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## Cultivating Uncertainty Through a Multimodal Perspective on Process to Encourage Transfer

Ariel Zepeda

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CULTIVATING UNCERTAINTY THROUGH A MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVE  
ON PROCESS TO ENCOURAGE TRANSFER

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

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by  
Ariel Zepeda  
December 2018

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December 2018  
Approved by:

Mary Boland, Committee Chair

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the ways in which a multimodal approach to teaching writing process can help students better understand the choices available as they navigate first-year writing and beyond. Such an approach destabilizes their understanding of what counts as writing, beyond the strictly text-based practices they may normally associate with writing. This destabilization emphasizes the uncertainty of writing as a productive frame of mind, as it encourages a more critical approach for students as they develop and adapt their writing processes. A multimodal perspective on writing process encourages a more proactive approach to students' development of a repertoire of writing knowledge and practice to increase their chances of transfer.

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## DEDICATION

To my partner and greatest friend, Esmeralda Castañeda.

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CHAPTER ONE  
JOURNAL ARTICLE

Cultivating Uncertainty Through a Multimodal Perspective  
on Transfer to Encourage Transfer

Introduction

When I taught my first FYC course in the Fall and Winter of the 2016-2017 academic year at Cal State San Bernardino, I had a day dedicated to students sharing how they feel about writing, through a hashtag I set up for the class. I learned that they hated writing—or at the least that writing scared them. I planned the day as an opportunity for students to share how they were feeling about their writing following the completion of their first project, as well as college writing in general. I also wanted it to be a space for them to see each other's thoughts in real-time, so while they were working on analyzing their own and their classmates' tweets and what they were accomplishing through them, I had a live feed up on the projector and could make comments about patterns among the comments as the session went on. It was here that I could see—and the students could see—their great fear of writing. I can share their sentiments because I had hoped writing my anxieties surrounding writing would dissipate. But every writing situation is different and brings about its own challenges; nonetheless, this fear our students feel can be generative if we view the uncertainty generating it as a productive energy.

What is writing, and what is the teaching of writing? What should/do our students take from our class and what should/do they apply to the writing they encounter outside of our classes? Recent scholarship has looked at questions of how students transfer or repurpose writing knowledge from task to task (Alexander, DePalma, and Ringer; Ball, Bowen, and Fenn; DePalma; Donahue; Fishman and Reiff; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, Heather Bastian, and Elizabeth Wardle write about the transfer of rhetorical strategies between genres as problematic, because novice writers tend to view genre as monolithic artifacts, rather than consisting of moving and moveable parts that are socially and historically constructed and situated, resulting in students overextending their practices across writing situations.

Students need to see their own knowledge and practice as something worth building on while understanding that uncertainty is a useful part of working in new contexts. This is a difficult balance to maintain, and students will face failure when it comes to transfer; however, failure is critical to building toward more conscious and effective transfer. Through failure, we approach our writing with a critical eye, casting uncertainty on our choices throughout or writing processes. More seasoned writers doubt their own judgment in such a way that they use the resources available to them to get to a point where can produce writing—they draw on the productive energy of uncertainty. They understand that writing is an epistemological process brought upon by curiosity—a state of uncertainty that requires exploration to mitigate. Uncertainty is integral to

effective writing—uncertainty of the task itself, of one’s knowledge, of one’s choices. Without doubt, there is no self-analysis—the kind of metacognitive process that is necessary for successful transfer.

Drawing on the intersections that are occurring in conversations within the realms of theories of transfer, genre theory, and multimodal scholarship, I argue for a practice and ethos of cultivated uncertainty in the classroom. Doing so invites students to see doubt and self-questioning as a useful frame of mind of a writer, distancing them from the view of the writer as a translator of knowledge and closer toward what we understand writing to be—an epistemic tool for generating and questioning knowledge. Thus, at the level of the individual student, writing is a tool for understanding their writing processes. I want to think about what it means to have students adopt a multimodal perspective when analyzing and adapting their writing processes. This requires that we understand the ways in which we can foster productive approaches to transfer in general. Cultivating the uncertainty students maintain when approaching writing in academic and professional settings can be productive for their transfer of writing processes and theories of writing.

### Multimodality and Dispositions for Fostering Transfer

How do we get students to better detect opportunities for transfer? And what do we, as instructors, classify as needing to be transferred? When facilitating transfer, we ask our students to take their past writing experiences and apply them to the writing task at hand. They must compare these

experiences to create something that resembles their past writing while meeting the requirements they perceive the new writing to entail, and we ask this of them with the hope that they add this new experience to their inventory of writing knowledge, so they can then apply it to some future task, and eventually to tasks outside of our classroom. Through all this, we experience two types of transfer—high-road and low-road transfer. High-road transfer is the mindful abstraction of principles from writing experiences, while the low-road transfer describes the more automatic drawing of comparisons between writing tasks (Perkins and Salomon; Reiff and Bawarshi). Reiff and Bawarshi differentiate between students who engage in more high-road transfer as “boundary crossers” who employ “a range of genre strategies,” while actively describing their work through “‘not’ talk,” in which they describe their work by how it does not fit into larger genres (325). Those who practice more low-road transfer or describe their work through how they do fit in larger genres—so-called “boundary guarders” (Reiff and Bawarshi)—are more likely to overextend their genre knowledge in new writing situations by carrying over practices that do not fit in with the new writing situation.

Through the teaching of transfer, we focus our attention on connecting—that’s our goal. However, our students might not be aware of the connections they are making; these unconscious connections are the low-road transfer that our students can so easily make because similarities between situations are clearer for students to see. Perkins and Salomon’s work on the nature of transfer

argues our students must detect the link between their writing experiences and the new writing situation, elect to explore that link, and connect their experiences to the new writing situation. These three bridges often occur simultaneously, but the ways we can activate them differs between different writing tasks and depends on students' prior knowledge—thus the difficulty we face as instructors trying to enact transfer through our classes. Even more troublesome: “the three bridges do not presume conscious awareness of making a link” (251). Part of successful transfer occurs in knowing that some strategies and knowledge cannot be directly applied to new situations, but rather require reworking (Bastian; DePalma and Alexander; Reiff and Bawarshi). Students have the tendency of seeing genres and texts as monolithic artifacts because they often focus too much on how texts within a genre are similar, without enough consideration of the nuanced differences between works within those genres (Bastian). It can be difficult for students to work in a new writing situation when, in comparing it to their prior knowledge, they find the “situations are ‘paradoxical,’ both similar and different” (Yancey et al. 16). We can tap into a larger vein of knowledge if we open students to viewing their writing knowledge through a multimodal lens.

A multimodal perspective can help students perceive and analyze the various aspects of a specific writing task and move past the tension between what to carry over and what to leave behind by considering the ways in which works within a given genre achieve their purposes in myriad ways. A multimodal

lens allows students to perceive and analyze their writing process to make more conscious decisions when approaching new writing situations. Multimodal composing, and specifically multimodal re-mediation, can help students inhabit this paradoxical state, in which their purposes might be similar, but the modes of communication are inherently different, operating by logics that also hold this “paradoxical” relationship. This practice, in turn, continues to strive toward the goal Perkins and Salomon put forth for transfer as “a gradual accumulation of a varied and flexible repertoire” through “a variety of somewhat related and expanding contexts” (“Rocky Roads” 120). A multimodal perspective could reveal to students the ways in which genres and texts within those genres maintain multiple purposes, or how their own purposes and strategies shift in their writing processes. Such an approach asks students to diverge from what is comfortable and what is known to understand how that difference can be useful. Moreover, a multimodal perspective on the transfer of writing process offers different avenues for detecting instances where they can begin connecting; they can’t elect to make those connections without recognizing them, and if we offer them more ways to perceive these instances, they may be more likely to make those connections (or choose not to) in the first place.

