In their 2006 study of student writing development, Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines, Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki observe that in regard to still-new forms of composition such as “multimedia writing,” there are not yet widely accepted models for thinking about what constitutes exemplary student work, or for understanding the effects of these modes and media on students’ writing development. Interestingly, more than a decade later, as a field, we don’t yet have robust descriptions of the variety of ways in which students might develop into what we would today call multimodal writers, or writers who can compose in digital contexts. In the past decade, there has been substantial work around developing pedagogical support for students’ multimodal composing and flexible, effective models for assessment (e.g., Shipka; Neal; McKee and DeVoss; Whithaus). Attention has been devoted to the need for multimodal assessment to do more than simply apply text-based assessments to these new contexts and rhetorical situations (see, for instance, Sorapure; Penrod; Gallagher). More recently, publications describing a variety of embodied composing processes in digital environments have also begun to appear (see DeVoss et al.; Gonzales), and we are beginning to see useful models for placing multimodal composition within existing frameworks for transfer of learning in writing studies (VanKooten). However, when it comes to analyzing the means by which students become rhetorically savvy multimodal writers, the field seems to remain in much the same place as Thaiss and Zawacki indicated in 2006: we are “not here yet” (93). That is the work of this chapter, then—to begin to define
and describe some dimensions of student writing development as students compose within digital, multimodal rhetorical situations.

To this end, we can draw on the conventions and best practices that have emerged for professional multimodal compositions, much as researchers do when looking at student development in disciplinary writing. In chapter 4, Ryan McCarty critiques this reliance on development of disciplinary expertise as a stand-in for student writing development as such, but I turn to the literature on multimodal composition to provide a conceptual framework that is just one indicator of student writing development in this area. So, for instance, we can look at scholarly journals that publish multimodal writing, such as *Kairos*, and consider the degree to which students such as our study participants enact the principles laid out in that journal’s style guide as one way to define their development as multimodal composers. The “*Kairos* Style Guide” specifies, among other directives:

- All media and design elements should be non-gratuitous and facilitate or enact the rhetorical and aesthetic argument of the webtext.
- All links should contribute to the possible meanings and readings of the texts. Linking for the sake of linking is discouraged.

These guidelines derive from a “theory of design as an integral element of digital rhetoric practice: design as rhetoric” (Eyman and Ball 68). As *Kairos’s* editors Douglas Eyman and Cheryl Ball argue, “For digital rhetoric, design is equivalent to style; thus, scholars must be concerned with understanding all the available elements of document design, including color, font choice, and layout as well as multimedia design possibilities including motion, interactivity, and appropriate use of media” (68). The authors go on to suggest that the “question is not whether we want style or substance but what kind of style we want to deploy as a component of substance” (68). For our student multimodal composers, then, one question to ask of their writing development is the extent to which they see themselves as composing “texts that are authored to use affordances of screen-based interactions and new media technologies that are neither digitizations of print-based material nor reproducible in print forms” (Eyman and Ball 65), and then, to what extent their integration of these affordances explicitly supports their rhetorical exigency.

Additionally, as much of the assessment literature on multimodal composition suggests, considering how students talk about their processes for achieving a given composition, as well as how they evaluate their success in meeting their own goals for it, can give us additional insights into their metacognitive development in this domain—especially in cases in which students demonstrate more novice facility as
multimodal composers. As Colleen Reilly and Anthony Atkins helpfully summarize, for instance:

Recommendations to use student reflections about digital writing assignments as artifacts that inform or are factored into the assessment of their projects have become commonplace (Hess, 2007; Huot, 2002b; Odell & Katz, 2009; Remley, 2012; Shipka, 2009; Yancey, 2004). [. . . ] As Jody Shipka (2009) noted, prompts for student project reflections can encourage substantive and rhetorically sophisticated responses, allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge of course concepts and ability to articulate project goals, discuss rhetorical choices, and constructively evaluate their work. Similarly, Michael Neal (2011) asserted that student reflections about their digital compositions should involve rhetorically oriented rationales of content and design choices. ("Rewarding Risk" n.p.)

Following this lead, then, and using it to build on the rhetorical design principles defined by Eyman and Ball, the degree to which students such as our study participants are able to articulate a “rhetorically oriented rationale” for their multimodal compositional choices can become an additional indicator of their multimodal writing development. This chapter is interested, then, both in what students do when facing a multimodal writing task and how they talk about what they do; or, to put it in more technical terms,¹ this chapter analyzes participants’ metacognitive awareness of the appropriate design principles for a given task and their metacognitive regulation of these principles as they put them into action in their composing processes.²

**Metacognition and an Expanded View of Writing as Signs of Multimodal Compositional Development**

This study captures two domains in which multimodal composition takes place: (1) within single artifacts, composed as a class assignment or an internship project, for instance, and (2) within eportfolios made up of multiple artifacts, composed most often for the minor-in-writing Gateway and Capstone courses, but also in other academic and professional contexts. In the entry and exit interviews conducted for this study, all of our participants were asked directly about their experiences with multimodal and digital media writing, whether in course work or other contexts (see appendix 4 for interview protocols). These questions were aimed at eliciting responses that speak both to rhetorical design principles and to student metacog-
nitive awareness and regulation of these principles. In doing so, the questions assist in making “metacognitive moves for composition [become] observable” (VanKooten), which Crystal VanKooten rightly identifies as a necessary step in our ability to understand student writing development.

Using grounded theory coding to analyze the interviews, the codes “new media” and “portfolio” were developed to capture mentions of these writing experiences in the two domains, and, in 131 interviews, concluded with 475 interview excerpts coded as “new media” and 419 interview excerpts coded as “portfolio.” There were 255 instances in which these codes co-occurred. As the number of co-occurrences suggests, these two domains overlap in significant ways in regard to themes that emerged in the student interviews. In regard to the forms of multimodal composition in which they engaged, students in both participant groups had experience blogging, whether for course work, in professional contexts, or for self-sponsored purposes. They also had experience with a variety of social media platforms, and they had created an array of digital media compositions, ranging from PowerPoint and Prezi presentations, to video production, audio podcasting, website design, pamphlet and other print-based multimodal compositions, and more. Additionally, students in both groups had experience creating eportfolios, though due to the eportfolio component of their curriculum, the minors far outnumbered nonminors in this regard.

