



Incorporating Cultural Diversity in Multimodal Composition Assignment

Nattaporn Luangpipat, University of Wisconsin-Madison¹

Instructor Commentary

Multimodal literacy and multicultural awareness are essential skills in the 21st century in both professional and educational settings. The two main assignments presented here are taken from English 201: Intermediate Composition course. The course is a 3-credit, intermediate-level writing course that fulfills the university's Communications B requirement. The university has two set of courses related to communication that are required for students: Communication A: an introduction to college writing and speaking and Communication B: in-depth practice with college writing in a particular field. In this case, this course emphasizes on enhancing literacy skills including thinking and reading critically, using supporting evidence effectively, and applying style and convention in composing and presenting multimodal texts. These assignments are designed, with classroom activities, to scaffold the students' multimodal composition skills and their understanding of cultural diversity. By the end of the course, the students are expected to be equipped with an understanding of the core elements in multimodal texts and the skills to analyze and produce multimodal texts that are appropriate for their intended

¹ Nattaporn Luangpipat is a Ph.D. student in the Composition and Rhetoric program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is interested in writing and healing, writing for peace, multimodal composition, and second language writing. She has been working as a teaching assistant in first-year college composition and intermediate composition courses at the University of Wisconsin-Madison since Fall 2018. Email: Luangpipat@wisc.edu

audience. They are also expected to incorporate cultural diversity in their work and present it creatively and clearly through a multimodal format.

For this course, the students are asked to craft two multimodal pieces: an informative infographic (at the mid-semester) and a mix and match composition of their choice from the elements of multimodal texts (by the end of the semester). The topic for the assignments depends on the student's interest within a cultural group they select. One of the challenges of these assignments is that the cultural group that students choose to explore should be the one that they are the least familiar with. The cultural groups, putting together according to designated programs and departments on campus, are African American, East Asian and Southeast Asian, Eastern European and Russian, Latin American, the Middle Eastern and South Asian, and Native American.

The design of the assignments and class activities is based on the concept of exploring, experiencing, and engaging with different cultures. By exploring and experiencing, I ask the students to participate in at least two events on campus and watch one movie related to a cultural group they select. The events can be either formal or informal varying from lecture series, special talk, musical performance, plays, festival, and so on. With the awareness that entering different spaces for the first time may cause discomfort to some students, I make sure that each cultural group has at least two students, so if they want a companion, they have someone to go with them or to talk to. After going to an event or watching a movie, they write a summary including what the event/movie is about, where it is held/what its setting is like, who organizes/produces it, who the audience is, who the speaker is, and what they get from that event, and any questions that they have during or after participating in those events. After getting themselves familiar with the cultural groups, the students choose a topic and gather more information for their individual informative infographic in writing project 1. After they present their work, the students find people who share common interest and work in group to complete their writing project 2 or final project: Multimodal Project.

The artifacts show the two main assignments with the required components and grading criteria. Each assignment is presented with some of the students' work. In the end, I reflect my experience and place excerpts from students' journals reflecting what they get from the cultural events they participate in and echoing how multimodal meaning-making practices with the emphasis on multicultural engagement in this class encouraged both monolingual and multilingual writers, who come with various learning and writing style, bodies, and beliefs, to step out of their comfort zone and be more mindful of different cultures as well as modes of communication.

Writing Project 1: Informative Infographic

Infographics, or “information graphics,” present concepts, ideas, and data visually and often include graphs, charts, diagrams, tables, maps, and other design formats that reveal relationships and contextualize information.

Objective: Use visual design to make your information more digestible and more attractive for college students.

Scenario: You get back from an international exchange program supported by your department; the department asks you to give a presentation to the college students who have no experience of the country or the culture you were in. You must bring handouts for the audience. The handout should show your information in an interesting format. The information can be the culture you were in or a topic you have studied or worked on when you

Task: In this assignment, you will design an informative infographic based on the topic related to your selected cultural group, either African American, East Asian and Southeast Asian, Eastern European and Russian, Latin American, the Middle Eastern and South Asian, or Native American.

Guiding Questions for Succeeding in Creating an Informative Infographic

Conceptual: What are the concepts you are trying to communicate? Can your audience look at your infographic and determine easily what you want to present and in what order? Does your use of images and design clarify the information you want to communicate?

Aesthetic: Are the visuals, text, and layout of your infographics coherent? Does this style suit the concept in ways that make it more appealing to your audience? Do colors, lines, background, and shapes that you use in presenting your information help or hinder how someone can read your infographic?

Technical: Is there an identifiable beginning, middle, and end to each graphic? Is the text kept to a minimum? Do you submit your work in the proper/readable file format? Do you include the bibliography at the end of the file?

Portfolio: Your portfolio should contain all the drafts from the first to the final ones and a writer’s memo. A writer’s memo serves as a cover sheet for your project. In the memo, you should describe your purpose and strategy in selecting all elements you use in your infographic including color, font, pattern, background, images; reflect the choices and changes you make during your revision; and ask any questions about the infographic that you may have yourself. This is your opportunity to provide some context for your infographic and allow the reader to understand why you design or present the information the way you do.

Presentation: Each one of you will give a 2-3- minute presentation of your second draft. The goals for this presentation are 1) to practice your presentation skills and 2) to let you have feedback on both your presentation and the infographic.

Due Dates

Draft 1 due: Friday, October 4, 2019

Draft 2 due (Presentation Dates): Friday, October 11 to Wednesday, October 23, 2019

Portfolio due: Monday, October 28, 2019

*All drafts and the portfolio must be turned in on Canvas by 11:00 p.m.