Another way of addressing the difficulty of detecting and electing to make connections is to consider the ways in which access to new media allows students to more readily publish their work for a real audience—especially through social media. Students must be cognizant of the ways that they present

themselves through their public communications because their work is susceptible to scrutinization by employers and friends alike. Alexander and Rhodes focus our attention on the necessary questions we must ask ourselves as a discipline: because students are becoming more and more capable of accessing public means of communicative production, how can we, as teachers of writing, prepare them for that kind of reality? To think of simply abandoning them because new media might fall outside of what we traditionally consider composition's scope is unacceptable. Our students face a world in which information is readily available and easily disseminated; they must have a place to develop the skills necessary to navigate the bodies of knowledge they will encounter in and out of academia. This requires at least a cursory acknowledgment of the various logics that dictate the communicative landscape of a networked world in which information can come together or fall apart.

When asking our students to expand their gaze, we must offer them a framework for feeling comfortable in this extension. Jeff Rice's discussion of the implications of teaching using a hypertextual pedagogy that he defines as a network of meaning that expands tangentially offers us a way to consider the implications of a more multimodal writing process for our students. He discusses the complications inherent in working in "the age of information flow" (301), arguing that in the world after the internet, we face the problem of having too much information at our disposal. Rice mitigates the overwhelming nature of this age of information by choosing to see it through a pedagogy of "network writing,"



in which network stands for “a site of meaning circulation” while entailing also “the study of how information comes together and how it does not come together” (304-5). This potential for coming together seems to be the crux of the transfer problem; for novice writers, the capacity to see these potential links between information (prior knowledge) is underdeveloped or at the least, lacking analysis. Rice argues that students should “embrace the box-logic of accumulation and arrangement of too much information” (309). This box-logic asks that the student should feel like their project expands beyond their grasp, that it requires that they reach farther than they might think necessary. It also requires that they take in as much inspiration (material, photos, quotes) as possible for later scrutinization. With a multimodal perspective of process, we can offer students more resources to accumulate. If they can understand their writing multimodally, even if their final texts are purely alphabetical, then we give them more options to choose from when composing, and more opportunities to catch moments in which they can transfer aspects of their writing process. Everything that students encounter can be useful, though not always, but students should view their experiences in that art stance, in the sense that anything could be the breakthrough toward creating meaning in a project—their project here being their conception of their writing processes. They should see every new experience as an opportunity to unlearn or relearn their knowledge. Rather than collecting images and language, students collect strategies as part of their repertoire, applying both a problem-solving disposition and art stance to their work, employing both the strategies of a

researcher and artist to the work they do in and out the academy, both inclined toward an attention to detail and adaptation.

Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak tackle the question of how to better prepare students to transfer outside of FYC by focusing on their “Teaching for Transfer” (TFT) course, which tasks students with developing their own theories of writing. This development relies on metacognitive practices—defining and identifying terms for transfer, writing proposals and reflections for each assignment, and developing their own theories of writing—to cultivate a sense of noviceship on which “writing development is predicated” (Writing Across Contexts 39). Adopting the stance of the novice as the appropriate approach to learning writing focuses on the recursive and collaborative nature of writing and learning in general. It also builds on the idea that students must negotiate their entrance into new settings, rather than being passively initiated into them (Donahue 153). With this approach, students understand their place in university as one of inquisitive explorer—drawing on the language of boundary crossers and guarders—while teachers serve as guides along the path to navigating their relationship to writing. As such, noviceship affords students a more adaptive approach to transfer, highlighting the dynamic nature of writing knowledge. They should always feel like there is more to learn. A multimodal approach to developing transfer, and in turn, toward developing students’ theories of writing, would offer students more avenues through which to examine their conceptions of writing and what should transfer between writing situations.

To approach the second question—what should our students transfer? — we look at the role of prior knowledge in facilitating successful transfer. Writing Studies, as a discipline, has construed prior knowledge and the writing situation as being stable, which has proven to be problematic (DePalma and Ringer). As students face new writing situations, their relationship to their experiences changes; the way that they are helpful or unhelpful is dependent on what the newest writing situation asks for. Every new writing situation is unique while, conversely, our students employ mental frameworks that work to find points of similarity to give order to the various knowledges they draw on. Luckily, there has been a shift toward understanding transfer as dynamic and contextual, to account for the ways that prior knowledge and writing strategies need to be adapted between writing situations. DePalma and Ringer attempt to push this view of transfer with their definition of adaptive transfer as the “conscious or intuitive process of applying or reshaping learned writing knowledge in new and potentially unfamiliar writing situations” (141). This theory of transfer is dynamic, idiosyncratic, cross-contextual, rhetorical, and transformative, and that final characteristic—that of the transformative—is one of the central goals of the practice of cultivating uncertainty.

Our students should be comfortable with transformation as the necessary reaction to uncertainty. It is important to emphasize the ways in which transfer is both “conscious” and “intuitive” because there is often a focus on encouraging mindful transfer, while ignoring the more “natural” forms of transfer that students

engage in (Writing Across Contexts). Without that sense of familiarity, the unfamiliar becomes much more daunting; students need their doubt grounded in an act of recognition. However, unfamiliarity requires that students transform their writing strategies. It is through comfort in the unfamiliar that our writers may grow. We can build on the ways our students already mitigate their discomfort with unfamiliarity through their writing processes. Doing so requires a more complete understanding of what we consider part of those processes.

### A Multimodal Perspective on Process

Our students should approach writing from a destabilized position to make the invisible technology of writing visible again. This means drawing their attention to the ways that they think about their writing processes—to move beyond the actual act of writing itself, and to include the ways in which extratextual practices inform their writing processes and decision-making. Jody Shipka, in *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, considers the myriad ways students compose, taking a sociocultural approach to their processes, and providing a framework for composing that allows students more freedom in terms of genre, media, and mode, as well as for how to access multimodal and new media compositions. In her chapter on working with texts that intersect various genre, media, and modes, Shipka argues that the possibilities and limitations certain technologies possess become more apparent when students:

explore and reflect on the potentials of different genres, technologies . . .  
to begin to “defamiliarize the familiar” (Samuels 2007, 111), making more

visible the social and historical dimensions of technologies that have become so invisible, and so, seemingly natural over time. (127)

While Shipka talks about media and writing technologies, and how they inflect our discussions of multimodality, her conversations are an implicit discussion of transfer; her concerns for the way we discuss multimodality offer an avenue for considering how multimodality may help our students and us as teachers see transfer more holistically. Shipka's work here strays toward a larger conversation about multimodality's role in expanding the possibility for students' compositions, away from a conversation she and Paul Prior had delved into in their work in "Chronotopic Lamination," where they focus their attention on both the mental and physical spaces that writers inhabit when writing. As the literature suggests, students' perspectives on what counts as process and what doesn't can influence what they see as possible for transfer. Thus, we should focus our students' attention on the ways they navigate and create both the physical and mental spaces necessary for addressing new writing situations.

For students to understand their own strategies and writing process, they must go through a process of defamiliarization to scrutinize the choices they have made. Jenn Fishman and Mary Jo Reiff argue that the practice of bridging between two separate writing experiences "demands both the decontextualization of knowledge and the deliberate abstraction of general principles" ("Taking it on the Road" 128). Destabilizing students' writing process is necessary if they are to participate fully in whatever writing they encounter. If

we want writers to engage in successful transfer, there must be a combination of conscious transfer (here imagined as requiring a process of defamiliarization and transformation) and automatic transfer. Taking a multimodal approach to genre and rhetorical strategies can help students effectively navigate the boundaries between writing situations by offering them a more complete understanding of the genres they are working in. Specifically, students should analyze their own writing processes through a multimodal lens with the purpose of more fully understanding their own theories of writing as they work to formulate them in and out of our classroom.

Multimodal perspectives on process can help students better detect links between writing experiences because they have a more complete perception of the choices they make throughout their writing processes. In my own class, during my teacher apprenticeship at California State University San Bernardino, I tried to achieve this multimodal perspective through discussions on texts that varied in terms of media and genre, but also by stepping away from academic texts to show students that the kinds of things they watch or read outside of academia are worthy of discussion and offer ways to inspect their own writing processes. If our goal is for students to take their approaches to writing—and to the creation of knowledge at large—and apply them outside of FYC, then we need to reach farther outside of academia. For these reasons, in my own class I discussed videos on comic book adaptations and movie soundtracks by YouTubers like NerdWr1ter and EveryFrameAPainting, as well as comics by

xkcd and Scott McCloud's TED Talk on "The visual magic of comics." We also considered the nature of different media, like comics and film, to defamiliarize literacy and rhetoric toward a greater understanding of both. One specific class period looked at how sampling works as the intertextuality of music, and how that might relate to citation practices. But if I had been more focused on teaching for transfer, I would have had students talking about how these practices fit or do not fit into what they had to do for my class and for any other academic writing. Nonetheless, this allowed me to make connections between unlike things, to work on creating a mindset for students that valued the yoking of disparate media and genres. Not open-mindedness for its own sake, but for the sake of being open to possibilities that could allow for that one breakthrough idea that could breathe life into their work—not necessarily for my class, but beyond it.

