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# Mapping New Routes to Composition: Allowing Access Through Universal Design for Learning

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**Mapping New Routes to Composition: Allowing Access Through Universal  
Design for Learning**

By

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Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts,  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Looking at multimodal composition through the perspective of disability studies, this thesis explores the links between multiple intelligences and multimodality to discover the rhetorical skills students report learning as a result of this method of teaching. The exploration of this topic includes a study involving students enrolled at a small Midwestern university. A qualitative approach was used, with the author directly interviewing students about their experiences with multimodal composition to determine the skills developed as a result of this approach. Prior to the interview, the student volunteers took a test based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. This test was included to discover any links between multimodal composition, multiple intelligences and rhetorical skills students reported developing. Using grounded theory as a foundation, the author analyzed the study results and concluded by suggesting a pedagogy framed in universal design for learning that provides access to the composition classroom to all students.

## CHAPTER I: Surveying the Road

According to a 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Department of Census, almost 84 percent of U.S. households owned computers and “74.4 percent of all households reported Internet use” (File and Ryan 2). Not only has the advent of the computer, Internet and other technologies changed the world where our students live, but it has impacted the way we teach composition. In the last two decades, the New London Group, Gunther Kress, Cynthia Selfe and others have led the way towards a multimodal approach to composition. A 2005 study funded by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) found that “Sixty-two percent of respondents (n=28) considered multimodal compositions to be texts that included a range of communicative modes including media such as audio, video, animation, words, images, and others.” (Anderson et al 69). Today’s composition teachers have more tools at their disposal than at any other time in history.

My own awareness of multimodal composition and its implications for my intended career as a composition instructor occurred during my first graduate course, Rhetorical and Critical Theory, a course focused on visual rhetoric. Until taking this course, I had thought about composition in terms of a traditional, alphabetic essay. In this course, my understanding of composition/rhetoric began to expand beyond the written word to include other modalities, such as photos, paintings, advertisements, etc. Prior to this course, I had looked at visual rhetoric more as a composition tool to be evaluated in written form rather than a rhetorical composition in itself. For instance, I understood writing a rhetorical analysis of a

particular advertisement or speech and evaluating the appeals (ethos, pathos, logos and kairos) and identifying the rhetor's message and its effectiveness with a particular audience. However, I began to realize that these visual arguments could actually be viewed as compositions. This experience helped me to begin looking at composition in an entirely new way, expanding my definition of composition to include a multimodal approach that encompassed a wide range of media.

In particular, I began to think about one of my children and the way that she could easily compose excellent visual rhetorical arguments, but struggled with composing traditional essays. For instance, in a Photography II course, my daughter completed a documentary photography project for the last assignment. Emphasizing the importance of "storytelling" in the project, the instructor asked students to present a final portfolio that included at least ten prints, four contact sheets and an artistic statement about the issue they decided to depict. Looking at my daughter's final project, I was impressed with the way she used photos to make a visual argument about the dangers of alcoholism and the need for a recovery program. As part of the final project, she made an oral presentation to the class, using her photos to deliver her message about alcoholism. Viewing this project from the perspective of composition/rhetoric, I wondered if a project like this photo documentary could be implemented in a composition course, expanding it to include an essay. Would the visual project also help students to improve writing, since it provided a framework, or guide, for a written essay?

Another project my daughter completed during this first year of college indicated that using a multimodal approach did improve writing. In an

Introduction to Fine Arts course, my daughter was required to choose one chapter, focused on a particular discipline (photography, art, architecture, music, etc.) and create a Power Point presentation with a clear thesis statement, either implied or stated, which included visuals and references to the textbook and other supporting documentation along with a Works Cited page. Naturally, my daughter chose photography, an area that she had begun pursuing while still in high school. Since I had often brainstormed ideas and offered suggestions for improving her writing in a first-year composition (FYC) course, I anticipated helping her with this project. However, I was taken by surprise when she immediately began working on this assignment by herself after hearing me explain that she needed to look at this project like an essay, developing a thesis statement and using visuals and words as supporting evidence. Not only did my daughter complete the project without any input whatsoever from me, but she was asked by her instructor for permission to use her Power Point presentation as an example for future students. Her presentation included a clear thesis, supporting evidence in the form of visuals and written text and a Works Cited page. As evidenced by her independent ability to create text along with the visuals to make a convincing argument, my daughter improved her rhetorical skills through a multimodal approach.

As I recalled these experiences in my daughter's life, I began to realize the importance of understanding that students learn and process information differently in order to provide more choices in making rhetorical arguments. Traditionally, composition has been taught primarily through an alphabetic approach with an emphasis on composing written essays. Ellen Cushman

observed in an article on new media scholarship: “Even though multimodal discourses and the sign technologies that allow their production are increasingly important to everyday acts of meaning making in schools, workplaces, and communities, the cultural practices of knowledge production in English still largely rely on the letter and print” (66). In other words, the world of our students is becoming more and more visual, but we continue to rely exclusively on textual communication in our classrooms. I would argue further that a multimodal approach not only addresses the changing technological advances in the world of our students, but also allows more students to succeed in composition classrooms. For instance, in my daughter’s situation, she was able to identify a clear thesis through the visualization of a project – a skill that she struggled to develop while taking FYC. Both of these visual projects also helped my daughter to organize her information more effectively. These experiences have led me to believe that composition can be taught more effectively by incorporating multiple media, using a multisensory approach, in the pedagogical framework of a composition course.

Some experts believe composition teachers could learn even more about multimodality and its benefits to students by looking at composition from the perspective of disability studies. In their introductory section of an article on multimodality and composition published in *Kairos*, Cynthia Selfe and Franny Howe introduce the topic by stressing the important relationship between disability studies and the teaching of composition. The authors state: “We need to pay attention to the teaching of composition through the lens of disability studies

to remind ourselves of just how much our profession has to learn, and just how much we have been content to ignore” (Yergeau et al.). In order to reach more students in a multimodal approach to composition, Selfe and Howe advocate turning to disability studies to further enhance teaching methods and strategies for reaching students of a variety of learning styles.

In this same article, Melanie Yergeau, both an English professor and a person with a disability, elaborates on the connection between multimodality and disability studies, saying:

When I think about the TechRhet listserv, the work of Gunther Kress, the vibrant digirhet blogosphere, the work featured in *Kairos*—or, more realistically, when I think about the emphasis on the sensorial and epistemological possibilities of multimodal composing, of the doors multimodal composing can potentially open for those who make meaning in what are considered nontraditional ways—when I think about all of these things, the overlaps with disability studies seem so obvious. At root, I think, both areas of inquiry (C&W and DS [Computers & Writing and Disability Studies]) are concerned with access, with opening up possibilities.

In other words, viewing multimodality through the perspective of disabilities studies provides students with even further access to composition.

Agreeing with Yergeau’s stance on the connection between disability studies and multimodal composition, I decided to explore multimodal

composition through the perspective of disability studies to discover the rhetorical skills students report learning as a result of this method of teaching. My exploration of this topic includes a review of the current literature and a study involving students enrolled at a small Midwestern university. I use a qualitative approach, directly interviewing students about their experiences with multimodal composition to determine the skills developed as a result of this approach. Prior to the interview, the student volunteers took a test based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (MI). Gardner identifies musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist as forms of intelligence (*MI: New Dimensions 1-8*). I included the test, since I was also interested in discovering any links between multimodal composition and MI.

In the following pages, I review my research and conclusions, beginning in chapter two where I synthesize the topics of multimodality, disability studies, MI and universal design. The common thread that weaves these areas together is a concern for access. I argue that a universally-designed classroom offers more students the opportunity to succeed through the inclusion of multiple modes of composition which allows students to use a variety of intelligences in the composition process. I explore the natural relationship formed between multimodality and MI by looking at the work of Howard Gardner and applying his theory of MI to examples of the variety of multimodal approaches used by several composition instructors. I address concerns composition instructors have expressed about displacing other key components of their courses or lowering

expectations by incorporating multiple modes of composition into their classrooms. I conclude by reiterating the need for a universally-designed classroom that addresses the needs of all students.

In chapter three, I discuss the methods I used for my research and the methodology behind this approach. As discussed previously, my research includes both a MI test and individual interviews with students. Through my research on multimodality and its intersection with disability studies and universal design, I discovered that a substantial portion of the literature is written from the perspective of composition instructors. I wanted to interview students directly to discover their understanding of multimodality and its role in helping students develop the necessary rhetorical skills to succeed in composition. To determine the skills students learned and the relationship between a multimodal approach and the development of these skills, I framed my study in grounded theory to determine the particular patterns I noted through a careful examination of the student interviews.

In chapter four, I discuss the findings of my study in detail. My findings suggest students develop rhetorical skills through a multimodal approach, rely on dominant intelligences in the composing process, prefer using more than one modality in making a rhetorical argument and are creating multimodal compositions in courses across academic disciplines. To arrive at these conclusions, I looked at the results of the MI test to determine whether there was a correlation between the participants' particular intelligences and their preferred composition modality, analyzed the responses collected through the interviews to

discover if a multimodal approach helped students develop the rhetorical skills needed to succeed in composition and looked at the ways students reported developing these rhetorical skills, how they were using their intelligences in composing and any challenges or obstacles such an approach presented.

In my final chapter, I take the findings from the study to develop a pedagogy based on universal design for learning (UDL) that engages students, presents material/concepts in multiple ways and allows students to compose in multiple modes. In an article on universal design in First Year Composition (FYC), Danielle Nielsen says she realizes that not every student will succeed, but “the pedagogical practice [of UDL] fosters an inclusive classroom that makes it more likely that higher numbers of students will not only succeed, but also learn in ways that best suit them” (Nielsen 3-4). Through framing my pedagogy in UDL, I look at the way universal design considers the MI of students and utilizes multimodality as a vehicle to provide access to the composition classroom for all students. However, along with these benefits, UDL may also present challenges to the instructor. I address these challenges as well as the problems solved as a result of such an approach.

## CHAPTER II: Taking the Scenic Route: Exploring Alternate Paths

One of the first steps towards looking at composition studies through the lens of disability is understanding the concept of UDL. According to the Center for Universal Design, “Universal design (UD) is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” Although this definition may sound like one that describes the environment, many advocates of UD have taken these principles to design classrooms and universities that provide access to all students – regardless of a disability. Citing the work of institutions like Ohio State University and the University of Washington in developing pedagogies which open the doors of learning to more students, Jay Dolmage calls UD “an action,” “a worldview,” “a form of hope, [and] a manner of trying” (24). In other words, a universal design of a composition classroom is a deliberate choice made by composition teachers who believe that this design provides access to a larger body of students. In this chapter, I argue that such a framework allows more students access to composition and the opportunity to succeed through a multimodal approach that addresses the MI of students.

While not every student will succeed, this approach offers the greatest possibility of student success in composition by providing students with multiple avenues to composition. Using multiple media, such as words, audio, video or visuals, ensures that each student has the opportunity to learn to make rhetorical arguments through a variety of avenues. As students utilize a variety of modalities

in both the process of composition and the finished product, these students will discover tools they can use in both understanding and making rhetorical arguments. This knowledge may even help them to compose traditional essays more readily, transferring skills learned through one media to another form. For instance, students that are very visual may find that an illustration helps them to develop a more effective argument. These students may find it helpful in future classes to draw a picture of the argument they are attempting to make or find an illustration that exemplifies this argument. This process may help students to write an essay by helping them to focus on their main argument and visually organize the essay with supporting documentation. The possibilities of implementing UDL in a composition classroom are innumerable and need to be explored to the fullest extent. The benefits of such an approach cannot be fully realized until more of our composition classrooms integrate UDL as an integral part of their pedagogy. However, it appears indisputable that such an approach allows more students the opportunity to succeed.

