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Writing in the Margins:

Critical Multimodal Literacies and Writing Pedagogies Across the Curriculum

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Abstract

Writing in the Margins: Critical Multimodal Literacies and Writing Pedagogies Across the Curriculum

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This study emerged from a curiosity about how disciplinary faculty engage with critical multimodal literacies in the writing courses they teach. Drawing on data from a yearlong faculty development fellowship, I explored how seven disciplinary instructors from across the university understood, adopted, and negotiated multimodal approaches to their writing pedagogies. Through participant observation of workshops, interviews, and analysis of participant course materials, this dissertation uncovers the ways language ideologies and disciplinary norms shape faculty writing pedagogies and praxes. Findings reveal both barriers and possibilities in grounding disciplinary writing pedagogies in equity-oriented, critical multimodal approaches to writing. This study contributes to conversations in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) by proposing a critical multimodal framework that challenges dominant assumptions about academic writing and supports more inclusive pedagogies.

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Chapter 1

The Writing@UW Fellowship: A Site for Studying Faculty Members' Orientations Toward Multimodal Writing

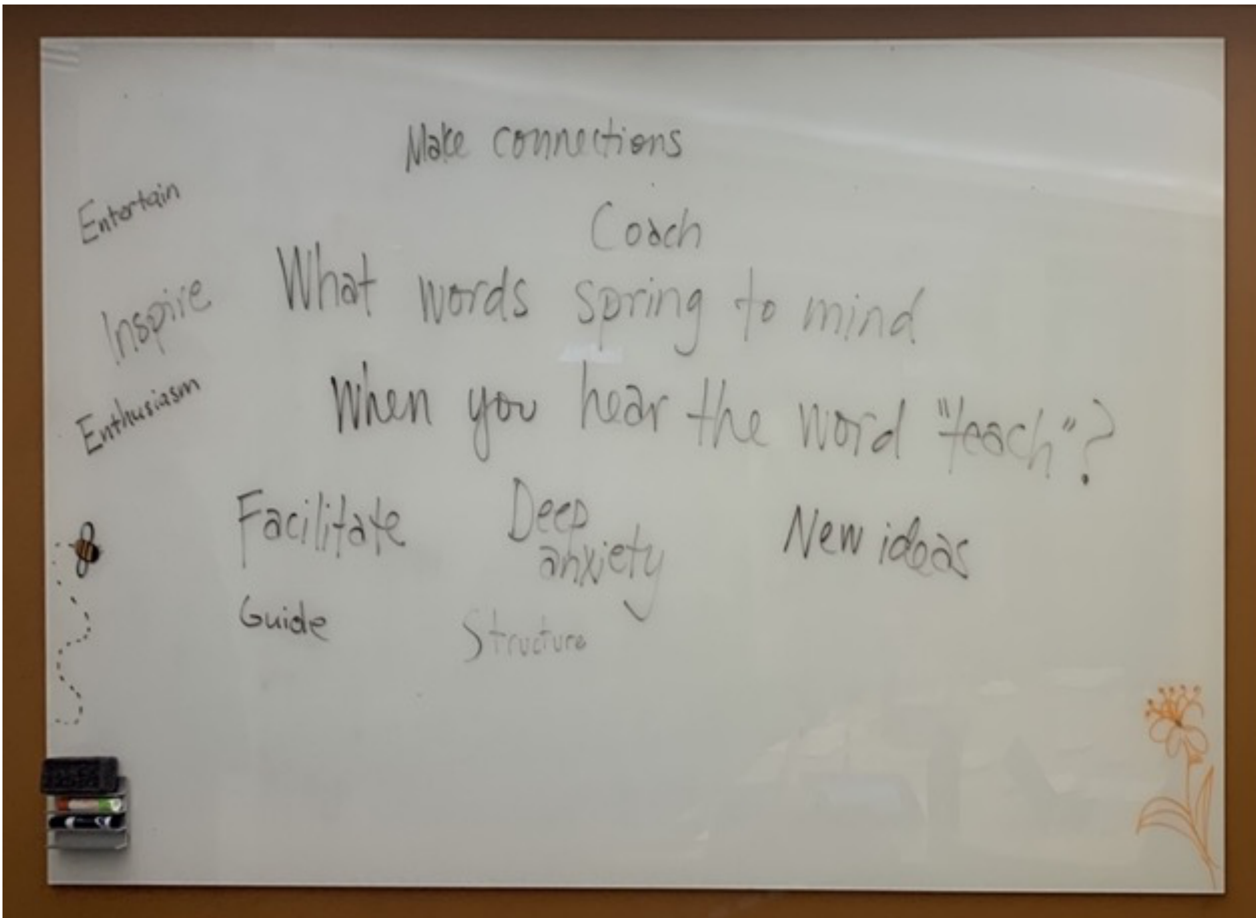


Image 1: Word-association activity on the first day of the Writing@UW Fellowship.

It's Friday, January 12, 2024: Day One of the Writing@UW Fellowship. I stand by the door of the main meeting room at the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of Washington, welcoming each of the seven faculty Fellows as they arrive. We'll be gathering here every other week for two quarters to build a community of practice for disciplinary faculty members who teach writing in their disciplines. Faculty members from Anthropology, Astronomy, Environmental Science, Communication,

English, Mechanical Engineering, and Music arrive with goals that range from increasing student confidence in scientific writing to scaffolding writing for community-based capstone projects and from supporting storytelling in music analysis to exploring how writing can deepen critical inquiry and reflection. While none of the Fellows initially expressed an interest in a multimodal approach to teaching composition, which is a framework that I forward and explore in this dissertation, all Fellows wrote in their Fellowship Application about a commitment to or a curiosity about writing pedagogy's connection to student empowerment. I was drawn to this group not despite their unfamiliarity with multimodality but because of it: their diverse disciplinary knowledge and understanding of communication in their fields offered rich ground for exploring how multimodality might take root, shift understandings, or spark new, unexpected ways forward.

As they enter, I introduce myself as the researcher who emailed them several weeks ago about my dissertation that explores critical multimodal literacies in disciplinary writing classrooms. I smile and point to the snack table, gesture toward the large oblong meeting table where we'll have our discussions over the next six months, and then direct them toward the whiteboard where Megan Callow, the Director of Writing at the University of Washington Seattle who co-led this Fellowship with me, has posed a question: *What words spring to mind when you hear the word "teach"?* Megan and I included this activity on the first day, primarily to surface Fellows' initial attitudes toward teaching writing. I was curious, though, about whether any responses might offer some insight into the ways Fellows consider multimodal work in their classrooms.

People pick up markers and walk to the whiteboard to write their responses: *Facilitate*. *New ideas*. *Deep anxiety*. The words collect, offering a glimpse into the complex ways these instructors think about how they teach writing. *Facilitate*, to me, suggests a role of mentorship or support. Others, like *Deep anxiety,* hint at overwhelm or pressure, which may be entangled with how faculty consider their pedagogical decisions. The activity felt, at least at that moment, like a way to ease faculty into conversation, a way for Megan and me to gently unsettle assumptions and spark dialogue about writing. But I also sense from the board how these initial responses foreshadow deeper tensions in how faculty

members undertake pedagogical change. This tension, between the desire to innovate and the gravitational pull of disciplinary norms, is not unique to this room: it's a tension I've seen across many conversations in Writing across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines (WAC/WID), one that prompts inquiry, not just about writing, but about how change happens in institutional spaces, about the need to rethink what writing is, how it functions across the curriculum, and what pedagogical change actually demands. What might seem like a scattered set of responses in the above whiteboard activity begins to take on a deeper meaning when read alongside scholarship on multimodality, critical pedagogy, and linguistic justice. These responses provide a starting point for examining how faculty conceptualize writing, teaching, and change, which are concepts central to my dissertation's focus on critical multimodal literacies.

When Crystal Fodrey, in "The Future of WAC Is Multimodal and Transfer-Supporting," offers a vision for disciplinary writing spaces that are grounded in "a deliberate, overlapping, and sustainable application of knowledges," she asks us to consider how scholarship on multimodality, WAC, writing transfer, and faculty development "can collectively guide efforts toward transformational change – supporting multimodal writing transfer across the curriculum" (135). She points toward a future of WAC that is multimodal, an evolution that, she argues, requires institutional and ideological shifts: redefining writing to include multimodal forms, embedding support for writing transfer across the curriculum, and building sustainable faculty development models that are integrated into the structure of academic departments. Drawing on Michelle Cox et al.'s *Sustainable WAC: A Whole Systems Approach to Launching and Developing Writing Across the Curriculum Programs*, Fodrey frames these shifts as transformational change, grounded in the need to reconceptualize what writing is and how writing instruction functions across disciplines. Building on the multiliteracies framework developed by the New London Group in 1996, Fodrey reminds us that all writing is already always multimodal and that effective communication in today's contexts involves attending to the interplay of multiple modes. Yet, as she and others have observed, these expanded definitions of writing remain largely absent from WAC/WID programs (Bearden; Fodrey; Fodrey and Mikovits; Reid et al.; Wooten et al.). My research responds to

Fodrey's call for more research on multimodality in WAC/WID contexts and aligns it with broader demands for writing instruction that also attend to racial and linguistic justice, equity, and inclusion. That is, scholars from across the field of writing studies argue that writing pedagogies must confront how academic institutions can reproduce dominant language norms and marginalize students whose rhetorical and linguistic practices fall outside them (Canagarajah; Bou Ayash; Baker-Bell; Gonzales; Inoue; Kynard). In this dissertation, I weave together frameworks and calls for transformation into an approach I call a *critical multimodal literacies pedagogical framework*. Later in this section, I situate my study within scholarship and preview the theoretical framework I develop more fully in Chapter 2; briefly, though, a critical multimodal approach draws on scholars such as April Baker-Bell and Carmen Kynard, whose work on Black language highlights how educational spaces often reinforce anti-Blackness by privileging dominant Englishes and marginalizing students' linguistic identities. Because a critical multimodal approach foregrounds communicative choice and agency, it pushes back against these hierarchies by challenging narrow definitions of what counts as legitimate academic communication. A critical multimodal approach also builds on work in translanguaging by scholars such as Nancy Bou Ayash and Laura Gonzales, which expands our understanding of how language and modality are intertwined with language fluidity and linguistic negotiation. Bou Ayash's research highlights how translingual practices confront monolingual ideologies in writing instruction, advocating for pedagogical approaches that recognize the fluidity of language use. Gonzales demonstrates how multilingual writers integrate various semiotic resources, employing translanguaging and multimodality in tandem to create meaning that is layered, flexible, and responsive to context. Together, these scholars encouraged me to view a critical multimodal approach as one that reveals how classroom decisions regarding writing and communication are never neutral—they either reinforce dominant norms or work to dismantle them. This approach invites faculty to expand what counts as valid meaning-making by affirming students' full communicative repertoires and resisting racialized, ableist, and monolingual standards in academic writing. I draw on scholars such as Cynthia Selfe and Aja Y. Martinez, among others, who advocate for a transformational reimagining of writing instruction—one that centers equity and inclusion not as

peripheral goals but as the very foundation of pedagogical design. Their work asks us to question the norms that shape what's treated as "good writing"—whose voices get heard, which forms of communication are welcomed, and what assumptions about ability and legitimacy are built into academic expectations. If we want to create just learning environments, we must name and challenge those assumptions.

Through my research in the Writing@UW Fellowship, I examined how the seven faculty members who joined, from Anthropology, Astronomy, Environmental Science, Communication, English, Mechanical Engineering, and Music, understood writing in their disciplines—and what happened when they were invited to rethink its purpose, shape, and function. Simply put, this project examines how and why these disciplinary faculty members took up multimodality in their courses and how the rationales connected to that uptake do (or do not) connect to racially just, equitable, linguistically just, and inclusionary writing pedagogies. Specifically, I ask:

- How can a critical multimodal approach contribute to language advocacy and equity-oriented writing practices across campus and its broader publics?
- What might a critical multimodal approach offer in terms of institutional transformation and faculty development within WAC/WID spaces? And what can we learn from faculty across disciplines about how language advocacy is—or is not—enacted through critical multimodal work?

Because my research site, a professional development space for WAC/WID teachers that ran for two quarters and met every other week, affected how critical multimodality was taken up, I drew on the following sub-questions because they center both participants' current understandings of multimodality and the kinds of support they find most meaningful:

- How are multimodal literacies being approached by instructors in Writing@UW-affiliated courses? How do these approaches align with programmatic frameworks that emphasize antiracist, equitable, and inclusive writing practices?

- What factors drive instructors to consider incorporating multimodality into their classrooms?
- What challenges do faculty describe when understanding or implementing critical multimodal work in their teaching? How do they navigate these tensions?
- What can we learn from these experiences about how to better support faculty in designing equity-oriented, multimodal writing pedagogies?

Faculty members' perspectives from the Writing@UW Fellowship, I hoped, would offer insight into how multimodality is conceptualized, the pedagogical commitments brought to teaching contexts, and the broader institutional constraints, language ideologies, program structures, and disciplinary norms that affect how writing is defined and practiced across campus. The Writing@UW Fellowship was an ideal site for this research because it brought together faculty members across disciplines to critically reflect on and redesign their writing assignments and pedagogies.

This project sits within and responds to ongoing conversations in WAC/WID, where writing is often taught by disciplinary faculty outside of the composition studies field. While these instructors are frequently tasked with integrating writing into their courses, they may have limited access to professional development or theoretical frameworks that address equity, multimodality, or racial and linguistic justice (Fodrey; LeCourt; Villanueva). As multimodal assignments become more common in WAC/WID settings, they are often adopted without deeper attention to power, access, or institutional norms (Fodrey). My research is not conceived as a critique of faculty but as a study of the conditions under which pedagogical change becomes possible—a change that supports faculty members in recognizing how language ideologies, disciplinary norms, and institutional structures affect writing instruction and in developing approaches that affirm students' full communicative repertoires, challenge dominant ideas of academic writing, and expand what counts as meaningful, legitimate expression in their disciplines. These concerns became tangible for me on that first day of the Writing@UW Fellowship when the abstract ways in which equity, modality, and pedagogy weave together began to take form.

Back in the CTL on Day 1, as faculty Fellows settle into their seats and Megan begins introductions, I glance back up at the whiteboard. These early responses don't offer me immediate or

definitive insights into my research questions, but they do suggest that faculty were already carrying assumptions—both hopeful and fraught—about writing and teaching. I begin to wonder: What definitions of writing are underlying these words? How do these faculty see their role in shaping students' writing practices? As I look around the room, I consider how we can ask faculty members to confront the ways in which certain modes of meaning-making are privileged while others are overlooked or dismissed, questions about possibility, constraint, and the reimagining of academic work that sit at the heart of my research project. From my position as a participant observer, the words on the board—especially in light of the conversations that followed over the course of the next two quarters—signal how faculty conceptualize teaching and writing. Though admittedly loosely connected to my research questions, responses like *Facilitate* and *Deep anxiety* could reflect both pedagogical values and underlying assumptions about what writing is, who it is for, and how it should function in the classroom. Reflecting on this moment, I can see these words that teachers wrote on the whiteboard capture not only our starting place in this Fellowship, but also point to the questions and tensions we will wrestle with throughout our time together, questions that explore a friction between faculty members' desire to expand their pedagogies and the language ideologies or institutional constraints that shape how they understand and implement multimodal work, a tension that was present from the start. For example, *Structure* sits next to *New ideas*, suggesting how the influence of tradition and norms lingers, affecting the types of innovation that feel possible in the writing pedagogies and classrooms. *Deep anxiety* sits just above *Structure*, making me wonder at the relationship between fear and familiarity and how that might come up in conversations about changing writing pedagogies. These responses gave me an early sense of the language ideologies that would shape faculty members' uptake—however partial—of multimodality throughout the Fellowship.

From here, I describe the Writing@UW Fellowship and explain how I approached the project as a participant-observer and Fellowship co-facilitator, and I examine how disciplinary faculty engaged with or resisted a critical multimodal literacies approach in their teaching. I also provide a brief overview of the scholarship that I draw together to inform a critical multimodal literacies approach to writing

pedagogies, which I detail in Chapter 2, but I wanted to include here to help ground the way I approached the Writing@UW Fellowship and make clear what I am examining in my dissertation and attended to through my participation in the Fellowship. I then walk through the research site and explain the specific methods I used along the way to collect and analyze data. Then, I explain how and why intersectional, feminist, and participatory frameworks shaped how I approached this research, especially in terms of how I thought about power, positionality, and collaborative knowledge-making. The chapter ends with an overview of the dissertation.

The Writing@UW Fellowship and a Critical Multimodal Literacies Pedagogical Approach

To help situate the Writing@UW Fellowship, I begin with a brief overview of the writing program, Writing@UW, at the University of Washington Seattle (UWS), where the Fellowship took place. In 2018, the university created a Writing Task Force with a mandate to rethink how writing was being taught across campus. The Task Force developed a set of Writing Principles and recommended the creation of a centralized initiative—Writing@UW—as well as a new faculty position, the Director of Writing, to support the broader writing ecology at UWS. This role was designed to coordinate campus-wide writing efforts that extend beyond the university's "C" requirement, a general education requirement that all undergraduates complete at least one course designated as "Composition." These courses—often taken in a student's first year through UWS's Program in Writing and Rhetoric—introduce students to academic writing as a space for inquiry, reflection, and rhetorical awareness, and they are grounded in critical composition pedagogies that work to create antiracist and inclusive academic writing spaces ("Statement"). These pedagogical commitments are outlined in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric's (PWR) "Statement on Antiracist Writing Pedagogy and Program Praxis," which frames the teaching of writing as "social action and ethical communication," and acknowledges that "literacy education and language policies in the U.S. are built on a foundation of racial capitalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism that persists and has delegitimized and often penalized the language practices, experiences, and knowledges of minoritized and historically underrepresented peoples." To meet these goals, PWR

seeks to develop "writing curriculum, assessment practices, teacher development programs, and language policies that recognize linguistic and other differences as the norm of communication" to support a campus-wide ecology that treats writing as "a socio-political practice that helps students and instructors examine how writing might be practiced as personally and socially impactful, ethical, and empowering forms of literacy" ("Statement"). These "C" courses incorporate multimodal composition as one way to center these attunements to rhetorical difference, linguistic justice, and writing as a socio-political practice. Much research has been dedicated to multimodality in these types of composition spaces designed for first-year students, yet it is often taken up in ways that focus on tools or genres rather than deeper questions of equity or social and linguistic justice (Arola and Wysocki; Fodrey; Cope et al.; Shipka).

At UWS, students are also required to complete "Writing" or "W" credits before they graduate; these courses are designed to help students "get experience with the different modes of communication particular to a given discipline, whether that is your major discipline or another field that interests you. Although you do not have to fulfill all of your W credits within your major, we recommend finding W courses that speak to your interests" ("Communicating"). Before the Writing Task Force offered formal guidance and clarified expectations for these courses, "W" credits were inconsistently defined and applied—individual instructors could assign "W" credit without shared guidelines or oversight. Part of Writing@UW's mission was to support and inform the teaching of "W" courses, which are often writing courses offered by the university's Program in Writing Across the Curriculum (PWAC), in 200- or 300-level courses in PWR and by faculty teaching writing in the disciplines. These courses are often taught by faculty outside of composition studies, where writing studies scholars have shown that writing instruction is frequently assumed rather than explicitly taught, treated as a general skill students should already possess (Beaufort; Fodrey and Mikovits). That assumption can make it difficult to implement more critical, multimodal, or justice-oriented approaches to writing (Fodrey). While scholars like Crystal Fodrey explore how multimodal frameworks might affect the future of WAC—particularly through work on transfer and sustainable faculty development—there remains limited research on how these

frameworks are taken up or resisted in WAC/WID settings like the UWS's "W" credit. My dissertation addresses this gap by studying how disciplinary faculty in these spaces engage with, challenge, and navigate critical multimodal approaches to their classroom practices. From this research, I join an emerging group of scholars in composition studies who bring together multimodality, equity, and translingualism to forward racial and linguistic justice in writing pedagogies (Gonzales; Lee and Carpenter; Sánchez-Martin). In Chapter 2, I expand on the conversations I draw from and bring them together in a *critical multimodal literacies framework*. For now, I offer a brief overview of that framework to situate this study and make visible the scholarly conversations I am entering and hope to contribute to.

Conversations in multimodality, translingualism and language advocacy, racial justice, equity, and inclusion form the foundation for this framework, help situate the stakes of this project, and are brought together in the following table overview. In the table, the "Key Concerns" column draws from widely cited scholarship in each tradition. The "Core Questions" are how I understand the central inquiries and key words that emerge from each approach, as well as how the approach has shaped the development of a critical multimodal literacies framework. For example, multimodality asks us to take a broader view of writing, one that recognizes how all communication draws on multiple modes, from the visual and sonic to the spatial and gestural. After the table, I briefly explain how each of these conversations inform a critical multimodal framework.

Critical Multimodal Approach: At the Intersection of Approaches, Concerns, Questions		
Approach	**Key Concerns**	**Core Questions**
Multimodality/ Multimodal Composition	Emphasizes composing with and across multiple modes (visual, spatial, sonic, embodied); rhetorical awareness and transfer across genres, models, contexts, and audiences; risk of tool-based uptake divorced from equity concerns (Arola and Wysocki, Selfe, Shipka, Palmeri)	How do students compose meaningfully across multiple modes? How do modes come together to creating meaning? What modes should be taught and why? What counts as writing in the classroom? How do instructors evaluate multimodal work?
Translingualism & Language Advocacy	Sees language as dynamic, fluid, and always in motion; emphasizes the negotiation of meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries, power, and difference; values students' full linguistic repertoires; promotes rhetorical flexibility and multilingual competence as assets rather than deficits; critiques and calls to question monolingual language ideology (Bou Ayash, Canagarajah, Horner, Lu and Horner).	Whose language practices are valued in academic spaces? How do instructors support rhetorical flexibility without reinforcing linguistic hierarchies or flattening difference, power, and inequity in language use?
Racial Justice	Focus on structural change to writing instruction and assessment to promote racial justice and culturally sustaining approaches to language and pedagogies; critique of white language supremacy and racialized classroom norms (Baker-Bell, Kynard, Young)	How does writing instruction reproduce or resist racial hierarchies? What institutional and classroom practices uphold whiteness as a norm? How can assessment be restructured to support racial justice?
Equity and Inclusion	Inclusive pedagogy; recognizing and addressing structural barriers for marginalized students (Ahmed, Selfe, Gonzales); attention to issues of accessibility (Dolmage, etc.)	How do faculty attempt to design for inclusion? What assumptions about ability, legitimacy, or normativity surface in their practices or hesitations?