I came short of what I propose in this article; rather than working toward understanding choice within a finished product, this article argues that we should be using multimodality so that our students can see their writing processes more completely. In my class, I was still too focused on the artifacts, rather than their creation. I should have asked them to analyze and manipulate their processes through what a multimodal perspective can offer them. The closest I came to this was in offering students a brainstorming activity in which they created a collage of words and images to come up with topics for their research essay. What would I have been able to offer them if I tasked them with working through different media and modes throughout their process? If we want writing in the FYC

classroom to be about knowledge creation, and not just regurgitation, our students need a wider range of strategies for processing that information—both in the sense of digesting and understanding it and of working through a process of writing to analyze and then synthesize information to create something new out of that process. Our students should have the widest range of communicative and representational strategies for dealing with their writing problems. Process should be as active as rhetorical choice.

In discussing Scott McCloud’s TED Talk, I failed to push my students to talk about what the talk meant for the process of writing itself. McCloud does so when he talks about the three different kinds of vision—the unseen, the proven, and the unproven—and how to work toward that last kind of vision, which we might call knowledge creation. McCloud argues:

What it comes down to, really, is four basic principles: learn from everyone; follow no one; watch for patterns; and work like hell . . . And it’s that third one, especially, where visions of the future begin to manifest themselves. What’s interesting is that this particular way of looking at the world, is, I think, only one of four different ways that manifest themselves in different fields of endeavor. (“the visual magic of comics”)

If I had been a more skilled teacher, I would have pushed on that paradox for understanding transfer and writing process—to look for patterns of the old in order to create something new. Or at the very least, to be ready for the new. We ask our students to draw on the old (their experiences and their past writing) to



adapt to new writing situations for creating new experiences and knowledge. But as McCloud argues, from his perspective as an artist, the approach he offers—or at the least, the observations he has made about his approach—can apply to creative endeavors outside of art, and toward more “academic” pursuits, for lack of a better categorization. I could have also touched on the idea that McCloud works toward throughout his talk: through this “road to discovery . . . it was just me embracing my nature,” that of the scientific mind in the arts—of that blend of academic and artistic that in itself presents another seemingly paradoxical concept.

Historically, teachers who maintained a pedagogy that incorporates both composition and creative writing “were often seen at the fringe of both fields” (Hesse 37). That sort of tension still exists enough that Doug Hesse, in his look at how the realms of rhetoric, composition, and creative writing have interacted in academia, must argue for a place for creative writing in composition. Moreover, the environment he writes in compels him to also argue that “composition’s current interest in multimodality” reflects a need to “focus on ALL the available means . . . including the nonfactual, nonpropositional, noncompelled by rhetorical situation” (48). For me, this requires a look at process and transfer in general because I espouse a shaving down of strategies and prior knowledge in which students actively decide what does and doesn’t work, not just in the choices they make in the text, but in how they approach the things that happen outside the page, in line with Prior and Shipka’s concept of chronotopic lamination. This

means borrowing and adapting from various disciplines and having an open discussion with students about the kinds of knowledge they bring to the classroom. In my class, I had a student who did not see himself as a writer, and he struggled throughout the two quarters I had him, but through a discussion of what his interests outside of my classroom were, we pinpointed a writing practice: his coaches had their players keep a scorebook of games, and they would have meetings in which they'd go over tapes and practice as a kind of debriefing. I wish I could have taken that conversation deeper, and discuss the principles behind such practices, and if I had been able to detect the opportunity to elect to connect his practices to the ones in our classroom, he might have been better for it.

Incorporating multimodality into our students' writing processes requires that we "unilaterally explore the place of creative writing—of creative composing—in teaching, scholarship, and in our expanded sense of ourselves as text makers" (49) through a focus on what multimodal re-mediation of our students' processes can offer for enacting successful transfer. I expand this exploration toward any composing process that could potentially benefit our students' theories of writing. Students should take an artistic and scientific approach to understanding their own processes, while understanding that the two approaches are not so different—but different enough to benefit from each other. Both approaches require rigorous attention to detail and a careful cataloging of information, yet they offer different kinds of products that meet different

expectations; we can help our students meet the expectations imposed on them by offering them a wide range of approaches beyond just the academic. No one needs to see that mess—the only traces will be those left in the text itself, and it is my hope that those remnants of process will offer their readers something valuable.

### Cultivating Uncertainty for the Novice Writer

Students should reflect on the transformation that they enact in different writing situations and the kinds of strategies they must employ in the process to confront moments of struggle during that transformation with a sense of confidence in the process itself. In their consideration of the kinds of processes that must occur for students to transfer writing strategies and practices, Yancey et al. think through what King Beach identifies as “the concept of consequential transition” as one that “is consciously reflected on, struggled with, and shifts the individual’s sense of self or social position” (9). This kind of transition builds on the ideas of transfer as “the act of transformation” (8), of necessitating change from one context to the next. Multimodality and, in turn, the process of multimodal re-mediation, emphasizes the literal transformation of strategies across modes and genres. This approach would in turn foster and develop a “problem-exploring disposition” rather than an “answer-getting disposition” (11) because students would have to navigate the murky waters of multimodal composing right alongside us as we work through the problems of implementing multimodal practices into the classroom.

The necessary nature of struggle in forming a consequential transition is essential for the purposes of cultivating uncertainty. The shift that struggle creates is the kind of moment that marks effective adaptation of prior knowledge and effective application of a theory of writing. Students learn from moments of “failure” as well as moments in which they find their practice matching with their own expectations and the expectations of the classroom. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak discuss this through zones of proximal development, with the need for instructors to push students far enough that they are challenged but not so far as to be discouraged. Thus, the problem-exploring disposition, which allows room for missteps and mistakes, is necessary for cultivating a productive relationship with uncertainty. Multimodal re-mediation can offer students an opportunity to see their prior knowledge in a new light, to de-familiarize their knowledge and experience and thus prompt students to question and adapt their prior knowledge to new writing situations.

In their study of students in their Teaching for Transfer class, Yancey et al. find that the students with the most success in engaging in positive and high-road transfer are those students who fail to complete a writing task or complete a task with partial success because they must consciously renegotiate their understanding of a given task’s requirements through metacognitive reflection and/or direct conversation with the instructor of the course. Interestingly, those students who see themselves as outsiders in the writing class are more likely to reflect on what does or does not work in different contexts, whereas students

more invested in their role as writers might unwittingly consider everything as general writing practices. Uncertainty, then, is an important part of successful transfer, and crucial to our students' writing practices. We must work toward a middle ground between students who strongly identify as writers and thus hold on to their practices and knowledge as somehow sacred and those students who do not put much stock into that part of their lives. By developing students' awareness of their prior knowledge, of their past experiences in writing, we can offer them a wider array of experiences to draw on, while also developing their critical awareness of when those experiences apply and how to adapt them to new situations.

