



CHAPTER 5 Thinking Rhetorically

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From “Reading the Face” by John Branscum
and Dan Keller

Given a familiarity with the conventions of alphabetic texts, English composition teachers recognize when such texts are rhetorically effective and know the strategies to pursue to help students become more persuasive writers. For example, instructors encourage students to use specific details, offer relevant examples, provide guideposts for readers, and avail themselves of figurative language. Composition teachers also know how to advise students writing persuasive texts. They help students, for instance, craft appeals that address an audience’s emotions (*pathos*), rest on a logical argument (*logos*), or appeal to an understanding of ethical behavior (*ethos*). We also recognize that such appeals often overlap and blend their effects. But how do visual compositions persuade? How do *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* apply to aural texts? How can our rhetorical understandings be applied to multimodal projects?

The audio and video assignments in Chapter 2 provide opportunities to think rhetorically across different modalities, to explore and understand the possibilities of multimodal compositions as rhetorical texts. In exploring the potential for such assignments in their own classrooms, readers will want to examine their own motivations—there is little reason to make radical changes in classroom or curriculum simply for the sake of keeping pace with technology. However, there is good reason to try multimodal assignments in order to learn more about how individuals are communicating and persuading through different modalities, and to examine the rhetorical possibilities of various kinds of texts, including traditional print-based texts. With calls for 21st-century literacies assuming urgency in schools at all levels, with conventional lines between media shifting and blurring with increasing regularity, exploration of a wider range of texts can only help improve our own teaching and students’ abilities to make meaning—alphabetically, aurally, visually.

This chapter focuses on rhetorical principles familiar to teachers of conventional alphabetic essays, and we will use them to build bridges to the study and composition of multimodal texts.

COMMON RHETORICAL PRINCIPLES APPLIED IN PRINT AND MULTIMODAL TEXTS

LOGOS: Appeal to Logic	PATHOS: Appeal to Emotion	ETHOS: Appeal Based on the Character of Author
Factual data and statistics	Expressive, vivid language	Fair-minded, honest tone
Quotations and citations of scholars	Emotional narratives	Correctness in formal features, vocabulary, and grammar.
Informed arguments	Figurative language	Authoritative and credible response.
Rational, balanced responses	Emotional responses	

To be most effective, the study and creation of multimodal texts should focus not only on how each modality is different or what affordances each brings to the task of making meaning, but also on the rhetorical uses authors can make of media and modalities and the ways in which both medium and modality can be employed to make a rhetorical appeal—or, more likely, some combination of appeals—to a specific audience.

By examining the rhetorical possibilities of different media and modalities, teachers can help students accomplish several instructional goals important to most composition classrooms:

- expanding the ability to author a wider range of texts
- learning how to read a wider range of texts with critical understanding
- gaining a better understanding of how to interpret and effectively respond to texts involving different modalities
- exploring the boundaries between various kinds of texts (audio, visual, and print)
- achieving additional understanding about the rhetorical potential of modalities and their various combinations

TEACHERS WITH RHETORICAL EXPERIENCE

Teachers of composition need to realize that they *already* have valuable rhetorical knowledge and experience that will help them approach the teaching of multimodal texts.

For example, teachers of composition may already be aware of many of the visual elements that shape a paper composed primarily of words—the type of paper, margins, typeface, font size, placement of white space, use of headings. Using a very traditional font and printing on paper with a high rag content, for example, might be just the ticket for an attorney or investment banker who wants to

convey information about his firm's conservative values, financial health, and longevity—all of which contribute to their ethos. Similarly, in using both a bold font and white space to emphasize the following headings on annual statements (Barnhardt, 2005) mailed to citizens, the U.S. Social Security Administration hopes to focus readers' attention on specific information about the fund's continuing security and its role in the future of this country—to convey the ethos, in short, of the federal government and its programs:

Social Security is for people of all ages . . .
Work to build a secure future . . .
About Social Security's future . . .

Clearly, the visual features of text (font, placement, white space, layout), far from being simple matters of aesthetics or elements that reveal students' abilities to follow formatting rules, actually communicate meaning and shape the rhetorical effectiveness of a text as Stephen Barnhardt (1986), Elizabeth Keyes (1993), and Anne Wysocki and Johndan Johnson-Eilola (1999) have said.