Scholars like the New London Group, Jody Shipka, Kristin Arola and Anne Wysocki, and Jason Palmeri have shown how a multimodal perspective challenges dominant understandings of literacy and opens space for more flexible, audience-aware composing practices. When multimodal assignments are used without attention to equity or linguistic justice, though, they can end up reinforcing the very norms they are meant to disrupt. Formats like podcasts, videos, or digital essays may seem innovative, but when they are assigned only for the sake of variety or out of the assumption that students already know how to use and make them, they risk becoming surface-level substitutions or add-ons; that is, without a deeper

interrogation of who is recognized as a legitimate writer and how power shapes that recognition, such assignments may leave dominant expectations of writing intact. Crucially, it is not only multimodal assignments that must be examined in this way. All writing tasks must be interrogated for how they construct legitimacy: who is recognized as a competent writer, what norms are reinforced, which audiences matter, and whose communicative practices and knowledges are valued or excluded. Without that deeper questioning, dominant expectations of "real" writing—such as neatly typed, error-free paragraphs in standardized academic English—can persist unchallenged, along with the racialized and colonial histories that have long devalued students' multimodal and multilingual ways of making meaning.

Translingual approaches ask us to see language not as a static system but as something people do; something shaped by relationships, histories, and power. Scholars such as Suresh Canagarajah, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Nancy Bou Ayash describe language as always in motion, always negotiated, and always tied to its context. What counts as "clear" or "correct" in one space might not in another, and translingualism urges instructors to treat language difference not as a problem to fix but as an asset, a resource students already know how to use. Faculty members in the Writing@UW Fellowship often talked about honoring student language practices while also adhering to disciplinary norms, discussions that reflect what Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge describe as "transmodal dispositions." These scholars argue that language and modality are never neutral but are shaped by institutional norms, material constraints, and histories of exclusion. Bou Ayash likewise pushes us to recognize the geopolitical dimensions of language and to challenge the dominance of Western, monolingual ideologies in how we teach writing. I'll go into more detail in the next chapter, but briefly, I view critical multimodality as a way o extend translingualism's commitments, to carry forward its attention to power and difference, but also to expand the range of communicative tools students are permitted to use. To be serious about valuing difference means that we have to invite meaning-making through sound, image, gesture, space—through whatever modes students use to express complex ideas in complex contexts. Antiracist pedagogies have reshaped writing instruction by centering race and calling attention to how white supremacy operates through

definitions of good writing, as well as how culturally sustaining pedagogies can be cultivated to support students' diverse linguistic and cultural knowledges. Scholars like April Baker-Bell, Carmen Kynard, and Vershawn Ashanti Young call on educators to confront how classroom practices can reproduce anti-Blackness and uphold dominant racial ideologies. Their work reframes writing classrooms as spaces where racial justice must be actively pursued, not only through what is taught but through how students are invited to participate. Building on their calls for justice-oriented practice, I argue that pedagogies grounded in racial justice can be further strengthened by attending to modes—not just what students write but how and why they communicate and for whom. A critical multimodal approach extends the work of Baker-Bell, Kynard, and Young by pushing us to value those resources as part of what it means to teach for racial justice. Equity-focused scholarship has shown that inclusive pedagogy requires rethinking not only what we teach but also how learning happens—and how participation is structured. Scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Laura Gonzales, and Cynthia Selfe push us to recognize that inclusive spaces are never just about adding accommodations; instead, they ask us to confront the assumptions that underpin our definitions of ability, legitimacy, and participation in academic spaces. This work invites educators to design for inclusion from the start, not as a checklist, but as a deep reconsideration of how form shapes inclusion. A critical multimodal approach takes up this invitation by asking what becomes possible when students are encouraged to draw on multiple modes of communication, not just to support inclusion but to reimagine the terms of engagement altogether. Working at the intersection of these conversations—on translingualism, racial justice, equity, inclusion, and multimodality in WAC/WID—I forward a critical multimodal approach to literacies that draws from and builds on these conversations by asking us to be intentional about the modes we privilege, the assumptions we make about form, and the conditions we create for students to express meaning. This approach begins with the understanding that language and communication are always shaped by power and that our teaching practices, especially the kinds of writing we assign, how we assess it, and what we count as valid, can either sustain dominant hierarchies or contribute to new realms of possibility and inclusion. A critical multimodal approach resists the separation of form and content; it takes up translingualism's call to see language as negotiated and

relational, antiracist pedagogy's demand to center race and justice in how we define writing, and inclusion scholarship's insistence that inclusion begins at the level of design. In doing so, it reframes writing as multimodal, translingual, and contingent—always situated within broader structures of power and possibility. By expanding students' rhetorical agency across modes, this framework aims to cultivate writing pedagogies that are more just, more expansive, and more attuned to the full range of how students know, express, and participate. My dissertation aims to explore this framework specifically in WAC/WID contexts, where we see less research and scholarship that can help us understand how multimodal literacies are taken up and integrated into writing spaces across the disciplines. Research has shown that faculty members in WAC/WID programs have not yet developed composition pedagogies or do not have a scholarly background in writing studies may struggle to access their unconscious knowledge of composition (Anson; Beaufort). This can lead to a reliance on generic, alphabetic, text-based writing practices (Allan) and little engagement with multimodality—especially with genres and modes that fall outside faculty members' disciplinary comfort zones (Fodrey & Mikovits). Scholars working in WAC/WID contexts have emphasized the importance of teaching the rhetorical and communicative functions of different modes of expression, as well as the need for faculty to support students in composing multimodally in ways that reflect real-world and disciplinary contexts (Blakeslee; Chen; Fodrey; Hall and Horner; Hall and Navarro). I see my dissertation as a response to the need for a deeper understanding of how faculty in the disciplines engage with critical multimodal literacies. By learning from their experiences, I clarify how this framework can be more effectively communicated in WAC/WID contexts and how it might support language advocacy and equity-oriented teaching. This study explores how instructors take up, resist, or reshape critical multimodal approaches—and what their experiences reveal about the barriers and possibilities for more than just writing instruction. Ultimately, I hope these insights will guide my ongoing work in building writing spaces that are equitable and grounded in racial and linguistic justice.

Studying Change: Writing@UW Fellowship as Site and Method

In the following two sections, I've integrated my discussion of research methods with the context of the Writing@UW Fellowship. This choice reflects my methodological stance and an encountered research struggle: in a collaborative, participatory project, the site, participants, and research methods were difficult for me to meaningfully separate from one another. In other words, I found that my methods—the observations, interviews, surveys, and collaborative activities—were shaped in real-time through my role as a co-facilitator and participant observer. I turn to discussing methodology only after establishing this context and process because placing it later in this chapter helped me reflect more fully on the feminist, intersectional, participatory, and rhetorical listening frameworks that guided how I understood the research as inquiry into power, relationality, and pedagogical change.

The origins of my involvement with the University of Washington Seattle's Writing@UW Fellowship as a co-facilitator and researcher can be traced back to a meeting I had with Director of Writing, Megan Callow, at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic school year. At the time, I was searching for a research site where I could explore my interest in critical multimodality in disciplinary writing courses. I emailed Megan, asking for an opportunity to talk about my research. As I walked to her office, I had hoped she might help connect me with faculty members from any discipline outside of composition studies who 1) integrate non-traditional writing assignments into their courses, and 2) might be willing to talk with me about how and why. I had taught Composition ("C") courses at the University of Washington Seattle, which I described above, for several years, and so I knew how that program intentionally incorporated criticality and multimodality to help students build the critical literacies needed to navigate academic, social, and public contexts. But I was curious how faculty outside writing studies defined writing, thought about its relationship to power, and saw (or didn't see) the potential of multimodal composition to foster more equitable classrooms. From my experience working with faculty globally and from scholarship on WAC/WID and multimodality (Anson; Fodrey; Fodrey and Mikovits), I also knew that multimodal approaches are often missing from disciplinary writing instruction. When I walked into Megan's office that day, I had no idea she was developing the Writing@UW Fellowship—a new initiative to build a community of practice among disciplinary faculty interested in strengthening

their writing instruction. When Megan and I first discussed the Writing@UW Fellowship, I was immediately drawn to the opportunity to learn alongside faculty from a range of disciplines who were grappling with questions about their writing pedagogies. As we talked through my research interests, Megan and I agreed that the Fellowship offered an ideal context to explore them, and so I began designing a mixed-methods study to examine how faculty take up multimodal composition in support of their goals related to equity, inclusion, racial justice, and linguistic justice. Through observations, interviews, surveys, fieldnotes, and artifact collection, I explored how these commitments were expressed, negotiated, and sometimes constrained in disciplinary teaching contexts. My study took place during the pilot year of the Writing@UW Faculty Fellowship, which was held during the 2023-2024 academic year, and my project received IRB-exempt status before the planning of the Fellowship began. The Fellowship ran over two academic quarters, from early January to mid-June 2024, and was designed for disciplinary faculty members to gather, discuss their writing pedagogies, and create a pedagogical intervention for their courses.[1] Megan and I designed the Fellowship to meet for two hours every other Friday, totaling nine sessions. My data collection process began months prior, in October 2023, right after agreeing to join the Fellowship as a co-facilitator and researcher. We then began meeting weekly to plan the Fellowship sessions. From the beginning, we understood my role not as an outside evaluator or uninvolved spectator but as a participant observer and co-facilitator embedded in the day-to-day work of the program. We worked together to plan and lead each of the workshops, and I often drew on my background in composition studies to suggest readings and shape discussion questions around multimodality, equity, and critical pedagogy. Throughout the process of brainstorming, discussing, and planning the Fellowship, I took fieldnotes that helped me track the ways in which we were thinking through issues of linguistic justice, institutional norms, equity, and multimodality.

[1] The project/intervention aspect of the Fellowship is detailed in the Writing@UW Fellowship Application, which is in Appendix 1.

In November 2023, Megan and I circulated the application form[2] for the Writing@UW Faculty Fellowship and selected seven Fellows to participate. After the cohort was confirmed, I contacted each faculty member individually to introduce myself, explain my research project, and request their informed consent. All seven Fellows agreed to participate and returned the signed consent form via email. I assigned each participant a pseudonym, which are in the following table, along with their discipline/field:

Pseudonym	Discipline / Field
Alice	Environmental Studies
Amina	Anthropology
Eleanor	Music History
Gillian	Astronomy
Nick	Mechanical Engineering
Nora	English Literature
SJ	Communication

After receiving their consent, I drew from my interview protocols[3] to create an intake survey[4] that I sent to each participant and asked them to complete before our first session. I reminded them that they could opt out of the study at any time without affecting their participation in the Fellowship. The intake survey responses offered insight into how participants initially conceptualized writing in their disciplines and served as both a baseline for understanding each participant's teaching context and as an early point of comparison for analyzing any shifts that might occur during the Fellowship. For example, on the survey, I asked Fellows to define "good writing," which connected to my research questions by revealing how faculty initially framed writing in relation to disciplinary conventions, equity, and modality—before encountering the concepts explored in the Fellowship. For reference, I've included a table that included these two key questions from my intake survey for each of the Fellows. I draw on these responses in my analysis in later chapters, but I include them here to provide context for understanding how their

[2] The application form Megan and I wrote for the Writing@UW Fellowship is available in Appendix 1.
[3] My interview protocols are available in Appendix 2.
[4] The full intake survey is available in Appendix 3.

perspectives shifted over the course of the Fellowship. This also can help illustrate the varied incomes faculty members brought with them into this work, and it foregrounds whose motivations were explicitly equity-driven from the start, an approach to teaching that affected my interpretive lens throughout the study.

Fellow	In your experience, is there a prevailing definition of "good writing" in your discipline? Does this definition differ from other definitions of "good writing" that you have seen in other disciplines or contexts?	What goals do you have for students in your course(s)?
Alice	I don't think there is a difference. For me, good writing is clear, evidence-based, coherent, and presents original ideas.	Understand the domain knowledge; Professional communications (both in writing and in oral presentations); Broaden their viewpoints of the multiple dimensions of environmental issues; Train students to have skills to integrate sources of information from different disciplines
Amina[5]	n/a	n/a
Eleanor	I'm not sure there's a clear consensus. Some people feel that it is clear and conversational, others clear and beautiful, others still like a really ornate style. There's probably more space to value tangents or beautiful turns of phrases than in most science disciplines. I guess one interesting thing in musicology is that we value both prose styles that are rooted in first-person language and conversation and prose styles that look more like third-person novels or popular history.	For my two current W courses: Write about music in a variety of styles Read critically different types of writing about music Analyze the role that music plays in your life and communities, [and] Recognize important musical styles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Hold a discussion about our weekly themes with an expert (some themes: the middle class, pianos, and gender; nationalism and exoticism; music and multimedia; funding music) Read an academic paper in music history Research a topic in music history and write a paper about that topic.
Gillian	I don't actually think we have a well-agreed-upon definition for "good writing!" I do think everyone would agree that clarity is the most important, but clarity is very often audience-dependent: clearly describing the physics of a stellar interior looks very different depending on whether you're writing to an expert colleague, a new PhD student, or a ten-year-old asking a question at a public talk. I believe "good writing" in astronomy, and the sciences in general, is able to be clear and detailed for whatever audience it's aimed for, and gauging the appropriate audience and detail level is a key skill as a result.	In my writing courses I want students to finish with 1) improved/strong writing skills across a variety of different writing types in my field (the precise goal here depends on where the students start), and 2) the confidence to use them and be less intimidated by writing going forward.

[5] While Amina did grant consent to participate in my research study, she did not complete the intake survey.

Nick	Good writing in engineering is clear, concise and communicates any major scientific points. Great writing shows a deeper insight into the significance of the work being shown.	In my W course, I have students write a technical report based on experiments they are conducting in a lab environment with the goal of learning how these reports are structured and to think more critically about the materials they are testing. In other classes, I have students write literature reviews on current research topics to understand how they may utilize new developments in the field.
Nora	I see a few prevailing definitions, that are not necessarily aligned. Professional good writing in my discipline may be defined as (variously) writing that displays outstanding scholarship, original conceptualisation or theorisation, intellectual risk-taking, rigorous analysis and argumentation, persuasive interpretation of primary materials, lucid and accessible prose. I have seen scientific and social-scientific professional (published) writing that to my outside eyes appears to be more descriptive than analytic, to be written in sentences and paragraphs that lack focus, concision, and are written with passive voice. Presumably it is considered good writing because it has been published by reputable academic presses?	Knowledge of how to analyse literary texts; critical thinking ; ability to follow instructions; ability to pursue active learning and independent enquiry; confidence in ability to communicate ideas, knowledge and understanding effectively in writing; self-awareness and capacity for self-reflection about their own processes of meaning making; knowledge about literature's ability to mediate social, economic and political issues; understanding of the ways in which literary expression can empower writers.
SJ	I often hear the rule of 15% different, 85% the same, which translates to 85% of the writing should be familiar to what is published already (in tone, writing format/layout/conventions, and ways of thinking), and only 15% or less should be "new" such as new ideas or new ways of expressing the science or theory being done. So "good" would be the same old thing as before, but maybe with a little more pepper or something like a zest of lemon. In my own world, good writing is writing that is approachable such that people who are reading it can identify there is an argument, identify there is evidence, and understand why this is being positioned in the first place. I typically resort to the "breadcrumb" rule - did the author leave enough bread crumbs for their readers to chart their path? In other words, perhaps I don't need that map, but if I did, it would be available.	I don't want students to be afraid or anxious about writing. I want to work against this stigma that writing is torture. I understand that it's challenging, but I really don't think it's torture in the 'body in pain' way. I don't think it has to be and I'm not sure I'm comfortable telling students that they better push through the pain. I'm being informal here, but I try to hold true to Audre Lorde's 'teacher as human' approach. Anyhow, translated, the goals are in buckets of conventional skills (e.g., writing conventions for example), topic level goals (e.g., certain concepts/ application of concepts), and then contribution goals (e.g., what do students do with this? how do we make what's learned something lived and breathed versus passive information that's left at the door). If you'd like specific examples of goals I'm happy to provide.

Most Fellows described goals related to student writing skills, critical thinking, and engagement with course content, and none explicitly mentioned student equity or diversity as a key motivation for applying to the Fellowship. This affected how I approached the study, prompting me to track how faculty conceptualizations of writing and modality evolved throughout the program.

Megan and I met every week to talk about each of the sessions' specific topic, structure, and agenda. We then curated a list of key themes and ideas that we wanted to cover in the Fellowship sessions.[6] We chose two anchor readings for each session, curating the selections to support Fellows' understanding of current scholarship in writing studies. In general, we sought materials that would not only ground our sessions in established composition theories but also provide specific and tangible support for faculty members as they considered more inclusive and equitable approaches to their classroom. John Bean and Dan Melzer's *Engaging Ideas* spoke to our goals for the Fellowship so clearly that we decided that each session would include one chapter from it as a required reading. To complement each Bean and Melzer chapter, we selected an additional required reading likewise centered on the session's theme. These included works such as Rick Wysocki et al.'s manifesto on multimodality and Adrienne Jankens et al.'s work on antiracist writing. Each session also had several recommended, but not required, readings, such as April Baker-Bell et. al.'s work on Black linguistic justice and Jody Shipka's work with multimodal composition. We knew we needed to limit the required readings to a feasible workload for Fellows, but we felt compelled to suggest additional texts that we loved and found particularly valuable. Session topics are listed in the following table, but included rethinking assignment design, confronting assumptions about academic English, understanding multimodal literacies, facilitating peer review and feedback strategies, and adopting inclusive assessment practices. Brief explanations are provided for each session in the following table, and Appendix 4 has further detail on the Fellowship syllabus, agenda, and reading list for each meeting.

Session	Topic	Key Talking Points
1	Alphabet Soup: Navigating W and C Ecologies at UW	● Introductions & goals ● Overview of the "C," "W," and other writing at UWS with guest speaker Stephanie Kerschbaum (Professor of English and Director, Program in Writing & Rhetoric) ● Writing to learn vs. writing to engage vs. writing in the disciplines ● Relationships between writing and disciplinary knowledge

[6] The Fellowship syllabus, which details all assigned readings and session topics, is in Appendix 4.

2	Write to Ignite: Writing for Learning and Engagement	● Using writing to foster learning, engagement, and critical thinking ● Designing and scaffolding assignment sequences
3	Beyond the Written Word: The Many Faces and Forms of "Formal" Writing	● Thinking about "high-stakes" writing assignments that matter to your field, to your course, and to your students ● Introduction to multimodality
4	Writing and Difference: Teaching Toward Justice	● Discussion with Maya Smith (Professor of French and Associate Dean for Equity, Justice, and Inclusion) ● Share-out of project descriptions ● Offer suggestions for formative questions to ask
5	Assessment Reimagined: Equity at the Heart of Evaluation	● Discuss spring plans ● Project check-in ● Roll-a-question: We'll roll dice to decide our discussion topic. Our topic will be pulled from a list of reading-response questions
6	Building Rubrics / Equitable Assessment Techniques	• Assessment, equity in assessment, alternative assessment frameworks, assessing multimodal projects • Rhetorical / criteria-driven feedback • Responding to student writing effectively and efficiently • Alternative feedforward methods • Supporting TAs in responding to student writing
7	Thinking Across Modes, Thinking Across Languages	• Multilingual students • Multimodal approaches • Case studies
8	Freedom Writing Workshop led by Professor Rachel Chapman	• Exploring writing as a practice of healing, liberation, and resistance • Centering embodiment, emotion, and community in pedagogical work • Reflecting on the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning • Reimagining academic spaces as sites of connection and care
9	Project Sharing Session	• Fellows share their final projects

Once the Fellowship began, I started to collect other data streams. Specifically, data sources included 20 transcripts (six two-hour-long Fellowship sessions and 14 interviews); 18 surveys; materials faculty created during the sessions such as posters, reader response discussion cards, and similar; faculty members' written annotations on pre-session readings; faculty members' course materials such as syllabi

from before and after the Fellowship; faculty members' assignment prompts from before and after the Fellowship, and fieldnotes from each session, interview, and planning meeting. Sessions typically began with a brief group check-in, followed by a guided discussion of a shared reading. Fellows were asked to read two key texts before each session and annotate them using the commenting features in shared Google Drive. For my analysis, I drew on these annotations throughout the Fellowship to show how Fellows' engagement with the readings were changing—not just by identifying key concepts but by making visible the tensions between their pedagogical orientations and institutional constraints. For example, we asked Fellows to read Rick Wysocki et al.'s "On Multimodality: A Manifesto," and in one annotation thread, Megan posed a question about modes of representation beyond language. Eleanor, a music faculty member, replied that her students compose through music and dance, "though those are mostly given in theory courses," she noted. Then she added, "Don't know how I'd assign that, but we certainly do it in class." That annotation captures a recurring theme throughout the Fellowship: Fellows, in discussions or one-to-one interviews, often described classroom activities or student work that I recognized as multimodal, inclusive, and intellectually rich—but they struggled to articulate how to assess it and therefore hesitated to treat it as legitimate. Annotations like these offered an early window into the kinds of pedagogical negotiations faculty were already making—and the institutional logics they were pushing up against, even before they had the language to name them. These questions often carried directly into the next part of each session, where Fellows worked through their own materials and collaborated with others to unpack what these theories might mean in practice.

