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Reverse Transfer: Using Social Media to Teach Academic Paper Principles

Kali Jo Wacker

University of Kansas

Abstract

Existing scholarship has predominantly looked at transfer with the composition classroom as the primary location for writing skill development. Subsequently, composition scholars have theorized about and constructed courses around this developmental, classroom-centered setup, with multiliteracy and multimodality at the forefront of these applications. This article adds a new theory and application into the mix. By using the growing influence of social media, the author has adopted a theory of transfer in which the focus is not about how the skills of the classroom can answer the call to the public and thus send students equipped and ready for a world of dialogue and symbolic meaning-making. Rather, the article focuses on the transfer of students' preexisting public rhetoric skills, via social media, into the classroom, which then deconstruct with my students, through class activities and assignments, to show how these skills can be used within traditional academic prose.

Key Words: Transfer, Pedagogy, Social Media, Public Rhetoric, Reverse Transfer

Introduction

As a multimodal composition instructor, I am continually captivated by how much my first year seminar (FYS) students know about new media, social media in particular, and consequently this article hinges on two student perceptions: the one that students think they do not have adequate skills to write an academic paper and the other that they operate within various social media platforms with particular regularity outside the classroom. Granted, students might have more exposure to social media than others, particularly if I categorize that exposure on a scale that ranges from hands-on experience to a more distanced observational role of social media; my students are likely to be sprinkled throughout. For this article's purposes, I work under the assumption that majority of students have a concrete working knowledge, although I suggest alternatives in my implications section for those students who purposely avoid or simply have little to no exposure to various social media outlets. My ideas behind incorporating social media are not particularly new ones—many scholars have incorporated social media into their pedagogical scholarship and practices (Sheridan, et al., 2011; Shipka, J., 2009, 2011, 2016; Miller, J. Gilkeson, S., & Pignotti, L., 2015; Larson, S., 2016; Wysocki, A., 2004, 2007; Davis, M., Brock, K. & McElroy, S., 2012; Langmia, K., Tyree, T. C. M, O'Brian, P., & Strugis, I., 2014). However, in this article, I overcome this early binary of expert and non-expert, with social media as the medium for transfer between the two situated publics my students have established and/or identified—the one in which academic prose is constructed and the other in which personal communication is carried out.

Much of the research above focuses on how social media can promote engagement, encourage collaboration, reflect rhetorical flexibility, support multimodality, acknowledge multilingualism, and so forth—all of which are worthwhile and necessary pursuits in the field rhetoric and composition; however, this paper adds a slight twist to these established ideas. Most of these categories outlined above have a particular forward-moving *je ne sais quoi* to them—scholars are using social media to further existing potentials within composition courses. I propose a slight shift of this usage. Instead of looking at transfer through the lens of “how can I get my students to transfer the skills they potentially learn in my courses to their other courses/other publics/other situations?,” I contend that we should use social media and their subsequent public contexts to further *existing* potentials of our students by engaging their *existing* multiliteracies within social media and multimodal communication practices by way of social media to further perpetuate the goals under which FYS operates. Basically, I wish to look at the transfer that occurs in the step that comes before pedagogy and before the composition-classroom-to-other-disciplines moment of transfer. Rather, I would like to look at the potential transfer that can occur from the experiential learning of the everyday, sometimes ritualistic, sometimes binge-oriented, social media usage of students. In the following pages, I briefly overview scholarship of transfer, multiliteracy, multimodality, and social media in order establish a baseline for my main objective: to demonstrate how social media, in its various forms, equips students for the very writing tasks they claim inexperience with, the academic paper. For simplicity’s sake, I use a visual analysis paper assignment from my 101 course to demonstrate how elements of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook can facilitate a transfer of skills from social media to academic research. Finally, I include an implications section in which I evaluate what this means for classroom pedagogy and the inherent practices of public rhetoric that occur with social media usage.

