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## Multimodal Mondays: Creating a Community Writing Contract in Your Syllabus

 Blog Post created by [Andrea A. Lunsford](#)  on Jan 30, 2017

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Today's guest blogger is [Jeanne Bohannon](#) (see end of post for bio).

It's here, readers. January and the first few weeks of spring semester are upon us. As I planned my syllabus, recent pivotal events got me thinking about communities and what we mean when we say we're part of one. I wanted to share with you this week an emerging idea about community learning with which my student-scholars and I experimented and provide you with opportunities to create your own sense of class community right in your syllabus as a contracted statement.

### Context for Assignment

The best time to work through a community statement is usually after the first week of drop-add, when students have settled into class and enrollment numbers have been relatively balanced. My notion is that students have also become acquainted with each other and me, while they also have glimpsed a bit of my teaching style. This is a good time to introduce community-learning precepts.

This writing assignment is an in-class, crowd-sourced opportunity that can serve as a framework for class discussions and a baseline for creating common ground among different student groups.

### Measurable Learning Objectives for the Assignment

- Synthesize peers' writing styles into a communal product
- Apply impromptu peer feedback as recursive writing process
- Create a crowd-sourced public document

## Background Reading for Students and Instructors

Acts of reading and viewing visual texts are ongoing processes for attaining learning goals in dialogic, digital writing assignments. Below, I have listed a few foundational texts. You will no doubt have your own to enrich this list.

- [The St. Martin's Handbook](#): Ch. 6, "Working with Others"; Ch. 28, "Language that Builds Common Ground"; Ch. 4, "Reviewing, Revising, Editing, and Reflecting"
- [The Everyday Writer](#): Ch. 27, "Language that Builds Common Ground"; Ch. 7, "Reviewing, Revising, and Editing"
- [Writing in Action](#): Ch. 18, "Language that Builds Common Ground"; Ch. 5, "Exploring, Planning, and Drafting"
- [EasyWriter](#): Ch. 1i, "Collaborating"; Ch. 18, "Language that Builds Common Ground"; Ch. 4, "Reviewing, Revising, and Editing"

## In-Class Work

You will need a few supplies for this assignment. Bring a selection of sticky notes to class. After students have arrived, begin the class session by providing a definition of community writing/learning and why collaboration is important for writers across disciplines and professions. I use Andrea's [Principles](#) to emphasize that writing itself is inherently collaborative, whether we think of it in terms of digital or face-to-face interactions with various audiences and co-authors or as a kairotic moment to bring people together. After you have completed this activity once or twice, you will have a starting point for future iterations of your community statement.

After students have worked through an understanding of both the base meaning and the value of community writing, pass out the sticky notes, giving each student one or more. Ask students to generate a word or simple phrase that exemplifies their personal understanding of what community writing will denote in your class, then place their sticky notes on the wall -- no particular order necessary.

Next, invite students to offer reasons for their word choice.

Encourage them to discuss what communities they are or have been part of and why collaboration is key in both academic and professional environments. The University of Connecticut Writing Center offers some [good collaborative writing tips](#) that may help you here. As an extension, you may also arrange words in topical order, before you start typing up your community writing statement in your chosen format. I have had equal success with handwritten (use document camera) and electronic versions. I

have also asked students to volunteer to lead the group composing with limited success.



After you work through this assignment a couple of times, you will have a relevant and rhetorical document that you can include in your syllabus and use as an icebreaker as well. This assignment lends itself to digital, democratic writing and unique contributions across types of classes because students choose their methods of composition, reflect on their process, and have the opportunity to present their work to their peers and publics.

## Community Contract Example

Below is an example that came from my past two semesters of course communities and large group processing of this crowd-sourced, in-class writing opportunity. We decided to phrase our statement as more of a "you-driven" manifesto. What comes out of your experiences might be similar or completely different. Please try out this assignment and leave comments to let us know how your experience went!

### Community Learning Precepts

Writing is method of human communication and is inherently dialogic, democratic, and sometimes digital. We practice democratic learning in the courses that I facilitate. What this means for you:

1. You are a vital and respected member of our learning community.
2. You will participate authentically in our work as a stakeholder in your own education.
3. Your voice is important, because it drives our interactions as a group.