After a discussion of the readings, most sessions asked Fellows to then transition into a hands-on activity or assignment analysis, often in pairs or small groups. As a co-facilitator, I helped guide discussions and contributed to activities while also taking detailed fieldnotes during each session. I captured observational data on participant engagement, emergent tensions or questions, and the evolving language faculty members used to describe their pedagogical goals. In addition to fieldnotes and recordings, I collected the materials Fellows generated during these sessions, including visual maps of course goals, annotated prompts, revised outcomes, discussion cards, and reflective writing. These

artifacts provided another window into how Fellows were thinking through equity, modality, and disciplinary writing in real time.

A few weeks into the Fellowship, Megan and I met with each Fellow to conduct an hour-long, semi-structured interview focused on their evolving Fellowship project. While these interviews were not directly centered on multimodality, I still sought each Fellow's consent to record and transcribe the interview because it provided valuable insight into each Fellow's disciplinary knowledge and approaches to teaching writing. During the interview, Megan asked Fellows to describe their course, what kinds of challenges their students faced, and how they approached writing in their course. As they spoke, I took notes and wrote in my research journal any ideas that came up that I might follow up on later in the conversation. Overall, listening to these conversations helped me understand how disciplinary norms and ways of knowing shaped each Fellows' pedagogical decisions as well as how they interpreted the goals of the Fellowship. Then, near the end of the Fellowship, Megan and I held virtual meetings with each faculty fellow for a wrap-up interview, which I recorded and later transcribed. We started each informal interview with a 30-minute conversation we co-facilitated, asking Fellows to reflect on their experience in the program. After that portion of the interview, Megan left the Zoom call, and I continued talking with each Fellow in an interview focused on my research questions, which typically lasted about 45 minutes. I asked how their thinking about writing and multimodality had shifted (if at all), what challenges they encountered (if any), and how they envisioned any ideas from our sessions on multimodality showing up in their future teaching. I used my IRB-reviewed list of interview questions[7] to structure my conversations with each Fellow, but I only used questions pertinent for each Fellow. With Nora, for example, a professor of English literature, we discussed how multimodality can support close reading and literary interpretation. I asked her, "In the English department, are there tensions between maintaining these traditional elements and the aims of creating a more equitable literary and media landscape? That is, how does the replication of genre, discourse, reading practices, audience curtail, fit into, create tension with

[7] My list of IRB-reviewed interview questions is available in Appendix 2.

equity goals?" With Gillian, who teaches technical writing courses in astronomy, we discussed genre conventions, documentation practices, and how multimodal work might impact disciplinary norms in STEM. One of the questions I asked her was, "In our workshops, we talked about multimodal composition several times, especially how we can redefine writing as being inherently multimodal. How did those activities and conversations affect how you think about writing? What surprised you or piqued your interest about the potential applications of multimodal composition in your course or in your field?" When I interviewed Nick from mechanical engineering, I asked, "In the workshops, we talked about multimodality and equity – which I call critical multimodal literacies. How have those conversations and workshop activities inspired your work toward racial or linguistic justice in your classroom or in the mechanical engineering department as a whole? How do equity issues matter in the work you and your students do? In the mechanical engineering department, what opportunities do you see for work to be done in these areas? What challenges exist?" These interviews provided me with insight into how faculty members were adopting the ideas we explored in the Fellowship, where they encountered resistance, and how those responses offered valuable insight about the ways disciplinary expectations, institutional pressures, and personal commitments influenced each participant's engagement with critical multimodality.

In addition to writing fieldnotes, speaking and writing reflective memos, and recording and transcribing sessions and interviews, I collected a range of artifacts, including teaching materials Fellows created during sessions, such as visual maps of course goals, pre- and post-Fellowship syllabi and assignment prompts, and pre-discussion reading annotations. I analyzed these materials in tandem with interview transcripts and fieldnotes to trace how Fellows' pedagogical choices evolved and how those shifts aligned with a critical multimodal approach. In several cases, which I detail in Chapter 4, I found that Fellows revised assignments to better reflect student agency better, shift from rigid genre constraints, or include multimodal options. For instance, Nora, a faculty member from the English department, expressed a fundamental shift in her understanding of writing by the end of the Fellowship. In her pre-Fellowship survey, Nora wrote,

> I continue to assign traditional academic writing assignments mainly to cater to graduate school admissions policies (that favour traditional writing submissions). I assign low-stakes and right-brain/creative writing assignments because I believe they are effective and empowering learning tools for students and because I have received advice on how to implement them. If I were to receive instruction/templates on how to introduce Online writing and compositions, analogue visual compositions, audio compositions and videos, and felt that they could be assigned in a way that did not involve a great deal of additional time and labor on my part, then I would gladly incorporate them.

In her post-Fellowship reflection, though, she wrote:

> I think I'll spend several weeks starting the class unlearning. Let's take the traditional analytic essay; it has zero emancipatory potential. All it can do is reward students who already know how to go through these hoops and that it doesn't really demonstrate a form of knowledge or learning in which the students make that material their own. It's not real engagement. It's just acrobatics.

Before the Fellowship, Nora framed her pedagogy as a strategic negotiation in which she balanced institutional pressures with practices she felt prepared to support. Afterward, she began to question the very legitimacy and purpose of traditional academic genres, seeing the analytic essay not as a neutral demonstration of learning but as a barrier to authentic engagement that privileges already-advantaged students. Nora's was a singular case in the Fellowship, though as more often than not Fellows demonstrated a partial uptake of critical multimodal pedagogies or a resistance to adopting multimodality in their courses at all, which I detail in "Chapter 3: Challenge, Resistance, and Negotiation of a Critical Multimodal Literacies Approach in Disciplinary Writing Pedagogies."

Once all my data were collected, I used Atlas.ti to organize and code my data, employing a round of open coding to identify broad ideas related to equity, multimodality, language ideologies, and disciplinary values. This initial pass helped me surface patterns and moments that warranted deeper analysis. I then printed hard copies of key transcripts with expanded margins to support a more layered second round of coding. In the left margin, I used Values Coding, drawing on Johnny Saldaña's definition of this method as capturing participants' "values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing [their] perspectives or

worldview" (110). In the right margin, I applied Versus Codes, or what Saldaña says, "identify in dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organization, phenomena, processes, concepts, etc. in direct conflict with each other" (115). This dual approach, which I learned about from an example in Saldaña's book, helped me identify how moments of ambivalence, resistance, or transformation emerged in dialogue and allowed me to track how participants navigated complex and sometimes contradictory institutional, disciplinary, and personal expectations.

As an example of how I used my coding methods, I'll turn to a conversation that happened during one of our Fellowship meetings involving Nick, a faculty member in mechanical engineering. The Fellows had started discussing the conventions their students "needed to learn" to be successful in their fields and disciplines (something I discuss further in Chapters 3 and 4). Nick joined this conversation by talking about bridges: how engineers write about them, how that writing conveys facts, and how the ways engineers write about them have been molded by histories of white ways of knowing. He described his deep admiration for bridges in the Amazon that are formed by weaving tree roots together over decades—a living, dynamic structure that seems to defy conventional engineering principles. When asked whether he asks students to write about or learn about Amazonian natural bridges, he responded with hesitation: "No, but I don't know how. I don't know how to incorporate it into the way that we understand Western engineering. It's this dynamic and complex system," he continued, that doesn't conform to with "our emphasis on straight lines and well-defined structures." To code this in my research journal, I used Values Coding in the left column of my printout, noting how Nick expressed disciplinary values such as precision, structure, efficiency, and technical legitimacy that, for him, functioned as both guiding principles and limitations. His hesitation when he said, "I don't know how," revealed a tension shaped by his disciplinary training and the professional expectations of his field. In the right margin of my printout, I used Versus Coding to mark the tension that Nick was pointing to, the tension between Western engineering paradigms and non-Western knowledge systems. This moment, for me, pointed to a conflict between what counts as legitimate engineering (quantifiable, replicable) and alternative forms of knowledge that are relational and non-linear. The tension wasn't merely epistemological but also

pedagogical—Nick admired these bridges in the Amazon and was curious about how to talk about them in his classes, but he also felt bound by the frameworks he was expected to teach within. These types of moments, in which values and tensions coexisted in complex ways, arose frequently throughout my data collection and helped me trace how participants weren't simply resisting or accepting multimodal or equity-based approaches but actively grappling with how to reconcile them with the norms and expectations of their disciplines. Thus, my coding practices functioned as both analytical and generative tools throughout this study; they helped me identify not only patterns across the data, which I explore further in Chapters 3 and 4, but also moments of tension, contradiction, and gradual shift in how faculty members conceptualized their teaching. Values Coding allowed me to track how participants' pedagogical commitments sometimes aligned with, but often ran counter to, equity-oriented goals. Versus Coding helped me attend to the discursive push and pull between disciplinary expectations and emerging pedagogical experimentation. It brought to light moments of uncertainty, ambivalence, or resistance, especially when faculty were working through inherited assumptions about writing and meaning-making. These coding practices shaped the thematic throughlines of my dissertation, making it possible for me to group responses in ways that reflected both shared concerns and disciplinary differences across the Fellowship.

Methodological Foundations

This study is grounded in a qualitative methodological framework shaped by feminist, intersectional, and participatory research traditions. These approaches center power, relationality, and social transformation as key concerns. Participatory action research, in particular, pushes back on extractive models of data collection by engaging participants as collaborators in knowledge-making (Cahill; Fine and Torre). Rather than treat faculty members as passive subjects of study, I saw them as co-inquirers, working alongside me to rethink writing instruction in their courses and, in some cases, their disciplines. My goal wasn't just to understand how faculty were approaching writing or critical multimodality. As a facilitator, I also wanted to create space for reflection, to invite participants to pause

and consider their own practices, even if that reflective work wasn't always directly tied to my research questions. It felt essential to the kind of research I aim to practice and true to how I understand my role in collaborative, justice-oriented inquiry.

I frame my approach as an integrated methodology grounded in feminist and intersectional theory, participatory research traditions, and rhetorical listening. This stance is not simply a set of values but a guiding framework that shaped how I entered the research space, how I interacted with participants, how I interpreted data, and how I framed this study as an inquiry into pedagogical possibility. Rather than applying each framework discretely, I use them in concert to interrogate the conditions under which pedagogical change becomes legible, ethical, and possible. In the table that follows, I briefly outline the frameworks that most closely connect with and align with my research philosophy, and summarize how each has shaped the structure and analysis of this project.

Framework	Key Principles	How It Shaped Research Design	How It Shaped Analysis & Interpretation
Feminist Research	Power, relationality, reflexivity, situated knowledge (hooks; Collins; Braun and Clarke; Rose and Weiser)	Centered participant voice and identity; designed workshops as collaborative, relational spaces (hooks; Freire)	Reflexivity-guided memoing and fieldnotes; researcher subjectivity treated as analytic resource rather than bias (Pillow; Ratcliffe)
Intersectionality	Attention to overlapping systems of power and identity across race, class, gender, and institution (Crenshaw; Gasdaglis and Madva)	Informed interviews and survey design to surface how structural constraints and social location shape writing pedagogy	Used as a lens to interpret faculty's layered commitments and tensions between equity and disciplinary norms (Crenshaw; Collins)
Participatory Action Research	Shared authority, collaboration, co-learning, resistance to extractivism, reflexive praxis (Cahill; Fine and Torre)	Framed faculty as co-inquirers; workshop planning emphasized responsiveness and distributed expertise (Fine and Torre)	Moments of uptake, resistance, and struggle were treated not as data gaps but as co-constructed meaning (Cahill; Braun and Clarke)

Rhetorical Listening	Understanding across difference, non-identification, accountability in interpretation, open to changing ideas about writing and research questions as a result of listening and learning from others (Ratcliffe)	Structured interviews and facilitation around openness, ambiguity, and interpretive generosity; recursive listening and (un)learning (Ratcliffe)	Guided analysis of tensions without imposing singular meaning (Ratcliffe; Jones)

Feminist research principles and intersectional theory inform my project, particularly scholarship that attends to how race, class, gender, and institutional context shape both access to and engagement with writing, as well as the conditions under which research is designed, conducted, and interpreted (Crenshaw; Collins). Katherine Gasdaglis and Alex Madva's argument about intersectionality becoming almost tokenized was especially useful as I interrogated my approach to my research questions and site: intersectionality, they say, has been interpreted as a general theory that encompasses everything from identity, oppression, legal structures, to statistical modeling. Treating it as a general theory risks conceptual confusion and political inefficacy by making it difficult to identify which categories matter, when, and why. They encourage researchers to draw on Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational work to see intersectionality as a "guiding methodological principle, rather than a general theory or hypothesis" (para. 3). For my study, this perspective helped me reflect on my own position—not as a neutral observer, but as a white, cis woman in midlife, from a middle-class background, whose privileged position within a predominantly white institution shaped how I moved through and was perceived in the research space. I inhabited a space where I was both a peer—similar in age to many professors in the Fellowship—and a graduate student with less institutional power than anyone else in the room. I was a clear advocate for multimodality in writing classrooms (I had emailed all the Fellows before the Fellowship began to introduce myself and my research project on multimodal composition), but also, in some ways, I was a gatekeeper in how I decided which texts and frameworks were foregrounded in our sessions. I was a facilitator but also a learner. Gasdaglis and Madva's framing of intersectionality helped me stay accountable to how my identity and institutional role shaped the space, whether through the pedagogical

stances I introduced, the readings I helped select, or the ways I facilitated and responded during workshop discussions. Their work also pushed me to stay reflexive and to revisit moments that felt tense or uncertain, to question my assumptions, and to recognize that my presence was never neutral, even in spaces built around collaboration. This lens helped me write more honestly about the research process and reminded me that accountability—not detachment—was at the heart of this work.

This feminist, intersectional orientation also grounded how I approached data collection and analysis. In designing interview protocols and workshop activities, I worked to create open invitations for Fellows to bring their full selves and contexts into the conversation to share not just what they taught but also how and why and under what constraints. One example of this came from my final interview with Alice, an international faculty member from the environmental studies department, who came into the Fellowship expecting concrete strategies for teaching writing. She explained that she expected the Fellowship to have "something more on the mechanics of teaching writing. Like Day One, we do this; Day Two, we do that." Although she still emphasized clarity, sentence structure, and grammatical correctness, what she called "something more useful" for her students, she also began to question whether conventional academic forms were the only way students could demonstrate understanding. As she put it, "If students can communicate their ideas and show their engagement with the material, can they be kind of liberated in a way to share their ideas in some other format?" Still, she remained grounded in what she understood her students to need, explaining, "What they care about is really what can I get from my degree and what are some of the work-related skills I can learn. So I feel like, make sure you write clearly, that you have clear sentence structure, that there's a goal of each paragraph—that's maybe something more useful for them." She also spoke about her own internal struggle navigating writing expectations: "As an English learner myself, I especially feel that is a very strong challenge because I always find myself debating whether everybody should be expected to have college-level English communication ability or I should acknowledge multilanguage learners have a more challenging starting point." Her reflections revealed a set of layered tensions: between valuing clarity and exploring flexibility, between preparing students for institutional and professional expectations and imagining more expansive

ways of composing, and between her own experiences as an English learner and the pressures she feels to uphold standardized norms in her teaching. Intersectionality, as a methodological lens, helped me see these layered tensions not as contradictions to resolve but as reflections of how race, language background, institutional position, and pedagogical expectations come together to shape faculty practice. Listening for that complexity helped me resist labeling her approach as simply traditional or resistant and instead attend to how her experiences and commitments informed her teaching in nuanced ways. During workshops, I paid attention to who spoke, who hesitated, how ideas were built upon, and how ideas were pushed to the side, especially when conversations touched on race, language, or institutional authority. When analyzing annotations, memos, and transcripts, I tried to embrace complexity and contradiction, recognizing that faculty often held overlapping and sometimes conflicting commitments. Rather than coding for fixed categories, I looked for moments of tension, such as when Fellows seemed to be working something out in real-time. As a methodological principle, intersectionality reminded me to attend to how multiple, interlocking aspects of identity, such as race, language background, gender, and institutional status, affect participants' experiences and access to authority in different ways. It pushed me to ask: Whose voices are being centered here, and whose are not? How are systems of privilege and exclusion operating in this moment? And how might my reading of this data reproduce or resist those dynamics?

Rhetorical listening, as Krista Ratcliffe defines it, was a central methodological practice throughout this project. Ratcliffe defines rhetorical listening as a "stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture; its purpose is to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally" (25). Later in the chapter, Ratcliffe defines a key tenet of rhetorical listening, "Promoting an understanding of self and other" when she writes,

> Understanding means more than simply listening for a speaker/writer's intent. It also means more than simply listening for our own self-interested readerly intent, which may range from appropriation (employing a text for one's own ends), to Burkean identification (smoothing over differences to achieve common ground), to agreement (affirming only one's own view of reality). Instead, understanding means listening to discourses not for intent but with intent—with the intent to understand not just the claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well. To clarify this process of understanding, rhetorical listeners might best invert the term understanding and define it as standing under, that is, consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others' while consciously acknowledging all our particular—and very fluid—standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, though, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics (28).

The aims of rhetorical listening are to promote understanding across difference and to foster accountability in how we interpret and respond to others. I routinely used her concepts of non-identification, or resisting the urge to assume sameness or project my own experiences onto others, and accountability, or taking responsibility for how I interpret and represent participants, as touchstones whenever I felt overwhelmed by the scope of data or unsure how to proceed analytically. Rather than treating listening as passive reception, rhetorical listening requires an active and ethical stance, one that attends to the affective nature of communication as well as the power dynamics embedded in how people engage with one another. In this study, rhetorical listening was both a methodological framework and a practical tool that I returned to throughout the research process, especially when navigating the tensions of being both a researcher and co-facilitator of the Writing@UW Fellowship. For example, early in the Fellowship, I found myself anticipating resistance from participants; I expected them to prioritize technical correctness or view writing instruction as ancillary to their disciplinary goals. When Nick, a faculty member in mechanical engineering, said during our first session, "I was never taught how to write. I learned to do it by doing a dissertation," I initially felt a sense that Nick was frustrated with teaching because of what had been missing in his own education. Rhetorical listening encouraged me to stay in that moment to consider what was underneath his statement. I realized that his comment wasn't just him

pointing to a perceived pedagogical gap but to a broader institutional pattern in which writing is treated as invisible labor. Or worse, treated as something faculty are expected to figure out alone. Listening rhetorically allowed me to shift away from judgment and toward curiosity so that I could ask what institutional narratives about writing influenced this comment and what role disciplinary norms and prior educational experience play in how he's talking about writing. The tenets of rhetorical listening affected how I responded in this and similar moments, co-facilitated workshops, responded to moments of tension in conversation, and how I approached data analysis. Another example comes from a final interview with Eleanor, a Fellow from the School of Music, who expressed some hesitation about the connection between equity and a critical multimodal pedagogical approach.

> I guess I'm not totally convinced. I think, as long as you're being upfront with the student about how you get to the final process, and if you're being sensitive to students who have different language backgrounds, then there's no reason a podcast is more equitable than a writing assignment. A lot of times, I hear some of my colleagues want us to do things like let the students make a documentary or make a podcast on the grounds that it'll be more just to them because writing is foreign to everyone. And I feel like podcasting is also foreign to everyone. And documentary filmmaking is definitely foreign.

My initial impulse was to clarify that critical multimodal pedagogy isn't about swapping one format for another; that it isn't about surface-level assignment changes. But a rhetorical listening approach had me pausing to consider Eleanor's hesitation more deeply. Her concern wasn't a rejection of equity. Nor was it a rejection of multimodality. Instead, it was a careful reflection on how assumptions about equity can backfire if multimodal assignments are presented as intuitive or self-explanatory. I used this moment to reconsider how multimodality had been framed in our discussions and how I might better foreground the scaffolding and context to support faculty in seeing multimodality not as a switch in format but as a shift in pedagogical approach to everything in the classroom.

That conversation stayed with me. It helped me realize that my own assumptions, especially about what faculty "should" be doing, were shaped by a kind of quiet deficit thinking. I entered the Writing@UW Fellowship focused on what I imagined instructors might lack, particularly in terms of

engaging writing as a site of equity, linguistic justice, racial justice, and multimodality. For example, Eleanor had previously assigned a podcast project but later "took it out" because "then I have to teach them how to podcast." She explained that the time required to support students through audio editing, scripting, and production felt beyond the scope of her class. When Elenor first said this, I jumped to interpret her decision as a reluctance to embrace multimodality. But rhetorical listening pushed me to reconsider that Eleanor's choice might reflect something deeper. Upon reflection and with an openness to what Eleanor was saying, I realized that her resistance to podcasting pointed to a thoughtful sensitivity embedded in her pedagogical goals, not a rejection of equity, justice, or innovation. Her hesitation was about ensuring students had the support they needed to succeed. This moment, and others like it, helped me see how my assumptions about faculty "resistance" could lead me to overlook the deliberate care embedded in their practices. This embedded bias that I held, once acknowledged, transformed my approach: I began to shift from identifying gaps to understanding how faculty negotiate disciplinary conventions, institutional pressures, and personal commitments to inclusion. Applying a deficit lens to faculty risks overlooking the ways they already engage with complex pedagogical questions, even if those practices don't match my notions of critical multimodality. For example, Nora, a literature faculty member, described how she restructured her course to dedicate an entire week—two full class sessions—to one-on-one writing conferences with students. "It felt so weird to determine that it was worth it," she admitted, noting how difficult it was to step away from content delivery in favor of individualized feedback. I remember feeling genuinely surprised. Not because I questioned the value of what she was doing but because I didn't expect a faculty member outside of composition studies to make that kind of tradeoff. My reaction revealed a deficit lens I hadn't fully acknowledged: the assumption that disciplinary faculty wouldn't prioritize writing in such intentional, student-centered ways. Rhetorical listening helped me recognize this bias and reframe moments like Nora's, not as exceptions but as evidence of the complex pedagogical negotiations faculty were already engaged in. I found reflexive methodologies that foreground researcher positionality and demand critical self-awareness helpful in these moments (Braun and Clarke; Pillow; Rose and Weiser). Reflexivity required me to consider how my subjectivities shaped

what I noticed, how I interpreted faculty practices, and the narratives I constructed. I completed dozens of analytic memos that surfaced patterns across sessions, traced my evolving understanding of the themes I explore in Chapters 3 and 4, and helped me map tensions between what participants said and how I was hearing them. Many of these were oral memos recorded on my phone while driving home from Fellowship sessions. Speaking aloud allowed me to process my affective responses, name any confusion or uncertainty, and capture my initial impressions. In one such memo, I reflected on a moment from Session 3 when Amina, a faculty member from Anthropology, asked me to define multimodality when she questioned the purpose of an icebreaker activity I designed that asked Fellows to bring a physical object representing their field. In response to her question, I reiterated the activity's goal of surfacing multimodal engagement. But in the memo I recorded on the way home, I noted, "I think she was asking me to talk about why multimodality is important. And about narrative and story … and I just didn't pick it up."

