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Supporting Multimodal Literacy

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Overview

Supporting multimodal literacy is an important aspect of education today as it encourages students to understand the ways media shapes their world. Most, if not all texts today, can be considered "multimodal texts," as they combine modes such as visuals, audio, and alphabetic or linguistic text. While it can be useful to create a distinction between multimodal texts and texts that are primarily linguistic in order to clarify assignment goals, all texts can truly be considered multimodal. Even an academic paper has multimodal elements such as font choice, double-spacing, margins, etc.

By teaching students multimodal analysis, you provide them access to a more complex way to read all the texts they encounter. In their media-saturated lives, students engage with a large number of multimodal texts per day that contain a variety of modes that work together to create subtle methods of persuasion and often implicitly reinforce cultural stereotypes. Because students are in the habit of passively viewing these texts, it's important to model strategies that will help them think critically about the messages directed at them through media.

However, while students have some experience analyzing traditional alphabetic texts, they often have difficulty transferring what they know about analyzing these texts to analyzing multimodal texts. And teaching students to analyze multimodal texts can be challenging as students have grown accustomed to viewing such texts as entertainment or basic sources of information without considering their meaning or context. Because analyzing multimodal texts is not intuitive, students need explicit instruction in order to gain multimodal literacy. Just as we teach students to perform a close reading or textual analysis on alphabetic texts, it's important to provide students with skills and models that will help them bring a critical eye to multimodal texts.

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General Considerations

Multimodal analysis needs to be modeled.
Because students often quickly dismiss or passively view multimodal texts, careful observation of the various modes (i.e. linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, spatial) without judgement or interpretation is an important first stage of multimodal analysis. But even when students can recognize the different modes that are present, they can still have difficulty turning their observations into an argument. Therefore, it is also necessary to show students how modes work together and how their observations can become arguments. A step-by-step strategy for modeling analysis is presented in the **In Practice** section below.

Meta-language is important to analysis.
Students need to be provided with terminology associated with modes, though different multimodal media (video, photographs, websites) and different disciplines (communication, anthropology, visual art) often use different terminology. Providing students with a shared language will help them deepen their analysis. Once a language that is appropriate to your field and your assignment goals has been identified, be sure to share this language with your students, including explicitly using it in the assignment prompt and classroom discussions. See the section below on **The Language of Multimodality** for further definitions.

Pedagogical goals and disciplinary concerns should guide assignments.
When assigning multimodal texts, consider what pedagogical goals you are trying to achieve, including how multimodal texts are used in your discipline. For example, communications students might be asked to consider how a television show reinforces cultural stereotypes, while visual art students might be asked how form affects content. Students in the sciences might need to understand how popular media portrays scientific research or might need to analyze or write about data provided in graphs or tables.

Assigning multimodal compositions requires sequencing and scaffolding.
Assigning multimodal projects, including podcasts, photo essays, and posters, is also part of developing multimodal literacy, though it's necessary to prepare students for creation of such texts by first asking them to practice analysis. By identifying the strong or weak aspects of existing multimodal texts and understanding how modes work together to create arguments, students can then make informed choices in the creation of their own projects. For strategies that will help you scaffold and sequence multimodal projects, see the Sweetland Teaching Resource **Sequencing and Scaffolding Assignments**, the section on Sequencing New Media Assignments.

Claims about multimodal texts should be both logical and debatable.
Students might sometimes claim that certain multimodal elements, like a melody or color, can mean "anything," but a claim made about a multimodal text needs to be supported by logical evidence and analysis. Since many multimodal elements, such as lyrics in a song or the use of a certain color in a painting, contain implicit connotations, it can seem like analysis is open-ended, but connotative meaning needs to be determined based on logical analysis of other contextual clues. For example, the color white might symbolize purity in some situations, but it doesn't always mean purity. In certain contexts it can mean absence or void or might even suggest something hidden ("whitewashing").

The Language of Multimodality

Students need to be provided with a shared language in order to analyze multimodal texts. Because of the many different disciplines and media that address multimodality in different ways, there is a variety of language that can support multimodal literacy. The following lists break down a few of the most common methods for categorizing multimodal elements. While it's necessary for students to be able to discuss multimodal terms using specific language, the choice of language is somewhat flexible, though whatever language you choose should be used consistently. Further categorizations based on media are also provided in the Strategies for the Classroom section below.

Because multimodal texts can be considered arguments based on their ability to persuade us toward a certain belief, feeling, or idea, they can therefore be analyzed using the rhetorical principles of ethos, pathos, and logos. Students also need to consider the aspects of the rhetorical situation when analyzing the messages and implications of multimodal texts. The following language includes the basic definitions needed to discuss multimodal texts in terms of rhetoric.

Mode - While the word "mode" has many meanings in different disciplines, including "modes of argumentation" in composition, when dealing with multimodal texts, mode refers to the method of communication being employed: spatial, linguistic, visual, gestural, audio.

Media (singular Medium) - Though media is sometimes used in place of mode in everyday conversation, it actually refers to the the ways a text reaches its audience (e.g. photograph,

website, song). A medium can contain multiple modes (e.g. a song has words and audio, a video of that song would also include gestures and spatial arrangement).

Affordances - The word affordances refers to the features particular to a chosen a medium that a creator can use when composing in that medium (e.g. a website includes the affordances of hyperlinks and visual images paired with linguistic text while a video includes affordances such as time, movement, editing and audio). Think of affordances as the potential ways a media can be manipulated to get a message across.