Figure 1
 “Transfer of Learning: A
 Researcher’s View”
 Mixed Media, 2012

Understanding Transfer

The ambiguity surrounding transfer has been a point of interest for many composition and education scholars (McCarthy, 1987; McKeough, Lupart, and Marini, 1995; Haskell, 2001; Smit, 2007; Bergmann and Zepernick, 2007; Driscoll and Wells, 2012; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak, 2014). In fact, its inherent pandemonium is quite colorfully captured in Dana Driscoll’s mixed media piece (as shown in Figure 1) entitled, “Transfer of Learning: A Researcher’s View,” which was published in *Composition Forum* in Fall 2012, and illustrates Driscoll’s belief that “because of transfer’s complexity, any model or representation of transfer will be incomplete.”

As can be imagined, then, this idea of transfer has allowed many questions to be asked, and as a result, has heard several responses. In fact, in an attempt to demystify transfer, many theories and classifications have developed—such as the four arrangements of transfer (low road, high road, forward, and backwards transfer) of Perkins and Solomon (1988), the three conceptions of transfer (task, individual, and context) of Downs and Wardle (2007) and near and far transfer of Royer, Mestre, and Dufresne (2005). Although this runs the dangerous risk of oversimplifying the complexities of transfer,

Driscoll and Wells summarized these explanations of transfer best when they stated, “most definitions of knowledge transfer involve three elements: something learned in the past, something applied in the future, and something that enables what was learned in the past to directly affect or influence what is done in the future” (2012, p. 2). Basically, in its most rudimentary sense, transfer is the procurement and application of skills and knowledge due to a continuous interaction of student hindsight and foresight. However, it is easier said than done. Scholars such as Ellen Carillo’s (2015) and Downs and Wardle’s (2007) see transfer as potentially problematic on epistemological, pedagogical, and conceptual levels (p. 566). Educators, particularly in composition, are often expected to teach students the skills needed to excel at writing across a variety of disciplines.

Consequently, the very fact that something is considered academic prose and is, indeed, written—whether they are lab reports or art critiques—often results in automatic assumptions about the types of transfer that should be occurring from first-year composition courses. However, the impact various discourse communities have on student transfer is often precarious. Introductory students, on the threshold of General Education requirements, enter into a variety of writing expectations, with each course garnering their own individualized preferences (McCarthy, 1987, p. 235). Transfer, then, in its forward-moving capacity from the composition classroom to other disciplines, is often challenged by the expectations of the new context (i.e. courses in other disciplines, situations involving other publics). If the backward-moving model of transfer is used, the composition classroom is fitted as the past experience to which students can refer back. In either scenario, the idea of transfer rests almost solely within the assumption that the initial skills gained and to be used were procured in the composition classroom.

My use of social media changes this dynamic. Instead, I suggest that the transfer occurs from skills gleaned from experiences outside of the academy, so that then, our job as educators and composition instructors is to highlight the similarities between pre-existing social media skills and those required for effective academic prose. Because as David Smit stated, “The only way teachers can help students with the process of transfer is to help them see the similarities between what they have learned before and what they need to do in new contexts” (2004, p. 119). I contend that it is our job to help students see how they are already writers and composers, particularly within social media, and how effective writing within those contexts can directly relate to writing done on others such as the composition classroom (as well as other disciplines).

Recognizing Skillsets

Although exceptions exist, the vast majority of my students know social media. Whether they have posted videos on their Snapchats or scrolled through pictures on Instagram, they have each witnessed and/or participated in different modes of expression as well as some creative sinew of design. In some ways, they have already transferred their skills across social media as new platforms were introduced—MySpace (2003) gave way to Facebook (2004) and then Twitter (2006) and Instagram (2010) and so on. As a result, students have composed, revised and synthesized in order to gain likes, loves, or retweets. By using their experiences with social media as part of the composition classroom, we might just be able to accomplish a similar adaptability within our courses. Since we are starting with what students know—social media—they can now operate within the rhetorical situation, defining an audience and purpose, using rhetorical appeals, and so forth without also having to tread unfamiliar waters or battle their preconceived ideas of what they can or cannot accomplish in the composition classroom.

