



MULTIMODAL ARGUMENT

INTRODUCTION

So far in this course we have studied how writing can be used to make effective arguments in various situations with various appeals and tools. Though writing is one of the main rhetorical modes we encounter, it is certainly not the only one. Each day we experience messages that use a number of visual strategies to convince us to buy something, vote for someone, or support some cause. Crafty *rhetors*—those who seek to persuade others—not only *write* arguments, they *design* them. Through the multimodal argument assignment, you will work with a group to design or *compose* a persuasive document using rhetorical principles you have already learned but in a new way.

WHAT IS A MULTIMODAL ARGUMENT?

The word “multimodal” suggests a persuasive message made up of text, hypertext, color, images, charts, tables, graphs, video and audio clips, or other symbolic strategies. Each mode has rhetorical qualities and constraints on its own, but a multimodal argument brings various modes together to form a persuasive ensemble. With your instructor’s guidance, your group will make and support a claim in a multimodal document to respond to a new rhetorical situation.

Through the multimodal argument you will learn **that**

- all communication is *situated*;
- much of your future composing will incorporate more than words; and
- various modes have different rhetorical *affordances* (strengths and constraints).

And you will learn to

- use multiple modes to compose an argument *collaboratively*;
- make intentional, effective rhetorical decisions using more than words;
- reflect on the decisions you make while composing in multimodes (especially if the instructor chooses to incorporate critical reflection into the final).

PREPARING TO COMPOSE

While you will rely on many of the same rhetorical principles in preparing to write your multimodal argument as you have used for other writing tasks, the multimodal argument will be somewhat of a departure since it is a collaborative project. Your first task is to meet as a group and decide how you will work together to complete the project. You may want to elect someone to act as group leader to make sure each member of the group knows his or her responsibilities. You'll also want to write up a timeline for when you will meet (both in and out of class) and when you will complete parts of the project.

Since this is a group task, you will be evaluated in part by how well you work with your team and how much you contribute to the final product. Though you may assign a group leader, no one person should do all the work or make all the assignments. Like all important endeavors, group projects require good rhetoric. Use effective appeals to work toward consensus in group decisions. You may want to vote on important decisions that need to be made after thorough discussion in which everyone is given a chance to assert opinions.

Before you begin composing your document, you will want to use invention strategies and research to come up with the most effective argument. Think of the needs of your audience. Once you have an idea of what your group wants to argue, start thinking about how you want to design your document. Your instructor may assign you a specific kind of document—a brochure, poster, web page, or proposal. Learn as much as you can about the rhetorical potential of the kind of document you'll eventually produce.

ORGANIZATION

You are used to the idea that an argument should have some kind of *shape* or *arrangement* that makes sense to the reader. We make our writing coherent and cohesive by sticking to the point, using topic sentences and signal phrases, and developing an argument in a logical sequence. In the multimodal argument, arrangement takes on a new level of meaning as you work with images and other visual cues to lead a reader through an argument that may not be as linear as an essay. Still, you will want to compose your multimodal argument in such a way that the reader experiences the argument in a sequence most conducive to your purposes.

Here are a few principles of arrangement you'll want to consider as your group composes your document:

- Contrast—are some items dramatically different than others for emphasis?
- Repetition—does your group use consistency by repeating aspects of design throughout the document?
- Alignment—is every mode and element placed purposefully in the document so that nothing seems arbitrary?
- Proximity—do you put like elements together to imply relationships?
- Usability—can the reader follow easily a sequence in your argument?
- Text—does the text support the images and vice versa? Do you use subheads, bullet points, and typefaces effectively to aid reading?

MULTIMODAL ARGUMENT ASSIGNMENT SHEET

Task: In groups of two to four, design an argument using at least *two* rhetorical strategies beyond alphabetic writing. Use images (e.g., digital photos), tables, graphs, charts, hyperlinks, audio or video clips, bullet points and other document design strategies to enhance your argument and convince your audience.

Select *one* of the following mediums for your message:

- brochure
- poster
- web page
- proposal

(Your instructor may assign the entire class to produce one of these documents.)

You must use at least 250 words of text in your document, in addition to two other modes.