Howard Gardner, pioneer of the theory of MI , would likely support a multimodal approach to enhance the experiences of every student and allow more students the opportunity to succeed in composition. As he noted in *Multiple Intelligences: New Dimensions*, “As human beings, we all have a repertoire of skills used for solving different kinds of problems” (32). Gardner has identified this repertoire of skills as MI: musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. In Gardner’s theory of MI, a student who is particularly skilled in the area of linguistics would likely

perform well in a traditional composition classroom. Linguistic intelligence involves the use of words, spoken or written. Using the poet as an example of a person equipped with strong linguistic intelligence, Gardner describes the poet as a person with “a sensitivity to the meaning of words,” “a sensitivity to the order among words – the capacity to follow rules of grammar, and on carefully selected occasions, to violate them,” and “a sensitivity to the sounds, rhythms, inflections, and meters of words” (Gardner, *Frames* 81-82). Based on Gardner’s theory of MI, a student that possesses a strong linguistic intelligence would be comfortable with using words and almost instinctively understand the placement of these words in a traditional essay. In contrast, those students with other dominant intelligences, whose linguistic intelligence is limited, would struggle with writing an essay and would likely benefit from a multimodal composition course that offers a variety of approaches.

Composition has come to include much more than simply putting words on paper. Rhetorical arguments can be made through a variety of multimodal avenues, including words, photographs, videos, and more. It is important for us to begin looking at these choices we have at our disposal and that of our students. Gunther Kress describes these choices quite clearly in an article he wrote for *Information Design Journal & Document Design*:

In the multimodal landscape of communication, choice and therefore design become central issues. If I have a number of ways of expressing and shaping my message, then the questions that confront me are: which mode is best, most apt, for the

content/meaning I wish to communicate? Which mode most appeals to the audience whom I intend to address? Which mode most corresponds to my own interest at this point in shaping the message for communication? Which medium is preferred by my audience? Or by me? How am I positioning myself if I choose this medium or this mode rather than those others? All of these call for choices to be made, resting on my assessment of the environment in which communication takes place (116).

Along with the questions posed by Kress, I believe that composition instructors can allow more students access to composition by asking themselves the following questions: Which modes can I use in my classroom to ensure that students receive the opportunity to compose in ways that complement their particular intelligences? How can I use these different modalities to teach the composition skills I feel are necessary for my students to learn? In the following section, I begin by exploring the connection between individual intelligences and composition and then discuss examples of ways instructors have used multimodal composing methods to teach the rhetorical skills they feel are important for students to learn.

### **The Intersection of MI & Multimodality**

Gardner advocates a school that is “individual-centered” and takes a “multifaceted view of intelligence seriously” (*MI: New Dimension* 5). Although it may be difficult to individualize a college classroom, instructors can offer options to students with an assortment of skill sets to allow more students the opportunity

to succeed in composition. A multimodal approach to composition offers just such an opportunity. For instance, students with strong spatial intelligence would likely benefit from using visual media in the composition classroom – whether the visuals are used as part of the composing process or as the finished product in making a rhetorical argument. Other intelligences identified by Gardner are already a part of most composition classrooms. Along with linguistic intelligence, many composition instructors cater to intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences through various classroom activities and assignments. Gardner describes intrapersonal intelligence as an “access to one’s own feeling life” (Frames 253). Students who are gifted with intrapersonal intelligences would know themselves well and would likely be able to more easily make a rhetorical argument about a topic important to them as individuals. In most composition classrooms, students are given choices in topics and encouraged to pursue areas of personal interest. Likewise, interpersonal, or “the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals” (Gardner, Frames 253) is another intelligence employed in many composition classrooms, such as in the discussion of determining audience or in the utilization of peer reviews or group discussions. Students with strong interpersonal skills benefit when working with others. As can be seen by the examples I have noted, a more individualized classroom can actually be achieved through the utilization of a variety of teaching methods and multiple options for composing. Although it would be nearly impossible to completely individualize a college composition classroom, instructors can offer more students the opportunity to succeed by using a multimodal approach.

For instance, Geoffrey Sirc uses what he terms a box pedagogy, based on Marcel Duchamp's *The Green Box*, in his first year composition (FYC) courses, allowing students to gather an assortment of information and arrange it in pieces through the use of technology. Explaining, Sirc says:

The Green Box is emblematic of how I want to use technology in my writing courses: as allowing students an easy entree into composition, a compelling medium and genre with which to re-arrange textual materials – both original and appropriated – in order to have those materials speak the student's own voice and concerns, allowing them to come up with something obscure, perhaps, yet promising illumination (113).

To further illustrate his method of teaching, Sirc refers to the box artistry of Joseph Cornell, Walter Benjamin and George Maciunas, focusing particularly on Cornell. While Duchamp's *Green Box* was composed of random textual notes and renderings, Sirc describes Cornell's boxes as artistry with "an ultimate poetic effect" (Sirc 114). In other words, the random objects placed in Cornell's boxes joined together to deliver a powerful message to its audience. One of the basics of composition is teaching students to make rhetorical arguments. Through the use of Sirc's box pedagogy, students are using a variety of intelligences through different modalities while learning to create an argument.

Just as Cornell combined artifacts, other visuals, texts and occasionally even music to construct his boxes, Sirc suggests that students may create electronic boxes of visuals, texts and audios in a particular space, such as a web

page, to create their own “box.” Through this box pedagogy, Sirc focuses his courses around “practicing search strategies and annotating material” (Sirc 122), skills that are highly important to develop in FYC. As an example, Sirc suggests assigning a general topic, such as clothing, or a topic based around the class reading and then breaking the class into small groups to explore topics in-depth. For instance, if a class were reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Sirc proposes that teachers ask students to begin exploring topics like “slavery, African-American religion, the Northern migration, Harlem nightlife, the Nation of Islam, Malcolm’s speeches, Malcolm’s media reception, the Islamic faith and Malcolm’s legacy” (Sirc 134). The students then begin to arrange visuals, text and even audio on a web site for the classroom. As Sirc explains, “The student becomes a mixer or DJ, practicing the key compositional arts of selection, arrangement, and expression” (Sirc 134). Sirc suggests culminating this project with an academic essay, explaining that the process of gathering information, annotating and arranging it and exploring a particular aspect of personal interest will serve as a foundation for the formal essay. Through Sirc’s method, composition instructors allow students to use a variety of intelligences through various modalities and teach important composition skills at the same time.

Sirc is certainly not alone in his belief that a multimodal approach to teaching composition can help students understand basic principles of writing an essay. Stefani Relles illustrated this teaching strategy by describing a study of 91 students in a remedial writing class. Explaining the concept behind the study Relles said, “Since it is generally accepted that argument is a key concept in

college writing, the study focused on students' digital literacies in the context of crafting online arguments" (478). The study used a social media site as a platform for students to develop online identities that showcased themselves as a college writer. To achieve this goal, students made an argument for this identity through the combined use of profile pictures and other visuals, videos and text. Although the goal of these researchers was to determine the effectiveness of using various modalities to improve rhetorical skills, the study's use of these modalities also ensured that students were able to make choices in modalities based on a particular intelligence strength.

The authors of this study likened developing a profile picture to writing a thesis statement. A profile picture needs to reflect the college student's identity as a writer in the same manner that a thesis statement reflects the main idea of an essay. Just as a thesis in an essay needs to be supported by evidence, a profile argument must be supported. However, the evidence within the social media profile will not be simply limited to textual support. Along with textual support, students in the study used images "such as logos, postcards, cartoons, and bumper stickers to justify identity claims" along with "YouTube videos" and "commercial songs" (Relles 492). Although the study asked students to support a profile as a college writer, students were encouraged to include their own relationships with people, interests/activities and personal preferences in supporting these profiles. This approach closely mirrors the way that students use their own identities in writing a traditional college composition. For example, students may be given an assignment to write a persuasive essay about the importance of supporting a

particular non-profit organization and decide to write about organizations dealing with animal rights, pro-life, needy families or a variety of other organizations, depending on the interests of individual students. In other words, students will include their own identity in their writing. Similarly, their individual identities can be supported in a social media site by using media and text that reflects their profile picture, the thesis of the argument they are making about themselves.

Through this project, students were able to receive feedback about their ability to support an argument and further develop the skills needed to produce a strong argument in any piece of rhetoric. The project also served as a way for students to learn to revise an argument, much in the same manner that would be done in a written essay. For example, a student may have discovered that the evidence he presented as support for a thesis (profile picture) was insufficient and needed to be revamped; or, the student may find that the thesis itself needs to be changed to more accurately reflect his supporting materials. These strategies are quite similar to those used in revising an essay, skills necessary for any composition student. Although this project focused primarily on visual rhetoric, many students also included blogs or essays as part of the support for the argument they were making through the profile picture.

Not only are students learning important rhetorical skills, but a closer examination reveals a variety of intelligences being employed through the use of these different modalities. Since students use a variety of modalities to support their own identity, they are using intrapersonal intelligence. Developing a profile picture that represents their identity as a writer, or a thesis statement made about

themselves, requires students to have a knowledge of themselves. The feedback provided in this particular study allowed students to use interpersonal skills as they discussed their work with the instructor or peers. The inclusion of visuals or videos would require the use of spatial intelligence, or “the capacities to perceive the visual world accurately, to perform transformations and modifications upon one’s initial perceptions, and to be able to re-create aspects of one’s visual experience, even in the absence of relevant physical stimuli” (Gardner, Frames 182). Students with spatial/visual intelligence would find it easier to make an argument through visuals, building their understanding of rhetorical arguments through the placement and overall effect of a combination of visuals in making an argument. The study’s authors’ decision to allow students the choice of incorporating music into their rhetorical argument allowed students to use musical intelligences. Gardner describes musical intelligence as abilities in the composition, performance and appreciation of music. The inclusion of music may help students with this particular intelligence to better understand the use of music in making a rhetorical argument, particularly in its strong emotional appeal. As these samples of the link between multiple intelligence and multimodality exhibit, a composition pedagogy may be developed that caters to a variety of intelligences, providing further access to composition to a larger group of students.

Reviewing just a few examples of multimodal approaches used by instructors, it is obvious that composition teachers have a wide range of modalities at their disposal. Not only can these strategies be used as a means of

composition, or making a rhetorical argument, but these same tools can also be used in the process of writing. For instance, a video or illustration may serve as a tool used to help students develop an argument. Initially, students could be asked to identify the argument made in a particular visual. Next, the students could analyze the rhetorical appeals used in the visual in an essay or through a group discussion. Following this analysis, students could be asked to research the issue, building research skills, and determining if they agree or disagree with the argument made in the visual. A final project could be an essay, video, visual or other multimodal project that relies on the student's research and interpretation of the issue. This example represents just a few of the many choices available to composition instructors.

### **Concerns of the Composition Community**

Some composition teachers worry that we may have too many choices available and risk displacement of other key components of their course. The researchers involved in the Anderson et. al study said it is a concern they have heard often, so the authors of the study asked respondents: "What is being displaced when teachers engage students in these writing practices?" A majority, "76 percent (n=31), responded that they believed nothing was being displaced (q27)." Instead, these respondents described their teaching of multimodal composing as an "alteration," "shift," or "remediation" of conventional composition instruction." (Anderson et al. 70). Of course, all of the respondents in this survey were chosen specifically because they were already using a multimodal approach in their composition classrooms and the goal of the

researchers was to learn more about the particular ways teachers were using multimodality and the support instructors received from faculty and administration.

Other instructors who have not previously used a multimodal approach may have more reservations than those interviewed in the CCCC study. This fear of displacement may stem from unfamiliarity with the tools used in a multimodal approach, since instructors may feel ill-equipped for such an approach to composition. As Cynthia Selfe explains in *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*: “It is not unusual for faculty raised on alphabetic literacy and educated to teach composition before the advent of image-capturing software, multimedia texts, and the World Wide Web to feel inadequate to the task of teaching students about new media texts and the emerging literacies associated with these texts” (67). This feeling of inadequacy may very well be at the root of composition teachers’ fear of displacing other aspects of their courses in lieu of a multimodal approach. I can understand this fear, since I did not grow up or attend primary or secondary school at a time when computers were in every classroom and technology was readily available as it has been for students entering college today. The World Wide Web had not yet made its debut. I am definitely more comfortable with writing an essay than presenting a visual argument, but I have learned to use some of the new technologies and believe that using a multimodal approach in a classroom benefits students in ways not possible through written texts alone.

