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## Genre Across The Curriculum

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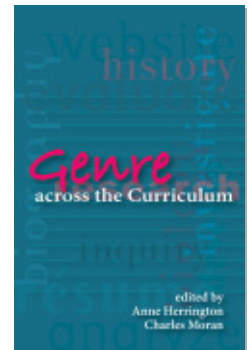
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### TEACHING AND LEARNING A MULTIMODAL GENRE IN A PSYCHOLOGY COURSE

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Increasingly, teachers in courses across a range of disciplines are creating assignments that involve the intersection of oral and written genres. In the past, when pedagogical literature on writing paid attention to oral communication, it did so from the perspective of the support that speaking can lend to a writer's developing text (through one-on-one tutorials, small-group peer conferencing, or reading aloud; see Brooke 1991, 1994; Gere 1990; Murray 1982; Walters 1992; Zoellner 1969). However, until very recently there has been little written on the teaching and learning of multimodal genres that involve both writing and speaking.

In this chapter, we first briefly describe and theorize new genres of communication that bring together writing and speaking in common performative events. In such events, the spoken genre depends upon or intersects with the written genre or vice versa, creating new constraints and new—and often challenging—textual and rhetorical decisions for students. We then turn to an examination of a multimodal assignment one of us (Karen) used in an undergraduate psychology course. We were especially interested in the relationship between the oral and written parts of this assignment, and in the decisions students made about what to present in each mode. In exploring this case of multimodality, we explain Karen's pedagogical rationale for the assignment, analyze the results of students' work, and, through an electronic questionnaire, consider the ways in which the students interpreted and responded to the task. In turn, the results of this descriptive analysis provided the basis for moments of reflection in which Karen considered the implications of the assignment for the further development of her teaching.

### MULTIMODALITY AND HYBRID GENRES

Newly emerging technologies are giving rise to unique, blended, “hybrid,” and multimodal genres of communication, what Holdstein calls “a type of generic bordercrossing” (1996, 281). In some cases, features of orality are said to be influencing written discourse, as in the rapid-fire exchanges common in Internet chat rooms or Instant Messenger–like systems (Leverenz 1997). Published essays can take the form of a printed e-mail exchange (Spooner and Yancey 1996). New technologies for visual display, such as PowerPoint and Flash Media, are altering the experience (for both speaker and audience) of conventional oratory (Yancey 2001). And information is increasingly conveyed through multiple media. The genre of the repair manual, for example, may now include written text, still and moving diagrams and pictures, brief video clips, and sound or voice, all enabled by Web-based or CD-ROM technology.

In theorizing the concept of genre in such multimodalities, we are drawn to work that rejects static or form-based conceptions of genre in favor of seeing genre in terms of its functions and actions within particular rhetorical spaces (see Anson and Dannels 2004; Miller 1984; Mountford 2001; Russell 1997). As Amy Devitt (2000) has suggested, genre is “a dynamic social construct, a changing cultural artifact with rhetorical and social functionality. . . . Developing within groups of users, the new genres are also fluid categories that reflect and reify the ideology and values of their users” (18). Genres, in other words, are context-specific manifestations of discursive and rhetorical actions that become normative through repeated use. For this reason, they often emerge as “hybrids” or blends of other genres, simultaneously realizing different forms, functions, and characteristics.

Early work on such permutations typically examined the ways in which a specific communicative event—a speech or a piece of writing—takes on characteristics of another, similar event in the same mode, blurring and blending their two sets of features. Jamieson and Campbell (1982), for example, describe a form of political eulogy that blends two broad rhetorical categories: epideictic and deliberative. The first three parts of the eulogy—acknowledging the person’s death, celebrating his or her work in the past tense, and consoling those living—are epideictic in nature. The fourth, bringing the community together in the memory of the dead, is deliberative, a political call to action that focuses on the agendas or unfinished legislation of the deceased. This fourth “subgenre,” Jamieson

and Campbell suggest, is not a component of a traditional eulogy; it represents a further manifestation.

In classroom settings, students often must complete assignments that similarly vary from canonical forms in ways that relate to a teacher's goals, experiences, and dispositions, as well as to the subject matter at hand. Some varieties of "journal writing," for example, constrain students enough in focus, style, and audience that the writing is no longer highly expressive as conventionally defined by theorists such as Britton, et al. (1975) and Elbow (1973). Students used to journal writing in its most expressive manifestation must reorient their assumptions about the genre to match the specific classroom uses of it in each case. Similarly, students used to "saying what they think" after a moment of reflection in a classroom must learn a new variety of this genre when they are the spokesperson for a small group of three or four students, reporting on what the group "thinks" after a breakout session.

This situation becomes even more complex with the addition of different communicative modes (spoken language, written language, visual representations both moving and still, three-dimensional objects, sounds, or other phenomena). Theoretical work in social semiotics suggests we make sense of the world using multimodal resources—not simply linguistic, but pictorial, gestural, choreographical, and graphical, to name a few (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Kress and Threadgold 1988; Lemke 2002a, 2002b). Especially in scientific fields, but increasingly in others as well, the communicative patterns of the disciplines are in and of themselves multimodal. As Lemke (1998) puts it:

Science is not done, is not communicated, through verbal language alone. It cannot be. The "concepts" of science are not verbal concepts, though they have verbal components. They are semiotic hybrids, simultaneously and essentially verbal-typological and mathematical-graphical-operational-topological. The actional, conversational, and written textual genres of science are historically and presently, fundamentally and irreducibly multimedia genres. To do science, to talk science, to read and write science it is necessary to juggle and combine in canonical ways verbal discourse, mathematical expression, graphical-visual representation, and motor operations in the "natural" (including human-as-natural) world (89).