Genre and Genre Conventions - Genres are further categorizations of media based on audience expectations. For example, the film media includes such genres as romantic comedy as well as animated shorts. Each genre includes a set of conventions. For example, the genre of a newspaper comic strip often has a series of three frames with a punch line delivered in the final frame. While the graphic novel genre shares features of a comic strip, the expectations of that genre call for a longer narrative told through a series of frames that can vary in number from page to page. When analyzing multimodal texts, students should consider the genre conventions of the text in question, including the ways a text realizes or challenges these conventions.

Rhetorical Situation - Every multimodal text is created for a particular time and place for a certain audience, and the expectations that arise from these circumstances are considered the rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation takes into consideration choices made based on the context, audience, purpose, genre, and author (or implied author).

Author (and Implied Author) - In some multimodal texts, the author is named, such as a film director or the author and illustrator who collaborate on a children's book. However, in many instances the author is unknown. This is the case in almost all advertisements, for example. Though there are authors behind the texts--or a team of designers, videographers, and writers-- when analyzing an advertisement one can consider the implied author to be the company who authorized the advertisement (e.g. McDonalds or Snickers). The same is true for an anonymous article posted on a website, such as WebMD. WebMD becomes the implied author of an article in absence of a named author.

Multimodality in Composition

In the composition field, multimodal elements are commonly defined in terms of the five modes of communication: linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, audio. These terms are often paired with the language of design to create a more thorough conversation about the different modes, especially when referencing compositions that combine words and images, such as posters, presentations and websites. The following lists are taken from the textbook *Writer/Designer* (see **Further Reading** below for more details).

The Five Modes

The following terms include the five modes of communication found in multimodal texts as defined by the field of composition. Though other disciplines may use different language to define some of the modes, this model provides a basic method for discussing multimodal texts.

Linguistic – word choice; delivery of spoken or written text (tone); organization into sentences, phrases, paragraphs, etc.; coherence of individual words and ideas.

Visual – color, layout, style, size, perspective

Gestural – facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, interactions between people

Spatial – arrangement, organization, proximity between people and objects.

Audio – music; sound effects; ambient noise/sounds; silence; tone; emphasis and accent of voice in spoken language; volume of sound.

The Language of Design

The following language includes some of the basic terms associated with design. These terms often supplement the language of multimodality by providing more precise ways of discussing certain aspects of visual texts.

Emphasis - The elements of an image that are most significant or pronounced.

Repetition - The recurring pattern of the same or similar shapes or objects, which can also indicate an overall emphasis or theme.

Contrast - The sharp differences between elements that are noticeable based on their relationship to each other.

Layout - The organization of elements on a page, including texts, images, shapes, and overall composition.

Alignment - The way that elements are aligned on a page, especially text which is often aligned at left, right or center.

Proximity - The relationship between objects in a space, particularly how close they are to each other. Proximity can indicate the nature of a relationship between objects.

For a handout of these terms to give to your students, see **Supplement 1: The Language of Multimodal Texts**.

For a table that organizes modes according to the language of design as well as a few other common media and disciplines, see **Supplement 2: Table of Multimodal Terms by Discipline and Mode**. You can share this table in its entirety with your students to familiarize them with a multitude of multimodal terms, or just share the parts of it that are relevant to your assignment.

Analyzing Multimodal Texts as Signs

Reading multimodal texts as signs can be considered similar to a close reading of an alphabetic text. Just as students can be asked to look for imagery or sounds or repetition that challenges the surface meaning of an alphabetic text, they can do the same with multimodal texts. It's also an important step in moving students from the categorization of modes (e.g. "What modes do you notice in this multimodal text?") to an argument about the cultural relevance of a multimodal text (e.g. "What cultural references are implied by the use of the apple imagery in the photograph?). Though questions like these derive from semiotic theory, you don't have to know a lot about semiotic theory to teach your students how to read signs.

When paired with the language of design and rhetoric as described above, or another basic language based on media (see **Supplement 2: Table of Multimodal Terms Categorized by Discipline and Mode**), multimodal elements can be read as signs in relationship to each other, which can foster a debate about the implications of the overall composition, and therefore, create the basis for an argument.

The examples below provide two models for reading visual signs using the language of multimodality in composition and design along with other rhetorical considerations, such as context and audience.
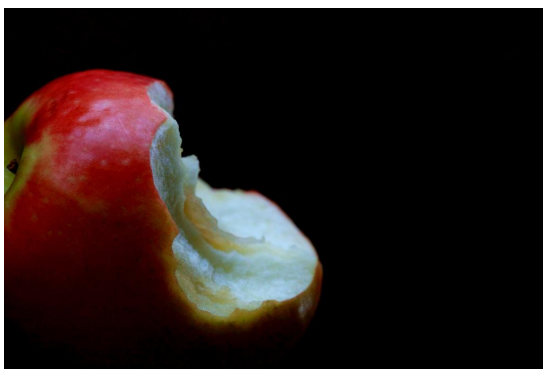
Figure 1

Figure 2

Both figure 1 and 2 feature an apple. An apple is an image with many connotative meanings in our culture, and as these images were found on American websites, the context allows the reader to analyze these apples based on American ideas about the apple. The apple can symbolize health, school or teachers, the Christian religion (the garden of Eden), technology (Apple computers), agriculture, New York City (the Big Apple), or the fairy tale Snow White,

among other meanings. In order to know which of these symbolic meanings of apple these images project, we need to analyze each image separately.

