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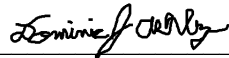
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MULTIMODALITY AND THE SOCIALITY OF LITERACIES: SHAPING FIRST-
YEAR WRITING STUDENTS' LITERACIES THROUGH MULTIMODAL
APPROACHES

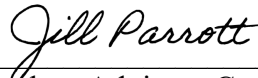
BY

JONATHON COLLINS

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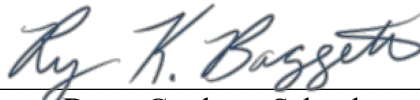


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YEAR WRITING STUDENTS' LITERACIES THROUGH MULTIMODAL
APPROACHES

BY

JONATHON COLLINS

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis work to my wife and best friend, Katherine. Her unconditional love fuels every positive in my life and any successes I experience are at the behest of her unwavering support. Words alone cannot express what she means to me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis and all of the work I have completed in Eastern Kentucky University's graduate program come with a perpetual thankfulness to those who helped me every step of the way. I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee: chair Dr. Dominic Ashby, Dr. Jill Parrott, and Dr. Erin Presley. Dr. Ashby has become an incredible mentor during my time at ECU and I can never thank him enough for setting me on this path and always being available for every little issue or concern raised during my time working on this project. I am also thankful for Drs. Parrott and Presley who agreed without hesitation to guide me in this endeavor and have provided invaluable support throughout the entire process.

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ABSTRACT

The research presented here focuses on approaches to developing multimodal literacies through social semiotics, digital modes of communication, and multiliteracies. Intentionally developing these literacies opens the door for first-year writing students to build upon social discourses in which they already engage and develop new modes of meaning making outside of solely alphabetic literacy. Composition textbooks today, both traditional and Open Educational Resources (OER), become more effective in developing post-process and collaborative pedagogy writing standards when they focus on multimodal literacies and practices as outlined in this research. My research addresses both the historical precedent for multimodality in the Composition classroom as well as scholarship on how and why it is used in Composition classrooms today. I conclude by comparing and contrasting two first-year writing textbooks, one a traditional class text and the other an OER text, in order to assess their capacity for and applicability of multimodal approaches. Specific focus is given to both textbooks in terms of competency in adaptability, sociality, and digital contexts as they relate to student literacies.

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I. Introduction

In evolving Composition courses away from current traditional rhetoric (CTR) and into process and post-process pedagogies, it is natural to assume that new pedagogical approaches have always resulted from a discursive need to reject whatever has come before. What was once viewed as a monolithic, monomodal focus on alphabetic literacy, now expands into new avenues of multimodal literacies and student-centric writing. However, when writing about the nature of CTR, scholars like Lisa Ede and Robert Connors seek to more wholly delineate between “good” and “bad” pedagogies. In other words, the path from CTR to post-process theory does not necessitate a counter approach to previous methodology, nor does it guarantee aspects of previous movements not finding their way into current theory. At its core, Connors defines CTR as a “product-orientation: an interest in the final essay as a discretely produced piece of writing, done to order, error-free” (210). Further definitions become more convoluted as it is misleading to consider CTR as a “coherent, static whole.” Rather, as Connors notes, it is better to think about CTR in terms of the practicality of actually teaching rhetoric since “it is a dynamic entity forever in flux, dropping used-up or discredited theories and assumptions and gradually absorbing new ones” (208). Ede is quick to point out in *Situating Composition* how extensions of CTR and process continue to inform the practices, pedagogies, and even textbooks of current Composition programs. In areas of focus like “thinking through practice” that define post-process theory, Ede remarks how this “does not privilege practice over theory—does not, in other words, simply reverse conventional hierarchies—but rather looks for productive ways to place the two in dialogue” (16). Therefore, in privileging certain

multimodal approaches to student literacies in my work, it is important to affirm not a desire to reject traditional literacies or CTR practices, but better establish how important elements of multimodality have existed since the inception of such theories and continue today to demand more engagement in Composition classrooms.

As noted by Composition historian Jason Palmeri, past Composition theories hold a rich claim to multimodal heritage outside of the predominantly technological focus we ascribe to multimodality today (18-19). The same can be said for evolving student literacies, which did not simply sprout into being at the behest of digital communication or new media pedagogy. Despite such claims, Composition textbooks understandably do not always ascribe to the multiplicity of historical and contemporary contexts which take into consideration the social semiotics and multimodal literacies dominating student languages in and out of the Composition classroom. More often than not, literacy for writing students is not the space for free-flowing ideas and communication promised by post-process theory; it is a barrier for language dictated by academic or professional tones founded on Standard American English (SAE) literacies. Thomas Thompson sums up this reliance on singular modes of communication in how we educators often focus on strict guidelines of “correctness” in the writing process rather than asking more relevant questions like, “What does literacy look like, and how can we develop a curriculum that fosters lifelong literacy?” (80).

Despite tremendous strides made in advancing multimodal pedagogy to benefit more universal approaches to literacies, students still tend to enter Composition programs with preset misconceptions about writing. They often consider technical foci of grammatical analysis, alphabetic literacy, and product-centric/isolated writing as

cornerstones of the writing classroom, perpetuated by practices like the traditional five-paragraph essays which “valorizes form, structure, and arrangement over discovering and developing ideas” (Vieregge 210). In researching digital rhetoric frameworks to address the contrast between new, diverse student literacies and the CTR model in first-year Composition courses, Melanie Gagich bases her ideas on post-secondary educators often continuing a focus on standard modalities. Gagich comments how “the proliferation of standardized high school writing curriculums and the continuous push for high school teachers to ‘teach to the test’ have made writing academically even less relatable for incoming students than it has been in the past” (3). We can find evidence of this fundamental misunderstanding of student literacies even at the inception of Composition studies as a discipline. In his chapter from *Bad Ideas About Writing*, Jacob Baab expands on misconceptions of the “ongoing literacy crisis” in America by tracing desires to fill in the literacy gap between high school and college writing. Baab writes, “First-year writing emerged in response to a perception among faculty members at colleges and universities...that high schools were not providing adequate instruction in writing and reading, so high school graduates were underprepared for the rigorous demands of academic writing” (14). The initial solution proposed by Harvard University in the 1880s was to create a new freshman Composition course that would serve the grammatical proficiency and clarity of students’ writing needs (15-16).

The commonalities noted here in authors and educators’ perceptions of the gap between high school and freshman writing is not meant to demonize the literacy standards of American high school education, but instead present the idea that these misconceptions on the parts of first-year writing students are not unfounded.

Assignments and practices which promote CTR still exist in high school writing classrooms and are often unintentionally reinforced by privileging singular modalities and standardized literacies.

So, how do we address students' misconceptions from a postsecondary perspective and from where do such misconceptions stem? First, we need to understand and address what literacy looks like for writing students today. How are they already communicating, and what modes of communication dominate the ether of college and professional discourse? According to Composition theorists like Palmeri and digital communication researchers like Carey Jewitt, multimodal literacy is the dominant catalyst for language and learning in first-year writing and, in turn, demands students engage with language and ideas beyond solely traditional textual information. In addressing the various ways writing students are asked to receive and disseminate information in the Composition classroom, the most important catalyst for information we need to address is the textbook. My research presents an adaptive model of assessment for contemporary Composition textbooks, both traditional and Open Educational Resources (OER), in terms of their application of and capacity for multimodal literacy. I begin with a brief review of scholarship on the historical and foundational aspects of the intertextual relationship between multimodality and Composition studies. This scholarship will also work to more clearly define "student literacies" as far as transferable modes of communication and social influences in the digital age are concerned. Textbooks are of particular interest here because they not only provide the most identifiable, stable framework of modalities throughout a semester of first-year writing, but they also play a major role in either developing or

hindering student literacies. In many cases, these texts are students' first introduction to what constitutes "quality" academic writing. This evaluation will provide a deeper understanding of the literacies first-year Composition textbooks privilege and the affect these focuses have on the cultural, social, and multimodal literacies growing to dominate academic discourse.

I then go on to establish an evaluative model for contemporary Composition textbooks drawing from multimodal frameworks established by Jason Palmeri's scholarship on developing transferable composing skills, Carey Jewitt's work to recontextualize literacy in terms of digital language and twenty-first century learning habits, and scholars like Aubrey Schiavone and J.L. Lemke in order to discern applicability of multimodal habits in terms of "multiliteracies." My research concludes by applying this evaluative framework to both a traditional classroom textbook used at my institution, Eastern Kentucky University, and the OER text meant to replace it. Both texts reflect important aspects of either multimodal competencies or opportunities for redesigned and remixed frameworks that better meet the multimodal needs of students. The texts I've chosen are Eastern Kentucky University's ENG 101 program's current textbook, *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers, Thirteenth Edition* edited by Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark and the program's currently unpublished future text, *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric*, edited by Dominic Ashby, Jill Parrott, and myself, Jonathon Collins. *The Commons*, being unpublished and therefore a somewhat incomplete resource, will be supplemented in certain sections by *The OER Starter Kit* by Abbey Elder and other scholarship on OER applicability in order to give a more uniformed interpretation of the capabilities

and priorities of OER textbooks. Through evaluating these texts and uncovering their engagements with student literacies, I argue that, given the multimodal literacies of students and demands of multimodal engagement emphasized beyond post-process theory, Composition textbooks should be the first aspect of the classroom we engage with when determining how to meet the literacy needs of students. Despite not being the sole authority of what constitutes “good” writing in compositional settings, textbooks need to be reexamined with multimodal pedagogy in mind regarding key threshold concepts of adaptability, sociality, and digital contexts. My findings assert Open Educational Resource (OER) textbooks to be the best option for addressing these literacy needs given their overwhelming capacity for and favorability of multimodal applicability.

