

The Digital “Story” Project: A Multimodal Composition

Project Due: Monday, January 25

Essay Due: Tuesday, January 26, with Final

Required Products (More Details on Page 2)

1. A **2-15 minute (“reading” time) digital, multimodal story** that must, in some way, include *textual, visual, and audio* elements. It could (and maybe should) cross or combine genres. For example, the story could begin as traditional text, move to comics format, and end as a short video. Or it could include text only as dialogue bubbles or graphic design elements, instead leaning heavily on recorded materials. It could do several things at once, too. You have many options. (Being “multimodal” means using more than one “mode” of communication.)
2. A 200-500 word **descriptive statement**, to accompany your work in the online archive.
3. A **reflective essay**, examining your choices and your process. (See note on page 2.)

Subject/Focus Options

- A short documentary or creative nonfiction exploration of a person, place, thing, or idea that interests you, in the style suggested by, for example, Ira Glass and *Radiolab* pieces we listened to. (For this option, you would want to choose something that you already understand quite well.)
- A journalistic news story/package designed for the web.
- An adaptation of a short work of literature (fiction, drama, or poetry) that interests you. (Or an adaptation of *part* of a longer work.) This could be your own work, or your friend’s, or something that is completely out of copyright/public domain.
- Something more poetic than traditional “stories” that makes good use of audio, visual, and textual elements. (Here, poetry becomes visual and auditory, as well as textual, in the style of *Born Magazine*.)
- A series of short adaptations of short works (e.g., a series of short poems).
- Other ideas? “Story” can mean many different things for this project. Let’s talk.

Media/Formats to Consider

Edited audio and video recordings, photo essays (with or without audio, probably with some kind of guiding captions, somewhere, somehow), comics sequences, hypertextual sequences and segments. “Mashups” in general, bringing together various formats and materials in various ways, are good to contemplate as you work out your ideas for this project. Other ideas? Let’s (as always) talk. Ideally, you will be able to place all of your materials online in some way.

Collaboration is Allowed (and Even Encouraged)

You may form a team for the purpose of completing this project. Teams may have no more than four members, and each member must write his or her own essay, addressing both his/her individual contributions and the project as a whole. The team will turn in one final product and may choose to turn in one collective creator’s statement or to write individual statements.

Projects Should...

Show thoughtful use of and *combination of visual, auditory, and textual* storytelling tools.

Contain elements of strong *literary artistry and/or journalistic storytelling* (e.g., characters, poetics, clear structure, an ending that is earned in some way by what has come before).

Demonstrate thoughtful use of basic *photographic principles* (rule of thirds, framing, avoiding mergers, using light well, and so on), *visual design, image selection, and image sequencing*.

Projects Should NOT...

Projects *should NOT use any copyrighted materials* that you do not have the right to use. You may use (and are encouraged to use) creative commons and out-of-copyright materials, but you should use those materials in ways that are consistent with the licenses attached to them.

Reflective Essay

For this project, the reflective essay is a part of the final essay/exam for the course. See separate assignment sheet for final.

Descriptive Statement / Screen Shot for the Course Archive

The model for this is the kind of brief note you might find beside a museum artifact. Provide a brief (200-500 word) introduction to your project, noting its title, creator(s), materials and technologies used, and relationship to your other work and interests. For example: “Joe Schmoe was a junior journalism major at Whitworth University when he created this multigenre visual poem. He used a series of images shot collaboratively with John Doe, a Spokane-area photographer, as the basis for his exploration of 21st-century indie rock music. The music is by Annie D’Arko and The Spokane Valley Five, used under creative commons licenses. The intricate textual intertitles interspersed throughout were created using PowerPoint and then modified with... [and so on].”

Include also a single screenshot of some part of your project (or some kind of appropriate photoshopped image) that can be included as a “link” picture for your project. Pick an image you think is representative somehow of the project as a whole.