In Figure 1, the apple is strongly emphasized and is aligned to the left leaving a great deal of negative space to the right. The apple has been bitten into and is partially cropped out of the page, which may indicate that this is an imperfect or incomplete view of an apple. Since the apple in the Garden of Eden was bitten by Eve, and this bite represented a loss of innocence, the bite might also allude to this message. The negative space is black, which could indicate a darkness or void. The contrast between light and shadow is also very strong, which also suggests dramatic emotional mood. The lack of humans or any other objects also heightens the sense of isolation. Based on these factors, one might argue that this apple more likely suggests a religious overtone than any of the other symbolic meanings listed above. One could even go further and argue that based on the elements of design used here, this image of the apple implies that the loss of innocence has lead to a sense of isolation. There is evidence for this argument, but it is also debatable.

In Figure 2, though the apple is again emphasized based on its placement in the center of the image and the focus of the camera, the other elements in the composition create different implications. The apple exists in close proximity (touching) to a human hand, and the gesture of the hand suggests the apple is being held up for display, so there is no sense of isolation here. Instead, we can assume this is about the relationship between the apple and the human. Though we assume Eve in the Garden of Eden story also held up an apple to take a bite, the background of this image creates different implications, as it seems to be a farm setting which is cultivated with repeating hay bales and mown grass. These factors shift the meaning of the apple to be more closely related to agriculture. Perhaps this is an apple that was freshly picked from the field and this apple is meant to symbolize a sense of pride in cultivation, or even, one might argue, control over nature. Again, this claim can be supported by evidence, but it is also debatable.

As you can see from the models, combining the implications suggested by signs found in an overall composition allows a reader to arrive at a complex understanding of the message. Though we don't have solid proof that the meanings presented above were the intention of the authors, we have enough evidence to make an argument about the implied meanings. This method can work for any media, not just still images, though different media, such as film or dance, might also require additional language in order to discuss the specific aspects of the composition.

If you would like a student version of the above section to use in your classroom, including further activities, see **Supplement 3: Reading Texts as Signs**.

In Practice

The strategies below are based on assignments that are most common in the college classroom and focus mainly on the needs of the composition classroom, though the final section also includes the basics of discussing multimodal texts in the sciences, and any of these strategies could be adapted for other disciplinary needs. All of these strategies focus solely on the analysis of multimodal texts. For strategies for assigning the creation of a multimodal text, see the Sweetland Teaching Resource **Sequencing and Scaffolding Assignments** section on Sequencing New Media Assignments. These strategies could also be adapted to other disciplines with further attention given to the pedagogical goals and discipline-specific language required in other fields.

Keep in mind, these strategies are only offered as suggestions to encourage you to design your own assignments, keeping in mind the best practices for teaching multimodal analysis, including modeling analysis in the classroom and scaffolding analytical assignments by moving from observation based activities to argument formation.

Since every strategy below ideally should also include in-class analysis that moves from observation to argumentation, a step-by-step recommendation for modeling analysis is presented below and can be paired with any of the strategies that follow.

Modeling Multimodal Analysis

As modeling is required for all multimodal analysis, regardless of media, suggestions for modeling are provided below and can be paired with any of the strategies by using a model text that is either in the same media as the assignment or features similar modes and media elements as the texts that students will analyze. For example, if students are being asked to analyze photos, videos or film, a film or video would be the better choice for modeling with some attention given to still frames to highlight the features of photographs.

The following steps will help students shift from passive observation of multimodal texts to active reading and argumentation. Throughout all of these steps it's important to let students know there is no right or wrong answer at any of these stages. Students should understand that the process of analyzing multimodal texts is a method of gathering evidence to make an eventual argument, but all observations are valid.

Regardless of media, always provide students with specific language that will allow them to identify and discuss the features of the multimodal text. For help framing this language with your students, you may use **Supplement 1: The Language of Multimodal Texts** and/or **Supplement 2: Table of Basic Multimodal Terms Categorized by Discipline**. Or you may choose to use of the handouts based on the specific media provided in the strategies below.

Step 1: Exposure and Observation - For this first stage, students are exposed to and asked to observe multimodal texts without judgment. When students move too quickly to evaluating texts,

they miss out on making valuable observations that can deepen their reading. It is useful to tell students explicitly that in this stage they should observe what they notice, but not make any judgements or assumptions.

There are options for exposing students to multimodal texts. Student can be asked to bring in multimodal texts that they come in contact with to foster discussion, and you might ask students to share the texts they discovered with each other, including discussing where they found the texts. Or, you may specifically assign a primary text that students view in class together--such as a print ad or commercial or a photograph of historical import--or read or view outside of class--such as a film or graphic novel. In either case, you might ask students to discuss what they noticed about it, and how the text affected them. Some preliminary questions that can get students thinking about the texts and their contexts might include the following:

- Where did you find this text and what is its purpose?
- What role does this text play in your life?
- Who is this text for (who is the audience)?
- Who or what is pictured in the text and why is this the focus?
- How did you react when you experienced the text?

However you choose to expose students to the text, be sure to honor their initial reactions and focus on observation without judgement, respecting that they will be able to move toward more sophisticated thinking in later stages.

