

SUPPORTING MULTIMODAL LITERACY: SUPPLEMENT 1

The Language of Multimodal Texts

When analyzing multimodal texts it's important to use precise language when making your observations. The following lists include the basic terms associated with multimodal texts, the language used to define the modes, and the language of design.

The Basic Language of Multimodal Texts

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

Media (singular = Medium) - Though media is sometimes used in place of mode, media (and its singular medium) actually refers to the ways a text reaches its audience (e.g. photograph, website, song). A medium can contain multiple modes (e.g. a song has words and audio, a video of that song would also include gestures and spatial arrangement).

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

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

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

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

an anonymous article posted on a website, such as WebMD. WebMD becomes the implied author of an article in absence of a named author.

Multimodality in Composition

In the composition field, multimodal elements are commonly defined in terms of the five modes of communication: linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, audio. These terms are often paired with the language of design to create a more thorough conversation about the different modes, especially when referencing compositions that combine words and images, such as posters, presentations and websites.

The Five Modes

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

Visual – color, layout, style, size, perspective

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

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

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

The Language of Design

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

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

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

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

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

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