In interview excerpts connected to both codes, students reflected in a variety of ways on how they understood the design elements of their multimodal compositions in relation to the argumentative elements of their writing. Indeed, the way students frame their sense of this “form-substance” relationship often provides an important indicator of their development as multimodal composers. For many students in the study, composing in modes and media other than “black words on a white page” (Sidney, “Exit”), as one participant put it, was a new experience, and not always a positive one. Several participants explicitly separated design from argument in their discussions of multimodal writing. The following responses, both from the entry interviews of minor-in-writing students, are typical of this impulse: “I think . . . designing the website and uploading the images and making sure everything was in the same format. It just seemed more technical than actually improving our writing” (Susanne); “I think that the technology stuff was not necessary. I don’t think that improved my writing at all . . . even the remediation became more of an art project than anything else” (Ariana). In these examples and other similar ones, when students speak of writing, it is always in regard to the text-based forms with which they are familiar. These are forms that carry value for students, while design is belittled as merely “an art project,” and facility with digital media is merely
“technical” know-how. It is of little surprise that these study participants—who have been shown to excel in myriad forms of text-based composition throughout the chapters in this volume—might express initial discomfort with or dislike for compositional forms that do not appear to align with the writing goals they envision for themselves. This perspective is demonstrated by Abby, another minor-in-writing participant, who declares in her exit interview:

I think that there’s just maybe a little bit too much of a focus on online writing just because—just as someone who’s coming from a science background who was interested in writing, none of the online stuff is relevant. Learning different writing styles and being able to go to a professional and ask them to help you with this specific type of writing that you’re interested in is more important to me than learning how to blog, or to look at an online portfolio, or something like that.

These students’ “resistant” stance toward multimodal composition does not necessarily mean they are unable to produce adequate multimodal products, but, as Emily Wilson and Justine Post suggest (chapter 1), their apparent refusal to engage critically with this new composing process, to adopt a metacognitive awareness of its affordances and constraints—even if they do not ultimately enjoy it—suggests limited development in this area.

Other study participants found the challenges of working with digital media and in multiple modes to be interesting and rewarding, though they still tended to approach “substance” and “style” as largely separable. The following exit interview exchange with Katie, a nonminor, demonstrates this approach to design rhetoric:

Interviewer: You said earlier about your blog too that it made you feel confident because it looked good. . . . Interviewee: Well, it was just a very new, different experience. I’ve never written like that before and it looked cool. It had the colors and it had the pictures and the video. . . . I was really proud of myself for making something that looked so interesting. . . . I forget what the actual class was about but I remember writing about Mad Men and the opening sequence for one of them. . . . I think I played the video and I had other pictures of advertisements from Mad Men in there so it looked cool.

Katie is clearly engaged in the content of her argument about Mad Men, and is considering her design choices in regard to its presentation; however, her key concern is not how these design elements (images, video) contribute to deepening or extending her argument, but rather their visual effect on the reader (“it looked cool”). It may be inferred that the argument about these opening credits preceded
the choice of visual materials, which then become add-ons that do create effect, but remain non-essential to the overall purpose of her composition. In this way, Katie demonstrates an appreciation for the affordances of multimodal composition, but a lack of metacognition about their potential effects on argument, which suggests that her conception of writing itself may not be deeply changed by her engagement with these modes and media.

Julia, a minor-in-writing student, offers a perspective in her exit interview that begins to come closer to the aim of creating her composition’s multimodal elements to “facilitate or enact [her] rhetorical and aesthetic argument” (“Kairos Style Guide”), and that also addresses the potential technical difficulty of carrying this process forward. She states:

For me, what I remember most is trying—I chose a visual theme. It was hard because what I wanted to do was do pictures to represent each of the different essays or each of a pair of essays that was like a representation of the different essays. . . . What ended up happening was to get the pictures all to be perfect squares and to get it in the way that—you know, you imagine something and then you really want it to be that way. Eventually, I got it to look how I wanted it to look—[laughter]—but, for me, I remember really nit-pickingly trying to get these pictures perfect.

Here, Julia seems to articulate a rhetorical rationale for her multimodal choices (she wants her chosen images to “represent” each category of artifacts she has uploaded to her Capstone eportfolio) that is similar to the relationship between words and images that Karen Shriver calls “stage-setting,” namely, when there is “different content in words and pictures, in which one mode (often the visual) forecasts the content, underlying theme, or ideas presented in the other mode” (413).

In Julia’s Capstone eportfolio, clicking on an image on her home page will take the reader/viewer to a new page that presents an essay or project thematically related to the image. For instance, the center image in figure 8.1 of two people in apparent wedding apparel kissing each other leads to Julia’s Capstone project, titled “For Better or Worse,” which explores gender roles in relation to marriage case law. Every other image in the grid similarly “forecasts the content, underlying theme, or ideas” of the artifact to which it links. In regard to design, the perfect symmetry of each image enables the grid format that Julia labored over and provides a visually dynamic first view of the eportfolio. Julia claims earlier in the exit interview that she is “not the most . . . technologically savvy. I’m just not really great with—[laughter]—computers.” Nonetheless, despite this apparent lack of confidence in
her technological design abilities, and her relative unfamiliarity with this mode of composition, Julia demonstrates a commitment to her design that allows her to overcome the frustration of the medium’s constraints and to realize her rhetorical vision for the “picture-essay” relationship on her eportfolio. In doing so, she evinces both metacognitive awareness and regulation, taking her rhetorical design from “imagination” (“You imagine something and then you really want it to be that way”) to realization (“Eventually, I got it to look how I wanted it to look”).

Sophie, a nonminor, describes an example of a different rhetorical relationship between visual and textual modes in her entry interview, one of supplementarity:
Prezi sort of allows you to almost communicate your thought process through the presentation, because you can zoom. We had this one map that we’re showing and then we want to show another map next to it and, rather than clicking on the next slide, we just zoom out, and you can see both maps next to each other. Which, when you’re watching something, it’s just much more visually appealing.

Shriver describes a supplementary verbal-visual relationship as “characterized by different content in words and pictures, in which one mode dominates the other, providing the main ideas, while the other reinforces, elaborates, or instantiates the points made in the dominant mode” (413). Sophie, who apparently describes a connection between what appears on two different maps, reinforces this argument for her audience by presenting the connection visually as well as verbally using the Prezi platform’s unique “zooming” affordances, and she articulates that relationship in her depiction of the “presentation” itself as “almost communicat[ing] [her] thought process.” Although Sophie falls back on the language of “visual appeal” (similarly to Katie) to explain why she prefers the spatial relationship enabled by the Prezi platform to a more linear, slide-based presentation platform, it seems clear that she has an intentional rhetorical design in mind (metacognitive awareness) and is able to choose the appropriate medium within which to facilitate it (metacognitive regulation).

In their interviews, these three study participants, Katie, Julia, and Sophie, each convey a sense of how incorporating multiple modes in their compositions (e.g., visual, spatial) may enhance the meaning of their intended argument. At the same time—while developmental differences among these participants are certainly apparent, from Katie’s primarily additive, not-particularly-rhetorical understanding of the relation of argument and media, to Julia’s and Sophie’s more deliberate and self-aware rhetorically design-based approaches—in all three instances, the incorporation of nonalphabetic modes appears secondary to the dominant text-based argument. It is, of course, often the case in multimodal composition that one mode may be predominant, but students’ awareness of when and how they might select these modes can offer additional insights into their writing development. The extent to which writers begin to conceive of “substance” and “style” as necessarily co-occurring, such that their argument could not be enacted without their design, marks a conceptual shift in their understanding of what it means to write, of what might “count” as writing, that may also signal developmental growth.