Additionally, they have familiarized themselves with the idea that what is personal is not always private, with social media being the main example, and so their knowledge-base is rooted in experience with the public limelight. Thus, some of the hesitancy that comes with academic expectations, or even public-focused projects is potentially negated. Students can ask themselves: “What have they seen?”

What have they done? What might be needed to best get the point across?” They are now situated with a problem-solver mentality, because they are coming from an established knowledge base and can start to transfer their knowledge to the composition classroom through multiple literacies, in new modes, and to diverse publics.

Identifying Multiliteracy and Multimodality

The rise of new media outreach and newly normalized communication practices dovetail with and expand upon current multiliteracy pedagogies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 2009; Unsworth, 2001; Duncum, 2004; Selber, 2004; Anstey and Bull, 2006). Within this scholarship, literacy is not seen as singularly embedded within written language; in fact, it takes on a flexible, often multimodal persona that comes is seen through art, music, etc. (Duncum, 2004, p. 253). Accordingly, multiliteracy and multimodality operate in contingent with one another, since language is communicated across multiple modes and with these modes come individual literacies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). Meaning making and the exchange of communicative symbols are redistributed across a variety of contexts and these remade representations are subsequently transformed depending on the resultant mode and sensory application—visual, audio, etc. For this article in particular, they are transformed depending on the chosen social media platform.

As a result, the spectrum of communicative expression for our students is expanded, thus broadening the discourse to encompass what Sheridan, Rudolfo, and Michel (2012) classify as the spaces typically reserved for professionals who think and produce profit-driven, rhetorical material and are not typically familiar terrain for students, who consider themselves unskilled in the composition classroom (p. xii). However, many of these professionals use skills—both directly and indirectly—linked to social media. So, when composition scholars ultimately call for “ordinary rhetors to appropriate the rhetorical tools of graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, and videographers in order to assume responsibility for the production of culture” (p. xii), social media has already allowed for much of the honing to occur. Instagram and Snapchat help the burgeoning photographer; filters and collage applications, and drawing functions assist with illustrative and graphic design needs. Vimeo and YouTube provide practice arenas for aspiring videographers and so on. Social media in a way has challenged the idea of “ordinary rhetor”, so if we are able to show the transfer from these platforms to our classrooms, we might just find that our students’ perceptions of themselves and their capabilities are thusly transferred as well:

Successful students are those who can, in their interactions with teachers during the semester, determine what constitutes appropriate texts in each classroom: the content, structures, language, ways of thinking, and types of evidence required in that discipline and by that teacher. They can then produce such a text. Students who cannot do this, for whatever reason - cultural, intellectual, motivational - are those who fail, deemed incompetent communicators in that particular setting (McCarthy, 1987, p. 233).

Ultimately, I think that more students will be able to fall in McCarthy’s first scenario because social media is linked to multimodal communication and the public sphere, since it is seen as kairotic discourse, thusly hinging itself on both correct timing and appropriate modality and placement as well as paying special mind to rhetorical situations (i.e. audience, purpose, etc.). Awareness of these components are the very things we strive to achieve in many of our composition assignments, so it follows that if we can point them out in a context in which our students are already familiar, such as social media, it will provide a smoother transfer of the identified skills.

Situating Social Media

Writing is an extension of our selves, not just because our phones often seem to be attached to the ends of our fingers, and part of our daily lives. Social media is a large contributor to this. A quick glance at the labs and study spaces in our university libraries often reveal computer screens’ multiple tabs, in

which Facebook and YouTube lie squished between pages of online resources as nearby phones, tablets, laptops, and smart watches buzz, ding, and beep with text messages and notifications about latest tweets and Instagram posts. The communication is ongoing, familiar, and communal.

As relational beings, social media is just that—a way for people to interact with others (i.e. be social) while using various media to do so, and a vast majority of our students grew up right alongside our current social media outlets. They shared birthdays and holidays and snow days and vacations together whereas other generations printed pictures for coffee table albums or Creative Memory scrapbooks, or developed film or captured moments with postcards, handwritten letters, and Polaroid cameras—and not just because they were hipster trendy as they are now. The way people share experiences have changed, and so too, should the way we use those experiences within our classrooms. The task, then, is to figure out how we get students to re-envision social media as a tool that can be used in the classroom (Tyree, 2013, p. 25).