Assessment Rubric for Informative Infographic (Using Single-Point Rubric)

Approach Expectation	Meet Expectation	Exceed Expectation
	Concept: The concept of the infographic is clear and well-organized. The presented information is cohesive and coherent. There is an identifiable beginning and ending to each set of information.	
	Technical: The work is submitted in a readable file format. The bibliography is separated from the infographic yet included at the end of the file.	
	Aesthetic: The style of the infographic suits the concept and the information presented. The use of texts, images, colors, lines, background, and shapes in the infographic help, instead of hinder, the readability of the information. The infographic is appealing to the audience.	

To create an infographic, I invite staff from the DesignLab, a digital media design consulting service for students and instructors at the university, to talk about the principles of infographics, design elements, and tools that the students can use. Then, they have a workshop for their first draft and received comments from their classmates. In the second draft which they have to present their infographic, the classmates, as the audience, write one thing the presenters do well or what they like about the infographic, one thing they can improve, and one question that the audience still have related to either content or the design. After that, the students revise their work and submit their final portfolio including all the drafts and a writer's memo.

Here are some of the students' work (final draft) from Assignment 1, in the Fall 2019. Since the students can choose how they want to design their infographic and how they prefer to organize the information, they come up with different length of the infographics, which I simply divide them according to the length into the short and long infographics.

Figure 1. Student's Short Infographic (1)

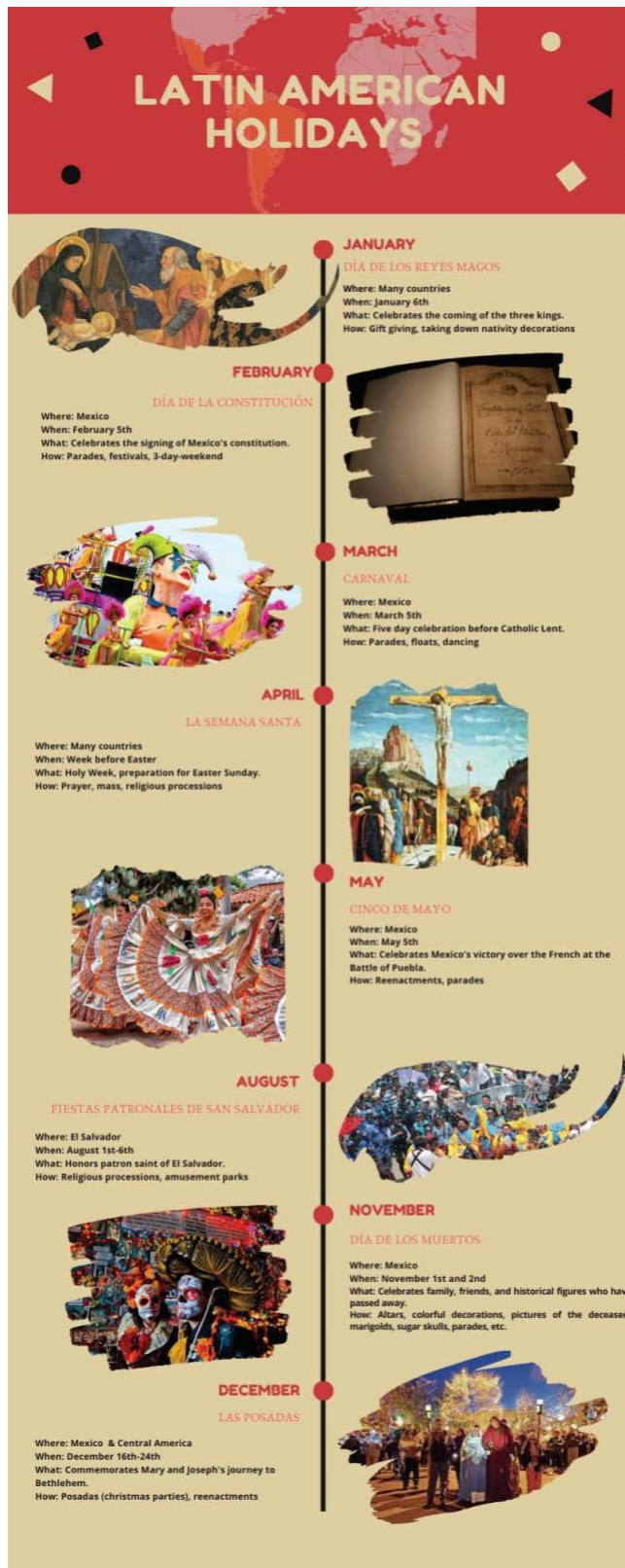


Figure 2. Student's Short Infographic (2)

