

Kirby Brown  
EH 454  
Linguistic Mode CRC

## Introduction

Academia has long relied heavily on the linguistic mode to teach students, but as new technologies have emerged, there has been a drastic shift in the realm of pedagogy. Multimodal composition surrounds us, be it advertisements or work emails. To enter the professional world without an understanding of how to compose multimodal texts would leave a student at a severe disadvantage. While it shouldn't be the sole mode of writing, the linguistic mode is still incredibly important in our communication across all aspects of life. The question is how to use it effectively and successfully, without relying too much on words alone, to teach students and professionals alike how to compose multimodal texts. I aim to answer this question by looking at two articles about multimodal composition: "On Multimodal Composing" by DeVoss et al. and "An Introduction to and and [sic] Strategies for Multimodal Composing" by Melanie Gagich. In this essay I will discuss how both articles aim to inform the reader of what multimodality means and how to go about composing a multimodal text. The contrast in how the articles attempt to inform leaves an opening for my analysis. I can look at how the linguistic mode is limiting or enhancing students' ability to engage with the concepts involved. I found that one article isn't necessarily more or less effective than the other because of its modalities. The usefulness of each depends on the context in which they are applied. Teaching is deeply tied to the rhetorical situation of the class—what writing proficiency level are the students at? What do they need or want to learn? The use of the linguistic mode in each can reveal the affordances and limitations of language in creating meaning and teaching composition.

## Affordances and Limitations of the Linguistic Mode

The linguistic mode is useful when attempting to explain, but not necessarily to show. In many cases, definitions and written explanations are the best way to approach a topic—a student can't begin to understand how to compose using multiple modes until they know what multimodality is. We think, operate, and move about our lives using language, so concepts must be defined in terms we can understand before we can take further steps with that knowledge. If a student doesn't know what the modes themselves are, how will they understand multimodality? Language provides the base that we need to move past definitions into more complex analysis and comprehension. "An Introduction to and and [sic] Strategies for Multimodal Composing" leans towards this approach. It was written as a chapter to be printed in a book, so the modalities used reflect that. While there are some images used as examples throughout the article, the primary source of meaning comes from the language. The images simply serve as reinforcement. Gagich describes a relatively traditional academic approach to the writing process in comparison to DeVoss et al. She offers five strategies for students to use when composing a multimodal text:

1. Determine your rhetorical situation.
2. Review and analyze other multimodal texts.
3. Gather content, media, and tools.
4. Cite and attribute information appropriately.
5. Begin drafting your text.

The methods she proposes are centered in the use of language. This isn't necessarily a bad choice. Some of the methods can go beyond the linguistic mode in practice, but they're conveyed and understood through language. Gagich also uses the first half of the essay to define terms and concepts, which is another primarily linguistic choice. The images she provides are a useful, but limited, way to enhance the reader's understanding of the definition. For example, Gagich includes a picture of her dog from her social media as an example of the visual mode. This is effective at going beyond the linguistic mode to describe the visual mode and is an accurate reflection of the definition. However, as an example for the aural mode, she includes a screenshot of a student's podcast. This is ineffective because the aural mode is not visual—an image doesn't accomplish the challenge of representing the mode. The inability to include audio is a constraint of the print medium that Gagich must contend with in this instance. In this case, the image doesn't provide anything to the definition and the language alone must attempt to create the meaning of the aural mode. In this medium, words are the most effective way to explain the concept and all other modes are secondary.

When discussing multimodal composition, students may require more than a linguistic explanation of multimodal texts. It's often said that *a picture's worth a thousand words*. Why is that? It's because language alone can't easily convey everything that's in an image or everything that we see. Even if we try to describe the pieces and every little detail, the sum of the parts doesn't give us the whole. Understanding requires the visual mode of the picture. In the same way, to understand a multimodal text we need to see and experience a multimodal text. To understand how to compose a multimodal text, we need more than a linguistic explanation of how to do it. "On Multimodal Composing" accomplishes that by using multiple modes. Where Gagich provides a list of steps for students to follow, DeVoss et al. provide a series of examples through videos created by the authors. In each video, the creator explains and shows their writing process. Instead of focusing on the standard act of researching and writing, they look at composition through a different lens and focus on everything that surrounds and interacts and influences their process. As a result, each writer's process is unique. They include parts such as interacting with others, listening to music, writing on both paper and a computer, and more. For a student with a solid background in writing and composition, it may be useful to shift away from the purely linguistic side of writing and start viewing multimodal composition as truly diverse and complex, interacting with the body as much as the intellect.

The texts come together in the gap between what one does and the other does not. The DeVoss et al. approach would not work well for a student without a foundation in writing and composition because they don't explain how to produce content and structure a text. A student can't begin to perform the metacognitive task of worrying about the influence of what music

they listen to while writing unless they already know how to write. However, the Gagich approach would be quite useful for that same student who has a lower proficiency level in composition. When we're first learning about multimodal composition, we're emerging from an educational system that values the linguistic mode above all others. It's familiar and it's comfortable, so by describing multimodality through the linguistic mode, Gagich's descriptions and explanations are accessible to less experienced students. For the student who understands the general definition of multimodality and how to take a rhetorical approach to creating a text, the linguistic descriptions don't help them shift their views of composition away from the traditional linguistic lens and towards the newer, emerging lens shown by DeVoss et al.

To effectively teach students how to compose multimodal texts, we must work along and between the Gagich and DeVoss et al. approaches, shifting between them when the situation calls for it. For example, it might be useful to start with Gagich and provide students with definitions, terminology, and examples of multimodality so that they can begin to be immersed in the discourse community that multimodal composition constitutes. For that, they need to have knowledge of the lexis, or technical language, used by compositionists. Once students have that base, they could move on to DeVoss et al. and learn a newer way of thinking about the writing process. While they learn that new framework and practice composing, it would be useful to reference back to the specific steps proposed by Gagich for composing multimodal texts. Through these interactions, the students can use *both* approaches to absorb the complex nature of composition more fully. Only through incorporation of the DeVoss et al. approach can they begin to see the involvement of the body, but by using the Gagich approach, they can also learn to produce the actual text—particularly the linguistic aspect of a text. This could be considered a comprehensive approach of its own, to be molded and formed to the individual.

The answer to my question—how to use the linguistic mode effectively and successfully, without relying too much on words alone, to teach students and professionals alike how to compose multimodal texts—lies in the situation that I've outlined above. It's not what each text does right and wrong or what's useful in each of them separately. It's about what we can gain by using them together and cohesively, taking advantage of their linguistic affordances to open up the student's view of multimodal composition.

## References

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