Somehow the connection between public and personal media skills and classrooms need to be made, and recently instructors have sought to remedy this apparent disconnect, as Jennifer B. Cox (2013) recognizes in her *Social Media* chapter, “Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and Media-Sharing Sites in the Classroom” in which she illustrates how blogs are primarily used for reflection, collaboration, responsivity, and public and audience awareness (p. 43-44), and how Twitter is largely a place to monitor events, make interactive communities, reflect, give feedback, and facilitate discussion (p. 45).

Additionally, she expands upon various Facebook practices that instructors have implemented, such as in activities contracted to recognize how good or bad particular posts are in regard to writing and rhetorical situations and in lessons geared around assessing the business intentions and practices of social media usage (p. 46). YouTube, as attributed by Cox, is often used to supplement lectures, with video illustrations or to replace them, such as with TED Talks, to further class discussion (p. 47) or to create a sense of community via video sharing (p. 48). Community is at the center of her classroom, with social media as its catalyst (Cox, 2013, p. 50). This perspective aligns with many other scholars (Wysocki, 2004; Langmia, et al., 2014; Miller, et. al, 2015), and one that classrooms have benefited from. Ultimately, then, these engagement practices focus on the use of social media more so in an atmospheric or modal sense, and in less regard to specific tools, correlations, and skills. As alluded to in the previous section, although many scholars have called for the use of multiple modes, such as Power Point presentations, blogs, web texts, sculpture, posters, videos, etc., the scholarship on how to create thesis statements or identify main ideas with social media is less abundant. This is where I carve my niche.

Theorizing Social Media Skills Transfer

So, finally, with somewhat of a context now established, I have compiled a rudimentary depository of social media practices that directly transfer into academia, particularly in respect to a traditional paper. By using a visual analysis assignment from one of my English 101 courses, this article situates these examples within a recognized context.

In the Appendix of this article, readers will find the first page of the assignment guidelines for my album cover analysis unit, in which last fall, my English 101 students ventured into visual analysis of an album cover of their choice. However, I do not use this assignment because I think it is some exemplary model for first-year students; rather, I use it to show how social media helped carry out various expectations for this particular assignment, which can then be transferred to others. In order to establish some sort of organization, this article is divided into proposed areas of transfer according to the bulleted information provided on my assignment sheet. Although several more could be added, transfer is divided into three sections in this article. First, we will look how social media can help students analyze various components of a rhetorical situation. Then, we will see how social media aids with the

use and identification of rhetorical appeals, and finally, we will look at how exposure to social media assists with student awareness and manipulation of the given principles of design.

Recognizing Audience, Authorship, and Authenticity

In my English 101 course, we identify the rhetorical situation as author, purpose, audience (and relationship to the viewer/listener), context, genre, and effectiveness. In the guidelines for my album cover analysis, these rhetorical factors are specifically identified, but typically, they are not as explicitly acknowledged; rather they are just understood as valuable components of a successful paper that are sometimes hard to identify. Social media can help remedy this uncertainty. For example, authorship and audience are essential parts of social media. They form the dialogue that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were created for—authors and audiences switch between user roles and generate various lines of communication. Authors can specifically choose audiences to which to direct their dialogue—on Facebook, audiences are tagged (i.e. personal links are attached to the intended audience’s profiles so that a notification will be received), and on Twitter and Instagram, they are selected by @callouts, or rather the pairing of the @ symbol with a username to directly link someone to a particular message, post, or tweet. Messages can be vaguely lofted out into the social media world without apparent rhyme or reason, but that does not mean an audience has not already been preselected, it has. By allowing friends and followers, social media users often have a hand in creating even their broadest audiences. Similarly, in student papers such as this visual analysis example, students need to think about what audiences have been selected, exposed to, or “tagged” in the subject at hand. For example, Taylor Swift’s 1989 album, featuring Taylor’s classic red lipstick, an 80s retro, crew-neck, bird sweatshirt, and the notations “T.S. 1989” marked across the bottom of what looks like a polaroid, identifies itself with several audiences. The aged photograph and plain handwriting alludes to hipster affiliations, the sweatshirt acts as a potential shout out to the 80s generation (which runs parallel with her pop music that has undertones particularly reminiscent of the 80s), the title draws in the 90s children (her own generation), and the classic lips call out all die-hard Taylor fans (her previous album cover, *Red*, almost solely focused on her cherry lipstick). Granted, social media cannot make these connections for our students, but by asking them what they would “tag” in the image, my students often produce similar responses to my example above.