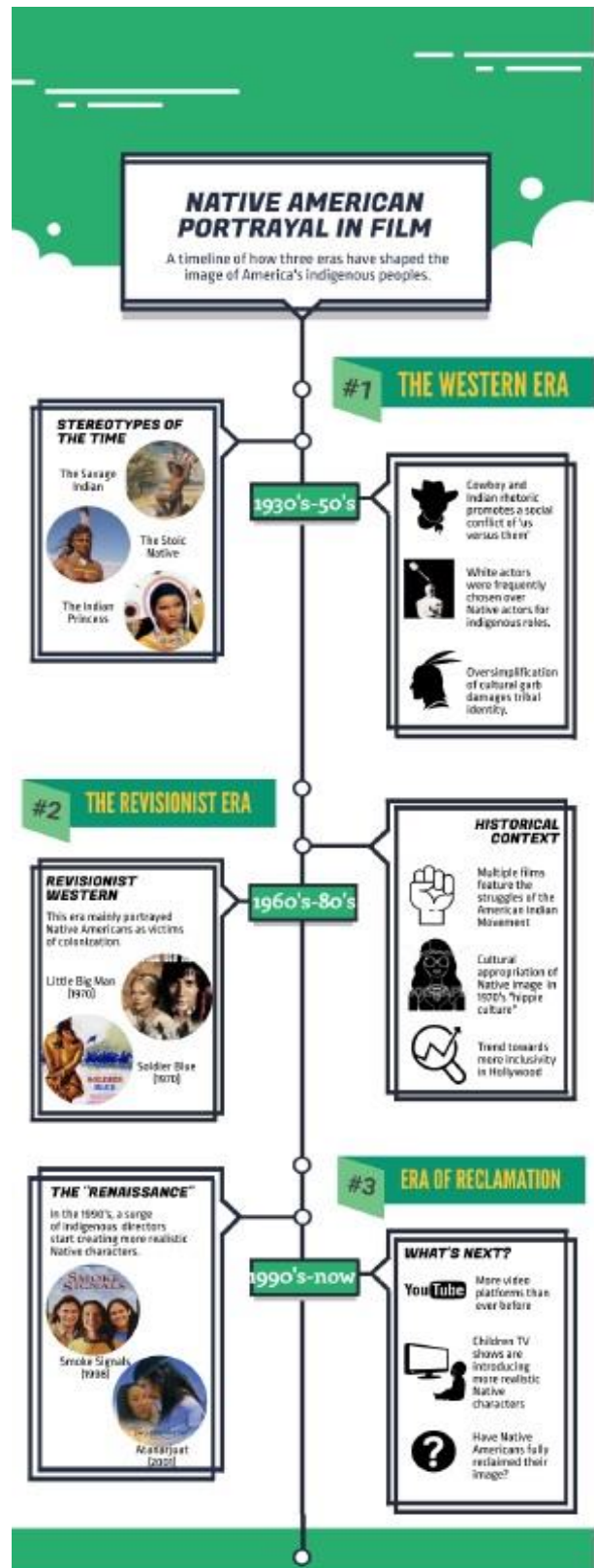


Figure 3. Student's Short Infographic (3)

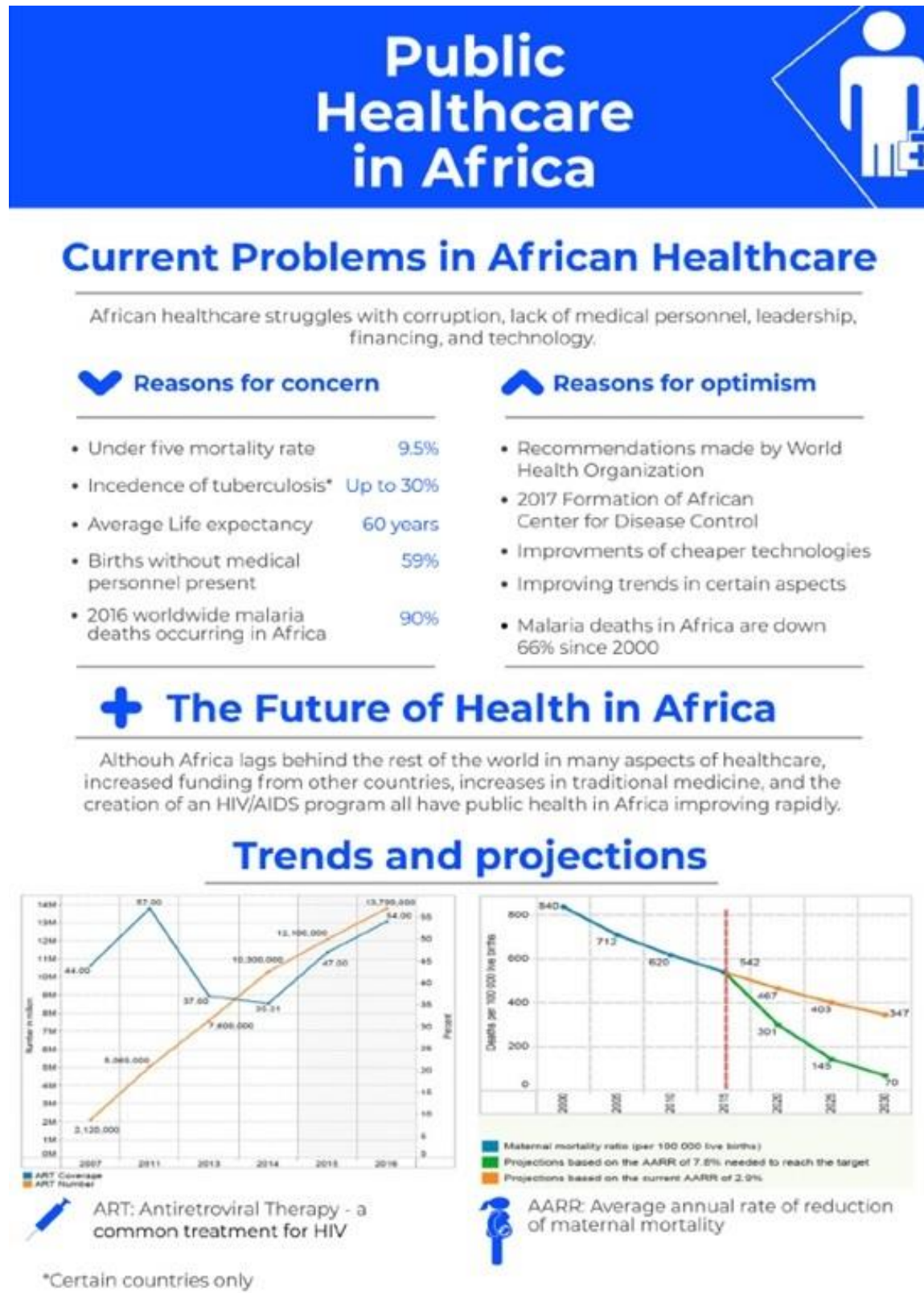


Figure 4. Student's Long Infographic (1)