Step 2: Labeling and Navigating Modes and Media - During this stage students should continue their observations, but at this point they should be given specific language relevant to the media in question that will help them label aspects of the text and understand how media elements work in relationship with each other. Class time should be spent guiding students in how to read multimodal texts both in terms of modes and media conventions. As students label aspects of the multimodal texts, it can be useful to list their observations on the board as their observations will be necessary to draw upon for the next stage. See the following strategies for questions that will engage students in discussion of specific media.

Step 3: Interpretation - At this stage of modeling students should be asked to consider the implications of the modes and media elements that they noticed in the prior stage. For example, if they have noticed that the font in an advertisement is in a fancy script, here they might consider what such a script suggests about the overall tone by brainstorming associations, such as wealth, formality, elite, expensive. Or if a woman's gaze at a man creates the primary direction in the composition, students might discuss what this implies about gender. By listing associations, students can begin to find prominent themes and patterns and from there they can begin to form an argument by choosing which elements they will highlight in their thesis and considering these elements in light of the rhetorical situation. *And it is important to remind them that evidence use involves choice--they won't be able to account for all of the multimodal elements, but they should include in their argument the ones that are most salient.* See the

section above on **Analyzing Multimodal Texts as Signs** for a basic example of this process performed with photographs.

Step 4: Framing Meaning in Relation to Rhetorical Situations: This stage might overlap with the previous stage, as interpretation relies on the rhetorical situation. As students identify the modes and media elements and how they work in relationship with each other, they need to consider how those modes and media elements persuade their audience based on their context and genre conventions as well as what kinds of social implications are present. The following questions will help generate a discussion about the rhetorical situation and genre conventions:

- What genre is this text (e.g. photojournalism or fashion photography, romantic comedy film or horror film)?
- What conventions are common to this genre?
- How are the media elements and modes shaped to audience expectations?
- How does the time period during which the text was produced relate to the content?
- What values or opinions are being suggested by the author or implied author to the audience?

Step 5: Evaluating (optional) - While interpretation is often the final stage of many assignments, once students have analyzed a texts, they can then evaluate a multimodal text in terms of a set of criteria, such as success or failure at reaching its audience or meeting genre expectations, or the positive or negative consequences of the message implied within the text. However, this stage is optional and should only come after students have thoroughly analyzed the text.

The steps above should be paired with any of the strategies below. Also, when assigning multimodal analysis, not only is modeling a key factor in helping students read critically, the assignment sheet should also reference the stages in the process above in order to reinforce this process when students move to analyzing on their own. Including a rubric that will connect the steps of analysis to how they will be evaluated is also useful.

For an example of a general assignment sheet that can be adapted to various multimodal media and genres, see **Supplement 4: Assignment Sheet for Analyzing Multimodal Texts**.

Strategy 1. Analyzing Advertisements

Advertising analysis is common in Composition classrooms and is an important aspect of Communication Studies, but other fields, such as Art History, Sociology, and Psychology, might also analyze ads as they provide insight into how media shapes culture (and vice versa). Advertisements also have a profound influence on students' lives. Asking students to analyze advertisements, especially ones that target specific groups of people, can help them to become critical readers of media and help students connect to the course material. Advertisement analysis is especially effective at providing students an opportunity to recognize stereotypical representations and logical fallacies.

Important Considerations

While some students may have been asked to analyze advertisements in high school, students haven't always arrived at sophisticated ways of discussing advertisements. Often students still consider the analysis of advertisements to be a simple matter of determining what the ad is selling. They might also not understand the relevance of analyzing ads as they are not academic texts and are fleeting in nature. When introducing the unit, discuss with students the reasons why analyzing advertisements is an effective way for them to become critical thinkers about media and culture, and be sure to emphasize that the goal is to get beyond what the ad is selling in order to determine what message it sends about our culture. Also, if you plan to assign an argumentative essay, be sure to model not only how to observe, but how to turn observations into arguments (see above for guidelines on modeling multimodal analysis). There are a few handouts available that can help with analysis and argumentation, including **Supplement 5: Advertising Elements and Analysis Questions**, **Supplement 6: Sample Shoe Advertisements for Analysis**, and **Supplement 7: Avoiding Weak Thesis Statements When Analyzing Advertisements**.

Preliminary Exercises

These exercises offer possibilities for how you might introduce students to multimodal analysis and scaffold higher stakes writing assignments. When assigning these exercises, you might consider using **Supplement 5: Advertising Elements and Analysis Questions** to help guide discussion and analysis.

- **Reflect on the prevalence of advertising** - Ask students to keep track of the advertisements they see in a day or a week in a journal or class blog. Lead a class discussion about what they notice about their interaction with ads.

- **Categorize Ads** - Bring in several ads for students and categorize them based on product and audience. Lead a discussion about the patterns and relationships between these ads.

- **Examine advertising trends** - Ask students to purchase a major magazine, particularly one aimed at a specific audience, such as Esquire, Cosmopolitan, the New Yorker, Ebony, or ESPN. Require students to keep track of all the ads in the magazine and to write about what they notice as the dominating features of advertisements.

Advertising Analysis Assignment Suggestions

1. Choose a particular theme for the advertisements that students will analyze, such as political ads, health or medical ads, or PSAs. This can be particularly effective if you have a thematic focus in the class related to these topics.

2. Let students choose their own ads, offering them guidance for ways to find ads that will allow for complex analysis, including looking for stereotypical representations of groups of people, such as groups based on gender or race or age. They also might look for unusual messages that are surprising or difficult to decipher.

