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# MULTI-TASKING IN A MULTIMEDIA WRITTING CLASS

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## **Multi-Tasking in a Multimedia Writing Class**

### **Synopsis:**

Our presentation will give practical guidelines on incorporating the use of technology in the writing classroom in the form of various projects that enhance writing assignments and showcases the results of student research. The projects become hands-on experiences giving students opportunities to explore first hand their topics from a more involved and personal advantage, and giving students skills that surpasses the typical freshmen composition experience.

## **Multi-Tasking in a Multimedia Writing Class**

In our desire to find a way to spark interest in our writing courses and to adapt writing skills to other disciplines and within various professions, we began to institute the use of technology in our composition classes offering a multi-media approach to writing. For several semesters, we have integrated basic writing assignments with technology applying the skills learned in composition into projects like computer peer critiquing, movie documentaries, an on line magazine, photo essays, and websites using technology through programs such as Movie Maker, I-Max, Final Cut Pro, Power Point, and Prezi.

The introduction of technology in the classroom was the next natural step in our pedagogy of teaching that centers on the idea of collaboration. Collaboration, coauthored writing, cooperation, and peer work are terms that have been integrated into our discussions of pedagogy throughout our teaching careers. We use the term *collaboration* to mean the action of two or more people working together to create something - a concept, a discussion, an essay, a project, a classroom technique. Our collaborative projects demonstrate to our students the value of collaborating and the wisdom of sharing ideas and working together in collegiality to accomplish a goal that reflects the best efforts of each member of the group. The use of technology enhanced this idea of collaboration.

We first applied technology to assist our students in revising their essays in a collaborative peer critiquing and discussion project called “The Peer Collaborated Conversation.” The project links two colleges, six composition classes, and 150 students on Blackboard for sharing students’ ideas and comments on reviewing and critiquing essays, group discussions, presentations and other shared projects. One of the main objectives for the project was to give students a more varied audience outside the classroom. Guided by specific guidelines, we create a forum for students’ to share ideas, give feedback and advice to their peers placing them in the role of tutor, coaching their peers to improve their writing. Using Blackboard extensively, we review and critique writing, exchange impressions and thoughts on common readings and view power point presentations given in each of the classes. Throughout this project, we have taught students various computer skills using Blackboard, Power Point/ Prezi, and streaming video. This project has successfully improved our students’ writing skills, editing skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills, and technical skills.

Another technological collaboration project we have used in our classes is the making of documentaries based on the readings and themes of the semester. The documentaries are approximately 10 minutes long, and the students use programs such as Movie Maker, I-Max or more professional programs like Final Cut Pro to create the documentaries using digital cameras, webcams, camcorders and smart phones. This year, our students focused on the social injustices presented in the stories they read in our class texts. Their documentaries were forays into understanding the causes and possible solutions for the many social injustice “isms” such as ageism, racism, classism, ableism, and sexism incorporating the use of ethos, logos and pathos through images, music and concise and meaningful language. This project fostered independent thinking that synthesized the students’ research into a convincing opinion while still maintaining an academic format. Making the documentaries utilized the skills we practiced in class about

writing such as the writing situation, modes of writing, organization, development, supporting evidence, tone, audience and other techniques of writing. It nurtured collaboration among students in the class even enlisting peers not in our classes to participate in the project. The students were excited to make the movies, and the finished product, exceeding all of our expectations, were posted on *You Tube* or on Google Docs.

More recently, we have moved our use of technology into the realm of research and argument. In the past we included making short concise mini arguments in the form of a PSA or public service announcement written, produced and filmed by the students. The PSA is based on the end of the semester argument research paper that is a culmination of a semester long dialog that includes class presentations on their research topic areas. The PSA is 5 minutes, so it forces students to make the most of their message using music, images, actors, wording and organization to state their message and appeal to their audience in the most effective way possible. It has brought the students together in collaboration working on joint projects. Currently, we have expanded our use of technology in our research process using digital research journals, digital portfolios and another culminating digital project with more options that requires students to convincingly argue their point of view in a digital presentation in front of the class. The students can use various digital methods to convince their audience of their points of view to include websites, documentaries, digital posters, digital comic strips, e-zines and other digital means of communication. These digital means of communication utilize all the same skills one uses to create a written argument such as tone, wording, organization and research, except it is combined with text to enhance the message through sound, color, and graphics.

In spring of 2014, we published our 8th annual on line issue of *The College Initiative*. We created a magazine authored and managed solely by students. This magazine is a publication about college students- for college students- by college students, and it is an ongoing collaboration between Marist College and SUNY New Paltz. The magazine focuses on our students' first year experiences, what they have learned and what they can share with incoming students. The articles reflect the students' interests and concerns as members of their campus communities and as citizens of the world. Our writers elaborate on what they think about, what they value and what they have accomplished during their first year at college. Our purpose is to bring to our readers a contemporary magazine that is informative, and to move our students' writing out of the classroom and into the world. We utilize web tools to create a digital publication.

Photo essays are another way to introduce technology into writing. Rounding out the readings and in class discussions that reflect a course theme like immigration, the students focus on photos as primary sources and use them as a form of supporting evidence. The students meet and cultivate relationships with interviewees conducting formal podcast interviews and documenting their research with photos in the investigation of their topic. The students use digital cameras and Photoshop programs to incorporate their photos into their text for a smooth inclusion of their supporting evidence and Audacity to record their interviews.

More importantly, we see our roles as teachers to emphasis integrity, honesty and self-reflection in our students' writing. We need to stress to our students the meaningfulness of their words, the

pride in their work, and that it should reflect the best part of who they are as human beings. Technology has facilitated this goal.