Perhaps to create a better match between the multimodalities in students' learning and the tasks they complete as part of that learning, assignments across a range of disciplines now increasingly involve such

merged representations, which are further enabled by new technologies that bring together text, speech, and visual media. In a teacher-education course at the University of Sydney, for example, students must compose the equivalent of one page in a textbook to be used to teach a concept to students in a particular stage of development. This text must include both visual and verbal elements. In the second phase of the assignment the students are asked to construct a digitized version of the text—a PowerPoint, Hyperstudio, or Web page (Simpson 2003). The students (prospective teachers) engage in such mixed-media assignments so that they can be better prepared to teach the next generation of learners. As the course designers put it, “the literacies involved in schooling and in social life are complex social practices involving the interpretation, production and use of a range of meaning making systems, including language and image. These are negotiated in a range of formats from traditional page-based material to screen-based electronic multi-media.”

Similarly, in a Design Fundamentals course at North Carolina State University, students are asked to create a studio book that is a visual, verbal, and written record of the semester, including notes or sketches from required lectures or exhibitions, reflections on required and recommended readings, drawings of ideas and images for the design process, and a scrapbook of handouts and objects or images the students think are important to their design (North Carolina State University 2003a). In a medieval literature course at California Polytechnic University, students are asked to give a presentation that provides a close reading of a particular text. The presentation must be accompanied by a pedagogical handout, which includes an outline of the presentation and any background information. Students are encouraged to be creative in this handout, using illustrations, visual representations of their presentation, and the like, as long as the handout serves pedagogical ends (California Polytechnic University 2003).

For students, performing well on such tasks requires them to understand and interpret these genres within their context of use. We speculate that to begin the process, students apply broad schematic representations to the genre first, placing it into the best-matching “meta-genre” category—general discursive types they have experienced before, often repeatedly. When students are told that they will be required to do an oral presentation on their group project in chemical engineering, for example, their schemas for the meta-genre of oral presentation provide them with some general expectations and conventions for their behavior: stand

up in front of the class, explain the project, and so on. Acting on such generalized knowledge, however, is not enough to guarantee them a successful performance. As they practice the speech genre within its context, more specific behaviors or expectations become clear: in an engineering progress report, presenters are often interrupted by the audience (a small group of managers) with questions or requests for clarification, a process often modeled by the teacher in class. Students unfamiliar with this instantiation must learn to “suspend” the progress of their presentation briefly to answer questions, and then, finding where they left off, quickly adjust the remaining presentation to accommodate the information they provided in the answer. As students prepare variations on poster sessions, presentations with accompanying visuals, or Web-based, multimedia assignments, they often need new strategies for deciding what information to convey in what mode, or how to organize it in a compelling and meaningful way for an audience.

The assignment we explore presents specific variations on the meta-genres of the classroom oral presentation and the classroom handout, brought together in a single communicative event. The more specific characteristics and constraints of the assignment—the length of the presentation, the accompaniment of a maximum one-page handout, the goal of extending the course material and informing peers about new concepts and studies—created a unique multimodal form. Because none of the students had ever completed such an assignment, it presented an interpretive challenge that had the potential to reveal much about the need for new methods of instruction and support, and new avenues for research on student learning and performance.

Our exploration of this assignment mirrors the kind of classroom-based assessment procedures encouraged in a view of teaching as reflective practice (see Angelo and Cross 1993; Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff 1997; Rice 1996; Schön 1987). In such a process, faculty systematically collect information about their instruction in order to engage in a “scholarship of teaching,” actively investigating the effects of pedagogical decisions and continually improving their instruction. As Angelo (1991) puts it, “the purpose of classroom assessment is to provide faculty and students with information and insights needed to improve teaching effectiveness and learning quality” (17). Consistent with principles of the scholarship of teaching and learning—asking a question related to student learning, gathering data to answer that question, making results public and peer reviewed, and incorporating reflective practice—we create here a

collaborative and cross-curricular variation on the typical processes of classroom-based assessment (see AAHE 2003).

In our meetings as a group, we settled on two operative questions that would simultaneously yield some broad speculation about multimodal genres in teaching and learning, and specific, instructionally helpful feedback for Karen in her own postcourse reflections:

- What performative choices did students make when faced with completing a multimodal (combined writing and speaking) assignment?
- Given a carefully articulated, supported, and assessed multimodal assignment, what can we discover about students' learning processes that can provide principles for crafting, supporting, and assessing effective multimodal assignments in the future?

Because Karen played a central role as designer of the assignment in question, as teacher of the course, and as beneficiary—in a direct sense—of her own reflection, we found our roles to be productively mixed. In keeping with investigative designs that encourage such a blending of roles and subject positions (see Fishman and McCarthy 2000), we developed a specific structure for our analysis. Two of us (Chris and Deanna) took the lead in collecting information: Karen's course materials, videotapes of the students' presentations, copies of all their handouts. In her role as instructor, Karen judged the students' performances on the assignment, rating them on a set of criteria and incorporating the results into her final course grades. Chris and Deanna then gathered information from the students through a postcourse online questionnaire. The questionnaire asked students to choose "agree," "disagree," or "not sure" for nine statements about writing and speaking and about the assignment. The statements were followed by twelve open-ended questions focusing on how the student completed the assignment, what they thought Karen was looking for, and so forth (see tables 1 and 2). They also coded the videotaped presentations for three features related to successful oratory: strong or weak eye contact with the audience, an extemporaneous style in contrast to a text-bound style (when students read note cards verbatim, for example), and the presence or absence of audience appeals (such as when the speaker asks the audience a direct or rhetorical question at the beginning of the talk). Karen then sent Chris and Deanna her evaluation of the students, including scores on each of the four categories on her rubric, and they figured those results into their analysis. They then presented a summary of their analysis to Karen, who began thinking about

the implications of the information for her own teaching and future use of the multimodal assignment.