This shift begins to be visible conceptually in Jenna’s exit interview when she is asked about what she learned from the projects of other minor-in-writing students:
I saw that there were a lot of different ways to say something, if that makes sense. It depends who you’re saying it to and why you’re saying it. I realize you have to think—there are a lot more decisions that go into how you want to convey something. . . . Like how do you want to—do you want it to be in an essay? Like literally words on a page or do you want to turn it into something with pictures or do you want to put it on a website? All of the things that play into that. If it’s just an essay anyone can read it but then if you put pictures with it you’re influencing people to see a certain thing or if you put it on a website then how do people navigate your website and where is the emphasis? There’s so many decisions that go into that.

Parsing the sequence of steps Jenna makes in her response, at least three important dimensions of multimodal writing development become apparent. First, Jenna’s conception of writing appears to have expanded through her collaborations with her Capstone course peers: “There were a lot of different ways to say something”; “There are a lot more decisions that go into how you want to convey something.” Second, she views this new compositional terrain as linked to rhetorical situation, to audience, purpose, medium, and context: “It depends who you’re saying it to and why you’re saying it.” And finally, Jenna understands that the choice of medium and mode is inextricable from the effect of the argument: “If it’s just an essay anyone can read it but then if you put pictures with it you’re influencing people to see a certain thing or if you put it on a website then how do people navigate your website and where is the emphasis?” “Put[ting] pictures with it,” then, can not only enhance an argument, making it stronger, but can influence a reader/viewer’s interpretation of it. In regard to fully digital media such as websites, design choices such as navigational structure can determine a reader/viewer’s experience of the argument as well as create argumentative emphases.

Jenna articulates the ideas that design enacts argument and that writing takes multiple forms with a high degree of metacognitive awareness, but this excerpt does not present evidence of how she herself follows through on her understanding. Examples from two other study participants offer a sense of what it can look like for this compositional development to become visible. In her entry interview, Dana, a writing minor, discusses her experience with remediating an alphabetic essay into an audio essay, and her realization that the argument she wanted to convey could not successfully be enacted using text alone:

For the remediation, I chose a piece that I wrote for [English] 125 on the Kanye West song. It was an essay that I wrote on an actual song. I thought that I wasted a lot of time
in the essay explaining how the music sounded or what the lyrics said. I made an audio essay of it, with me reading it and then it cut into the actual music. That was something that couldn’t have been done without new media.

Dana’s opportunity in the minor-in-writing Gateway course to transform the medium in which she conveyed her message about the Kanye West song enabled her to enact aspects of her argument that were previously not available, and in this way the new medium does more than merely enhance a previously existing argument. Dana’s example may be viewed as something of a transitional developmental moment, in that the remediated audio essay draws heavily on the text-based argument that preceded it, but nonetheless accomplishes new rhetorical work made possible by an aural medium.

Lauren, a nonminor majoring in screen arts and culture (film studies), offers a fuller example of compositional development in her entry interview in regard to film-making, in which she begins to understand multimodal and multimedia composition itself as writing. Here, shot selection and continuity editing perform functions that might be taken up, for instance, by selection of evidence and paragraph organization in alphabetic writing. In this way, Lauren, too, shows that her conception of writing has begun to develop as she considers the design elements of composing in a non-text-based medium:

It’s cool because I can express myself in a medium other than words, but I can still express the same ideas that I’m writing about. I mean, I’m like—for my SAC [Screen Arts and Culture] 290 class, we are doing black and white 16mm silent film, so it’s really cool cause we had like somebody playing chess—two guys playing chess—and it looked really, really gorgeous. It was like, “I could write about this, but it’s so much cooler to see it in this medium,” and the way I choose to cut the angles, and where I’m cutting for continuity, and stuff like that, that is kind of like writing in itself.

Though Lauren relies in some ways on the language of visual effect (“it’s so much cooler”), her deeper point seems to be that the rhetorical design work that goes into film composition is central to the aesthetic meaning conveyed. Like Dana, she realizes that “writing about” it is possible, but the resulting composition would be entirely different—and ostensibly less successful. Here, then, Dana and Lauren seem to be discovering and exemplifying Jenna’s point that “how you want to convey something,” the media and modes a writer selects, determines the meanings that may be enacted and communicated.

The participants represented in these several examples of interview excerpts
in which there is co-occurrence of the “new media” code and the “portfolio” code offer compelling snapshots of how student writers begin to negotiate and articulate multimodal writing development, helping to make visible the kinds of decisions students make as they transition among modes. The interviews reveal how students can begin to broaden their understanding of composition as they think through what it means to compose in nonalphabetic modes and media, and to communicate their envisioned arguments and designs beyond simply adding in media as nonessential ornamentation or emphasis. None of these participants claims prior expertise with these multimodal and multimedia forms, yet each finds her way to a self-aware demonstration of some of the principles laid out in professional guidelines, such as the “Kairos Style Guide,” and in multimodal assessment best practices—principles that may be paraphrased in terms of the three dimensions of multimodal writing development Jenna articulated: an awareness of an expanded conception of writing, a deliberate attention to the rhetorical situation, and an intentional enactment of substance via style.

Portfolio Development and ePortfolio Development as Incommensurate Processes

Because the creation of eportfolios plays such a central role in the “new media” experiences of study participants who were enrolled in the minor-in-writing program, the second part of this chapter will turn its focus specifically to an analysis of the effect eportfolios may have on students’ writing development. ePortfolio, of course, is a contraction of the phrase “electronic portfolio,” that is, a portfolio created using a digital platform; consequently, one of the challenges of analyzing the effects of eportfolios on student writing development is the difficulty of distinguishing the effects of portfolio creation in itself from its specifically digital or electronic forms. In other words, it is important to consider both the “portfolio-ness” and the “e-ness” of participant eportfolio compositions in connection to their writing development, and also participant talk in interviews and reflective writing about both of these elements and their interactions. This part of the chapter, then, will aim to disaggregate the “new media” and “portfolio” codes to better understand their related influences on student writing development. In brief, in this analysis, writerly self-identity is found to comprise a new factor in how multimodal writing development becomes observable, such that the most robust development is characterized not only by a composer’s expanded conception of writing, but also their expanded self-perception as a writer. In this broader frame, writers view substance
and style as integrally linked, and also view themselves as composers in any mode or medium that enables them best to enact an argument within a given rhetorical situation. However, an additional finding is that development via reflection during eportfolio construction does not necessarily lead to development in multimodal composition—the two seem to proceed independently.