II. Rethinking Student Literacies

In Fall 2021, I had the privilege of teaching my very first section of ENG 101: Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric. Despite years of experience in the first-year writing program as a writing center consultant and course embedded consultant, helping students navigate the vast network of required reading and writing competencies built into university curricula, I came to a nerve-racking realization days before teaching my first class: I had no idea what they would want to write about. Through all of the theory classes, research papers, and previous one-on-one interactions with Composition students as a writing center consultant, I had never taken the time to consider the thought process of the typical incoming college student. For example, how do they view the relationship between their high school English classes and the literacies currently informing their individual voices? Do they even see a relationship between the two? Does ECU's current first-year writing textbook introduce or address any of these concerns?

On the first day of class I attempted to rectify this situation by asking my students two simple questions: What do you think is the main goal of this class and, if given the option, what do you want to write about? Regarding the first questions, the responses were alarmingly consistent with grammatical errors and sentence-level issues making up the collective mindset of the classroom. Anyone who has worked with first-year writing students can likely relate to this experience. With the latter question, however, responses tended to reflect more creative engagement. Personal interests, chosen majors, and current world issues made up the bulk of potential reading and writing topics and accurately represented the social spaces students were already

engaging in outside of academia. These responses mirror different areas of focus of CAST's (formerly known as the Center for Applied Special Technology) Universal Design for Learning Guidelines. Autonomous responses like these tend to emphasize student engagement in terms of them understanding the "Why" of their learning and writing process. From a multimodal perspective, offering multiple means of personal engagement "optimize[s] individual choice and autonomy [as well as] relevance, value, and authenticity" (CAST). The personal components or *voice* we desire in student writing often result from core concepts like self-motivated writing and value-centric ideation. Regarding the connection between the two questions initially posed to my class, I get the impression one represents a "universal" academic language that writing students often perceive us forcing on them (robbing them of autonomy), while the other more closely resembles allusions to a separate, more personal social language.

The myth of universal or "standard" American English pervades college campuses to this day despite the acknowledgment of this standard as a myth dating back to the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) position statement on the matter in 1972. "Students' Rights to their Own Language" opens with, "We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity" (CCCC 1). What students wish to write about and the social languages used in communicating their writing are widely recognized as needing to be protected, yet we still witness first-year writing programs' assignments and textbooks delegitimizing these invaluable literacies. In my time working with first-year writing

students in both writing center settings and reading, writing, and rhetoric classrooms, I have witnessed a predominant share of students entering their respective programs with misguided impressions of Composition learning outcomes and purposes, seemingly remnants of “current-traditional” pedagogy dictating writing in the name of “correctness.” Sharon Crowley writes as recently as 2010, deep into post-process theory, how “current-traditional textbooks are still being published...Advertisements for the more successful textbooks list the names of as many as three dozen colleges and universities that have adopted them for use in their introductory composition program” (139). Writing students often perceive us as shaping them into academic linguists who only use the “tool” of writing when trying to separate the language of university from the social languages they are already using. David Bartholomae addresses this phenomenon in “Inventing the University” when pointing out the perceived separation of student writing and actual beneficial modes of learning and communication. Bartholomae notes, “Much of the written work students do is test-taking, report or summary, work that places them outside the working discourse of the academic community, where they are expected to admire and report on what we do, rather than inside that discourse, where they can do its work and participate in a common enterprise” (11). This practice leaves the vast majority of first-year writing students entering composition programs with preset misconceptions regarding technical foci of grammatical analysis, alphabetic literacy, and product-centric/isolated writing to be cornerstones of the writing classroom.

In response, disabusing students of these notions becomes a matter not of simply replacing over-utilized modalities, but adding more complementary ones such as the

literacies already dominating their social languages. The steadiest solutions involve both multimodal and social definitions of literacies informed by multiliterate practices beyond the traditionally singular or alphabetic.

For the purposes of this research, the “student literacies” I reference throughout can be defined in terms of Gunther Kress’s broadly conceptualized idea of literacies including a “revolution in the uses and effects of literacy and of associated means for representing and communicating at every level and in every domain” (2). Essentially, every broad multiplicity of literacies I draw from can be understood as including all social, cultural, and technological factors that demand continuous re-evaluation of the various ways writing students communicate in the “here and now.” Such a broad conceptualization is important because, as Kress points out back in 2006, everything from constantly changing sociocultural characteristics to economic fluctuations demands a “new agenda of human semiosis in the domain of communication and representation” (183). Even from a multicultural perspective, written language from 2006 to now remains unsettled, pointing to multimodal literacies as the only viable catalyst for making meaning.

III. Historical and Foundational Implications of Multimodality

Multimodal communication is not only an intertextual element of developing pedagogies of multiliteracies, but also holds an inextricable influence on the process movement of the 1970s and 1980s, and by virtue the post-process movement as well. In applying multimodal strategies to contemporary Composition classrooms, clear influences of creating meaning across different modes of communication present at the inception of the process movement reject notions of alphabetic literacy as the primary or sole focus of first-year writing. Even going back to Janet Emig's foundational 1971 publication "The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders," ingrained in teaching writing is the idea that Composition instructors should practice varying complementary modalities in order to break away from product-centric ideation. In noting formulaic tendencies of creation in English classes, Emig writes, "Partially because [English instructors] have no direct experience of composing, teachers of English err in important ways. They underconceptualize and oversimplify the process of composing. Planning degenerates into outlining; reformulating becomes the correction of minor infelicities" (98). I would argue here that most of Emig's section addressing process theory's implications for teaching does not necessarily seek to condemn English instructors of her time as illiterate or even compositionally incompetent. There is simply a clear disconnect between CTR implications of the pedagogical practices of instructors and standardized expectations for student writing. The implication that many Composition teachers "do not write" is a reflection of how "unimodal" the teaching of composition was in 1971 and continues to persist in many ways today. Emig argues that the concern of many Composition courses "is with sending a message, a communication

out into the world for the edification, the enlightenment, and ultimately the evaluation of another” (96). The distinction here between unimodality in Emig’s time and monomodality today can be viewed in terms of perceived limitations of modes of expression with teaching Composition pre-process seen as more limiting compared to today. The monomodal disconnect here is not just between modes of expression but also between student writing and perceived audiences of said writing. For Emig, illiteracy for Composition instructors looks like an untrained expectation of creating a product for a specific audience (usually the teacher) and paying little to no attention to the avenues of creation implemented in the composition process.

Erika Lindeman references the same study of student composing processes and concludes that not addressing student mindsets of writing as a one-stage process leads students to assume failure is the only outcome of school-sponsored writing. Lindeman observes how “we can *talk* about prewriting, writing, and rewriting separately, but in real life these processes all interact with one another and are extremely difficult to distinguish” (31). Each theorists mentioned in this research would agree that the traditional essay model of prewriting, drafting, and revising is substandard in quantifying the connection between a student’s literacy and semiotic mode of expression. Instructor and researcher Lee-Ann Breuch in “Post-Process ‘Pedagogy’: A Philosophical Exercise,” argues against problematic tendencies of process and post-process theory assumed as universal models of students’ writing processes. Breuch argues that rather than scaffold writing as an exercise in repeating and articulating “universal” languages in Composition classrooms, we should reevaluate post-process theory in terms of, among other focuses, “our methods of teaching as indeterminate

activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic” (120). In a sense, we have become too comfortable with process theory, assuming the dialogue between instructor and student is self-evident in traditional models of the writing process.

Writing is, above all else, the pursuit and exploration of discovery. In my own teaching I have also been guilty of “over-simplifying” each stage of the process, incorrectly assuming that typological meaning making always comes naturally to students with writing stages so intrinsically linked to one another. Such approaches to process ultimately lead Emig to challenge notions of alphabetic literacy as the sole authority of Composition studies; she instead calls for writing instructors to practice interdisciplinary invention such as visual and spatial processes.

Decades later, with first-year writing courses steeped in post-process pedagogies, multimodal scholar Carey Jewitt furthers the conversation by promoting meaning-making as a universal by-product of the mode in which information is presented. Jewitt notes how “the form of representation integral to meaning and learning . . . the ways in which something is represented shape both *what* is to be learned, that is, the curriculum content, and *how* it is to be learned” (241). The natural next steps then become identifying: 1) What modes or literacies most commonly dominate the social discourses and interdisciplinary demands of writing students? 2) How can Composition texts best serve the interests of these literacies? This research seeks to elucidate the necessary benefits of structuring first-year writing courses around the usage of truly multimodal texts to create and shape writing processes which, in turn, emphasize and promote how students generate meaning.