Here's how you will participate:

1. Every week you will respond in a D2L forum and/or via Twitter and/or in class to a given question, visual, or article. These writing opportunities will come from coursemates, me, and YOU! Your responses serve as departure points for organic class discussion of research strategies and academic writing techniques.
2. At the beginning of the semester you will also choose a peer reviewer, someone who can serve as a point of contact for you as well as a comrade to read your papers.
3. Often, you will complete joint forum responses and **help lead class discussions**.
4. You will help crowd-source culminating assignments, which you will then compose.

Want to offer feedback, comments, and suggestions on this post? [Join the Macmillan Community](#) to get involved (it's free, quick, and easy)! If you have ideas for Multimodal Mondays or would like to write a guest post, contact [Leah Rang](#).

[Jeanne Bohannon](#) is an Assistant Professor of English in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kennesaw State University. She believes in creating democratic learning spaces, where students become stakeholders in their own rhetorical growth through authentic engagement in class communities. Her research interests include evaluating digital literacies and critical engagement pedagogies; performing feminist rhetorical recoveries; and growing informed and empowered student scholars. Reach Jeanne at:

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## Multimodal Mondays: Re/Mixing One Multimodal Genre into Another

 Blog Post created by [Andrea A. Lunsford](#)  on Apr 24, 2017

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Today's guest blogger is [Jeanne Law Bohannon](#) (see end of post for bio).



This semester has presented numerous reflective opportunities for me, especially when thinking about re/mixing writing for multimodal assignments and applying multimodal composition as DIYs across genres and contexts. This week, I offer a re/mix of a multimodal, public writing assignment from my grammar course, where students re/constructed texts across genres and platforms, culminating in vlogs for public dissemination on YouTube.

YouTube was part of our daily lives in this class, from serving as digital teacher ([Ian McCarthy on Social Media](#)),  to digital tipster ([Bohannon's Blogging Guidelines](#)). As we watched to learn, students began to comment about adding their own voices to these video conversations about grammar(s) and creating content in digital spaces. So, we crowd-sourced an idea: student-produced vlog-casts.

### Context

This public text construction (or renovation, if you like) comes at the end of an upper-division writing course focusing on digital grammar, after students have drafted three other texts of varying formality, demonstrating their understanding of specific language conventions and associated usages in digital spaces. Throughout the course, students practice applying grammar and syntactic structures in unconventional ways across digital platforms in social and public media. YouTube is, of course, one of the most popular of these spaces.

My students and I run this writing assignment late in the semester, as a re/mix of a previous one. Prior to starting the process, the class reads, responds to, and discusses multimodalities of texts and content

management across digital discourses. We read [Multimodalities for Students](#) and [Popular Media Writing Tips](#). We also peer review each other's original texts and offer ideas for relevant re/construction.

## Assignment

Students take any analytical study, essay, or other text and re/mix it based on vlogging guidelines to produce a multimodal, public vlog-cast.

## Measurable Learning Objectives

- Apply multimodal composition strategies to video productions
- Create video blogs (vlogs) as rhetorical, content-delivery devices
- Synthesize meaning through critical production of digital texts on-screen

## Digital Deliverables

Please feel free to edit, revise, and use these documents for your class.

[Academic Blogging Guidelines](#)

[Vlogging Guidelines](#)

## In Class and/or Out

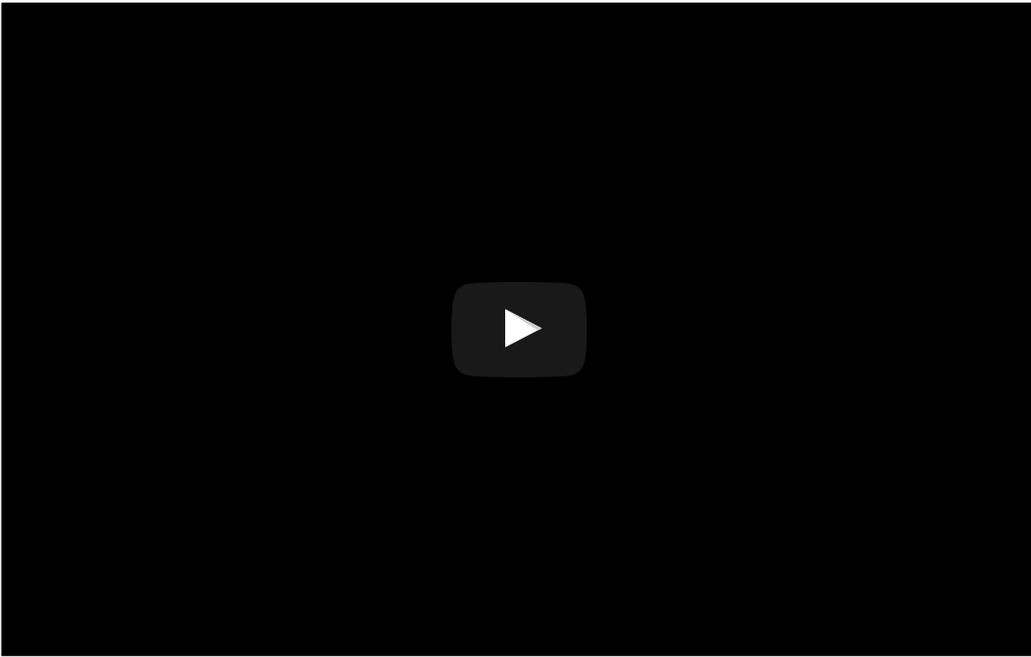
During the semester, we watch YouTube instructional videos such as [English Lesson with Adam](#) and [Grammar Girl](#) podcasts. For this class, we collaboratively searched YouTube for videos that taught us brief histories of English, helped us figure out usage (courtesy of [Grammar Girl](#)), and advised us on how to write for popular media. Searching together as a group was a most rewarding experience; I highly recommend it!