Engaging in a little genre-bending of our own, we also chose a somewhat unusual way to present the results of this study. As Karen considered the impact of our analysis on her teaching, she wrote brief reflective statements, eventually creating a commentary that appears in italics toward the end of the essay. In this way, she played a kind of hybrid role, at once the coauthor of the main text and the sole author of pedagogical reflections emerging from the analysis.

### EXPLORATIONS IN MULTIMODALITY: THE MICROPRESENTATION

The context for our explorations was a special section of Psychology 201—Controversial Psychological Issues. This general education course is designed, as Karen’s syllabus explains, to introduce students to “psychology and contemporary topics to illustrate how psychologists address controversial psychological issues.” Karen’s course objectives were to:

- refine the student’s ability to research, analyze, evaluate, and make decisions about the details of complex contemporary issues in psychology
- improve the student’s ability to effectively express views about psychological issues in writing and speaking
- expand the student’s knowledge of psychology

Karen’s preparation for this section of PSY 201 was supported by two faculty-development initiatives: the First-Year Inquiry Program and the Campus Writing and Speaking Program. In an attempt to reform “transmission” or “conduit” models of education (see Reddy 1979) and give students a more supportive experience, the university enlists faculty to teach First-Year Inquiry (FYI) versions of their courses. The FYI program encourages more hands-on work, more activities and assignments, and greater attention to “guided practice in writing, speaking, listening, asking questions, looking for answers, and evaluating evidence” (University of North Carolina 2003b). Participating instructors engage in a series of orientations and workshops designed to acquaint them with principles and methods for active learning, student-centered instruction, and inquiry-guided learning. Section size is capped at twenty to support the more student-centered nature of the course. (In her FYI section of PSY 201, Karen allowed one additional student to enroll, bringing her class size to twenty-one: eleven men and ten women, almost all first-year students. The class represented a mix of fourteen different intended majors.)



Supported by her work in the FYI program, Karen's version of PSY 201 engaged students in small-group work and class discussions, and included numerous informal writing and speaking assignments (usually one for each class), which counted for 20 percent of the final grade. Frequent ten-minute quizzes and a final examination provided assessments of learning, and together counted 40 percent of the final grade.

Karen's inclusion of the assignment that is the subject of our inquiry had a more direct genesis in NC State Campus Writing and Speaking Program's faculty seminar, which Karen took during the semester before teaching PSY 201. The semester-long, biweekly seminar is designed to help faculty incorporate both formal and informal writing and speaking into existing courses, with special attention to learning goals, assignment design, and assessment. During the seminar, Karen designed a new, formal, multimodal writing/speaking assignment: the oral presentation and accompanying one-page handout, which earned students 20 percent of their final grade. Before taking the seminar, Karen had built brief oral presentations into many of her courses, but she had never paired those with a writing assignment in a way that represented a single discourse activity utilizing both oral and written text. Students had occasionally used the board or an overhead projector to punctuate their presentations with something visual, but Karen had not built this systematically into the requirements for the assignment.

In its final version, Karen's assignment description took up three single-spaced pages and included a set of three learning objectives, five recommended steps to complete the assignment, and half a page of suggestions and tips for success. Described throughout as a "formal writing and speaking assignment," it allowed many options for topic choice but placed relatively tight constraints on delivery: students were asked to prepare a micropresentation—a brief oral presentation delivered to the class in no more than four to six minutes—summarizing an article they had located in the psychological literature about a controversial subject such as parental spanking of children, the psychological effects of video-game violence, and the use of electroshock therapy to treat depression. An accompanying written text (only a handout was allowed) had to be no more than a single page in length, designed to highlight, extend, elucidate, or provide examples to support the oral summary. The assignment sheet explained that the handout "is not a written summary of your presentation, nor is it a copy of your presentation notes. It is a visual that helps the audience understand and focus on your presentation. The

handout allows elaboration on points; this enables you to provide more information in less time.” Students were asked to bring twenty-five copies of the handout.

In addition to the list of five instructional suggestions included in the assignment handout (which we have reproduced as appendix 1), various kinds of classroom support were also foreshadowed in the assignment description: informal writing and speaking assignments to “serve as practice for successfully completing the steps” in the multimodal assignment, opportunities to discuss the students’ readings in class, and peer-group work that yielded feedback on the preparation for the presentation. In addition, Karen provided the class with a set of detailed criteria (see appendix 2). These criteria were designed to be formative (helping the students to prepare the assignment) as well as summative (helping her to apply clear, consistent criteria to her grading). Constituting one of four separately scored criteria, the handout category “refers to the quality of your accompanying one-page handout. How well does it accompany your remarks? If you need to add time to your presentation to explain the handout, then the handout is not supporting your presentation. The handout illustrates, elaborates, and clarifies your remarks. A handout riddled with errors, hard to read, confusing, or poorly laid out indicates incomplete work.”

To score the presentations, Karen used a rubric matched to the categories in the descriptive criteria.

From the perspective of classroom research, the three of us were interested in how students would respond to this multimodal genre: what would they do to complete the task? How would they conceive of the relationship between their spoken words and the written text? Could we discern anything in their performance or reflections on the experience that would help us to prefigure some new areas for pedagogical development and research on genres in communication across the curriculum?