IV. Progression of Composition Studies and Multimodality

Much of the scholarship detailing the history of Composition studies as a discipline also addresses a linear progression of student literacies being shaped by shifting notions of the purpose of writing. Composition theorists like Jacob Babb believe that “writing is not an end in itself—it is a method of invention that gives shape to our view of the world and empowers us to engage in discourse with our fellow humans” (16). Composition studies presents unique opportunities for discourse, metacognitive reflection, and meaning making for students that are not as prevalent in other disciplines. However, too much classroom emphasis on molding student writing into an immaculate conception of university language drives pedagogy in favor of grammatical correctness over writing holding the key to metacognitive reflection. Lisa Ede notes in *Situating Composition* how much of the scholarship in theories of English studies today, and by virtue Composition studies, builds off assumptions and practices impacted by unchanging modernist ideologies. Ede writes, “Despite the many changes scholars in English studies have seen in the last thirty years...scholars in the field continue to privilege texts that manifest the traits of consistency, coherence, parsimony, elegance, and originality” (161). Out of the ashes of these lingering “disembodied theories,” scholars in the English field often perpetuate an advancement of knowledge which favors Enlightenment theories disguised as modernization in their teaching philosophies and pedagogies. Primarily in terms of classroom frameworks for assessment, we see Composition instructors still attempting to apply traditional frameworks of letter grades and product-centric assessment to multimodal approaches despite years of calls for a focus on process, from Donald Murray in 1972 and on.

Progressing beyond such traditional frameworks comes in the form of practices like Asao Inoue's labor-based assessment and grade contracts which are universally better suited for multimodal pedagogy that puts the power of language back in the hands of students. Labor based grading in this context involves substituting traditional evaluative frameworks of letter grades and percentages with broader social agreements of what work is required to achieve a desired final grade. Freeing students of the stresses of finalized, standardized grading cultivates students' personal voices in their writing rather than an idea of the voice instructors want for them; as a result, it opens the door for less restrictive and more experimental writing.

Inoue's assessment models are of particular importance when put in conversation with understanding student literacies because they address the ever-prevalent issue of white language supremacy in writing classrooms. In promoting a more inclusive writing assessment ecology, Inoue notes how "labor-based grading contracts attempt to form an inclusive, more diverse ecological place...The ecology does not use a single standard of so-called quality to grade students, and focuses time, labor, and attention on other elements in the ecology, realizing that these other elements construct more of the ecology than a standard" (13). Many scholars and theorists today promote the usage of grade contracts as a means to alleviate writing students of the burden of what Bartholomae refers to as writing "within and against a discourse" (17). First-year writing students already have the difficult task of creating ethos for an audience more familiar with academic discourse than themselves. At the authority of product-centered letter grades these same students are more inclined to identify the figure assigning letter grades as the most important or only audience of their writing.

Inoue addresses this common disconnect by implementing labor-based grading contracts which privilege an inclusive understanding of writing processes in diverse student literacies. In outlining the relationship between his course learning outcomes and grade contracts, Inoue writes, “It is the student-determined directions and methods of travel that I’m most interested in understanding when trying to make arguments about the effectiveness of my assessment ecologies, not the specific locations at which my students may end the course” (244). He cares more about understanding and promoting processes that lead to an “awareness of language” rather than a stringently perceived academic language. Debatably more dire than forcing students into a vaguely defined notion of academic language is the literacies they are asked to give up as a result. In referencing the previously mentioned CCCC position statement on student language, as Composition instructors we are meant to “ask ourselves whether our rejection of students who do not adopt the dialect most familiar to us is based on any real merit in our dialect or whether we are actually rejecting the students themselves, rejecting them because of their racial, social, and cultural origins” (CCCC 3). SAE language superiority is a widely agreed upon myth by today’s standards, and any effort to alter such literacies has the potential to create a larger divide between the identities of students and the audiences we wish to connect them with.

Efforts to move away from product-centric pedagogy have often resulted in pedagogies which fail to define modern literacies, let alone take advantage of them. Susan Miller argues at the turn of the post-process movement how, despite changes in process-focused Composition providing stability in the blossoming discipline, it “has not yet provided an accurate or even a very historically different theory of

contemporary writing, even if we grant it partial paradigmatic status'' (108). The same can arguably be said for contemporary literacies of students today. While much emphasis has been placed on evolving process pedagogy to modernize Composition studies in terms of creative processes moving away from current-traditional five paragraph essays, multimodal texts and practices have arguably not received equal attention. The following research dissecting frameworks for multimodality sheds some light on where attention has been placed and what implementations deserve more focus.

V. Review of Multimodal Scholarship and Multimodal Perspectives

The multimodal perspectives outlined in this research are meant to reflect both the perspective of first-year writing students with preset misconceptions of product-centric writing as well as that of Composition instructors who wish to efficiently address such misconceptions with class texts compatible with multimodal literacies. In *Multimodality in Writing: The State of the Art in Theory, Methodology and Pedagogy*, authors Arlene Archer and Esther Breuer define a multimodal perspective by how it “approaches representation, communication, and interaction as more than language and treats the choice of mode as significant” (1-2). The mode itself, as the authors point out, generates meaning from social and cultural influence. The intertextuality of social influence is important to emphasize here because the historical implications of multimodality, in contrast to misconceptions of alphabetic literacy as the sole arbiter of meaning making, rest on social innovations rather than academic ones.

As Kathleen Yancey points out, our current moment of recontextualizing Composition in the new key of technological innovations shares many similarities with that of new reading mediums in nineteenth-century Britain. By means of more accessible reading materials and economic changes leading to more leisure time to read, the novel became the new, socially accepted medium of reading and writing (299-300). Important to note is how the popularity of literature and novels at this time came about as a result of both technological and social innovations in the form of consumers shaping the development of genres and production as well as the emergence of “reading circles” and author readings which promoted “both oral and written forums” (300). Yancey emphasizes how these were social innovations, not academic ones, which

played a role in essentially shaping an entirely new form of reading and writing. She ultimately concludes that “like 19th-century readers creating their own social contexts...[we] self-organize into what seem to be overlapping technologically driven writing circles” (301). Our circles have just expanded to include Google docs, Discord, ePortfolios, social media discourse, blogs, and a number of other innovations which, when implemented into multimodal writing pedagogy, take full advantage of social innovations and essentially create new ways of creating. Most of these inventions in writing are either born out of social literacies familiar to students or represent adaptable circles students are apt to engage in. If we are to take into account how Archer and Breuer view coming to terms with digital media in first-year writing through social and cultural influences, the best place to start is by “expanding the scope of writing instruction beyond the essay and other traditional print forms by aligning writing instruction with the attention structures and semiotic practices of a generation of young people already wired into digital networks” (Archer & Breuer 20). Today’s digital “reading circles,” though far more expansive than those of nineteenth-century Britain, still hold the same principal modes of social and cultural influence. If we are to take similar advantage of the power writing students hold in shaping digital discourse, then the potential of new modes of meaning-making are limitless.

Moving on to literature primarily focused on multimodal literacy, the scholarship on multimodality in Composition circles can be divided up into two complementary sections. One addresses the historical and foundational frameworks for multimodal composition while the other focuses on theoretical frameworks and implementations today. Scholarly research like J.L. Lemke’s “Metamedia Literacy:

Transforming Meanings and Media” and Stuart Selber’s *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* offer well-researched entry points into how writing is taught and assessed in the digital age. Both works will be more thoroughly analyzed in relation to the evaluative framework below, but they essentially serve as groundwork for digital media literacy and, more specifically, computer literacy as a domain of communication on Selber’s part. Stuart Selber contextualizes the debate on multimodal discourse in terms of the digital spaces often familiar to first-year writing students. Contrary to emphasizing “correctness” in student writing, Selber contextualizes digital literacy in terms of writing and communication skills that are necessary in contemporary composition classrooms rather than technical skills limited to computer literacy programs. Selber’s methodology combines developmental computer literacy programs with composition techniques that emphasize visual and multimodal literacies necessary across disciplines and professions outside of the composition classroom. His focus is on strategies that help students navigate these various literacies through digital writing and communication that are already somewhat familiar to them. One focus for Selber is the “functional literacy” of writing students in how they effectively utilize technology with social judgements. Of notable importance is how writing instructors’ competency for engaging students with computers as rhetorical tools plays a critical role in this dynamic because the added element of new media pedagogy does not negate the persistence of CTR in practices and assignments. For Selber, the implementation of functional literacy in the writing classroom means utilizing computers and digital communication not merely as a tool for encoding and decoding but more so for the expansion of social and rhetorical context familiar and important to writing students.