After each viewing, we then analyze key rhetorical components through the [Five Elements for Visual Analysis](#), noting what works and what doesn't for different audiences and purposes. We provide feedback in both large and small groups to re/visit our writing for vlog-casting Guidelines.

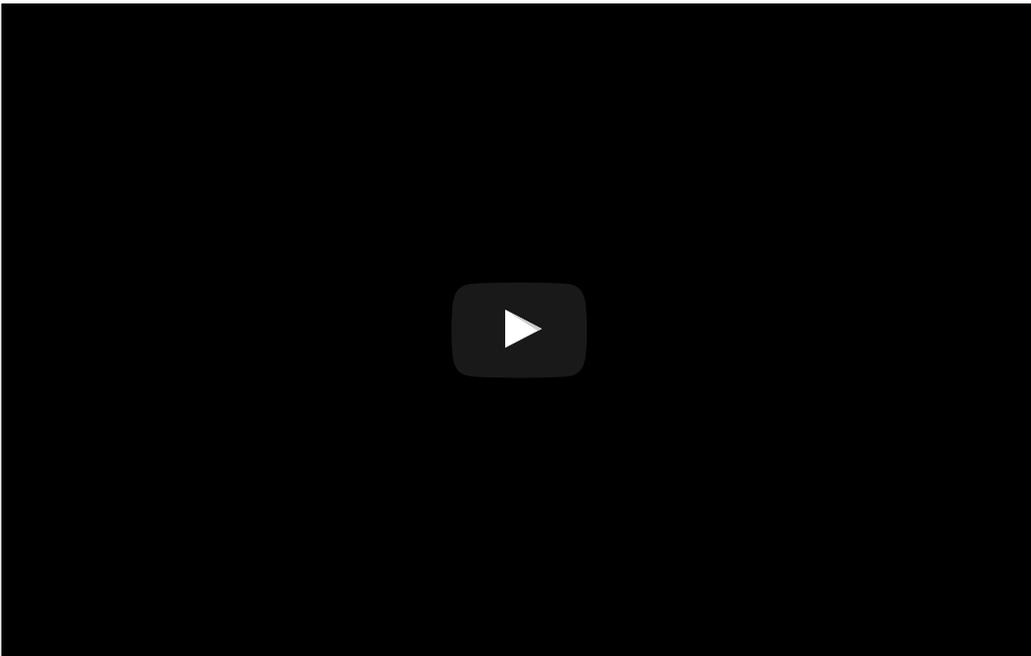
We then produce our "Grammar Vlogs" using tools such as iMovie, QuickTime, PowerPoint, and PowToon. The average time spent is about four, one-hour class periods, with production happening outside of class.