For students to adapt their knowledge, they need to be aware of the moves they are making. Halbritter approaches this by arguing that novice writers should read (or view or listen to) their own work with a similar level of attention to detail as when they analyze the work of experts or canonized writers. Students must see their own work as worthy of study to see the value in developing themselves as writers with a critical eye; we should “respect students by refusing to create double standards or different rules for student writers than for expert writers” (Downs and Wardle 560). For students to understand the role of the novice as one of growth toward expertise, we must put students' writing—in terms of being worthy of analysis—at the same level as the kinds of authors we traditionally have them analyze, to truly embrace the democratizing force of the genre function. However, the kind of analysis we should ask of our writers should

be inclined toward text- and knowledge-production, that of gathering strategies for producing their own work, not just analysis for its own sake. In his discussion of the role of genre in shaping the way novice writers work between different writing tasks, Bawarshi defines the genre function as readers' interpretation of texts as belonging to a certain, socially defined category. The genre function democratizes the hierarchies within English Studies, which privilege established authors over student writers when it comes to criticism. While Bawarshi argues for an awareness of the homogenizing effects of the genre function on students' interpretation of the requirements and features of genres, we can turn this specifically to students' personal writing processes. We can look at the way that students' conceptions of what their writing processes should be are entrenched in similar discussions of texts we normally categorize as being part of larger genres; writing processes are susceptible to the same ways "we experience and enact a great many of our discursive realities, functioning as such on an ideological as well as on a rhetorical level" (339).

Ultimately, we must work through the uncertainty that we maintain in a world that is constantly evolving the means of communication. At the very least, we can admit that to encompass a full understanding of communicative practice—in and out of the academy—our students will have to take advantage of tools that extend beyond the printed page. To prepare our students for the future, we must allow these other media to inform our pedagogy. As Jody Shipka argues at the end of *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, we must "resist the privileging

questions like ‘What makes writing good?’ or ‘Is this written well?’ Instead, we must also begin asking questions about the purposes and potentials that writing, when combined or juxtaposed with still other forms of representation, might serve” (132). The question isn’t so much about multimodality itself, but rather the various media we might encounter in the classroom and in our students’ experiences. There are the mainstream channels we are most readily aware of: Twitter, Facebook, Second Life, World of Warcraft, Wikipedia, Reddit, etc. The ever-expanding nature of these types of media offers us opportunities for showing our students the importance of being conscious of how these platforms can inform their writing practices. Such an approach can help students see how they are already layering their experience over their writing practice.

#### The Layering Prior Knowledge and Practice

Fostering uncertainty as a productive frame of mind requires a multi-layered approach: students must reflect throughout the writing process to develop metacognitive practices; they must be challenged to a tolerable level of struggle in the process; students must feel comfortable in expressing doubt and uncertainty in the classroom; and finally, they must see their doubts as productive to themselves and their classmates. In order to build those practices into the classroom, we can use multimodal re-mediation projects to emphasize the productive energy of uncertainty. Gunther Kress, in his discussion of the effect of integrating a multimodal approach to applied linguistics, argues that “multimodality names and describes a domain for work; it does not name a

theory” (“Semiotic Work” 54). Instead, multimodality is a lens through which we learn something about the theories to which we apply it. Specifically, multimodality reveals the “partiality of modes” in communicating a concept or thought, and in this sense, troubles the “assumption of the sufficiency of ‘language’ for all human social, representational and communicational needs” (57). Each mode (speech, text, and image for Kress) can only express one dimension of a communicational need; multimodality in turn helps us communicate more fully by using different dimensions of communication. This applies to the way that students understand their prior knowledge and the writing processes they develop through them. We must cast doubt on the way students understand writing, to push them to question their analyses further to include a wider range of communicative modes.

To cultivate this uncertainty as something productive, teachers can use multimodal brainstorming and re-mediation to help students more fully realize their understanding of their writing projects, as well as their theories of writing more generally. If the theories of writing that students carry are so central to our writing practices, then our students should understand them and be able to express them as fully as possible. Our brainstorming practices already gesture toward the mixing of modalities; we ask students to outline to “see” the shape of their essays, we urge them talk about their ideas to us or to the class at large, and we have students diagram their concepts to understand their thinking as a



spatial phenomenon. We should strive then to use multimodality as the driving force for working comfortably with uncertainty.

We thus can marry the concept of a problem-exploring disposition with Geoffrey Sirc's approach of encouraging students "take an art stance to the everyday . . . suffusing the materiality of daily life with an aesthetic" ("Box Logic" 117). Sirc asks this central question before advocating for such an approach: "Is the essay still our central genre?" (111). We should consider the nuanced history of the essay, even if only very briefly, to understand where the role of uncertainty comes in, before going deeper into the art stance Sirc espouses. We can take the broad approach of thinking of "everything as the 'essay'" (Alexander and Rhodes 37) in returning to the word's French roots and Montaigne's prototype and exemplar, as an attempt or act of trying. Take the form back to its exploratory roots because that is what FYC is about—not the perfection of our students' writing, but the cultivation of their willingness to continue to grow as writers, a process which necessitates experimentation and, in some cases, failure. We take an essayistic approach to our writing, in that the processes by which we ask our students to produce text in our classrooms are the result of true exploration—by way of moving away from our "fetishization of the composed essay" (43). Students can benefit from resisting the idea of a composed writing process, away from this conception of their theories of writing as stable artifacts that can't or shouldn't be changed. Students should explore what is possible and play with what is acceptable in every writing situation, especially when it serves

their own purposes for writing. This is especially important when we consider that part of our fear of the multimodal or of new media in general is that we don't know enough to teach it; this an opportunity to accept our students' unique knowledge as an asset and point of conversation as part of a truer collaborative effort in the classroom.

We should consider the ways that students layer various strategies and writing practices to tackle new writing situations, in line with Prior and Shipka's concept of chronotopic lamination. Their entire processes for writing—from who they talk to about their writing, to how they set up their desk, to what music they listen, to even whether they prefer typing first or creating handwritten documents before working on a computer—is worthy of consideration, because at any one of these sites of creation, there is a possibility for transfer. Each layer of writing practice can be used or adapted or abandoned depending on the writing situation, and students should be able to reflect on how each decision they make effects their writing process. However, we should consider the overwhelming nature of asking students to choose from within those layers their most effective practices and experiences.

Some may see multimodality as threatening our grip over what composition is about, that it might expand beyond the realm of what compositionists traditionally know. Luckily, this “sense of threat has turned into active engagement” for some concerning how to use new media and multimodality to enrich our teaching of writing (Alexander and Rhodes 33).

Nonetheless, there is still resistance to such engagement, as it moves us away from what we traditionally consider part of writing.

Our focus still needs to be on writing, but with an understanding of the ways that other modes of communication impact how we understand purely alphabetic texts. We should ask ourselves: What resources can we draw on to inform our student's writing processes? Such active engagement is necessary in an environment of "consumer bias," both in the larger American landscape of commercial multimodal compositions and in academia because we must consider the very real issues of copyright and fair use when working with remixed compositions that ask students to transform and repurpose the compositions that surround and influence them (Westbrook). This has its parallel in more traditional writing when we ask students to work with various sources by rewriting them in their own words and forwarding them in their own work. This means creating texts and not just writing about already composed texts. Such pedagogy necessarily begins at the level of consumption, but consumption with the purpose of producing (Alexander and Rhodes; Fishman and Jo Reiff, "Taking in on the Road"; Halbritter; Westbrook). Bump Halbritter, in *Lights, Camera, Symbolic Action*, discusses what a more actively productive multimodal composition class would require of students and teachers. His approach to teaching writing urges a more inclusive consideration of modalities, through a multidimensional rhetoric encompassing the textual, aural, visual, and spatial dimensions of text creation. For Halbritter, a prosumer approach, one that advocates consumption of texts as

a means to producing texts, reflects an understanding of the Burkean parlor in its more complete sense, the conversation as not those notes left behind on the bar, but the conversation itself, the sights, sounds, smells, and movements of the discussion. After all, our students look on and listen, as well as read, all while occupying personalized spaces that they curate themselves (Prior and Shipka). Halbritter proposes that “the value of multidimensional rhetoric for teaching twenty-first century writing is found, fittingly, in embracing the contraries of recognizing wholes (entitling) and of recognizing parts (defining)” (76). To understand communication in the current communicative landscape, we have to go beyond the partial mode of textual language (Kress), and Halbritter’s “defining” process offers students a way to piece apart the complex weaving of image, sound, and text. Through such a rhetorical framework, we can un-teach the “schooled awe” (74) of a consumer-biased culture by allowing students to produce those works themselves, to go beyond mere technical skills towards craft and artistry.