In retrospect, Amina's comment was an invitation to think more deeply about multimodality, about how material objects shape disciplinary knowledge and how those frameworks connect to student learning and representation. My initial response had flattened her insight into a generalized comment that didn't pick up where she wanted to conversation to go. Recording that oral memo helped me realize that I had unintentionally narrowed the conversation, and I had overlooked the deeper point she was raising: knowledge production is often inseparable from tactile, spatial, and embodied engagement. Memoing helped me return to her words with a different orientation, attuned not just to content but to what counts as knowledge and how we represent it. These types of moments were critical to my reflexive process; rather than treating reflexivity abstractly, my oral memos and written fieldnotes allowed me to return to what Natasha Jones describes as the ethical imperative to "purposefully position oneself" in the research narrative. Through this practice, I was able to surface and examine my biases, including how I interpreted faculty engagement through a deficit lens and how I might instead center listening and complexity in my analysis. One example I've mentioned earlier but resonates here, as well, was when Nick, from mechanical engineering, said, "I was never taught how to write. I learned to do it by doing a dissertation." My initial reaction was of surprise that he had received no formal writing instruction until the dissertation

stage—a level of institutional neglect I hadn't fully considered. Later, in my fieldnotes, I caught myself: my surprise was rooted in the assumption that everyone had access to the same formal training I did. That moment revealed what Peggy McIntosh calls the "invisible knapsack" of privilege—my unexamined history of training in composition and my confidence with writing instruction. I had not considered how many faculty had to piece together their writing expertise alone without institutional support. Recognizing this pushed me to see myself as someone who listens, questions, and learns from how faculty navigates these gaps. Taken together, these methodological commitments allowed me to design a study that was responsive, relational, and reflexive. They informed not just the structure of my data collection but the stance I took as a researcher, co-facilitator, and participant in the Writing@UW Fellowship.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, "A Critical Multimodal Approach to Writing Pedagogies in WAC/WID", I bring together scholarship in critical language advocacy, linguistic justice, racial justice, and equity-oriented writing pedagogies to forward a critical multimodal literacies pedagogical framework for writing pedagogies in WAC/WID faculty development and curricular design initiatives. This chapter draws together approaches from across writing studies and is a practice-oriented intervention into disciplinary writing pedagogies.

In Chapter 3, "Challenge, Resistance, and Negotiation of a Critical Multimodal Literacies Approach in Disciplinary Writing Pedagogies", I move into my data analysis of how faculty members resist or challenge critical multimodal pedagogies in WAC/WID contexts. I draw on discussions among Fellowship during Writing@UW Fellowship workshops, survey data, materials created by faculty, and interviews to delve into the institutional, disciplinary, and ideological barriers that can shape resistance to multimodality in writing pedagogies. In this chapter, I also envision a few possibilities for a critical multimodal approach to disrupt these barriers, pointing to the potential for more equitable, expansive, and responsive writing pedagogies.

Chapter 4, “Critical Multimodal Literacies in Action”, takes a closer look at how two faculty members—one from the humanities, one from STEM—engaged with a critical multimodal approach in their teaching. Building on Chapter 3’s discussion of barriers and tensions, this chapter focuses on how instructors navigated those challenges in real-time. Even when uptake of the approaches wasn’t complete or consistent, it still marked a shift, I argue. A shift that can make space for new questions, new practices, and new possibilities. Through interviews, course materials, and classroom observations, I trace how each faculty member grappled with what multimodality could mean in their classrooms.

In Chapter 5, my conclusion, I reflect on what this research might mean for the future of faculty development, writing instruction, and institutional change. I return to the questions that shaped this project to consider how a critical multimodal approach might be more fully supported across WAC/WID spaces—not just through pedagogy but through policy and program design. I also offer recommendations for supporting faculty in this work from across the disciplines, drawn from what I observed in the Fellowship. This final chapter is both a reflection and a call to keep pushing: to treat writing not as a fixed set of forms but as a space where language is always in motion.

Chapter 2

A Critical Multimodal Approach to Writing Pedagogies in WAC/WID

Let's take the traditional analytic essay. It has zero emancipatory potential and some days I feel that all it can do in this setting is reward students who already know how to go through these hoops.

— Nora, post-Fellowship interview

That's where I started to see how video communication is itself a form of writing. That's an example of where I see multimodality having an empowering application for multilingual students, and that's a racial equity issue.

— Nora, Fellowship discussion

I used to ask students to make podcasts. But I don't anymore because I spent too much time teaching them how to make a podcast.

— Eleanor, Fellowship discussion

This project advances scholarship on critical multimodal literacies by exploring how disciplinary faculty members understand and engage with multimodality to foster equity, racial and linguistic justice, and inclusion in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) contexts. In this chapter, I forward a critical multimodal literacies framework that draws together composition scholarship centered on multimodal composition, critical pedagogies, racial and linguistic justice, equity, inclusion, and WAC/WID contexts. My research site was the pilot year (2023-2024) of the Writing@UW Fellowship at the University of Washington Seattle (UWS), which included seven disciplinary faculty

members who teach writing within their respective disciplines. I detailed the Writing@UW Fellowship in Chapter 1, but briefly, the pilot year was marked by a two-quarter-long series of workshops for disciplinary faculty members to gather, discuss writing instruction, and develop a pedagogical intervention for their courses. For my research project, I wanted to know how these faculty members discussed, adopted (or resisted), and negotiated a critical multimodal approach to their writing pedagogies, so I could better understand what possibilities exist for grounding writing pedagogies across the academy in equity, inclusion, and justice. To situate my findings within the broader conversations in writing studies, I draw on WAC/WID scholarship that interrogates the historical and ideological forces defining writing instruction across the disciplines. While scholarship in WAC/WID has worked for decades to explain the ways in which institutional power is woven into writing in the disciplines to shape the construction and validation of knowledge (Bizzell, LeCourt, Russell, Villanueva), I found through my research and analysis that language ideologies that hold writing as objective, neutral, transparent, arhetorical, and apolitical are present in disciplinary contexts. While this isn't especially surprising, given how dominant monolingual language ideologies are across the university and beyond, what stood out to me was how disciplinary faculty navigate these ideologies in their own contexts. I see this as a necessary intervention in professional development—both for supporting critical multimodal literacies and for pushing toward more equity-oriented writing pedagogies overall. In a meeting early in the Writing@UW Fellowship, for example, one faculty Fellow asked about the purpose of first-year composition courses, wanting to know why those courses didn't support student development of standardized or genreless types of writing, a set of generic writing strategies that disciplinary faculty could then "work with" in their specific disciplines. They argued that "students [need] to have a general set of writing skills that [instructors] can help mold in different ways once they get to our classes." This framing overlooks the contextual nature of writing: rhetorical choices, genre expectations, and communicative norms are always shaped by audience, purpose, and power. The assumption of a transferable, context-independent writing foundation risks erasing the situated, negotiated, and often contested nature of how writing actually functions across disciplines. Later, another Fellow talked about "removing the conventional midterm

analytic essay" because "students want it. They're familiar with it. The ones that have a humanistic background know how to do it." This Fellow touches on how traditional academic genres, like the analytic essay, are often retained not because of their pedagogical value but because they feel attainable to students with prior exposure. While this Fellow seeks to remove the assignment for exactly those reasons, the rationale still reflects an underlying belief that traditional forms are neutral tools for success—an assumption that can reinforce inequity by privileging students already familiar with dominant norms and tacitly marginalizing those whose prior writing experiences differ. It also suggests that student comfort, rather than critical reflection on form and purpose, may sometimes drive assignment design. As Eleanor, a Fellow from music history, put it,

> A lot of times, I hear some of my colleagues want us to do things like let the students make a documentary or make a podcast on the grounds that it'll be more just to them because writing is foreign to everyone. And I feel like podcasting is also foreign to everyone. And documentary filmmaking is definitely foreign.

These comments reflect a recurring theme across the Fellowship that certain forms of writing are seen as legitimate because they are familiar, legible, or institutionally sanctioned, while others are viewed as peripheral or even unintelligible within faculty courses. Eleanor's skepticism about podcasting and documentary filmmaking wasn't a rejection of equity but an indication of how quickly multimodality can become framed as an unfamiliar and extra labor rather than a mode of meaning-making central to disciplinary knowledge. In this framing, multimodal work is not positioned as integral to writing but as an add-on—something optional or foreign. These discussions provided me with important grounding moments for this research project because they point to perspectives on language and writing that many disciplinary writing faculty hold, perspectives that conceive writing as a neutral conveyance of facts rather than as communication shaped by complex systems of power. Among other things, these perspectives can idealize and thus reinforce dominant language and communication norms about what counts as legitimate writing, restrict students' rhetorical agency, and limit the uptake of pedagogical practices that center equity and multimodality.

Ultimately, my research calls for a shift in how writing is defined, particularly in relation to language, modality, and power, and especially in WAC/WID programs, where expectations about writing can reproduce traditions that value standardized English and limit students' rhetorical agency (Bearden; Chen; Fodrey and Mikovits). These limiting traditions can reify white histories of knowledge production, marginalize students with diverse linguistic backgrounds, and constrain students' communicative agency (Inoue; Villanueva, "Politics"). To address these concerns, this project brings together several overlapping fields and stems from an orientation toward critical pedagogy that contributes a framework for treating classrooms as spaces of reflection and transformation where power can be made visible and challenged (Freire; hooks). From multimodal composition, I draw on the insight that all communication is inherently multimodal and that writing instruction must attend to visual, aural, spatial, and embodied forms of meaning-making (Selfe, "Movement"; Shipka; *Toward*; Arola and Wysocki). From translingualism and language advocacy, I draw on the understanding that language is always in motion—shaped through ongoing negotiation —but that negotiation happens within durable structures, such as genre conventions, institutional expectations, and dominant language norms. In this view, students' full linguistic repertoires are resources, not deficits (Bou Ayash; *Toward*; Canagarajah). I draw on critiques of institutional diversity efforts that reveal how inclusion is often framed symbolically rather than structurally and how pedagogical practices must move beyond access to confront systems of power (Ahmed; Gonzales). Scholar–teachers who advocate racially just writing pedagogies remind us that dominant norms of clarity, correctness, and rigor often reproduce whiteness and exclude marginalized students (Inoue; Baker-Bell; Kynard; Poe). And finally, WAC/WID scholarship offers tools for understanding how writing is shaped by disciplinary values, histories, and ideologies while also calling for sustained faculty development and institutional change (Fodrey, "Future"; LeCourt; Russell). I bring these conversations together in what I call a *critical multimodal literacies framework*—not as an add-on to existing writing pedagogy but as a re-envisioning of writing pedagogies that support justice, equity, and inclusion across the disciplines. By exploring these moments in the Writing@UW Fellowship, my research contributes to: 1) ongoing conversations in composition studies about equity, inclusion, and accessibility in WAC/WID settings, 2)

ways we can deepen our understanding of language practices and challenge narrow views of writing pedagogy, and 3) efforts to develop resources for UWS faculty members and its broader publics, including high school teachers and two-year college instructors, to create resources to support their adoption of a critical multimodal literacies framework. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on this framework in more detail by further exploring scholarship in these various overlapping conversations. Figure 1 offers an initial overview of the conversations that animate a Critical Multimodal approach to literacy.

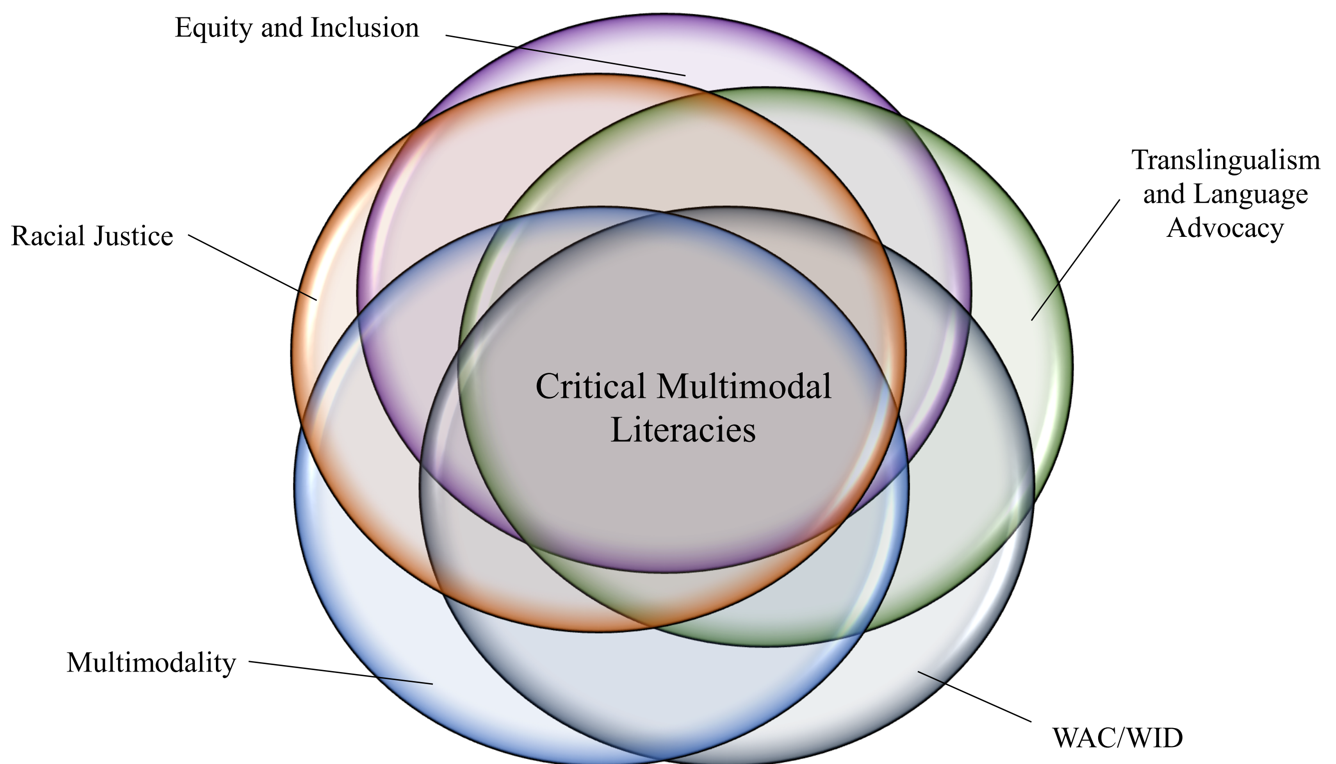


Figure 1: A Critical Multimodal Approach to Writing Pedagogies in WAC/WID.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of key scholarly conversations that shape the theoretical landscape of a critical multimodal literacies approach that I develop in this dissertation. I first look at foundational frameworks that treat multimodality and multiliteracies as socially and materially situated,

showing how meaning is made across modes in ways that are affected by culture, power, and institutional context (New London Group; Kress; Jewitt; van Leeuwen). I then draw on composition scholarship that investigates how multimodality functions in writing instruction, emphasizing pedagogical practices, rhetorical agency, and reflective assessment in classroom contexts (Ball and Loewe; Bowen and Whithaus; Shipka, *Toward*; Yancey). Next, I turn to translingualism, where scholars challenge monolingual and standard language ideologies by emphasizing the fluidity and hybridity of language in practice (Bou Ayash; Canagarajah; Horner et al.; Gonzales; Lee and Carpenter). These insights are especially relevant in WAC/WID settings, where dominant language ideologies are replicated and often remain unexamined (LeCourt, "Opening"; Thaiss and Myers Zawacki; Villanueva, "Politics"). Next, I take up a scholarship that explores the intersections of racial and linguistic justice in composition, particularly critiques of how academic writing instruction has historically upheld white, monolingual norms as the standard of legitimacy, which often exclude, devalue, or penalize students whose linguistic and cultural practices fall outside that frame. These scholars advocate for antiracist pedagogies that do more than diversify content; they center students' lived experiences, challenge the ideological roots of "standard" writing, and reimagine classrooms as spaces of linguistic liberation and critique (Baker-Bell; Inoue; Kynard; Motha; Young). Finally, I examine how multimodal literacies can contribute to institutional transformation and broader access by unsettling dominant standards of communication and legitimizing multiple ways of knowing (Arola and Wysocki; Ball and Loewe; Ball et al.; NCTE; Selfe). Underpinning my engagement with these conversations is a grounding in critical pedagogy. Scholars such as bell hooks, when she draws on Paulo Freire, insist that classrooms are inherently political spaces shaped by broader structures of power and inequality. Freire argues that teaching is a political act, and hooks writes that "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (12). For both, pedagogy is never neutral; it must actively work to "create new visions," "enable transgressions," and "make education the practice of freedom" (hooks 12). Both hooks and Freire remind me that efforts to support racial justice, equity, and inclusion in education cannot rely on superficial gestures. Instead, they require sustained attention to how institutional norms—including language and modality—function

as gatekeeping mechanisms that tacitly replicate forms of discrimination and inequity through the uncritical promotion and rewarding (or denigration and dismissing) of certain knowledges, language practices, and modes of expression. As I traced how faculty participants in the Writing@UW Fellowship described their pedagogical goals, constraints, and commitments, I often returned to hooks's insistence on education as a site of transformation. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks speaks to what it means to approach teaching as a political and liberatory act when she says,

> The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (207).

hooks helps me see how a critical multimodal literacies approach could support students' communicative agency, not by simply offering more options for composing, but by encouraging instructors to reimagine their classrooms as spaces for confronting and reshaping the systems that dictate what, and whose, knowledge is valued.

These conversations collectively establish the theoretical foundation for my development of a critical multimodal literacies framework for WAC/WID. At its core, my dissertation asks how faculty working within disciplinary writing contexts can engage multimodal composition to support linguistic and racial justice, equity, and inclusion. I argue that a critical multimodal approach to writing spaces—grounded in this literature and responsive to the institutional constraints of WAC/WID—offers a framework for reimagining writing instruction in ways that affirm students' full communicative selves.

From here, I turn to four overlapping conversations that inform a critical multimodal approach to writing: multimodality, translingualism and language advocacy, racial justice, and equity and inclusion. Each of these conversations is far more complex than I can fully discuss in this chapter, and so I focus on the threads most relevant to reimagining writing instruction in WAC/WID contexts. In each section, I trace how these conversations contribute to a vision of writing pedagogies that affirms students' full

communicative repertoires, challenges dominant norms, and opens space for more expansive, justice-oriented approaches to writing across the disciplines. Together, these conversations shape my understanding of the possibilities for implementing a critical multimodal approach in disciplinary writing spaces.

What Counts as Writing? Rethinking Composition through Power, Practice, and Possibility

My work in critical multimodal literacies builds on the New London Group's 1999 Theory of Multiliteracies, which called for a re-envisioning of literacy practices to account for the technological, social, and cultural contexts that shape how we communicate and make meaning. As they write,

> Literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. This includes understanding and competent control of representational forms that are becoming increasingly significant in the overall communications environment, such as visual images and their relationship to the written word—for instance, visual design in desktop publishing or the interface of visual and linguistic meaning in multimedia.

This approach responded to a need for multimodal pedagogies that better reflect the increasing diversity of student populations and the complexity of meaning-making in a globalizing world. While the New London Group's work pioneered a call for literacy instruction to address diverse modes of meaning-making, it primarily focused on preparing students for participation in a globalized, technologically integrated world. My project extends this work by foregrounding the political and pedagogical stakes of multimodality, not just as a response to technological change but as a means of challenging dominant language ideologies and expanding what counts as legitimate communication in academic spaces. Where the New London Group emphasized access and adaptability, I build on that foundation to ask how multimodal pedagogies can also support racial and linguistic justice, center students' lived experiences, and interrogate the institutional norms that shape writing and learning. Scholars such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen extended the approach put forth by the New London Group—a collective in which Kress was a part—by developing a social semiotic theory of multimodality. This framework

understands meaning as made through the interaction of multiple modes, including visual, spatial, gestural, oral, and digital. In this view, modes are not simply containers for meaning; instead, they are socially and culturally shaped resources, and communicative acts must be understood in context, not in isolation. Kress and van Leeuwen define multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event" where these modes "are orchestrated to act synergistically" (20). When Gunther Kress, Carey Jewitt, Jon Ogborn, and Charalampos Tsatsarelis further highlighted how multimodal communication is not merely about decoding messages but about design, they write that it is, instead, a process shaped by a communicator's social position and intended effect. "Communication," they write, "is always an act of design," and meaning-making reflects the communicator's choices within culturally and historically specific contexts (Kress et al. 7). This view highlights the need for pedagogies that attend to students' agency in influencing how meaning is made. While much of this early scholarship focused on the rise of digital literacies in educational settings, their arguments call for a broader rethinking of literacy itself, urging us to recognize the full range of communicative resources people draw on to make and share meaning.