Composition teachers also know that when they can help students pay special attention to such features *and* make rhetorically effective choices about type font and size and style, the use of white space and bulleted lists and columns, the placement and formatting of text, students can be more effective in communicating to a specific audience, for a particular purpose. In effect, then, composition teachers who pay attention to such matters *are already helping students to think rhetorically about texts that are visual as well as alphabetic.*

Similarly, most teachers of composition already encourage student writers to think about their alphabetic essays in aural terms—discussing how to bring out the author's voice in an essay or suggesting that students read their work out loud to check on how effective the content and argument might be with a particular audience. In student-teacher conferences and peer-review sessions, composition teachers frequently encourage students to read their papers aloud, not only so that the authors themselves catch errors, but also so an audience can “hear” the rhetorical moves of juxtaposition and comparison-contrast at work. Many teachers also ask students to read their work aloud as a way of focusing on emphasis and word choice, repetition, and clarity. By paying attention to such matters composition teachers *are already helping students to think rhetorically about texts that are aural as well as alphabetic.*

In Appendix 17 at the end of this book, we provide an assignment that should help teachers—and students—build a conceptual bridge from thinking about *rhetorical effectiveness in alphabetic essays* to thinking about *rhetorical effectiveness in multimodal contexts*. We encourage teachers to modify this activity to meet the needs of specific students, assignments, courses, programs, and institutions.

THESE YOUNG KIDS TODAY, WITH THEIR HOVERBOARDS AND MULTIPLE MODALITIES . . .

By now, most teachers of composition have encountered students in their classes who seem to know a great deal about technology. Indeed—although computers are still unevenly distributed within the United States and the world—it is not uncommon to meet students who are involved with various media, whether through maintaining their own Web sites (combining print, audio, and visuals); creating and editing music and movies; programming computer games; or reading film and music in sophisticated ways. Indeed, even students without direct experience in *composing* multimodal texts often know a great deal about *reading and interpreting* multimodal texts as a result of being bombarded daily with television commercials, magazine and billboard advertisements, hundreds of cable channels, cell phones with text-messaging and gaming options, news websites that borrow elements from both print and televised news, and video games that feature popular music and attempt to recreate the visual style of film.

It is also true, however, that although many students are familiar with composing and reading texts in various modalities, they also lack the rhetorical skills necessary to be reflective and critical about these texts—especially in sustained ways. Operating from the base of rhetorical theory and practice, teachers of composition can help students gain critical perspective on the purpose and intended audiences of multimodal documents, as well as the appeals employed within these texts. In exchange, students can help teachers become familiar with a wider range of rhetorical texts and learn some of the skills required for producing such texts. When this reciprocal exchange happens, composition classrooms can become dynamic and engaging places where teaching takes place on multiple levels.

ARE YOU THINKING RHETORICALLY?

Part of thinking rhetorically about multimodal texts involves learning the language of video and sound. In the Additional Resources listed at the end of this book, we provide readings that can help composition teachers and students acquire some of this language; and in the Glossary, we define many of the more common terms associated with audio and video production. However, although a focus on developing vocabulary might be reassuring—in that it offers a patch of solid ground in an uncertain terrain—it often proves less important than a focus on the *rhetorical* possibilities and approaches of multimodal texts.

To help teachers *balance* the focus on specialized vocabulary and rhetorical effectiveness, we suggest the approach of identifying only a short list of specialized terms (Fig. 5.1) and encouraging stu-

KEY TERMS

Point of View: The perspective from which events are presented within a video.

Camera angle: The direction from which events are shot by a video camera and recorded.

Title Screen: A screen in a video that uses alphabetic text to convey information about the video.

Soundscape: A context—social, cultural, historical, natural, artificial—characterized by a particular set of sounds (Schafer, 1997).

Keynote: A sound that serves as a fundamental tone, orienting the audience to a piece's overall meaning. A keynote may not always be heard consciously, but it adds meaning to the surrounding tones (Schafer, 1997).

Signal: Foreground sounds that are given direct attention. These are hard to ignore: bells and sirens (Schafer, 1997).

Soundmark: A sound that has a unique meaning to a community (Schafer, 1997).

Establishing Shot: Visual images that establish the location of a story or sequence of events.

Voice over: Audio commentary, explanation, or interpretation added by the author in a video or audio essay.

Fade Out and Fade In: Paired terms that apply to both the audio and video. To make the transition to a new subject or theme, authors can make images gradually appear on the screen and/or gradually increase the volume (gain) of sound (fading in). To signal the end of a sequence or episode, authors can make an image gradually disappear and/or gradually decrease the volume (gain) of the audio (fading out).

Affordance: The capabilities of different media and modalities.

FIGURE 5.1 Specialized terms for audio and video analysis

dents to practice using these terms as they engage in rhetorical analyses of multimodal texts. To demonstrate how this process might work, in the following section we offer sample analyses of Beth Powell's video essay "Literacy and Public Transportation" and Dan Keller's audio essay "Human-Computer Interaction." Both focus on rhetorical principles and introduce a series of four key terms specific to multimodal compositions.