In fact, many instructors have reported that a multimodal approach actually enhances the teaching of composition. Michael Pennell, an Assistant Professor of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Rhode Island, concluded a multimodal project by saying, “The two to three weeks this project lasted provided some of the most fruitful discussions of the rhetorical situation, persuasive appeals, and drafting that” he had ever “witnessed in first-year writing” (571). Pennell decided to capitalize on a campus-wide competition in the fall of 2009 that offered prizes for the winners of a 30 to 60 second public service announcement (PSA) video to help prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus by requiring students in a first-year honors writing class to create a PSA. To introduce the rhetorical situation, Pennell began by discussing “genre, medium, audience, purpose, and other aspects” along with discussing topics like “the differences in an H1N1 PSA targeting college students versus one targeting the elderly” and the “secondary audience for the PSA — a panel of health and film experts” (Pennell 569). By including this project, Pennell was able to introduce rhetoric in a “hands-on” situation that was relevant in the lives of his students. Along with the PSA, Pennell says the project helped open the doors to discussions on other forms of communication, ranging from Web sites and e-mails to flyers and Twitter,” illustrating the multimodal composing practices many writing teachers stress to students” (Pennell 569). Although some students were resistant to stepping out of their comfort zones as traditional written communicators, Pennell felt that the project was a great learning experience for students.

As Pennell suggests, the use of multimodality in a classroom can only serve to enhance the experiences of our students. As a future composition instructor, it is my dream to engage students in discussions that help them develop their critical thinking skills, enhance their understanding of the writing process and improve their skills as writers. Although I have not yet taught composition and took FYC myself in an era void of technology, I can think of examples where I have both seen and used technology and/or a multimodal approach in ways that definitely enhanced the course. For instance, in a Major Black Authors course, the instructor required a group project based on a particular book, a critical analysis essay and a creative final presentation. Not only did I witness students engaged in critical thinking in discussions resulting from these presentations, but I also saw rhetorical arguments made through visuals, music and drama. These experiences combined with my research has led me to view multimodal composition as providing a new dimension and depth to the teaching of composition rather than seeing it as a threat to the traditional essay. Further, the use of multiple modes of composing ensures that we reach a larger body of students by allowing the use of MI in the composing process.

Some instructors fear that such an approach may lower expectations. However, Patricia Dunn, a composition instructor and author of several books and articles on composition and disability studies, says these new tools actually “raise expectations,” allowing students with disabilities to engage more fully and allowing other students to move beyond their preferred comfort zone—say, conventional reading and writing—to venture into other modalities, where they

will have insights they would not have had in routine, print-based realms.” (Dunn, “Re-Seeing” 14). Echoing Dunn’s assessment, Danielle Nielsen says, “Content and expectations are not less rigorous, and the amount of student work does not decrease” (7). Instead, Nielsen believes a multimodal approach to composition enhances the experience of every student

### **The Need for UDL**

In conclusion, a UDL composition classroom offers us the opportunity to widen the doors to our classrooms through a pedagogical foundation of access which addresses the multiple learning styles of students through a multimodal approach. Students have more tools at their disposal in this universally-designed environment, providing them with a better chance at succeeding in at least one area of composition. To provide further evidence of the value of such an approach, I decided to talk directly to students to determine their experiences with multimodality and any links between their preferred modalities and dominant intelligences. The chapter which follows focuses on the methods and methodology I used in my study to allow others the opportunity to further study this important research area and its benefits to the composition field.

### **CHAPTER III: Planning the Trip**

This study explores multimodal composition through the perspective of disability studies to discover the MI students report using to develop rhetorical skills. I solicited volunteers from a small Midwestern university, asking students to take a MI test based on Howard Gardner's theory of MI followed by an interview to further study the connections between MI and preferred composition modalities. Through this study, I sought to answer the following questions: How do students develop rhetorical skills, such as those used when making a rhetorical argument, through a multimodal approach? Further, what connections can be determined between MI and students' responses to multimodality?

When I began my research, I knew that I wanted to interview students to help me to understand the ways that a multimodal approach helped students to make a rhetorical argument. I also wanted to understand how this information could help composition teachers to develop a pedagogy that would reach a larger number of students. I asked myself: How can we make composition more accessible to all students? An article by Mark McCaslin and Karen Wilson, "The Five-Question Method for Framing a Qualitative Research Study," helped me to both better understand qualitative research and to begin to formulate more focused research questions. The five-question method utilizes a series of questions based around qualitative methodologies (biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study) to help in "forming a problem statement, forming a purpose statement, and finally developing a grand tour question" (McCaslin & Wilson 447-448). Through this five-question process, I

arrived at several conclusions. First, it is important for composition instructors to understand that students learn and process information differently in order to provide more choices in making rhetorical arguments. Second, many college composition courses are modeled on a traditional alphabet form of instruction, resulting in a failure to recognize the diverse learning styles of students and inhibiting student success by the absence of an approach that addresses the variety of learning styles. Finally, a study was important to discover the way that learning styles influence students' ability to present rhetorical arguments, explore the role of multimodal composition as a tool and to determine if students can transfer the skills used in developing a non-traditional rhetorical argument to a writing project.

As I answered questions about who I would interview and the questions that I would ask, my thoughts began to focus on the role MI played in students' preferred composition modality and the skills learned as a result of this approach. I was familiar with Gardner's theory of MI and felt that his theory would serve as a tool in determining any link between preferred modalities and MI. I liked the fact that Gardner focused on abilities rather than any disability or learning impediment. He recognized that all people have different skill sets that can be used to solve a variety of problems, leading him to his theory of MI. To understand the link between MI and multimodality and the rhetorical skills developed as the result of a multimodal approach, I decided the best approach would be to interview students directly concerning their experiences in multimodal composition. The majority of the research I had read about

multimodal composition had been written from the perspective of writing instructors. I believed that students could provide us with new insights into the benefits of using a multimodal approach or any associated problems. I wanted to add to the growing body of research by looking at multimodality from the perspective of students, focusing particularly on the link between MI and multimodality, as well as the skills developed as a result of a multimodal approach, to determine if this approach could provide more access to composition for a larger number of students.

### **Deciding on a Methodology**

My decision to interview students directly led to my exploration of the qualitative methodologies available. According to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, “Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. It can be used to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known” (19). Although there has been a substantial amount of research on multimodality in the last several decades, it is a relatively new field with as yet unexplored potential for re-shaping the composition field and very little research has been done from the perspective of students. Even less research has been done on any links between multimodal composition and MI. In order to explore this connection and determine the skills developed as a result of this approach, I combined a MI test with an interview focused on the different modes preferred/used by students and the rhetorical skills developed.

I had several methodologies available to me and ruled out all of my other options, before deciding to frame my research in grounded theory. Since I planned to interview students from several classes who may or may not have shared a common experience, I felt that phenomenology would not be the best choice for my study. I was also not planning to study a particular culture group, an individual's experience or collecting material to examine a "bounded system," so ethnography, biography and case studies did not seem to fit well with my intended research either (McCaslin & Wilson 448-449). I turned to grounded theory for further exploration. McCaslin and Wilson describe grounded theory as a methodology where "the researcher generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, a theory that explains some action, interaction, or process" (McCaslin & Wilson 449). I felt that this methodology fit best with the type of research I was conducting, since I intended to look closely at the phenomenon of multimodality and MI to determine if such an approach provided further access to composition.

Strauss and Corbin expand on grounded theory, describing it as "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductive derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (24). Through my review of the literature, I had begun to believe that a universally-designed composition classroom would provide access to more students through the use of multimodality and the consideration of MI. However, I wanted to understand more specifically the benefits of such an approach, any connections between students' dominant intelligences and multimodality, and the skills developed

through multiple modes along with using the results to understand any challenges a multimodal approach presented and to develop a pedagogy based on my research and the study results. Grounded theory allowed me to answer these questions through a systematic analysis of the data.

Although I had a general belief in the value of a multimodal approach and the benefits of viewing students as individuals with various capabilities, I did not have any preconceived notions of any particular links in these two areas or a hypothesis concerning the skills such an approach might help to develop. I intended to look directly at the data, the results of the MI test and interview notes, to develop a theory grounded in the data collected. My study would be an exploratory study that had not been done in the past and I needed a systematic way of examining the data to develop a compositional theory. I felt that grounded theory offered me the best opportunity to systematically analyze my interviews and test information, forming categories and concepts to help in developing a pedagogical theory.

### **The Study Population & Design**

I solicited volunteers from First-Year Composition (FYC), Advanced Composition and Writing as Performance courses at the university. Until the 2014/2015 school term, this university served upper division students transferring from community colleges. During the 2014/2015 school year, the university admitted its first freshman class and opened its first on-campus housing. Prior to this year, students commuted from various locations throughout Chicago and its south suburbs. This small Midwestern university serves “approximately 7,000

students through the course of a year,” who are both “culturally and economically diverse” (GSU Fact Book 7). Over 50 percent of students and 28 percent of faculty identify themselves as “racial and/or ethnic minorities” (GSU Fact Book 8). Not only is this university culturally diverse, but it also serves students of a variety of ages, ranging from 18 to students past the age of 50. Traditional students, 18-24, compose just over 30 percent of the student body. This university is also unique in its teaching of freshman composition, employing full-time instructors to teach these courses rather than adjuncts or graduate assistants.

Two students agreed to participate in the study. Both students were transfer students in their early 20’s and had taken freshman composition at separate community colleges before transferring to the university. One student was enrolled in an Advanced Composition course and another in a Writing as Performance course at this university. I interviewed one student on the campus and the other through a phone interview. To protect their privacy, I immediately de-identified students by providing each participant with a pseudonym. Each participant signed an informed consent form (See Appendix A), which explained the study and assured each participant that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time during the process.

The major benefit I hope participants received was to improve their rhetorical skills and expand their understanding of writing to include a variety of modalities. I believe that reflecting on the MI used in a variety of rhetorical areas helped participants begin to recognize ways they can use dominant intelligences to strengthen their rhetorical skills. I feel that this understanding of MI opens the

doors to a multimodal approach to composition – where the participants can begin to view composition as an area that encompasses alphabetic writing, visuals, videos and other means of composing. Along with expanding their understanding of composition, I believe that developing these rhetorical skills will also help these participants to improve their skills in completing traditional writing assignments, such as an essay.

As part of the study, volunteers took an online MI test based on Gardner's theory of MI. I decided to offer an online version of the MI test rather than a paper-based test to offer students the most convenient and efficient use of their time. I chose the Birmingham Grid for Learning Multiple Intelligence Test, (See Appendix B) due to its comprehensiveness (40 questions) and protection of personally identifying information. The test only required participants to indicate their sex, age range and country of residence. Other sites asked for emails and other information. The online test took participants about ten minutes to complete and the interviews lasted from 20-30 minutes.

I asked students to provide detailed descriptions of past projects using multiple modes of composing, describe the process they used to determine audience and rhetorical appeals and to choose one or more modalities that they felt could be used to make the most effective arguments (See Appendix C for a list of specific questions). I analyzed each line of the interview, determining when, why, where and who was using these modalities/intelligences and how the modalities/intelligences were being used. Along with analyzing the data to determine the specific skills developed and intelligences/modalities used, I

analyzed the results of their intelligences test to determine any correlation between the modalities used and their dominant intelligences.

### **Coding Process**

In grounded theory, each line, and sometimes single words, of an interview is closely examined to begin to form categories and concepts, the foundation of a particular theory. The process begins with open coding which helps to establish concepts and categories by breaking the data into many pieces. These pieces are then brought back together in axial coding and selective

*Table 1 Initial categories & descriptions in coding process*

Categories	Descriptions
Multiple Composing Modes	Video, Pictures, Music, Words, Statistics, Games, Data
Rhetorical Skills Developed	Audience, Appeals, Argument, Rhetorical Canons
Multiple Intelligences Used	Linguistic, Logical, Visual/Spatial, Kinesthetic, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Musical

coding, followed by the writing of memos based on the coding notes. For instance, I looked at the category of multimodal composition, rhetorical skills developed and MI (See Fig. 1). These category were further broken apart by analyzing the types of modalities, specific rhetorical skills and MI used by the study participants. These subcategories were then broken apart by asking a series of questions, such as: 1). Where, when, why, who, what and how were these modalities being used? 2). How were students developing these rhetorical skills and were there any links between the modalities used, MI and the skills developed? 3). In what ways, were students using MI and were these intelligences helping them to develop rhetorical skills or serving some other purpose? As I

broke multimodality, rhetorical skills and MI into small pieces and asked further questions about these subcategories, I was able to more fully analyze these areas through coding and written memos. Finally, I examined all of these memos to determine any connections between these sub-categories, resulting in further memos and ultimately leading to a composition pedagogical which utilizes multimodality/MI as a components of a UDL approach to composition.

