ADDING NEW MEDIA
TO THE 21ST CENTURY COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Many students entering today's college-level classrooms already have experience within the digital environment of new media. For most people living in the modernized world, the ability to connect to others regardless of distance at nearly the speed of face to face conversation via the World Wide Web is second nature. By the time students reach college age, they will have likely scanned their own groceries, mastered a high-tech phone/micro-computer, played at least one video game, and connected with friends in numerous places through texting, chatting, tweeting, or something invented tomorrow.

- Email has now become common for personal, educational, and business use.
- Twitter and Foursquare have become the new favorite means of keeping up with friends and contemporaries.
- Pinterest is quickly growing into a major social networking site with as-yet undefined total applicability.
- News of the world is delivered via YouTube video, streaming video, or status updates sent directly to the iPhone or similar devices.
- Texting gives one the convenience of online chatting without the necessity of being chained to a desk.

"Nowadays, we think nothing of emailing our aunts in Germany and getting an answer back within minutes or seeing the latest streaming video full of up to the minute news" *(Boswell, 2006).*

Not only is it expected instant answers to any possible question will be found, but that answer should prove both entertaining and engaging while it informs. Trying to compete with new media within the composition classroom might soon prove impossible.

Teaching with new media is complicated by the probability that there will be no 'standard' level of experience in any given demographic group for any given platform or device nor any reliable level of mastery of any new media format without gaps in the skill set. In other words, there's no way to ensure all students will be similarly competent in any given platform, access device, or usage level. Incorporating new media into the composition classroom is necessary both to prepare students for the challenges they are likely to meet in the working world and to collaborate with these media forms to gain student attention. Before one can determine how best to employ new media, though, it is first necessary to develop an understanding of what is meant when we say 'new media.'

WHAT IS NEW MEDIA AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

http://www.conversationagent.com/2007/11/what-is-new-med.html

When people think of new media, they generally tend to think either of the devices that can deliver this media or the various ways in which media is shaped to be delivered. In other words, they either tend to think of the computers, iPods, smart phones, Kindles, and other devices or they think of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, NetFlix, wiki pages, blogs, and other formats developed to digitally deliver information to the end user. To ensure everyone is working from the same definition, it is important to understand the difference and exactly what is intended when one uses the term 'new media.'

According to media expert Vin Crosbie (2006), there are two major hallmark characteristics of new media.

- New media is "uniquely individualized information [which] can be delivered or displayed to a potentially infinite number of people."
- Secondly, "each of the people involved - whether publisher, broadcasters, or consumer - shares equal and reciprocal control over that content."

Notice that in neither of these definitions is the platform or device containing or delivering the information mentioned. Within current terminology, the high variety of devices capable of delivering media no longer takes center stage as newspaper, television, and film once did. It would be almost impossible to do so given this fast-changing environment.

The point of new media is to be accessible across a wide variety of devices and thus leave the preferred form of delivery in the hands of the consumer. This enables media distributors to build in concepts that enable them to fully customize delivered content to each individual end user, but also allows each individual end user to determine whether to accept the distributor's entire delivery package or just opt to accept specific elements - such as accepting the article without the advertising. The interactivity of the second hallmark thus becomes its truly defining characteristic.

"Interactivity, as long ago defined by Dr. Jonathan Steuer in the Journal of Communications is 'the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time'" (Crosbie, 2006).

As Crosbie identifies it, new media is a concept that facilitates a "many-to-many" medium of communication regardless of the devices used to share it. This concept of the defining characteristic of new media as being highly interactive, personalized, and participatory is echoed in a similar exploration on the topic published in *The Economist*.

"What is new is that young people today, and most people in future, will be happy to decide for themselves what is credible or worthwhile and what is not ... they will rely on human editors of their choosing; at other times they will rely on collective intelligence in the form of new filtering and collaboration technologies now being developed" (Kluth, 2006).

In seeking out and participating in the new media, users are actually contributing to the creation of a new reality in which every individual with access to digital technology and a sense of how to use it truly has a voice in the grander design. For evidence of this, one needs go no further than the massive popular uprisings taking place throughout the Middle East in what is often being labeled the Facebook Revolution (Taylor, 2011). Through increased access to information, increased ability to explore the real issues and increased connections being made between people, social networking in the form of Facebook, Twitter, and other similar sharing sites have sparked revolutions in many highly oppressed parts of the world.

Those who know how to use these tools will be in position to join the new economy while those left behind in the so-called digital divide (people without the ability or the knowledge to contribute) will struggle to keep up. What this all suggests is that the world of composition entering into the 21st century is a world full of electronic change and adaptation as both our modes of delivery and our approach to information delivery must change. If we expect to teach our students how to communicate effectively in the new century, we must find ways of incorporating these modes of communication into the composition classroom or risk failing in the task.