Since portfolio learning and portfolio assessment took off in the mid-1980s (see, e.g., Hamp-Lyons and Condon), a rich literature has been produced on the benefits of portfolio creation for student writing development, particularly in regard to how portfolio composition fosters student self-reflection and metacognition. In a 2009 American Association of Colleges and Universities article, Ross Miller and Wende Morgaine summarize some of these benefits as follows, noting that the reflective work students engage in as they construct a portfolio can:

- build learners’ personal and academic identities as they complete complex projects and reflect on their capabilities and progress,
- facilitate the integration of learning as students connect learning across courses and time,
- be focused on developing self-assessment abilities in which students judge the quality of work using the same criteria experts use,
- help students plan their own academic pathways as they come to understand what they know and are able to do and what they still need to learn.

Examples of each of these areas are represented in participants’ interview responses. For instance, when asked in his exit interview, “Do you think creating the eportfolio has had an effect on your writing?” Zach replies: “Yeah, definitely—just being able to organize all of this and categorize what I did as an undergraduate and then put a thread through it all. It really helped define me, I guess as a writer—at least in the past—told me what I wanted to try to do with it in the future.” In this excerpt, Zach touches on three out of four of Miller and Morgaine’s bullet points—building a sense of identity connected to his undergraduate writing (“It really helped define me, I guess as a writer”), facilitating his integration of learning by making visible the implicit linkages among his writing experiences (“put a thread through it all”), and helping him plan an academic pathway (“at least in the past—told me what I wanted to try to do with it in the future”).

Ayanna echoes some of these same themes in her response to a similar question in her entry interview:

I don’t think . . . it’s affected my writing writing, but I think it’s affected about how I feel when I write though. I think it definitely makes me feel like more of a writer, more of
someone who can take risks, and do stuff . . . in general just with any reflective writing. I think it gives you a good chance to think about how you’ve grown as a writer. I think it, especially specifically the ones I have in this portfolio, I think solidified my identity as a writer.

Ayanna touches on the effect eportfolio creation has had on her “confidence” as a writer (a term she uses elsewhere in the interview), and her sense of her capabilities as “someone who can take risks” in writing by inhabiting and effectively responding to a range of rhetorical situations. She also implicitly invokes what Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon name as the “three main” characteristics of portfolios, “collection, reflection, and selection” (118, emphasis original), in her discussion of the ways her reflection on the artifacts she selected (“specifically the ones I have in this portfolio”) operated to help her consolidate a sense of writerly identity that characterizes her as an integrative learner.

Some participants, such as Ayanna, have already come to this sense of a “solidified” writerly identity through the construction of the Gateway eportfolio earlier in their college course. Other participants, however, demonstrate a marked development in their self-perception as writers from the entry interview’s discussion of the Gateway eportfolio to the exit interview’s discussion of the Capstone eportfolio at least a year later. For instance, when asked in her entry interview about the possible effect of the eportfolio on her writing, Madeleine replies: “Not any effect other than enhancing the reflective writing that I already was getting the base for in the Gateway. . . . I don’t think it changed anything.” In her exit interview, however, when asked a somewhat broader question regarding “the process of creating the eportfolio, both the selection process, the design process, what effect that kind of combined effort may have had on you as a writer,” it seems clear that Madeleine has gained a fuller sense of her own writing experiences and the ways she has grown as a writer, and at this point is able to articulate the effects of “collection, selection, and reflection” on her sense of writerly development over her time in college:

I think it was really—it was kind of cool to go back and see my writing from the very beginning. . . . I’ve had five years of writing artifacts. . . . I think it made me realize how much I’ve changed as a writer. . . . I began to realize that I really had been writing about personal experiences and reflecting on them and articulating them through a bunch of coursework, whether I had intended to or not. In that sense reflecting on it kind of solidified how I view myself as a writer maybe and how I’ve written while at Michigan.

For this participant, then, when prompted by the Capstone course writer’s evolution essay and the composition of her Capstone eportfolio to take a long view of
her cumulative writing, a through-line emerges that allows her, too, to “solidify” and integrate a sense of writerly identity bound up with a sense of herself both as a student (“coursework”) and as an individual learner who places “personal experiences” within a broader context.

Samantha demonstrates an even more profound shift in perspective from the entry to the exit interview. In her entry interview, she discusses her earnest attempts to meet the demands of the Gateway eportfolio assignment, despite her sense that “I didn’t have a concept of what the portfolio was supposed to be for a very long time. I still don’t know if I fully do or not. . . . I guess, it forced me to think about how I wanted to showcase myself as a writer. Yeah, I don’t know if it’s had an impact on my writing though.” At this early point in her college writing experience, Samantha evinces a not-uncommon frustration with the eportfolio form. For many students, the apparent artificiality of the genre can be hard to overcome, as is the often-ambiguous sense of audience. As Chris Gallagher and Laurie Poklop report, students often have trouble identifying their audience, as they find themselves writing for multiple readers consisting of instructors, program evaluators, and external audiences such as potential employers, among others (7). This difficulty can be further compounded by the sometimes-conflicting range of purposes eportfolios may serve—from opportunity for self-reflection, to course or program assessment tool, to external presentation of one’s best work, and more. For some students, the result can be that no genuine exigency is defined for the eportfolio. Samantha presents this frustration in strong terms in her entry interview:

I still don’t feel like I have a totally, 100% grasp on the functional portfolio. . . . I guess the other thing I had a hard time with the portfolio was the writing is so different. There’s the new media writing class and there’s my science writing classes and then there’s just random assignments. English classes and psych classes. . . . I kept hearing to include blog reports and all these other manner of things. I couldn’t—there’s nothing cohesive I felt about it. I know you can tag and organize that stuff but I don’t know, it still feels pretty disjointed to me.

Samantha gives voice to the idea that, while there may be technical ways to overcome the sense of disjunction among the range of artifacts the Gateway eportfolio prompt asked her to include (“I know you can tag and organize that stuff”), she had trouble seeing this range of her writing become a coherent composition—it remains a mere “collection.” The large-scale multiplicity of eportfolio composition, then, can flummox a student like Samantha who—as discussed by McCarty in chapter 4—recognizes generic and disciplinary differences among her various
alphabetic and “new media” compositions (“There’s the new media writing class and there’s my science writing classes and then there’s just random assignments. English classes and psych classes.”), and does not see them belonging together in a representation of her writing.