Selber makes the point that baseline functional approaches to computer literacy, or the mere implementation of digital components in a writing classroom without instructor training, carries with it similar issues to creating and evaluating under the guise of CTR. He writes, “This view understands functional literacy in much the same manner that current-traditional rhetoric understood written texts: not as socially or rhetorically embedded, but as expressions of grammar, style, and form, all of which could be learned in prescriptive and decontextualized ways” (32). Similar to the limitations of CTR, students are discouraged from multiliteracy if the competency of digital tools demanded of them for academic and professional success lacks social conventions of meaning making. One example of these conventions involves being “alert to the limitations of technology and the circumstances in which human awareness is required” (47). Selber writes about these limitations in terms of the contrast between operational functions and “social judgements” required of writing students with a new media focus in 2004, but these same functions hold true in a much more streamlined cultivation of student literacies today. Selber references Ben Shneiderman’s descriptive model of syntactic vs. semantic knowledge in computer literacy. Important in understanding how students create meaning in digital contexts, we see how “syntactic knowledge about computers is motley and device dependent; it is acquired by rote memorization and thus forgotten rather quickly...[where as] semantic knowledge is structured and therefore more easily remembered. It is device independent and amassed in purposeful circumstances” (70). Both processes of knowledge are vital, but semantic knowledge is particularly important in this context because it offers more leeway for imagining problems and solutions, synthesizing, and relating purposeful metacognitive

reflection. This navigation of complementary modalities helps students critically consider different ways functional literacy can be viewed in the digital age. Both from a rhetorical and a functional standpoint, computer and digital literacy needs to be considered as a necessary avenue of communication for students in the classroom as its applicability and demand continue to increase in the academic and professional world.

Going beyond solely the digital applications of multimodality, J.L. Lemke sees an underutilized advantage with multimodal approaches discerning typological vs. topological meaning making in students. Lemke notes in “Metamedia Literacy” how teaching writing begins with understanding how student literacies, informed by cultural and social languages, make up “semiotic modalities” greater than the sum of their individual parts (77). In other words, the language students use to create meaning holds greater value because, in addition to giving more agency to the student in how they extrapolate or interpret meaning, it also connotes familiar cultural and social characteristics. Lemke’s scholarship primarily acts as an assessment model for discerning how well the textbooks discussed in this research consider both concepts of meaning making and appropriately utilizes both depending on language or media presentation (81). Essentially, where typological semantics are commonly concerned with traditional alphabetic literacy and representation on the page, topological meaning making is better suited for experiences in the world as far as the interaction between cultures, environments, social realities, etc. These assertions also weed out tendencies toward “curricular learning paradigms” where vaguely explained literacy competencies and uniformed learning contribute to writing students losing the “why” of their learning process (85). Lemke takes these functions classifying and creating meaning and applies

them to a multimodal writing classroom where interactive learning environments more closely resemble semiotic modalities made up of cultural and social influences. Similar to Selber's influence of helping students navigate often underutilized literacies in digital spaces, Lemke's research can apply functions of social semiotics and social influences on multimodal literacies in Composition textbooks.

In addressing more foundational structures of multimodality, Jason Palmeri in *Remixing Composition* furthers the conversation by pointing out how, contrary to monomodal perceptions, composition has always been inherently multimodal. Palmeri notes how even if we are to restrict our focus to solely alphabetic writing predating digital media, students still cognitively compose texts through visual, gestural, and auditory literacies. In other words, he notes how "alphabetic writing" almost always necessitates "multimodal thinking" (32). In analyzing the foundational work of Linda Flower and John Hayes, Palmeri notes how students' thinking processes generate meaning through varying, complex symbol systems. He writes:

If writing about a remembered place, the writer might perceive sensory images of that place. Instead of setting a rhetorical goal in words, the writer might picture an audience member and imagine how he or she would react to the writing. The writer might imagine the organization of the piece in terms of a visual shape rather than in terms of a verbal outline. (32-33)

The strict alphabetic artifacts of contemporary student writing do not necessarily reflect the metacognitive process of generating said artifacts. Palmeri goes on to state that the same understanding of how students generate meaning today holds even more potential in how these naturally dynamic modes of thinking can be more accurately articulated

through multimodal expressions such as digital media. He concludes by writing, “Multimodal composing activities can be a powerful way to help students invent ideas for and consider revisions . . . If we limit students to only alphabetic means of invention and revision, we may unnecessarily constrain their ability to think intensively and complexly about their work” (44). The potential for multimodal thinking has always existed in writing students and continues to manifest naturally regardless of the structure of writing assignments, but solely alphabetic means of interpretation do nothing to further develop these multimodal literacies.

Kress’ perspective discusses eliminating the possibility of monomodality altogether in relation to written and spoken language which are influenced by cultural and social aspects of the world and, in turn, further influence the mode and materiality of subjectivity. Even breaking language down to its most anatomical levels, the usage of organs and body parts to produce and interpret signs, Kress notes how “the concept of communication — as transport and transformation of meaning — is hugely extended in a multimodal approach to semiosis. The involvement and engagement of our bodies makes ideology (as systematic sets of meanings organized from a particular system) truly a lived experience” (189). Not only is multimodal thinking a naturally flourishing process for students as outlined by Palmeri, but the very literal physical nature of communication, according to Kress, denotes an undeniable predisposition of multimodality to the point that monomodality is arguably a cultural fiction. The goal for us writing instructors should be to not only acknowledge these multimodal tendencies but take full advantage of them through assignments that reflect the way students are already thinking and producing.

Important in establishing the inherent pervasiveness of multimodality in all literacies is the idea that applying such concepts to common expectations of first-year Composition does not require radical changes to how writing instructors approach learning outcomes. Most theories of multimodality are already grounded in making sure rhetorical truths of “self” in words and the process of voice remain central to teaching and assessing first-year writing. Peter Elbow, despite not focusing on multimodality specifically, is credited as popularizing pedagogical practices in the 1960s that hold these truths as keys to effective, persuasive writing. In “A Method for Teaching Writing,” Elbow’s theories of writing deal with assessment acting in service of foundational rhetorical language students already possess. This offers students a greater chance for developing the “self” of their words and shaping the context of the course to better suit the varying needs of their voices.

Theories like meeting students where they are rhetorically speaking pair well with also meeting them where they are compositionally. Practically speaking, a student's writing is markedly stronger when they use the rhetorical building blocks of previously established literacies. Those literacies, in turn, circumvent previously defined models of “university standards” to instead help students compose with language skills emblematic of the sociality of their literacies rather than what they interpret as “good” writing from the sole authority of the instructor. Returning to Bartholomae, a good portion of “Inventing the University” addresses what it looks like for students to write as a part of a community rather than an imitation of the prose of that community. Bartholomae writes, “What our beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind,

tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that determine the ‘what might be said’ and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community” (11). This is one example of where well-defined social literacy and voice come from in student writing, the notion that if you are speaking and discovering in a certain role, you are inherently of that role. In the practical role of a classroom, this can look like one of the first developmental traits of student writing, writing to the instructor as an audience. Elbow notes how “the student’s best hope of learning the teacher’s criteria will come from enhancing and building up his own talents for distinguishing certain kinds of goodness in writing from certain kinds of badness” (117). Anyone who has taught first-year writing can attest that students do not learn to distinguish “good” from “bad” writing by looking at examples; they build upon their own previously established literacies and notions of what good and bad communication are, and then apply that to the classroom. If we are to define multimodality as not just a growing necessity in most professional spaces, but a natural skill students develop outside of the classroom, basing this research on foundational practices of student-centered writing and inherently multimodal practices should be paramount in developing writing processes.

VI. Evolving Literacies of Digital and Social Spaces

Much of the scholarship promoting twenty-first century digital language practices spends a majority of focus countering generational or academic barriers which view digital texts as a hindrance to “correct” writing. Scott Warnock writes about the relationship between language panics of the past like new forms or genres of writing impacting grammatical correctness and similar fears of digital language poisoning the alphabetic literacy of contemporary writing students. The notion that digital communication hinders student writing builds off of a misunderstanding over not only how students think and create but also, for Warnock, over what grammar fundamentally is and is not. The author points out how complaints over poor grammar come across as some kind of reverence for “sacred, official, absolute rules” when, in actuality, individuals are only expressing personal biases over “how they think language should be used correctly” (303). In response, Warnock goes on to cite a number of studies denoting a largely consistent understanding among postsecondary writing students regarding the typological separation of multiliteracies, including digital literacies like texting.

Where many in the “texting ruins language” school of thought, such as those Baab responds to who perpetuate the diatribe of the American literacy crisis, would argue that grammatical standards are deteriorating with newer generations, Warnock would argue that is not the case. Not only is this not the case according to researchers finding no transferable texting language in formal academic essays, but the focus on such rudimentary rules is not even an issue of grammar. Standards of “correct” English or Standard American English (SAE) serve no practical function in assessing the clarity

or interpretation of a student's writing, they only hold power as far as pseudo-agreed upon rules contributing to the style of a student's text rather than the merit of what they have to say. The entire purpose behind multimodal and open pedagogy is defeated if we carry over the same inequitable CTR standards and expectations incapable of meeting the needs of diverse collections of student literacies. Asao Inoue questions the practicality of these standards by asking, "Could focusing on habits of mind like curiosity, openness, and engagement be a writing course's way of making slaves of our students if we grade them by our standards and measures of what it means to be curious, open, and engaged?" (25). These standards, for Inoue, draw direct lines to white language supremacy as a result of basing expectations on the literacy habits of white students in the majority. The CCCC's original position statement on student languages addresses this concept in terms of student dialects. The statement reads:

If we name the essential functions of writing as expressing oneself, communicating information and attitudes, and discovering meaning through both logic and metaphor, then we view variety of dialects as an advantage . . . In communication one may choose roles which imply certain dialects, but the decision is a social one, for the dialect itself does not limit the information which can be carried, and the attitudes may be most clearly conveyed in the dialect the writer finds most congenial. Dialects are all equally serviceable in logic and metaphor. (CCCC 11)

Open pedagogy that emphasizes voice and self-expressions needs to be considered in "universal" terms. Universality in this case does not mean pedagogical expectations and standards that actively serve students in the majority while demanding those with

minority literacies adapt or be left behind. Instead, we must apply multimodal, social, and digital approaches to literacies inclusive to different voices and dialects while also understanding these literacies do not hinder “logic and metaphor” in writing but instead create a more equitable bridge between student literacies and clarity of thought in writing.

