Design Decisions, Curious Readership, and Asynchronous Responses to Multimodal Compositions

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Presentation Transcript/Outline

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# Slide 1

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Kate Balogh, and I am a senior academic assistant/writing coach in the Writing, Reading, Speech Assistance area of the Learning Commons at the College of DuPage. Today I’ll be sharing some existing literature on feedback on multimodal compositions, how those frameworks might be useful in writing centers, and the method and resources WRSA has developed to more effectively and authentically respond to multimodal compositions asynchronously.

# Slide 2

I’d like to begin with a bit of context about C.O.D. and W.R.S.A.

The College of DuPage is a 2-year community college in the western suburbs of Chicago. Enrollment is roughly 20,000 with students coming from 48 communities with a total population of more than 1 million people. The district includes 26 public high schools and 10 private high schools.

Writing Reading Speech Assistance (W.R.S.A.) is part of the Learning Commons, which also houses Math Assistance and Tutoring as the College’s academic support services hub. In the fall semester, coaches in W.R.S.A. provided support in 2962 conversation, speech, reading, and writing appointments. More than half of those appointments were conducted in-person, and another 37% were online using Zoom and video conferencing through W.C.Online. Roughly 6% of W.R.S.A.’s support was delivered through asynchronous email feedback.

# Slide 3

A 2018 program review in the College of DuPage’s English department encouraged the use of multimodal texts in first and second-year composition courses. Now, many instructors include a multimodal component in their mid-term and final assignments, and more recently, multimodal projects have replaced traditional essays as “final products.”

The College’s College Skills course typically requires students write a résumé, and many students create one for scholarship and transfer applications. Students can meet with career counselors in Career Services for guidance and assistance with their résumés, but they often work with W.R.S.A. coaches if the résumé is assigned as part of a class or if they are writing an essay in addition to the résumé for an application.

# Slide 4

You may be thinking, and rightfully so, that résumés are not really multimodal compositions. And you’re correct about that. But in W.R.S.A., and for our purposes today, we categorize résumés as designed documents. Other designed documents include infographics, PowerPoint decks, brochures and flyers, and social media posts.

What compositions, projects, or assignments that you have seen in your spaces might also fall under the designed documents umbrella?

# Slide 5

Jody Shipka, in her article “Negotiating Rhetorical, Material, Methodological, and Technological Difference: Evaluating Multimodal Designs,” describes the first time she received a multimodal student response to an assignment in a course she was teaching: the response, in this case a shape-sorting toy with the packaging and copy completely redesigned and revised by the writer, “neither looked nor worked like the linear, print-based texts [she] was used to receiving. [She] assumed the student had misunderstood what the task was asking her to do” (Shipka, 2009, p. W344). She continues, “I was at a disadvantage when it came time to assess these multimodal texts. I thought I knew how to evaluate the similar-looking linear, print-based texts I received, and assigning them made me feel confident that I was doing my job” (Shipka, 2009, p. W345).

And isn’t this in some ways the experience of many tutors and coaches the first time we are asked to provide feedback on a multimodal composition? I know the questions to ask when I’m reading a traditional essay. I know the structure, the conventions, the rubrics. Do I know the same for infographics? Or a rhetorical analysis turned Instagram post? What has your experience been working with multimodal compositions?

# Slide 6

Shipka’s assessment framework, detailed in this article, centers on a core set of questions writers respond to in a document separate from their multimodal piece–she calls this a statement of goals and choices (S.O.G.C.). These questions ask them to articulate the goal and purpose of their composition and the choices they made in service of that purpose and then evaluate the efficacy of those choices considering others available to them.

The S.O.G.C. requires students and instructors to adopt what Anne Wysocki calls “strategies of generous reading.” She says (as quoted by Shipka) that “we need to acknowledge that texts we receive from others can look and function differently from those to which we’ve become accustomed, and this is where generosity too must enter, so that we approach different-looking texts with the assumption not that mistakes were made but that choices were made and are being tried out and on” (Wysocki, 2004, p. 23, as cited in Shipka, 2009, p. W353).

Shipka combines this with other extensive reflective writing to create a full assessment rubric and plan for assessing and responding to multimodal compositions. Hers is not the only multimodal assessment framework from which writing centers can benefit.

# Slide 7

From 2010-2012, the National Writing Project convened a committee to develop a framework for instructors and students working with multimodal compositions. The Multimodal Assessment Project (MAP) framework includes 5 dimensions: 1) artifact, 2) rhetorical skills, 3) substance, 4) process management and technical skills, and 5) habits of mind (Jimerson, 2011).

Much of the research in the development of this framework looked at existing assessment strategies for traditional writing. What the committee found was that rubrics that “examine processes that lead to the creation of a text” and looked at “the context in which a text is created and how the production of that text reflects the demands, the constraints, and the affordance of that text” reflected an attempt to accommodate a broader definition of text in assessment. In many cases, this broader definition was just text plus image, but the committee tested them against true multimodal compositions and used the findings to inform the development of the MAP framework (Wahleithner, 2014, p. 81).

