Time Keeps on Slipping
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I’m a new media person: I have a smartphone, I enjoy Facebook, I like coding websites. I know it probably seems a little blasphemous for a writer to say something like, “I like the Kindle” or “making a website is the same as writing,” but new media is obviously where writing is converging toward. I’ve never been one to favor tradition over anything new which is probably why new media appeals to me; it feels progressive to try out these emerging technologies and learn how to use them to my advantage. But, I’ll admit, with learning and teaching new media, there comes an unavoidable, somewhat difficult factor to deal with: time and time management. And this factor really boils down to a fundamental misunderstanding of and aversion to new media writing in writing curriculums.

It’s easy to write new media writing off as “easy” writing, because a lot of the work is done at a computer. But, let’s not confuse “at” with “by.” Working in digital and new medias, in my own personal experience, is far more time consuming and requires a considerably greater commitment than traditional writing. Simply because work is done on a computer, often with the assistance of the Internet or programs like Photoshop, doesn’t mean it’s any easier to do. In my experience, the struggle with the computer and programs that are meant to make life easier do exactly the opposite. If anything, traditional writing is far easier than writing in new media.

Because, when making a website, or a Prezi, or video clip, there’s more to analyze than just the text. In media like video and audio, text isn’t even necessarily present. Writing in new media doesn’t take longer than traditional writing because of the what’s being said, but because new media elements force the writer to think about how he/she is conveying his/her ideas in more ways than the arrangement of the text. With new media, not only does one have to worry about constructing a logical, well supported argument that’s written in a way a reader could understand, he or she must also consider the non-text elements (images, video, audio, etc.) of the piece and whether or not they’re serving the purpose of what he/she is trying convey.

When I write a traditional paper for a class like English, I can more or less gauge how much time it will take me to finish based on the assignment and what I’m trying to say. And, that only makes sense: I’ve been writing papers for a long time. And I think the same can be said for the vast majority of students who have made it through the American education system. We’re taught from an early age to read books, write essays, compose theses and argue to them. Students should be good at doing these things by now, which means they should understand just how long it takes to write a twelve-page research report or a seven-page explication. The case isn’t the same with new media.

The only time frame I seem to be able to establish for finishing an assignment is “quite a while.” I think this is partially to blame for the lack of emphasis on new media as a legitimate rhetorical form in our educational/academic institutions. We place such an emphasis on textual literacy that we fail to recognize the existence of visual and aural literacy. And that’s not okay. If I submitted this paper in a traditional classroom environment, I’m willing to be that the hyperlinked text above would be singled-out as “distracting” from my text, and would result in a grade reduction. I doubt the link would even be investigated, even though it refers to a video clip relates directly to the topic at hand. The world we live in constantly barrages us with images, videos, and audio clips from
all fronts: television, the internet, radio, video games, mobile phones—the list goes on. Focusing on new media, how to interpret it, and how to use it to make arguments should be a crucial part of the writing curriculum because that's how the world is communicating with itself.

And I think we’re off to a good start with what we're doing here in the writing minor, as a part of Sweetland. By consciously exposing ourselves to new media, we’re engaging with it in a way that many students don't get to, and so far, the experience has been rewarding. But we’re a small group, and it seems that the majority of students aren't being taught how to understand rhetorical forms other than text based ones, or worse yet, are being asked to use new media without being taught how to effectively manipulate it first. I personally cannot count the number of times I’ve had to sit through a terrible powerpoint presentation, or watch a video that seems completely unaware of the vast, argumentative capabilities of its medium. Again, I think the issue boils down to time. New media is time consuming to use, because like anything worth learning, it takes time to understand, and even more time to master, which also makes it difficult to teach. But, I think we need to at least try.

Make no mistake, the journey to satisfaction is not an easy one, and I've found myself frustrated with projects from this class more than any other because they've been difficult and time consuming and have stretched me beyond what I thought was my comfort zone. But, when a project is finished, I’m ecstatic, because I feel like I’ve created something that's effective, and worth not just reading, but looking at; I feel like I’ve made something worth considering. A paper for an English class is something only a professor will ever see, but new media somehow legitimizes what I’ve written and makes me believe in it more. This is why I write: to challenge myself to be better, even though I will never “master” writing. I will always have something to learn, and new media is a part of that perpetual challenge.

Works Cited