Along with audience selection and authorship, comes authenticity. Internet commentary is often criticized because of its anonymity and the subsequent false bravery or intensity that ambiguity brings about—Twitter handles do not require real names, Instagram accounts can be set up without any direct reference to real people, and fake Facebook profiles can be created. However, the personal social media sites, such as Facebook, that students use to connect with friends, family, and acquaintances intentionally strengthen the connection between commenter and commentary. Profile pictures, cover photos, albums, bio sections, favorites pages, status updates—these all work to establish some sort of layered identity for a particular member. The more detailed and open people are, the more their online ethos is strengthened, and the same goes for students and their papers. If they work to establish themselves as writers with a clear and distinctive voice, they are more likely to be perceived as interesting, genuine, and credible. Neither of these connections to authorship or audience are overly complex ones, but by showing our students how they interact with these rhetorical factors every day, their recognition of similar occurrences within academic papers seem to become more streamline.

Gathering Evidence and Support

“Streamline”, however, is not typically the word I use to describe the progression of my students through analysis, as far as context is concerned. Getting my students to think about the historical and cultural factors that contribute to their chosen topics, in this case album covers, requires a healthy dose

of research, and the absence of this supplementary evidence can prove quite problematic within academic papers. To help patch some of these discrepancies, I teach research by way of the “Facebook Creeper.”

In order for my students to understand context, they must first identify their subject’s origins, affiliations, and tendencies. I often liken this to many of my students—and sometimes my own—guilty pleasure of “Facebook creeping.” When searching an unknown or barely known person, we often head straight to the “About” section of our selected individual. Depending on their privacy settings, we can glean information about where they come from, how old they are, what their favorite quotes are, and to whom they are related. By scrolling through their wall and sidebar feeds, we can also determine whether we share any friends, favorite books, movies, sports teams, music, or check-ins. By finding this information, we can then start making inferences as to how our best friend’s cousin knows our sophomore-year roommate or why Jane Johnson was put into our “Suggested Friends” list. Our search has allowed us to collect and assess key components of the particular individual under question. Academic papers require similar investigations. For instance, in the case of the album cover, asking when was it released is similar to asking when a person was born. Asking what was going on at that time of the album’s release runs parallel to thinking about how the generation to which a person belongs to what influences they have been exposed. Questions like “What other albums or artists or demographics is it connected to? What does it promote or illustrate?” are more or less variations of “Who is this person related to? Who are their friends? What organizations, teams, and communities is this person a part of or support? Students then procure context by channeling the detective skills they already utilize, when trying to connect the dots about an unfamiliar face that surfaced on their social media.

By working out the similarities in an extremely methodical and direct fashion, students start being able to think of their Facebook tendencies as a tool for inquiry in academic genres as well. My classroom makes lists of how they would “creep” on Facebook on one side of a sheet of paper, and then together we discuss how similar practices might look in other contexts. The transfer that occurs is both comical and productive—while “research” often leaves a poor taste in many of my students’ mouths, “creeping” utilizes the same skills but with more humorous underpinnings.