Kathleen Blake Yancey's 2004 CCCC Chair's Address, "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," was a landmark call to reimagine composition in light of the multimodal and networked landscape students already inhabit. She argued that writing instruction must move beyond the page and reflect the diverse ways students make meaning, insisting that "we compose in a number of ways" and that "writing has always been multimodal" (Yancey 314, 320). Yancey emphasized the urgency of responding to the "extracurriculum" of literacy—spaces outside school where students develop complex rhetorical abilities through multimodal forms like video, web design, and collaborative digital moments (312–313). Her address expanded the field's conception of writing beyond alphabetic text and advocated for pedagogies that recognize composition as a symphony of modes, media, and audiences. This framing supports how a critical multimodal literacies approach to writing pedagogies must be embedded not as optional or additive but as central to equitable and justice-oriented pedagogies. Like Yancey did more than 20 years ago, I argue instructors ground their pedagogies in the premise that students are already

composing in richly multimodal ways and that our responsibility as educators is not to remediate them into traditional forms but to create classroom contexts that validate and build on the rhetorical practices students already bring with them. Together, these and the other composition and multimodal scholars that I speak to below helped me identify moments in my research when Fellows talked about multimodality as a novelty or trend; I was reminded particularly of Yancey's call to recognize the sorts of invisible writing students already do across media, as well as her argument that writing instruction must respond to students' lived literacy practices. These scholars helped me see multimodality not just as a response to the digital age and new ways of communicating in the digital sphere but as a way of reconsidering all aspects of communication and pushing back against narrow definitions of what counts as writing in academic spaces. That means asking whose ways of knowing we make room for, whose voices count, and who we imagine students are writing for. It pushes us to think beyond the traditional essay and opens space for forms of knowledge grounded in community, multilingual practice, embodiment, and lived experience.

In their "Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age," the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) describes literacy as something shaped by context—an evolving set of communicative and cultural practices that shift depending on who we're addressing, how, and why. They argue that students must be able to "explore and engage critically, thoughtfully, and across a wide variety of inclusive texts and tools/modalities" and that culturally sustaining pedagogies must "recognize and honor the multilingual literacy identities and cultural experiences individuals bring to learning environments" (NCTE). This emphasis on modality, identity, and power aligns with how I conceptualize critical multimodal literacies—not as a toolkit, set strategy, or curriculum to be implemented, but as an orientation toward writing rooted in justice. I was especially drawn to Bruce Horner, Cynthia Selfe, and Tim Lockridge's contribution to the *Digital Rhetoric Collaborative*, where they describe both language and modality as practices shaped by institutional norms, material conditions, and histories of exclusion. These scholars introduce the concept of transmodality, which they define as "the relations among modes and their differential uptake in and across communicative contexts" (Horner et al., para. 2). Horner et al.'s use of "transmodal dispositions," which they describe as habits of mind that acknowledge how

communicative practices are always shaped by these relations and histories, gave me a new way to think about how faculty and students make meaning—not by selecting from a set menu of modes or languages, but by negotiating expectations, constraints, and their own communicative histories. This framing helped me see how composition pedagogies can obscure the multimodal labor and meaning-making strategies already embedded in traditional assignments. Horner et al. also caution against additive models of multimodality, which assume that layering images, sounds, or other modes onto a written text necessarily makes it more inclusive or effective. Instead, they argue for a shift in disposition, an orientation that recognizes how meaning is always made through the interplay of modalities and shaped by histories of legibility and institutional legitimation. As they put it,

> We need to be wary of the power of monolingual-ist, monomodal-ist, dispositions to distort our sense of the practices under consideration. This danger manifests in two ways: the tendency to view practices not marked as either multimodal or multilingual as SL/MN [Standard Language / Monolingual Norms]; conversely, the tendency to conflate practices marked as either multimodal or translingual with multimodal/ translingual dispositions, when their non-SL/MN character may be more apparent than real (column 2, para. 2).

I found this especially relevant in the WAC/WID context I studied, where faculty members often treated traditional ideas of writing as unquestioned default. This ignores Horner et al.'s call to avoid judging a communicative act by its surface features alone; we need to ask how it was made, how meaning is being negotiated, and what histories or norms are affecting it. One faculty fellow, Eleanor from music history, for instance, said, "I used to ask students to make podcasts, but I don't anymore because I spent too much time teaching them how to make a podcast." While framed as a practical concern, her comment reflected a broader pattern I observed: multimodal work was often imagined as additional rather than foundational, something extra to manage rather than integral to composing itself, aligning with Horner et al. caution against this additive model. This orientation toward writing, as fixed, textual, and institutionally sanctioned, appeared repeatedly in my data, and it raised important questions about how instructors might begin to disrupt these norms in their own pedagogical contexts.

Cynthia Selfe's essay "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning" helped bridge theory to practice. In it, Selfe critiques the dominance of print literacy in U.S. composition instruction, arguing that it "functions to limit our professional understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity and deprive students of valuable semiotic resources for making meaning" (617). This critique affirmed a central argument in my own work that narrow definitions of writing suppress students' full communicative agency, particularly for those whose rhetorical strengths do not conform to dominant academic norms. Jody Shipka's *Toward a Composition Made Whole* helped me think differently about how faculty position multimodal work in their classrooms. She argues that all communication is inherently multimodal and shaped by context, which pushed me to examine how disciplinary writing norms show up in faculty pedagogies. She also argues for multimodality as a means of social critique, pushing composition beyond digitized or screen-based forms. Her work challenges the tendency to equate multimodal composition solely with new media or digital tools, arguing that doing so risks reinforcing rather than disrupting dominant paradigms. She asks, "In an attempt to free students from the limits of the page, have we instituted another, limiting them to texts that can be composed, received, and reviewed onscreen?" (10), urging us to expand what counts as composing by recognizing the rhetorical value in any communicative material—ballet shoes, textures, objects, scent, performance, and space—alongside or instead of more traditional texts. This insight was essential to my analysis of how faculty in the Writing@UW Fellowship created—or failed to create—space for students to draw on their full sensory, linguistic, and cultural repertoires in their work. For example, Gillian, a Fellow from the field of astronomy, often described using multimodality as a scaffold toward more traditional genres. She encouraged students to draw or use emojis to build confidence in their ability to perform the more rigid conventions expected in the final project. Through a critical multimodal lens, however, this framing risks positioning multimodal work as merely preparatory—a step toward "real" writing rather than a valid academic product in its own right. A critical multimodal approach takes up Shipka's challenge by insisting that classrooms must accommodate a wider array of meaning-making practices, not just as support tools or creative flourishes but as central to epistemological legitimacy and student agency. In our

interviews and Fellowship discussions, faculty often described multimodal assignments as extra—something nice if there's time but not essential to student learning. At first, I saw those responses as mostly practical concerns, but revisiting them through the lens of critical multimodality and Selfe and Shipka's critiques helped me see something more profound: that these hesitations often reflect attachments to traditional ideas of what writing is supposed to look like. Take Eleanor, for instance. As I mentioned earlier, she stopped assigning podcasts even though aurality is central to her field, explaining that her choice was due to teaching the technical parts taking too much time. I initially read that as an issue of support, but the more I thought about it, the more I saw how institutional ideas of "real" writing—linear, textual, alphabetic—had limited how far faculty could imagine going. When Eleanor said she stopped assigning podcasts because she was spending too much time teaching them, what lay beneath was an assumption that time spent on teaching multimodal tools was a detour from "real" writing instruction. Her decision wasn't just about workload—it reflected a hierarchy of value, where learning to express ideas through sound was treated as secondary to other, more traditional forms. Shipka's work helped me recognize this not as a neutral tradeoff, but as a pedagogical choice shaped by deeply rooted norms about what constitutes legitimate academic work. Drawing on Shipka, Selfe, and Horner et al., I considered not only what faculty said about multimodality but how they talked about writing more broadly, especially what writing they positioned as default, neutral, or valid. Across their work, I see a shared push to move away from values like control, conformity, and institutional legibility and toward pedagogies that center on negotiation, agency, and justice. Faculty reflections in the Writing@UW Fellowship surfaced similar tensions between wanting to create inclusive, student-responsive classrooms and working within systems that often sideline multilingual and student-driven approaches. This framing positions multimodal and linguistic diversity not as core to academic writing but as supplementary, reinforcing the very hierarchies that critical multimodal pedagogies aim to disrupt.

Taken together, the scholars in this section helped me think about critical multimodal literacies not as a set of tools or techniques but as a way of approaching writing that centers equity, challenges dominant language norms, and pushes back on institutional definitions of what counts as valid

communication. This framework doesn't treat multimodality as something to layer onto traditional assignments or as fun alternatives; instead, it asks us to rethink the assumptions behind those assignments, such as the ways histories of power, access, and exclusion shape them. Within WAC/WID contexts, where disciplinary norms are often unexamined and writing is often framed as neutral or skills-based (LeCourt, *Identity*; Villanueva, "Politics"), this orientation is particularly important. It insists that communicative choice is always ideological and that expanding what is possible in writing instruction requires more than offering students multimodal options; it requires dismantling the structures that have historically privileged certain modes, voices, and identities over others.

Indeed, scholarship on multimodality in WAC/WID programs has consistently pointed to a lack of programmatic support for instructors who want to bring multimodal pedagogies into their classrooms (Chen; Fodrey and Mikovits; Rademaekers). For example, Chen points to WAC/WID programs needing stronger support structures, including time, training, and institutional encouragement, if faculty are to meaningfully engage with multimodal composition. Fodrey and Mikovits argue that without sustained opportunities for pedagogical development, faculty often take up multimodal assignments as isolated practices rather than as part of cohesive pedagogies. Rademaekers argues that while multimodality may be increasingly valued in WAC/WID programs, they often lack the institutional frameworks and faculty development structures needed to support widespread and meaningful implementation. At UWS, I wanted to understand how disciplinary writing instructors conceptualized multimodality, why they chose to incorporate it into their teaching of writing, and how those choices were informed by commitments to equity, inclusion, and justice.

In "The Politics of Literacy Across the Curriculum," Victor Villanueva argues that writing in WAC contexts has too often been treated as neutral, a treatment that ignores how writing has always been political and shaped by histories of race, language, and power. He points out that disciplinary writing norms don't just teach students how to write in a field; they also carry assumptions about who belongs and how legitimacy gets defined. These norms, he argues, often reflect white, middle-class values that marginalize students whose ways of knowing and communicating don't align. Villanueva, drawing on

Freire, calls for a different kind of engagement, one that teaches genres critically, surfaces their histories and assumptions, and opens space for students to use writing as a tool for critique and social action. This call directly aligns with a critical multimodal literacies framework, and although Villanueva doesn't name his call critical multimodality, his similar call echoes throughout his larger body of work. In *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, he blends personal narrative with institutional critique, emphasizing that rhetoric is inseparable from identity and memory: "not only persuasion," he writes, "but the expression of the self, of the culture, of the memory" (12). His 2020 essay "Mode Meshing: Before the New World Was New" pushes this further, framing multimodal expression as an ancestral and embodied practice that has long been present in communities of color. Villanueva critiques the tendency of writing studies to treat multimodality as a recent innovation, arguing instead that what is now called "multimodal" has deep cultural roots through gesture, storytelling, rhythm, and other forms of meaning-making that have been historically devalued in academic contexts. His framing demands that we not only adopt new modes but attend to the racialized histories of whose modes have long been excluded from legitimacy. These insights shaped the lens through which I approach my own research. Like Villanueva, I understand writing as never neutral, that the forms and conventions faculty teach are always bound up in power and historical memory. In the Writing@UW Fellowship, I saw faculty begin to name the invisible norms in their disciplines, values that appear straightforward—like clarity or coherence—but are built on unspoken assumptions that can function as barriers to participation. My work extends Villanueva's call by asking what kinds of pedagogical support help disciplinary faculty move from seeing writing as a neutral skillset to treating it as a socially situated practice shaped by power and open to reimagining.

With this call in mind during my research, I looked for how faculty grappled with questions of power, legitimacy, and form in their teaching. I paid particular attention to moments when faculty framed alternative modes of expression not as add-ons to "real" writing, but as legitimate ways of knowing and meaning-making. I listened for how faculty talked about nontraditional assignments' potential for resisting dominant language norms, supporting linguistic and racial justice, and legitimizing multiple ways of knowing and expressing ideas. For instance, Nick, from mechanical engineering, described

incorporating visual representations of engineering concepts as a way to support student understanding before asking them to write in conventional STEM genres. While not framed as a critique of academic norms, his approach nonetheless opened space for students to engage with disciplinary writing in more accessible ways—a move that aligns with Villanueva's vision of using multimodality to approach academic forms critically and inclusively. Similarly, Nora, from the English department, offered a blunt critique of the academic analytic essay, describing it as lacking "emancipatory potential" and rewarding only those who had already learned to navigate its conventions. I explore her story more fully in Chapter 4 as well, but briefly: her comment reminded me of Villanueva's call for interrogation of the dominant norms defining academic communication as well as an aim of a critical multimodal literacies approach, which is to foster a critical consciousness by expanding the communicative tools students use to engage with disciplinary knowledge.

This understanding of multimodality as a way to interrogate and reimagine the values embedded in writing instruction shaped every aspect of my research design and analysis. It informed how I listened to faculty as they described their writing assignments, how I asked questions about pedagogical intent and institutional constraint, and how I analyzed the moments when instructors either embraced or resisted multimodal approaches. For example, when I listened to faculty, I attempted to observe how they described the pedagogical function of multimodal work: whether they positioned it as central to student meaning-making or as a scaffold toward more traditional, text-based genres. Or when faculty participants spoke about struggling to incorporate nontraditional assignments or expressed discomfort with unfamiliar forms of student expression, I interpreted these not simply as pragmatic challenges, but as moments shaped by institutional language ideologies and inherited disciplinary expectations. Michelle Cox et al.'s work in *Sustainable WAC* underscores that equitable WAC programs require systemic support, including robust faculty development and administrative buy-in. This, when aligned with Selfe's call for a multimodal intervention that resists narrow, alphabetic-centered conceptions of literacy and pushes educators to attend to the political and institutional dimensions of meaning-making and Logan Bearden's call for programmatic change toward multimodal composition's widespread support if it is to be treated as

integral to writing instruction rather than an optional or supplemental practice, points to another central argument of my work: that a critical multimodal approach to composition requires systemic institutional change toward more expansive, equitable, and justice-driven definitions of writing and communication. An institutional commitment to the adoption of critical multimodality is an implication that I discuss further in Chapter 5, but briefly, I bring the scholarship in this chapter together to call for a critical multimodal approach to align with WAC/WID programs across university campuses. My research also contributes to scholarly conversations that centers broader institutional, programmatic, and public-facing initiatives dedicated to the creation of writing spaces that actively work to resist racism and be more inclusive and equitable. Broadly, I see my dissertation joining these conversations on institutional and programmatic change, especially conversations that explore ways multimodality can support more expansive interpretations of valid writing practice that can open new pathways for student expression, participation, and institutional transformation (Bearden, Fodrey and Mikovits; Chen; Selfe, "Technology"). Logan Bearden and Cynthia Selfe both call for a reimagining of writing instruction that extends beyond the boundaries of the traditional essay and recognizes the multimodal realities of contemporary communication. Bearden calls for programmatic change to support multimodal approaches—not just because they open up what counts as writing, but because they offer better support for students with varied backgrounds and goals. He argues that writing programs need to broaden how they define meaningful writing, a point echoed by Selfe, who emphasizes the importance of faculty development programs and other institutional initiatives that can make multimodal approaches more sustainable. These calls for structural change resonate with what I heard from faculty in the Writing@UW Fellowship; that is, many of the Fellows expressed a desire to expand their writing practices but felt limited by institutional constraints. One participant, SJ, from the communications department, for example, described assigning written essays even though she questioned their pedagogical and ethical value, asking, "Should I teach students how to perform good writing even if I don't believe in it? I know it's full of biases and historical prejudices. Should I teach them how to perform that so they can participate?" Her question reflects a recurring issue that arose throughout the Fellowship: how faculty

navigate the tension between preparing students to meet dominant academic expectations while working to resist the exclusionary language ideologies embedded in those norms. Taken together, the work of Bearden and Selfe and the Fellow's experiences and approaches to teaching writing in their disciplines underscores the need to move toward programmatic structures that affirm multimodal composition as both legitimate and transformative. In this project, I respond to these calls by showing how critical multimodality can serve as both a pedagogical and institutional intervention—one that reframes writing instruction to center equity, linguistic justice, and the full range of students' communicative resources.

In the sections that follow, I further map the scholarly terrain that shaped this framework, drawing on key conversations in translingualism, racial justice, and equity in writing instruction to build the foundations of a critical multimodal literacies framework. I focus on how these conversations challenge dominant language ideologies, expand what counts as writing, and foreground the political stakes of communicative practice. Rather than offering a linear summary, I use this chapter to trace how these bodies of work inform the questions I ask, the stakes I name, and the interventions I propose. I close with a manifesto moment—bringing these strands together to articulate the kind of pedagogical and institutional change this project ultimately calls for.

Critical Multimodality as a Translingual/Transmodal Intervention in WAC/WID

Recent scholarship on language advocacy, especially work focused on challenging monolingualism and standard language ideologies in writing pedagogies, has expanded our understanding of communication and literacy as socially, culturally, and politically situated. Scholars, such as Nancy Bou Ayash, Bruce Horner, and Laura Gonzales, among others, I explore in this section, underscore that communicative choice is never neutral; they argue for pedagogies that recognize and value the full range of students' rhetorical resources. A critical multimodal approach aligns with and extends these efforts by encouraging instructors to see modal diversity as also central to meaning-making, particularly for multilingual students. Rather than treating linguistic and modal variation as aesthetic flourishes or optional enhancements, I put forward that all communicative practices are legitimate and valuable sites of

negotiation and identity formation. To fully realize the transformative potential of this approach, however, we must consider how writing is taught—and who determines what counts as valid communication.

This is where WAC/WID as an institutional and disciplinary ecology becomes critical. If we are to move beyond surface-level or additive inclusion of diverse communicative practices, we must examine the institutional and disciplinary structures that shape writing instruction across the curriculum. WAC/WID frameworks help illuminate how language ideologies become embedded in disciplinary norms, but they also offer openings for intervention. A critical multimodal approach taken up in these contexts can challenge the dominance of standardized, monolingual, and text-centric conventions, making space for more equitable and inclusive writing pedagogies. In the introduction to the edited volume *Toward a Transnational University: WAC/WID Across Borders of Language, Nation, and Discipline*, Horner writes, "We should think of WAC/WID as engaged not so much in boundary work but boundary play in which we recognize borders as 'porous, fluid, as lines which connect more than they divide'" (5). Horner's framing aligns with the critical multimodal approach I advocate, which likewise challenges rigid disciplinary and linguistic boundaries and instead emphasizes the generative possibilities that emerge through crossing and negotiating them. His notion of "boundary play" invites us to see WAC/WID not as upholding static norms of communication, but as sites where the meaning, value, and form of academic writing are actively contested and reshaped—precisely the kind of work that critical multimodality makes visible.

Jonathan Hall's article in the same volume similarly makes a direct intervention into WAC/WID contexts by urging us to see translingualism not just as a language theory, but as a framework for rethinking the boundaries that structure our programs, practices, and pedagogies. He argues that WAC/WID must contend with the "age of trans-," a moment marked by transdisciplinary, translingual, and transnational movements that complicate traditional institutional categories. Hall calls on WAC/WID scholars and practitioners to "think with trans," challenging the field to move beyond monodirectional notions of transfer and instead attend to how meaning is made in the in-between—through negotiation, movement, and friction across boundaries. Hall's argument aligns with my project's central claim: that a

critical multimodal approach invites faculty to recognize and work within the fluid, negotiated spaces of meaning-making rather than clinging to fixed disciplinary or linguistic norms. Both Horner's concept of "boundary play" and Hall's call to "think with trans" frame WAC/WID as spaces where the boundaries of language, genre, and modality are not only crossed but reimagined. This perspective is foundational to my argument that multimodality, when taken up critically, can unsettle dominant ideologies of academic writing and open new possibilities for more inclusive, justice-oriented pedagogies across the curriculum.

Scholars including Bou Ayash, Horner, and Canagarajah emphasize that language difference is the norm rather than the exception, and that communicative acts are always situated, negotiated, and shaped by power relations. Horner et al. assert that a translingual approach "takes the variety, fluidity, intermingling, and changeability of languages as statistically demonstrable norms around the globe" (305). Canagarajah similarly highlights the ways writers negotiate between linguistic resources rather than simply code-switching between fixed languages. Bou Ayash's *Toward Translingual Realities in Composition* further shaped my understanding of these dynamics by emphasizing that all communication is grounded in language diversity; that diversity is the norm, not an obstacle to overcome. In her work, she describes language difference as a resource that should be "constantly tapped into, rhetorically deployed, and capitalized on" (25), encouraging me to explore how faculty participants might see linguistic diversity—and, by extension, modal diversity—as pedagogical assets. A critical multimodal approach builds on this argument by asserting that all communicative modes are also integral to how meaning is made. Many faculty members in my study described a tension between valuing students' home languages while feeling pressured to align their teaching with academic, professional, or disciplinary conventions steeped in standardized English. SJ, from the field of communication, explained, "One of the honor students invited me to their thesis and she wants to cite literature that's in her language. I've been very open to that, but then she proposed, 'Can I write my thesis in my own language?' And I was like, I think that should be a possibility, but I'm not quite sure how to approach it with the department or in terms of giving feedback. It gets complicated." While SJ expresses openness to the student's linguistic choices, her uncertainty highlights the institutional challenges in accommodating such practices: this

reflects the complexities Bou Ayash discusses regarding the negotiation of language ideologies within academic institutions, and it underscores how multimodal practices, much like linguistic ones, must also be negotiated within institutional constraints.