Select *one* of the following rhetorical situations to respond to with your multimodal argument:

1. BYU's President has invited a campus-wide dialogue about the university. Your group has decided to argue for a change in policy that you believe will improve campus life. Create a document that argues for such a change. You can argue for a change in facility, technology, course offerings, campus amenities, or administrative procedures. You may suggest substantial changes in services or institutions, or you may want to propose a new program, organization, service, or institution that would benefit the university community. Direct your document to the BYU community at large.
2. You and your peers have decided you want to make the world a better place. Write a multimodal argument that addresses a public problem and suggests a course of action. Your goal is to persuade stakeholders at the local, state, or national level that you understand the problem and have a compelling stance, backed by good reasons and evidence. Consider yourselves an advocacy group focused on bringing this issue to the attention of the public and convincing them to feel, think, or behave a certain way about your issue. You may want to turn to the clubs, voluntary societies, and discourse communities you already belong to for ideas.
3. You have just finished a researched issues paper for Writing 150. Perhaps someone in your group wrote about an issue that your group feels that all 150 students should know about. Take that argument and transform it into a multimodal argument addressed to your peers in this class.

GRADING RUBRIC: MULTIMODAL ARGUMENT

___The “A” Multimodal Argument (90–100 points)

The “A” MA has a clear, compelling, *kairotic* argument supported by effective rhetorical appeals and strategies for the audience selected. Additionally, the writers use writing and at least two other modes (like images, tables, or symbols) to create a convincing, clear ensemble that is both unified and coherent.

The writing in the document is appropriate for the audience, grammatically correct, precise, and eloquent—a convincing *ethos* is established. Punctuation, spelling, mechanics, and other usage reflect the highest standards of edited American English. Other modes are blended in effectively to reinforce the argument, present salient information, and connect to readers emotionally. There is a clear arrangement principle at work. The writers use principles of design effectively (such as contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity; color and font; balance, emphasis, point of view, proportion, and unity). Overall, the writers use the chosen format appropriately and to its full potential.

___The “B” Multimodal Argument (80–89 points)

The “B” MA has a clear, *kairotic* argument supported by effective rhetorical appeals and strategies for the audience selected, though there may be minor gaps in the argument or weaknesses in the appeals. The writers use writing and at least two other modes (like images, tables, or symbols) to create a convincing ensemble that is mostly unified and coherent, though at times the relationship between all the parts or strategies may not be as strong as it should be.

The writing in the document is appropriate for the audience and grammatically correct, though the *ethos* of the group may not be distinct or completely convincing. Punctuation, spelling, mechanics, and other usage mostly reflect high standards of edited American English, with few exceptions. The writers use an arrangement principle that is mostly clear. Other modes are blended in effectively to reinforce the argument, and the writers use principles of design. In places the design may seem less effective or more arbitrary than it should be, but design decisions do not yet distract from the overall purpose or argument. The writers use the format well, if not necessarily to its fullest potential.

___The “C” Multimodal Argument (70–79 points)

The “C” MA has an argument, though that argument may not be completely clear in the document. The writers’ purpose is evident, but the argument is not supported enough to be completely convincing. The writers may not establish the timeliness of the argument. The document uses writing and at least two other modes, though the document may have too much text or too many images to make the point intended. There is an argument present, but the ensemble may not contribute strongly enough to make the argument convincing.

The writing in the document is readable, with a few obvious errors in punctuation, spelling, mechanics, and usage that may mar slightly the credibility of the writers. Overall arrangement might be a bit mysterious. The writers make design decisions that begin to distract from the experience of the reader: e.g., the document may lack effective contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity, emphasis, or unity. It takes some effort to understand how the writers want readers to experience the argument. Other modes are used, but the connection they have to other parts of the document is weak. The writers make competent—though not necessarily effective—use of the chosen format.

___The “D” Multimodal Argument (60–69 points)

The “D” MA demonstrates little awareness of the rhetorical situation, and the purpose or position of the writers is not clearly defined. Claims go unsupported, or rhetorical appeals are superficial or unpersuasive. The writing has glaring errors. Other modes may be used, but they are used ineffectively: e.g., data cannot be read, images are blurry, there is no alignment or arrangement principle at work, the colors clash, the text is illegible, the modes do not reinforce each other, etc. The important information may not be accessible. Generally the document looks thrown together.

___The “E” Multimodal Argument (0–59 points)

The “E” MA falls well short of the minimum requirements of the assignment, is plagiarized, or violates a policy established by an individual instructor.

COVER SHEET**MULTIMODAL ARGUMENT PAPER**Group Members _____

Section _____

MA Subject _____

We have included the following documents in our portfolio:

- MA Grading Rubric
- Reflective memos from each group member
- MA (final draft)
- MA drafts from each group member

Note: If your portfolio is missing any of the items listed above, you may be docked points on your grade for this assignment.

If you agree to let future instructors of WRTG 150 use your paper (with names removed) for training purposes, check below:

I agree to let instructors of WRTG 150 use my paper for training purposes.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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