Credits

There’s no clear-cut MLA-style guideline yet for crediting what you borrow, cite, and repurpose in a multimodal composition. For now, follow this guideline: Find a way to respect your collaborators by giving credit where it’s due. One way to do that is the way it’s done in movies and on TV shows—through scrolling credits at the start or end, or at least through a “credits” screen somewhere. You might also work image credits into the composition itself, if you can do so in a way that isn’t disruptive. Or you might, in some cases, include credits as part of the written or recorded portions of your work. E.g., “This image, taken from a collection by Bob Loblaw, shows...”

Potential Creative Pitfalls to Worry About

Be sure to think through the complexity of what you’re trying to get done for this project. Scripts that demand lots of actors can be very difficult to pull off. Dramatic dialogue itself can be incredibly difficult to get right, and for that reason alone you may want to limit the amount of dialogue you use in your “story.” (Voiceover, as you know from creating your slideware project, can be more easily managed.) Scripts/ideas that include several different locations may make it difficult for you to record audio or to keep audio levels more or less the same throughout your project. Without high quality cameras, lighting can be an issue in certain situations. Basically: Give some thought to the complexities of your script as you develop it. You may be able to find great, low-budget work-arounds for most problems, but you may also want to write certain problems out of your project.

A Partial List of Tools You Might Use

Images: Flickr Creative Commons Search; Creative Commons.org; other potential image sources that you can find by following links on our course “Tools” page. Remember that you can create/shoot and edit your own images for this—or any—of our projects.

Stealing Material: Don’t use any image or other material that you don’t have the right to use.

Some Desktop Software: MS Word, MS Publisher, MS PowerPoint (or Apple’s Keynote), Screen Capture Software (such as Jing), Audacity (or Apple’s GarageBand), Windows Movie Maker (or Apple’s iMovie)

Online Software: Picnik, Jing, Flickr, Slideshare.net (or Sliderocket.com), FTP to Whitworth (or Archive.org or Odeo.com) for posting audio, SiteKreator and Weebly and Blogger.com for simple template-based website creation, kompoZer for website authoring

Equipment: See me if you need to borrow a microphone or Flip video camera.

Capture Video from DVD for Educational Purposes Only: Handbrake

Other? → Feel free to use other tools that you have access to and are familiar with.

More Useful Links Here: <http://abjohnson.net/DigitalStorytellingTools.html>

Scoring for Digital Story Project (Essay Scored Separately)

A: Project is ambitious, interesting, and thoughtfully executed. Project demonstrates that the creator is coming to grips with multimodal composition as a combination of image, word, design, and sequence meant to communicate. The project itself will be evidence that its creator has been paying attention to the ideas we've been exploring in class. More work will not necessarily net a higher grade, but the "A" project is likely to include a wide variety of elements, smoothly meshed together to create a unified "story."

B: A very good project that falls short of "A" standards in some key way.

C: The project does its basic job as a short multi-modal production, but it may be weak in its message or audience awareness, lack unity, or demonstrate less ambition in terms of design and content.

D and below: This project may suffer from weaker writing, unambitious design, or an unclear message. It demonstrates only passing familiarity with and/or grasp of class discussions and readings on the combination of images, words, and sequence.

Points / Scoring Guide

10 Points **Creator's Statement + Screen Shot**

20 Points **Audio and Time-/Sequence-Based Elements**

20 Points **Visual Design Elements**

20 Points **Verve, Effort, and Ambition**

30 Points **Overall Clarity/Quality; Successful Merging of Different Elements**

****Note/Addendum for *The JUMP*****

As suggested above, the reflective essay that accompanies this project is 30% of the take-home final exam for the course, scored separately from the project itself. This is the prompt for the reflective essay:

As the graphic novelist Seth suggests of his own work, the kind of multimodal communication you've done for your digital story can be a challenging combination of poetry and graphic design. In a 2-4 page reflective essay, you should examine both the results of your work on the digital story and the composing processes behind it, highlighting your discoveries about the expressive opportunities and difficulties presented by this increasingly common kind of multimodal composition.

If helpful, you might include screen captures from different phases of your work, to demonstrate your choices (or to illustrate your more general points about how multimodal composition works), and you might include copies of your developmental materials—scripts, storyboards, and so on.