This in turn helps to relieve some of the anxiety around the “reduction of technology and techne to ‘skills’ and ‘know-how,’ a reduction” that Alexander and Rhodes argue is “based on the emptying of new media of its excess, its generative power” (*On Multimodality* 19). This excess can only be embraced with the proper disposition, one that looks not to clean off the messy edges, but to look for some meaning within them. This excess exists in traditional writing as well, and the messiness and chaos of writing must be embraced and not ignored

in our classrooms, especially when considering the way we have “overlooked the messy, multimodal, and highly distributed dimensions of writers’ processes” (*Toward a Composition Made Whole* 34). We use writing as an illusion of order, a small glimpse into a swirl of conversations and concepts, and our classrooms should reflect that process. If we introduce students to that perspective on the work they are doing, they may feel more comfortable with the sense of dread that writing can produce.

#### Conclusion: The Solace of Uncertainty

I found myself reflecting on the power of multimodal re-mediation for transfer especially when composing this paper. This paper went through various modes, media, and genres. It began, as most graduate theses do, in a class for writing the proposal for said thesis. From there, it became a proposal for the Four C’s where I then re-mediated my thoughts and ideas for my paper into an eight-page paper, then into a twelve-slide presentation, which reflected on where the ideas for this paper had really begun—in a class with Jacqueline Rhodes on computers and writing, where, for my final project, I first questioned “how transfer and re-mediation (sic) can feed each other?” (“Transfer and Remediation,” see Appendix A). I tried to showcase my thoughts on the “crossroads of genre and multimodality” by showing, through the structure of the website, the split I saw between the two in the literature I was reading. What that space offered me, through the process itself, was a different way of viewing or interacting with my thoughts on the subject. At this point in my academic career, I was passionate

about what I was writing—I wanted to find answers for myself, and I had chosen the class for myself. That is an important part of what we aim to build in our students through FYC, though we can rarely rely on our students being passionate about FYC. It is difficult to work that kind of passion into what our students write in FYC, but it is important to do so, because we can push our students further when they have a personal interest in what they are writing.

Research suggests that students do not see FYC as a productive enterprise outside of FYC itself (Blythe and Gonzales; Moore; Wardle) or at least that they are not conscious of how FYC affects their writing once out of the course (Reiff and Bawarshi, 317; Yancey et al). Thus, it can be difficult for students to see the value in working on their writing processes in FYC when they don't see it as effecting their writing in general. Yet, even if our students are willing, we cannot have students who move on and think that their journey through writing is finished, and we can work toward that by offering our students assignments that matter to them, that require of them a multimodal and multidimensional process. We should the messiness inherent in multimodal remixing as generative rather than problematic, with some going as far as suggesting that unfinished projects be permitted in final assignments to promote this sense of growth beyond the classroom, and to reflect the messy nature of writing (Downs and Wardle; Halbritter). For Sirc, the importance of the box artists for composition was their readiness to draw from various experiences of text, image, and object to influence their own representations. Sirc argues for “a

pedagogy of the curio cabinet, an aesthetic of the objet trouvé” which considers “perception as a performative gesture” (“Box Logic” 125). His approach parallels the problem-exploring disposition necessary for high-road transfer, in that it asks the composer to work through the materials or (to extend the metaphor to transfer) rhetorical strategies and writing processes that they have in hand to work through an artistic endeavor, or for the purposes of transfer, to work through an unfamiliar writing task.

Cultivation of uncertainty then calls for students to be aware of the possibility and productive power of doubt; multimodal re-mediation offers students a way of confronting that doubt as fully as possible, and to recognize the ways in which their approach might be lacking in particular dimensions. Are they “seeing” their work? Are they able to talk about their work without relying on what they have written? Could they provide a road map to their ideas for someone to navigate their understanding of concepts? Focusing on multimodal re-mediation allows us to build on the concept of literacy linking, “the idea that literacies from one domain can be transferred, integrated, and reshaped to fit another domain” (Alexander, DePalma, and Ringer 35). While literacy linking describes domains as different discourses that an individual may be a part of, multimodality plays a part in every domain that an individual participates in. If writing links different domains, then working on writing using multimodality throughout the process should help students recognize those links more easily. Multimodality can serve as a tool for raising students’ awareness of those

connections, and for realizing those connections more fully, regarding their writing process and the knowledge they create through that process.

This requires experimentation on our part and on the part of our students. For students to feel comfortable in uncertainty, there needs to be a semblance of equality in the classroom. Teachers should work multimodally and present assignments and class objectives through multimodal works. I attempted such a move in my class, by presenting the prompt for their final project through a traditional text, and then re-mediating as a website for them to peruse. I found that I had more options available to me for communicating the kind of approach I wanted my students to take for their own re-mediation projects. We could discuss how their understanding of the assignment changed with this new presentation of the same assignment.

At that time, I lacked a framework for students to engage fully in that conversation and can thus endorse an approach that develops and supports a common language for talking about both students' development as writers and about the rhetorical aspects of multimodal compositions. But even opening the discussion to how I could improve the website offered students an opportunity to see something that was not expertly crafted, to question my relaying of information and thus engage in a discussion about what the project was asking of them; an approach that they should adapt for use outside of the classroom. The website also offered an opportunity for us to discuss how we could fulfill the same purpose differently, and how our choices change as we move across genre



and media. I felt uncertain about my own choices, and was able to get feedback from my students on how to be clearer about what I expected from them. One of my purposes for the website was to incite such a discussion, to spark questions that arose out of confusion about the assignment or between the two methods of representing what I wanted out of their final projects. I did so by borrowing elements of an FAQ—a box for students to send me questions, links to various articles that we had read during the class to refresh their memories, even calming music to ease the tension I thought would accompany them accessing the site and worrying about their final project. I wanted the discussion to prompt them to be more open about their uncertainty and while the discussion was not as lively as I wanted it to be, I was able to answer questions in a group setting that wouldn't normally have been raised, and it offered me a chance to talk explicitly about this social nature of writing—that they have each other as resources, and that many of them share the same uncertainties.

If anything comes out of this paper, I hope that we approach uncertainty with our students as an opportunity for growth. I hope that we pay more attention to the ways that our students struggle, and I hope that we value struggle as part of the writing process itself. My own experiences of multimodal re-mediations over the course of writing this paper offered me a fuller perspective of what I was trying to do and about how to make decisions that would shape it as a finished text. I struggled. And I tried every trick in my bag of tricks; I printed out drafts, I changed where I was writing, I played my favorite music, I took walks, I watched

videos, I took breaks, I pulled paragraphs out and isolated them. My experiences presenting my work—in Rhodes' class, at Four C's, with my professors, with a random counselor at a school I subbed at, in my notebooks and in the margins of articles—all of them informed the choices I made.

Even if each individual step along the way did not completely manifest itself in this “final” project, what I learned along the way was valuable to my writing process. That is what we want for our students: for them to be confident enough and passionate enough to work through and with uncertainty, and to see failure as a necessary and worthwhile part of their composing processes. Too often, students' approach to uncertainty about a writing task is to pretend they understand for the sake of keeping appearances, but if we show students that uncertainty and doubt are valued in the classroom, then they can engage with their tasks with the stance of the novice, the artist, the explorer—and in so doing, ask for direction. I know I have been fortunate enough to be able to talk to people about my ongoing project, and to share it in various ways with professors and classmates, strangers and friends. This network of modalities and genres embedded in conversations and texts has helped me to understand what my writing could be and only from there am I able to make the choices I make now. It's a daunting task, for novice and expert writers, and no one can survive out there alone.

CHAPTER TWO  
CONFERENCE PAPER PROPOSAL

Proposal for Pedagogy, Practice, and Philosophy 2019

Topic Area

Writing Space and Environments

Title

Cultivating Uncertainty Through a Multimodal Perspective on Process to Encourage Transfer

Synopsis

A multimodal approach to teaching writing process can mitigate the anxiety surrounding students' uncertainty when adapting their writing knowledge and practice when we see that uncertainty as a necessary productive stance in their writing.