Figure 5. Student's Long Infographic (2)

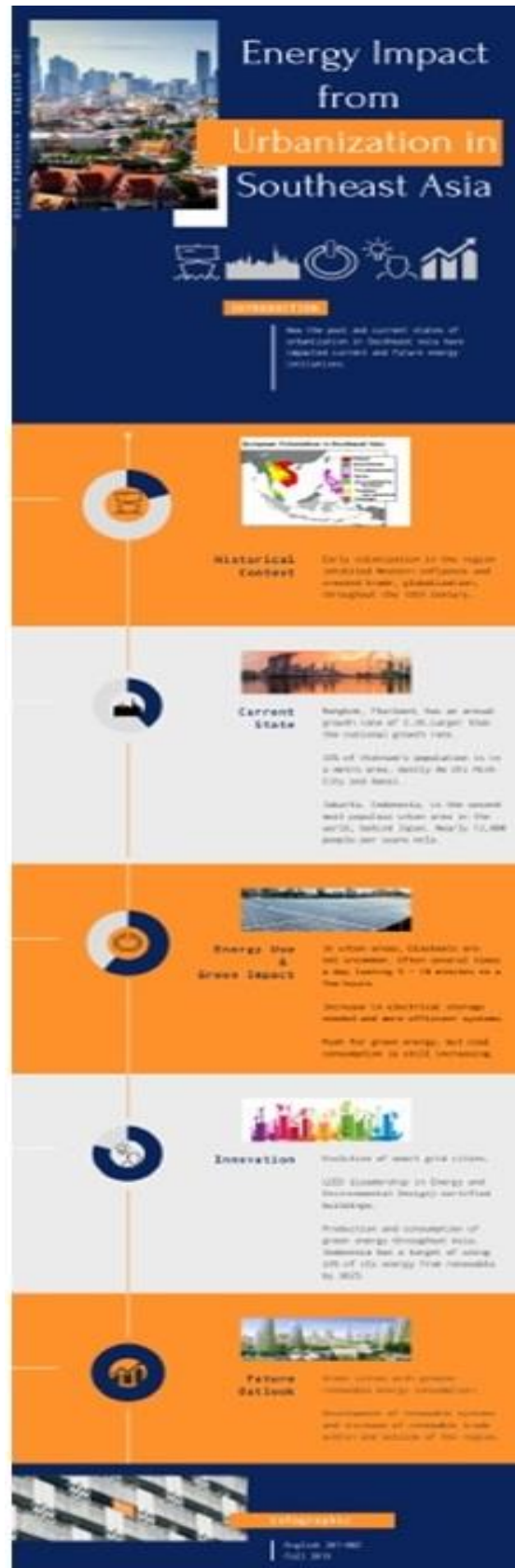
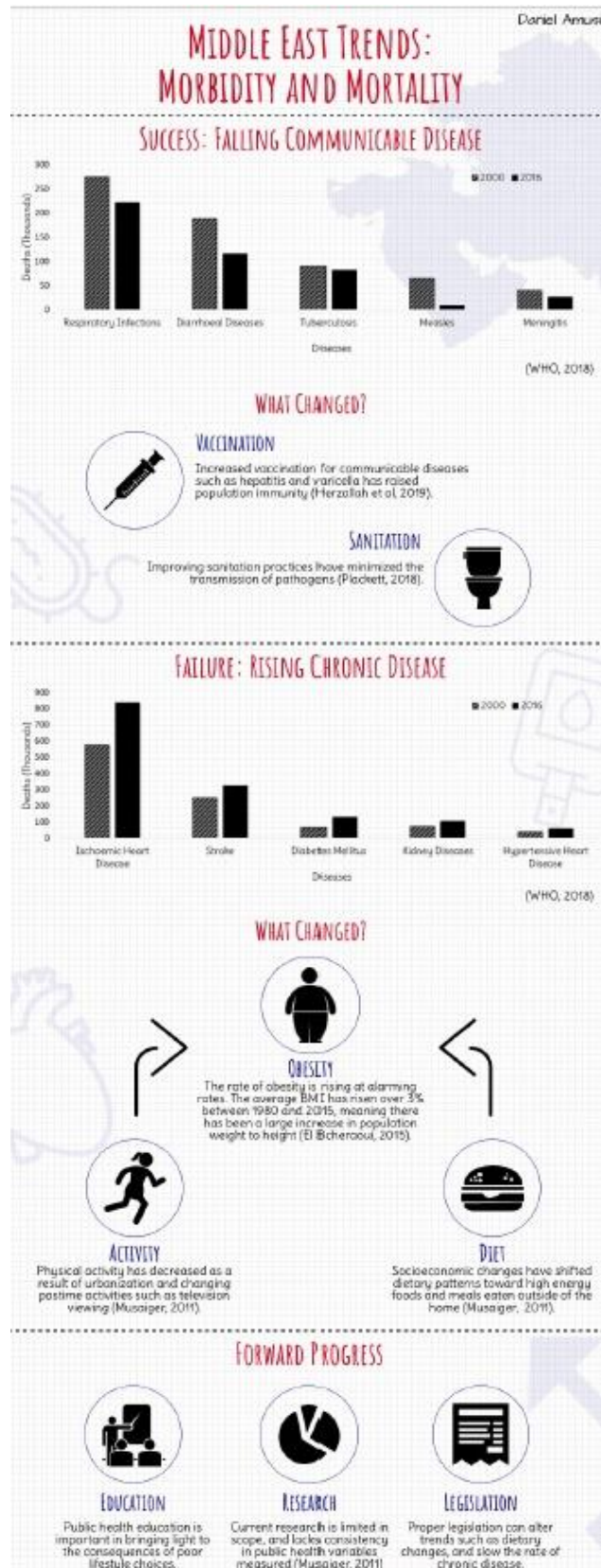