3. Ask students to compare ads from two different time periods or two different sources and make an argument about the differences. Keep in mind that comparative analysis should only be assigned only after completing an assignment that asks students to analyze a single subject.

Supplement 5: Advertising Elements and Analysis Questions
Supplement 6: Sample Shoe Advertisements for Analysis
Supplement 7: Avoiding Weak Theses When Analyzing Advertisements

Strategy 2. Analyzing Journalistic Photography

Though the analysis of journalistic photography occurs most often in composition classrooms and Communication Studies, it is relevant to many fields, as images in the news shape our understanding of issues related to disciplines such as anthropology, geography and politics. Asking students to analyze the photographs that accompany news articles or historical accounts can provide an excellent opportunity for improving students' media literacy. Because these images are often considered truthful representations, showing students that the techniques used by the photographer can shape our understanding of history, politics, or culture will encourage them to think critically about images they encounter in their lives. Using iconic images, such as the photograph Migrant Mother by Dorothea Lange or the images captured during the attack on the World Trade Center, can also help students to see that photographs provide a subjective view of important historical events.

Important Considerations

This unit might begin as an exercise in visual analysis or it might arise from studying a topic or theme, such as war or work, that has been influenced by documentary photography. Either way, it is important to introduce students to the idea that photographs shape our understanding of events and people and that photographs are subjective. As students might not be familiar with the concept that news articles or historical accounts also present subjective angles, this unit might begin with some comparative analysis between different text-based news articles or historical accounts before introducing the further challenge of visual analysis.

As journalistic photography relies heavily on contextual factors, such as time period, location, controversy at the time, and other factual details about people or events or information about the reception or distribution of the image, this unit might also require students to do some research on topics related to the photograph they're analyzing in order to make an argument about how the visual images affect our understanding of the event. If students are unfamiliar

with research methods, the unit should also include instruction on using library databases and locating credible sources.

Preliminary Exercises

These exercises offer possibilities for how you might introduce students to multimodal analysis and scaffold higher stakes writing assignments. When assigning these exercises, you might consider using **Supplement 8: Photojournalism Analysis Questions** to help guide discussion and analysis.

- **Compare angles in the news** - Ask students to locate three to five news articles on the same event from different sources that include visual media and bring them to class. Ask them to discuss in groups how the articles present differing angles and why they think the angles differ depending on context.

- **Discuss popular portraits** - Gather a large number of images of iconic figures from the news that can be categorized as "good" or "bad," including sports figures, political candidates, celebrities winning awards or being criticized, heroic citizens and criminals. Create a class discussion around how people are portrayed in the media. Identify key features that represent positive portraits versus a negative portraits, such as facial expressions, body language, lighting, arrangement. Use this discussion to foster awareness of how photographs shape reality.

- **Examine iconic photographs** - Select an iconic yet controversial image, such as Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima or the Migrant Mother, and share the photograph along with the history of its publication and reception, along with any controversy surrounding the image. Ask students to consider what the photograph and its controversy says about the role of photography in shaping the public's understanding of certain events.

Journalistic Photograph Analysis Assignment Suggestions

The following prompts could be assigned as minor or major writing assignments depending on how they are weighted, how many pages numbers are required, and whether or not students will be asked to revise them. Before assigning multimodal analysis as a major writing assignment, you should scaffold the skills needed for these tasks by including smaller stakes exercises, such as the exercises offered above.

- Assign an analysis of a specific iconic documentary photograph (or let students choose from a selection of photographs). Require students to research the people or events portrayed in the photograph and/or information about the photographer (if available) and use their research in an essay that makes an argument about how the photographic visual elements attempt to shape the contextual details related to the event.

- Assign an analysis of a recent news article, including attention to how the story is portrayed visually. This might work best as a comparative analysis so that students can make an argument about the different viewpoints that arise based on photographic elements.

- Ask students to find a photo essay that interests them (there are many featured in the *New York Times*). Assign an essay that analyzes the overall argument being made about the event or issue covered in the essay. You might require that students focus on the overall relationship between the photographs or the narrative created as well as on specific details in a few individual photos that they feel are most relevant.

Supplement 8: Photojournalism Analysis Questions

Strategy 3. Analyzing Visual Art

The analysis of visual art is a large part of Art History courses, but it is also useful in other disciplines where visual art can provide additional information about specific issues or cultures, including Anthropology, Psychology, Classics, English Literature, etc. Visual art can be analyzed with greater focus on the visual cues found in the image or with more attention given to the history surrounding it, depending on the pedagogical purpose of the assignment. Either way, students will benefit from guidance in reading visual images. The analysis of visual art may also provide students with a greater appreciation for the arts throughout their lifetime, as they will gain experience breaking through the barrier that many viewers feel when they encounter art. When students learn that all visual art arises from particular contexts, they will have a clearer access point for the art they encounter in the future. The art review is also a "real world" genre that students could read and imitate, which will include additional attention to audience, though evaluation should be performed only after a deep analysis of the work.

Important Considerations

Keep in mind that students often perceive a barrier to viewing art, as art is often considered an elite subject. Activities such as visiting a local museum or art gallery or watching a video about an artist or art movement can help to demystify art and provide students with an accessible introduction to the subject. Students also tend to want to judge art as good or bad before understanding it. It can be useful to let students know that analysis should precede judgement and that an evaluation of art should be based on criteria that are relevant to the piece in question. For example, it would be unfair to criticize a Cubist portrait for not accurately capturing its subject. Only by first understanding the purpose of the piece can one judge whether the work has met expectations of the genre or whether the form accurately matches the content.

