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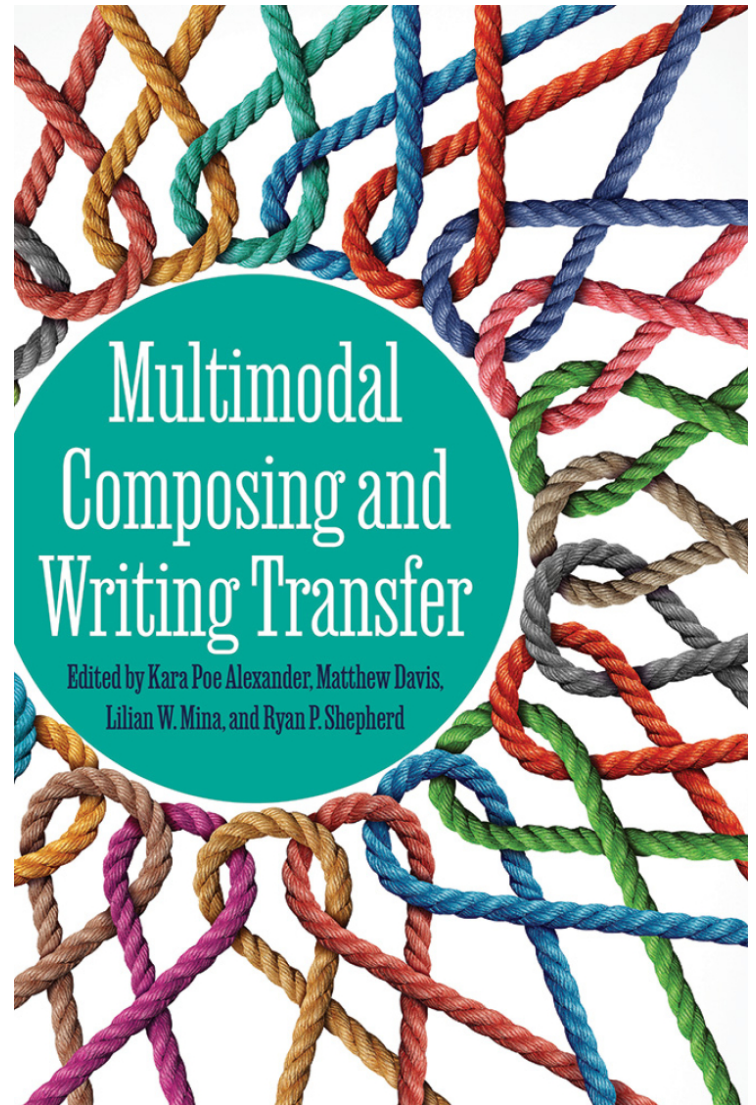
Review of *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer*, edited by Kara Poe Alexander, Matthew Davis, Lilian W. Mina, and Ryan P. Shepherd

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Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer, edited by Kara Poe Alexander, Matthew Davis, Lilian W. Mina, and Ryan P. Shepherd. Utah State University Press, 2024.

Any discussion about multimodal composition inevitably invites the question: “What counts as writing?” This question of what “counts” often reveals an

underlying assumption that multimodality lacks adequate academic rigor. “What counts as writing” leads to further considerations, such as identifying pedagogical strategies to help students expand their knowledge in new writing contexts and genres. In their 2016 edited collection, Chris M. Anson and Jessie L. Moore define transfer “as the ability to repurpose or transform prior knowledge for a new context” (370). As they offer their definition of transfer, Anson and Moore note the complexity of the term and write, “for many scholars transfer functions as an umbrella term, encompassing an array of theories about the phenomenon” (370). Kara Poe Alexander, Matthew Davis, Lilian W. Mina, and Ryan P. Shepherd’s edited collection *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer* considers writing transfer and what counts as writing within a multimodal context.



Concerns about what “counts” as writing are legitimate. The editors’ Introduction notes how multimodality and writing transfer “emerge from scholarly starting points that treat writing as a complex, socially embedded, purpose-driven activity and prompt scholars and teachers to attempt to push past moments in which writing is treated or studied as if it were singular, static, monomodal, or immutable” (4). Multimodality centers the complexity of writing. Multimodal work represents a key area of possibility for writing transfer, as Chris M. Anson calls attention to in the book’s Forward (xiv-xv). By later quoting Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes in the Introduction, the editors frame the stakes of multimodality as it pertains to transfer by arguing that “ignoring multimodal composing and continuing to leave it at the doorstep of our writing classrooms means we may ‘fail to meet our students’ most pressing needs as communicators’ who use those technologies every day” (7). Multimodal composing

enables students to write in legitimate ways. Multimodal composing endeavors create assignments that match students' writing futures and create meaningful transfer opportunities.