#### **ASSISTED INQUIRY: CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENT FROM THE OUTSIDE IN**

As we reviewed the videotapes of the students’ presentations, we were immediately struck by how they used the handout. The class was evenly divided between those who distributed their handouts before starting their presentation and those who waited until it was over. Because Karen had made no recommendations or requirements for whether the audience should have the handout for reference during the talks, we speculated

that students construed its purpose differently. Those who provided it at the end were perhaps seeing it as a form of documentation for Karen, or as something the audience could refer to later, while those who began their presentations by circulating the handout may have understood it to be a visual gloss, providing additional detail or allowing the audience to “follow along” as the speaker worked through his or her points.

Survey results confirmed our speculations: students described the purpose of their handout in quite different ways, some to “keep [the] audience on the right track so they could easily follow [the] speech without getting lost or bored,” some to “restate” what they presented, and some to “provide a visual aid.” A few students clearly used their handout as the equivalent of their talking points, reading from it verbatim. Although 47 percent of students referred to their handouts during the presentation, as many as a third simply handed it out and did not mention it (see table 1).

This key rhetorical and pragmatic difference in the presentations—handout before or after—was mildly correlated to the students’ overall grade (with a six-point higher average score among those who circulated their handout in advance of the presentation). In addition, our codings of the videotapes showed a strong relationship to the “before or after” handout order: students who provided their handouts first generally gave livelier presentations, connected more with their audience, and spoke more extemporaneously, sometimes starting their presentation with an audience-directed question. In contrast, students who distributed their handouts at the end were more likely to read their note cards (or the handout itself) aloud, make little or no eye contact with the audience, and use few audience appeals. In two such cases, the students remembered to distribute the handouts only as they were about to take their seats again after their presentation.

Although we might imagine a further connection of these features to questionnaire items that asked students to say whether they liked or thought they were good at oral presentations, we did not see a predictable pattern. Students’ self-concepts as orators or writers did not appear to be related overall to these aspects of their presentations. In fact, as shown in table 2, two-thirds of the class indicated that they do not dislike giving oral presentations (with more of them disliking writing assignments), most believe both writing and speaking are important in their planned careers, and most desire more writing and speaking instruction. Yet table 2 (page 183) shows them to be almost evenly split between those who think they are better at writing versus speaking.

TABLE 1  
*Responses to open-ended questions (by percentage)*

<b>What was the hardest part about this entire assignment for you?</b>	
Getting up in front of the class	40%
Doing the research	27%
Figuring out how to organize the information/what to present	20%
Nothing/overall it was easy	13%
<b>How did you go about writing your accompanying handout?</b>	
Focused on key points/made an outline of my talk	60%
Took facts from the Internet	20%
Tried to add more interesting information	20%
<b>How did you go about preparing for the presentation?</b>	
I read over the material and created an outline.	40%
I wrote/studied notes about my material.	20%
I practiced aloud (alone or in front of a friend).	26%
I memorized my material.	7%
I didn't prepare at all.	7%
<b>Did you do the handout first, or work on the oral presentation first?</b>	
I did the handout first.	33%
I did the presentation first.	67%
<b>Considering everything that you presented to the class, what percentage of that information do you think went into the handout and what percentage went into the presentation?</b>	
5% to 10%	40%
20%-50%	47%
80-90%	13%
<b>What percentage of your time went into constructing the handout?</b>	
5%-10%	27%
20%-40%	46%
50%-75%	27%
<b>How did you use the handout in your presentation? Did you refer to it, read from it, etc.?</b>	
I referred to it as I talked.	47%
I just handed it out.	33%
I read from it.	7%
I used it as a guide.	13%
<b>What purpose did you want the handout to serve? Did it serve that purpose? Why or why not?</b>	
Visual aid for the audience	20%
An outline/summary/restatement of my presentation	40%
Reinforce/back up my major points	13%
Provide information on my topic	27%
<b>If you could decide how to give a presentation in a future class, would you use an accompanying handout or not? Why or why not?</b>	
It would depend on the presentation/information.	33%
Yes (conveys info., helps class to follow, backs up my points)	67%

(continued on next page)

(table 1 continued)

What do you think your teacher was looking for in the presentation and handout? That is, what do you think a "successful" handout and presentation looked like?	
Good connection between presentation and handout	33%
Performance factors: clear, understandable, thought-provoking	33%
Informational factors: hard work, knowledge, evidence of research	33%
If you could have chosen to summarize your article either in writing or in an oral presentation, which would you have chosen? Why?	
Writing (not good at oral/less time to prepare/feels more natural/can revise)	60%
Oral (not good at writing/can explain better orally/fewer errors/hate writing)	40%
Are you better at providing information orally or in writing? Why?	
Orally (body language, easier than writing, can show emotion)	40%
In writing (easier to organize thoughts, nervous with oral, can revise)	60%

The handouts themselves represented range of styles, textual density, and use of visuals. For example, Alan's handout, shown in reduced form in figure 1 (page 184), is visually appealing, with mixed font size, sophisticated layout, and a large red and black bar down the left side. He includes a graphic of a brain, and the handout is organized as bulleted points answering a central question at the top of the page. Along the right side of the page, further bulleted points provide examples of the language of diagnostic labeling, the subject of the article he located. In contrast, Kelly's handout on ADHD (figure 2 page 185) provides far more text and no visuals. It is organized as bulleted answers to two questions ("What is ADHD?" and "What are the symptoms of ADHD?"). Information about the article itself appears at the very end of the handout, in a five-line paragraph. Most of the text is in the same font size.