### **Biases, Study Limitations & Conclusions Drawn**

As with any study, I am aware of the potential for bias in my results and would like to fully disclose any personal bias that may have influenced the results of my research. First, I am a student myself at this university and may have been influenced by my involvement at the university. I had never met one of the participants prior to the study, but knew the other student before the study. Second, as I discussed in the first chapter, I have a daughter that struggles with academic writing, but is able to complete visual projects with relative ease and may have been biased through my relationship with her and knowledge of her educational preferences. Lastly, I have always had a difficult time sitting for long periods of time through classes that are primarily lectures and enjoy the potential variety afforded by a multimodal approach. Although I prefer composing in alphabetic forms of writing, I favor a multimodal presentation of materials.

Though this study was completed in a very methodical manner, I also need to address the limitations of the results due to the small number of participants and the focus on students in one particular higher education institution. The small number of participants limits the study, since it cannot be determined if these

same results would apply to a general student population across various ethnic, age, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. As stated previously, the university where the study was conducted is unique in its diverse student population, representing a variety of ethnicities, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. A larger study, or the combination of smaller studies performed at a variety of institutions with diverse student populations, would provide more definitive results. Further studies are needed to better understand the links between MI and multimodality as well as determining rhetorical skills developed as a result of this approach.

However, this study combines with other research and scholarly work to add to the growing body of research on multimodal composition and its value to composition pedagogy as well as looking at the role of MI. One of the strengths of this study has been looking at multimodality from the perspective of students. The information provided by students will help composition instructors to better integrate multimodality into their classrooms and provide further access to a larger group of students. Since this study addresses the correlation between MI and multimodality, composition instructors will also have more information on the different intelligences of students and methods they can use to reach a larger body of students through a multimodal approach. In the next chapter, I review my findings and the conclusions I drew upon close analysis of these results.

## CHAPTER IV: Taking a Test Drive

Two students, who transferred to this small Midwestern university from separate community colleges, participated in this study: Sarah, a 23-year-old Communications major, and Brandon, a 22-year-old Advertising/Marketing major. The names of both participants have been changed to protect their identities. Although Sarah was enrolled in an Advanced Composition course at the university at the time of the study and Brandon had taken a Writing as Performance course the previous semester at this same university, both students took freshman-year composition (FYC) at community colleges. These students completed an online MI test followed by an interview to determine the rhetorical skills developed as a result of a multimodal approach to composition and any links between MI and the different modalities used with such an approach.

Following a grounded theory methodology, I closely analyzed the results of the MI test along with the individual interviews to arrive at several conclusions

- 1). Since instructors in a variety of courses across campus appear to be using multimodal composition as a part of their courses, it is important for composition instructors to use these modalities in their courses to prepare students for future academic work.
- 2). Students have reported developing a variety of rhetorical skills as a result of a multimodal approach, leading me to believe that this type of approach to composition has value in helping students to improve rhetorical skills.
- 3). Finally, there are links between the students' strongest intelligences and preferred modalities, suggesting the need for a variety of composing choices in order to reach the largest number of students. These conclusions, as well as the

students' expressed interest in using a variety of modalities, has led me to believe that a multimodal approach allows more students the opportunity to succeed in composition and prepare them for future academic work.

### **1. Multimodality Across the Curriculum**

Both students in this study reported using multimodal composition in several different courses. Sarah described projects she had completed in a psychology, education and advanced composition course. The psychology course involved a PowerPoint presentation that focused on drug abuse and delivered an argument about the dangers of addiction. The PowerPoint included words, pictures, statistics and videos. In the education course, Sarah created a multimodal composition as a final project to highlight important parts of the course. Sarah's final project included words, videos she had taken herself of class activities and a Jeopardy game. For the composition class, Sarah said she combined writing and visuals in a narrative analysis of her literacy history, adding that she felt the "visuals helped make it [the analysis] more effective." Sarah's comments reflect her belief that a multimodal approach added value to her composition.

Brandon discussed using several modalities in a breast cancer marketing plan for a marketing course, but said he had completed similar projects in a variety of other courses. The marketing plan was a group project, so each member of the group completed various tasks that were combined into one project. As the group manager, Brandon helped with strategic tactics, the introduction, audience research and finding a location to reach the targeted audience based on location demographics. The marketing plan described the entire project, including

descriptions of the audience and rationale for using a particular location to target the audience, distribution of informational literature, creation of advertisements, a budget and a fundraiser/breast cancer awareness event, which included an appearance by a local musician. This marketing plan used visuals, words, statistics and music to create a multimodal composition. Along with his description of the multimodal marketing plan, Brandon briefly described his work in a Writing as Performance course – where he wrote more creative pieces and then performed his work, and the writing of others, on a small stage at the university. Although these pieces were more creative, Brandon felt that each of the pieces he wrote, political in nature, also delivered rhetorical messages, combining words with movement, body language and audio modalities.

These students' descriptions of multimodal projects completed across academic disciplines suggests that multimodal composition is an important skill our students need to develop in order to achieve academic success across the curriculum. Since students are using multimodal composition in a variety of courses, it seems the natural place to begin preparing students for such work would be in FYC. Instructors could focus on the ways various modalities may be used for particular rhetorical purposes to offer students a better understanding of the choices made in these compositions and to help students develop rhetorical skills to make more effective arguments in compositions using a variety of modes. Incorporating a multimodal approach to FYC would equip students with important skills needed to succeed in future academic courses.

## **2. Rhetorical Skills Learned**

### **2.1 The Rhetorical Canon**

Although neither student used the word “rhetorical canon,” both Sarah and Brandon discussed stages of this classical rhetorical canon when describing various multimodal projects. During the invention process, Brandon talked to members of his group and listened to all of the ideas shared while working on the marketing plan. Brandon described the ways group members discussed the best ways to present a marketing plan to a particular audience, considered the various modalities at their disposal and the most effective use of each particular mode and decided on the best arrangement of the project as a whole. Explaining, Brandon said, “Everyone had different skills and different perspectives.” In his political pieces in *Writing as Performance*, Brandon also considered audience, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. For instance, he considered word usage and arrangement, body movement, facial expression and voice inflection to best help him present his message.

Describing the multimodal projects she created, Sarah discussed the ways she formed ideas and decided on a way to present a message to a particular audience. For the majority of this process, Sarah drew on her own personal experiences and thoughts surrounding particular issues or messages she wished to deliver to a particular audience. Considering various modalities, she contemplated the best uses of each mode to create an effective argument. For instance, when she prepared for the presentation on drug abuse, she viewed all of the choices (visuals, words, statistics/charts, etc.) to envision the ways all of these modes

could be combined into a presentation that made a strong argument about the dangers of drug abuse/addiction. She looked at evidence she had collected, deciding on the best ways of presenting and arranging this evidence in order to reach a specific audience. Elaborating, Sarah said, “I wanted to reach drug addicts, but I also wanted to reach kids in schools.” For the education class project, she echoed many of the comments she had made while discussing the drug abuse presentation.

Similar to the stages of the classical rhetorical canon used in a traditional essay, Sarah and Brandon both developed important skills in helping them with various stages through a multimodal/MI approach to compositions. Both participants described processes used during invention, arrangement, memory, style and delivery in order to help them make the most effective argument. The participants’ descriptions of their process during the invention stage shows that rhetorical skills important in this step of a rhetorical argument are being developed as a result of multimodal composition. The processes the two students describe only appear to differ in the modalities used. Rather than using alphabetic text alone, Sarah and Brandon consider a variety of modalities during this planning and preparation stage. In the following sections, I discuss more specific ways that each participant relied on specific modalities for a particular rhetorical skill.

## **2.2 Audience**

As noted above, determining audience, another important rhetorical skill, was an integral step in Sarah and Brandon’s composing process. When Sarah

envisioned her audience for the drug abuse presentation, she says she imagined herself presenting a seminar to other people who were drug users. Sarah thought about what she would want to hear if she were the drug user. Reflecting on the process, she said, “I didn’t want to say something that was just a cliché. If I were a drug user, what would get my attention?” In the education class, the majority of the students were the same age as Sarah, so she focused on ways she would respond to a presentation, leading to her decision to include words, video and a game. Recalling her consideration of audience, Sarah said, “I wanted something that they would enjoy and could get involved in, so I just thought of things I would enjoy and used them in my presentation” Sarah said she had gotten to know the other students well and they shared common interests. Throughout these multimodal compositions, Sarah thought carefully about her audience.

Brandon also gave close consideration to his targeted audience. In fact, during the marketing plan group project, he was responsible for researching the audience. Not only did he determine a specific audience, older women, particularly older Black women, but Brandon also found a location that would best help his group deliver a message to a particular audience. Along with his research, Brandon discussed the best ways to reach this particular audience with his group, saying he felt it was important to receive many perspectives. Discussing his methods for reaching the audience, Brandon said, “I think the most important part is to make your message relatable – whether it’s through auditory, visuals, words or whatever.” While creating this multimodal project, Brandon was also developing skills in helping him to determine audience.

Audience is a key consideration in composition and it appears that these students were both developing skills in this rhetorical area while composing in multiple modes. Although students used modes other than words, Sarah and Brandon both reported a process that is quite similar to that taken by students who are composing traditional essays and following a process to determine audience. Students need to understand that audience can change the entire content of a composition, from its argument to its arrangement, depending on the strategies needed to appeal to a particular audience. Based on the responses given by the participants, it appears that Sarah and Brandon both understood the importance of audience and were able to further develop these skills through the process of a multimodal composition.

### **2.3 Rhetorical Appeals**

Along with discussing approaches to determining audience, the participants in this study responded to questions about using rhetorical appeals in multimodal composition. Instead of using the words pathos, logos, ethos, or kairos, I asked students to describe the modes they would use to appeal emotionally, logically and credibly in a manner that was timely. Following are summaries of the responses the participants provided to these questions. Although the participants seemed less familiar with some forms of appeals than others, Sarah and Brandon both reported using rhetorical appeals while composing in multiple modes. This finding suggests that students are developing skill with using rhetorical appeals in multimodal compositions.

Interestingly, Sarah and Brandon both responded immediately with visuals when asked which mode they felt was most effective in appealing to an audience's emotions. Brandon used the word "visuals" in his response and Sarah used the word "videos." Explaining his response, Brandon said, "The aesthetics help draw your audience in." In other words, Brandon seemed to feel that visuals helped capture the attention of the audience through an emotional appeal. Sarah also described her reasoning behind choosing videos for emotional appeal: "I think videos help appeal to emotions. Like if I were trying to get a message across about the way drugs destroy, I could show a coffin at a funeral. That would be really powerful. I want to be sensitive, but also get my message across." Both students understood the ways that visuals could be used to appeal to an audience's emotions. Sarah added that she felt videos combined with music were an even more powerful appeal. The participants' remarks indicated their understanding of pathos and the way this appeal can be used to persuade an audience.

When describing ways to appeal in a logical manner, Sarah and Brandon both discussed the need for statistics and evidence, but described different approaches to using this appeal strategy. Although she felt statistics and documentation were important in establishing a logical appeal, Sarah said it was just as important to be personally invested in the rhetorical argument. Explaining, she said:

I think it has to be more than that [statistics/documentations] though. It needs to be something that you are a part of or feel strongly about. How can you expect your audience to believe you

if you don't believe in it yourself. It's kind of like trying to sell a car to someone and driving a completely different kind of car.