In Chapter 1, "Seeing It Hearing It, Feeling It: Digital Methods for the Study of Transfer Across Media," Crystal VanKooten calls for multimodal methods of data collection to better understand and study writing transfer (28). In her research, VanKooten observed and used video recordings for class interactions, lessons, and research interviews for meta-awareness and transfer across media (32). The deliberate use of video as a multimodal research tool enables greater representation and participation in the research process. Moreover, as VanKooten notes, multimodality enables her to "look, listen, and feel" through the data. VanKooten's approach, informed by a qualitative grounded theory methodology, is especially important for marginalized students and perspectives (33). Vankooten's work demonstrates the expansive potential of multimodal methods.

Jialei Jiang calls attention to technology design tools as a key issue of writing transfer in Chapter 2, "Making Transfer Matter Across Digital Media Platforms: First Year Writers' Design of Multimodal Campaigns for Social Advocacy." Jiang writes that "while transfer of writing seems to be effective when students are able to see the commonalities between print-based and multimodal composing tasks... challenges include difficulties in conceptualizing audiences, negotiating semiotic resources, and addressing rhetorical constraints" (50). Jiang's chapter focuses on digital platforms and students' familiarity with those platforms. Empirical data was collected from surveys on students' familiarity with design platforms and tools. Formal knowledge of creative platforms from both in-school and out-of-school contexts plays a significant role in students' transfer abilities like what counts and what is valued in the classroom. Jiang closes by calling attention to the affordances of cloud-based technologies for multimodal projects. The multimodal projects enable students to expand their writing knowledge through these cloud-based technologies.

Joseph Anthony Wilson and Josie Rose Portz offer an expansive definition of multimodality in Chapter 3, "On the Labor of Writing Transfer: Bodies and Borderlands Discourses in Translation." They define multimodality to be "methods of conveying meaning across (linguistic, generic, technological) boundaries" (66-7). Their definition expands multimodality to conceptualize the rhetorical work of translation as multimodality and as a form of transfer. Their chapter considers the language practices of their participants in English and Russian

Sign Language (RSL). Zhannat, a research participant in Wilson and Portz's study, engages in embodied communication through her use of signs. Accordingly, motions captured in social media videos are not *part of* how she communicates but are *how* she communicates. Wilson and Portz succinctly note the significance of the positionality of the translator with respect to writing studies, asserting that "a positionality toward translation that considers resistance might instead clue teachers and researchers in to the gendered, hetero-normative, ableist, and the ethnic discourses (to name a few) that writers negotiate, even in the production of texts appearing in line with institutional and pedagogical objectives" (80). The benefits and potential of multimodality expand beyond simply opportunities for an assignment, as multimodality may become a dynamic knowledge making endeavor. Wilson and Portz' chapter demonstrates the labor inherent in multimodal composing for meaning making beyond just alphabetic prose.

Part II, "Multimodality and Transfer in Vertical Curriculum," shifts the focus of transfer and multimodality beyond first-year writing contexts. The chapters in this section consider other spaces of institutional transfer and multimodal learning. Part II opens with Kara Poe Alexander, Becca Cassady, and Michael-John DePalma's "Equipping Tutors to Transfer Multimodality Writing Knowledge to Writing Center Contexts." This chapter focuses on writing center tutors as they support students working on multimodal projects and writing center directors are likely the primary audience for this chapter. Tutors do not recognize their "non-academic" multimodal knowledge basis (93). Again, questions of what counts as multimodal knowledge and what counts as writing return. Centering multimodal composition in writing classrooms creates additional opportunities for tutors to further their academic multimodal knowledge. Their chapter recommends that writing center directors define key terms with tutors relating to multimodality/transfer and seek new ways to connect vernacular terminologies of multimodality to rhetoric and composition concepts (100-01). Greater clarity of terms between tutors and instructors/directors can support student learning. Clearly defining key terms between academic jargon and vernacular usage can be a productive practice too.