These analyses are not meant to be exhaustive, and our sample reading of these two texts should not suggest that we believe all readers will approach them in the same ways. Different readers, with different experiences and backgrounds, we know, will read and respond to texts in very different ways. Nor are the analyses we offer meant to suggest that a focus on rhetorical appeals—specifically *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—is the *only* way that teachers and students might want to approach these texts. Teachers and students, we hope, will apply a range of analytical tools to such texts. Rather, we hope these short sample analyses provide one concrete, if limited, example of how teachers can introduce a small handful of specialized terms within the context of a discussion of rhetorical effectiveness.

BETH POWELL'S "LITERACY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION"

For her video documentary, "Literacy and Public Transportation," Beth Powell interviewed her mother, Mary Reeve, about the literacy practices she encountered on buses as a child in Nashville, Tennessee. In the introduction to the video essay—roughly, the first minute of the piece—Beth took on the task of establishing an authorial *ethos* that was both playful (in keeping with the theme of childhood) and serious (in adding insight about the cultural contexts of literacy). Faced with this dual challenge, Beth decided that she needed to maintain a focus on her mother's generally positive memories but place these recollections within a more serious historical context and connect them, in some informed and knowledgeable way, to scholarship on literacy.

Beth did not want to make her composition seem too weighty or suggest that viewers were about to watch something as serious as *Roots* or Ken Burns' *The Civil War*. She did, however, want to intimate that the subject mattered. To properly orient her audience, in short, Beth needed to balance appeals to *ethos* (in part, by establishing her own credentials as a person knowledgeable about literacy), *logos* (in part, by connecting her mother's memories to scholarship on literacy), and *pathos* (by linking childhood memories and selected historical events). How did Beth try to accomplish these tasks for the viewers/readers of her text?

Beth's piece opens with video taken from inside a moving bus set to the music of Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again." Beth then combines Nelson's jaunty song, which suggests a nostalgic sense of the past, with historical black-and-white video footage. This footage is shot from a **camera angle** that recalls the point of view of a passenger looking out the window of a moving bus. Using this combination of sound and image, Beth is able to establish the primary **point of view** in the movie—that of her mother, Mary Reeve, as a school-aged child—and evoke a sense of nostalgia and *pathos*. With the formal title screen at the end of this sequence, "Literacy and Public Transportation," Beth cues the audience to the focus of the video. The formal diction of this screen (the diction choices of "literacy" rather than "reading and writing" and "public transportation" rather than "bus") helps to establish Beth's scholarly *ethos* (0:00-0:20). Beth continues the work of establishing a scholarly *ethos* with three static shots of buses, taken from different camera angles outside the bus, suggesting that these vehicles are objects worthy of study and observation (0:23-0:31). With the title screen at 0:33, "Specifically literacy practices on the bus," Beth narrows the focus of her video subject for the audience.

At 0:37, Beth introduces a new theme in the video—the historical context of her mother's bus rides—with an audio **signal**: Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth," music introduced dramatically against the backdrop of a black screen, to indicate an important new section of the video. The song by Buffalo Springfield—used in countless Vietnam War-era films—also helps the audience place

themselves back in the **soundscape** of America in the 1960s. Importantly, for the ethos that Beth wants to establish (as a scholar she wants to place her subject in a historical context) and the pathos she wants to evoke (associated with the nostalgia of her subject matter), this song serves as a **soundmark** of American culture. Although the song might evoke different feelings for each viewer, its lyrics point directly to the political awareness that characterized the 1960s as a historical era in which civil rights issues predominated. Beth chose this music to set the stage for the historical images of Rosa Parks and the Freedom Riders that follow (0:43-1:02) (Figure 5.2).

Although Beth has used no voice over commentary at this point in the essay, she has employed the music and black-and-white images in effective ways to convey meaning—especially in conjunction with accompanying alphabetic messages. As the music identifies the historical theme of political activism in the 1960s, for instance, the visual images and the alphabetic information within these images (e.g., the image of Rosa Parks on a bus juxtaposed with the words “How I Fought for Civil Rights”; an image of a charred bus juxtaposed with the words “Freedom Riders bus set on fire by the KKK”; and the image of a newspaper clipping with the headline “Bus Mixers are Beaten”) combine to provide a textured sense of the political scene in the South during this period.