## Student Examples

[Joseph](#)

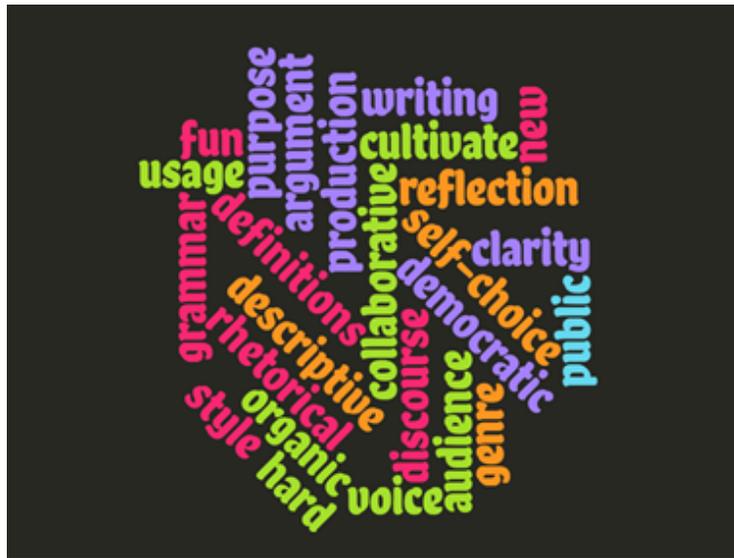


Caitlin 



### **Reflections on the Activity – Students**

When my students reflected on this writing opportunity, here are the words they used to describe their learning experience:



## My Reflection

I think this assignment would work well across topics and courses because it doesn't teach content but rhetorical behaviors. It draws out rhetorical performances as well, which engenders creativity and scholarly research processes that are relevant throughout the Humanities. Instructors could re/mix their own topics and search for YouTube videos that are specific to their students' interests and needs. **I would love for folks outside of our field to try it, so please share this post with others; try the assignment and let me know what you think!**

[Jeanne Law Bohannon](#) is an Assistant Professor of English in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kennesaw State University. She believes in creating democratic learning spaces, where students become stakeholders in their own rhetorical growth through authentic engagement in class communities. Her research interests include evaluating digital literacies and critical engagement pedagogies; performing feminist rhetorical recoveries; and growing informed and empowered student scholars. Reach Jeanne at: [jeanne\\_bohannon@kennesaw.edu](mailto:jeanne_bohannon@kennesaw.edu) and [www.rhetoricmatters.org](http://www.rhetoricmatters.org).

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## Multimodal Mondays: No Fear Gramm(r) and Students' Top 5 Lists for Rhetorical Growth, 2.0

 Blog Post created by [Andrea A. Lunsford](#)  on Mar 13, 2017

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Today's guest blogger is  [Jeanne Bohannon](#) (see end of post for bio).

A thread came across the WPA listserv last week that reminded me of a post I wrote a couple of years ago ( [Multimodal Mondays: No Fear Gramm\(r\) and Students' Top 5 Lists for Rhetorical Growth](#)), which described a low stakes grammar assignment using Andrea's Writer's Help diagnostics and her Top 20 Student Grammar Mistakes . I have used Writer's Help to create individualized exercises for upper-division writing majors as well as to measure rhetorical growth with first-year writers. In my classes we call it “No Fear Gramm(r),” deciding to intentionally misspell/(re)spell the word in order to indicate the no fear aspect of the label. As students increasingly ask for prescriptive grammar help in their writing courses while simultaneously seeking assistance in applying those conventions across digital writing genres, I have found the below series of tasks beneficial for both generating conversation and demonstrating the transformative uses of digital grammar.

### Context

No Fear Gramm(r) is a low-stakes opportunity to use traditional diagnostic tools to create dialogic growth and community. In a class of eight professional writing majors, students not only take the diagnostic, but they then share their top five grammar issues with each other in a discussion forum, responding to coursemates and finding commonalities among everyone's usage mistakes.

### Assignment

Students take a Grammar Diagnostic from [Writer's Help 2.0 for Lunsford Handbooks](#) . I don't assign points to this assignment, but I talk with students on the first and second days of class about how we will use the results as departure points for the entire semester to grow specific qualities of our grammar usage. Although I

don't use the Gradebook option, [Writer's Help](#) does have one, so you can assign and grade the Diagnostic as well as the accompanying grammar exercises.

### Measurable Learning Objectives

- Examine results of a grammar diagnostic for areas of improvement
- Compare diagnostic results to others' in an open discussion forum
- Synthesize content-meaning through dialogic writing and shared semantics

### Background Reading for Students and Instructors

Acts of reading and viewing visual texts are ongoing processes for attaining learning goals in dialogic, digital writing assignments. Below, I have listed a few foundational texts. You will no doubt have your own to enrich this list.