The range of styles, formats, density, font types, and other textual and visual elements in the handouts appears to reflect the way that students constructed the relationship between the oral and written components of the task. Karen did not provide examples of handouts, nor any information (beyond what we have already described) about their expected form and content. Considering all the information and suggestions Karen's assignment offered about the presentation—give it a clear structure, don't read it verbatim, use note cards, practice in front of a mirror, and so on (see appendix 1)—this range clearly shows that unfamiliar genres require more instructional support than most teachers are used to providing in content-area courses.

An examination of Karen's scores on the rubric showed no strong or predictable relationships to features of the handouts. However, we noticed a tendency for handouts that began with provocative or

TABLE 2  
*Responses to yes/no questions (by percentage)*


Questionnaire item	Yes	No	Not sure
I generally dislike giving oral presentations.	33	67	0
I generally dislike doing writing assignments.	47	47	6
Oral presentations will be important in my career.	70	15	15
Writing will be important in my career.	67	13	20
I enjoyed the formal writing/speaking assignment in PSY 201.	60	13	27
The handout helped my oral presentation.	80	13	7
The handouts added significant value to the oral presentations of other students.	67	20	13
I would value additional instruction in how to give effective oral presentations.	80	13	7
I would value additional instruction in how to write effectively.	73	7	20

interesting questions, followed by an “answer” to the question in the form of well-organized information, to receive higher scores than handouts that simply provided information. This recognition of audience appeals appears to match Karen’s overall scores on the presentations as well as the students’ presentational styles: students who made more eye contact and used extemporaneous styles and audience appeals in their presentations tended more often to organize their handouts around questions. However, Karen’s scores on the handouts also indicate as much concern for the clarity of the information as for the visual appeal of the handout per se; one or two well-designed handouts that contained seemingly random pieces of information in “unparallel” form received somewhat lower scores than less visually appealing handouts that were more carefully organized. When considered next to the descriptive rubric shown in appendix 2, these specific aspects of students’ performances are most explicitly tied to her suggestions about delivery: demeanor, being both “relaxed and professional,” and delivering the presentation “in a way that shows you are interested in your work.” Clearly, some students are able to act on these general recommendations and admonitions while others need more explicit or extensive help knowing what they mean and how to apply them to their own performances.

Questionnaire results also suggest few strong consistencies among students, although some general tendencies do emerge from the data. Most students agreed that the handouts helped their own presentations, but were somewhat less sure that they helped the presentations of others. It is not possible to tell whether students felt their own handout helped them as presenters (e.g., to organize information or stay on track) more than it helped their audience; however, almost half said its purpose was

*Controversial Psychological Issues...*

## Does diagnostic labeling/ psychiatric language hinder treatment???



- \* When a client's behavior is categorized, the client's "window" of normality may be narrowed.
- \* Labeling can alter social attitudes.
- \* Using clinical language makes the client feel as if they are mental patients, not human beings.
- \* Language and labeling encourages the client to play the "sick role."
- \* Clients feel as if only the doctor can understand them, alienating them from society.
- \* Sometimes, clients falsely interpret their behaviors as stemming from some underlying disease.
- \* Patients are already vulnerable, they need encouragement that makes them feel normal and makes the problem easier to tackle.

**NCSU**

**Examples of Language**

- ◆ "I think she's an ACOA"
- ◆ "Sounds like Axis II Stuff"
- ◆ "He's an enabler"
- ◆ "She's playing the dependency role again"
- ◆ "She's carrying a lot of baggage"
- ◆ "Don't feed into his behavior"
- ◆ "Pathological"
- ◆ "Self-defeating Personality"
- ◆ "Co-Dependency"
- ◆ "Disease Process"

◆ Doctors often use this language/labels instead of simply saying, for example, "family problems," which makes the client feel as if something terrible is wrong.

Figure 1: Alan's Handout

to provide an outline or restatement of their presentation, while about one-fifth referred directly to the needs of their audience. The students who saw their handout's purposes in this audience-focused way received the highest overall scores on their presentation, and were among those who connected with their audiences, spoke extemporaneously, and made eye contact.

Students' responses to the questionnaires provide a window into their learning processes as they completed the combined writing and speaking assignments. As shown in table 1, most students worked on the oral presentation first, before creating the handout (67 percent), and spent more time working on it than preparing the handout (73 percent spent one-half to three-quarters of their time preparing the presentation, while only 27 percent spent this amount of time on their handout). Students also

## ADHD.....

What is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the most common behavior disorder diagnosed in children and teens. ADHD refers to a group of symptoms that begin in early childhood and can continue into adulthood, causing difficulties at home, at school, at work, and within the community if not recognized and treated.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

The three groups of ADHD symptoms are:

- **Inattention.** This is the most common symptom. In addition to having difficulty paying attention, people with this ADHD symptom often are unable to consistently focus, remember, and organize. They may be careless and have a hard time starting and completing tasks that are boring, repetitive, or challenging.
- **Impulsiveness.** People who frequently act before thinking may not make sound judgments or solve problems well. They may also have trouble developing and maintaining personal relationships. An adult may not keep the same job for long or spend money wisely.
- **Hyperactivity.** A hyperactive child may squirm, fidget, and climb or run when it is not appropriate. These children often have difficulty playing with others. They may talk a great deal and not be able to sit still for even a short time. Teenagers and adults who are hyperactive don't usually have the more obvious physical behaviors seen in children. Rather, they often feel restless and fidgety, and are not able to enjoy reading or other quiet activities.