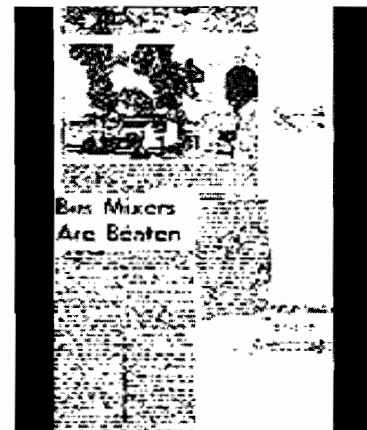
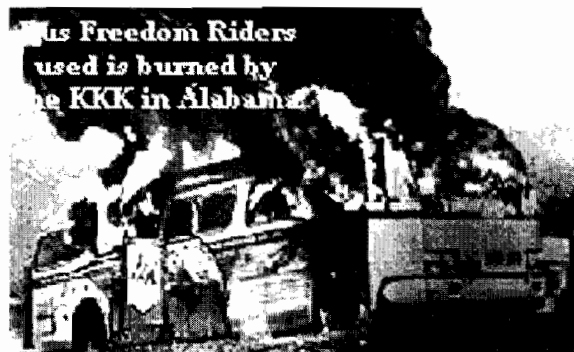
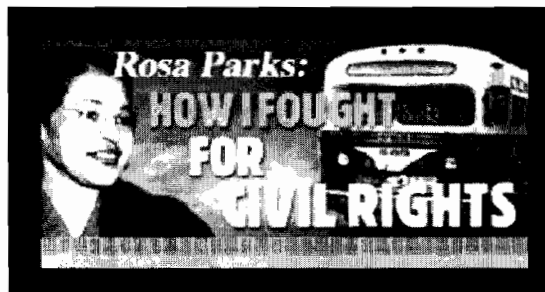


FIGURE 5.2 Historical images of the civil rights era in the 1960s

With these **establishing shots**, Beth manages to situate her mother's story in the South and in the 1960s, providing a historical context for her mother's literacy experiences on buses. She also indicates that she considers the story of her mother's literacy practices on buses to be a narrative about social action, one linked to the 1960s themes of political awareness and democratic involvement. These black-and-white images also carry a great deal of authority as historical artifacts, a move that contributes to the logos of Beth's project, and their arrangement in the video sets the stage for the narrative that is about to follow.

Teachers who want to conduct this kind of rhetorical analysis of Beth's video essay may also find it useful to note all the work that gets done within this minute and a half of video time and ask students to consider how the composition might have been different if it used only the modality of audio. Beth could have retained the music by Willie Nelson and Buffalo Springfield, for example, but she would have had to add additional audio soundmarks from buses themselves—sounds of buses driving, doors opening and closing, horns honking, and so on—to properly orient her audience. She might have also needed to create audio voice over to establish her subject, which she does in her video in a more expedient fashion with a combination of images and title screens. For the segment on Rosa Parks and the Freedom Riders, which helps establish historical context and logos, Beth could have included sound bites from interviews and news reports to locate her mother's story within the context of political action.

The main subject of the video is Beth's mother, Mary Reeve. At 1:02, Beth uses a series of audio and video moves that complement each other to provide viewers with a rhetorically effective transition from the context-setting work she did in the video's introduction to the main subject of Mary's story. During this series of moves, she simultaneously **fades out** a photograph of Freedom Riders looking at the charred remains of a bus to a black screen (visually signalling the end of the history segment) and **fades out** the Buffalo Springfield song to a moment of silence (providing an auditory signal that the sequence is ending). Next, Beth **fades in** visually on a title screen announcing the new topic ("My Mom, Mary Reeve, b. 1952, Nashville, TN (1:03) and **fades in** to a new auditory **soundmark**—a special version of "I Get Around" (artists, Brian Wilson and Gary Usher), performed by a chorus of children at the Wix-Brown School in Langley, British Columbia, and a segment of **voice over** narration provided by Beth's mother. With these carefully coordinated rhetorical transitions, Beth ends one segment of the video and begins another. The visual fade-to-black and the auditory fade-to-silence serves as the equivalent of white space in a print document—it demarcates segments of the video and signals the importance of the material to come. Beth uses these rhetorical devices to signal the importance of her mother as the primary narrator of the video. With the "I Get Around" music that fades in, Beth refocuses the audience's attention on the theme of *childhood* memories. The song serves as another soundmark of the 1950s and 1960s, and the lyrics help establish a rhetorical coherence with the theme of buses as a form of public transportation and mobility.