Figure 6. Student's Long Infographic (3)



After the students present their infographics, they partner up or make a group of 3-4 with their classmates who share a similar topic. Then, they work towards a final project: Multimodal Composition. For their final project, the students have a chance to choose a topic, their audience, purpose, and mode of communication.

Writing Project 2 (Final Project): Multimodal Composition

What is a Multimodal Composition?

The word “multimodal” is a mash-up of multiple and mode (Lutkewitte, 2014). A mode is a way of communicating one’s message. Multimodal describes how one uses more than a single mode to achieve their intended purposes. Five modes that the New London Group outlined as the main components in a multimodal text are: linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial (Arola, Sheppard, & Ball, 2014). When working on a multimodal composition project, you should carefully consider the choices you make related to the different modes. A brief description and some examples of each mode is presented below:

- Linguistic: written text or spoken words/narration, word choice, delivery, organization of ideas
- Visual: typeface, fonts, lines, shapes, background, color, transitions, quality of images, visual coherence, repetition, contrast
- Aural: intonation of spoken text, sound effects, ambient noise, music, volume, silence, transitions from different audio clips
- Gestural: facial expressions, gestures, and body language
- Spatial: line spacing, navigation, transitions, size of the page, size of the images, the proximity of images, the space between images and other elements, line length, visual salience, white space, visual organization, and alignment.

Objectives

- 1) Work with others in gathering and selecting information, crafting a story you want to say, learning to divide the work based on resources and skills the group members have.
- 2) Apply different modes of communication to deliver your messages to your target audience with a purpose that you aim for.

Task

Work in pair or a small group of 3-4 people to create a multimodal composition piece to showcase the information, idea, and issues that your group comes up with after combining the information that you gather for your informative infographic. Select a format of a multimodal text that you want to do from a choice of a 2-3-minute video essay, narrated video, animation video, audio essay, voiced over infographic or posters, digital storytelling on Microsoft Sway, or any other forms that combine at least visual and aural modes.

Some of the information and example of the multimodal genre you can choose from

Video Essays are often structured with an outline and present research or craft an argument with an addition of audio and visual components. (Example: <https://designlab.wisc.edu/a-midlife-crisis-but-in-college-by-eddie-estevez/>)

Narrative Videos are comparable to a motion picture film, in that they are often fictional and tell stories. They typically include monologue/dialogue, music, and sound effects. They differ from animations by using real people and places. (Example: <https://designlab.wisc.edu/resources/projects/video/#examples>)

Audio essays explore topics using spoken text, audio interviews, archival recordings, music, and/or sound effects. (Example: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/> or <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab>)

Infographics (or information graphics) present information and data visually. Infographics can include text, graphs, charts, diagrams, tables, maps, lists, and other forms of data visualization. (Example: <https://www.dailyinfographic.com/>)

Microsoft Sway is a presentation program that allows users who have a Microsoft account to combine text and media to create a presentable information. (Example: https://sway.office.com/egg_flour)

Guiding Questions for Succeeding in Creating a Multimodal Composition Project

Multimodal Components: How do the visuals support your messages? Are the visual good quality and relatable to your messages? Is the audio clear? Does the audio support your messages/images and other elements? Does the use of linguistic mode strengthen the visuals/audio or vice versa?

Concept: Can you tell what the main idea is? Is the purpose clear? Is the main idea well supported? Does your use of images and design clarify the message that you want to send? Is your mode of communication appropriate to your target audience and purpose?

Organization: Is the presentation easy to follow? Is the content well connected? Does the content flow smoothly?

Aesthetic: Is the combination of modes coherent and cohesive? Do your messages flow effectively and interestingly? Does this style suit the concept in ways that clarify and make your messages more appealing to your audience?

Professionalism: Is each presenter well-prepared (including verbal, non-verbal communication, and technical preparation)?

Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection of your writing process; it provides you an opportunity to reflect on the work that you do and see your own development. Your portfolio should include a writer's memo and various drafts of the assignments. A writer's memo serves as a cover sheet for your project. In the memo, you should describe your purpose and strategy in selecting all elements you use; reflect the choices and changes you make

during your revision. This is your opportunity to provide some context for the audience and clarify what is happening behind-the-scenes.