Proposal

This project considers the ways in which a multimodal perspective on writing process can help students to better adapt their writing processes. This is in answer to the way that recent scholarship in transfer has looked at the ways in which students adapt prior knowledge and practices to new writing situations, rather than directly applying them. Students transfer process just as much as they transfer specific writing knowledge, and as such, they require a more complete understanding of what comprises that process; a multimodal perspective on their processes, building on the work of Paul Prior and Jody

Shipka in “Chronotopic Lamination” in understanding students’ processes, can offer students more opportunity for transforming and adapting their processes by showing them more of what makes up their processes than a single mode perspective.

This project also considers the importance of fostering uncertainty as a catalyst for transfer. Transfer requires the reshaping and adapting of knowledge and strategies, and thus our students should take a metacognitive approach to their writing process. Uncertainty is a productive frame of mind because it puts our students in the position of the novice; they are cognizant of the need to doubt their knowledge, to see it as insufficient. It is a position that promotes growth and a critical approach to their writing practices. A multimodal perspective in turn promotes uncertainty because it defamiliarizes writers’ writing processes by showing them different facets of their writing practices and strategies. It expands their choices by moving beyond the purely alphabetical. Such an approach to teaching writing process should emphasize uncertainty as a productive mindset to offset the anxiety that students might feel in having to constantly question and inspect their writing process. Re-mediating students understanding of their writing processes can hopefully encourage a higher success of transfer.

CHAPTER THREE  
CONFERENCE PAPER

Cultivating Uncertainty Through a Multimodal Perspective  
on Process to Encourage Transfer

Introduction

What should and do our students take from our class and what should/do they apply to the writing they encounter outside of our classes? Students need to see their own knowledge and practice as something worth building on while understanding that uncertainty is a useful part of working in new contexts. This is a difficult balance to maintain, and students will face failure when it comes to transfer; however, failure is critical to building toward more conscious and effective transfer. Through failure, we approach our writing with a critical eye, casting uncertainty on our choices throughout or writing processes. More seasoned writers doubt their own judgment in such a way that they use the resources available to them to get to a point where can produce writing—they draw on the productive energy of uncertainty. They understand that writing is an epistemological process brought upon by curiosity—a state of uncertainty that requires exploration to mitigate. Without doubt, there is no self-analysis—the kind of metacognitive process that is necessary for successful transfer.

Dispositions for Transfer

Part of successful transfer occurs in knowing that some strategies and knowledge cannot be directly applied to new situations, but rather require

reworking (Bastian; DePalma and Alexander; Reiff and Bawarshi). Students have the tendency of seeing genres as monolithic artifacts because they often focus too much on how texts within a genre are similar, without enough consideration of the nuanced differences between works within those genres (Bastian). It can be difficult for students to work in a new writing situation when, in comparing it to their prior knowledge, they find the “situations are ‘paradoxical,’ both similar and different” (Yancey et al. 16). We can tap into a larger vein of knowledge if we open students to viewing their writing knowledge through a multimodal lens.

A multimodal perspective can help students perceive and analyze the various aspects of a specific writing task by allowing students to perceive and analyze their writing process to make more conscious decisions when approaching new writing situations. This practice strives toward the goal Perkins and Salomon put forth for transfer as “a gradual accumulation of a varied and flexible repertoire” through “a variety of somewhat related and expanding contexts” (“Rocky Roads” 120). We can reveal to students how their own purposes and strategies shift in their writing processes by asking them to diverge from what is comfortable for them. Moreover, a multimodal perspective on writing process offers different avenues for detecting instances where they can begin connecting; if we offer them more ways to perceive these instances, they may be more likely to make those connections (or choose not to) in the first place.

When asking our students to expand their gaze, we must offer them a framework for feeling comfortable in this extension. Jeff Rice offers us a way to

consider the implications of such an expansion in his discussion of the implications of teaching in “the age of information flow” (301), arguing that in the world after the internet, we face the problem of having too much information at our disposal. Rice mitigates the overwhelming nature of this age of information by choosing to see it through a pedagogy of “network writing,” in which network stands for “a site of meaning circulation” while entailing also “the study of how information comes together and how it does not come together” (304-5). This potential for coming together seems to be the crux of the transfer problem; for novice writers, the capacity to see these potential links between information (prior knowledge) is underdeveloped or, at the least, lacking analysis. We can offer students more resources to accumulate through a multimodal perspective of process; even if their final texts are purely alphabetical, they will have more options to choose from when composing, and more opportunities to catch moments in which they can transfer aspects of their writing process. Our students should view their experiences with the sense that anything could be the breakthrough toward creating meaning in a project—their project here being their conception of their writing processes. They should see every new experience as an opportunity to unlearn or relearn their knowledge as they collect strategies as part of their repertoire. We offer them the skill to sift through that sea of experience.

## A Multimodal Perspective on Transfer

Our students should approach writing from a destabilized position to make the invisible technology of writing visible again. This means drawing their attention to the ways that they think about their writing processes—to move beyond the actual act of writing itself, and to include the ways in which extratextual practices inform their writing processes and decision-making. Jody Shipka, in *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, considers the myriad ways students compose, providing a framework for composing that allows students more freedom in terms of genre, media, and mode. Shipka argues that the possibilities and limitations certain technologies possess become more apparent when students “defamiliarize the familiar” (Samuels 2007, 111), making more visible the social and historical dimensions of technologies that have become so invisible. . . . over time” (127). While Shipka talks about media and writing technologies, her conversations are an implicit discussion of transfer; her concerns for the way we discuss multimodality offer an avenue for considering how multimodality may help students and teachers alike see transfer more holistically. Shipka’s work here strays away from a conversation she and Paul Prior had delved into in their work in “Chronotopic Lamination,” where they focus their attention on both the mental and physical spaces that writers inhabit when writing, which are as varied as their texts themselves. As the literature on transfer suggests, students’ perspectives on what counts and doesn’t count as process can influence what they see as possible for transfer. Thus, we should focus our



students' attention on the ways they navigate and create both the physical and mental spaces necessary for addressing new writing situations. For students to understand their own strategies and writing process, they must go through a process of defamiliarization to scrutinize the choices they have made. We must make them feel that destabilizing their writing process is necessary if they are to participate fully in whatever writing they encounter.

Students should analyze their own writing processes through a multimodal lens to more fully understand their own theories of writing as they work to formulate them in and out of our classroom. Multimodal perspectives on process can help students better detect links between writing experiences because they have a more complete perception of the choices they make throughout their writing processes. In my own class, during my teacher apprenticeship at Cal State San Bernardino, I tried to achieve this multimodal perspective through discussions on texts that varied in terms of media and genre, but also by stepping away from academic texts to show students that the kinds of things they watch or read outside of academia are worthy of discussion and offer ways to inspect their own writing processes.

Incorporating multimodality into our students' writing processes requires that we “unilaterally explore the place of creative writing—of creative composing—in teaching, scholarship, and in our expanded sense of ourselves as text makers” (Hesse 49) through a focus on what multimodal re-mediation of our students' processes can offer for enacting successful transfer. I expand this

exploration toward any composing process that could potentially benefit our students' theories of writing. Students should take an artistic and scientific approach to understanding their own processes, while understanding that the two approaches are not so different—but different enough to benefit from each other. Both approaches require rigorous attention to detail and a careful cataloging of information, yet they offer different kinds of products that meet different expectations; we can help our students meet the expectations imposed on them by offering them a wide range of approaches beyond just the academic. No one needs to see that mess—the only traces will be those left in the text itself, and it is my hope that those remnants of process will offer their readers something valuable.

### Cultivating Uncertainty

Students should reflect on the transformation that they enact in different writing situations and the kinds of strategies they must employ in the process to confront moments of struggle during that transformation with a sense of confidence in the process itself. It is important here to consider King Beach's "concept of consequential transition" as one that "is consciously reflected on, struggled with, and shifts the individual's sense of self or social position" (Robertson, Yancey, et al. 9). This kind of transition builds on the ideas of transfer as "the act of transformation" (8), of necessitating change from one context to the next. Multimodality and, in turn, the process of multimodal remediation, emphasizes the literal transformation of strategies across modes and

genres. The necessary nature of struggle in forming a consequential transition is essential for the purposes of cultivating uncertainty. The shift that struggle creates is the kind of moment that marks effective adaptation of prior knowledge and effective application of a theory of writing. Students learn from moments “failure” as well as from moments in which they find their practice matching with their own expectations and the expectations of the classroom. Multimodal remediation can offer students an opportunity to see their prior knowledge in a new light, to de-familiarize their knowledge and experience and thus prompt students to question and adapt their prior knowledge to new writing situations without requiring moments of failure that could otherwise discourage novice writers.