In her exit interview, Samantha describes writing the Capstone’s reflective essay, which will introduce her eportfolio and ideally explain to a reader how the artifacts it holds represent a genuine and meaningful act of selection that conveys something about her commitments or identity as a writer. At first, the process did not seem to be going well, and it looked as if she might end up facing a feeling of disjointedness and incoherence similar to what she experienced previously: “I’m writing it along and I’m like, ‘This is kind of superficial,’ which is what they told us purposely to avoid. I was like, ‘I’m really not saying anything constructive right now.’” But then she voices a textbook moment of reflective discovery:

It just eventually came around to me as I was writing. I was like, “I write because I learn.” Then it—through that, I want to write so other people can learn. I was like that’s why—that’s what drives and motivates me to write. That kind of—it’s kind of cool because that came out of me just writing this essay here, and it kind of forced me to . . . assess my college career through writing, . . . which is something I wouldn’t have done. . . . It was interesting too because it’s really my learning style. . . . It’s a very integral part of how I learn. I mean, that’s—this is the part I love about writing is finding this viewpoint that I didn’t set out to find, but then it kind of just happened because I was writing.

In reflecting on the variety of forms of writing she has composed over her college years, Samantha finds a common thread in the idea of writing to learn, and of learning in order to share one’s knowledge with others. Drawing on a quotation from Maya Angelou (“When you learn, teach; when you get, give”), she writes in her eportfolio reflection, “I have never been comfortable with the inherent amount of introspection and selfishness that seems to come with ‘being a writer’ and my personal workaround is that writing is a way to teach.” Samantha’s experience, like those narrated by Madeleine, Zach, and Ayanna, illustrates the best outcomes of portfolio learning as constructed in the research literature, and it seems clear that in creating their eportfolios these study participants have developed their sense of writerly identity and an understanding of their own learning by engaging in sustained reflection on the writing they have selected to include in them. The story told by this study’s “portfolio” code, then, seems to be one of success.

At the same time, however, as certain remarks from some of these same participants suggest, a successful “portfolio” experience is not always tantamount for
these students to a sense that composing the eportfolio itself has benefited their expertise as writers in any particular way. That is, while these participants feel they have solidified their identities as writers—as demonstrated by their successful metacognitive regulation and evaluation of their collected writing experiences—they do not seem to have expanded these identities to alter their conceptions of writing itself. In this way, their compositional development may be said to remain bounded as well. Indeed, when asked if they thought “creating the eportfolio has had an effect on [their] writing,” it might be recalled that three of these four participants (Ayanna, Madeleine, and Samantha) respond in the negative in their entry interviews. In their exit interviews, while Madeleine does not respond directly to the question, Ayanna says, “I don’t know if it’s directly changed anything. I think if anything it’s just helped me reconcile my thoughts about writing. I don’t know if it’s directly impacted how to write.” Samantha notes, “I don’t think it affected my writing. I think it had an effect on how I value writing, or how I think about writing, or why I write, I guess.” In all of these instances, from both entry and exit interviews, these participants identify their clear sense of the developmental benefits of the acts of “collecting, selecting, and reflecting” over the span of their writing during college and see these benefits as accruing to their metacognitive sense of themselves as writers, but do not see them as also having an effect on “how to write,” on their true “writing writing” (Ayanna). The not-so-implicit suggestion here, then, is that eportfolio composition in itself is not writing for these participants—an observation that in turn suggests the research implication that portfolio development and eportfolio development are not commensurate.

A closer look at the eportfolio as a compositional genre might help to explain a basis for this apparent bifurcation. Comprised of multiple artifacts ideally framed within a coherent webtext, eportfolios can be complex digital compositions. The prompts for the two minor-in-writing eportfolios describe the projects as comprising “a self-curated online collection of your work tied together by self-reflective writing and purposeful design” (see appendix 2a online for the Gateway eportfolio prompt); further, “your portfolio isn’t simply a collection: it is a composition itself” (see appendix 2a online for the Capstone eportfolio prompt). The aims of “collection, selection, and reflection” are certainly represented in these descriptions, but simply placing a set of curated artifacts next to one another, accompanied by a reflective document explaining the internal connections the author perceives, does not appear to be sufficient to the eportfolio genre—it must also be “composed” and “purposefully designed.” Eportfolios meeting these criteria belong to a category that researchers such as Kathleen Blake Yancey label as “web sensible.” Yancey coined this phrase in a 2004 article in which she distinguished it from “what we
might call ‘print uploaded,’ . . . a version of portfolio that is identical in form to the print but that is distributed electronically” (745). Whereas the “print uploaded” eportfolio typically incorporates “digitizations of print-based material” (Eyman and Ball 65) linked in linear fashion, one to the next, the “web sensible” eportfolio is “one that through text boxes, hyperlinking, visuals, audio texts, and design elements not only inhabits the digital space and is distributed electronically but also exploits the medium” (Yancey 745-46). The eportfolio, then, is “a composition . . . operating inside multiple networks” (Yancey et al.), and as such, it asks its composer to operate at least adequately, if not always comfortably, within a networked digital environment.

Returning to Ayanna, Madeleine, and Samantha, their reluctance to attribute their development as writers to the act of composing their eportfolios might be understood as a version of the antipathy voiced by study participants such as Susanne, Ariana, and Abby, who explicitly separated design from argument in their discussions of multimodal writing. For these three successful portfolio learners, too, “writing” remains alphabetic writing—“black words on a white page,” as Sidney states in her exit interview—and unless they make the broader leap of coming to see themselves as multimodal writers, like study participants Jenna, Dana, and Lauren, they often do not view their writing itself as having changed, despite the very positive effects of this particular act of digital and multimodal composition on their sense of writerly self-efficacy. For this very reason, eportfolios can offer insight into the differential development of student composers who may exhibit highly developed rhetorical awareness and flexibility in one mode, while demonstrating fairly early stages of rhetorical command and metacognitive awareness and regulation in another.

Students in the minor-in-writing program have complete freedom to choose their eportfolio platform and design their eportfolio as they wish. The eportfolio prompts encourage them explicitly to consider the extent to which, as the “Kairos Style Guide” puts it, “media and design elements [are] non-gratuitous and facilitate or enact the rhetorical and aesthetic argument” of their eportfolios. The Gateway eportfolio prompt, for instance, asks students to consider the “reading experience” they wish to create, the kinds of “interactivity” that will further these aims, and the “media” that will support it (see appendix 2a online for the complete prompts). Consequently, all of the eportfolios created for the minor-in-writing program are web sensible to at least some extent; none of them is a simple “print uploaded” portfolio as Yancey defines it.