Although Sarah understood the need for evidence to be used to appeal in a logical manner, she felt that it was equally important to be personally invested in any argument made. Brandon discussed the importance of understanding the audience in order to present statistics and evidence in a way that would most appeal in a logical manner. According to Brandon, understanding the audience helps him to reach the audience through logical appeals. The students' comments indicate that they are developing skills in logos appeals through multimodal composition.

When discussing credibility, both Brandon and Sarah discussed the importance of appealing to an audience through personal credibility, but did not discuss the need for any other types of credibility, such as credible sources. Using the marketing plan as an example, Brandon describes his strategy for establishing credibility by saying, "As far as credibility, I use my own credibility as a college student, a person that has successfully led several marketing projects and been involved in coordinating projects at the university. People believe you're credible if you are trustworthy." Brandon's remarks illustrate his understanding of the importance of a rhetor establishing his own credibility through experience, education or character. Sarah made similar remarks, focusing more on the importance of personal attachment to a particular cause or belief system in order to establish credibility with an audience. However, neither participant mentioned using the background of a source, such as an expert in a particular field, to establish credibility. Since both participants talked about the need for statistics, or

support for an argument, they may just have assumed that this information to support their argument must come from a reliable source.

The participant's responses to questions about timeliness of an argument were very vague and they did not seem to understand kairotic appeal as well as some of the other appeals. When asked about the importance of timeliness in presenting an argument, Sarah was uncertain about the best way to use this appeal. Brandon did not seem to have a clear understanding either. He simply commented, "Breast cancer is always timely and always important to present." Although the participants did not report developing an understanding of kairos, this finding does not mean that it could not be developed through a multimodal approach as effectively as through a traditional essay. These students focused more on multimodal compositions in academic disciplines other than composition. Kairos, or the timeliness of an argument, was likely never discussed. In composition courses, Kairos could be taught through a multimodal composition as well as through a traditional essay. Since students reported development of other rhetorical appeals through multimodal compositions, it is not unreasonable to believe Kairos could also be developed through a more focused discussion and application of it in a composition course.

#### **2.4 Rhetorical Arguments**

Although the participants did not clearly state the argument made in every multimodal project they discussed, Brandon and Sarah did report making rhetorical arguments in several multimodal compositions. For instance, Sarah described the argument she made in her adult psychology class presentation,

saying, “I wanted to focus on the addictive personality, to show kids or other people the way that drugs can destroy.” To help her make this argument, Sarah discussed using clips from the *Intervention* television show, pictures of drugs, personal experience, statistics and words to make her argument about the devastating effects of drug addiction. Using the marketing plan as an example of making an argument through a multimodal composition, Brandon said the group’s message, or argument, centered on the importance of early detection and treatment for breast cancer. In his Writing as Performance course, Brandon said that all of his work focused on arguments about a political issue. These students’ statements indicate that they were learning skills to develop rhetorical arguments as they composed in a multimodal form of composition.

Not only did students report making rhetorical arguments through multimodal composition, Sarah and Brandon both said they would choose multiple modes to compose the most effective argument. The students were asked:

If you were given the choice, which of the following methods do you believe would help you to make a more effective argument (an argument is defined as a position that you take which could be opposed by another)?

- a. a traditional essay
- b. a document that includes many charts/statistics
- c. a drawing, painting or other visual
- d. a video or slide presentation with a soundtrack

- e. a project based on your own inner thoughts
- f. a group project where you interact with others
- g. a project where you were able to move around as you made your argument
- h. a project that involved nature (presented or composed in an outdoor setting and/or about a topic in the natural environment)
- i. a combination of several of these methods (Identify which methods you would choose.)

Brandon said he felt he could make the most effective argument through a group project that included charts and statistics along with video. Sarah also chose a document with many charts and statistics based on her own inner thoughts as her preferred modalities for making an argument. Since Sarah had used video in several projects in the past, I asked her the reason she did not include video as one of her choices and she replied, “I think that video can only do so much and you need statistics and charts to really make an argument about something that you really believe in.” Sarah viewed videos as more of an emotional appeal and recognized the need for supporting evidence. Brandon also noted the need for supporting evidence, but felt that video could make an argument even more powerful.

Based on the responses of these two participants, students will choose to compose in multiple modes when given the choice. Sarah and Brandon both described using multiple modes in an argument as “more effective” and “more

interesting.” These participants seemed to feel that a multimodal approach allowed students to be more effective by using more than one mode to deliver an argument. For instance, Brandon discussed the way that visuals made a composition more powerful, adding more than can be achieved through the use of words and statistics alone. Both participants also agreed that multimodal compositions were more interesting. Describing her decision to create a multimodal project that included video/visuals, words and even a game for her education class, Sarah said, “I wanted something that they would enjoy and could get involved in.” Both students reported that they had not used any other modalities than traditional essays in their FYC courses taken at separate community colleges in the Chicagoland area. Brandon commented, “I haven’t used these [multiple modes] in a composition class. I would like to use multiple media. It keeps me more interested.” Not only do these students believe a multimodal approach is more effective, but they also reported a higher interest level in such an approach, indicating that such an approach engages students more than a traditional alphabetic approach to teaching composition.

Thus far, the findings in this study indicate several benefits to a multimodal approach to composition. Students are composing, using multiple modes, in a variety of courses across the curriculum and need to be prepared to succeed in other courses. Students are developing rhetorical skills using a multimodal approach and could develop further skills in this area by a more focused teaching of rhetoric using multimodalities. Students appear highly interested in using multimodality in composition, suggesting that this engagement

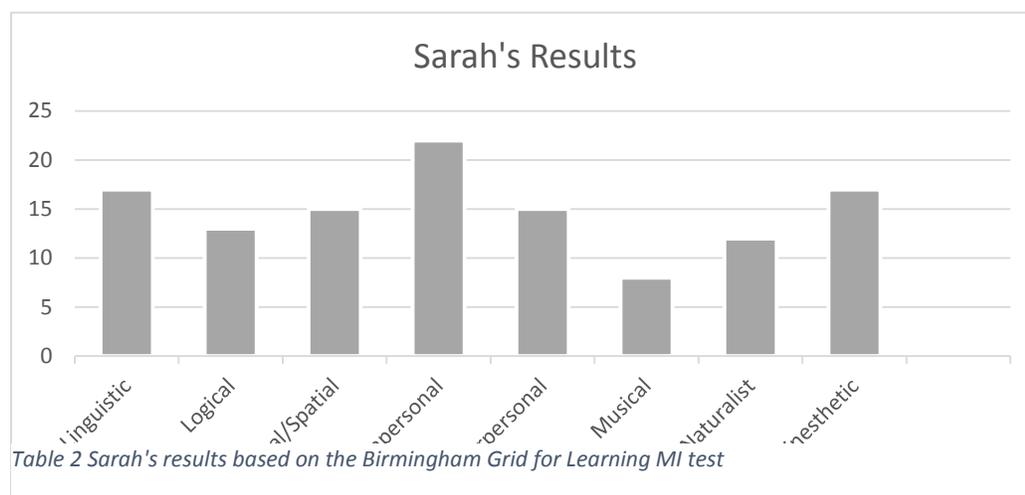
with these compositions may further motivate students. In the next section, I look at the findings of the MI tests and the participant's interview responses to determine any links between students' reported intelligences and preferred composing modalities.

### 3. Connecting Multimodality and Multiple Intelligence

Both students completed the Birmingham Grid for Learning MI Test, based on Gardner's theory of MI. Describing his argument for his theory of MI, Gardner says, "I was claiming that all human beings possess not just a single intelligence (often called by psychologists 'g' for general intelligence). Rather, as a species, we human beings are better described as having a set of relatively autonomous intelligences" (*Frames* iii). Gardner's original seven intelligences included linguistic (word smart); logical (number smart); interpersonal (people smart); intrapersonal (myself smart); musical (music smart), visual/spatial (picture smart) and kinesthetic (body smart). Later, Gardner added naturalistic, or nature smart, to his list of intelligences. After taking the 40-question multiple intelligence test, participants received the results of their test in the form of pie charts.

#### 3.1 Sarah's Results

According to the MI test taken by Sarah, (See Fig. 1), her largest



intelligence was in the area of intrapersonal, or a deep understanding of herself. Interestingly, her conversation continually turned back to herself when describing choices she made in the composition process, showing a link between her strongest intelligence, intrapersonal, and the choices she made or the ways she chose to compose. For instance, Sarah discussed the drug abuse/addiction project, which included several modalities, saying, “In a psychology class, I did a PowerPoint about drugs. I used videos and real-life information in it. I had an aunt that had a problem with drugs and I’d seen the way that drugs hurt not only her, but the people she loved . . . I wanted to show the way drugs destroy.” Throughout her interview, Sarah referred to the importance of putting herself into her compositions and/or writing about topics particularly important to her.

In her discussion about the process she used to determine her audience, Sarah again turned to her own inner thoughts about herself. She envisioned herself as both the presenter of this multimodal composition and as the receiver. Commenting, Sarah said, “I always want to make sure that I am not going to hurt anyone – to be considerate – don’t want to piss someone off.” Although she discusses the need to think of others, Sarah brings the discussion back to herself to ensure she presents her compositions in a way that considers the needs of others: “I pictured myself presenting a seminar to other people that were drug users. I also thought of what I would want to hear if I were the drug user.” Sarah places herself in the audience to determine the way she presents an argument that will be both effective and sensitive to the audience.

Along with relying on intrapersonal intelligence in the invention stage and audience determination, Sarah's responses indicate her use of this intelligence in some of the rhetorical appeals and in the choice she made for presenting the most effective argument. As noted previously, Sarah discussed the need to be personally invested in a multimodal composition when she talked about both credibility and logic in her appeals. Likewise, when given a choice of multiple modes, Sarah chose a multimodal composition based on her own inner thoughts. Explaining, Sarah said, "I just think it's really important for you to believe in something that you're trying to convince someone else to believe." For Sarah, intrapersonal intelligence played a large role in the entire multimodal composition process – from invention to audience to arrangement and delivery.

Though this link is interesting and needs to be further explored, intrapersonal intelligence does not particularly link to a multimodal approach. Intrapersonal intelligence can be just as easily integrated into a traditional composition course which primarily relies on the creation of alphabet texts. In fact, since many composition instructors allow students to choose a particular topic or personal approach in the creation of traditional essays, this type of intelligence is already a consideration in many college writing courses. Still, it would be valuable for composition instructors to be aware of this intelligence strength in particular students to help guide students in further developing rhetorical skills. For instance, Sarah continually thought of herself and her own responses when determining audience. Perhaps, she could have been encouraged to rely on this intelligence, but helped to further develop this skill by directing her

to other equally valuable sources to determine audience, such as statistics or demographic data. An awareness of Sarah's strong intrapersonal intelligence could help a composition instructor to broaden Sarah's understanding of audience.

Other intelligence strengths of Sarah included nearly equal amounts of kinesthetic and linguistic intelligences. Since linguistic intelligence, or word smart, is an intelligence already used in traditional, essay-based composition courses, I will focus on the connections between Sarah's kinesthetic intelligence and multimodal composition. Not only was it important for Sarah to be personally invested in a particular rhetorical argument, but her responses indicate she preferred bodily movement during these multimodal compositions. Although she showed just a small amount of spatial intelligence, her use of video in the education class presentation prompted her to move around the classroom as she took videos of her classmates during particular projects. Describing this experience, Sarah said, "I videotaped the class with a GoPro camera throughout the class to show the different things we worked on and meshed it all together at the end." Throughout the composing process, Sarah was in motion, using her kinesthetic intelligence. Sarah elaborates on the experience, saying, "Rather than just doing worksheets like we had been doing in class, I wanted something that they would enjoy and could get involved in." Her words once again reflect a need for movement during the composing process. Even the final multimodal compositions Sarah described were delivered in a mode that required movement. In contrast to the final draft of a traditional essay, the final presentation of Sarah's multimodal compositions allowed her the opportunity for movement during the

delivery process. A multimodal approach allows students with kinesthetic intelligence more opportunities to move during the composition process – whether through videotaping, a performance, a presentation or another multimodal composition involving movement.