Assessing Rhetorical Appeals & Effectiveness

Once this research is done and context established and positioned next to the author and audience, rhetorical effectiveness can be ascertained, and this process does not necessarily require as much social media connection—the information is all there, so conclusions are more a matter of synthesis and associations. However, if needed, an additional way to strengthen students’ abilities regarding effectiveness is to use examples of tweets, as well as Facebook and Instagram posts that range from very poor to very good in order to facilitate discussion on what promotes effectiveness and how might that be reflected in other forms, such as an album cover or academic paper. This might prove particularly useful for a discussion of ethos, pathos, and logos, in which following questions are explored:

- Where are these found in social media?
- What do they look like?
- What is their purpose?
- How might they be similarly demonstrated in other media?

For example, if we look to Facebook once again, the reaction emoticons that can be chosen as responses for uploaded pictures, status updates, and wall messages demonstrate the role of pathos within prose. The beliefs and values of the audience are demonstrated through selections of “Like,” “Love,” “Haha,” “Wow,” “Sad,” “Angry,” and one of the holiday-specific additions, “Thankful,” are shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 2. Screenshot of Facebook reaction emoticons.

By having my students use Facebook reactions in responding to papers, assigned readings, and even album covers, I have found that discussion tends to be more free-flowing. The simple nature of the reaction options help alleviate some of the apprehension that come with entering class discussion. These options are not hard to pick from, and they allow elaboration to occur, since each can be easily followed up with, “Why?” The emoticon reactions become a comfortable catalyst for dialogue that is sometimes hard to come by because it forms a sense of community (by having only so many options, students are bound to share reactions with classmates) as well as provides a sense of familiar ground (Facebook is meant for conversations).

Although a rather simple activity, by situating the rhetorical appeals in a familiar context, students are more likely to be able to identify their purpose because fewer question marks are associated with the genre of study. As Cox (2013) stated, “Students who engage in technologies similar to those for purposes outside academia can be taught to examine professional lessons in more personal contexts. By incorporating these technologies, students can relate their personal experiences to their studies to help them think critically about the social media messages they send and receive on a daily basis” (p. 51). Whether composed of images or text, social media as a classroom tool of rhetorical recognition helps students start to see rhetoric as more than just an ancient term associated with grammar and red ink.

However, academic papers are often comprised of more than just appeals and factors of rhetoric. They typically entail, but are not exclusive to, introductions, thesis statements, main ideas, summaries, scholarly research/expert opinion, in-text citations, situated vocabulary, and use of design principles—and possibly not surprisingly, each of these can be found in social media.

Creating Engaging Introductions and Thesis Statements

To help identify introductions, I often send my students to two places: YouTube and dating profiles typical of OkCupid or some other online dating site. Using the former, I show my students the various ways people have chosen to start their videos, whether it be with description, narration, surprises, statistics, or some other variation. By showing movie clips—I use Disney intros—I can illustrate possible ways of providing a solid “hook” for any academic paper or project. Regardless of medium, we always want to attract the interest of our readers/watchers, and the first few lines or seconds are very crucial in that pursuit—just as we want our potential dating profiles to demonstrate intelligence, foster curiosity, and/or provide a little mystery. A short look at dating profiles—good and bad—rather quickly illuminate what intros work, and what ones fall flat, appeal to select audiences, and so on. Introductions, however, only go so far; even more important is the line that follows, the infamous thesis statement. This, I often liken to “What People Think I Do” memes, as shown in Figure 4, that tend to populate Facebook and Twitter. Within these memes, the main purpose is to acknowledge differences in perspectives while ultimately making a claim about what the author actually believes is true. In essence, they are saying “although people think this or this, I think this,” which is often a solid starting point for thesis statements. To help illustrate this concept for my students, we divide into groups and create our

own memes, present them to each other, and explain why. Thus, we complete the final element of this particular type of thesis statement: the “because” or “why.” Our final thesis, both in meme mode and in regular prose looks something like: “although X statement, I think Y statement, because of Z explanation.” Although many alternative thesis statements can and will be derived, we have at very least begun our papers through social media, and more specifically, through memes and Disney animations.

Figure 3. A screenshot of a Google search on “What people think I do memes”.