Interestingly, those students who see themselves as outsiders in the writing class are more likely to reflect on what does or does not work in different contexts, whereas students more invested in their role as writers might unwittingly consider everything as general writing practices. In their study of students in their Teaching for Transfer class, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak find that the students with the most success in engaging in positive and high-road transfer are those students who fail to complete a writing task or complete a task with partial success because they must consciously renegotiate their understanding of a given task’s requirements through metacognitive reflection and/or direct conversation with the instructor of the course. Uncertainty, then, is an important part of successful transfer, and crucial to our students’ writing practices. We must work toward a middle ground between students who strongly

identify as writers and thus hold on to their practices and knowledge as somehow sacred and those students who do not put much stock into that part of their lives.

### The Layering Prior Knowledge and Practice

Fostering uncertainty as a productive frame of mind requires a multi-layered approach: students must reflect throughout the writing process to develop metacognitive practices; they must be challenged to a tolerable level of struggle in the process; students must feel comfortable in expressing doubt and uncertainty in the classroom; and finally, they must see their doubts as productive to themselves and their classmates. To build those practices into the classroom, we can use multimodal re-mediation projects to emphasize the productive energy of uncertainty. Multimodality reveals the “partiality of modes” in communicating a concept or thought, and in this sense, troubles the “assumption of the sufficiency of ‘language’ for all human social, representational and communicational needs” (Kress 57). Each mode can only express one dimension of a communicational need; multimodality in turn helps us communicate more fully by using different dimensions of communication. This applies to the way that students understand their prior knowledge and the writing processes they develop through them. We must cast doubt on the way students understand writing, to push them to question their analyses further to include a wider range of communicative modes.

To cultivate this uncertainty as something productive, teachers can use multimodal brainstorming and re-mediation to help students more fully realize

their understanding of their writing projects, as well as their theories of writing more generally. If the theories of writing that students carry are so central to our writing practices, then our students should understand them and be able to express them as fully as possible. Our brainstorming practices already gesture toward the mixing of modalities; we ask students to outline to “see” the shape of their essays, we urge them talk about their ideas to us or to the class at large, and we have students diagram their concepts to understand their thinking as a spatial phenomenon. We should strive then to use multimodality as the driving force for working comfortably with uncertainty.

#### Conclusion: The Solace of Uncertainty

I hope that we approach uncertainty with our students as an opportunity for growth. I hope that we pay more attention to the ways that our students struggle, and I hope that we value struggle as part of the writing process itself. My own experiences of multimodal re-mediations over the course of writing this paper offered me a fuller perspective of what I was trying to do and about how to make decisions that would shape it as a finished text. I struggled. And I tried every trick in in my bag of tricks; I printed out drafts, I changed where I was writing, I played my favorite music, I took walks, I watched videos, I took breaks, I pulled paragraphs out and isolated them. My experiences presenting my work—in Rhodes’ class, at Four C’s, with my professors, with a random counselor at a school I subbed at, in my notebooks and in the margins of articles—all of them informed the choices I made.

We want our students to be confident and passionate enough to work through and with uncertainty, and to see failure as a necessary and worthwhile part of their composing processes. Too often, students' approach to uncertainty about a writing task is to pretend they understand for the sake of keeping appearances, but if we show students that uncertainty and doubt are valued in the classroom, then they can engage with their tasks with the stance of the novice, the artist, the explorer—and in so doing, ask for direction. I know I have been fortunate enough to be able to talk to people about my ongoing project, and to share it in various ways with professors and classmates, strangers and friends. This network of modalities and genres embedded in conversations and texts has helped me to understand what my writing could be and only from there am I able to make the choices I make now. It's a daunting task, for novice and expert writers, and no one can survive out there alone.

APPENDIX A  
TRANSFER AND RE-MEDIATION WEBSITE



# Transfer and Re-mediation

Crossroads of Genre and Multimodality

**TRANSFER:** applying rhetorical strategies from one genre to another, with emphasis of moving out of the classroom and into the 'real world'

**RE-MEDIATION:** translating communication from one mode to another and necessarily changing the meaning communicated

When we think about multimodality, we turn to the senses; sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. And when we move between them in our compositions we talk about remediation, or the reworking of material from one mode to another, and we say that this changes the way we "view" or "hear" whatever we are communicating - it changes our perspective.



"I draw on the New London Group's definition of mode ... 'modes of meaning' ... which I more often refer to as 'modes of communication'" ("Genre and Transfer" 33)

*How is this (not) a poem? Written on a wall?*

In genre studies, we speak about the transfer of rhetorical strategies when moving between genres, as students' antecedent genres (Bawarshi, "The Genre Function") inform the way they engage with whatever genre they find themselves currently working within.

*Can't hangry fit a text? Cook it up in the stove. Stir in medium genre mode and make me something raised.*

What happens when we take the idea of transfer and apply it across both genres and multimodalities, or when we take the idea of remediation and apply it in the same way? What are the differences and similarities between the two ideas in the way our discipline conceptualizes them?

"If we can't classify the essay without ossifying it, then what are some of its central characteristics?" ("Back to the Future?" 47)

When we confuse the distinction between medium, mode, genre, we are not mistaking them and we reveal the relationship between the three, the relationship between the productive, and the remedial.

We can think of transfer and remediation as forms of movement and as forces that shape.

How sure can we be of the features of a genre when genres are always changing? The essay is flexible (and personal) by nature and to define it would be to lose part of its (and the writer's) identity. The multimedia essay gestures

We move something that we have learned here over to this new experience. This new gesture, 57 multimedia communication

dangerous.

In this confusion, we might find the way we think about how transfer and remediation can feed each other.

"When does a technology change from being a medium ... to a convention of the genre, and thus (in some cases) a genre itself?" ("Genre and Transfer" 34)

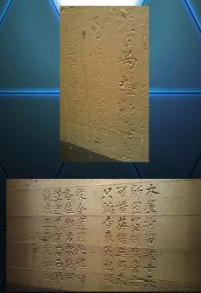
"written text itself is multimodal in that it carries visual, spatial, and sonic properties every time students type a new letter character on the page" ("Genre and Transfer" 18)

Poetry, or "poetic" writing is multimodal in that it gestures towards the other modes, the other senses, in its language.

"Separated from the activities the writing serves, the writing of one activity system will likely seem strange (even inexplicable) to an outsider" ("Mult Genre" 781)

experience, this new exigence. We move my communication into a new modal space.

We shape our strategies to fit a new situation. We shape the communication into a new form - text to image, image to sound, sound to touch. You get the picture - or sound.



The poem, thought of as a genre in itself, though there are subgenres within poetry. Poetry becomes a vehicle for communication and we have to think about the "triangulation of mode-media genre" ("Genre and Transfer" 26) to figure out where poetry stands along the spectrum of all three.

How does it act as a genre in itself? What does poetry as a genre dictate, and how is that different from what it dictates as a mode?

On the left here is poetry from Angel Island, etchings on the wall from Chinese immigrants detained on the island. We might also classify these poems as part of a genre in themselves, what became a genre for those detained there, with certain expectations and certain materialities - a tactile mode and a visual mode, on the medium of the wall, and the exigence being the fact of being detained and all the attending associations. The wall and the digging into it out of necessity. Detainees responded to each other's writing and formed their own poem in response to these that came before.

In being unfinished in the sense that the experience kept changing what writers believed needed to be written, the genre of the Angel Island poems kept changing, and in presenting them here in an image, and in talking about them in text, I have remediated them through the medium of this website. Even visiting the [National Department of Public Health's website](#) on the island itself, and in experiencing its leaving out part of the nature of what the island was (in the name of objectivity) sheds light on the nature of the genre, metaphorically repeats painting over the poems, silencing the work, and thus casts these texts in a different light, that works in relation to the rhetorical situation. A website can hide the genres that exist in relation to the information that it presents or does not present.