Mary's narration opens with her looking back on her childhood: "When I was a little girl, my mother worked for the National Transit Company . . . so my sister and I got to ride the bus for free." In this opening, viewers hear Mary's Southern accent and her laughter. These auditory elements help create rhetorical coherence in the essay by reminding viewers of Beth's visual establishing shots (of the Southern civil rights movement) and reasserting the lighter tone associated with the theme of childhood memories suggested by the Willie Nelson music in the introduction. These auditory elements of laughter and accent, clearly, would be difficult to convey adequately using only the modality of print. Throughout this segment of the video, Mary's diction and recollections sound both natural and unforced. As the author of the video, Beth has refrained from editing out the slight stumbles and pauses of her mother's recollections. This decision helps establish a sense of authenticity in the essay and shapes Beth's rhetorical ethos as a documentarian of history and literacy. The **affordances** of sound in this multimodal essay make it possible for the audience to get a sense of Mary's speech patterns, her Southern accent, and the timbre and speed of her voice. These qualities would be difficult to convey in an essay that was composed only of words printed on a page.

As the video essay continues, Mary recalls how she and her sister rode the bus as children, and Beth uses several video clips of buses on city streets (1:03-1:36) to provide an illustrative scene. These

brief video sequences (Fig. 5.3) are clearly modern, but Beth has rendered the video clips in black and white to suggest historical authenticity and, thus, further support an appeal to logos.

Beth has also used these video scenes to create a sense of rhetorical coherence in her video essay. All these bus scenes, for example, are recorded from street level and the same side of the street—a **camera angle** that suggests the **point of view** of a bus rider. The sequence of scenes, moreover, mirrors Mary's narration of the daily routine that her bus riding takes (1:07-1:36)—starting in the morning and ending in the evening. The repetition of bus images helps to emphasize, in a rhetorical sense, the central theme of buses as sites for public literacy practices.

As Mary continues to narrate her stories about practicing literacy on buses (1:37-4:04), Beth employs an appeal to logic in her composition—using specific images to provide visual evidence for the observations her mother makes: among these images, a bus billboard, an advertisement, and a picture of a Nashville landmark (Fig. 5.4).

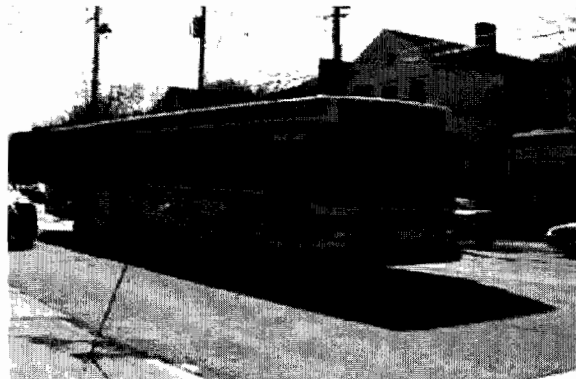
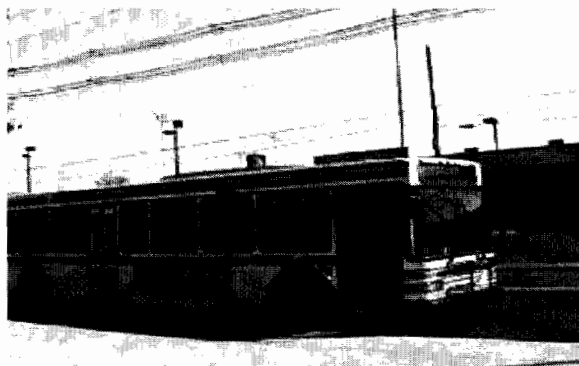


FIGURE 5.3 Rhetorical coherence and consistency

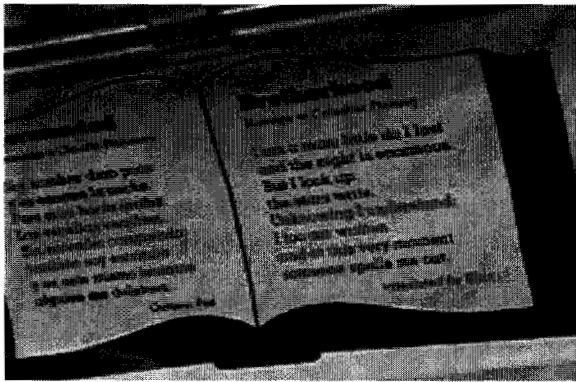


FIGURE 5.4 Visual evidence of Mary Reeve’s claims about literacy

The conclusion of Beth’s video essay can also provide some interesting points of rhetorical analysis. In alphabetic compositions, the conclusion often “zooms out” from a series of detailed points to focus on some larger implications. In the conclusion of this video essay, when her mother has finished with her recollections, Beth’s video similarly “zooms out” from a personal story to re-establish the importance of the bus as a site of public literacy. During this final segment, Mary talks about the sense of community she felt on the bus: “It was a fact, and you never thought about not doing it: If an older person got on the bus and there were no seats, you got up and you gave that person your seat—race, color, gender, did not matter.” This sentence both resonates with and complicates the earlier visual and aural references to political activism, public transportation, and the Civil Rights movement in the South during the 1960s—establishing, once again, a coherent set of themes within the essay. Beth underscores her point with more songs that serve as **soundmarks** of the 1960s—the Youngbloods’ “Get Together,” which includes the lyrics, “Come on people now, smile on your brother. Everybody get together, try to love one another right now.” As Mary speaks, and the music