That said, the eportfolios vary tremendously in the extent and effectiveness of their rhetorical design, and some are largely “digitizations of print-based mate-
Ayanna’s and Madeleine’s Capstone eportfolios both belong to the latter grouping. The writing they each include is varied in style, genre, and sophistication, and each writer reveals unique interests and commitments in her selection of essays. In terms of design, Ayanna’s is organized linearly, and incorporates very few hyperlinks or images, while Madeleine’s is topically organized and does include supplementary images related to several artifacts, as well as some internal hyperlinks that connect writing samples organized along a graphical timeline (see figure 8.2). However, both eportfolios consist entirely of digitized and/or embedded print-based artifacts. Samantha’s Capstone eportfolio is much more visually dynamic, incorporating colorful, apparently stock photographs (they are not attributed), but it shares Ayanna’s linear organization and collection of digitized and embedded print-based artifacts. Because they all contain extensive reflective writing, these eportfolios do tell a coherent narrative about their composers, and do demonstrate the portfolio learning each participant speaks of in her exit interview.

However, the eportfolios are minimally web sensible, and show little evidence of the three dimensions of multimodal writing development Jenna articulated in the first half of the chapter, which can provide a framework for analysis of eportfolio-based multimodal and multimedia composition here: that is, awareness of an expanded conception of writing, a deliberate attention to rhetorical situation, and the intentional enactment of substance via style. Consequently, while these three participants clearly develop as “portfolio” composers from the Gateway to the Capstone experience, as articulated in their interviews and also in their eportfolio reflections, the design of their Capstone eportfolios and the modes and media of the artifacts the students include suggest that they have attained a less robust development as multimodal and multimedia composers by the end of their college educations. The story the data tell about “new media” writing development thus appears to be a more circuitous, and also more troubled, one.

ePortfolio Development as Entailing Both Expanded Writing and an Expanded Writer

Nonetheless, this study does present evidence of “portfolio” and “new media” writing development progressing together, and it is to one such example that I turn in the final section of this chapter. Kaitlin’s Gateway eportfolio reveals that she is already a disciplinarily adept writer by her second year of college. She presents artifacts from her Gateway minor-in-writing course as well as from courses taken
for her double major in English literature and communication studies. The essays themselves, in all three areas, display markers of a confident, rhetorically savvy and flexible writer (see McCarty, chapter 4, for an analysis of advanced disciplinary rhetorical moves in writing), and the brief, reflective introductions to each essay further show that Kaitlin possesses a robust level of metacognitive awareness and regulation of her writing in its varied genres and disciplines.

To give one example, Kaitlin's English essay entitled “Evidence of Psychological Realism in Nella Larsen's *Passing*” begins: “Psychological realism may be described as that genre of prose fiction that derives its singularity from a tight focus on the world inside the mind. Rather than leading readers through a plot by way of neutral narration, pieces of this genre tend to place. . . .” This paragraph first states a premise in solid academic form (and with canny use of hedging: “may be described,” “tend to”), opens up a contrast in the next sentence, and then continues to develop the definition and turn to the specific features of the novel that align with it. In the next paragraph, the essay begins a close reading of a specific scene in the novel that provides the initial evidence for the claim offered in the essay’s title. Kaitlin establishes her idea quickly and clearly, and goes on deftly to support it.

Her reflection on this essay, while written in a more informal register, interest-
ably comments on these very aspects of her writing, and further extrapolates from them to make a broader claim about how the essay represents her capabilities as a writer of evidence-based arguments:

I’ve chosen this bit of writing as an example because I find that the vast majority of academic writing and even a lot of group work correspondence stems from the same basic format: make a statement and back it up. Regardless of whether or not you’ve read the book I’m talking about, you should be able to see here that there is a clear presentation of an argument and solid evidence to substantiate it.

Kaitlin’s other reflective introductions in the Gateway eportfolio do similar work, focusing less on the content of the essay presented and more on a thoughtful (and sometimes witty) analysis of what the essay demonstrates about a particular aspect of her writing abilities. Indeed, in her entry interview, she speaks about the role that reflective writing has played in allowing her to “take a step back from all of the details and the specifics and see [her writing] as a bigger picture . . . It helps me remove myself from the details and say, ‘Has this accomplished the task’ . . . I guess, from a broader outline perspective, than the individual assignment specifications itself.” As a portfolio, and approached holistically, Kaitlin’s Gateway eportfolio displays all four of the qualities that Miller and Morgaine identify as significant: it defines a provisional writing identity, reveals integration of learning, showcases self-assessment, and outlines an initial academic path. On her home page, by way of introduction to the eportfolio, she writes: “The texts that I have chosen to include here are ones I hope will give you the best picture of my writing style, and since my goal is to convey my adaptive skills as a writer, I’ve included pieces I think demonstrate the range of topics and styles I’ve tackled so far. What you’ll find here is an organized collection of writing from my collegiate career at the University of Michigan.” And she delivers on this promise.

At the same time, as an eportfolio, it is rather surprising. In appearance, Kaitlin’s Gateway eportfolio is very similar to Madeleine’s Capstone eportfolio—text-only on an unobtrusive background. In a short paragraph on the home page, preceding the description of the artifacts I quoted above, she explains this look, writing, “Welcome to my electronic writing portfolio! Despite its format, this is not a blog. Rather, it is the paperless, online equivalent of a printed portfolio that gives you samples of my writing from my different academic concentrations” (see figure 8.3). Here Kaitlin seems to be offering a precise definition—and celebration—of Yancey’s “print uploaded” digital portfolio, “a version of portfolio that is identical in form to the print but that is distributed electronically” (745). And indeed, like Ayanna’s,
Madeleine’s, and Samantha’s eportfolios, Kaitlin’s offers only “digitizations of print-based material” (Eyman and Ball 65). In her entry interview, also like them, she downplays the effects of creating the eportfolio on her writing as such, and instead focuses on how the process helped her obtain a new perspective on her writing: “maybe not so much in the fact of my writing as maybe my perception of my writing where I guess I didn’t really have a picture of myself as a writer before. . . . it just kind of gave me more confidence that I have done this, so I shouldn’t be doubting that I can do it again.” Based on these design features of her Gateway eportfolio, then, it appears to be far less robust an example of composition in its genre—the web sensible eportfolio—than the print-based artifacts she includes in it. And her unenthusiastic interview statements about her eportfolio as a mode of writing do not seem to display the same metacognitive awareness present in virtually every other statement she makes in the interview about her writing goals, commitments, and development. Kaitlin’s Gateway eportfolio thus seems to provide a clear example of uneven writing development among modes and media.

Yet on a closer look, the picture turns out to be a bit more complicated. Like
Madeleine, Kaitlin incorporates internal hyperlinks that connect to splash pages and artifact pages, weaving them together and creating additional pathways among them. She includes external hyperlinks that point to evidence and examples for arguments, as well as a high number that provide connections to cited material. Her remediation project, intended for an online magazine, is the only multimodal artifact in the eportfolio, and incorporates a wide variety of images—those that are worked into the writing itself, as, for example, in a sentence prior to a pair of images, which uses ellipses to indicate that the reader should now turn to the images to complete the thought, as well as those that act as simple illustrations of a point made.