Identifying Main Ideas

Main ideas, then, are next on the list of execution, and they, along with summaries, can quite often be practiced with Twitter. Students are often aware of hashtags (some too much so, aka they get a bit hashtag happy), but regardless of their opinions on the use of the pound sign in social media, it serves as a helpful tool for identifying main ideas. By hashtagging the paragraphs they have written, students can simultaneously identify the main idea of the selected text. Additionally, with all their hashtags in mind, they can summarize their papers and typically, this helps alleviate some of the unnecessary repetition that comes from trying to conclude a paper. Single words and simple phrases help them emphasize the main purpose of their paper without walking the dangerous line of simply restating their thesis.

Finding Expert Opinion

Additionally, Twitter, as well as Instagram, help contextualize the importance of scholarly sources and/or expert opinion. As platforms for connecting with and following celebrities, scholars, and other people of public importance, Twitter and Instagram provide a small blue checkmark of recognition that establishes each person as public figure. In my classroom, I often associate this with peer-reviewed scholarship. Although many students think finding scholarly sources is unnecessarily laborious, when I explain how using peer-reviewed scholarship bears a particular likeness to a blue-check social media

figure, they often retain that information much better than when I explain the differences between popular and scholarly sources on a more literal level.

Formatting According to Genre

My final points of transfer—in-text citations, situated language, and design principles—are probably the most straightforward examples in this social media transfer theory. Firstly, in-text citations, when compared to links and tagging, helps my students think about how much of our information comes from outside sources. When asking my students to tag their sentences with people, as they would in Instagram or Facebook, the task of logging “who said what” often appears less daunting. Secondly, situated language, which I use to encompass everything from jargon to tone, is woven throughout all my students’ social media. The way they wish a happy birthday to their grandma on Facebook (a wall post with complete sentences) is different from how they do so to their best friend on Snapchat (a duckface selfie) or their celebrity crush on Twitter, gushing shout out of undying appreciation. Similarly, the words, formatting, and tone vary across the genres—just as they do in more scholarly prose, such as a research paper or exercise science report. And lastly, since the various forms of social media include audio and visual elements, formatting and design go beyond sentence syntax and paragraph arrangement, and as a result, we can use these established multiliteracies and multimodal components found in Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook to illustrate how patterns, symbols, colors, and contrasts effect our reactions, particularly if venture into their built-in photo filters and video editors.

My “rudimentary depository of social media practices” as I named it in section five is by no means exhaustive or without fault. Transfer between modes and contexts acts much like an analogy or metaphor—it can provide a helpfully imaginative bridge between two points, but with imagination comes discrepancy, and as such, there are several potential shortcomings my social media approach to the academic paper. In fact, social media is not the doorway to a writing utopia. I know this pedagogical move complicates the composition classroom in two distinct areas: by bringing the war between public and private to the forefront and by potentially adding to the abyss created by what many call the digital divide.

The shaky ground between public and private has only been further rattled social media. Each platform has a varying level of public and private settings, but ultimately much of what occurs is less private than the phrase “personal media” implies. Inherently, it cannot be—anything based in communication requires back-and-forth exchange, and thus, nothing is completely private; rather it has varying degrees of publicness. The use of social media as a transfer point in my course only muddies that water further. Additionally, my students’ social media serves a collection of publics, and thus requires public rhetoric that interacts with authentic audiences and produces equally authentic ramifications or pushback. My social media practices struggle to replicate this. Instead, it operates as more of a proto-public much like Rosa Eberly (2000) identifies in her book, *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*. Although my social media approach is beneficial in increasing awareness of public rhetoric, its potentials, exigencies, formats, and regulations, my activities themselves, do not often take the additional step of activism that the public turn invites, particularly because I chose to focus on the transfer of public rhetoric into the academic sphere instead of the transfer of academic into public. This was intentional on my part, largely due to a concern that by predominantly focusing on the latter, we end up doing it an unfortunate disservice. To me, the transfer between the two is much like what happens among social media platforms—the dialogue gives and takes as a form of call and response, forever in motion, forever cycling back and influencing what came before.