plays, the audience also sees video images of people getting on and off the bus. These scenes (Fig. 5.5) are shot from the **point of view** of a rider inside the bus, situating the audience as part of the community (3:30-3:45) being referenced—an effective rhetorical appeal to pathos.

As Mary's narration fades, Beth finalizes the importance of her subject using quoted material from literacy scholars Brian Street (4:05) and Kathleen Rockhill (4:37), and a summary of her own thinking about the social and literacy practices Mary Reeve observed—and participated in—on the bus (4:49). These statements are displayed in white text on black screens, an aesthetic decision that, for some readers, lends a sense of authenticity (through a connection with things that are old) and a sense of authority (though a connection to scholarly expertise) to their content—thus, appealing to ethos and logos. The video ends with a picture of Mary Reeve standing on a chair as a child, one last appeal to pathos.



FIGURE 5.5 Buses as “a place for community”

DAN KELLER'S AUDIO ESSAY “HUMAN-COMPUTER INTERACTION”

In this audio essay, Dan explores the relationships humans have with computers through daily interaction and media representations. The composition itself refrains from taking an argumentative stance; instead, it functions as a cross between a sound performance and a sound documentary. The narrator's voice is presumed to be that of the author, but this is complicated by the fact that the voice is inhuman, mediated by a text-to-speech computer program like that employed by physicist Stephen Hawking. This **voice over** commentary serves both as a **soundmark** that references the information age of the late 20th or early 21st century and as a **signal** in representing the complex and dependent relationship between humans and machines. It also complicates the notion of ethos—listeners may be unsettled by the cyborg-ian voice, but they also understand that a person, at least in part, helped generate the voice. This realization could prove thought-provoking (logos) or novel (pathos) to the audience.

Dan introduces his essay with the sounds of several technologies, organized roughly in historical order: pages being flipped, alphabet letters being recited (“A, B, C”), a pen scribbling, typewriter keys tapping, a telephone ringing, binary code being recited (“1,0,1,0”), and, finally, a computer modem dialing and connecting to a network (0:21). These **signal** sounds focus the audience's attention on the related themes of technology and its effects on the lives of humans—a primary subject of the audio essay. The sounds may also encourage the audience to reflect on the commonsense narrative of technological progress. Dan uses an audio clip from Pink Floyd's song “Welcome to the Machine” (0:29-0:31) to complete this segment of his audio essay. The song serves as a **keynote** reference to the technological age—interrupting the modem connection sounds with overpowering

vocals and industrial sounds. In this context, Pink Floyd's inhuman "welcome" to the age of information technology strikes the audience as either ironic or menacing (0:29)—or both. The "welcome" is followed by brief silence—an auditory marker that signals a transition to a new segment.

The next segment of the essay (and the second segment of the introduction) begins with the cyborg narrator's **voice over**:

A 1999 study by software company Symantec Corporation reveals that 33% of computer users have physically assaulted a computer. Over 70% admit that they curse at computers. I fall into the 70%. At least once a month, I curse at my printer—and that's if it's a good month. (0:29-0:59)

This opening line of this segment lends itself both to the appeal of logos (the use of statistics) and pathos (most listeners will be able to relate to similar feelings toward technology). When the voice admits that it curses at its printer, the audience realizes that the voice speaks for all human beings who maintain a vexed relationship with technology. The humor of this segment is underscored by the mechanical delivery of the cyborg voice and an audio clip of a man ranting about the "paper jam" message that appears on a photocopy machine (an audio clip from the film *Office Space*). The man's accent implies that troubled relationships between humans and machines are increasingly widespread in a global context.