### 3.2 Brandon's Results

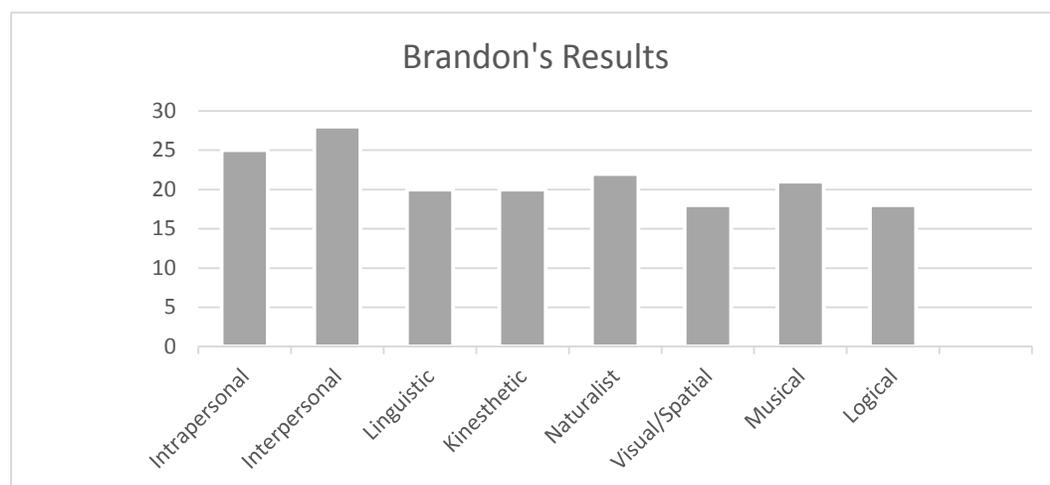


Table 3 Brandon's results based on Birmingham Grid for Learning MI test

Although Brandon's results were quite different than the results of Sarah's multiple intelligence test (His results indicated a larger variety of intelligence strengths.), he followed a similar pattern to that shown in Sarah's results, using his strongest intelligence, interpersonal, or people smart, for a large part of the composition process and rhetorical choices he made. Throughout the composition process, Brandon relied on interaction with group members in the planning and creation of his multimodal text.

For instance, Brandon relied on his interpersonal intelligence in the invention stage as he listened to feedback about his own ideas and suggestions from group members during the planning stages of the breast cancer marketing

plan. The group met to share ideas, determine an overall plan, and to assign individuals with particular tasks. Explaining his preference for group compositions, Brandon said, “I think working in a group is more efficient and gives me a better perspective. You have different people doing different parts. That helps it to be more efficient. And, you are able to try to get a better understanding of other people by looking at something from a variety of views.” For this participant, working as a part of a group was important to him, showing his preference to use his interpersonal intelligence in the composing process.

Although Brandon was in charge of researching the audience, he brought his results back to the group to further refine the audience. He relied on his strong interpersonal intelligence to determine audience, listening to suggestions from group members. In the end, he said this process helped the group to identify a secondary audience, school children. While discussing audience, one word that Brandon continuously used was “relatable.” He said the message needed to be “relatable.” In order to reach people from different backgrounds in a way that was “relatable,” Brandon felt that a multimodal approach, using a variety of media, would succeed in reaching this diverse group. Brandon’s comments suggest that his interpersonal intelligence plays a large role in determining audience.

During Brandon’s discussion of rhetorical appeals, he also relied heavily on his interpersonal intelligences, shown by his concern for “understanding” his audience and making his composition “relatable.” For instance, even though he understood the importance for statistics and documentation to appeal to an audience in a logical manner, Brandon talked about the need to understand the

audience. Explaining, he said, “The better you understand your audience, the better you will be able to create a logical argument, to reach them in a logical way.” In other words, understanding people, or interpersonal intelligence, played a large role in appealing to an audience through various rhetorical appeals.

Since Brandon’s test results indicated an array of individual intelligences, the findings from his test combined with his interview reflect his use of a variety of intelligences. For instance, Brandon used multiple intelligences in Writing as Performance. In this course, the students wrote a variety of unique creative pieces each week and shared these writings with the class, receiving feedback on their written work. Through this process, Brandon was able to use his intrapersonal, linguistic and interpersonal intelligences with both his own work and the critique of other writers. As I mentioned earlier, Brandon felt that each of his pieces made a particular political argument. Brandon description of the process he used to arrive at these arguments indicated a deep, personal connection to the political arguments. In this manner, he used his intrapersonal intelligence in the invention and actual writing of the composition. The group critiques allowed Brandon to use his interpersonal intelligence as he received feedback and offered suggestions for improvement and positive feedback to others. In one piece, he included a song, illustrating his use of musical intelligence. The Writing as Performance course required students to perform three pieces: 1). A piece written and directed by the student 2). Another student’s piece directed by the performer and 3). A piece that was both written and directed by another student. Following each performance, Brandon received several critiques from fellow students in an online

forum. The performances combined linguistics, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and (at least once) musical intelligences in a multimodal composition.

### **Final Thoughts**

Although the size of this study limits its applicability to a larger group, I feel that further studies of the links between multimodality and multiple intelligence would strengthen my argument for a universally-designed classroom that considers the MI of students to provide further access for all students through a multimodal approach to composition.

Based on my study, these students enjoy using multiple modes of composition and are using these modes across the curriculum. When given the opportunity to choose a particular modality, the participants both chose multiple ways of composing rather than a single mode, indicating that they found value in using multiple modes. The results of this study also support the development of rhetorical skills through multimodal composition. Each participant reported a variety of rhetorical skills being developed as a result of this approach. There was also a clear link between the participants' preferred composing processes and their dominant intelligences.

Perhaps, even more importantly than the link between multimodal composition and multiple intelligence is the recognition for more individualized instruction in the teaching of composition as instructors consider the vastly different needs of the students in any one composition classroom. Gardner describes such an approach:

An educator convinced of the relevance of MI theory should individualize and pluralize. By individualizing, I mean that the educator should know as much as possible about the intelligences profile of each student for whom he has responsibility; and, to the extent possible, the educator should teach and assess in ways that bring out that child's [adult's] capacity. By pluralizing, I mean that the educator should decide on which topics, concepts, or ideas are of greatest importance, and should then present them in a variety of ways (Frames iv).

Of course, it would be nearly an insurmountable task for composition instructors to individualize every assignment for every student. However, I believe that individualized instruction is possible to some degree. In the final chapter, I discuss a pedagogy framed by the concept of universal design that uses a variety of multimodal tools to ensure a more individualized attention to the MI of students.

## CHAPTER V: Blazing New Trails

Not many instructors would argue with the belief that our students are all individuals with distinct learning styles. Though my own research was limited by the small number of participants, my results revealed that students used dominant intelligences quite frequently, suggesting that there is a link between MI, the rhetorical skills developed as a result of using those intelligences and preferred composition modalities. I am encouraged by these results and would like to explore this issue further in the future with a larger sampling of students. For now, I have used this information to begin formulating my own composition pedagogy as I look forward to working with my first class of freshman composition students this coming fall. At the center of my pedagogy is the belief that students are individuals with unique intelligences which requires a pedagogy that provides access to the composition classroom for all students. UDL provides the framework needed for just such a pedagogy.

According to the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), UDL provides “a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.” A nonprofit organization of education researchers based outside of Boston, CAST has spent over 30 years researching and developing curriculum to make learning more accessible to all students. CAST offers three principle for UDL:

1. Engagement: (For purposeful, motivated learners, stimulate interest and motivation for learning.)

2. Representation: (For resourceful, knowledgeable learners, present information and content in different ways.)

3. Action & Expression: (For strategic, goal-directed learners, differentiate the ways that students can express what they know.)

These three principles can easily be applied to composition/rhetoric. Using these principles as a guide, a UDL composition pedagogy engages students, presents information in multiple forms and allows students the opportunity to compose in multiple modes.

### **Setting Goals**

To begin implementing UDL, CAST advises instructors to first set goals. I agree that goals should be the first step in developing a composition pedagogy. Instructors can ask themselves questions like the following: 1). Do I want students to develop skills in research and annotation (as Sirc mentions in chapter 2), rhetorical appeals and arguments or in another area? 2). How much written work, or traditional essays, would I like my students to create by the end of the semester? 3). What end result would I like to achieve with my students? Setting goals helps instructors in developing a pedagogy framed in UDL that offers access to a greater number of students. For instance, my goal for FYC is to help students develop skills in recognizing, critically analyzing and creating rhetorical arguments, skills that I believe can be transferred to students' personal lives and their future academic experiences and careers. In this way, composition is serving to enhance the personal, intellectual and professional lives of our students by teaching them to both critically analyze and create rhetorical arguments.

The term “service” has come to have many negative connotations in the composition community, since service has traditionally denoted a lower status on the university academic ladder, treating composition as serving the larger academic university. As Sharon Crowley writes in *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*,

Since its beginning in the late nineteenth century, university-level composition instruction has maintained an ethic of service. Its teachers and supporters have argued that composition instruction served the needs of the academic community, as well as those of students and the community at large, by teaching students to write error-free expository prose. Since the late nineteenth century, this instrumental ethic has provided most American colleges and universities with a rationale for requiring introductory composition courses of all students. (250)

Crowley believes this service concept of composition has eroded its status in the university and severely limited the scope of composition studies in higher education. In addition, she asserts that the requirement of composition as a general education course works to further restrict composition’s scope, relegating it to that of the “distasteful” required courses that students take only when forced to do so (Crowley 255). Although I understand Crowley’s position and agree with the belief that composition is much more valuable than that of a course designed to help students “write error-free expository prose,” (250) I still view FYC as a service – not to the university – but to the student, helping the student personally,

academically and professionally. By helping students to critically analyze and produce rhetorical pieces, whether written or otherwise, I believe it will help them in other academic courses, since the focus would be on developing critical analysis and rhetorical skills, attributes that are much more readily transferable than a particular form of writing. Students need to be able to recognize rhetorical arguments in their personal lives too - whether it's the commercials they watch, an article they have read or a politician they have heard speak. Learning to create their own rhetorical arguments will also help students in multiple areas of life as they create arguments to reach others - whether in their local community, educational institutions or workplace. My belief in the importance of developing these skills in the lives of my students has led to my goal of teaching students to recognize, critically analyze and create rhetorical arguments before leaving my classroom. Later in this chapter, I provide more specific examples of implementing this approach, but before moving on to specifics, I would like to address another element of planning that is equally important to the setting of goals: the process of understanding my students better.

In order to tailor my lessons to the MI of my students, I need to both understand my students and be willing to be flexible. Dunn stresses the importance of teachers reflecting often and adapting teaching methods to their individual groups of students. To illustrate this point, she quotes Freire: "In order to follow me, it is essential not to follow me" (qtd. in Dunn, *Talking* 40). In other words, it is important for each instructor to evaluate the needs of her own students in order to teach effectively. For instance, a MI test, such as the one I used in this

study, could be given to students during the first class of the semester to help give instructors a better understanding of the students in their classrooms.

Recently, I talked to Jodi Latham, an English teacher at Bradley-Bourbonnais Community High School in Bradley, Illinois – where I substitute teach - and she told me that she gives her students MI, learning styles and personal character assessments. I had been talking to her about my thesis project when she began to share the way she used these assessments in her English courses. Not only does Latham feel these tests give her a better understanding of her students, but Latham feels that the tests combined with follow-up assignments also help students to understand themselves better. After students take a MI test, Latham asks students to review the results and attached explanations of particular strengths, highlighting words the students feel will be most helpful in their progress as students. This activity is followed by a reflective paragraph in which students “compare the results with [their] perception of [themselves]” (Latham). After taking a learning styles inventory, Latham asks students to also reflect on these results to determine the ways in which these styles may help them improve as students followed by a paragraph, explaining these reflections. The final component Latham employs is a character development assessment that focuses on leadership skills. Following this exploration of character traits, Latham asks students to choose three traits to be developed by semester’s end to improve their “leadership and character development within the classroom”. All of these assessments help both the instructor and the students themselves in understanding

the students' individualized approaches to learning and participating in the classroom environment.