Not only do misconceptions of grammar and universal writing standards cloud the constant evolution of human language, but misinterpretations of digital literacy as a substituted catalyst of meaning making also hinder the progression of student digital literacy. In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, communication theorist Marshall McLuhan breaks down how actual modes of communication hold more cultural and self-sustaining power than the ideas they communicate. The author writes, “For the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale . . . it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure” (2). For McLuhan, the impact different mediums have on human association is always a result of the usage and purposes of said medium. In utilizing this line of thinking, any dismissal or suppression of digital literacy as a rapidly expanding mode of communication only hinders avenues of change that define writing pedagogy. Digital literacy does not exclusively create new means of thinking; it more accurately accelerates the progression of ideas leading to new creations. Metacognitive processes of reflection are more or less the same in principle.

Those in fear of a looming literacy crisis in America often misperceive multimodality as a broad replacement for the written word when, in reality, it only takes a portion of power away from written text and gives that power back to writing students and their more social or digital literacies. Gunther Kress views digital literacy in terms of its inevitable usurpation of written text by the screen or any accessible digital modality. His argument comes from commonly held assumptions about the relationship between common modes of writing and traditional textual information becoming diminished as we live through rapid social and technological changes. In detailing the power of technologies containing an essential repository of all information, Kress notes how “meaning in the mode of writing is now just one possibility among others: when meaning can easily emerge in music as in writing, then the latter has lost its privileged position. Writing becomes equal to all other modes in a profound sense” (278). In my view and that of the scholarship referenced in this research, these varying modes of meaning making do not mean to replace alphabetic literacy as much as adjust its position to better serve writing students. This is essentially one of the core tenets of multimodality in the writing classroom. It is a necessary literacy which encompasses nearly every aspect of how students communicate and create meaning, but it also serves to take the onus off the “textbook” as the sole authority of knowledge or “correct” writing (and by that virtue the instructor, as well).

As a brief but important note on visual literacy, while just a single modality in relation to broader concepts of multimodality and literacies, it remains a dominant catalyst for comprehension for writing students as well as an often-underutilized mode of expression. Leslie Ross emphasizes these points in relation to interpreting and

analyzing visual rhetoric when noting how “images are potentially infinite in form and structure; they are inherently polysemic...they are often unfamiliar and more difficult to ‘read.’ Visual space is about looking, while scriptive space is about learning...The reader becomes a viewer, and is distanced from the word's discursive content and made more aware of the non-cognitive and affective qualities of the visible” (86). In other words, visual literacy is not something that is usually naturally developed in writing students in contrast to previously argued literacies more conducive to student comprehension.

The ability to discern images and extrapolate meaning from them in relation to potentially relevant text builds off important cognitive functions that address the same core tenets of the writing process that first-year Composition instructors wish to address in their students. Visual literacy is often disregarded in classroom settings not by scientific or academic reasoning, but more so by the socio-cultural constructs of academic and post-academic life, similar to previously argued misconceptions over digital communication negatively impacting alphabetic literacy. As media literacy expert Cary Gillenwater puts it, “It is necessary for someone to be able to read and write in order to fill out a job application; therefore, print literacy is beneficial in our society. Conversely, if it were requisite for a person to be able to interpret and create art to get a job, then visual literacy would be the preferred mode of literacy” (36). Within this argument is the idea that focusing on textual mediums in the classroom hinders students in their ability to interpret and extrapolate meaning from images. While some could make the argument that not every discipline or profession requires well developed critical thinking skills in terms of imagery/visuals, it is also important to point out that

becoming more fluent in visual literacy “considerably augments a person’s ability to interpret his or her world by providing additional modes of making meaning,” which remains a central goal in modern pushes for more multimodality in academic spaces (38).

Some of the best examples of integrating visual texts into a course to fit in twenty-first century student needs and engagement can be found in many of the works of cartoonist and composition/visual arts educator Lynda Barry. In *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor*, which is essentially structured as a collection of Barry’s course materials compiled over years of teaching, she presents a chaotic sensory overload of imaginative and thought provoking honesty about teaching and how images can affect students in different ways. On both a visual and textual level, the makeshift composition book style gives a sense of visual disorder akin to stumbling upon a professor’s pile of jumbled classroom notes, but the way she structures her class syllabi parallels how she structures her courses around student engagement.

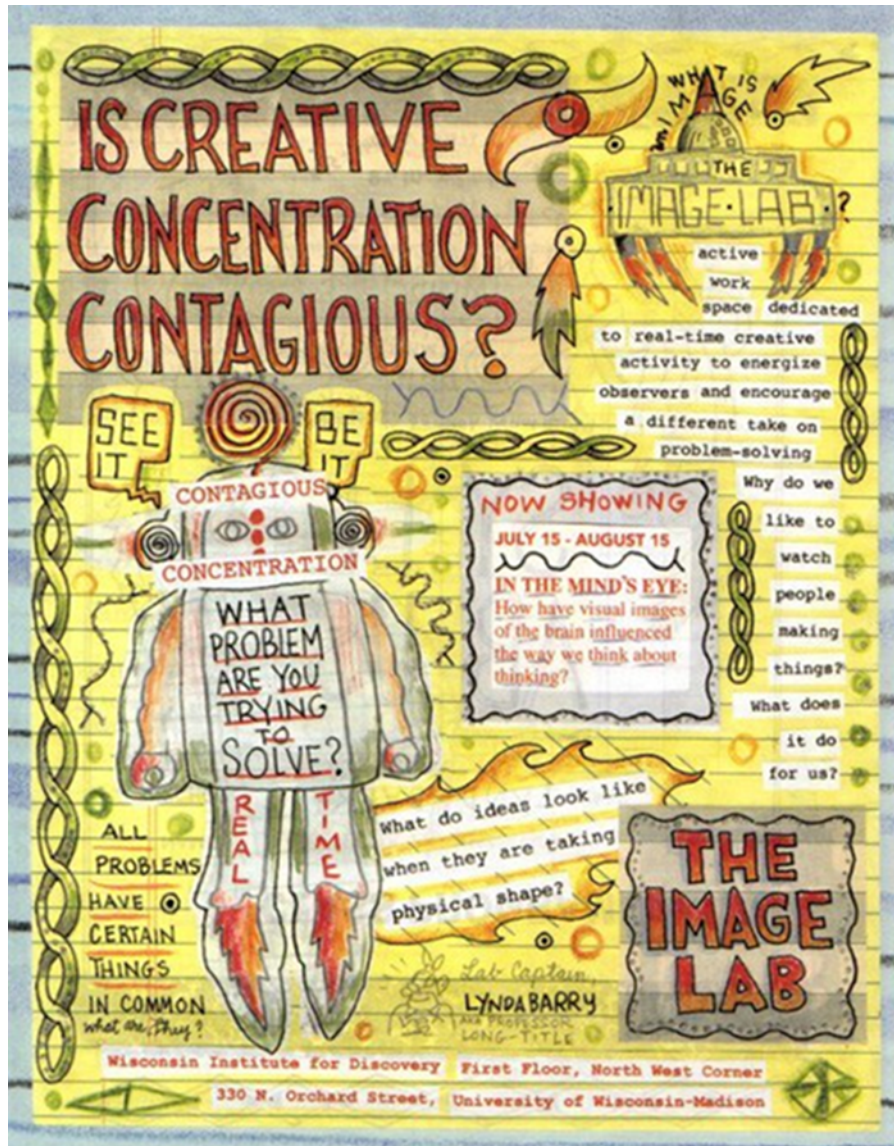


Figure 1. Barry, Lynda. Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor. pg. 78.

In this visual introduction to her Wisconsin Institute for Discovery workspace called “The Image Lab” (fig. 1), Barry offers insight into critical problem solving and the impact that results from presenting ideas in physical shapes. Structured in the same style as her class syllabi, Barry engages her readers through an accessible and welcoming style that has the potential to instill passion in students through a medium which alludes to a number of pedagogical possibilities. Barry’s effort to engage students fits in

Katheryn Comer's ideas of comics in pedagogy when she writes about how "comics rely on more than just linguistic and visual modes of communication; they combine words and images with gestural, spatial, and even audio modes into a truly multimodal experience. . . within a form that is familiar and accessible while still challenging and innovative" (76). Barry's style of teaching emulates these spatial and gestural ideas of communication in how she attempts to engage her students through multimodal ideas that go beyond the sole authority of the class textbook.