[Writer's Help 2.0 for Lunsford Handbooks](#): “Diagnostics”

[The St. Martin's Handbook](#): “The Top Twenty”

[The Everyday Writer](#): Ch. 1, “The Top Twenty: A Quick Guide to Troubleshooting Your Writing”

[Writing in Action](#): Ch. 1, “The Top Twenty: A Quick Guide to Troubleshooting Your Writing”

[EasyWriter](#): “The Top Twenty”

### Before Class: Student and Instructor Preparation

My students and I run this writing assignment during the first week of the semester as a low-stakes icebreaker and departure point for semester-long evaluation. To prepare, I embed the [Writer's Help](#) link in our class LMS as a Newsfeed item; I also email students before the first day of class with the same link and an explanation of what we are going to do.

### In Class and/or Out

Students begin by posting and discussing their perceived Top 5 grammar issues in our course LMS. They then join our [Writer's Help](#) course and take the Diagnostic Pre-test. You can either have students complete the diagnostic in-class if you teach in a writing lab or have them complete the assignment on their own. I have tried both and have found better results when students work on this assignment outside of class. Since this assignment is low-stakes, I really only care about their authentic participation, however I can elicit it.

After students receive their results (immediate), they write up a comparison of their top five grammar issues versus their perceived ones, then post them, along with a reflection, in our online discussion forum. They interact with classmates in the forum, seeking out connections and discussing why these issues exist. We re/group in our face-to-face class the next week and examine interesting conclusions together. Students keep their *Top Fives* at-hand as they work through informal and formal writing opportunities during the semester. They also take a post-test diagnostic at the end of the semester to measure their growth in their Top 5 errors.

## **Anecdotal Results**

This semester I have thirty students (two are non-native speakers), and the results showed many commonalities. The *Top Five* below represents elements of grammar reported by all students, in order of descending occurrence.

1. **Comma Usage**
2. **Semicolons/apostrophes**
3. **Pronouns**
4. **Specific uses of Punctuation**
5. **Sentence Structure/verbs**

Interestingly, #3 (pronouns) was the #1 mistake in 2015, when I last measured these grammar elements for this blog. Comma usage shows up #1 this time, and was missing in 2015 altogether. Students still report issues with verbs, semicolons, and specific uses of punctuation.

## **Do Students Appreciate It as Much as I Do?**

Every student I surveyed in an IRB-approved assessment of this assignment series reported that they learned more about their own specific grammar concerns by taking the diagnostic pre-test. Accordingly, all of them thought their syntax-level grammar improved on the post-tests because they knew their specific concerns upfront.

Students further narrated their thoughts regarding the grammar diagnostic:

"The Grammar Diagnostics helped me better understand where my grammatical problems lay. For the most part, everything made sense in understanding why a convention that I used was incorrect and what the better one was, but some of the questions in the diagnostic seemed a little questionable. The only other thing about the Diagnostic that I didn't like so much was that it was multiple choice driven, which does not reflect the actual grammatical process of writing a research paper or other scholarly activity."

"My only concern is that I wish it included a longer pool of observation in the questions. For instance, I don't think that three questions concerning comma usage is enough evidence to prove if I am skilled or not at using them. Also, there should be extensive explanation of 'why' I answered a question wrong and what would be the correct answer and 'why' that answer would be correct. I just wish it had deeper explanations attached to each wrong answer."

"I feel they help to identify errors I've made a habit of using/not using."

"I think the Grammar Diagnostics is a great tool and should be introduced earlier in a college course. There are so many grammar 'rules' you should have learned in high school, but never do."

## My Reflection

For me, low-stakes writing means “no worry” opportunities, where students can write and discuss their rhetorical concerns openly, without fear of grading or making mistakes. This assignment is multimodal because students use real-time ed-tech to see a snapshot of their grammar issues and then participate in digital forums to connect with other students about the same concerns. “No Fear Gramm(r)” counts for me, in terms of multimodal composition, because it encourages students to reflect on their own writing practices and become active participants in community-driven, digital conversations about writing. Try the assignment and let me know what you think!

*Do you have an idea for a Multimodal Mondays activity or post? Contact [Leah Rang](#) for a chance to be featured on Andrea's blog.*

*Jeanne Law Bohannon is an Assistant Professor of English in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kennesaw State University. She believes in creating democratic learning spaces, where students become stakeholders in their own rhetorical growth through authentic engagement in class communities. Her research interests include evaluating digital literacies and critical engagement pedagogies; performing feminist rhetorical recoveries; and growing informed and empowered student scholars. Reach Jeanne at:*

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