One of the interesting aspects of Latham's assessments is the reflective activities that follow these assessments. The results from the variety of tests provides Latham with an understanding of her students, but the reflective paragraphs offers her a more comprehensive understanding by receiving additional information directly from her students. I plan to use a similar strategy in my own classroom in order to understand my students better and allow students to also better understand themselves. Although I do not plan to use the character assessment in my courses, I would like to use a learning styles test in conjunction with a MI test in helping me to assess the MI/learning styles of my students. In the following pages, I discuss my own plans, as well as examples from others in the composition field, to implement a UDL pedagogy that both considers the needs of my students and allows me to focus on developing rhetorical skills in my FYC courses. I will use the CAST principles of engagement, representation and action/expression as building blocks for my own pedagogy.

### **Engaging Students**

How do we engage students through a pedagogy framed in UDL and aimed at reaching students with MI? Engagement begins by using a variety of modalities to reach students with MI and multiple ways of learning. Both in my own study and in the research of others, students have responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to compose in different modes. The two students in my study both reported a higher interest in multimodal composition versus the composing

of a traditional essay. Not only did these students report a higher interest in multimodal composition, but these participants also both chose more than one modality when given the choice of a variety of modalities. Earlier in this work, Pennell discussed the way his students were thoroughly engaged in a multimodal, video project in a FYC honors course. Pennell reported a high level of engagement as students discussed a variety of rhetorical skills in a manner he had not experienced before in a FYC course. In an article in *Computers and Composition*, “The Digital Manifesto: Engaging Student Writers with Digital Video Assignments,” Paul Baepler and Thomas Reynolds reported on a study involving students in two composition courses at colleges in the Midwest. The authors concluded that the multimodal assignments increased the engagement of students based on self-reporting reflections completed by the students (Baepler & Reynolds). In her dissertation, *Composing on the Screen: Students Perceptions of Traditional and Multimodal Composition*, Jeanie Parker-Beard discusses the findings from her study of two FYC courses. Parker-Beard compared the responses of students to traditional essays to video productions and concluded: “Students are more engaged with their topics and have an enhanced sense of audience awareness, rhetorical purpose, and social agency with video production” (198). These examples represent just a few of similar findings reported by other researchers, suggesting that using multiple modalities engages students in composition classrooms.

The responses given by the students in my study indicated that a composition pedagogy which considers the MI of students would also serve to

more thoroughly engage these students. For instance, Sarah continually used her intrapersonal intelligence in projects and expressed enthusiasm for a video project – where she was able to move around the classroom – using her kinesthetic intelligence. Brandon relied heavily on his interpersonal skills, preferring group projects to individual or single-mode projects. Using their primary intelligences seemed to engage these students more in the composition process. Based on these findings, I would suggest that a pedagogy that considers the MI of students would also more thoroughly engage students. As an example, a student with visual/spatial intelligence is more likely to respond with enthusiasm to a visual presentation by an instructor or the opportunity to compose through visuals. Likewise, a student with musical intelligence will be more likely to respond positively to instructors who included an audio component and a student with naturalistic intelligence will be more immersed in the composition process if given the opportunity to compose about topics in the natural environment. Students with logical intelligence are engaged by the use of statistics and a logical framework and those with linguistic intelligences through the use of words, both written and spoken. These examples illustrate the ways that students can be engaged in the composition classroom through the opportunity to utilize their particular intelligence strengths. In my own classroom, I plan on using multiple modes/teaching methods, such as those mentioned, in order to engage my students.

In summary, a UDL composition pedagogy uses multiple ways of presenting materials and allows students to compose in a variety of modalities to

ensure that each student receives a variety of opportunities to access information and reproduce compositions in ways that rely on MI. Although it would be nearly impossible for composition instructors to tailor every lesson/assignment to meet the needs of every student, it is possible to ensure that each student receives instruction in his or her own preferred delivery method at various times in the course as well as the opportunity to compose in modes that complement these intelligences. In the next section, I discuss representing materials/learning opportunities in a variety of manners.

### **Representation: Presenting Material in Multiple Ways**

Nielsen's work in a UDL classroom provides a foundation for exploring a pedagogy that presents information in a variety of ways in order to reach students with MI. Explaining the concept of UDL, Nielsen says, "UDL attempts to address all students' needs, not just those with disabilities [or those with specific intelligences], and suggests that rather than focusing on specific disabilities [or intelligences] and interventions, teachers should ensure information is accessible in many different ways" (6). In other words, Nielsen suggests that teachers use a variety of means to allow all students access to materials. To begin, Nielsen ensures that all texts are available electronically to ensure that students are able to access it, changing the font if they need. She also makes any handouts or extra readings available online, allowing students easy access and gives students the opportunity to print these assignments if they so desire. Instructions are given both orally and in writing and are broken up into small pieces. Though Nielsen's approach focuses more on making composition more accessible for students with

disabilities, the principles of UDL may be applied to all students and used to build a pedagogy that views students as individuals with a variety of intelligences.

In my own classroom, I will present materials and concepts in a variety of ways in order to reach students with MI and achieve my goal of helping students to recognize, critically analyze and create rhetorical arguments. Since it is an election year - an election year that has garnered unprecedented attention from the media and the public at large - I plan to focus on the rhetoric of the presidential candidates this fall in my composition classroom. Not only do I believe this topic to be timely, but I also feel it will engage students. I substitute teach in the local schools and constantly hear students, particularly those in high school, but occasionally even younger students, passionately discussing the candidates for the 2016 presidential election. To begin the process of teaching students to recognize rhetorical arguments, I will ask the class to read two articles, which include opposing viewpoints, about one of the candidates and to pick out the main argument and the way these arguments are supported. As an alternative to using words to identify the main arguments, I will offer students the option of drawing the main arguments and the details supporting this argument, allowing those with visual/spatial intelligences the opportunity to analyze an argument in a way that supports their particular intelligence strength. During class, I will break students into groups to discuss various perspectives with other group members, facilitating the use of interpersonal skills through this exchange and the classroom discussion that will follow the group activity. These initial activities will lead into a discussion of the rhetorical appeals used to support the argument as well as the

targeted audience. In my discussion, I will use a PowerPoint slide with visuals to enhance a discussion of the rhetorical appeals and audience. This lesson will last several days, culminating in students writing a two to three paragraph reflection on their own reactions to the articles and the reasons they believe the arguments were successful or ineffective. Through this type of teaching strategy, I will be able to reach students of MI and help them to begin recognizing and critically analyzing rhetorical arguments. This same strategy will be used to identify and analyze arguments in visuals, videos and music. In exploring online resources, I have found an ample supply of these types of media related to the 2016 presidential candidates, including parody songs, Saturday Night Live skits, campaign ads, speeches/debates and interviews.

I am certainly not alone in my approach and have discovered many ideas from reading works by other composition professionals. In chapter two, I discussed several methods used by composition instructors that would appeal to a variety of MI. However, these methods are not the only approaches available to composition instructors. For instance, Dunn sometimes asks students to call and leave a message for her, describing their composition. Instead of writing a reflection, I may ask students to call and leave a message about their reflections on the rhetorical arguments we have discussed in class to allow those that are able to formulate ideas more clearly through speaking an opportunity to exercise this particular learning style. As another example, Dunn has asked her students to debate a particular issue, allowing the students the opportunity to interact with one another, develop evidence to support a particular argument, address any

counter claims and to improve skills in recognizing the evidence and arguments made in written essays or readings (*Talking* 133-136). Dunn's use of a debate as a way for her to present important composition concepts helped her to reach students with a variety of intelligences.

Since I feel that Dunn's example of a debate will be a good way to engage students, teach research skills and strengthen the students' ability to recognize and critically analyze rhetorical arguments in a manner that appeals to a variety of intelligences, I plan on using this strategy in my own classroom. One intelligence that I have not discussed in this chapter is logical intelligence. Through the process of gathering evidence to support a particular position in the debate, students will need to gather factual evidence from reliable sources to support an argument, relying on logical intelligence in this process. Using an activity like a debate is a good way to teach students about research and scholarly sources. Not only will students be more likely to be engaged in a debate versus a lecture on rhetorical arguments, but it is also an opportunity for students to practice research skills with the help of other group members and to discuss a variety of appeals that can be used during the debate. Through this activity, students can learn even more about rhetorical argument, appeals and audience, leading to a final project – where students create their own rhetorical argument, combining an essay with other modalities. These examples are not given to suggest a particular blueprint to follow in order to reach students with MI. Instead, I have used these examples to emphasize the importance of presenting material to students in a variety of ways that consider the MI of students. Every instructor will develop his or her own

unique ways of presenting material and concepts. The most important UDL principle to follow in developing a particular approach is to allow access to a variety of learners with MI. In the next section, I discuss a composition pedagogy based on UDL that allows students the opportunity to compose in a variety of modes.

### **Students Take Action/Express Themselves**

Along with engaging students and presenting materials in multiple ways, a UDL pedagogy allows students to compose in multiple modes to allow access to composition to learners with MI. In the preceding chapters, I have discussed several ways of allowing students to compose in a variety of modalities. However, Dunn's work is of particular importance, since she specifically discusses using a multisensory approach to allow students with a variety of learning styles access to the composition classroom. In *Talking, Sketching, Moving*, Dunn argues that composition instructors focus too heavily on "linguistic pathways" and miss opportunities for students to "teach us about oral, spatial, visual, social, or other ways of knowing" (8). Along with citing Howard Gardner's work with MI, she discusses Paulo Freire's "multiple channels of communication" (qtd. in Dunn, *Talking* 37) as an example of using a multimodal approach to learning, describing Freire's approach as taking "advantage of different people's aural, spatial, visual, and kinesthetic ways of knowing" (Dunn 37). Instead of looking at multimodal composition as simply another form of composing, Dunn views multimodality as a way to address the learning styles of individual students, recognizing the MI of students.

Although she stresses the importance of tailoring lessons to the needs of students, Dunn offers many examples in *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing* of ways she has implemented an approach that considers the learning styles of all of her students. For example, Dunn discusses a cutting and pasting exercise that she attributes to Utica College of Syracuse University instructor Anna McMullen, where students cut their essays into paragraphs, shuffle the papers and allow other students to tape the pieces into a particular order (providing kinesthetic learners with an opportunity to use this particular learning styles while building critical thinking and organizational skills, along with many other suggestions, including her asking students to “draw, sketch, free write, or make a simile or metaphor” about a particular topic (*Talking* 58-97). All of these suggestions allow students to use a variety of intelligences in the composing process.

I agree with Dunn’s stance and plan to allow my students the opportunity to compose in a variety of ways in order to allow students to use their particular intelligences in ways that may not be available through the writing of a traditional essay. For instance, after discussing the way a particular visual argument is made, I will ask students to create their own visual argument in a low-stakes project. This approach would help those with visual/spatial intelligence to better understand making a rhetorical argument by exploring it in a way that works with their individual learning style. I believe this approach will also help other students by taking them out of their comfort zone and expanding their understanding of rhetorical argument from a different perspective. Since these projects will be low-

stakes and not impact student's grades drastically, I believe that it is fair to all students and allows those with particular intelligences greater access to the materials presented in the classroom and different ways of expressing their own arguments. As I discussed earlier, students will also be writing throughout the course, describing the argument made in a particular visual we have discussed in class as well as the appeals used, the targeted audience, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the argument and the student's reaction to the particular piece of work. As Sirc suggested in his description of his box pedagogy, students will be gathering information around a particular topic throughout the semester and will culminate the semester with a longer essay. However, instead of concentrating on research and annotation as Sirc proposed, I will concentrate on teaching students to recognize, critically analyze and create rhetorical arguments. Since students will also be performing some research and writing throughout the semester, I believe that research and annotation will also be learned through this focus on developing rhetorical skills. By focusing on the same topic for the entire semester, this type of teaching will serve as scaffolding as one project built upon another, making the final essay a culmination of the semester's work.