TYPES OF NEW MEDIA

While new media is not described in terms of any of the devices used to distribute information and facilitate communication, part of the problem in getting students to participate is overcoming the barriers of how to use these devices effectively in order to gain access. New media is also not delivered as a simple static form that can be merely read or even listened to. Formats for the delivery of information are constantly changing and merging, allowing the newspaper to become a video channel, a video channel to put out a series of tweet text messages, or a classic novel to be converted into an animated graphic novel. While this can make the field confusing, knowing what some of the options are and having the flexibility to allow for unique combinations of the formats can make the composition classroom both exciting and effective as students make the transition into real-world application. We need to make static composition as dynamic as the field around it.

http://www.clipartof.com/details/clipart/70421.html

LISTSERVS AND CHATROOMS

One of the earliest forms of online communication that is still in use today is called a listserv. Through listservs, internet users can post their questions to a specific audience who subscribes to that listserv. This process is somewhat similar to standing at the top of the highest hill and shouting a question out to the group beyond. The message is carried across national boundaries, physical obstructions, gender, and ideological divides based upon the subscribing audience of the listserv. If the user has selected an appropriate forum, they can expect to get an answer back within a relatively short period of time. In addition, their question can stay online for as long as the server cares to host it. This enables other users from all places and existing within multiple time periods into the future to respond to the question and keep it open for further discussion.

Chatrooms build on this concept by making it possible to post instant responses to the text-based questions or comments posted. As soon as a user enters their thoughts on the chatroom board, other users can respond in real-time, simulating to some degree an actual conversation regardless of distance. Typically organized to reflect a group of shared interests, chatrooms allow people to share information on a wide scale while they are currently involved in it. They can do this without being dependent upon more traditional methods of news media distribution and without the wait typically associated with previous community-specific publications such as magazines and newspapers (Pack, 2003). There remain several inherent risks with this method of communication however, one of the most worrisome being that of internet predators seeking younger and more vulnerable internet users for harmful purposes (Sullivan, 2006). Since their earliest development, chatrooms have made the transition to a new digital landscape in the form of the Smart phone and texting, a new source of distraction and discussion for the classroom environment.

USE OF LISTSERVS AND CHATROOMS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

- As an instructor, join listservs such as those listed on the SDSU website (http://rhetoric.sdsu.edu/resources/listservs.htm) or others within your areas of interest. Become a part of the conversation.
- Encourage students to join similar listservs while attending your class; ask them to share something interesting they've learned through the listserv or questions they've had answered. They should begin to see themselves as participants in the dialogue rather than students listening to a lecture.
- Use chatroom software to conduct a remote class meeting - students without individual computer access can often gain access through library resources or campus computer labs.
- Explore chatting/texting shorthand as compared to academic English as compared to the language found in listservs.

WIKI WIKI WEBS (WIKIS)

Wiki Wiki webservers are essentially open-source databases in which access is permitted to a group or open to the general public. It is software that allows users to put textual information on the Internet and link to other pages without needing to have any other software or specialized equipment. With nothing more than a library computer connected to the Internet and perhaps a password to gain access, users can type messages, articles, ask questions, point to favorite web links, and communicate with others all while they are learning some of the simplest markup language commands to change the text appearance (color, size, italicized, or bold, etc.).

"Using only a web browser, any number of users can quickly and easily create, access, and edit wiki pages, including those created by others. While at first this sounds like a recipe for disaster, the truth is that sites using this concept have developed surprisingly complex and rich communities for online collaboration and communication" (Garza & Hern, 2005).

One of the most well-known wiki sites is Wikipedia, a site most students who have done research papers are familiar with. The open-source approach has allowed thousands of pages on a wide variety of topics to be added, but many of these pages lack the peer review and dedication to fact-finding expected in published journals or other sources. For that reason, many teachers, when giving research assignments, specifically mention Wikipedia as an unreliable source. Nevertheless, students often go to Wikipedia as their first source as a means of gaining the overall general picture of their subject before moving on to more specific research questions. Acknowledging and building upon this strategy is a better approach to student instruction. This teaches critical thinking and the importance of evaluating the validity of the source, skills that will only become more important as the interactive aspect of new media evolves.

The open-source approach makes the Wiki one of the most democratic forms of Internet publishing. Regardless of an individual's personal experience using new media formats, wikis are easy to learn and encourage participation by making it possible for every user to edit or add to every page. As a result, it strongly facilitates collaborative writing among

group members or the general public. At the same time, depending upon selected settings, the material placed on a wiki can be made available globally and remain available globally for as long as the wiki site is operational. Students using wikis can break out of the student/teacher roles they expect because they are taking part in a much larger conversation. This allows for greater accountability and greater discovery.

"Wikis invite experimentation at all levels of the writing process. Students create their own structure/processes/paths rather than just simply filling the voids that are so common in other systems such as word processing programs and course management systems. Theories of writing as process and of knowledge and language as social constructs become real when using wikis" (Garza & Hern, 2005).

In addition, wikis force users to make all the decisions regarding how the finalized database will look, how one might navigate from one section to another and so on. This may seem daunting at first, much like a novice art student looking at a lump of clay and understanding that they are to make something useful out of it, but soon becomes liberating with a little time for adjustment. Rather than being given a model to follow to the letter by simply dropping in the right information in the right place, wikis enable users to determine their organizational structure, presentation standards, or other features that contribute to readability and usability.