Gonzales's work, which brings conversations in translingualism and multimodality together, offers a clear alignment with the linguistic justice aims embedded in a critical multimodal pedagogical framework. In "Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies," Gonzales looked at how multimodality supported students with multilingual backgrounds, finding that students can feel limited when they are required to convey their learning solely through a text-centric approach. She writes that students "described using multimodality to layer meaning as an affordance they could leverage when they did not have specific words available" (Gonzales, "Multimodality"). Essentially, students felt limited in what they could explain and how they could convey it if they only used writing. This was especially important for my research as I looked at ways faculty members might consider multimodality to support their approach to linguistic justice; I wanted to know how faculty members engaged with multimodality and how (or whether) those considerations were connected to language ideologies faculty members had about writing and communication. Scholarship in multimodal composition has become an increasingly important site of inquiry for language advocacy, especially those scholars and pedagogues working to challenge monolingualism and standard language ideologies in writing instruction. Rather than treating multimodality as aesthetic, additive, or optional, these scholars position it as a critical site of negotiation and meaning-making where students have the agency to draw on a wider range of communicative resources and assert the value of their linguistic and cultural knowledge across any and all modes available to them.

The challenges faculty members in the Writing@UW Fellowship described as they talked about honoring student language practices and adhering to disciplinary norms reflect what Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge describe as "transmodal dispositions"—an orientation that sees language and modality as always shifting, negotiated, and shaped by institutional and material conditions. They argue that language and modality are never neutral; they are shaped by institutional norms, material constraints, and histories

of exclusion. This orientation helped me interpret moments in my data not as necessarily resistance to multimodality, but as evidence of deeper ideological commitments to what counts as “real” and legitimate writing. Indeed, Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge argue that dominant ideologies train us to recognize only certain kinds of work as multimodal, while “rendering invisible the multimodal labor embedded in practices like alphabetic writing” (15). In other words, all writing is multimodal, but only some forms are institutionally legible as such. To think through how multimodality and translingualism can work together in classroom practice, I turned to Santosh Khadka’s work, which centers student negotiation and transformation. In one case study, Khadka describes an assignment where students reworked their academic essays into public-facing websites for cross-cultural audiences. This shift pushed them to think beyond language alone—to consider how visual, spatial, and digital elements could help them communicate with multilingual, multicultural readers. Framed through a translingual lens, the project invited students to make rhetorical decisions across modes and audiences and to see writing as something fluid, relational, and shaped by context. This required them to think about the rhetorical affordances of different modes, consider multiple audiences simultaneously, and make intentional decisions about what to highlight or translate—not just in language but in tone and organization. As they worked, Khadka explains, students developed a reflexive understanding of how meaning is shaped by context, medium, and audience. For my project, this was especially generative: it helped me see how faculty members might similarly use multimodal assignments to support student agency, deepen rhetorical thinking, and challenge monolingual assumptions embedded in academic genres. For example, through the Fellowship, Nora, whom I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, added a new final assignment option for students: a multimodal project that asks students to envision new audiences for their work. This shift encourages students to exercise rhetorical responsibility in new modes, making choices about what they want to say, as well as how and why they are saying it. Like in Khadka’s study, Nora’s assignment encouraged students to see writing as a rhetorical act shaped by context, not a fixed form, and to draw on a fuller range of communicative resources in making meaning.

Taken together, these scholars challenge a value system in writing instruction that privileges monolingualism, textual fixity, and standardized academic English as the default for legitimacy. Bou Ayash, Horner, and Canagarajah push us to understand language as fluid, relational, and deeply shaped by power, while Gonzales, Horner et al., and Khadka demonstrate how multimodal and multilingual practices expand access to meaning-making, especially for students navigating linguistic difference. A critical multimodal approach builds on this foundation by insisting that writing instruction centers rhetorical, cultural, and modal diversity—not as add-ons or exceptions, but as essential to student learning and epistemological legitimacy. For my research, this meant understanding how faculty members at UWS both opened and constrained communicative possibilities for their students and how critical multimodal literacies might help surface, examine, and ultimately transform those constraints. This work is central to the broader goal of reimagining WAC/WID through an equity-oriented lens, one that recognizes literacy as already shaped by language, modality, and power.

Critical Multimodality as Racial Justice Practice

Recent scholarship on racial justice in writing instruction has made urgent calls to recognize how dominant norms around language and genre can reinforce white supremacy in academic spaces. Scholars such as April Baker-Bell, Carmen Kynard, Vershawn Ashanti Young, and Mya Poe (among others I take up in this section) argue that writing classrooms often function as sites of racial gatekeeping—whether through standardized language expectations, narrow definitions of clarity, or assessments that reward proximity to whiteness. This work insists that pedagogies must move beyond mere symbolic inclusion in institutions that sustain racism and other inequities without addressing systemic harm. This work aims to actively dismantle the racial hierarchies embedded in dominant communicative practices. I build on these calls by arguing that a critical multimodal approach can operationalize racial justice in writing instruction; that is, by expanding our definitions of what counts as valid communication, a critical multimodal approach can challenge the institutional norms that have historically marginalized students of color. As Kynard reminds us, "“You have to fight for the time and space to think and be” (“A Week in the Life”);

and as Baker-Bell reminds us, justice is not achieved through participation in existing systems but through their transformation; she says, “If y’all actually believe using ‘standard English’ will dismantle white supremacy, then you’re not paying attention!” (5). To advance racial justice through multimodality, we must confront not just what forms of communication are allowed in our classrooms but who gets to decide what counts as knowledge. And why.

In *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, Baker-Bell explicitly names the harms of linguistic racism and argues that the pursuit of Black linguistic justice is a pedagogical imperative. She describes how Black students experience racialized linguistic violence, being told that their language is incorrect, unacademic, or unprofessional, resulting in internalized Anti-Black Linguistic Racism that can deeply damage their sense of self and identity (40). Her work urged me to look critically at moments in my data where faculty resisted—or inadvertently reinforced—dominant language norms. For example, during a Fellowship discussion, a faculty member expressed a desire to honor students’ linguistic diversity while also feeling obligated to prepare them for academic and professional contexts. This tension, which I explore further in Chapters 3 and 4, reflects what Baker-Bell identifies as “linguistic double consciousness”—the conflicted position of valuing someone’s linguistic identity while recognizing that it may be penalized in dominant systems (49). Baker-Bell’s framing helped me see that pedagogical practices can push students to adapt to standardized English without interrogating the white linguistic hegemony embedded in those expectations, which can reinforce the very hierarchies that antiracist pedagogy aims to dismantle. When instructors silence or sideline other modes of meaning-making, or treat white language practices as neutral, they participate in a system that, as Baker-Bell warns, is “killing Black youth softly through anti-Black Language pedagogies” (39). Baker-Bell’s work makes clear that white linguistic norms are not benign or neutral; they are maintained through pedagogical practices that demand linguistic assimilation and frame deviation as deficiency, often in the name of “college readiness” or “professional success.” These expectations exact a psychological toll, forcing students to compartmentalize or suppress parts of themselves in order to appear academically legitimate. As Baker-Bell writes, “an anti-Black Language education not only contributes to Black

students despising their mother tongue, but it also causes them to see themselves through a white gaze" (21). Her students' responses in attitudinal assessments—many of which characterized Black Language as "ghetto" or "trouble"—reflect the internalization of anti-Black linguistic racism as a product of school-based ideologies that position Black speech as deficient. A critical multimodal literacies approach can confront these types of erasure by unsettling the assumption that there is a single, legitimate way to communicate in academic spaces. When writing pedagogies shift from enforcing conformity to cultivating rhetorical agency across modes, students are no longer asked to translate themselves into whiteness just to be heard.

Asao B. Inoue, in his foreword for *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, reminds us that even well-intentioned antiracist efforts in the classroom can reproduce harm when educators treat language as neutral rather than a racialized practice. His story of being misread as a child in a diverse, under-resourced school foregrounds how teachers often enact "whitely ways" by enforcing rules without understanding the histories behind students' language (xiii). Inoue argues that real work rooted in racial justice requires more than equitable policies or diverse texts. Racial justice demands that we challenge the white authority embedded in how we assess, value, and respond to student communication. Nora, a Fellow from the English department, took up this call, which I saw in our final interview when she told me,

> That's where I started to see how video communication is itself a form of writing. That's an example of where I see multimodality having an empowering application for multilingual students, and that's a racial equity issue.

Nora embraces the demand that Inoue talks about; through the Fellowship, she began to leverage a critical multimodal approach to her classroom, not through just the text she chooses, but in how she approaches the modes she asks of students and how she assesses them. A critical multimodal approach, as I saw with Nora in the Fellowship, can address Inoue's call by challenging not only what counts as good writing but also how racialized norms of clarity, professionalism, and correctness shape those judgments. It demands that we interrogate how white language supremacy operates through dominant modes of communication;

by expanding the range of communicative practices we value and by critically examining who those practices center and exclude, this approach creates space for a rhetorical agency that is accountable to students' lived realities.

Aligned with these ideas, Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections* redefines literacy using a lens of Black Freedom Movements, insisting that academic spaces recognize Black language as a site of intellectual and rhetorical power. Her digital platforms, including *intersectionaljustice.com* and *blackfeministpedagogies.com*, offer pedagogical models rooted in Black traditions that challenge the dominance of white, academic English. Kynard challenges us to center student agency through multimodal, culturally grounded expression, pointing to the ways in which pedagogical transformation requires not just adding new genres, but redefining what counts as knowledge and who gets to produce it. This insight sharpened my analysis of faculty discussions during the Writing@UW Fellowship. In my fieldnotes from our first session, I recorded a moment that cut through the institutional language of reform. As we went around the table introducing ourselves and our reasons for joining the Fellowship, Amina, a faculty member in Anthropology, spoke about teaching writing as an act of love and liberation. She reminded us that our pedagogies shape students' lives in powerful ways. She said she joined the Fellowship because she wanted to be part of university-wide change—but then added, with quiet force, that none of it felt like it was "doing anything to stop Black people from being killed." Her words demanded that we stop treating classroom practice as neutral and apolitical; it was a demand that we see our classrooms as spaces that can perpetuate harm, a demand that we understand the distinction between symbolic gestures at institutional transformation and real, systemic change.

Linking a critical multimodal approach to Black racial justice offers one way to take up the demands issued by scholars and activists to interrogate the structural and rhetorical boundaries that shape whose voices are heard, what forms of expression are deemed legitimate, and how knowledge is recognized in academic spaces. I found myself often returning to this question during the Fellowship—particularly after moments like the one in Session 1, when Amina expressed deep skepticism about institutional change efforts, asking whether anything we were doing would actually keep Black people

from being killed. That moment, and others like it, pushed me to reflect on foundational documents like the 1974 "Students' Right to Their Own Language" statement, issued by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), which affirms that students bring rich and legitimate language practices into the classroom that must be recognized—not corrected or erased. Emerging from the civil rights movement and Black student activism, the statement challenged the dominance of white middle-class language norms and insisted that linguistic diversity be seen as a resource, not a deficit. Decades later, April Baker-Bell, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier, Davena Jackson, Lamar Johnson, Carmen Kynard, and Teaira McMurtry extended that call in the 2020 CCCC statement, "This Ain't Another Statement! This Is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice", reframing linguistic injustice as anti-Black violence and demanding not inclusion but abolition of white linguistic supremacy, of code-switching mandates, and of pedagogies that tokenize rather than transform. In my own work, a critical multimodal literacies framework responds to this demand by foregrounding racial and linguistic justice at every stage of writing pedagogy.

Specifically in WAC conversations, Poe argues that race has remained largely unaddressed despite the field's professed commitment to inclusive writing instruction. Drawing on an example from a Health Policy course, she demonstrates how racial tensions can become meaningful opportunities for writing and reflection. She critiques dominant frames used in university spaces (like the multicultural, achievement gap, and post-racial frames) for flattening identity and sidestepping deeper interrogations of how race shapes student experiences and expectations. Rather than assuming race is too complex or fraught to bring into conversations about writing, Poe urges us to see it as essential to doing this work well. She writes,

> WAC's limited engagement with race stands in contrast to the rich body of literature in composition studies on ethnic rhetorics and literacies. One gesture to bring race to WAC scholarship is to draw on this body of research. However, because WAC operates throughout the university community, it is also important to consider that simply importing theory into our practices will likely fail (89).

Poe reminds us that addressing race in WAC requires more than borrowing insights from composition studies—it demands a transformation of local practices attuned to the institutional logic and disciplinary norms that shape writing across the curriculum. Like Baker-Bell and Kynard, Poe names the structural and institutional conditions that shape how students experience writing and how faculty respond to it. Her insistence on situating race locally reminds me that we cannot meaningfully discuss student learning unless we consider who our students are, how they perceive themselves, and how others perceive them in institutional spaces. Just as Poe challenges "achievement gap" framings that reduce writing struggles to deficits within students, I'm interested in how a critical multimodal approach can disrupt the connections between academic performance and racialized and standardized communicative norms. Her discussion of racialized expectations in writing classrooms helped me interpret moments in my own data where faculty talked about linguistic diversity as a challenge rather than a resource. These moments underscore how deeply ingrained our expectations can be, as well as how those expectations can inadvertently marginalize students who don't conform to dominant literacy practices. A critical multimodal approach can address this issue because it involves challenging the ideologies embedded in those tools, inquiring about who they serve, and creating space for students to engage in ways that reflect the full complexity of their identities.

Making space for students to engage in ways that reflect the full complexity of their identities requires not only changing assignments but also confronting the institutional and ideological norms that govern language and communication. My findings from the Writing@UW Fellowship reveal how deeply ingrained racialized assumptions about writing shape faculty pedagogical choices, even when those choices are framed as neutral or student-supportive. In her final interview, Amina described writing as a

space for "healing, expression, rupture, liberation" and spoke candidly about how difficult it is to offer that vision in institutional spaces that prioritize containment and correction. Within Fellowship discussions, she told us she often felt as though her words were met with silence or redirection; moments that left her message unmet and abandoned. As she explained, this disconnect between what she sought and what she received was not personal but structural: a product of white supremacy in the academy, which polices emotion, limits discomfort, and silences radical possibility. Another Fellow, in their final interview, spoke of wanting to "honor students' linguistic diversity," but in the same breath, emphasized the importance of "preparing them to succeed in other classes"—effectively reasserting standardized academic English as the only legitimate outcome. These contradictions reflect what Baker-Bell and colleagues name as pedagogical performances of equity that fail to address the deeper conditions of anti-Black linguistic racism. They also echo Asao Inoue and Poe's critiques of how racialized expectations shape writing assessment: when students' epistemologies and linguistic practices are seen as incompatible with academic success, they are quietly excluded.

These moments reflect what Poe identifies as the consequences of racialized expectations in writing, what Baker-Bell points toward when she describes the violence of anti-Black linguistic racism embedded in everyday classroom practices, and what Kynard demands we change when she calls for pedagogies that make Black language, identity, and epistemologies central rather than marginal in academic spaces because when students' communicative practices are viewed as incompatible with academia, their epistemologies are implicitly devalued. This can manifest not just in what is taught but in what remains unsaid, especially around power. During my research, I observed several instances where faculty members avoided acknowledging power in classroom interactions. One participant stated, "I never talk about the power relationship with my students," and instead saved conversations for discussions with colleagues. During my analysis, I linked moments like this during the Fellowship to the racialized pedagogical silences that Baker-Bell critiques, movements that highlight how institutions claim to value equity while instructors sidestep the work of directly confronting linguistic and racial injustice in their teaching. Through a critical multimodal lens, I interpreted these moments not just as institutional

constraints but as opportunities to better support faculty in reimagining multimodal composition as a site of racial justice work.

A Critical Multimodal Literacies Approach to Writing Pedagogies

In the preceding sections, I explored how linguistic and racial justice, equity, and inclusion intersect with and inform a critical multimodal literacies approach to writing pedagogies; drawing them together asks us to both challenge systemic power structures in academic spaces and reimagine what counts as knowledge, who gets to make it, and how it can be communicated. By integrating a multimodal approach into critical pedagogical practices, we can create opportunities for students to bring fuller communicative repertoires into the classroom and challenge the dominance of standardized, text-centric models that can reify histories of white ways of knowing that can lead to students seeing themselves, as Baker-Bell says "through a white gaze" (21). The experiences of the seven faculty members in the Writing@UW Fellowship underscored the need for institutional support to interrogate writing pedagogies so they orient toward equity and justice more directly. I call for these interventions in more detail in Chapter 5, but briefly, to address the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequity, uphold linguistic and racial hierarchies, and narrow the possibilities of what counts as legitimate knowledge both inside and outside the academy, we must support critical multimodal literacies as a framework for transformative change in higher education, one that reorients how we think about writing, language, and learning. This approach encourages us to move beyond deficit-based views of student writing and instead design learning environments that recognize multimodal forms of communication as legitimate and powerful. It invites institutions to revise their curricular structures and faculty development programs to reflect a broader, more inclusive understanding of literacy and meaning-making.

Critical multimodal literacies brings together conversations from writing studies on multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, Lanham, Laure, Murray, New London Group); equity-oriented and social justice writing praxes (Gonzales, Horner & Lu, Lu & Horner, NCTE, Parks, Selfe, Shipka, Yancey); racial justice (Baker-Bell; Inoue; Kyanrd; Poe) and linguistic justice and critical language advocacy (Canagarajah,

Freire, Gonzales, hooks, Sánchez-Martin) to critique how social identities such as race, gender, and class influence our communicative choices, as well as to develop the awareness and ability necessary to engage in communication practices that challenge oppression and promote social justice. When I consider how I place my work, I draw on not only these scholars but also those who point to a theory of multiliteracies as making way for modern digital literacies (Cope et al.; Lankshear and Knobel; Selfe), as well as those who advocate for a view of literacies as situated and shaped by factors such as power relationships, social and cultural contexts, and historical legacies that cannot be understood in isolation (Cheatle and Jarvie; Gee; Gonzales, Kalantzis et al.; Shipka). By emphasizing the situated and complex nature of literacy practices, these scholars highlight our need for a flexible and responsive approach to literacy education that can better meet the diverse needs of learners, communities, and audiences.

Putting these threads together in a critical multimodal approach insists that to develop the ability to critique how meaning is created, circulated, reproduced, and perpetuated, we must understand how different modes of communication interact, as well as how these modes are affected by social, cultural, and political factors. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for recognizing how power operates through language and form but also for imagining more expansive and just possibilities for writing instruction. Critical multimodal pedagogies can intentionally resist traditional approaches to communication and support the dismantling of hierarchies across academic ecologies to foster communicative spaces that engage students' communicative agency across modes. A critical multimodal literacies framework offers one way to do this work by:

- centering multimodal composition as a practice of racial justice by affirming the legitimacy of racialized, multilingual, and community-based ways of knowing, and by challenging white language supremacy and reductive standards of academic writing that exclude these practices;
- contributing to linguistic justice and inclusion by valuing diverse language practices, challenging linguistic hierarchies, and amplifying marginalized voices through the incorporation of multiple modes of communication and expression;

- providing students and faculty with ways to interrogate and understand how different forms of communication can reinforce or challenge dominant narratives, as well as ways to resist and transform through multilingual, multimodal, and culturally grounded expression;
- encouraging students, faculty members, and administrators to challenge the academic/public divide that can marginalize knowledge and experience by valuing multimodal writing for varied audiences inside and outside of the academy;
- teaching students to develop rhetorical responsibility across modes by making deliberate, ethical choices about form, audience, and purpose that is grounded in an awareness of cultural context, rhetorical impact, and engagement with diverse publics.

Together, these commitments push us to support equity, inclusion, racial justice, and linguistic justice by challenging dominant narratives that treat traditional, text-based forms, which are often rooted in white institutional histories, as the standard for academic writing. This orientation is central to my argument that writing instruction across the disciplines must shift toward approaches that question the norms and values shaping what counts as legitimate communication. A critical multimodal literacies framework brings those questions into focus, asking us to treat WAC/WID not only as sites for disciplinary writing instruction, but also as spaces where faculty and students can name, question, and reshape dominant expectations and work together toward more equitable futures for writing and learning. Taken together, these threads forward initiatives dedicated to supporting equity, inclusion, antiracism, and social justice; ask us to challenge dominant narratives and work toward dismantling systemic racism; and push us to promote linguistic justice, allowing transformative engagement with intersecting identities and experiences.

In the following chapters, I explore how a critical multimodal literacies approach was taken up, resisted, and negotiated by Fellows in the Writing@UW Fellowship. I found that all Fellows wrestled with disciplinary norms and institutional expectations that shaped their understanding of what counted as legitimate writing; yet, within and through those constraints, they made different choices. Some reimagined their pedagogical approaches in ways that aligned more fully with the equity-oriented goals

that they brought into the Fellowship, while others made smaller or more cautious shifts as they navigated doubts or institutional and disciplinary limitations. These variations were not a simple matter of resistance versus embrace but of situated interpretation shaped by language ideology, institutional context, and disciplinary training. By tracing these engagements, I show how the uptake of critical multimodality is not linear or uniform but layered, reflective, and shaped by complex negotiations of power, language, and pedagogy.

Chapter 3

Challenge, Resistance, and Negotiation of a Critical Multimodal Literacies Approach in Disciplinary Writing Pedagogies

What we build are Museums, peculiar sorts of cultural temples in which students are 'invited' in to sample the best that has been thought and expressed in our language *and maybe even, like the art students we see poised in galleries with their sketchbooks and charcoals, to learn to reproduce the master's craft.*

—Geoffrey Sirc, "The Still-Unbuilt Hacienda"

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.

—bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

I find it useful to imagine formal writing as one in a number of different modalities that I could use for final projects. This enables me to think through what exactly I am hoping the students will gain from writing and to articulate to them how and why they should write.

—Fellow Eleanor, in her post-Fellowship reflection

As I write this chapter and return to key moments working with disciplinary writing instructors through their involvement in the Writing@UW Fellowship—the site of my research—I'm struck by how participants responded when they encountered multimodality not just as a theoretical concept but as a challenge to their classrooms, their disciplines, and their assumptions about writing. These encounters often surfaced friction: some participants described multimodality as an add-on, while others struggled to see how it fit within disciplinary norms. In many cases, faculty responses revealed the weight of institutional expectations and the persistence of language ideologies that define what counts as legitimate

writing. And yet, even within moments of friction and resistance, I also saw moments of reflection—points where instructors paused to reconsider an assignment so that it aligned with pedagogical goals or name a tension they hadn't noticed before in how writing was positioned within their discipline. These moments didn't always signal clear shifts or resolutions. More often, they revealed what I've come to understand as generative tension: a productive discomfort that opened new questions about how power circulates through language norms, genre expectations, and institutional definitions of "good writing." In these tensions, I saw the beginnings of more critical conversations—about who gets to define academic discourse, whose rhetorical practices are centered or marginalized, and what possibilities open when instructors begin to question the ideological assumptions embedded in their teaching. In this chapter, I trace these tensions as evidence of the labor involved in confronting deeply held assumptions about writing and the role of modality in academic communication.

When I think about how faculty learn alongside their students and how teaching itself becomes a site of transformation, I turn to bell hooks, drawing on Paulo Freire in her *Teaching to Transgress*, reminding us that critical education cannot be a one-way street. For hooks, learning is reciprocal and revolutionary for everyone involved. She writes, "Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow and are empowered by the process" (21). I think about how the principles of critical pedagogy, with its emphasis on reflexivity, power, and relational learning—shape how faculty encounter and engage with critical multimodality. In the Writing@UW Fellowship, these encounters often surfaced through hesitation, resistance, and negotiation. As a facilitator and participant-observer within the Fellowship, I was embedded in these dynamics, listening as other participants worked through the tensions that emerged when multimodality disrupted familiar definitions of writing and academic legitimacy. What I trace in this chapter are not fully resolved shifts or embraces of critical multimodality but points of friction—places where institutional expectations, disciplinary norms, and personal commitments met and responded to a critical multimodal approach. These moments often surfaced quietly, in metaphors or offhand remarks, but they revealed deep underlying assumptions about what counts as legitimate writing;

the friction and labor and partial uptakes involved in encountering and shifting these assumptions show us the potential for a critical multimodal approach across disciplinary writing spaces.

For me, one such moment came during our very first session, when Nick, a faculty member in mechanical engineering, responded to a discussion about "genreless writing." One fellow had brought up the idea that students should emerge from first-year writing classes with a "general set of writing skills," to which Director of Writing Megan Callow (the facilitator of the Writing@UW Fellowship) gently pushed back and led a short conversation about how communicative choice doesn't happen in a vacuum, that rhetorical choice depends on context, audience, situation. Nick immediately responded: "That makes sense," he said. "You can't explain nuts and bolts, put them on a table, and then ask students to make an airplane the next day." At first, Nick's comment surprised me; it gestured toward an understanding of writing as a process—that students need time, support, and contextual understanding to develop their learning. But as I revisited Nick's metaphor, I began to interpret it differently. What struck me later, during my analysis, was how his metaphor might reflect ideologies of communication in STEM that see writing as decontextualized and connected to tool-building. For Nick, writing is a set of static components students tinker with to build a tool with an already determined shape and function; writing in this way is not situational or negotiated; it is predetermined. This stands in contrast to what the New London Group describes as a pedagogy of multiliteracies, which positions meaning-making as a process of design that is context-dependent, socially situated, and responsive to multiple modes and communicative needs (66). This conversation and Nick's metaphor, I realized during my analysis, was an early Fellowship moment that pointed to tension in which the logics of critical pedagogies and engineering met and didn't quite align; the nuts and bolts on the table pointed to a value system in which writing serves a fixed function, a value system that might be at odds with a critical multimodal approach. Nick's metaphor suggested a view of writing as the transmission of technical knowledge rather than as a rhetorical act, a view of communication that resists the kind of contextual, justice-oriented reimagining that critical multimodal pedagogy demands. This moment reminded me that critical multimodal pedagogy, if it's going to matter across disciplines, must attend to the frameworks that already shape how people teach and learn. Scholars

in WAC/WID have long noted that disciplinary norms are not just stylistic but epistemological—that is, they reflect what counts as knowledge in a field and how that knowledge should be communicated (Carter; Thaiss and Zawacki). As Christopher Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki explain, disciplinary instructors often perceive writing as a way to convey content knowledge rather than as a rhetorical practice shaped by context. Nick's metaphor was when I began to see this scholarship in action—when I began to understand that disciplinary faculty approach writing not only through different expectations but through entirely different conceptual frameworks, values, and language ideologies. That shift pushed me to reconsider how critical multimodal literacies might need to account for, and work with, these disciplinary epistemologies.

My analysis draws on six months of participant observation and facilitation of the Writing@UW Fellowship, a professional development series where seven disciplinary faculty members from across the University of Washington Seattle gathered every other Friday for workshops on writing pedagogy. In addition to participating in each session, I co-designed Fellowship activities, discussions, and workshop lesson plans with the Director of Writing, Megan Callow. In this chapter, I analyze two key moments during the Fellowship when Fellows directly engaged with concepts central to a critical multimodal literacies approach to writing pedagogies, an approach that I developed in Chapter 2 and that I used as a framework for analyzing pedagogical change during the Writing@UW Fellowship. Briefly, a critical multimodal literacies approach asks us to incorporate diverse modes of expression and knowledges into the classroom with the specific intention of disrupting dominant norms about what counts as writing and who gets to participate. This approach also broadens who our classrooms can reach and what knowledges are centered, opening space for more expansive audiences, purposes, and ways of knowing to be recognized as legitimate within academic contexts. A critical multimodal approach brings together critical pedagogy, racial and linguistic justice, translingualism, and multimodality to envision writing classrooms in which students can challenge oppressive systems by valuing all available means of persuasion that they can leverage to do so.

The moments that I analyze in this chapter surfaced tensions, possibilities, and negotiations around critical multimodal writing practices in the Fellows' disciplines and classrooms, and they are contextualized through a range of data: transcripts of workshop discussions, survey responses, annotations of Fellowship required readings, and interviews. I also draw from materials Fellows created during workshop activities, notes from guest speaker sessions, and my fieldnotes from each session and planning meeting with Megan. Together, these sources provide a nuanced understanding of how faculty members adopted and negotiated critical multimodal literacies. In my analysis of these moments, two main themes emerged: first, *institutional and disciplinary gatekeeping* (the formal and informal mechanisms that limit access to full participation in academic communities) and *implicit language ideologies and expectations embedded in academic contexts* (unspoken norms for what constitutes appropriate language use in assignments, classrooms, and disciplinary discourse).

In the next section, I define language ideologies, drawing on translingual and critical language scholarship to support a conversation that explores how I saw language ideologies in action during the Writing@UW Fellowship and how these ideologies shaped faculty engagement with critical multimodality, especially in relation to disciplinary norms, assumptions about student language, and notions of academic legitimacy. This section sets the stage for the rest of the chapter by foregrounding the role of language ideologies as a key force shaping how instructors make sense of and respond to critical multimodal approaches. By surfacing these underlying assumptions, I contextualize the moments of friction, reflection, and uptake that unfold in the two sessions I analyze below. I then explore two key sessions in which Fellows were explicitly presented with a critical multimodal approach to disciplinary communication. The first moment, which I explore in the subsection of this chapter called, "Reclaiming and Resisting: Multimodality, Disciplinarity, and Linguistic Justice", came during Session 4 when guest speaker and Associate Dean for Equity, Justice, and Inclusion, Maya Angela Smith brought up the liberatory potential of critical multimodality in academic spaces, sparking diverse responses from several Fellows that revealed contrasting language ideologies and disciplinary conventions. The second moment, which I analyze in the subsection of this chapter named "Navigating Multimodal Adoption: Barriers and

Emerging Practices", came during Session 7 when Fellows engaged with a workshop activity that I designed, in which they were asked to consider multimodal assignments as a way to leverage their pedagogical goals for equity and inclusion.

Ultimately, this chapter examines how faculty in the Writing@UW Fellowship engaged with, pushed back against, or struggled to adopt a critical multimodal approach in their disciplinary writing classrooms. By looking at key moments in the Fellowship, I show how language ideologies and disciplinary norms affect what feels possible—and what feels too risky—when it comes to designing for equity and inclusion. This chapter makes the case that shifting writing pedagogies requires more than new frameworks or assignment templates; it also entails confronting the assumptions that shape how writing is taught, learned, and valued across disciplines.

Legitimacy and Language: Unpacking Language Ideologies

Language ideologies do more than shape communication norms. They tether to and sustain systems of power, delineating what forms of language use and knowledge are seen as credible, who is heard, what audiences are reached and valued, and whose modes of expression are marked as valuable or deficient (Bou Ayash; Flores and Rosa; Inoue). Through my research on and work with faculty Fellows in the Writing@UW Fellowship, I came to realize that understanding how Fellows were engaging with language ideologies is crucial to understanding the applicability of a critical multimodal literacies framework to disciplinary writing spaces. Often internalized through habit and practice, language ideologies can seem naturalized and tacit rather than imposed (Bourdieu), but their effects are anything but neutral: they align with broader systems of exclusion to define whose knowledge is recognized and whose is dismissed (Motha; Inoue). Likewise, language ideologies are not incidental to writing instruction; instead, they are baked into the very assumptions that undergird assignments, assessments, and classroom interaction (Horner and Trimbur). When faculty operate within fixed notions of academic English, they may unintentionally reinforce dominant expectations about tone, genre, grammar, or citation style—assumptions rooted in racialized, classed, and ableist norms (Baker-Bell; Lockett). These norms

can function as gatekeeping tools, particularly for students who are multilingual, neurodivergent, or from non-dominant educational and cultural contexts (Greenfield; Prendergast).

A critical multimodal literacies pedagogical framework this framework challenges the pervasive and narrow idea that meaning is best or only made through formal, standardized English and traditional academic genres. It insists that meaning emerges through multiple forms of expression and that these forms should be recognized, respected, and integrated into how we think about writing, especially because they carry cultural, linguistic, and political significance. Critical multimodality cannot be seen, however, as merely adding modes to a curriculum without changing underlying exclusionary language ideologies or structures. Instead, critical multimodal approaches offer an orientation to language and meaning-making that aims to transform the communicative possibilities of the classroom in ways that disrupt racialized, classed, and ableist hierarchies of language. This disruption, though, depends on instructors being willing to examine and unsettle their own assumptions about language. Through my research, I found that by surfacing and questioning language ideologies, instructors could more fully realize the liberatory potential of a critical multimodal approach, not just as a pedagogical strategy but as an equity-oriented stance that can help us identify where gatekeeping happens, how access is restricted, and what shifts are needed for genuinely inclusive writing practices.

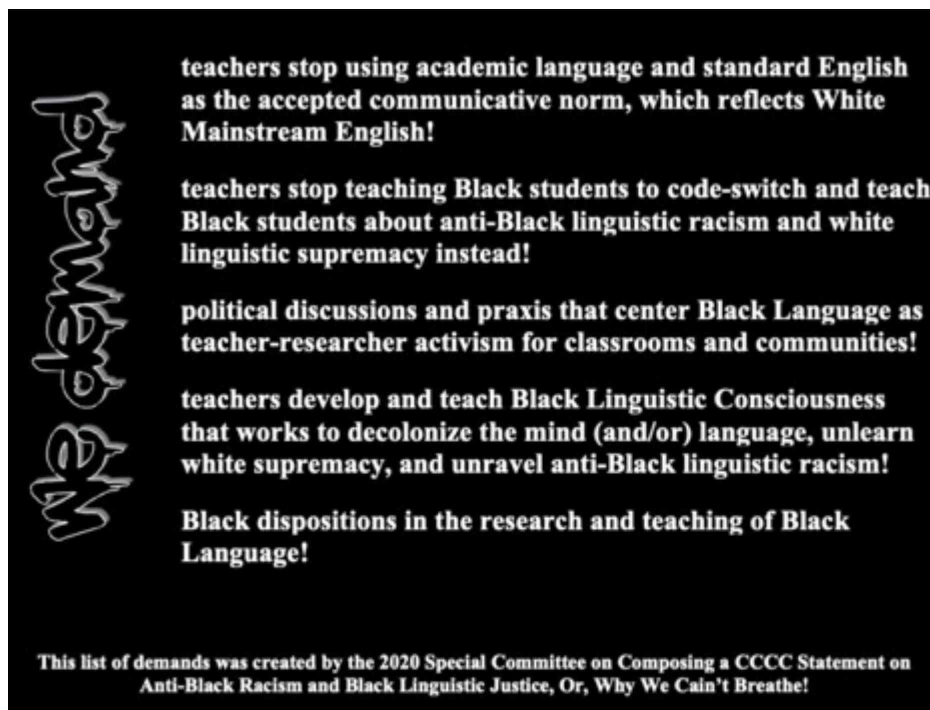
Some days the theoretical ideas you have as a researcher seem to swoop down and manifest right before your eyes in a felt, everyday moment. One of those moments happened during Session 4, when Dr. Maya Angela Smith, the Associate Dean for Equity, Justice, and Inclusion and our guest speaker for that day of the Writing@UW Fellowship, offered us a powerful shift in our perspective when she invited us to think beyond scaffolding and toward transformation, framing multimodality as a means of reclaiming academic space.

“Who attended the Big Read last week?” she asked, as she looked around the table. She was asking us about a recent event sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences that brought Dr. Joy Buolamwini, author of *Unmasking AI: My Mission to Protect What is Human in a World of Machines* and founder of the Algorithmic Justice League, to campus. A murmur of recognition came from around the

table, but none of us had attended. Dr. Smith nodded and described the event for us: she explained that Dr. Buolamwini told the audience that her presentation would reclaim the *academic presentation* as a space that was wholly hers. Dr. Buolamwini used poetry to tell stories about how facial recognition software fails to see women with darker skin tones—braiding personal experience with data to expose the harms caused by technologies trained on datasets built around middle-aged white men. Dr. Smith shared this moment with the Fellowship to show how powerful that multimodal performance had been. In a setting where academic talks can feel routine, Dr. Buolamwini transformed an abstract technical issue into something embodied and urgent. Her blend of poetry, narrative, and visual data didn't just challenge the form of the academic presentation—it challenged what counts as knowledge in academic spaces. Dr. Smith used this moment to ask us to consider how multimodal work can push back against dominant academic norms that privilege linear, alphabetic, and supposedly objective arguments. It wasn't just about diversifying form. It was about power—about how academic standards often center on white, Western ways of knowing while sidelining other rhetorical traditions. By raising this example, Dr. Smith invited us to reconsider where and how academic legitimacy is constructed. As she gathered her belongings to leave for another meeting, Dr. Smith paused to lean forward and engage us one last time, encouraging us to consider Dr. Buolamwini's approach as a model for how we, too, might reclaim spaces. It was a challenge, an invitation to think critically about how we create educational spaces, what we value in those spaces, and why we value it.

During the break that followed Dr. Smith's visit, people stood to stretch and grab snacks, and some grabbed their laptops. I remember this moment well, as I sat back and free-wrote in my research journal about Dr. Smith and Dr. Buolamwini, genres, and modes, my thoughts a swirl of promise and potential of multimodal pedagogy to disrupt dominant academic norms and make space for more inclusive, justice-oriented teaching. But I also remember the mix of thoughts of the constraint and convention imposed by institutional expectations that prioritize polished, text-based work in standardized English. I thought about the weight the institution puts on the form and polish of products, prioritizing standardized English language and traditional text-based academic genres over the diverse modes of

expression that could better serve our students' realities, support diverse knowledges, and appeal to audiences within and beyond the academy. I thought about Baker-Bell et al.'s **DEMAND** for Black linguistic justice, especially their assertion that "Socially constructed terms like academic language and standard English are rooted in white supremacy, whiteness, and anti-Blackness."



Screenshot of April Baker-Bell, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier, Davena Jackson, Lamar Johnson, Carmen Kynard, and Teaira McMurtry's "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!" on NCTE's website.

They challenge educators to stop treating Black Language as a problem to be fixed and instead recognize the harm caused by language policies and classroom practices that position whiteness as the standard. This harm is visible in grading rubrics, expectations for formality and tone, and assumptions about what constitutes "good" writing. Their work compels me to think about how institutional norms around polish and form not only marginalize multimodal expression but also silence the linguistic realities and cultural knowledge our students bring with them. Their **DEMAND** reminds me that institutional expectations often reinforce embedded norms rooted in white supremacy—norms that constrain not just students but also the faculty who want to teach differently. It pushes me to see critical multimodal pedagogy as part of

the work of linguistic justice; a direct challenge to the hierarchies that continue to shape academic writing.

As I sit with these ideas during my analysis later, I start to see how they're all pointing to the same thing: Dr. Smith's recounting of Buolamwini's multimodal performance and her charge to reclaim academic spaces, Baker-Bell's call for linguistic justice … They're asking us to be intentional about the forms we privilege, to recognize how language and genre can operate as gatekeepers, and to imagine what might be possible if we chose otherwise. I think about how often faculty members and others in academia—including myself—feel the pressure to produce polished, text-based work in standardized English and how that pressure trickles down to our students. This feeling of expectation reflects the dominance of white language supremacy in academic spaces, where a fiction exists of a fixed, neutral, and standardized English, a socially constructed ideal rooted in whiteness and designed to maintain hierarchies of access and credibility, continues to infect our expectations for what counts as legitimate expression. What is treated as standard or neutral in academic writing is anything but; it's an ideology that rewards certain patterns of speech and writing while devaluing others, often demanding that racialized ways of knowing conform in order to be recognized as legitimate. In their work, both Inoue and Baker-Bell name many of the ways these norms uphold systems of exclusion that privilege whiteness and marginalize Black, Indigenous, and multilingual expression. Critical multimodality is a way of pushing back; it's not a fun add-on for classroom variety. It's a way of saying that voice, movement, image, and non-dominant language practices have a place here, too, and, not only have a tolerated place, but a place that contributes transformational knowledges and meaning-making practices that are needed to broaden what counts as knowledge, how it's communicated, and who is authorized to produce it. It's in these moments, sitting around a table, scribbling in a notebook, listening to a poem about algorithms or a story about a classroom, that I begin to see more clearly the kind of work I want to do: create more room: room for students, room for other voices and more diverse audiences, room for different ways of knowing and being in the world.

My work is deeply influenced by translingual, multimodal, and critical language scholars such as Bou Ayash, Canagarajah, Inoue, Selfe, Suhanthie Motha, and others, who I detail in Chapter 2. Still, in sum, these scholars examine dominant language ideologies—embedded ways of thinking about language that shapes which forms of communication are prioritized, accepted, and valued in academic spaces. Translingualism emphasizes language as fluid, negotiated, and shaped by power, challenging monolingual norms by highlighting the rhetorical and political dimensions of language use. Within this framework, Bou Ayash demands that there has to be an "activist dimension to translingualism in writing pedagogy, which involves a deliberate intervention in taken-for-granted monolingual and multilingual language representations and practices" (18). Inoue further critiques this by arguing that writing instruction grounded in language standards inevitably reproduces racial hierarchies that result in damage to our students:

> It's heartbreaking at times to know that this fundamental aspect of the college experience, writing assessment, fucks up so many young students who stop using writing for their own ontological purposes because the assessment ecologies they enter are unfriendly, caustic, uncomfortable, and unsafe (280).

Taken together, these scholars insist that critical pedagogies challenge not just what is taught but how communication is defined and evaluated in academic settings. A critical multimodal literacies framework extends these demands for racial and linguistic justice by treating language and modality as already shaped by power. By bringing these definitions together, I aim to show how dominant language ideologies shape faculty perceptions of both student work and their own pedagogical possibilities—and why multimodal and translingual practices must be central to efforts toward more just writing instruction.

The faculty Fellows I worked with encountered a tension when considering critical multimodal pedagogies in their classrooms—a tension that I found often connected to a feeling of mismatch between their desire to honor students' linguistic and cultural resources and the institutional pressures to maintain what counts as academic legitimacy. As I explored my data, I identified two overlapping themes within the broader scope of language ideologies that I explore in more detail below and in the subsequent

sections: “Institutional and disciplinary gatekeeping” and “Implicit language expectations embedded in academic contexts.” The difference between these lies in their mechanisms and scope within a restrictive language ecology. To illustrate how I considered *gatekeeping* in my analysis, I draw on scholars of disciplinary writing who have argued that gatekeeping in academic contexts often takes the form of invisible expectations and institutional norms that privilege dominant, standardized forms of English. For example, Horner and Trimbur warn that,

> Tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism has shaped the historical formation of U.S. writing instruction and continues to influence its theory and practice in shadowy, largely unexamined ways (594).