As students often have an emotional reaction to art, it can also be good to begin a unit like this by leveraging their subjective reactions. Making connections between how the art makes them feel and the choices the artist made in order to elicit this response can provide an entryway to deeper analysis. Connecting the effect a piece has on viewers to the visual elements can also

be a good way to introduce visual language. For example, if an image of a military hero on a coin gives them a sense of seriousness, begin by asking what parts of the image evoke these feelings and name these parts--is it the use of media, the line quality, the composition, or all of the above?

Visual art is typically broken into three parts: 1. Context, or the information relevant to the creation of the artwork, including the time period and the artist's background; 2. Form, or the material and formal elements of the artwork; and 3. Content, or the issues or subject matter addressed in the artwork (e.g. landscape painting or political issues). These three features must all be taken into account when judging the work. These three parts ideally work together, with the choices of form affecting the message sent about the content.

Though a the relationship between form and content is often the topic in visual art analysis, it is also crucial to provide students with context, especially if the context will challenge a surface reading. For example, the French Impressionist paintings are often appreciated for their expressive brushwork, and initial emotional reactions often include peacefulness and relaxation, but contextual factors, such as critics' outrage over their work and their tendency to paint subjects rife with social controversy, will challenge an initial emotional reaction.

Writing about art also requires a great deal of active descriptive writing. This mode can be challenging to students, as they don't often feel like they have the authority to assert their own voice when describing another's work. In addition to modeling the analytical process, it can also be useful to bring in models of descriptive passages about art or to ask them to do in-class exercises in which they describe what they see with as much detail and dynamic language as possible.

Preliminary Exercises

These exercises offer possibilities for how you might introduce students to multimodal analysis and scaffold higher stakes writing assignments. When assigning these exercises, you might consider using **Supplement 9: Visual Art Elements and Analysis Questions** to help guide discussion and analysis.

- **Take a Museum Trip** - Take students to (or ask students to visit) a local museum or gallery and to select an image that evokes a strong emotional response for them. Require them to take notes based purely on their observations without any emotional reaction. Then, once they have taken several notes about what they observe, ask them to write about how the image makes them feel, connecting their feelings to the observations they just made.

- **Engage with artwork and criticism** - Show students a series of works from a particular show and, after allowing them to discuss their reactions, show them a short multimedia piece related to the work. Some good sources for multimedia about art are the **Art 21 video series** (http://www.pbs.org/art21/videos) and the **multimedia section of MOMA's**

website. Then continue the discussion, taking the artists and/or viewpoints into consideration.

- **Access specific topics and cultures through art** - After spending time covering a particular topic, history, or culture, bring in a selection of artworks that exemplify issues that have been discussed, such as an advertisement from a historical era, a painting of an important geographical location, or an artifact of an ancient currency. This activity can add dimension to discipline-specific lessons related to literature history, economics, psychology and so forth. By showcasing art related to the context, students can discuss how concepts from class are reflected in artwork.

- **Practice descriptive writing** - Show students an artwork and ask them to describe it in great detail for someone who hasn't seen the work (and might not ever see it). Encourage them to use active verbs, to focus on concrete detail, and to be as engaging as possible in their language choice.

- **Determine evaluation criteria** - After students have analyzed an artwork, ask them to determine what criteria would make sense when judging the work. Remember, the criteria set will be based on analysis and be debatable, but the student should be able to make a logical argument about why the piece should succeed in a certain way.

Visual Art Analysis Assignment Suggestions

The following prompts could be assigned as minor or major writing assignments depending on how they are weighted, how many pages numbers are required, and whether or not students will be asked to revise them. Before assigning multimodal analysis as a major writing assignment, you should scaffold the skills needed for these tasks by including smaller stakes exercises, such as the exercises offered above.

- Assign an analysis of a contemporary visual work that students can see firsthand in a gallery or museum. Ask that they take into account any contextual information provided about the artist or the piece as well as their own interpretation based on the visual elements they observe. This assignment could also include an evaluation of the work once an analysis has been performed.

- Assign an analysis of an artwork or series of artworks from a particular time and place and ask students to make an argument about how the artwork responded to its context and what it reveals about the culture of its time.

- Present students with artwork by a particular artists (or a series of their works) along with critics' responses to the work(s). Ask them to assess whether or not the critical viewpoint is more valid based on their own interpretation of the artwork.

- Provide students with models of art reviews and ask them to do a brief rhetorical analysis to determine the expectations of the genre. Then ask students to write an art review that is geared toward a particular audience (perhaps suggesting that their finished piece could even be submitted to a local publication) based on the rhetorical principles they observed in the models.

Supplement 9: Visual Art Elements and Analysis Questions

Strategy 4. Analyzing Television, Film, and Video

The analysis of television, film, and video occurs in many fields beyond Composition, Communication, and Film Studies. Courses focused on particular cultures or historical periods or that explore certain stereotypes or issues that are reinforced in the media might include an analysis of television, film, or video. Regardless of the discipline, this form of analysis is particularly relevant to supporting media literacy as students have typically been viewing these forms of media for most of their lives, but they are not accustomed to viewing such media with a critical eye, beyond quickly judging whether they like or dislike them.

