

WRD103 - Rhetoric and Composition I  
Autumn 2011

**Essay #2 – Multimodal Essay**

**Context**

In his essay, “The Language of Advertising,” Charles O’Neill argues that advertising is the most pervasive form of persuasion. He goes on to write that

Ads are effective because they sell products. They would not succeed if they did not reflect the values and the motivations of the real world. Advertising both reflects and shapes our perception of reality. . . . of the world. (376)

According to O’Neill, advertising derives its power from a “purposeful, directed combination of images” (371). A combination that is successful because “its appeal goes right to the quick of our fantasies: happiness, material wealth, eternal youth, social acceptance, sexual fulfillment, and power” (Goshgarian 356).

**Guidelines**

**Compose a Multimodal Essay (see attached Introduction and Requirements), that respond to the following prompt:**

Evaluate the advertising techniques of several popular brands. Select several ads—both from print media (magazine, newspaper, billboard) and from electronic media (television, film, website)—and evaluate how they succeed, or fail, to fulfill their ultimate goal: to “sell products.”

As part of your analysis of the ad/commercial’s success or failure, consider . . .

- O’Neill’s argument that “advertising derives its power from a “purposeful, directed combination of images” (371).
- Goshgarian’s suggestions that advertising is successful because “its appeal goes right to the quick of our fantasies: happiness, material wealth, eternal youth, social acceptance, sexual fulfillment, and power” (Goshgarian 356).

Remember, as part of your analysis of the advertising techniques to examine. . .

- . . . the advertiser’s use of images, visuals, typography, sound, music, movement.
- . . . the advertiser’s use of language (including weasel words, doublespeak, brand-specific taglines and slogans)
- . . . the advertisement’s representation of gender and sexuality.
- . . . the advertisement’s representation of class and material success.

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### **The Multimodal Essay – An Introduction**

The second main writing project for this course is to compose, revise, and present a multimodal essay. This is an essay meant to be read online and that makes strong use of the affordances of the web.

Students will post the final version of this essay to Digication and make it accessible to the class for comment and feedback. The Multimodal Essay is the **only required component** of your final Digital Portfolio.

#### **What is a Multimodal Essay?**

What differentiates multimodal texts, though from their more traditional counterparts, is that multimodal composing goes beyond the alphabetic to include any combination of images, sound, color, animation and *text* (Takayoshi, Hawisher, & Selfe, 2007, p.1). Moreover, these texts, which most often occupy a predominately digital space.

A multimodal essay is one that combines two or more mediums of composing, such as audio, video, photography, printed text, magazine cut-outs, a hypertext web document, a website, video game, etc. One of the goals of this assignment is to expose you to different modes of composing.

#### **Affordances of the web?**

An affordance is an aspect of an environment, technology, or object that allows an individual to do something. An affordance of writing, for instance, is that it allows us to make our thoughts visible to ourselves—to note something down on a page. An affordance of print is that it allows us to circulate our thoughts to a much larger readership—to publish. And some of the affordances of the web are . . . well, finding that out is one of the main points of this assignment. But, clearly, one thing the web affords is an ability to combine modes of expression—to mix prose with still images, hyperlinks, sound files, and videos.

So another way of putting this is to say that your task here is to compose a digital essay in which you do things you could not do (or could not do as evocatively or as well) if you were limited to printing out your work on paper. Let me pause to emphasize the term digital in the previous sentence. Your task is to produce a text that will be read onscreen. There are other forms of multimodal expression that involve the fashioning of objects, events, costumes, sets, but such work is not a concern of this course.

Beyond that, there are few limits to this assignment—other than to say that your work should be substantive, researched, imaginative, and carefully composed, designed, and edited.