

SUPPORTING MULTIMODAL LITERACY: SUPPLEMENT 4

Assignment Sheet for Analyzing a Multimodal Text

Proposal Due Date:

Rough Draft Due Date:

Final Due Date:

Length:

Format:

Introduction

Most media you encounter each day combines modes—news articles include photographs; television shows include audio, verbal text, and gestures; websites make use of alphabetic text and spatial arrangement; music contains both lyrics and sound. Even an academic paper has multimodal elements such as font choice, double-spacing, margins, etc. By analyzing multimodal texts you can become a more active viewer of the media that surrounds us and understand how media shapes our understanding of the world. But it can be challenging to analyze multimodal texts because first we must learn how to recognize modes in order to discover how the modes work together to create meaning and how they respond to the rhetorical situation.

Assignment Goals

- To gain the ability to recognize the modes and media elements in a multimodal text.
- To use multimodal evidence to make an argument.
- To improve the ability to describe evidence in specific detail.
- To strengthen critical thinking and analysis skills
- To understand a multimodal text in terms of its rhetorical situation.
- To become an active viewer of multimodal texts.

Language of Multimodality

The following are the five main modes that can be found in a multimodal text with some examples of elements of each mode. Each media you choose will also include more specific language and elements. Be sure to reference terms related to your chosen media when brainstorming and drafting.

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.

Choosing a Multimodal Text

There are various multimodal texts you can choose from: advertisements, websites, film, television, social media, photography, music, news articles, and visual art are all multimodal texts. When choosing a multimodal text to analyze, look for a text that is surprising or mysterious to you. A straightforward text with a clear message might be more difficult to analyze than a more complex one that raises questions for you. Look for texts that include a variety of modes and that seem to target specific groups of people (youth, gender, elderly, minorities).

Brainstorming Your Essay

Once you locate a multimodal text, brainstorm about it to locate a central question you would like to use to address this text.

1. Make of everything you notice in the multimodal text, using the elements and language relevant to your media. Be as objective as possible, listing only concrete details you notice in the text.
2. Freewrite about your immediate reactions to the multimodal text. How does it make you feel? Why? Connect your answers to some of the elements listed in step one.
3. Freewrite about the message you feel the multimodal text is sending about society.
4. Look over your list and your freewrite and look for connections and themes that emerge.
5. Select one theme and use this theme to create a central question about your text.

The following are some example central questions:

- What message does this ad send about the role of women in today's society?
- How does the narrative and cinematic elements work together in this film to oversimplify romantic relationships?
- How does the editing, camera angle, and music work together to create an exaggerated sense of good and bad in this reality television show?
- Does this song promote violence or is it criticizing violent media? What elements reveal this perspective?

Essay Proposal

After you have brainstormed and arrived at a central question, then post a proposal on the class website that answers the following questions:

1. What multimodal text have you chosen and why?
2. What central question are you considering using to address your multimodal text?
3. What elements from the multimodal text will be relevant evidence in your essay?

Using Modes and Media Elements as Evidence

As you draft your essay, use your central question to guide the selection of modes and media elements that you include as evidence. When you brainstormed, you noticed likely made observations about a large variety of elements. For the essay, you will choose the elements relevant to answering your central question. You also need to describe the specific details of the media elements you choose to include in your essay. For example, rather than just saying “the close up shows the attitude toward women in the ad” describe what the close up shows. Include specific details about what you see and hear when discussing your evidence. Be sure to always follow your evidence with analysis that discusses how the evidence helps to answer your central question.

Things to Avoid

Don't evaluate – Your goal is to interpret, not to evaluate. Do not focus on why the text is good or bad. You may explore this in your conclusion if you would like to touch on the value of the text once you have clearly argued your position on the meaning of the text.

Don't just write a list - The essay should not simply list modes and media elements—choose a few specific issues or elements to analyze and discuss how they relate to each other or build on each other to create your interpretation.

Don't be too broad - Avoid being too broad by covering too much material. The text will include many media elements and modes that you might observe—focus your argument on a few key features that matter to your argument.

Avoid weak analysis - The analysis should avoid generalizations (“this text means many different things to different people”—what specific interpretation do you assert is prominent for the specific audience in question?).