VII. Social Discourses and Multimodal Applications

Once we work to define student literacies through social approaches and identify the vast potential of multimodal approaches, finding success becomes a matter of application to writing pedagogy. Success in this case looks like reconditioning our conception of student literacy to include multimodality not as a secondary, optional area of development but an intrinsic part of how students learn and think in the twenty-first century. When students are able to produce, understand, and compose texts in multiple forms they are more likely to find academic and professional success. Each of these applications, those I have personal experience with as well as those championed by multimodal scholarship, contribute to my evaluative framework for Composition textbooks by highlighting what already works in engaging multimodal literacy and showing theory in practice. In my classroom, I engage students in social discourses by assigning differing modes of multimodal reading and learning which reflect the social spaces they are already occupying ranging from traditional articles promoting important sociocultural issues to current event twitter threads and podcast excerpts. These practices are informed by the likes of James Paul Gee, Gunther Kress, and Stuart Selber in how process-oriented writing and meaning making come through more clearly when expressed in varying modalities. The practices I have incorporated in my classroom denote formal writing such as rhetorical analysis and position/synthesis essays, but they also include informal and ephemeral writings designed to promote metacognitive reflection along with voice and style development. I have found success with informal writing typically involving some form of Elbow-influenced freewriting exercise while ephemeral writing has included Lynda Barry's "Five Minute Diary," the latter of which

helped students identify social influences in their writing by generating ideas and metacognitive reflection.

Each of these practices coincide with James Paul Gee's interpretations of literacy social practices by going beyond connected, coherent languages of discourse to instead focus on what he calls "Discourses" with a capital D. Rather than build off of traditionalist interpretations of language and grammatical correctness, Gee cares more about "ways of being in the world...forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (6-7). Multimodal learning most efficiently encompasses the relationship between student, writing, and instructor when the social "state of being" is at the center of creating meaning. Barry's practices reflect such theories of integrative social realities in how composition processes in her classroom almost always come from a place of self-reflection and sustainability. Barry notes in *Making Comics*, "Part of our work together is to be able to watch an image in a sustained way, as if it were alive and capable of change. Part of our work is to take time, to wait like any bird watchers, to hold still and be taken in" (12). Integrating all of these various modes of communication contrasts the futile nature of assigning a singular definition to literacy and, in turn, a singular idea of "correct" writing. In considering Gee's notions on the intrinsic nature of social practices and Discourses, we see how definitions of literacies only take shape through the representative literacies that exist in social, academic, and professional environments, as well as those existing in the stillness of a one's own thought process.

Many writing instructors today continue to adopt the process teaching model of focusing on student writing processes rather than simply the product of the writing. In

the “New Media” chapter of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Collin Gifford Brooke discusses this concept’s relation to new media pedagogy in stating how “we should think about writing less in terms of products and/or objects, and more in terms of practices, and this is one of the ways that individual teachers can mitigate potential conflicts between adopting new media and mandated course outcomes” (180).

Essentially, in the same way the writing process should be a central focus in the Composition classroom, new media should be considered in terms of how digital modes are integrated into the process rather than their relation to the final product. Think in terms of how much interaction a writing student has with a given type of digital media rather than how much their audience interacts with the same media when engaging with their text.

A great example of this kind of multimodal focus that emphasizes writing process can be found in the University of Connecticut’s “Writing Across Technology” collection of curriculum and resources developed by UConn’s Department of English. Among their resources for multimodal assignments in the first-year writing classroom, there is a selection which asks students to focus on “Footwork”, a brief essay by Rebecca Solnit which deals with literal and theorized forms of walking and the metacognitive correlations between walking and thinking.

The assignment dictates that “to work on their reading, students annotate, create a word cloud, discuss the ‘keywords’ of the text; identify (and discuss) the aims, methods, and materials the text presents; and then use the word cloud to craft a ‘rendered summary’ of the text” (Blansett, et al.). Students are then meant to start formulating a rhetorical analysis based on the summary inspired by their annotations

and how they visually organize those ideas into a digital world cloud. To take it a step further into a fully realized kinesthetic modality, they are then asked to go on individual walks (in nature, their town, etc.) during the drafting process, using “Alltrails” or some other smart phone tracking app for the purpose of engaging with their landscape in a similar fashion to Solnit. This helps the writing process become a more fully realized, three-dimensional experience, in which students are able to not only engage with the ideas they are writing about, but are also developing metacognitive strategies which can help them consider their own personal histories and the experiences of others as they develop their writing process. The text also pairs with new media in the form of digital word clouds and tracking technology from students’ phones as well as the actual text which remains central to the assignment.

The previously stated multimodal assignment satisfies a number of important modes of communication and meaning making which are often only emphasized in first-year writing classrooms through base-line textual information. Fitting in line with the Conference on College Communication and Composition’s position statement on the postsecondary teaching of writing and studying the rhetorical nature of writing, the CCCC/NCTE website states, “Instructors emphasize the iterative nature of writing by providing opportunities for students to develop processes for brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing... fostering the development of metacognitive abilities that are critical for writing development. It also includes explicit attention to interactions between metacognitive awareness and writing activity” (NCTE). It is both the repetition of utilizing skills like brainstorming and drafting as well as the varying levels of applicability that work to foster creativity and introspection of individual writing

processes for students. Compare this statement with Janet Emig who puts it best in her eternally relevant work “Writing as a Mode of Learning” when she states, “Writing . . . connects the three major tenses of our experience to make meaning. And the two major modes by which these three aspects are united are the processes of analysis and synthesis: analysis, the breaking of entities into their constituent parts; and synthesis, combining or fusing these, often into fresh arrangements or amalgams” (125).

Essentially, where past, present and future tenses of students’ experiences are often neglected in developing writing processes, Emig argues in favor such experiences to help students see writing as a more heuristic process. Another way to view this approach to students’ writing processes is by acknowledging experiential elements of “self” in student writing as a means to more fully realize writing concepts such as analyzing and synthesizing. The UConn multimodal project succeeds at promoting heuristic writing by addressing both core tenets of synthesis and analysis while leaving room for multimodal engagement with students’ own social and digital literacies.

In asking students to break their analysis into individual key parts by means of annotating and creating a digital word cloud, they are breaking up the text into its bare essentials, helping them extrapolate meaning in a more tangible, organized way. Synthesis then comes in the form of reassembling these key parts to form their own rhetorical analysis, which builds off their summary and gives them both the visual and physical means to better connect with the rhetoric of the author. In other words, by organizing the “aims, methods, and materials” of the text, they are exploring a visual medium and engaging with the text in a meaningful way by mirroring the act of walking. The students are able to gain a better understanding of the rhetorical features

of the text they are studying: the author's intended audience, purpose, and possible rhetorical situation.

VIII. Explorations in Open Educational Resources

The previously explored examples offer compelling evidence for the versatility and applicability of multimodal assignments, but for the purposes of the evaluative framework housed in this research, efforts to expand on student writing processes need to be supported by the most consistent form of rhetorical authority in the classroom: the textbook. Though Composition textbooks are by no means universally limiting in their capacity for adaptable pedagogy, they still often serve as a foundation for the curricular structure of the class along with providing the most consistent source of evaluative information, outside of collecting syllabi, of comparative coursework across first-year writing sections. A growing area of focus for textbook usage in Composition circles has been in the implementation of Open Educational Resources (OER) due to factors such as cost efficiency and easier access to classroom materials.

John Hilton, in a study evaluating student perceptions and efficacy when engaging with OERs, defines these resources as any “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and repurposing by others” (854). In a similar study further expanding on Hilton’s research, researchers provide more context on the classroom practicality of OER materials by defining them as “learning materials that may be used in teaching and learning contexts...and recognized by all stakeholders as an invaluable means to allow inclusive and equitable gain to information and learning” (Kılıçkaya & Kic-Drgas 402). Inclusivity is important to highlight here because, beyond copyright considerations, elements of design consideration like adaptability and the ability to easily remix and modify these texts provide greater depth

for multimodality. The adaptable nature of OER also “leads to inclusive, open and participatory education, saving teachers significant time and effort on resource development” (403).

The consideration of students’ academic expenses cannot be overstated enough, however, for the purposes of this research, the most significant pedagogical benefits of OER materials come from their capacity for multimodal creation and learning in contrast to traditional textbooks. As investigated further in the evaluative framework of this research, OER textbooks in comparison to traditional textbooks offer not only more opportunities for equitable access and open engagement, but also increase student success in less often considered categories. According to many adopters and researchers across disciplines today, OER textbooks also produce notable positive results when measuring student likelihood of critical reflection and retention in the classroom leading to improved performance overall. In a study on the opportunities and challenges associated with OERs, Rita Birzina engaged in exploitative qualitative research with a diverse population of students from the University of Latvia to determine different areas of literacy affected by and required for engagement with OER resources. The author wished to engage the best practices of OER by analyzing “the interrelation of . . . personal growth and information literacy [as well as] language literacy and computer literacy in the context of opportunities and challenges offered by the use of OERs” (Birzina 19). The types of OERs used by students in the study range from compiled sections of eBooks and university databases to Open Access Journal publications and YouTube videos. The broadly diverse range of materials used are worth noting in this instance as they play a role in the efficacy of compiled and evaluated research from the

study. However, areas of literacy engagement remain uniform throughout the author's methodology.