In most print essays, the rhetorical goals of an introduction involve establishing a purpose, focusing on a topic of exploration (often, but not always, expressed as a thesis), and giving some preview of what is to come. In this second segment of the introduction to his audio essay, Dan accomplishes much of this same work—articulating the topic he will explore ("our relationship with computers" 1:15) and his thesis ("many people fear what the wired world is doing to our society" 1:27). He also indicates—with the Pink Floyd music, the cyborg voice, the audio clip about the paper jam, and his choice of statistics—that his intention is to undertake a seriocomic exploration of this thesis. In the introduction, Dan also makes another important move. From 1:45-2:07, for instance, the cyborg narrator observes that people's fears of computers and the Internet are reflected in popular culture, an observation followed and underscored with music (Elliott Smith's haunting "Can't Make a Sound," containing the lyrics "Nobody knows what he's doing"), and several audio clips from film (*Office Space* and *Sneakers*, 2:17-3:00). With this carefully crafted sequence, Dan actually forecasts and demonstrates the organization of subsequent segments of the essay. He previews how—in each segment—the narrator will introduce a particular point of view on the human-computer relationship and then provide popular culture examples taken from television and film to support the claim. Within the rhetorical structure of this audio essay, then, Dan has structured it so that the cyborg narrator articulates the claims, and a series of popular culture examples provides evidence of each claim.

In a subsequent segment (4:17-5:14, Fig. 5.6), for example, the cyborg narrator makes the claims that humans are "worried about becoming machines" and they are concerned with maintaining their humanity within an increasingly technological world. Dan provides evidence for this claim with a series of audio clips from a television show (*Six-Million Dollar Man*) and two movies (*Robocop* and *Star Wars*). Dan also **fades in** a song ("AntiStar") by Massive Attack—written in a minor key (4:25-5:14)—to provide a subtle sense of the anxiety characterizing the postmodern information age, thus underscoring the concern and worry addressed more directly and explicitly by the narration and contributing to a sense of pathos.

The rhetorical effects of this carefully constructed sequence will vary from person to person, of course—just like the rhetorical effects of a more conventional alphabetic essay will differ with each reader. Some listeners, for instance, may be unfamiliar with the original source of the clips and, thus, will listen to them primarily as **signal** sounds, understanding the direct commentary on the relationship between humans and computers. Other audience members will be familiar with the original context of the clips. For these individuals, the excerpts may serve as **soundmarks** that locate the

Narrator:

Not only are we concerned about our relationship with machines, but we are also worried about becoming machines.

[Audio clip: Running sound from TV show *Six-Million Dollar Man*; Background music track: Massive Attack's "AntiStar"].

Narrator:

The question seems to be: Do we maintain our humanity as we depend more upon technology?

[Audio from the *Six-Million Dollar Man*: "We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world's first bionic man. Better than he was before—better, stronger, faster."]

Robocop audio: "Robo? Excuse me, Robo? [robotic gear noises] Any special message for the kids watching at home?"

"Stay out of trouble."

Star Wars audio: [Darth Vader breathing]

FIGURE 5.6 A short segment of Dan's layered audio essay

essay's claims more precisely in a system of signification associated with a specific film or television show and the historical context within which it occurred.

For example, some members of the audience will immediately recognize the audio clip Dan placed from 4:36 to 4:52 as coming from *The Six-Million Dollar Man* television series. For these individuals, the audio clip works both as **signal** (commenting directly on the beneficial aspects of the human-computer relationship) and as **soundmark** (referring to one of the first television shows to deal with the subject of humans being augmented with robotic technology). Other individuals, however, may *not* be familiar with the series. These individuals may nonetheless perceive this audio excerpt as an important **signal** sound because it occurs during a pause in the narration and, thus, foregrounds commentary on the relationship between humans and machines. Similarly, people familiar with the movie *Robocop* may recognize the original source of the audio clip that Dan includes from 4:53 to 5:00.

THINKING ABOUT AFFORDANCES

Many readers will have noticed, by this point, how difficult it can be to describe the effects of a multimodal composition—like a sound essay or a video essay—with words alone. A discussion of even a short excerpt takes a great deal of space and time. Moreover, in print, references to music and sound clips (which are laden with meaning and reference in an audio essay) or video clips (which render movement and sequence so dynamically) can come across as one-dimensional and flat given the affordances of alphabetic text. We do not want to suggest with this observation that one modality is better than another in all cases. But each modality does have certain affordances—capabilities of representing meaning in particular ways and in certain contexts. We have, for example, chosen alphabetic text as one modality to convey information in this book. Words, after all, are a common

modality familiar to teachers, and they work well in representing the propositional logic familiar to most educators. We have also, however, chosen to include visual images in this book and a DVD with video and audio essays. Each modality and medium we use allows us to take advantage of different affordances. Video, for example, is extremely efficient and effective in representing movement and the passage of time. Music can convey emotion and tone with great efficiency and effectiveness.