Due Dates

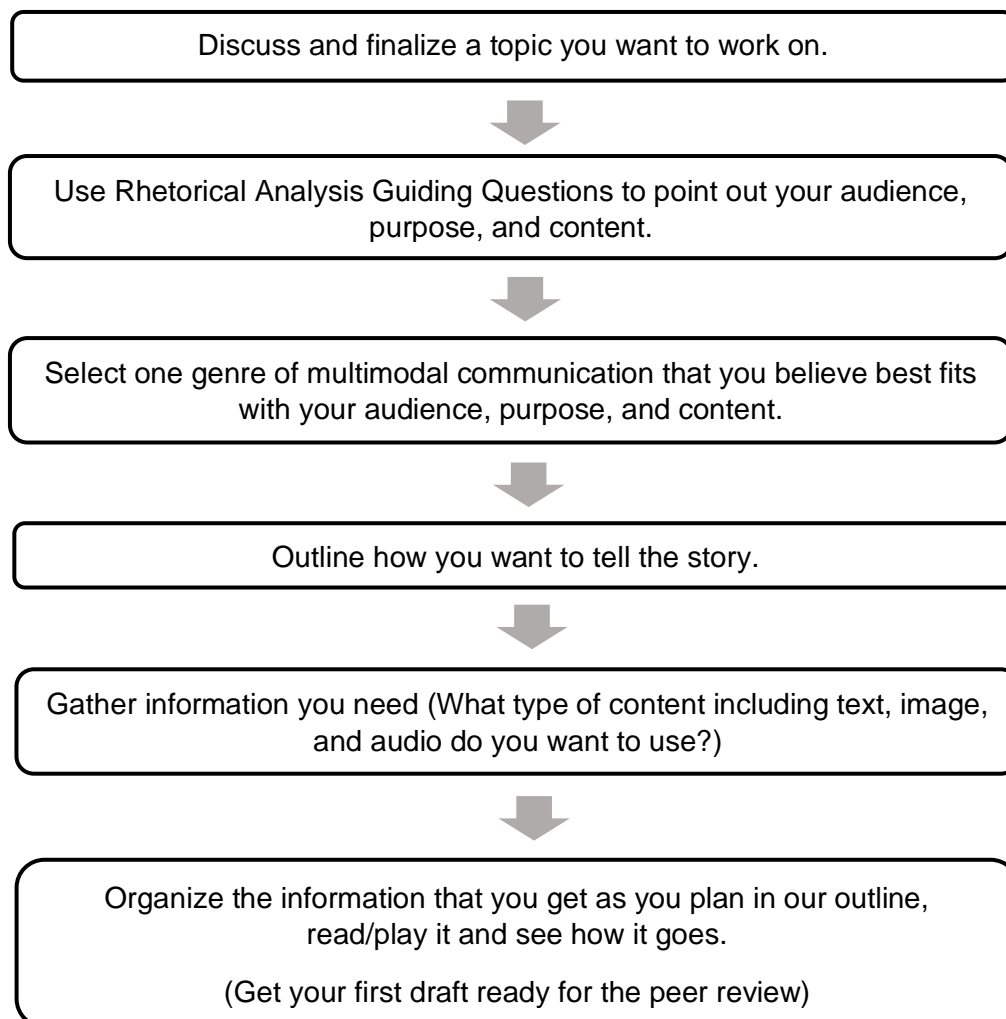
Draft 1 due: Monday, November 18, 2019

Draft 2 due: Monday, December 2, 2019

Final draft and Portfolio due: Wednesday, December 11, 2019

*All drafts and the portfolio must be turned in on Canvas by 11:00 p.m.