By the end of the study, a key set of opportunities and challenges remained consistent through Birzina's results. The author writes, "As an opportunity there is student's personal development and growth through the usage of different types of OERs; a challenge for students is to become more informal learners, bridging formal education with complementary resources and making learning more self-organized and self-directed focused on active learning" (26). Personal growth and development are evident here in how OER by its nature compels instructors to decentralize classroom authority such as monomodal engagement and the five-paragraph essay structure in favor of greater engagement with and production of multimodal texts. Even more impactful to note here are the "challenges" of informality and active learning in these spaces. Another way to understand these concepts is in how multimodal their effects can be. "Opportunities" might be a better designation in this case as well since the demands of engaging authorial purpose with a specific audience in first-year writing become more fully realized by student writers if the onus is on them to find the best mode of communication for connecting with their desired audience outside of reinforced academic structures. It is then up to the instructor to help make these modes more readily available and reinforce students' competencies in them, not to mention also the need to make the connection between students' literacies and these varying modalities more clear. More focus will be given to the pedagogical implications for instructors in OER contexts in the evaluative framework, but for the purposes of this discussion, even in an isolated context OER is the preferable choice for its often more

friendly implementation of digital rhetoric and capacity for multimodal connections
between audience and purpose.

IX. Key Features of Evaluative Framework

The following framework sections are structured to apply previously analyzed scholarship on specific areas of multimodal literacies and practices in relation to relevance, application, and adaptability. The goal is to address: 1) What does the text excel at in terms of previously mentioned tenets of multimodality, from historically relevant applications to newer considerations of digital and social modes of communication? 2) What can be redesigned or remixed in the text to better suit the multimodal needs of first-year writing students? This can look like transferability into an OER resource where possible, additions of multimodal readings/assignments, or creating stronger connections with previously established student literacies. This framework is designed for broad use among Composition textbooks, but focuses specifically on two first-year writing textbooks, *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers, Thirteenth Edition* and *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric*, as a way of testing and putting it into practice. The multimodal thresholds outlined here are intentionally broad enough that they can theoretically apply to most first-year writing textbooks.

Recontextualizing Textbook Design for Digital and Social Learning Habits

This model is based on Carey Jewitt's research on the relationship between multimodal classrooms and contemporary literacies as well as Stuart Selber's research on computer literacy and digital communication. Special consideration in this framework is given to how well the text understands modes of meaning making beyond what they communicate. In other words, how much does it focus on how knowledge is

presented rather than what is being presented? Social semiotics come into play in terms of how important cultural and social influences are when determining the chosen modes of communication thrust upon students. Ultimately here is where we need to determine how well the text understands the modes or literacies most commonly dominant in the social discourses and interdisciplinary demands of writing students along with how well the text serves these interests.

The best way to compare and contrast the applicability and adaptability of both texts in terms of sociocultural and digital literacy accessibility is by analyzing fundamental design principles of both and breaking down what utilizations of multimodality best serve writing students. Important to note here is that this model of design does not refer to the structural elements of either text but rather Jewitt's and The New London Group's (NLG) definitions of design as a dynamic process of interpretation and communication. As Jewitt describes it, "Design refers to how people make use of the resources that are available at a given moment in a specific communicational environment to realize their interests as sign makers" (252). Adding on to that line of thinking, the NLG's concept of design requires:

Available Designs: the representational forms available for meaning making.

These can include grammars, discourses and conventions of all resources ready at hand. *Designing*: the work done on the available designs to make new meaning. During the design process, available designs undergo new representations and recontextualisations. *Re-Designed*: the outcome of the design process. (Jewitt 234)

Tables 1 and 2 each provide categories for this model and break down individual levels of multimodal considerations through adaptability, sociality, and digital contexts with respect to the design process.

Table 1 - Overview of *Language Awareness Accessibility*

<i>Language Awareness</i>	Adaptability	Sociality	Digital Contexts
<p>Notable Readings:</p> <p>“Fake News Starts with the Title” by Benjamin Horn</p> <p>“Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces” by John Palfrey</p> <p>“Reading to Write” by Stephen King</p>	<p>Collectively dated by 2022 standards</p> <p>Rapidly changing political contexts lead to dated information or resources</p>	<p>Helps shape interest in students’ social worlds, but lacks timeliness only addressed through multiple editions</p>	<p>Individual readings can be downloaded through the eBook and altered for personal use</p>
<p>Assignments/Prompts:</p> <p>Language in Action and Writing Suggestions – pg.53, pg.545</p>	<p>The design of these post-reading assignments range from prompting an artificial engagement with the articles to persuasive writing calling to action that no longer holds relevance</p>	<p>Restricts creative potential of student in favor of reiterated traditional pedagogy rhetoric</p>	<p>Some assignments require action writing on social media or on a local level, though the follow-through of said assignments is questionable</p>
<p>Textual Information:</p> <p>“Writing in College and Beyond”</p> <p>“Language Evolution: How and Why Does Language Change?”</p>	<p>Limited scope in design</p> <p>Engagement does not go beyond critical reading exercises and question prompts checking student understanding</p>	<p>Well organized, but lacks the “re-designed” process for transformed meaning</p>	<p>Textbook is available as an eBook</p>

Table 2 - Overview of *The Commons* Accessibility

<i>The Commons</i>/OER Resources	Adaptability	Sociality	Digital Contexts
<p>Notable Readings:</p> <p>“Multiple Intelligences” by Fred Mednick</p> <p>“How to Read like a Writer” by Mike Bunn</p> <p>“Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media, Both Intentionally and Accidentally” by Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer</p>	<p>Readings can be swapped out or updated much more efficiently than traditional class textbooks</p> <p>Readings here present opportunities for developing more personal literacies while also adhering to first-year writing learning outcomes</p>	<p>Designed to address social literacies more personal to first-year writing students like discerning misinformation in social media communication</p>	<p>More readings apply to digital communication</p> <p>Individual readings accessible in a digital format</p>
<p>Assignments/Prompts:</p> <p>Open Pedagogy</p> <p>Renewable Assignments</p>	<p>Innovative open pedagogy means “[Instructors] can adapt existing materials to meet the specific needs of their class [and] they can share created materials with other instructors in their subject area around the world” (Elder 41).</p>	<p>Demands ongoing design in terms of “representations and recontextualizations”</p>	<p>Renewable assignments allow for assignments that take full advantage of digital tools such as Google Docs/Google Drive and Hypertexts</p>
<p>Textual Information:</p> <p>“Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric in a Nutshell”</p>	<p><i>The Commons</i> was created with a specific student population in mind</p> <p>An entire section devoted to introducing and explaining the</p>	<p>Designing the textbook with our specific student population offers a greater opportunity to connect with their social literacies on a personal level</p>	<p>Desired textual foci reach outside of just those of us working on the text and include various creative voices in the first-year writing program contributing to what textual</p>

	basis for our program is engrained into the class textbook.		information most benefits their specific students.
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The greatest contrast noted between the two tables is the margin between adaptability and application with respect to how students consume readings assigned out of the textbook and the extended life of those readings beyond textual information. OER solutions address this phenomenon by their nature of remixing and remediating educational resources, assignments, expectations, etc.

Though the focus of this research is on the multimodal connection between Composition textbooks and writing students, it is worth noting the invaluable role instructors play in making this process a reality. Outside of textbooks, instructors are viewed as the central authority of Compositional excellence in the classroom, and it is up to instructors to model and encourage more process-oriented creation. Every student clearly has the capacity for agency in their writing, but they are often not yet tuned into their individual writing processes in first-year composition, nor are they aware of what questions to ask when developing their writing processes. The current predicament of Composition instructors relates in many ways back to Janet Emig’s argument that instructors of her time under-conceptualize the Composition process as linear, non-metacognitive writing models.

Decades after arguing on behalf of more process-based modes of writing production, Composition instructors and textbooks today still reinforce the necessity of the “five-paragraph theme” essay. Much in the same way CTR of the 1970s represented

a deep misunderstanding over the transferability of highly structured writing production to other areas of notable literature or professional transcription, the persistence of traditional five-paragraph essay models today represents a resistance to proper engagement of multimodal literacies. Newer modes of representation and communication are often impossible to quantify in this domineering essay format, and as investigated further in the next section, lack any means to topological areas of meaning making. Jewitt points out the vast diversity of types of writing in and out of the classroom in how “multimodal representation and globalization are close companions, providing new foundations for processes of remixing and remaking genres and modal resources in ways that produce new forms of global and commercial processes. These in turn are constantly personalized, appropriated, and remade in local workplaces, communities, and institutions” (243). Considering the cognitive and sociocultural elements of multimodal literacies currently pervading student discourses, Composition instructors should be inclined to broaden the pedagogical scope of creation beyond limited models of writing such as five-paragraph essays and even constricted interpretations of the writing process solely consisting of prewriting, drafting, and revision. Instructors are responsible for helping develop *new* literacies or the idea that “what is positioned as new literacy practices in the school may be new to school but are often already well established among many young people” (Jewitt 248).

In acknowledging the role first-year writing instructors play in usurping traditional pedagogical frameworks, the question then becomes, “What next?” To put it simply, we need to work to better situate instructors in these multimodal literacies through training and adequate classroom materials. I address the materials in this

research by offering OER as a tangible bridge between domineering tenets of alphabetic literacy and multimodal application, but training instructors to recognize and respond to these literacies is slightly harder to define. Theoretical frameworks of “multiple literacies” are so varying that it would be impractical to demand cohesive competence of Composition instructors on every identifiable literacy students may individually engage with. A more practical application looks like broader implementations of four key factors of multiliteracies pedagogy Jewitt outlines in her research. These four factors are “Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice” (248-252). In adapting each area of multiliteracies application, I believe OER textbooks generally present more favorable design practices that afford instructors opportunities to reframe each factor to best fit the needs of them and their students.