Symptoms vary by individual and range from mild to severe.

Symptoms of ADHD can be similar to those of other conditions, such as:

- Learning disabilities.
- Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).
- Conduct disorder.
- Anxiety disorder.
- Depression.

These conditions are sometimes mistaken for ADHD. They may also occur along with ADHD, which can make diagnosis of the primary problem difficult.  
(information above taken from AOLHealth/ WebMD)

The article that I chose for my presentation was "ADHD, HUNTING, AND EVOLUTION: 'JUST SO STORIES'". In the article, the author is basically giving the reader many bizarre stories that account for ADHD and then he tells why they are faulty and untrue. He then goes on to tell what is the truth about those who have ADHD and why it is true and why the other "Just So Stories" are untrue.

Figure 2: Kelly's Handout

used specific processes to prepare the oral presentation and the handout. In preparing for the presentation, students typically read over their material or created an outline (40 percent), or practiced aloud (26 percent). When they created the handout, they typically focused on key points or made an outline for the talk (60 percent). The majority of students also estimated that much less information was provided on the handout than in the presentation. Yet all but one of the handouts provided more text than could be easily read aloud in four to five minutes. Students believe, in other words, that a brief oral presentation conveys far more information than a piece of written text with potentially equal informational and presentational value. These results suggest that, for the most part,



students tackled this assignment with the perception that the handout was secondary to the presentation, rather than a tool for structuring or generating the presentation (see Yancey 2001).

Karen's weighting of the grading criteria toward the oral presentation (as well as the usual urgency of having to stand in front of one's peers) no doubt contributed to students' perceptions of its importance relative to the handout. Only one-third of the students explicitly connected the handout to the presentation in describing what they thought Karen was "looking for" in the assignment, in spite of Karen's including this as one of the criteria for success. Yet the majority of students agreed that they would use an accompanying handout for oral presentations in the future if given a chance. We see, then, a complicated relationship between the way that each mode in the assignment is weighted in the evaluation—in this case, not equally—and the overall rhetorical and pragmatic nature of the task. Professionals might understand that the quality of a handout is part of the quality and overall effect of the entire presentation, whereas students interpret this relationship using instructional cues such as how much each part counts, how extensive the suggestions are for each part, and the like.

Our analysis suggests that although students' performances variously interwove or kept separate the oral and written components of the assignment, generally they interpreted them as separate, familiar genres that they were asked to link together. Lacking schemas or operational knowledge for creating a single, multimodal genre in which the written/visual and spoken texts could strategically and artfully reinforce each other, they prepared each as a separate communicative medium. In a few cases, notably among the students who were most aware of the needs of their audience, the merging of the two modalities was fortuitous, but their success did not appear to be a consequence of the instructional support provided for the assignment.

From this perspective, we return to the design and nature of the assignment. In spite of the thorough, carefully presented information Karen provided to the students, and in spite of the direct and indirect instructional activities she crafted to support the assignment, the nature of its complex multimodality also revealed areas for continued instructional development. Certain language in the assignment description, for example, may have suggested the separateness of the two modes even while it was being presented as a single, multimodal task. Including the handout as a separate category in the evaluation rubric, even alongside an explanation pointing to the need for the handout to "support" the presentation,

may have led students to divide their attention accordingly when preparing the assignment. Allocating fewer points to the handout relative to the oral presentation likewise suggests an instructional asymmetry between the two. Like the development of a creole from two separate languages, the “evolution” of this multimodal genre may be at a stage when both teachers and students find it easy to revert to more stable and canonical conceptions of each part.

#### **ASSISTED INQUIRY: CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENT FROM KAREN ST. CLAIR**

*After participating in the NC State Campus Writing and Speaking Program faculty seminar, I realized that when developing writing and speaking assignments, I need to consider several factors that affect the student’s success in completing my assignments: the purpose of the assignments, my plan for guiding students through the assignment, my expectations when evaluating the student’s performance, and the student’s experience with writing and speaking assignments.*

*Consequently, for this section of PSY 201 I set out to mirror the course objectives in the formal writing and speaking assignment objectives. I believed the student should be able to apply a course-specific critical thinking process to an empirical or theoretical article concerning a psychological controversy, personalize the critical analysis by reflecting on how the controversy relates to his or her life, and effectively communicate this analysis and reflection. The term “effectively” is, finally, subjective, but specific criteria for evaluating the presentation introduced some objectivity: substance (accuracy and completeness of the information presented), coherence (clarity of the presentation), delivery (timing, evidence of rehearsal), and the handout (quality of support it provides). I prepared a detailed student handout describing the steps to take in completing the assignment, suggestions for successful completion, and how they would receive class support along the way. Reflecting on the analysis now, I recognize that the mixing of writing and speaking requirements in an assignment necessitates even more instruction and support along the way than I planned. Evaluation proved to be difficult; a greater consideration of the student’s writing and speaking experiences offers some new insights that could translate into clearer criteria for evaluation.*

*The results focusing on the order of the handout—something that had not occurred to me to discuss—suggest the need for more time explaining the purpose of the handout (which was to support the information presented) and ways to prepare the handout (use of text and symbols, color and white space). When teaching this course again, not only would I provide stronger suggestions for incorporating the handout throughout the oral presentation, I would*

*change the way I model this expectation by preparing one-page handouts that support or embellish some of my mini-lectures. I would distribute these handouts at the beginning of my presentation and “walk” the students through the points I make by referring to the handout.*