The poems ask for a certain reader, and their reader changes over what I consider another mode - time. If communication is written in a way that is meant to be reflected on after time, or over the course of time as a new kind of artifact, does time become a mode? How do different genres use time as a mode and how do they use time differently? A time capsule may deal with

multimedia essay gestures towards the inherent multimodality of the (paradoxically traditional) essay.

"remediations, appropriations, reflections, and performances often deepen students' learning and develop a fuller range of their communicative abilities" ("Multimodal Composing, Appropriation, Remediation, and Reflection" 167)

*Looking at them, they are all painting at the delayed progress.*



*Looking at them, they are all pining at the delayed progress.  
What can one sad person say to another?*

of artifice, does time become a mode; now on different genres use time as a mode and how do they use time differently? A time capsule may deal with time as a mode more directly, as it is an artificially created anthropological artifact. Time changes the piece that is written, and writers have to think about time as a feature of the rhetorical situation.

The writers take what they already know (antecedent genres) and apply it to a new medium (remediation) and to a new situation (transfer): "The Chinese immigrants, in particular, raised with a tradition of public poetry, composed carefully crafted verses that drew on Classical traditions, forms, and situations" ("The Writing on the Wall").

"Antecedent genres thus play a role in constituting subsequent actions, even acts of resistance" ("The Genre Function" 341)

*Look outside and you will see  
Reworked genres and modalities*

And the writers make due with the technology available. But what changes occur to the genre and how it is experienced by both writer and reader? What happens to something like the essay when it is made both multimodal and multimodal?

"No piece of writing is ever finished, it's just due" ("Learning Goals" 85)

No work in a genre is ever finished, others invested in the work of the genre will rework it. Writers respond to each other and continue to build a community around those responses, and vice versa.

How do writers/composers take what they learn from one instance of composition to another? From one medium to another? How can poetry or walls (as mediums) help us understand that process?

"blogging is truly writing within a community" ("Blogs" 79)

*I look back to know where to go  
Look to new places to put the old  
not when I finally get to know  
the place that our genre so loves*

Here, I'd like to think about the particular way poetry lets us see the crossroads of genre and multimodality of transfer and remediation

*When I speak, to broken lines  
Or had not written word  
And change the way  
I am seen or heard*

*To break the rules*

*They go through change again  
Revising the opening and the ending  
Not when they're being written  
Always knowing they're always being*

*I bring about a change in you  
And ask you to participate  
in what I have to show  
Show*



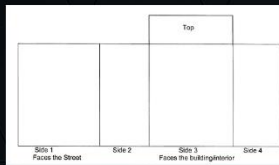
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This may not be poetry in the sense of words written down in lines, but it shares some of its materiality, the confined nature of the poem, the rigid structure that it can take, especially when we look at the rhetorical situation or at the kind of generic structure that the situation called for:



**Requirements for Traffic Signal Box Art**  
Materials will be used that ensure durability and longevity.  
• Preparation of the surface to ensure strong adhesion for durability and longevity. This may include sanding, a primer and any other preparation necessary for the optimum bond of the paint to the traffic signal box.  
• A professional contractor creates over the finished art that provides resistance to vandalism and the hot desert sun. Two applications (one coat) of SEI Chemical Co.'s 200 Gacrol Primer to cover all sides of the Traffic Signal Box when art is completed and cured are required.  
• The artist will provide an "Artist Maintenance Plan" per section V, sub C, "Maintenance and Conservation of Public Art" of the Art in Public Places Program Guidelines (dated April 5, 2018) that describes the material used (so that repairs may be made) and a schedule of required maintenance (such as the replacement of the anti-graffiti coating). The artist is not required to maintain the art or make repairs. A Sample Maintenance Plan is included with this application.  
• Proposals should include an experience letter for general public viewing and must be subject to the terms of use established by the Commission.  
• A current rendering of the proposed design for the artwork using the template provided above must be presented in JPEG format. Grades will not be accepted.

The "Artist Maintenance Plan" offers a way to consider how, even when a work is "finished," the composer has to consider how to maintain the future of its communicative possibilities. This can be in a material sense, as considered here (or the reality of being painted over for the Angel Island poets), or in a discursive sense, considering the environment the communication will enter and how to best survive it.

We see the composer playing within the confines, the door here opens to the gate within the image.

We see what we can consider as places where the communication must end, the edges of a canvas, or the end of a line of poetry, the content must consider the constraints of the form and change accordingly; form and content influence each other in the composer's mind, and that influence continues to change as they work within the framework and continue to imagine and reimagine the product through that process. I am here rearranging within the space of this website and what you'll find, as with these poems and these utility boxes is some nexus of several considerations and decisions.



And we see the composer of this box (left) working with the dimension themselves, using the vertical space to their advantage. And in my own composing of this image, I use that verticality myself, to emphasize the composed nature of the piece. Part of the power of remediation.



And then you wonder at something like this, with that empty space and you start to see what you might change. Composers-in-the-making (or those we consider earlier-in-the-making than ourselves) have a chance to see public work that they could improve on, or that looks like it has something missing. What does this work fail to do that they could do better? They start to consider themselves in the place of the composer. Maybe showing them brilliant works intimidates, but give them something messy like this and they start to see possibilities. They can reimagine instead of guess at the composer's process.

*Give me a little space, a little light  
And you might teach me to see  
The world's strategies revealed to me  
And not their words repeated distantly.*

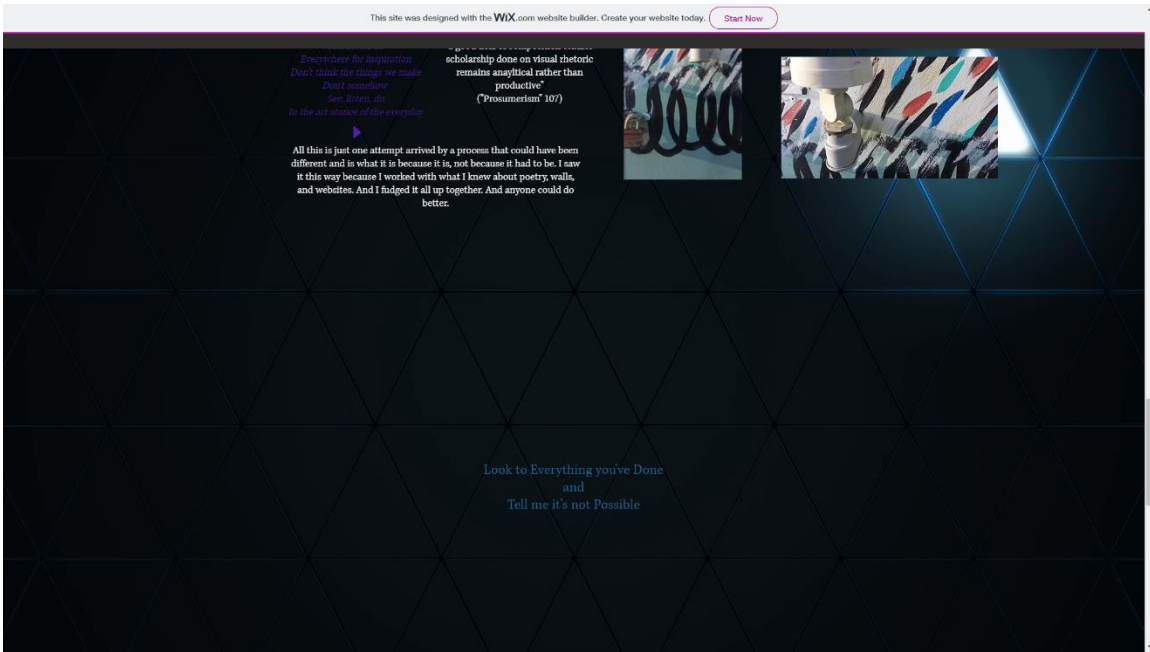
A good deal of composition studies scholarship done on visual rhetoric remains unapplied rather than

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Website designed by Ariel Zepeda

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