However, the analysis of these media presents an additional challenge to students, as it must take into account not only the image, but also movement and sound. There are also four dimensions to consider when analyzing: 1. literary (aspects of the narrative, character development, metaphors, etc.) 2. cinematic (aspect related to the camera angles, editing, lighting, etc.) 3. dramatic (aspects of the performance by the actors or the set or costume design) and 4. ideological (aspects of the values portrayed or the cultural norms that are assumed--this might also be seen as the context). A great deal of theory and terminology is also available from Communication Studies that can add further depth to an analysis of these media, though this is not necessary to do a basic analysis.

The complexity of analyzing these works can be aided by breaking down the analysis, providing students with the language needed to discuss these parts, and modeling methods of creating arguments about these media.

Important Considerations

Students are accustomed to discussing the literary aspects of texts, so it will be important to introduce the other elements explicitly to help them see how literary elements are affected by cinematic, dramatic, and ideological elements. If you are unfamiliar with the language used to describe moving images, the first step in beginning this unit is to gain familiarity with the key terms related to these media (See Supplement 10: Film and Video Elements for a basic introduction to these terms). Without this language, viewers can often fall into the habit of discussing film and television based primarily on their literary aspects, such as the characters and plot. Terms such as mise-en-scene, framing, and continuous versus discontinuous movement will be unfamiliar to students, but they will provide them with a rich way of discussing these media.

When modeling the analysis of these media, it can be useful to increase complexity one step at a time. Beginning with a still frame, then moving on to a short clip before discussing a film in its entirety can help students learn the language needed to analyze in stages. A short clip can even be viewed with the sound down before adding audio elements to the analysis. As viewing a film in its entirely in class is not often possible, modeling active viewing *before* assigning students to watch a film on their own can also get them viewing actively from the start.

Preliminary Exercises

These exercises offer possibilities for how you might introduce students to multimodal analysis and scaffold higher stakes writing assignments. When assigning these exercises, you might consider using **Supplement 10: Television and Film Analysis Questions** to help guide discussion and analysis.

- **Analyze a film or television clip in isolation** - Bring in segments of a film that contain a variety of cinematic and dramatic elements to discuss. Play the film with different elements in isolation: show a still image, play only the sound (no image), play only the image (no sound). For each option, ask students what elements they notice and how they affect the mood or meaning of what they see.

- **Observe conventions through trailers** - Watch a variety of film trailers in class for different film genres (romantic comedy, horror, documentary) and discuss the cinematic elements that are highlighted for each genre.

- **Model analysis on a short with the full class** - Watch a short experimental film in class (many are available on the Short of the Week website (https://www.shortoftheweek.com/) and ask students to perform an analysis. Begin by watching and discussing general observations, then show the film again and ask students to take notes on the different film elements they notice, listing them on the board as they do. Then ask students to work in groups to select elements on the board as evidence to make a claim about what underlying meaning is found in the film.

- **Observe ideological elements** - Assign students to watch a television show of a certain genre (comedy, drama, reality) and take notes on the ideological aspects of the show-- What roles are most common for certain genders? How are groups of people portrayed? Who is not portrayed? Discuss these observations in class alongside clips from the show to show how cinematic and dramatic elements shape the ideological message.

Television and Film Analysis Assignment Suggestions

The following prompts could be assigned as minor or major writing assignments depending on how they are weighted, how many pages numbers are required, and whether or not students will be asked to revise them. Before assigning multimodal analysis as a major writing

assignment, you should scaffold the skills needed for these tasks by including smaller stakes exercises, such as the exercises offered above.

- Assign students to analyze a single episode of a television series that they typically watch, a show of a particular genre relevant to your pedagogical goals (for instance, a news report, reality tv show, or popular sitcom), or a film. Ask them to make an argument about the ideological elements that the show or film promotes based on the cinematic, dramatic, and literary elements they notice.

- Bring in a few models of film reviews that are in-depth and contain some analysis, such as the reviews found in the *New Yorker* magazine. First ask them to label the elements the writers address in their reviews--how do they discuss cinematic, dramatic, literary, and ideological elements? Then ask students to write their own review of a film of their choosing, or one you have chosen for them, based on the models.

- Ask students to watch two films from a certain time and place that both address the same central social themes, but from different points of view, such as gender, war, government, racism, immigrants, etc. Assign a comparison essay that makes an argument about how the films address a certain aspect of society at the time. Require them to use evidence from specific scenes of both films and to discuss the scenes in terms of film elements. *Keep in mind that a comparison essay should only be assigned after students have analyzed a single subject.*

Supplement 10: Television and Film Analysis Questions

Strategy 5. Analyzing Visual Data

Students are very engaged by visual data (also called data visualization or information graphics), as they appreciate the concise and creative ways that complex and abstract facts and concepts can be shared with an audience. Information graphics are being used in a wider range of applications that include the traditional uses to convey data but also to convince an audience of the importance of an issue - for example, so many news reports in the *New York Times* use data visualization to present information alongside news reports that the learning network even had a **week devoted to teaching with infographics** from the *New York Times*. (http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/teaching-with-infographics-places-to-start/)

Interpreting and writing about visual data is another form of multimodal analysis that is crucial to improving multimedia literacy. Though visual data, such as graphs, charts, and schematics, are often considered more explicit as they present "real-world" findings, it can still be difficult for students evaluate graphical representations from a critical standpoint. Visual data can also be highly convincing given the factual or scientific context in which it is presented, so teaching students how to think critically about visual data can also prevent them from accepting fallacious data as fact. Describing technical concepts presented in visual media for a specific audience

can also aid students in understanding difficult scientific concepts and improve their ability to create their own graphics.

