

Are you ready to assign multimedia projects? A pedagogical questionnaire

Dr. Cheryl E. Ball, English Department, cball@ilstu.edu
<http://www.ceball.com/classes>

- Do you have a **good reason** to do it?

Will assigning a multimedia project meet the same, or more, goals that your original “paper” assignment? Because it’s “fun” or “the students like it” is a good place to start, but how does the assignment help them learn/synthesize the course content?

- Have you **done the project** yourself?

Do you know how much time/effort goes into composing a multimedia project as compared to a 10-page paper? (See rule of thumb below.) Have you encountered all the technological hiccups, multimedia snafus, and – most importantly – communication choices the students will inevitably ask you about? Having done the project yourself will give you a better idea of how to evaluate the students’ projects. Plus you’ll have a model/example for the students to follow that shows what you value in their projects.

- Are you willing to assign **value** to the **learning** process and the students’ use of multiple media?

A student learning to shoot and edit video for the first time is the same as a student learning to *write* for the first time. Most students won’t have production experience despite their consumption experience with digital media. This isn’t Microsoft Word. This isn’t using block quotes.

A 10-page paper is not nearly equivalent to a 10-page video with respect to the time it takes to compose nor in its learning outcomes. **Rule of thumb**—a *proficient* producer of digital video has a typical editing-to-finished product ratio of **200:1** minutes. That’s 200 minutes of editing for every 1 minute of finished video. And that’s JUST the editing part. Add in all the research, storyboarding, scripting, filming, and capturing parts involved in the “writing” process, and you’re looking at more like **2000:1**. Consider a 2–3 minute video as equivalent in scope and purpose to a 10-page, double-spaced paper.

- Do you and the students have access to appropriate **hardware, software, and personnel** to support the students’ projects?

Multimedia involves sharing and collaboration at its best (think of Hollywood movies). Do you have movie cameras to loan out to small groups? Does someone else on campus? Do the students own cameras? Will you allow students to “rip” videos from websites like YouTube to use? How about Creative Commons or the Prelinger Archives?

If you have a departmental lab that students might be working in, who are the IT people responsible for that lab? Do they know you’re working on this project? What kind of hard-drive space or network space will your students need to use? What are the open lab hours?

Who will be buying the media on which students will film? (tapes, Flash media, etc., depending on cameras). Will the students be using audio? If so, have you asked them to buy headphones? Is this on your syllabus?

- Are you willing to take **class time** to teach the students what you want them to do?

Just like assigning research papers in your class, the outcomes are usually better when you show the students how to complete the assignment. This doesn't mean knowing the software inside and out and being a technical expert. There are plenty of tutorials online that will help students through freeware programs like MovieMaker (for PCs), iMovie (for Macs), or Audacity (for audio-editing). Having students work in groups, and sharing their technical knowledge among and across groups is one of the best ways students learn new skills.

- Are you prepared to answer **copyright and permissions issues** for your students?

What's your take on Fair Use, digital remixing, and multimedia citation practices? If they interview someone, make sure they get permission (on tape or in writing) from that person to film them. They also may need to get permission to use copyrighted material. Regarding Fair Use, however, a **rule of thumb** is this: If the "quote" they are using (from a video, song, etc.) is crucial to making their argument/meeting the purpose of the piece, then it probably falls under Fair Use and students do not need to get permission to use the clip. IANAL, but another **rule of thumb** that I use: Have students cite every piece of media they use in their videos (unless its original footage) just like a Hollywood movie cites the actors, music, scriptwriter, etc. For more information on Fair Use, see the [Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Online Video](http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/resources/publications/fair_use_in_online_video/):

http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/resources/publications/fair_use_in_online_video/

If you plan on distributing these movies (either on YouTube or in your research, etc.), you may need IRB approval.

- Do you like to be **schmoozed or wowed**?

Many students will want to be reassured that you're not judging them on technical proficiency, unless that's the point of the class (in which case, you wouldn't be at this workshop). Beware of the schmooze factor. Something whiz-bang can be a critical dud. On the other hand, do you value lo-fi work if it succeeds in fulfilling the purpose of the assignment? (These pieces often "wow" me because they are thoughtful and smart while being relatively low-end on the technical proficiency.) Let students know where you stand regarding the expected "production quality" of the work. How will production quality figure into their grade? (Keep in mind that a video that won't actually run isn't the same as lo-fi. It's just broke.)

- How will you **assess** the students' projects?

Combine what you know about grading paper assignments with what you know from everyday life about how multimedia persuades us. Come up with a rubric (if you want) that assesses the whole assignment. A good starting place is with a text's purpose. Do all of the multimedia elements (voiceover, inter/titles, soundtrack, video, still images, etc.) help you understand the text's point? Think of a song: What mood does hearing Willie Nelson put you in? Would you expect to find "Crazy" paired with a video about elementary-age special education students? No! (Ugh!) But you might find a children's song, or a light instrumental. Be able to articulate these basic reactions and explain to students (through a workshop process, if possible) that they need to consider how ALL media choices affect the meaning a viewer takes away from the piece.