Situated practice stands out as a good starting point for developing multiliteracies pedagogy for instructors as it identifies “students’ experiences and the designs available to them in their life worlds” as foundational for bridging the gap between university language and student discourse (249). Rather than beginning with a strict set of academic expectations that disincentivize students’ cultural or social literacies, we can situate classroom expectations within the merging of traditional pedagogy and student-centric writing processes. Examples from *The Commons* in Table 2 arise in the form of textual information which is designed to be adapted and remixed to address specific student needs. In the case of first-year writing instructors, this looks like the inclusion of embedded videos and relevant information about ENG 101 (grading rubrics, general expectations, “First-Year Writing in a Nutshell,” etc.) which compile everything the instructor and student need to know about our program in one

accessible, easy-to-understand space. Other examples are prominent in the make-up of OER texts that reflect aspects of overt instruction and transformed practices. For Jewitt, overt instruction stresses “metalanguages of design” and an emphasis on meaning making through design processes. OERs benefit overt instruction by encouraging the incorporation of Open Pedagogy and renewable assignments. By collaborating with other instructors and building off of the real-time needs of their students, assignments can be implemented which stress design and critical analysis outside of traditional five-paragraph essays such as infographics, ePortfolios, collaborative proposals, and any assignment better designed for specific social and cultural contexts. In this way, instructors are better incentivized to implement transformed practices which relate “the ways in which students recreate and recontextualize meaning across contexts” (249). In terms of digital contexts, the limitations of *Language Awareness* are apparent in not just formatting but assignments as well that showcase little to no interest in expanding digital, social, or cultural literacies.

Ultimately, OER resources provide more opportunities to flourish in Jewitt and the NLG’s principles of design. Archer and Breuer note how design “provides much-needed freedom and agency to students. It offers learners the opportunity to develop and implement their own solutions to communication and literacy issues, which may exist outside traditional conventions” (233). The multimodal qualities stressed in OER production provide the best opportunities for student agency with not just their social literacies, but how they best utilize those literacies.

Applicability of Multimodal Habits

This section deals with how successfully previous tenets of multimodality are applied in conjunction with clearly defined standards for multiliteracies and J.L. Lemke's concepts of typological vs. topological forms of meaning making. Lemke's scholarship primarily acts as an assessment model for discerning how well the text considers both concepts of meaning making and appropriately utilizes both depending on language or media presentation (81). Essentially, where typological semantics are commonly concerned with traditional alphabetic literacy and representation on the page, topological meaning making is better suited for experiences in the world as far as the interaction between cultures, environments, social realities, etc. These assertions also weed out tendencies toward "curricular learning paradigms" where vaguely explained literacy competencies and "uniformed learning" contribute to writing students losing the "why" of their learning process (85).

In traditional Composition textbooks like *Language Awareness* we see typological meaning making take precedent in efforts to categorize primarily alphabetic literacy, making up every rhetorical concept or article, through varying degrees of contrast. This of course makes sense as the make-up of spoken language naturally emphasizes the need to contrast ideas through associative categorization more so than variations of degree. Through every social or cultural development of language, humans primarily "make meaning by contrasting types or categories of things, events, people, signs...For instance, we distinguish right from left, up from down, male from female, fruit from vegetable [etc.]" (Lemke 87). These hallmarks of typological meaning making largely make up the structure and presentation of most Composition textbooks,

including *Language Awareness*. One important area of focus in Table 1 is of the applicability of sociality found in each subcategory of the traditional text. The notable selections of readings, assignments and prompts, and textual information on display all represent degrees of category often antithetical to the social literacies of writing students. In addressing the available readings, between “Fake News Starts with the Title” and “Safe Spaces, Brave Faces,” we have representation for important social issues, but in terms of social relevance, the articles only meet bare minimum typological expressions due to addressing very specific aspects of students’ social worlds. Though there is still great value in the subtext and opinions of these articles, many incoming first-year writers would likely find difficulty relating to reactionary analysis of “fake news” specific to the 2016 election cycle nor would they find the concept of “safe spaces” to be a highly debated issue across college campuses today.

In terms of the cultures and attitudes making up students’ social literacies, the inadaptability of these readings caused by the design of traditional textbooks leaves little room for concise and specific changes necessary to accommodate the rapidly evolving and diverse social languages of writing students. According to Lemke, multimedia literacy cannot solely exist as a space to categorize students into “typologies and stereotypes” (86). Taking cues from the quantitative reasoning that makes up various fields of mathematics, Lemke notes:

If the time comes when a new generation's multimedia literacy is as much at home with quantitative reasoning and representation as with depiction and verbal text, then ideological oversimplifications based purely on category names, like White vs. Black, Straight vs. Gay, Masculine vs. Feminine will be

vulnerable to quantitative deconstruction for far more people than the few technical specialists who understand these arguments today. (80)

I would argue that the time has come where purely binary categories of “is” and “is not” can no longer satisfy the diverse student population we serve in Composition studies, nor can it satisfy the social and cultural literacies making up their varying modes of communication. What Lemke refers to as “hybrid people” truly makes up the majority of voices dominating college discourse today, so offering an adaptable Composition textbook to address the social spaces students engage in should take precedent in the design of these textbooks. The articles, assignment prompts, and textual information offered to them should work to reflect the social spaces writing students already occupy.

Beyond creating a greater balance between typological and topological meanings to reflect the social languages of students for better engagement with texts, the actual content of these textbooks must also provide means for multimodal creation. Aubrey Schiavone’s research on the multimodal components on first-year writing textbooks in “Consumption, Production, and Rhetorical Knowledge in Visual and Multimodal Textbooks” addresses this concern. Schiavone develops a similar theoretical framework to the one presented here but focuses mostly on student production of visual and multimodal texts rather than broad concepts of social and digital literacies (364). Practices the author outlines correlate with the multimodal practices and approaches my own research emphasize as necessities in multimodal appropriate Composition textbooks. Both texts clearly have the capacity for typological meaning making, but in terms of “visual perception and spatial gesturing” which demand more topological means, the OER text provides more opportunities for

multimodal creation (Lemke 77). Take for instance the comparative adaptability of both texts. As previously mentioned, a core tenet of OER materials is the ability to remix and remediate materials for both copyright purposes and connectivity to specific student populations. In the case of *The Commons*, the collected readings and textual information were created and organized with the specific student population of Eastern Kentucky University in mind. This means more uniformed approaches to evaluations of classroom pedagogy, but it also means the creation of a text steeped in our specific English program requirements and the first-year writing expectations of ECU. In other words, the articles and textual information our writing students are asked to engage with are organized to fit the needs of their digital and sociocultural literacies interpreted by instructors who directly teach the materials and engage with these students' literacies. Furthering the need for collaborative, social writing, *The Commons* has been designed with input from a number of university instructors ranging from introductions for various articles to textual information reflecting rhetorical and program-specific expectations.

X. Conclusion

I believe Composition studies faces an impasse today similar to that of Janet Emig's calls for process theory in Composition pedagogy in the early 1970s. Where Emig's ideas of writing processes emphasized the necessary consideration of students' voices and languages, Composition classrooms today face a similar problem recontextualized in terms of rapidly evolving social, cultural and digital literacies. While most Composition instructors would agree with calls for wider implementations of multimodal texts and practices that better meet the literacy needs of students, addressing these concerns becomes increasingly more complex in a post-process world. In analyzing the historical precedent for multimodality in Composition spaces as well as scholarship on their usage Composition classrooms today, it has become clear that the disconnect exists not as much between the willingness and means to apply multimodality but more so between support and practicality for instructors and students. I argue in favor of bridging this gap through one of the most widely recognized and necessary supporting resources for classroom pedagogy, the textbook.

Composition textbooks today, in terms of design and content, need to address broadening conceptions of multimodal literacies. The most relevant areas of focus necessary for engaging the consumption and production of these literacies come in the form of delegitimizing "correct" notions of writing according Standard American English, pushing back against conceptions of monomodality and alphabetic literacy as primary modes for engagement and production, better understanding student literacies' as transferable modes of communication and social influences in the digital age, and

recognizing textbooks by means of adaptability, sociality, and digital contexts as they concern the literacies dominating writing students' discourses.

In focusing specifically on two comparable first-year writing textbooks meant to serve similar learning goals in the same first-year writing program, I conclude that Open Educational Resources hold more potential to unlocking students' multimodal literacies due to elements of design that are entirely more adaptable to the needs of writing instructors and students. While the comparisons and evidence pulled from *Language Awareness* and *The Commons* are by no means exhaustive, they do highlight key areas of consideration when designing or choosing Composition textbooks in terms of multimodal applicability. Room still exists to broaden this research in consideration of multimodal practices and habits in Composition textbooks as social and digital communication continues to change more and more frequently, but acknowledging the language spaces students occupy beyond the classroom today is a good starting point in developing multimodal pedagogies and textbooks that eliminate residual effects of current traditional rhetoric in favor of the endless possibilities of multimodal meaning making.

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