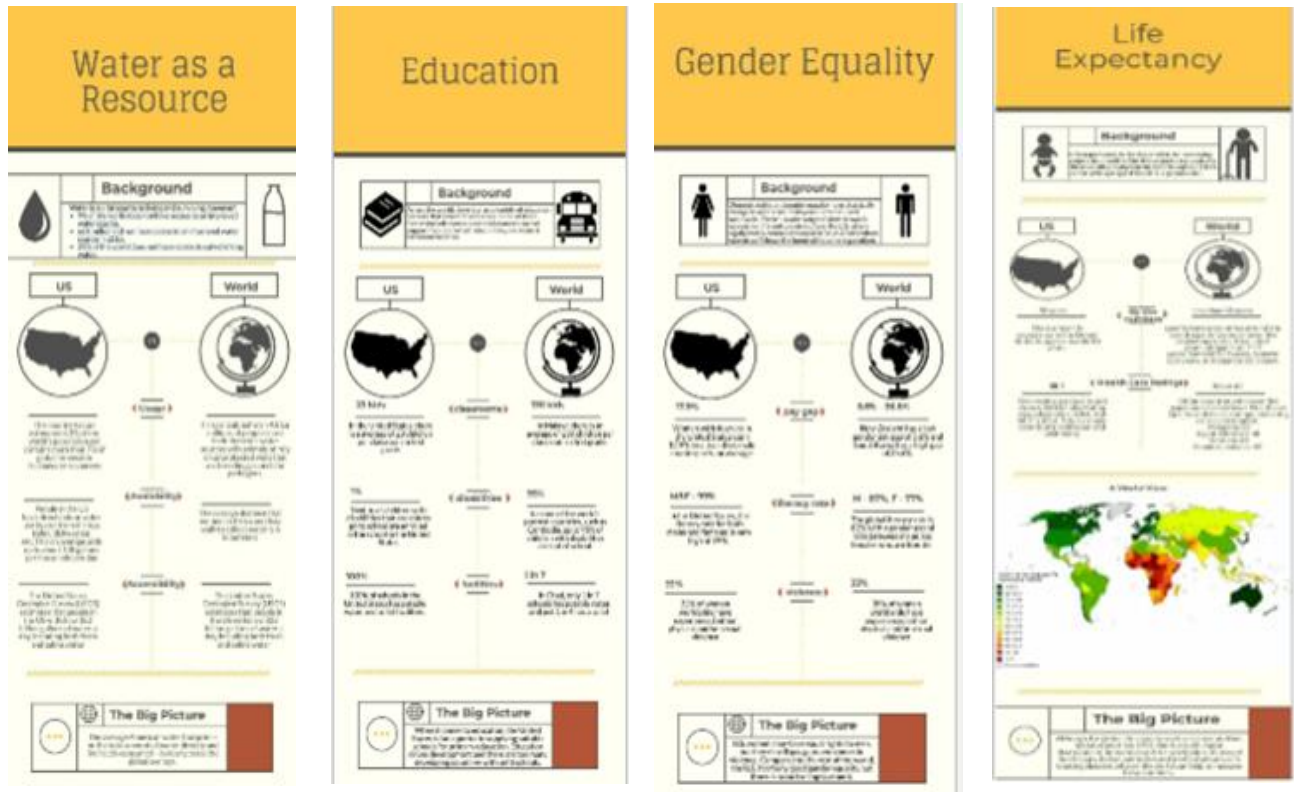
Suggested Procedure



Assessment Rubric for Multimodal Composition Project (Using Analytic Rubric)

Criteria	30	20	10
Visual, Audio, and Sources (30/100)	The use of multimodal elements clearly and effectively supports the messages. All of the visuals and the audio have good quality and relate to the information. Other elements like spatial comprising layout, camera angles, or direction are well designed to support the messages.	The use of multimodal elements clearly supports the messages. Most of the visuals and the audio have good quality and relate to the information. Other elements like spatial comprising layout, camera angles, or direction are designed to support the messages.	The use of multimodal elements does not clearly support the messages. The quality of visuals and audios is poor. The visuals and the audio do not relate to the information. Other elements are poorly designed and do not support the messages.
Criteria	30	20	10
Organization and Clarity (30/100)	The work is well-organized. Ideas are connected smoothly and articulated clearly throughout the whole project.	The work is somewhat organized. Ideas are connected smoothly and articulated clearly throughout most of the project.	The work is poorly organized. Ideas are disconnected or not articulated clearly.
Criteria	15	10	5
Response to Prompt, Purpose & Audience (15/100)	The project responds to the prompt nicely. The work is appropriate and appealing to the target audience. The purpose of the work is clearly and interestingly presented.	The project responds to the prompt. The work is appropriate for the target audience. The goal of the writer is clearly presented and well supported.	The project does not respond to the prompt. The work is not appropriate for the target audience. The goal of the writer is not clearly presented.
Criteria	10	5	0
Invention and Ideas (10/100)	It is clearly a unique work that has its own originality and voices in language and style. The work can keep the attention of the reader for the whole time.	There is some originality in language and style. The work can keep the attention of the reader most of the time.	There is no sense of originality in language and style. The work can hardly keep the attention of the reader.
Criteria	15	10	5
Growth as a writer (15/100)	There is a substantial reflection on all changes or developments from the first draft to the final draft including feedback, reasons for all rhetorical moves. Strengths, and weaknesses of the work are clearly identified.	There is a reflection on some changes from the first draft to the final draft. Some feedback and reasons for the rhetorical moves or the changes are provided. The creators can point out the strengths, and weaknesses of the work.	There is a reflection on some changes from the first draft to the final draft, but the reasons are not clearly provided. The creators cannot or do not point out the strengths, and weaknesses of the work.

Figure 7. Student’s Multimodal Composition Project (1)



[Description: Series of infographic with voice-over—Comparing various topics of equity in the Us & other countries.]

Figure 8. Student’s Multimodal Composition Project (2)
 (Retrieved from: <https://prezi.com/view/IU3lj4tplbjSncMSrxDt/>)



[Description: Prezi—Latin American including food, dance, and cultural events.]

Figure 9. Student's Multimodal Composition Project (3)

(Retrieved from:
<https://youtu.be/sXm5Tkope1s>)



[Description Video about Female Representation in the Music Industry.]

Figure 10. Student's Multimodal Composition Project (4)

(Retrieved from:
<https://youtu.be/OBvAS2tcSaM>)



[Description: Video about Diversity in the Big Ten Schools.]

Figure 11. Student's Multimodal Composition Project (5)



[Description: Images from a whiteboard style animation video about disparities in healthcare.]

Teacher's Reflection

As a teacher for this course, let me clarify why I choose to focus on multimodal composition and multicultural and enact both in the class by asking the students to explore, experience, and engage with different modes of communication as well as cultures. I believe we are in the age that communication is highly and rapidly versatile; to be able to catch up with those changes, writing skill alone is not enough. Instead, the adaptability in molding the information in the form that easily accessible and responsive to their target audience is key. In terms of cultural diversity, due to the rising number of the cross-cultural working atmosphere as well as both explicit and implicit conflict of different cultural groups, I believe getting to know one another is vital in sympathizing and realizing that we are all human beings. That was the main reason I asked the students and myself to step out of our comfort zones.

In doing that, of course, I was terrified that the students might reject the idea. Luckily, they agreed to do it and learn with me. The challenges that I found are the adjustment to unfamiliarity in terms of both topic and techniques in producing multimodal texts, as well as the difficulty in assessing various multimodal texts and making sure it was fair for everyone.