USE OF WIKIS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM
- Use wikis to help students track through the learning materials of the class on a collaborative level.
- Encourage students to understand that writing is a messy process, demonstrating thinking at work and allowing them to ask questions and receive responses.
- Help students pull thoughts together in their wiki pages, editing, sharing, and collaborating until they are satisfied their results illustrate their learning outcome for the semester.

BLOGS

The term 'blog' is techno-geek shorthand for the concept of 'web logging.' In the early days of its development, it gained a strong reputation as a form of online diary or journal entry program. However, as its potential became more widely recognized, businesses and individuals began using it as a more effective means of publishing editorial content and even news to attract consumers and readers. As an alternative form of news distribution site, blogs enable writers to allow comments from their audience, inviting discussion among a wide group of people from around the world and through time. Blogs have also proven to be very effective in bringing about real change as more and more people turn to well-established bloggers for information.

"Blogs can be used to make political statements, promote products, provide research information, and give tutorials" (Ng, 2007).

Today, blogs can be found composed by politicians, musicians, novelists, sports figures, newscasters, and other notable figures as attempts to not only share their opinions, but to promote their own personal agendas separate from the restrictive and uncontrolled traditional venues of newspaper and television. Blogs can incorporate a variety of media including images, sound files, video files, and links to other sites with more in-depth information or to point out a great post by a friend.

There are many ways in which blogs help composition teachers communicate strong composition skills to their students (Wysocki, 2004). By their very nature, blogs exist within and are forced to interact with complex rhetorical situations such as how much personal information should one share publicly and how much protection should be offered to the anonymity of others mentioned. Users naturally tend to link to the sources of their information, especially when it is deemed controversial in some manner, creating concrete intertextual connections between groups, and fostering closer textual analysis. They also encourage interaction among authors as each person responds to the blog in different ways and shares their thoughts in the comments section. Further comments can be directed either toward the main post or toward some of these other comments.

USE OF BLOGS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

- As instructor, use blogs to share important information about general composition good practices as is seen in the example at the blogging site Grammar Girl (http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com).
- Require students to maintain a class-specific blog and share comments among each other as part of the course.

WEBCASTS/VLOGS

Webcasts and video blogging are two sides of the same coin. These formats combine the blog's openness for self-expression with the interactive aspects of listservs and chatrooms utilizing the elements of streaming media to deliver. In effect, these formats both enable the individual to become his or her own interactive news program to discuss whatever most interests them. Depending upon the platform used, such as YouTube, these videos can also be commented on and spark discussion among the audience in much the same way as is accomplished by the blog.

Similar to webcasts but without the instant communication element, video blogs, or vlogs, add the elements of sound and video to the blogger's presentation, building or reducing their credibility based upon the quality of the presentation.

"The potential for everyone to self-publish has the ability to revolutionize the world by sharing video across cultures and countries" (Clint Sharp cited in Dean, 2005).

By turning to video, vloggers are able to bring multiple subjects to the screen rather than being concerned about the filters of mass media publishers. They can also incorporate as many of the other forms of digital media as they choose.

One of the things that makes webcasts different is that they can occur live and be opened to multiple streaming channels of audio or video. Many large and small businesses have already discovered the advantages of webcasting as an effective and more efficient means of conducting business as compared to transporting representatives from field offices to the primary location for meetings.

"Online meetings are interactive and collaborative. They're in real time so there's two-way communication via instant messaging or other software between a participant and the conference leader or across the team or group, depending on how you customize the meeting. You can instantly share content and visuals, watch and listen to presentations or ask questions and make comments – often simultaneously" (Krotz, 2007).

Within this setting, webcasts are becoming more widely used as a means of training new employees, distributing new product information, and providing customers with live help or education about products among other things. Business to business applications have followed in the same line. Wider applications include politicians webcasting to launch new campaigns or to advocate party affiliations such as the webcast in which Hilary Clinton announced her candidacy for president or organizational use as a means of quickly distributing press releases and new product announcements. Distance learning and even traditional learning scenarios have also employed the use of webcasts both in and out of the classroom.

USE OF VLOGS/WEBCASTS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

- Many of the same techniques used in the classroom with blogs can be repeated with the use of vlogs after ensuring that all students have access to the proper equipment.
- Webcasts can be assigned on a collaborative basis, encouraging small groups of students to create presentations or to conduct class experiments and report from the field. Be sure your campus library and at least one student in each group has access to appropriate hardware and software.

CONCLUSION

One of the most exciting things about the new media advances that have been made in the past 10 years or so is the way that it is changing the writing landscape. Numerous forms are merging and building off one another to create entirely different forms of media. This is not only changing how we expect to receive our information, but also how we process it, accept it, and share it. Information is no longer viewed as the exclusive property of the owner but has morphed into something collaborative, interactive, and ever-changing. Composition studies, focused as they are on understanding the communication processes between humans, must continue to use these techniques and new ones that arise if they are to effectively prepare students to compete in the working world of the 21st century.

Rather than being phased out of existence, it seems clear that composition studies are even more in demand today as students must learn to navigate the different forms of literacies required to function in the new media world. Only by teaching these literacies in the classroom for proper use and participation can composition classes be successful.

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