Important Considerations

The key to helping students interpret visual data is to offer students a chance to carefully observe the components of visual data, including not only the key findings and implications of the data, but also the design aspects used to illustrate the data. Issues such as scale, proximity, color, repeated patterns, contrast, and what is omitted from the graphic can all affect how data are interpreted. The text used to introduce or explain the data can also factor into an audience's perceptions. Use the language of design provided above and in Supplement 11: Analysis Questions for Data Visualization to give students the language they need to address how data is displayed. It's also important to model for students how to take into consideration the contexts and limitations of the data, as well as their own assumptions, if they are writing about their own research.

Even if students have collected the data themselves, however, it can be difficult for them to present their findings in an accurate and comprehensive way that is not misleading. Interpreting visual data is a great way to start a segment in which students will be collecting and creating their own graphics. If your students are creating visual data themselves, it will be important to support this activity as well. Though the creation of multimodal data is beyond the scope of this resource, there are many resources available that can provide strategies for helping students visualize, transcribe, or code multimodal data.

Preliminary Exercises

These exercises offer possibilities for how you might introduce students to multimodal analysis and scaffold higher stakes writing assignments. When assigning these exercises, you might consider using **Supplement 11: Visual Data Analysis Questions** to help guide discussion and analysis.

- **Examine Misleading Graphics** - Bring in a handout on design along with one or two data visualizations that you have chosen that are engaging as well as misleading. Show the image to class without commenting on it and ask students to write briefly about the data visualization and whether they feel it is successful. Then give them a handout about design elements and ask them to discuss the aspects of design they notice without judgment. Then ask them to return to their writing and see how their initial view of the data visualization has changed. Lead a discussion about data visualization, perhaps even assigning the texts mentioned in the suggestion below as a follow up. See Supplement 11: Analysis Questions for Data Visualization for a handout with questions that prompt analysis of visual data.

- **Read about Infographics** - Ask students to read texts about data visualization, such as **Data Visualization for Human Perception** or Edward Tufte's book *The Visualization*

of Quantitative Information (Chapter 2: Graphical Integrity is especially relevant). Or assign texts that point out specific problems with data visualization, such as **Not Fit to Print: When Good Design Goes Bad** (https://medium.com/aj-news/not-fit-to-print-when-good-design-goes-bad-cc52931a2ce0) or **Misleading Graphs: Figures Not Drawn to Scale** (http://www.forbes.com/sites/naomirobbins/2012/02/16/misleading-graphs-figures-not-drawn-to-scale/) and discuss the implications of creating misleading visual data.

- **Evaluate Scientific Papers** - Assign students a scientific paper that includes figures, such as graphs, charts, or tables. Ask them to first look at the figures and discuss what they think of the results. Then ask them to read the article and notice how the additional information about context, limitations, and future research suggestions changed their reading of the figures. If you would like to have students consider whether the figures are well-designed, you should also first discuss what makes figures successful. There are some examples of bad graphs that could create an interesting class discussion on the webpage ***Top Ten Worst Graphs***.
(https://www.biostat.wisc.edu/~kbroman/topten_worstgraphs/)

Data Visualization Assignment Suggestions

The following prompts could be assigned as minor or major writing assignments depending on how they are weighted, how many pages numbers are required, and whether or not students will be asked to revise them. Before assigning multimodal analysis as a major writing assignment, you should scaffold the skills needed for these tasks by including smaller stakes exercises, such as the exercises offered above.

- Ask students to find an example of data visualization online on a news site, such as the *New York Times* or on one of the popular data visualization sites, such as ***Information is Beautiful*** (http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/) or ***Visual.ly*****'s community page** (http://visual.ly/). Once they find a design, ask them to share it on a class blog with comments about why they chose the design, what audience it is for, what aspects of design make it engaging, and whether they feel it is successful or not and why. This exercise could also be done as an in-class discussion if they bring the link to class and share it on the screen or with peers.

- Assign an essay about a recent data visualization that a student has located in the news and ask students to make an argument about whether or not the visualization is successful and why. This essay could include research into the topic that the data visualization portrays to help the students understand the topic more deeply. You might include in the prompt such questions as: How has the designer used design elements to highlight issues related to this topic? How does the designer provide context about the topic? Does this data visualization accurately portray the issue or does it mislead the audience? What important information is left out?

- Give students two scientific articles on the same topic that include figures of some kind, such as tables, graphs or charts, that include measurements of similar data. Ask them to write a summary of the figures and how they are used in the article and then compare and contrast the way the articles use figures--which is best and why?

Supplement 11: Visual Data Analysis Questions

Further Reading

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Serafini, Frank. *Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy*. Teachers College Press, 2013.

Few, Stephen. Data Visualization for Human Perception. In: Soegaard, Mads and Dam, Rikke Friis (eds.). "The Encyclopedia of Human-Computer Interaction, 2nd Ed.". Aarhus, Denmark: The Interaction Design Foundation. 2014

Tufte, Edward R., and P. R. Graves-Morris. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Vol. 2. No. 9. Cheshire, CT: Graphics press, 1983.