Additionally, one of the essays included in Kaitlin’s eportfolio, “Why I Write Revisited,” explicitly addresses the topic of “new media” writing in a way that demonstrates a higher degree of metacognitive awareness than was apparent in the entry interview, as well as thoughtful analysis of the significance of this mode for deepening argumentation and revision:

Comparing traditional writing and new media writing is to me the difference between a printed set of papers and a piece that lives on the web. What made me start to accept new media was its gift of using hyperlinks to forever banish the bibliography to the seventh circle of literary hell. Even better, hyperlinks give you the power to seamlessly provide research and evidence for a point with nothing more than the click of a mouse. With new media you also suddenly have the ability to illustrate writing with pictures and graphics that there previously was never room for. And with new media, pieces truly do live. On the web, you don’t just publish something; rather you have the capability to keep going back and editing what you’ve already put out there.

Here, Kaitlin narrates a change of mind regarding “new media,” which is amplified in her entry interview in her comments on how reading Andrew Sullivan’s article “Why I Blog” in her Gateway class influenced her perspective on the value of blogging (from an apparent “waste of time” to something that “can be completely professional”). She demonstrates that she is open to reconceptualizing what might count as “writing,” and expresses that she writes rhetorically, with her audience’s needs in mind—a point she makes several times in her entry interview (e.g., “for the love of God, don’t be mean to your audience”). In these ways, though the rhetorical design of Kaitlin’s Gateway eportfolio is very similar to the less web sensible Capstone eportfolios of Ayanna, Samantha, and Madeleine, and her multimodal writing development has not progressed in tandem with her writing in text-based modes and genres, similar to Jenna, it is already possible to see elements of meta-
cognitive awareness and regulation regarding multimodal and multimedia composition that preview the genuine development found in her Capstone eportfolio.

From the first glance, the differences in appearance between Kaitlin’s Gateway and Capstone eportfolios (see figure 8.4) are striking—from the bold use of color and images that dominate the very brief “Welcome” text, to the playful icons indicating different elements to be found throughout the site, to the unifying visual theme of travel and mapping. Indeed, this eportfolio reads more like a website created to reach an audience of fellow travelers than a collection of work compiled for a school-based purpose—an impression borne out by the subordination of the section titled “Portfolio” to the bottom of the page, as just one element among others. In her exit interview, Kaitlin herself comments on the differences between the two eportfolios, clearly indicating her preference for the later one:

I hated my Gateway portfolio. . . . It was just bland and boring. I was very nervous to put anything personal on it. It was not visual. It was just a bunch of text that really wasn't broken up by anything. It wasn't really multimedia. I mean, there were links, but just in the text, like here's a blue word here and there. . . . I had this idea that it really needs to look like a resume, but just like a normal paper thing but online so you don't actually
have to have paper. . . . Whereas, with the Capstone portfolio, I was challenging myself not to take paper and put it online, but something that was created online and lives online. The content was made for that form. I think that was the biggest difference in my mind.

Kaitlin’s commentary here about the differences she perceives between the two eportfolios, and her intent in composing the Capstone eportfolio to be something “that was created online and lives online,” marks a striking conceptual leap in regard to multimodal and multimedia composition. Further, her statement that “the content was made for that [online] form” suggests that she considers design, or “style,” to be the means by which her content, or “substance,” is conveyed. In this way, by the time she reaches the end of her Capstone course and has created this Capstone eportfolio, she has developed from a champion of “print uploaded” digital writing to a committed creator of “web sensible” digital texts. Another way to put this would be to suggest that Kaitlin seems fully to meet the criteria laid out in the first half of this chapter, that an important way to define the study participants’ development as multimodal composers would be to consider:

1. the extent to which they see themselves as composing truly “born digital” texts (their intentional enactment of substance via style);
2. the extent to which their integration of these affordances explicitly supports their rhetorical exigency (a deliberate attention to the rhetorical situation);
3. the degree to which they are able to demonstrate metacognitive awareness and regulation of their multimodal compositional choices (an awareness of an expanded conception of writing).

Looking further into Kaitlin’s eportfolio and the process she describes in her exit interview for creating it, these criteria seem to hold up, and to extend into an expanded sense of writerly identity as well. In this interview, when asked, “Do you think that creating this e-portfolio has had an effect on your actual writing?” Kaitlin responds, “Definitely.” She expands this answer with information that also develops the ideas about “online” composition quoted above:

Mostly because when I start writing, I usually want to write for pages and pages and pages. The challenge was how can I achieve the same effect but in a visual format or in a format that is something besides a printed 8 x 11 piece of paper? . . . I would start
writing for paragraphs, like for each bullet point. I said, “Okay, how can I figure out how to make it academic but at the same time not go on for pages?”

Here, Kaitlin can be seen thinking about how to demonstrate an ethos as a multimodal composer and connect with the community of readers she has in mind for her website. In particular, she’s focused on how to convey an “academic” argument in a form more suitable to web-based writing. She is explicitly engaged at these moments in thinking through the transition from print-based to digital rhetoric in regard to the composer, audience, and textual elements of the rhetorical situation.

Looking at the Capstone eportfolio itself, it becomes apparent how she develops a solution to her dilemma, one that makes full use of the affordances of the digital medium in an intentional and rhetorically savvy way. She goes on to say in her interview, “I would pick out quotes where it was making the point that I wanted, but over an image, so you’re not just immediately assaulted with a ton of text. You have to scroll over it to see it.” Kaitlin introduces the key texts and characters in her composition visually (see figure 8.5), but when you mouse over each image, it offers you a brief quotation that serves as one response to her guiding question on this page about what adventurers have to teach others who want to follow in their footsteps—or, as she frames the question on the project splash page, “Why do people adventure, and what do they know that I don’t?”

Finally, when you click on the image, it takes you to a slide show where you again see the image in full, along with the full quotation, and clicking through the slide show reveals this view for each of the images on the original page. It might be disputed how “academic” this particular solution is—it appears more directed at a general audience of “adventurers,” and “academic” in Kaitlin’s words might mean something in this context more like “research-based”—but in terms of its design rhetoric and its exploitation of the affordances of the web template, it constitutes highly successful web writing and a sophisticated response to the composer’s original rhetorical challenge.

Like Jenna, Dana, and Lauren, who each found their own way to understanding themselves as multimodal composers, despite having no prior expertise with multimodal and multimedia forms, Kaitlin, too, describes the hurdles involved in learning to compose and design for a digital rhetorical situation:

I had never done that before. Nobody had challenged me to do that before, so doing this portfolio definitely taught me how to do that. . . . It was a lot of learning to write in a way that made the content work for the form, the form work for the content, which we
talk about that with essay classes but never in something like this. That was definitely a unique challenge and I think a good growing challenge.

