front—even questions students don't yet know they have.

The faculty orientation leaders want the annual presentation to be about generative AI like ChatGPT and are reluctant to change their minds. Eventually, they say this to your group: compose questions and answers for an FAQ, create slides and a script for the proposed presentation, and email them in for consideration.

Your task: persuade them to go along with your group's proposal by creating customized, well-researched, strategically designed, polished presentation materials.

- To brainstorm, students respond to questions that center their own recent experiences and learning. Prompts include, “What’s something you wish you knew before the start of class?” and “What’s something you know or understand differently after [X] weeks of class?”
- Next, students complete a worksheet to help facilitate logistical considerations (e.g., presentation software of choice) and review course content. A worksheet prompt asks: “Look back through the course calendar. Are there any readings or activities we did over the term that might help you generate material for your presentation?”

- Students draft out the questions they plan to address in their presentation, which they turn into the instructor for feedback. In-class drafting and peer response time provides additional feedback and revision opportunities.
- With instructor support, students explore databases of open-access images to consider options for visual slide design. Instructor support includes guidance about copyright, the public domain, Creative Commons licenses, and citation guidelines for images.
- Students collaboratively critique provided sample slides, to practice generating feedback on multimodal texts and to help consider their own design choices. At the conclusion of the slide critique, students work on composing their own slides in class, where peer and instructor feedback is readily available.
- Students workshop a draft of their presentation materials (script and slides) with their peers.
- Finally, students review their workshop feedback, revise their draft materials, and turn in the slide deck and script with all required components: a welcoming statement, five questions and answers, and closing thank-you.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of multimodality and put that understanding into practice
- Compose across different genres
- Think critically about the needs of audiences situated outside of the immediate classroom

- Reflect on their own thinking, learning, and writing practices
- Identify concepts that contribute to their own understanding of writing and what they value in current and future writing spaces

Learning Accommodations

- Students may find working with slide templates or design tutorial videos helpful
- Slide design may provide an opportunity for students to practice composing alt-text
- Elements of project scaffolding such as brainstorming, slide critique, and peer feedback can be adapted for in-person instruction or asynchronous digital delivery

Works Cited

- Ball, Cheryl E., and Colin Charlton. "2.4: All Writing is Multimodal." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah State University Press, 2015, 42-43.
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd ed., Jossey Bass Wiley, 2011.
- Gagich, Melanie. "An Introduction to and Strategies for Multimodal Composing." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, vol. 3, edited by Dana Driscoll, Mary Stewart, and Matt Vetter, Parlor Press, 2020, pp. 64-85.
<https://writingspaces.org/volume-3/>.

Further Reading

- Taczak, Kara. "5.4: Reflection is Critical for Writers' Development." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing*

Studies, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah State University Press, 2015, 78-80.