Teachers can help students explore the affordances of media and modalities by comparing how different modalities do the work of creating meaning and talking about the possibilities of representing meaning in different ways. Teachers might want to show Beth's video to students first *without* any sound. The class could talk about the essay and the meaning conveyed both by the alphabetic title screens and the video clips and still images before seeing the project again—this time with the sound. After this second showing, a productive discussion might focus on the specific ways in which sound adds meaning to this essay and the ways in which sound combines with still or moving images to create meaning in dialogue with these modalities. With Dan's essay, teachers might want to explore how the essay would come across to readers/listeners if the cyborg voice were changed to a normal human voice. For some readers, this change might affect the meaning conveyed by the author or his effectiveness in communicating through the text of his audio essay.

Another productive classroom activity might be to imagine what kind of work it would take to transform an essay that employs one modality into an essay that employs another modality or a combination of modalities—for example, what would be involved in transforming Dan's audio essay to a video essay. It is clear that some of the work involved in such a transformation would be relatively easy: video clips from the television shows and films could replace the audio clips. The visuals might even make the composition's length (over 12 minutes) more palatable to audiences. Because some of the films and television shows "quoted" within the audio composition are obscure (e.g., *Six-Million Dollar Man* and *Office Space*), visual accompaniment would assist audiences to more easily connect with some of the examples. But some of the advantages of audio might be diminished: the surprise of hearing Darth Vader's breathing would be lost, for instance. Also, would audiences be able to focus on the difficult cyborg voice—already competing for attention among an array of other sounds—if images were present? If this were the case, then the cyborg voice might not be a feature of a video composition. Making such adjustments is a crucial part of learning the affordances of each modality.

Finally, after talking about affordance from various perspectives, teachers might want to work with their classes to identify a more explicit categorization of the affordances associated with video and sound as modalities: conceptual, presentational, or scholarly affordances, for example. In Chapter 2, we suggested that the audio and video assignments be sequenced and combined so that students can use the same material for two different modalities.

As teachers and students assess multimodal compositions, both may become overwhelmed by how technologically impressive the pieces may seem. Although the overall quality should be something to take into account in assessment, we would also recommend that a key factor in assessment should be what the students have learned about multimodal rhetoric (see Appendix 14 for an example of a self-evaluation sheet and Appendix 15 for a sample of a group-evaluation sheet). Less emphasis on what students produce and more emphasis on what students have learned will not only engender experimentation in the students' compositions, but also ease teachers' minds by providing them with familiar assessment tools.

STOP THINKING SO MUCH. GET TO WORK!

This chapter provides teachers with a brief introduction to thinking rhetorically about multimodal texts. Students will need to practice this kind of thinking as well. They will need help not only in learning some of the specialized terms involved in working with video and audio essays, but also,

more importantly perhaps, in understanding and using this vocabulary within a framework of rhetorical effectiveness.

Teachers can best encourage this work by giving students multiple opportunities to rehearse this work in class:

- ✓ Before they begin their own multimodal compositions, students can benefit from viewing and listening to multimodal compositions created by others, and then discussing the structural elements of specific works using a short list of specialized vocabulary (e.g., camera angles, points of view, soundmarks, signal sounds, keynotes) *within a framework of rhetorical effectiveness*. See Appendices 18, 19, and 20 for in-class activities that can be used for this purpose. We encourage teachers to modify these activities to take advantage of their own special expertise, as well as meet the needs of specific students, assignments, courses, programs, and institutions.
- ✓ As they are engaged in creating their own multimodal compositions, students can benefit from both formal and informal opportunities (e.g., studio-critique sessions, informal showings, peer-review sessions, reflection logs) in which they analyze their own projects. In these sessions, students can rehearse ways to talk and write about the structural elements of their projects, use some specialized vocabulary, and focus on *rhetorical effectiveness*. See Chapters 8 and 9 for further information about assessment.
- ✓ As they are engaged in the work of creating their own multimodal compositions, students can benefit from opportunities (e.g., small group demonstrations, mini-teaching sessions, team work sessions) to collaborate with others. In these collaborative efforts, students should be encouraged to focus on sharing specific technical strategies they have learned (e.g., camera shots, interviewing techniques, video- or audio-editing strategies) for creating pieces that are increasingly effective in rhetorical terms (see the Collaboration Checklist, Appendix 16).
- ✓ After they have finished their projects, students can benefit from opportunities to assess their own or others' projects. In doing this work, students should be encouraged to talk and write about the structural elements of their projects, use some specialized vocabulary, and, most importantly, focus on the *rhetorical effectiveness of compositions* (see Chapters 8 and 9).

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