For today’s workshop I believe the most relevant dimensions to consider more closely are rhetorical skills and substance. Rhetorical skills look at how an artifact operates in context, how it could be and is received by its intended audience. Substance asks how and why. How did the artifact elicit a specific response in context? Why was this choice made? (Jimerson, 2011).

# Slide 8

How, then, can we as writing center practitioners adapt these frameworks for feedback to multimodal writers?

The strategy we have developed and use in W.R.S.A. combines Shipka’s generous reading with MAP’s rhetorical skills and substance dimensions.

In W.R.S.A., we have taken to calling generous reading curious readership, asking questions as readers because we genuinely want to know and understand and then communicating that knowing back to the writer.

We talk about rhetorical skills as purpose and audience, and substance as design choices.

We’ll discuss the specifics of this using a quick-reference infographic which also includes a text-only version.

# Slide 9

We begin where we do when working with any writer and any piece of writing–we are readers first.

For multimodal compositions, reading feels different than it does for alphabetic texts. It takes practice. But it is worth noting that we are practicing frequently in our day-to-day lives. We are reading infographics in the grocery store and at doctor’s offices. We are reading social media posts. We are reading slide decks, webpages, videos. We are multimodal readers in a multimodal world.

When we are reading with the intent of providing written asynchronous feedback, we are going to focus on audience, purpose, and design.

# Slide 10

Next, we summarize our reading.

Asynchronous feedback from W.R.S.A. coaches explicitly include a reader’s summary. This serves two purposes. It helps us, as coaches, ground our feedback. All our specific notes will hinge on these big ideas, so there needs to be a shared understanding. Summaries also help writers see if and how their writing is being received. If the summary is aligned with the writer’s intention, great. If the summary is off, the writer can use the feedback to better understand why.

# Slide 11

Finally, we provide specific feedback to writers always through the lens of design:

How is the specific design element getting in the way of or furthering understanding of audience or purpose?

# Slide 12

We’ve found examples and sentence starters are helpful for this section:

Instead of directing the writer to change the color of an element, we try to share how the current color is making the element stand out or disappear.

Instead of simply pointing out inconsistent formatting or capitalization, we explain how the inconsistency makes it difficult for us to connect ideas or follow a line of thinking.

Instead of directly stating that an element is too small or too large, we tell the writer about what the size of the element suggests to us as the reader.

We always follow a piece of feedback with a connection back to the effect on purpose and audience.

“This affects my understanding of your purpose in these ways…”

# Slide 13

We’re going to apply this strategy to a sample together before breaking into groups for more practice.

The sample we’ll be using is an early draft of an infographic interpretation of WRSA’s anti-racism and inclusivity statement.

Take a moment to read it, and then share a few gut reactions in the chat. We’re going to revisit these in a moment.

Who do you think is the audience of this infographic? How would you summarize it? What is its purpose? [Open discussion]

Would any of your responses change if the writer told you that the audience was students and not W.R.S.A. or Learning Commons staff? [Open discussion]

Complete this statement in the chat: I learned \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from this infographic. [Discuss of responses]

Let’s discuss some of the initial reactions you shared. How could these be revised or reframed to get the writer thinking about the choice that was made and the effect of that choice on the reader, the message, and the purpose? [Open discussion]

# Slide 14

After presenting this method to W.R.S.A. coaches in the fall, we realized it would be helpful to create a library of some of the common issues we saw students struggling with as well as ideas for responding to those issues as curious readers and with attention to design choices.

This library in the form of a matrix is a living document and can be accessed at any time by any W.R.S.A. coach. [Google Doc will be linked in chat]. They can add to it, pull from it, or otherwise review it as they are drafting asynchronous feedback. Most of us have this bookmarked.

# Slide 15

Before we break into groups to practice, what questions do you have for me? [Open discussion]

# Slide 16

We’re going to spend some time practicing drafting feedback using examples created by student desk workers in W.R.S.A. and a sample résumé.

Before moving into your Zoom room, access the examples in the folder linked in the chat. Then as a group, complete the following tasks for each example:

* Read the text.
* Draft a (brief) summary for the writer.
* Take note of three (3) initial reactions/responses.
* Revise these reactions to be included in feedback.
* What are three (3) questions you would ask in your feedback?

# Slide 17

[Open discussion of work completed in Zoom breakout rooms.]

# Slide 18

[Guided discussion of challenges, opportunities, and best practices]

* Personal design preferences vs. design that serves the purpose
* Draft and polished responses
* Practice as writers
* What wisdom and experiences can you share from your spaces?

# Slide 19

Thank you so much for your participation and contributions today!

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