That being said, this dialogue is not always possible, which leads to my second concern—the digital divide. As a fringe millennial, I too grew up with social media in my back pocket. In fact, in some ways I almost think I am even more informed than the most recent generation, because at social media’s

debut—especially of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter—I was of the ideal age to use it, and consequently I was actively present as the founders and developers honed each social media platform. I had Facebook before it had the chat function and when the Newsfeed did not yet carry real news—only status updates of fellow friends. I had Instagram when the timeline function operated in real time instead of by relevance, and with each change, I was able to see how each platform increased and decreased its usability, options, and outreach. Many instructors, however, do not have this same background. Some come from a pre-social media era, so the tools and platforms are less familiar. Others come from generations who are less inclined to share the play-by-play of their lives with 1,000 of their closest friends, and others yet are cynical of cyberspace and the security issues that come with its usage. Some simply fail to see the educational significance of social media (Cox, 2013, p. 41). The reasons might vary, but the result is the same: a gorge exists between various instructors and their tech-savvy, social-media-oriented students. For this, I want to emphasize that these approaches are not for all. They are created to help students make the jump from their real-world rhetorical experience to their classroom one by way of their pre-existing knowledge of social media. An instructor moving from a place of established expertise (the classroom) to an area of uncertainty (social media) would most likely be of little benefit to either party, just as a student who wishes to avoid social media would likely be rather unreceptive of these approaches to transfer.

However, no one is too far outside the bounds of social media—just more practice and preparation would be required—nor are these skills exclusively achieved through social media. In the end, it simply is one composition instructor’s attempt to acknowledge the call for writing instructors to find ways to make our classroom content relatable to our students’ everyday lives (Moore, et al., 2016). My students’ existing public rhetoric was my access point, academic prose was my objective, and social media was my bridge. Much construction has yet to be done, but for my students, a glimpse of what they are capable of has been given to them in a way they never quite expected.

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Appendix

Sample Guidelines of a Visual Analysis Assignment for Composition 101

Analyzing an Image Text

In Unit 1, we focused on creating effective narratives and thinking about the rhetorical situations surrounding them. You thought about the rhetoric behind your own work, explaining the audience you envisioned and how you tried to reach that audience. In this unit, we'll build upon these skills. Instead of your own work, you'll be challenged to think rhetorically about someone else's work.

You will choose two examples of album artwork (album covers or artwork included with MP3 downloads) on your own to analyze. In essay form, you will complete an analysis of each piece of artwork you choose. Then you will compare and contrast the elements of each visual text and consider why the similarities and differences between them matter. We will devote part of a class period (Monday, Sept. 26th) to looking at images you might want to work with where you will get feedback from your peers and approval from me on the images.

As you analyze your album covers, you will consider:

- **Author** - (Who is the artist?)
- **Purpose** - (What is the artist trying to **accomplish** or **communicate**?)
- **Audience & Relationship to the Viewer/Listener** - (Who might be the intended audience of this album artwork? How does the artwork appeal to that audience?)
- **Context** - (What are **influencing factors** surrounding the event of the image? i.e. historical and cultural influences)
- **Genre** - (What genre of music does the artist perform? Does the album artwork employ **musical genre conventions**?)
- **Effectiveness** - (Is the artwork rhetorically effective? How well does the artwork **appeal** to the intended audience?)

Your rhetorical analysis should consider how the artwork utilizes one or more of the three elements of the **rhetorical appeals**:

- **Ethos** - Appeals to the character and expertise of the artist
- **Logos** - Appeals based on logic, reasoning, and evidence concerning the subject
- **Pathos** - Appeals to the beliefs and values of the audience

You will want to consider the ways in which the artist uses visual elements to enhance the document's effectiveness. In considering the overall design of the document, you may want to address how the author uses the **basic principles of design**. The five basic principles of design are:

- **Balance** - The distribution of elements from top to bottom or left to right
- **Alignment** - Patterns of visual elements within the document in relation to the borders or background
- **Grouping** - The arrangement of like or complimentary items within the text
- **Repetition/Consistency** - The extent to which patterns are established or repeated throughout a document