Chapter 5, "'It's Not Like I Can Put a Picture of a Paper on Instagram, You Know?': Genre and Multimodality in Writing Knowledge Transfer across Contexts" by Anna V. Knutson, looks closely at genre to explore student writing in a social media context. Her chapter featured interviews from eight undergraduate students associated with feminist student organizations. Knutson synthesizes one student's experiences composing for social media. She writes, "Ava is thinking in sophisticated ways about the relationship between genre and multimodality in

online writing, even if she is not using the same language writing studies researchers would use to describe these phenomena” (108). Knutson reminds readers that writers are always negotiating genre implications of length and scope and argues that length plays an important role in understanding what writing is valued. Knutson writes that “it is understandable, then, that students tend to place so much value on how *much* they write as an indicator of how *well* they write” (118). Recognizing students’ prior knowledge about language and writing can lead to social justice outcomes. Emphasizing multimodal genres offers potential for writing transfer.

“The Other Curriculum: Social Media and Its Connection to University Writing,” Ryan P. Shepherd’s chapter, builds upon the value of recognizing students’ prior writing knowledge. Shepherd writes that “it is unlikely that the listener would imagine writing emails, expense reports, Facebook posts, text messages, image captions... people do these kinds of writing every day but may overlook them *as writing*” (125). Shepherd considers the location of writing curriculum and instruction. Students learn writing from a range of curriculums– including noninstitutional contexts. Writing instructors should integrate students’ existing knowledge when designing coursework to aid in writing transfer for students’ futures. Thesis statements are a clear example. Shepherd views them as often a “low-road transfer situation” (128-9). There is an assumption that future writing situations will also call for constructed thesis statements and that the student can approach that situation in the same way (128-29). Of course, students’ writing futures include genres beyond the traditional thesis structure. Shepherd calls for an expanded constellation of writing practices in writing courses to better match students’ future writing situations (135). He offers a key takeaway for instructors: “one of the biggest questions writing teachers should ask themselves is how they can keep connections across writing contexts after the class is finished” (136). Multimodality is a key avenue writing instructors can utilize for successful student transfer.

Chapters in Part III, titled “Multimodality and Transfer Across the Writerly Life,” directly address transfer beyond academic writing contexts. Kevin Roozen’s contribution, “Drawing Worlds Together: Tracing the Semiotic Practices along Histories of Literate Activity,” details a longitudinal study of a student’s “textual practices” over three years (146). Roozen argues for literacy activity as a way to extend multimodal transfer (146). Roozen’s study follows a student, Laura, documenting her literacy activities and her engagement of science and medicine with visual art. Literacy activity productivity challenges notions of writing as a “discrete bound act of transcribing a text–privileging written language as the dominate semiotic mode” (149). In other words, Laura’s literacy is not just her written language, but her work with visual art too.

Multimodality can thus value a range of knowledge making endeavors. New conceptual pathways of knowledge making through lived experience become possible and valued. Laura's studio art as a mode of communicating medical knowledge is one example.

Jeff Naftzinger's contribution, "If You Build It, Will They Use It: Composing Infrastructures, Communities of Practice, and Instructor Dispositions," investigates how program infrastructures are impacted by individual instructors' dispositions. Naftzinger argues instructor communities of practice can shape their dispositions in productive and unproductive ways (210). These communities of practice include how a particular instructor views their professional identity– including the journals they read and submit to, the conferences they attend, the subfields they work within, their pedagogical choices, and so forth. The research considers four graduate instructors at Florida State University to best consider instructor barriers to understanding and using multimodal infrastructure. Reflecting on a particular graduate instructor participant, Naftzinger observes, "Tobias's disposition toward digital composing was modeled after his previous instructors' dispositions, which left him uninterested in digital composing" (219). Naftzinger noted that graduate instructors are impacted significantly by their educational backgrounds. Literature graduate students were less likely to implement multimodality in FYW courses than their rhetoric and composition graduate student peers.

The various chapters of the text productively expand the idea of what counts as multimodality and transfer. These expansive definitions are demonstrative of the possible audiences for *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer*, including first-year composition instructors, writing program administrators, graduate teaching assistants, writing center directors, translators, professional writing instructors, and researchers of rhetoric and composition. These potential audiences are also reflected in the book's structure. As digital media technologies and cloud-based infrastructure become increasingly significant venues of communication, multimodal composition will be critical for supporting student writing transfer to their writing futures. In the afterword, Kathleen Blake Yancey calls back to the all-important question of defining writing and even names it as the "key-est of the key questions" (229). Questioning what counts as writing is an expansive endeavor and in turn invites further dialogue, which *Multimodal Composing and Writing Transfer* is likely to inspire—particularly given the rapid growth of digital media and the increased use of digital tools and technology in education and everyday communication.

Works Cited

Anson, Chris M., and Jessie L. Moore, editors. *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado, 2016.

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