*The frequent opportunities over the semester for reading, speaking during class, writing informal assignments, and listening to others undoubtedly prepared the students for getting up in front of the group. Being at ease, however, does not necessarily mean skill in relating to the audience. Our analysis suggests that students have difficulty getting away from “doing something for the teacher.” Even at the end of a semester, some students continue to “speak to the teacher” and ignore the classmate to whom the response is intended. Students are used to being “taught to” and, clearly, have difficulty making the rhetorical and interpersonal switch to “teach” their classmates. Expecting students to know intuitively the effect of delivery on the audience and to plunge into focusing on its needs and response is probably too high an expectation. Including effective communication as a course and assignment objective requires considerable guidance, modeling, and time for more practice in presentation. A practice I would like to explore further involves the use of “response cards.” These small pieces of paper allow students to write comments about each other’s presentations. The teacher reserves the editorial privilege to cull thoughtless or unnecessarily harsh comments, and delivers the comments the day following presentations. Perhaps an extension of this technique—using response cards following “practice” oral presentations and allowing for class discussion of specific aspects of presentation style—would provide peer support to reinforce the importance of one’s audience.*

*It is possible, however, that students with less skill at audience appeal and less creative applications for the handout may have better understood their topics and prepared a more thoughtful presentation. My plans to manage the process of the assignment went awry when I set about to evaluate the presentation. Had I read each student’s chosen article and carefully helped them work through their presentation outlines, I may have been better able to separate the evaluation criteria: substance, coherence, delivery, and handout. I did require that the chosen article meet my approval to avoid selection of a nonprofessional work. And I required each student to submit an outline of the oral presentation, but this was merely an exercise to keep them on track and avoid last-minute preparations. I found it impossible, however, to recall topics, articles, and outlines when listening to the presentations. Consequently, I was attracted to the delivery and use of the handout over the substance and clarity of points made.*

*The data also suggest some productive areas to consider when making fair comparisons among the students. Certainly, matching observable evaluation criteria*

*to assignment goals and objectives makes the grading task easier. And arranging for the formal writing and speaking assignment to be counted for only one-fifth on the final grade puts the value of the student's performance on the assignment in perspective. But my expectation for creative, unique presentations made fair evaluations difficult. The PSY 201 presentations were delivered over three class days. On the second and third day, I found myself grading less stringently than on the first day. In fact, I regraded the first two or three presentation to be fairer. I believe my gradual leaning toward being less stringent reflects my feeling of responsibility for the students' performances. This is not to say that many of the presentations were not what I would describe as "top notch." What I am suggesting is that when a student did not create an eye-catching handout, utilize the handout effectively, deliver the main point of the article, or present his or her reflection on the controversy, I recognized the need to provide a lot more guidance to students to help them through the preparation process.*

*An ever-present course objective has been to prepare students of psychology for a variety of professional writing and speaking requirements. Although it is undoubtedly true that not all psychologists are skilled at writing and speaking in their work, I nevertheless feel an obligation to expose my students to what has been written and require that they write and speak about the discipline. With that obligation comes the need to state my objectives, guide students through the completion process, and prepare to evaluate what I ask for. All these and consideration of the students' experiences with writing and speaking would not only reduce my own frustrations, but would undoubtedly result in enhanced student outcomes. In the absence of formal study in composition and communication, many teachers in my position face sometimes daunting challenges when we incorporate writing and speaking—even as separate modes—into our classes. The help of experts like Chris and Deanna in "assisted classroom assessment" can reduce those challenges, as has been the case with my own multimodal assignment; but there is obviously much cross-curricular work yet to be done in the face of rapid change in communication, technology, media, and the goals of higher education.*

## **CONCLUSION: GENRE, MULTIMODALITY, AND THE NEED FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Our limited results suggest that multi-modal assignments, although designed to help students to use new and increasingly important communicative strategies that stretch beyond the usual boundaries of canonical classroom forms, are often interpreted by students as separate genres that function to achieve similar goals. In essence, students seem to have difficulty seeing these genres outside of their traditional instantiations

(“informative oral report,” for example, and “accounting for one’s reading in an outline of ideas to be turned in during class”). In this scenario, perhaps students are operating within an academic activity system whose scripts of “handout” and “presentation” position them in a contiguous, not complementary, relationship to one another (Russell 1997). Our informal data also suggest that students were only obliquely aware of ways they could enhance their presentation for their peer audience, perhaps by calling attention to interesting or relevant information in their handouts.

As we discovered in our informal exploration of a relatively simple multimodal assignment, students clearly need to be more fully supported in their acquisition of strategies and skills for communication in an increasingly complex world of discourse. The students’ performances ranged from mediocre to excellent, yet almost all of them expressed a desire to receive more instruction in both writing and speaking. And if it is more likely that students will experience complex, multimodal assignments as they move out of general education courses like Karen’s and into specialized courses in their majors, the need to establish a base of support early on is clearly an issue for further consideration.

If Karen stands at the end of the WAC continuum where well-informed, diligent faculty reside, it is easy to see the scope of work that remains to be done in faculty development and orientation to communication across the curriculum. Our experiment in “assisted inquiry” finds some affinities with new processes in which peer or outside consultants can offer teachers formative evaluation that is sometimes difficult to collect on one’s own; for example, a teacher can’t simultaneously be an observer of his or her own teaching, nor is it possible to gather impressions from students that an outsider could using a procedure like small-group instructional diagnosis (see Lewis and Lunde 2001).