In terms of uncomfortable topics, such as stereotype, race, belief, or cultural differences or unfamiliar area, bringing readings and videos that present cultural diversity or produced by multilingual writers/producers help the students become more familiar with the unfamiliarity, which gradually prepared them to be ready to explore by themselves. Another thing that I believe helpful and reduces their stress is a list of events that they can attend on campus. It contains lecture series, cultural events, or informal gatherings that I collected from different regional departments and students' organizations. Also, regular check-in with them, asking about their experience in the class, or asking them to reflect in their journal was valuable. It gave me a chance to know how they were doing and if they have any concern, I could respond to that in time. I did every other week check-ins. The first check-in (about week 4 of the semester) brought up a conversation about how they feel when they go to those events, how they adjust/learn, and how, by the time, they get better and better. What I heard from them (which I presented some of their thought here) surprisingly brought me joy and those sharing moments built a community in our class, which later on opened up more discussion in other sensitive issues. For example, we discussed what stereotype that we had for certain kinds of people, the way our races or ethnicity influence our perception, or how media and education affect or influence these perceptions, and those turned out incredibly productive and genuine.

For the production of multimodal texts, I have some experiences in producing multimodal texts, but not anywhere close to an expert, so I consulted with DesignLab staff, who have more experience and are used to these cross-modes of communication. I asked them to come to my class as a guest lecturer presenting about design elements, and how to work with audio and video elements. For those who do not have people who have experience in designing or media producing, maybe you can 1) finding online resources such as how-to videos will be helpful so that the students have something to refer to when they start working or 2) ask your students: some of them are experts or have some experience; it might be a good chance for them to share with the others. Also, I provided them information about where to check-out equipment like an audio recorder or a video camera, because sometimes, they have the skills, but they do not have the right equipment. However, in my case it turned out most of the students used their phone in recording audio, taking photos, or recording a video. So, shifting to how to use a phone in recording or producing multimodal texts might be more helpful and more accessible for most of the students, instead of professional audio or video recorder. Another point that I think is beneficial in my class is giving multiple options for the students to work with, in

both topic and modes of communication, so that the students feel that they have agency in their work, they put more effort in working, and they enjoy the work more.

Lastly, for the assessment, I presented the students with the rubric and ask them if there is anything they want to add/delete/change and why. We spent about 15 minutes discussing that, which were both useful for both the students and me. The students know what they are assessed on and how they were assessed while I could clarify and make sure their understanding of the rubric was aligned with what I aimed to. The negotiation in entering different cultures, topics, modes of communication, and assessments was not easy, but rewarding for me as I learned about my students more and It felt honored to introduce them to these diversities where they learned more about others as well as themselves.

Students' Reflection

The last part of the artifacts is excerpted reflections from the students' journals (I exclude the name of the students and use alphabet (A-I) instead for privacy purposes.)

Student A: *“Prior to this event, I did not have much pull towards learning about India. I thought of it as a single homogenous unit. Attending this event really opened my eyes to the diversity of people and animals living there.”*

Student B: *“Going to the event, I was a bit nervous... Previously, when I had thought of jazz, I pictured Ryan Gosling starring as Sebastian in the movie “La La Land”...Pawan and Sameer (The musicians) challenged this assumption by showing that the true definition of jazz is rooted in improvisation, not instrumentation...”*

Student C: *“Some thoughts came to me during the event about how I really tend to stay surrounded only by people of my culture, but should be more open and try to expand to being involved with other cultures as well.”*

Student D: *“While I was nervous arriving I was so pleasantly surprised as to how welcoming everyone was. Not only did they allow me to sit in on their holy service, but they also did it happily... Islamophobia is very real in America. Much of our society has a twisted view that the Quran teaches to hate. This is clearly not the case as the sermon was all about acting properly and living with love in one's heart. What I gained most from this experience was an appreciation for the people”*

Student E: *“From this event, I learned that I am not exposed to others of African descent and race as much as I should be. In today's day and age, and*

especially being surrounded by so much diversity here on campus, I feel as though I should be more accustomed to others' accents."

Student F: *"I never listen to Latin American music but found myself wanting to get into it more... It was something outside of my comfort zone. I learned that this was a very good way for me to exercise not only physically, but also mentally. It made me forget about all of the stress I had from school and I was able to let loose and have fun."*

Student G: *"In the future, I definitely want to keep what I learned in mind and be mindful of the space that I occupy and the privilege that I have as a white woman in the United States. Remaining questions that I have included what specifically I could do as a healthcare provider to help individuals in underserved populations such as Native American youth."*

Student H: *"I was nervous to go because I didn't know what to expect or if I would be welcomed, but everyone that I talked to was very friendly and they offered everyone coffee and tea. I felt welcome in the space very shortly after I arrived."*

Student I: *"One of my biggest takeaways from the talk was the importance of not creating an image of native people as one. Each tribe has different characteristics, heritage, and personalities. It was very influential in my understanding of native culture and how I present information that is not only accurate but also shows a clear representation of the true diversity in native culture."*

These reflections are only a tip of the iceberg that shows how these small experiences could impact students' lives and perspectives and leave them with more doors to open and learn about differences, both in culture and modality. Both positive and negative feelings that they may feel during the events disrupt their normal assumption and common beliefs about certain things, which could lead to creating something extraordinary. Composing multimodal projects with information collected from different sources across cultures encourages the students to challenge their box of thinking, which is vital for them not only to study or work but to live in such a diverse world surrounded by multimodal communication.

References

- Arola, K., Sheppard, J., & Ball, C. (2014). *Writer/designer: A guide to making multimodal projects*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Lutkewitte, C. (2014). *Multimodal composition: A critical sourcebook*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's.