In these comments, it becomes clear that, since her entry interview, Kaitlin has deeply rethought what it means to write and to be a writer. Becoming a multimodal composer entails a new kind of “learning to write,” one that “uniquely” enabled her growth and development. However, as she also astutely notes, multimodal writing is ultimately quite similar to print-based writing in its imperative to attend to the rhetorical situation of the composition—here, as in “essay classes,” an effective writer must be intentional about presenting content so that the form meets the needs and expectations of the audience. Reflecting in her interview on how she understands her writing development as a result of this project, Kaitlin makes a direct link to the rhetorical instruction she has received in more traditional writing classes, and her need to transfer this learning into the new digital context. In other words, it is rhetorical instruction, not technical instruction, that enabled her to grow as a multimodal composer, and it is worth asking if a more thoroughgoing attention to digital rhetorical instruction might help shift the value judgments and critical engagement of study participants such as Ariana, Susanne, and Abby, who seemed to view design rhetoric as little more than fiddling with technology.
Conclusion

This chapter raises two central questions, then, about “new media” and “portfolios” in their connection to student writing development. One has to do with what is learned from analyzing student multimodal and multimedia writing development in all of its forms—in singular artifacts and in large, multifaceted compositions such as eportfolios. The other has to do specifically with how to understand the value added by the “e-ness” of eportfolios, that is, what other aspects of student writing development might surface when “portfolio-ness” and “e-ness” are working together?

Taking the second question first, this chapter’s analyses have demonstrated a robust “portfolio effect” across the study participants’ eportfolios, as represented in their interviews and their reflective writing. In regard to their digital dimension, it has been noted that even the more “print uploaded” versions of the minor-in-writing eportfolios are web sensible to some degree, such that their “e-ness” adds a not-negligible dimension to their “portfolio-ness,” whether or not this addition is realized or acknowledged by the writer. In the broadest sense, the need to build the eportfolio in an online platform requires design decisions for even the more print-based versions. Kaitlin, for instance, in responding to a question in her entry interview about what the most memorable aspect of creating the eportfolio was for her, said, “I think probably doing all of the reflective writing and also the horrible experience that it was to pick a background. You wouldn’t think that that’d be so hard, but I think I went through about 100 different ones before I ended up with the one that I had.” Although she did not embrace design rhetoric at this point in her writing development, Kaitlin nonetheless took her design choices seriously enough to search for just the right neutral blue background for her “paperless, online equivalent of a printed portfolio.” Further, as Jenna noted (“If you put it on a website then how do people navigate your website and where is the emphasis?”), the very fact of creating a navigation for the eportfolio requires decisions about organization and presentation that would not be needed in a purely print-based portfolio. Creating the navigation also creates connections among artifacts, and “draws a thread” that might not otherwise become visible in the same way, and these connections are further emphasized by the use of hyperlinks and graphical elements, as in Madeleine’s Capstone eportfolio. Consequently, even study participants who do not embrace the potentials of multimodal composition as readily as Kaitlin ends up doing, nonetheless engage in rhetorical design work by the very fact of creating their portfolio as an eportfolio. The “e-ness” becomes a value added to the important developmental work created by the “portfolio effect,” and it is worth asking if this effect would be as robust without it—a potential topic for a future paper.
Returning to the first question, one of the key insights shared by study participants who demonstrate robust multimodal writing development is the emergence of a flexible and capacious conception of how writing is defined, of what “counts” as writing—not only black text on a white page, not only traditionally conceived academic genres, but images, film, sound, websites, and more. Study participants who embrace the affordances of multimodal and digital media production, and who learn to address their constraints as rhetorical problems to be solved or worked around, evince a highly metacognitive relationship to the rhetorical situations they compose within. This characteristic is not unique to these multimodal composers, of course. Several chapters in this book demonstrate students’ abilities to navigate among a range of text-based genres and disciplinary conventions. In chapter 3, Lizzie Hutton and Gail Gibson profile study participants who find ways to integrate “academic” and “creative” domains of writing, coming to understand “writing and their writerly growth as entailing both generative activity and adherence to communicative norms, instead of viewing these approaches as requiring an either-or choice” (p. 105). Ryan McCarty also examines how students turn formal, discipline-based writing instruction and self-sponsored writing experiences to their own ends, navigating among them and drawing elements from different genres and domains to meet their personal needs “as educated communicators across a range of contexts” (chapter 4, p. 130). A multimodal composer such as Kaitlin makes similar moves in her exploration of how to communicate her research and original ideas about travel and adventure (what she calls the “academic” dimension of the project) through web-based design that speaks to a broad audience. Like some of the participants in Hutton and Gibson’s chapter, she might be said to integrate “academic” and “creative” domains of writing for her own communicative ends. In bringing modality and media into the rhetorical mix in a highly reflective capacity, alongside discipline, genre, or style, writers such as Kaitlin and Jenna perhaps make even more literally visible the innovative negotiations and play in which all of the highly developed participant composers represented in this volume engage.

Returning to the value added of the “e” in eportfolio, however, this chapter has also shown that eportfolio development does not only demonstrate the expanded conception of writing articulated by Jenna, but that this work of expansion and extension is, as Kaitlin puts it, “a good growing challenge.” That is to say, it produces a developmental effect both for the writing and in the writer. Kaitlin herself articulates this connection in her exit interview, stating, “It’s hard for me to separate writing development from personal development because I think that the two really are tied together.” Kaitlin’s reference to “personal development” here corresponds to the discoveries of a writing “identity” voiced by Zach, Ayanna, Madeleine, and
Samantha via their acts of portfolio reflection. Yet in Kaitlin’s case, the discovery points to the transformational effect becoming a multimodal composer has had on her personal writerly growth. Once such metacognitive awareness and regulation of the expanded possibilities for enacting substance via style within a digital rhetorical situation become visible, there appears to be no going back. When students find their way to deep multimodal writing development, then, their expanded senses of writing and of themselves as writers function as threshold concepts about whose effects there is still much more to learn.

NOTES

1. Gregory Schraw’s overview of these widely used terms is a useful point of reference here. He defines metacognitive knowledge or awareness and its subcategories of declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge, and metacognitive regulation and its subcategories of activities for planning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s knowledge. See, for example, Schraw, “Promoting General Metacognitive Awareness.”

2. It should be noted that students who display both robust metacognitive awareness and robust regulation may still create fairly novice compositions if they are new to the modes and conventions such genres demand. Nonetheless, I would argue that these students demonstrate genuine development as multimodal composers.

3. To be sure, these features are made available as part of the “Nomad on the Road” theme from Wix. The point here is not that Kaitlin created them all from scratch (though she has incorporated several original photographs and other elements), but that throughout the website, she makes creative and intentional use of them to enact a specific rhetorical purpose.

WORKS CITED