But thankfully, not all such formative data collection needs to be externally supported. The process we used to explore and understand students’ performances on this task is one that with little alteration could be fruitfully used by any teacher interested in how students interpret and respond to new kinds of assignments. Karen felt that her reflections were considerably enriched by an analysis that, with a few modifications (such as some additional categories on the scoring rubric in the absence of videotapes), could be used by teachers across a range of courses. Such methods promise to bring together the study of new educational genres with their principled application in courses across the varied landscape of higher education.

Finally, not only does our exploration suggest a need for support in students' acquisition of communication skills in multimodal settings, it also raises more complex questions about the nature of genre acquisition and performance. As they become more proficient members of their chosen disciplines where they are increasingly assigned multimodal genres, when do students stop performing within the frameworks of more traditional, single-mode genres? As they move from novice to expert in their disciplines, do they develop more complex and increasingly multimodal understandings of the communication genres that will face them in their professional context? Or are there other constraining aspects of the academic activity system that hamper the acquisition of complex multimodalities? Although our work does not fully answer these questions, our informal exploration suggests that when moving from single to multimodal genre pedagogy, the instructional complexities are also exponentially multiplied. Further research and pedagogy might benefit from increased explorations of these complexities.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **KAREN'S "SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS" (AS EXCERPTED FROM THE ASSIGNMENT)**

1. Actively participate in class discussions about articles, the difference between theoretical and empirical research, and evaluating an article's quality.
2. Use information from class discussions on critical thinking, the scientific method, and psychology as guides when carefully reading the article to understand, identify, and critique the author's question, answer, and evidence.
3. Allow time for reflection about what you have discovered from study of the article. Do you agree with the author? Why or why not? How do you relate to the issue? What connections do you have with the author's stand? Do not rush to agree or disagree without being able to articulate why you agree or disagree.
4. Prepare an oral presentation of your work and a supporting handout for distribution by carefully planning and rehearsing.
  - a. Consider your audience. Audiences show respect by paying attention to what you have to say; in return, respect them by keeping the focus on your assignment and not on your popularity. The audience expects your presentation to be more interesting than the article. Therefore, an engaging presentation style keeps your audience's attention.
  - b. Typically a talk consists of introductory remarks, content or substance of the presentation, and a summary or restatement of the purpose. The substance of your presentation is an oral version of your work on the assignment: identifying the issue, the author's stand, and the author's evidence. Introductory remarks and summary of the purpose are "bookends" for your substance.
  - c. No doubt you cannot memorize your presentation, but you are not to read a narrative to your audience. Prepare notes and record them on note cards. Insert talking points (key phrases, words, visual cues) into your notes to guide you through your presentation. Talking points include "check time," "refer to handout," "look at audience." A copy of the presentation notes are turned in to the instructor.

- d. The handout is no more than one page. You can have more than one page if you need to have a chart or diagram or an overhead. Make twenty-five copies of your handout (for each student, the instructor, and possible visitors). The handout is not a written summary of your presentation, nor is it a copy of your presentation notes. It is a visual that helps the audience understand and focus on your presentation. The handout allows elaboration on points; this enables you to provide more information in less time.
- e. Deliver your presentation for four to six minutes. When preparing the presentation, divide it into logical parts and make one note card (or two small) for each part. As you rehearse, time the parts of your presentation so adjustments can be made without sacrificing a whole part.
- f. Rehearse in front of a mirror, standing up. Do it alone until it is perfected. Once the wrinkles are ironed out, deliver the presentation to a trusted listener and ask for suggestions for improvement.



## APPENDIX 2

### ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA GIVEN TO STUDENTS

#### SCORING CRITERIA

1. *Substance*: This category refers to the accuracy of the information presented. Have you thoroughly and appropriately applied the critical thinking process? Have you correctly described the controversial issue and the author's stand on the issue? Do you completely and accurately present the author's evidence? Do not neglect to include your reflections on the issue and the author's stand. If you relate the issue, the author's stand, and the author's evidence but do not provide your reflections about the arguments, then your presentation is incomplete.
2. *Coherence*: This category refers to the clarity of the presentation. Your presentation should be clear enough for your audience to understand. How well does it hang together? Providing minute detail about the author's position and too little detail about your position renders your presentation incoherent or unbalanced. Consider providing context or introductory statements. Would the audience know which part of the assignment you are delivering?
3. *Delivery*: This category refers to the way you deliver your presentation. As you rehearse, consider your demeanor and professionalism. Running out of time (you will be stopped when your time is up, no matter where you are in the presentation), having too much time left, stumbling over your ideas, and losing your place indicate lack of preparation. Be relaxed but professional. Humor is acceptable within reason and when relevant. Delivering your presentation in a way that shows you are interested in your work will likely instill audience engagement and sustained interest.
4. *Handout*: This category refers to the quality of your accompanying one-page handout. How well does it accompany your remarks? If you need to add time to your presentation to explain the handout, then the handout is not supporting your presentation. The handout illustrates, elaborates, and clarifies your remarks. A handout riddled with errors, hard to read, confusing, or poorly laid out indicates incomplete work.

**SCORING SCALE**

Each criterion will be scored on the three-point scale of 3, 2, and 1, which roughly equates to the letter grades of A, B, and C, respectively. Each criterion is weighted equally. The maximum total score is 12. The scores for the criteria are totaled and divided by 12 and multiplied by 100 to yield a percentage score. The percentage score can be compared to the following percentage–letter grade scoring scale: 100–90 = A, 89–80 = B, 79–70 = C.

Any criterion scored 0 would equate to a letter grade of D or F, indicating that the criterion is met at a severely minimal level or not met at all. Should total scoring result in an assignment earning less than the equivalent of a C grade, the student would be obliged to redo the assignment. The new assignment score is subject to a “second-try” reduction in value.