As I teach, I plan to reflect often on the response of my students and the effectiveness of my teaching methods on reaching my goals for my class. Dunn stresses the importance of understanding the principles of UDL rather than following specific suggestions for ways to provide access to composition for more students. Explaining, Dunn says:

This concept provides an apt parallel, and a kairotic moment, for the argument in this book: what is important is not so much the products themselves but the ideology behind the design, just as the few strategies described here are important not for the activities themselves but for the change in perspective their description might inspire (*Talking* 159).

As Dunn so eloquently describes, it is not the methods of multimodality, but the concept behind the principle of UDL that are important in developing a pedagogy that considers the MI of all of our students. Although most composition instructors would likely not argue with the value in such a pedagogy, it is important to also recognize difficulties associated with implementing UDL. In the following section, I discuss problems composition instructors may face in implementing UDL pedagogies and strategies for addressing these difficulties.

### **Problems of Implementing UDL**

Instructors may face a few barriers themselves in implementing a UDL pedagogy in their classrooms, including inexperience with technology, difficulty developing appropriate assessment tools, course content requirements of the rhetoric/composition department and a lack of support from the administration. Based on my research, I believe that the key to overcoming these barriers lies in the hands of the rhetoric/composition department and the institutional administration. Not only can the support of the department and administration alleviate the last two barriers mentioned, but this support can also help in

addressing inexperience with technology and problems in formulating assessments.

According to Anderson et. al, “one hundred percent of the teachers who responded (n=42) to how they learned the technologies they needed to teach multimodal composition were primarily self-taught (q73)” (73). Although the instructors in this survey were able to learn to use these technologies primarily through teaching themselves, many instructors may feel inadequate for such a task. Approximately half of respondents reported receiving help with learning new technologies through “institutional workshops (n=21)” and “friends/family (n=20).” The remaining assistance with learning new technologies included “professional development workshops at other institutions (n=18)”, “colleagues at other institutions and/or listservs (n=17)” and “lab staff (n=16)” (Anderson et al. 73). These findings suggest that instructors receive the majority of training with new technologies with sources outside of the institution in which they teach.

Instructors again found themselves relying on themselves for planning, implementing and assessing multimodal composition. The authors of the study reported that “97 percent reported (n=40) that they trained themselves how to implement multimodal pedagogies into their classrooms” (Anderson et al. 74). With the support of the administration, instructors could receive the necessary training in technology used in multimodal composition as well as preparation with planning, implementing and assessing multimodal composition as part of a UDL pedagogy. Workshops and other in-service training by the administration could address this need of instructors.

Some instructors may feel pressured by departmental requirements of a minimum number of pages written by students through the course of a semester. This requirement may cause instructors to feel as if other multimodal compositions cannot be fitted into the course. Nielsen suggests a way she has found to meet departmental requirements and also use other modalities in her classroom. Her department requires students to write at least 25 pages in a “traditional essay” form – where students must “summarize, analyze, and synthesize” information (15). One assignment that Nielsen uses to meet this departmental goal is to ask students to design their own public service announcement (PSA) and then analyze it rhetorically in a written essay. In this way, Nielsen is linking her multimodal compositions with traditional essays to ensure she is able to utilize a multi-faceted approach that addresses the MI of students and provides further access to the composition classroom. Although instructors may follow a similar path as Nielsen to ensure her composition courses both meet departmental requirements and address the MI of students, composition/rhetoric departments would add further support by providing a framework for instructors to plan, implement and assess a multimodal approach to composition that operates under UDL.

### **Paths of Accessibility & Flexibility**

In conclusion, it is important for plans to be loosely-structured and flexible in order to allow students the best opportunity to succeed in a composition course. By loosely-structured and flexible, I mean that a UDL composition pedagogy needs to focus on a variety of ways instructors may achieve the goals identified

and leave room for adjustments as teachers reflect and tailor lessons to meet the needs of students. For instance, in my own composition classroom, I will use a variety of methods and assessments as both a recognition of the MI of students and a way to meet my goal of teaching students to recognize, critically analyze and create rhetoric arguments. By appealing to a large variety of learning styles, I believe that I will enhance the experiences of my students in their personal, educational and professional lives – helping students to recognize, analyze and create rhetorical arguments in all of these areas.

However, in reaching these goals, I am reminded once again of Dunn's recommendation of focusing more on the principles behind a UDL pedagogy than any particular method used in such an approach. The most important aspect of UDL is recognizing the need for a multimodal, multisensory approach that addresses the MI of students and provides access to all. Instead of looking at some students as less capable than others, we should view our students with unique abilities and talents. In her book, *Learning Re-abled: The Learning Disability Controversy and Composition Studies*, Dunn discusses the reason she chose the title of her book:

I used the word re-abled in the title of this text to argue that so-called disabled people do have abilities, which have been disabled in part by a society and school system that insists on a way of learning convenient or familiar to a majority of learners, but which does not tap into the substantial intellectual resources of 1 to 5 percent of the population (*Re-Abled* 7).

By focusing on the abilities, rather than disabilities or learning difficulties of our students, we can change the direction of our composition classrooms, allowing multiple paths to reach the same destination – a destination that is accessible to students of all intelligences/learning styles.

I am reminded of Robert Frost’s “A Road Less Taken,” as the speaker stands, contemplating which path to follow. Here, I quote just a few lines:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood  
And sorry I could not travel both...  
...Then took the other, as just as fair...  
...Though as for that, the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same, (48)

As Frost notes in this often-quoted poem, there are many different paths to take in life, but one is really not that much different than the other and we could take the first just as easily as the second, arriving at the same destination in the end. The road to composition is similarly filled with many different paths and a UDL pedagogy that considers the MI of students allows for these variety of paths to ensure that every student reaches the final destination. In my own classroom, these paths converge into a final destination at the completion of the course – where it is my goal for all students to be able to understand, critically analyze and create rhetorical arguments. Although the paths may appear different, they are really the same in that each student is developing the same skills through taking a different path to reach the journey’s end. Though every student may not succeed, the paths to composition will be open to all.

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## Appendix A

Following is a copy of the informed consent form provided to students.

M. Lynn Dill  


Hello,

My name is Lynn Dill and I am a graduate student in the English program at Governors State University (GSU). As part of my thesis research, I am conducting a study this semester to discover the different ways First Year Composition (FYC) students develop the skills needed for persuasive pieces that combine more than one media, such as the combination of words, video, audio or visuals. I will be incorporating the study results into my thesis to help composition instructors understand the ways multiple communication media can be incorporated into FYC courses to provide further access for students.

I will be conducting this study Spring 2016 on the GSU campus. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw from this study, you may do so at any time.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take an online multiple intelligences test based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. This test should take five to ten minutes to complete. Following the test, I will interview you concerning your past experience with multiple communication media and the ways you developed persuasive communication skills through the use of multiple intelligences.

This study poses no foreseeable risks to participants. Any risks associated with this study are not any more than those experienced by individuals in daily life. Every precaution will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of student identities. If you choose to participate, you will be given a pseudonym in notes and my published materials. Every precaution will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of your identity. In addition, I will not share any confidential information that you may reveal during the interview that you do not wish to be made public. I am committed to safeguarding the identities and confidential statements made by participants.

I believe that this study will help you by encouraging you to reflect on your own process that best helps you to compose persuasive pieces of mixed media communication. Further, this study may be used by instructors to design courses that allow access to students with a variety of learning styles and to incorporate a mixed media approach to composition.

If you have any questions about this survey, you may reach me by email at [REDACTED] Project Director Dr. Bradley Smith at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research study or concerns regarding the study itself, you may also contact the Co-Chairs of the Governors State University Institutional Review Board (IRB): Renee Theiss, [REDACTED] or Praggyan (Pam) Mohanty, Ph.D. at [REDACTED] or email at irb@govst.edu . The IRB reviews research projects to insure the ethical conduct of research with human subjects.

Sincerely,

M. Lynn Dill  
Participant Consent

I have read the description of the study being conducted by M. Lynn Dill, and I understand what will happen during this research process.

I am at least 18 years old.

I understand that I may ask questions about the project to Lynn Dill or Dr. Bradley Smith, using the information provided to me in this document. I also understand that I can contact the Institutional Review Board with questions or concerns about this project, using the information provided to me.

I understand that I can withdraw my consent to participate at any time.

Lynn Dill has my permission to take notes and publish parts of what I say during an interview about my writing, with the understanding that she will not reveal my name or other identifying information in any publications or reports.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

Following are the questions asked on the Birmingham Grid for Learning

“Multiple Intelligences Test” used in the study.

Section 1: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Are you male or female?

What is your age? 11 or under, 12-14, 15-16, 17-18, 19 or over

Where do you live? (Students will be prompted to choose a country.)

Section 2: Multiple Intelligences

Participants are asked to click a box that most agrees with them in response to a list of 40 statements. The box choices are: This is not like me at all. I am very rarely like this. This is a bit like me. This is sometimes like me. I am like this more often than not. I am always like this. Following are the list of statements:

1. I enjoy being outdoors when I learn.
2. I am interested in why people do the things they do.
3. I learn well from listening to others.
4. I learn best when I have to get up and do it for myself.
5. I enjoy social events like parties.
6. I can use lots of different words to express myself.
7. I like to think through problems when I walk or run.
8. I like working and thinking on my own and quietly.
9. I can picture scenes in my head when I remember things.
10. I am good at mathematical problems and using numbers.
11. I enjoy making music.
12. I like to make lists.

13. I know myself well.
14. I like to work with my hands.
15. I enjoy writing things down.
16. I like to use charts and diagrams in my learning.
17. I am an independent thinker. I know my own mind.
18. Pollution makes me angry.
19. I like or keep pets.
20. I enjoy games involving other people.
21. I can sort out arguments between friends.
22. I can pick out different instruments when I listen to a piece of music.
23. My mood changes when I listen to music.
24. I always do things one step at a time.
25. I can remember pieces of music easily.
26. I like to think out loud.
27. I remember things like telephone numbers by repeating them to a rhythm.
28. I have a good sense of direction.
29. I can link things together and pick out patterns easily.
30. I am sensitive to the moods and feelings of others.
31. I like to work with a team.
32. I get restless easily.
33. I enjoy working on my own.
34. I enjoy logic problems and puzzles.
35. I need to see something in it for me before I want to learn something.

36. I have a good sense of balance and like to move around a lot.

37. I can take things apart and put them back together easily.

38. I am observant. I often see things others miss.

39. I find it easy to explain to others.

40. I can recognize and name different types of birds, trees and plants.

[http://www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources\\_ftp/client\\_ftp/ks3/ict/multiple\\_int/index.htm](http://www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources_ftp/client_ftp/ks3/ict/multiple_int/index.htm)

Birmingham Grid for Learning. "Multiple Intelligence Test

## Appendix C

Following are a list of the questions students were asked during the interviews.

1. Have you ever composed pieces that communicate, using different media in this one piece, such as words, visuals, audio, or video? Could you describe this composition?
2. Thinking about this particular piece, describe what you did or envisioned to determine your audience. Do you feel that one particular media, or a combination, helped you to more effectively reach your audience? Why?
3. Again, thinking about this particular project or another multiple media project, describe your thoughts, process and actions when you work on appealing to an audience through emotion (pathos), logic (logos), credibility (ethos) or the timeliness (Kairos) of a topic. Let's look at each of these appeals separately.
4. If you were given the choice, which of the following methods do you believe would help you to make a more effective argument (an argument is defined as a position that you take which could be opposed by another)?
  - a. a traditional essay
  - b. a document that includes many charts/statistics
  - c. a drawing, painting or other visual
  - d. a video or slide presentation with a soundtrack
  - e. a project based on your own inner thoughts (ex.
  - f. a group project where you interact with others
  - g. a project where you were able to move around as you made your argument

h. a project that involved nature (presented or composed in an outdoor setting and/or about a topic in the natural environment)

i. a combination of several of these methods (Identify which methods you would choose.)

5. Explain the choices that you made in response to the previous question.

Why/how do you feel that these methods would help you to make an effective argument?

6. Have you ever used any of the above methods in a composition classroom?