These tacit policies have tendrils that affect communication norms across university campuses, reinforcing dominant writing norms and functioning as gatekeeping mechanisms that privilege certain linguistic practices while marginalizing others, which is a view that a critical multimodal approach seeks to challenge. A critical multimodal literacies framework invites instructors to interrogate normative assumptions about language and mode—examining how these intersect with power in pedagogical choices that may, even unintentionally, reinforce gatekeeping around which communicative modes, practices, audiences, genres, and knowledges are recognized as legitimate. A critical multimodal approach doesn’t abandon dominant forms but asks faculty to interrogate what those forms mean, whom they serve, and what it costs to center them. Importantly, a critical multimodal literacies framework does not preclude the teaching of traditional academic genres—lab reports, literary analyses, and research essays, which are themselves multimodal as all communication is—but insists that these forms be taught critically, which I’ll say more about in later sections. There are good reasons to teach them: they provide access to academic and professional opportunities and help students navigate institutional expectations; however, the trouble arises when such forms are taught as the only legitimate modes of academic communication, uncritically, without attention to their histories, exclusions, and the power they wield in determining who succeeds and who is left out. A critical multimodal approach instead situates communicative choice

within a broader rhetorical ecology, where students learn to analyze and respond to the politics of genre, mode, and audience with awareness and agency.

WAC/WID scholars have long noted how disciplinary writing expectations often appear fixed yet are, in fact, shaped by tacit norms and institutional histories that can be challenged and reshaped (Anson; Hall). As Hall argues, WAC/WID must engage in "boundary play" rather than simply enforcing boundaries, recognizing disciplinary conventions as porous and open to transformation. Faculty in the Fellowship often found themselves caught in a bind of wanting to open space for more inclusive and multimodal forms of student expression while also feeling pressure to maintain institutional and disciplinary constraints that continue to reward conformity to narrow writing standards. These tensions are not incidental; they are shaped by ideologies about language, knowledge, and legitimacy, what Cox, Galin, and Melzer call the "cultures of writing" embedded in disciplinary and institutional systems, and they surface most clearly in the moments when faculty reflect on what they feel able—or unable—to change in their classrooms. When I interviewed Fellows about multimodality in their courses at the end of the Fellowship, for example, several Fellows talked about disciplinary gatekeeping mechanisms that they felt prevented or limited a comprehensive critical multimodal approach. Both Nora, from English, and Gillian, from astronomy, told me they struggle with master's degree applications because students must demonstrate proficiency in specific genres, such as research articles or literary analyses if they want to be accepted into higher education programs. Both Nora and Gillian discussed their knowledge of and ambivalence towards this form of gatekeeping, and both expressed a sense of frustration at a perceived inability to influence the systems that affect who is granted access to advanced academic opportunities based on their ability to conform to these standards. What's significant here is not just their recognition of these expectations but the tension between wanting to support student access to these pathways and wanting to disrupt the structures that make access to the academy so conditional. In my own teaching, I've struggled with this same tension—how to prepare students for institutional demands without reinforcing the narrow definitions of what counts as legitimate writing. This ultimately led to my interest in researching multimodal approaches in writing classrooms. Drawing on my own experiences and

connecting them to the choices I made as a participant observer of the Writing@UW Fellowship helped me unpack these types of moments in the Fellowship conversations. That is, these moments in the Fellowship revealed for me the kind of negotiation that a critical multimodal literacies framework invites and demands. A critical multimodal approach does not preclude a focus on standard academic conventions; rather, it insists on situating those conventions in a broader ecology of rhetorical practice, where students learn to read and respond to the politics of genre, mode, and audience with critical awareness.

But formal genre expectations are only one part of the picture. Just as powerful are the *unwritten rules* that circulate beneath the surface of academic life. These informal expectations are harder to name and, therefore, more difficult to resist, yet they significantly shape how faculty and students navigate institutional spaces. Unwritten rules function through cultural and social norms that are often "just how things are done." I found Bourdieu's concept of habitus helpful here, as it explains the ways in which individuals, often unconsciously, internalize and perpetuate practices that sustain systems of power. Bourdieu defines habitus as

> systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to serve as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (53).

This definition can feel overwhelming, and so I found sociologist Steve Vaisey's interpretation helpful in clarifying its implications. Vaisey describes habitus as "a hard-to-change, widely applicable set of habits of acting, seeing, and talking that are learned from patterns in our social environment and, through their repeated use, tend to recreate similar environmental patterns over time." These habits might feel intuitive, he explains, even though they reflect underlying systems of power. They are not neutral; that is, they reinforce these systems, and they are racialized. As Motha puts it, "racism has become so naturalized

within the project of teaching English that its presence is no longer noticeable" (71). Her point highlights how power often operates quietly—not through official policies but through everyday teaching practices and assumptions that rarely get questioned. These unwritten norms stick around because they feel like common sense.

When I think about the stories shared by Fellows throughout the Fellowship, I can see a connection to Bourdieu's habitus in that they demonstrate how even when formal rules aren't explicitly stated, they are still felt and enforced. During a Fellowship discussion, for example, Gillian told a story of submitting a journal article early in her career and having it rejected because the scientific journal editors were "grumpy" about her word choice. SJ, from the Department of Communication, shared an experience with a student who wanted to write parts of their honor's thesis in their own language. While SJ's department doesn't have an explicit rule forbidding it, SJ encountered resistance from department members who expected the student's work to conform to standardized academic English. The experiences Gillian and SJ described reflect how these ideologies about what is valid and appropriate in certain contexts operate beneath the surface: faculty may not be enforcing formal rules, but the expectations are clear and carry consequences. These faculty members' stories illustrate how dominant language ideologies become naturalized in disciplinary contexts and shape not only what counts as "good" writing but also who is seen as capable or legitimate. In my own work as both a teacher and a researcher, I return often to Canagarajah's observation that standardization is never just about clarity—it is about control.

> Though efforts at language standardization, purification, and codification in many communities are often considered heroic efforts of progress, we have to also consider the ulterior motivations behind them. This is often an arbitrary process of grouping diverse semiotic resources together, attaching a label to name them, and claiming ownership of them (21–22).

Here, Canagarajah argues that the construction of standardized language is a social act bound up in power, power that reflects the interests of those who get to decide what counts as legitimate communication. This insight motivates much of my research: the understanding that these groupings, which are often either

invisible or presented as neutral, inevitable, carry real and often punishing consequences. These dominant English language ideologies shape who is seen as proficient, who gains access, and whose meaning-making practices are marked as deficient. I've seen how these ideologies surface in my own classroom and in the professional development spaces I facilitate. I don't position myself as outside these dynamics; instead, I see myself as working within them, trying to name what often goes unnamed (including in my own practices). In both Gillian and SJ's cases, the issue wasn't a set of formal rules—there was no handbook listing which words were off-limits in astronomy journals or dictating the language requirements of an honors thesis. Instead, the internalized norms made certain ways of writing feel unquestionably "correct." These norms, shaped by disciplinary history and language ideologies, function with the same regulatory force as official policies but are harder to name and, therefore, harder to challenge. A critical multimodal literacies framework allows me to read these moments not as isolated frustrations but as evidence of how language ideologies operate systemically, quietly shaping what feels possible, acceptable, or legitimate in academic writing.

Through identifying barriers to engaging with the practices and principles of a critical multimodal approach, I also saw how deeply entrenched language ideologies affected faculty approaches to writing in their courses and disciplines. These insights offered a deeper understanding of the forces at play when faculty consider integrating multimodality into their classrooms. In the following sections, I address two central challenges that emerged from my research: first, how disciplinary norms and institutional expectations constrained faculty engagement with critical multimodal pedagogies, and second, how implicit language ideologies influenced assumptions about students' linguistic practices and academic legitimacy.

Reclaiming and Resisting: Multimodality, Disciplinarity, and Linguistic Justice

"Writing and Difference: Teaching Toward Justice," was the title of Session 4 of the Writing@UW Fellowship. Megan and I designed it to deepen Fellows' engagement with linguistic justice and antiracist pedagogies. We asked Fellows to prepare for this session by reading three texts that prompt

reflection on how language ideologies shape teaching across disciplines: the Program in Writing and Rhetoric's "Statement on Antiracist Pedagogy and Program Praxis", Vivian Zamel's "Strangers in Academia" and Adrienne Jankens et al.'s "A Dual Mission: Antiracist Writing Instruction and Instructor Attitudes about Student Language." The broad goals for this session were for faculty to better understand how writing pedagogies in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (where students typically earn their "C" credit) center racial and linguistic justice and how antiracist approaches to writing in composition might inform writing instruction across disciplines.[8] We opened the session by discussing key concepts from the readings, including the tensions between antiracism and disciplinary norms and the role of writing in shaping access and authority, when Dr. Smith joined the conversation to talk with us about her work as the Associate Dean for Equity, Justice, and Inclusion. After Dr. Smith left the session and we all took a break, we then transitioned to a project share-out, where Fellows described in-progress assignments and received formative feedback from one another. This overall structure—first exploring theory and praxis, then applying those ideas to concrete projects—provided an important backdrop for conversation.

At this moment, after discussing the two texts, talking with Dr. Smith, and listening to one Fellow talk about their Fellowship project, Megan posed a question about genre conventions in the variety of disciplines represented in the Fellowship, tying it to a tension between disciplinary genre constraints and inclusive pedagogies. When we were planning the Writing@UW Fellowship, creating moments like this one was one of our core goals—to prompt Fellows to examine the forms and genres they assign and to consider why certain genres are privileged over others. We wanted Fellows to reflect on how these genre preferences shape not only what students are able to express but also what they feel permitted to express within their courses and, more broadly, within their fields. We designed activities that would support Fellows in interrogating their own assignments, surfacing ways that writing pedagogies can reinforce biases that naturalize whiteness, marginalize multilingual expression, and uphold inequities in who gets heard and how. In this session, during the workshop portion where Fellows shared course materials,

[8] More information about this session is available in Appendix 4.

Megan turned to the group: “We have to acknowledge that genres in certain disciplines are much more highly constrained,” she said, “while others are more free, experimental, or creative.” By implicitly referencing fields like art, creative writing, and some humanities disciplines, she invited the group to consider how epistemologies shape the genres students are asked to compose in. “I think that points to how genre constraints represent epistemological differences,” she continued. “So how do you cope with that—fostering inclusivity while working with a highly constrained genre?”

This moment brought our planning conversations into the Fellowship space; Megan’s framing emphasized what we had hoped Fellows would begin to articulate: that genre is not simply a neutral container for content but a reflection of how knowledge is constructed, valued, and communicated in a discipline.[9] As she spoke, I glanced around the room, wondering how it would land—what kinds of reflections it might spark. Megan’s question illuminated a central dilemma in writing pedagogy: how to support inclusive, flexible approaches to meaning-making in disciplines that require mastery of rigid, tightly bound genres. This balancing act had come up in nearly every workshop planning session we held. We hoped that by asking Fellows to reflect on disciplinary conventions, they might begin to see those conventions with fresh eyes—to recognize how easily extensive experience can make such norms invisible, like water in a fishbowl. A critical multimodal approach invites us to question which modes are welcomed in particular contexts and what those choices reveal about power, access, and voice in academic spaces. It insists that modes are not neutral choices but carry ideological weight: some are privileged as legitimate carriers of academic meaning, while others are marginalized or excluded altogether. As a researcher, I hoped this conversation might open the door to multimodality—not as a set of alternative formats, but, as Jody Shipka describes, a way to foster rhetorical and communicative flexibility. Her work invites both students and instructors to reflect on why they make the choices they do

[9] My understanding of genre come from the work of Amy Devitt, Charles Bazerman, and Anis Bawarshi, who, in different ways, emphasize they ways in which genres aren’t neutral—they’re affected by disciplinary histories and social contexts, and in turn, they affect what kinds of knowledge are valued and how authority is constructed. That framing helped me approach genre as a organizing force in academic life—one that can either reinforce dominant norms or be questioned and reimagined through our writing pedagogies.

and what those choices make possible. As co-facilitators, Megan and I wanted Fellows to consider not just how communication moves in their fields, but also what certain genres might exclude: what modes, languages, voices, and students. By asking faculty to surface how genre expectations regulate not only content but also form, modality, and linguistic legitimacy, we aimed to support a pedagogy that treats multimodality not as an add-on but as a way to question the racialized, classed, and ableist assumptions that undergird academic communication. Gillian, a faculty fellow from astronomy, responded first.

> I start by not constraining them. If they're freaked out about starting to write something, I tell them, write a terrible draft. I purposely use words like terrible draft or crappy draft – write it and don't care about how it sounds. If you need to use an emoji, if you need to curse, if you need to use slang, if you need to use your own language, like get the ideas on the paper and then we can edit it and play with the language. But if they're trying to write in a highly constrained style, they highly constrain how they think. And then it gets in the way of like, you have really complicated ideas, you just need to put down. Put them down however you like and then clean them up. It's taking away the guardrails of the style at first, because I find that it's always easier to get the style later once the idea is down. But if you're trying to do it all at once, it's really you really stiffen up.

Her comments underscored a key tension in critical multimodal work: that genre constraints don't merely shape how students express their thinking—they delimit the kinds of thinking and knowing that are possible in the first place. She explained how she tries to get students not to constrain their thinking while also attempting to alleviate their anxiety about perfection in their writing, pointing to two instances in which she often sees students stymied by constraint. Gillian continued,

> I have students who are terrified of writing because they feel like they need to write to not screw up. They feel like the writing has to come out of their fingers good, and they approach it very defensively.

This fear, she explained, informs her pedagogy as she strives to support student confidence in their ability to write in scientific genres. She talked about guiding students through stages of writing development: a "larval" stage in which ideas are messy and unclear and can be shaped, polished, and developed to better align with scientific language and convention at later stages. Gillian explained that many of her students

fear making mistakes, not just because of grades, but because they worry that any error will reflect poorly on their competence. This fear, she told the group, prohibits students from wanting to write at all. She talked about helping students overcome writer's block, asking them to email a friend or family member to "complain about their writing assignment," an informal approach that she hoped would help students organize their thoughts without the pressure of a formal structure or a "scary" audience, such as an editor of a scientific journal. She also asks students to write a "crappy draft," in which she encourages students to engage in freewriting, using emojis or slang, creating drawings, or writing in other languages; the intent is to get ideas out of the student's head and onto paper in any way they can.

Gillian came into the Fellowship wanting to work on a senior-level writing course that she had taught for a year. The course is for astronomy majors, most of whom are concurrently conducting independent research. The course ends with in a major writing assignment: a research paper modeled after those published in astrophysics journals. However, Gillian recognized that many students—particularly multilingual writers and those without prior experience reading or writing in disciplinary genres—approached this task with a lot of anxiety. To address this, she devised a "paper a week" structure, not to assign full-length polished papers but to create regular, low-stakes writing engagements that build toward the final assignment. These weekly assignments might include zero drafts, detailed outlines, figure design, or mimicry exercises like rewriting a breakfast routine in a scientific voice. "It's a trick," Gillian explained, "to get them doing what we all wish they would do: start early, revise often, and get comfortable with the genre." This iterative model prioritizes writing as a process and recognizes how genre fluency develops through recursive practice. While her assignments scaffold students toward standard disciplinary forms, Gillian's reflective teaching and creative prompts also open possibilities for critical multimodal engagement. By treating scientific writing as rhetorical rather than neutral, emphasizing voice, audience, and translation across contexts, and foregrounding visual communication, Gillian's course demonstrates how instructors can meet disciplinary expectations while also unsettling the gatekeeping norms that make scientific writing feel inaccessible. With a more intentional framing, her course could move toward a critical multimodal approach—not by removing disciplinary genres but by

teaching them as situated and affected by power. While Gillian's strategies demonstrate a genuine effort to support student expression, they're still framed as steps toward more traditional forms, and multimodality is presented as a bridge to conformity rather than a means to question why those norms exist. That difference matters. Without a critical lens, multimodal work risks becoming a fun extra, an add-on instead of a way to challenge the disciplinary structures that define what counts in her field.

While Gillian does not explicitly frame her approach to her classroom as multimodal, her use of varied modes—such as drawing, emojis, and informal language—creates entry points that help students feel more comfortable engaging with scientific writing. These strategies provide students with low-stakes opportunities to explore their ideas and reflect an intentional effort to make writing less intimidating. In this way, multimodality becomes a means of reducing barriers and inviting students into the work of disciplinary communication. Yet, while these practices draw on multiple semiotic resources, they are ultimately framed as part of a progression toward a singular endpoint: polished, conventional scientific prose. Gillian refers to early-stage student work as "larval," a term that signals not only messiness and growth but also temporariness. The implication is that these multimodal forms are valuable primarily as steps on the way to more legitimate expressions of disciplinary knowledge. This framing, while pedagogically generous, stops short of engaging with the political dimensions of multimodality. It casts nontraditional modes as developmental rather than legitimate, and in doing so, reinforces the very genre, linguistic, and knowledge hierarchies that multimodality has the potential to unsettle. Without a critical lens on how and why disciplinary standards are constructed, multimodal strategies risk being used simply to prepare students to conform to dominant academic norms rather than equipping them to question them. As I detail in Chapter 2, a critical multimodal approach is not defined by the assignment itself but, among other things, by how it positions students in relation to dominant norms—whether it invites them to see those norms as fixed or as contingent, open to critique, and shaped by power. Gillian's approach illustrates the tension between using multimodality as a scaffold and using it as a transformative practice, a practice that could encourage students to see their own communicative choices as rhetorically and intellectually valid, even when they diverge from dominant norms.

Gillian's use of informal modes, such as leveraging emojis and drawings, informal letters to family, or "crappy drafts," helps students approach writing more playfully. However, these strategies ultimately serve to scaffold student progression in a way that reinforces the idea that rigid, traditional scientific genres are the ultimate goal for academic work. This limits the potential for multimodality to challenge or disrupt these conventions and also highlights an important tension in the application of multimodal strategies in higher education: when multimodality is framed as a tool to translate disciplinary expectations into more accessible forms, such as when Gillian asks students to use emojis to write about their research in early "crappy" drafts, a risk exists of perpetuating linguistic hierarchies that privilege dominant forms of communication that are often rooted in white, Western, and patriarchal norms. Gillian's approach mirrors what many scholars (Baker-Bell, Bou Ayash, Canagarajah, Inoue, Anzaldúa, among many others) describe as linguistic assimilation, in which students are supported in adapting to the norms of academic language and are not encouraged to critique or transform the systems that perpetuate them. By framing multimodality as a tool or scaffold toward achieving disciplinary standards rather than as a critical practice, Gillian maintains the status quo of disciplinary standards rather than opening space for students to resist or reimagine them. A critical multimodal literacies approach doesn't require abandoning standard academic forms or genres, such as lab reports, research essays, or literature reviews. Instead, it insists that when we teach these forms, we teach them critically. This means making visible the histories, values, and exclusions baked into disciplinary conventions and helping students see that these genres aren't neutral—they're built by people, and that means they can be rethought. The point isn't to toss out structure but for both instructors and students to ask harder questions about it: Who do these conventions serve? What do they make possible? What do they leave out? An instructor might assign a scientific journal article, for example, but start by unpacking its rhetorical history: why clarity and precision became prioritized, how those values relate to power, and where they might fall short for communicating complex, human-centered science. They might also invite students to think about who gets seen as competent in their field or to try translating their diagrams into an infographic or a narrative before moving them into a standard form. These kinds of moves don't reject disciplinary norms—they put

them in context. They provide students with more room to understand and navigate those forms, to work within them, and to question them simultaneously. That's the potential of a critical multimodal approach, not to erase disciplinary writing but to open it up for transformation.

In short, while Gillian's use of multimodality reflects her interest in supporting student success within her discipline, her approach to multimodality is not intended to be transformative; rather, multimodality is a tool that ultimately teaches students to prioritize compliance over critical inquiry. The implications of this form of adoption of multimodality extend beyond the STEM classroom to the broader writing ecology of higher education: if multimodality is seen as a tool for assimilation rather than transformation, it cannot disrupt hierarchies that reify exclusionary practices that uphold whiteness and Western values. Inviting students to incorporate auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, or digital forms of communication as legitimate and valuable in their own right, rather than merely as a preamble to traditional writing, could open pathways for more inclusive and equitable educational spaces across the university.

To be clear, a critical multimodal approach does not ignore the realities of disciplinary expectations—but it refuses to treat them as neutral or uncontested. In fields like STEM, where writing is often framed as a vehicle for clarity and precision, dominant genres, such as lab reports, journal articles, and white papers, carry institutional weight. Yet those genres are not natural endpoints; they are constructed, policed, and historically aligned with dominant cultural values. A critical multimodal approach invites students and instructors alike to interrogate how those expectations came to be, what they excluded, and how they might be reimagined. Gillian might, for example, invite students to examine the history and function of scientific genres, asking whose voices are centered, which communicative practices are deemed legitimate, and how those standards have been constructed over time. This kind of inquiry could help students recognize that even highly conventionalized forms are not neutral but rooted in specific cultural and epistemological traditions. A critical multimodal approach in Gillian's classroom might also involve expanding the range of audiences and purposes students write for. In addition to producing traditional scientific articles, students could be invited to translate their findings into other

genres and modes—creating infographics, TikTok-style videos, op-eds, or collaborative websites aimed at broader publics. These compositions would not replace disciplinary writing but rather sit alongside it, helping students understand how different modes and audiences shape meaning. In this way, students could see scientific genres not as fixed endpoints but as one rhetorical choice among many. Treating these modes as serious forms of meaning-making can shift who gets to be seen as knowledgeable in the classroom. It opens up space for students to draw on their lived experiences and the ways they already know how to communicate. In this way, multimodality becomes not just a pedagogical strategy but a vehicle for equity that challenges the norms that have historically excluded marginalized voices from academic discourse. Rather than using multimodality solely as a scaffold to "fix" student writing, Gillian could position it as a tool for critical reflection and rhetorical flexibility, which are core components of a justice-oriented writing pedagogy. This tension between using multimodality to support students in mastering dominant norms and using it to interrogate and potentially transform those norms remained central to our discussion. As Gillian's comments reveal, faculty often feel caught between wanting to make space for student expression and needing to prepare students for the expectations of their disciplines.

It was at this moment when Gillian articulated how she uses informal, multimodal practices to ease students into conventional scientific genres, that Amina responded, drawing our attention to the ideologies embedded in technical writing. Amina, from the Department of Anthropology, leans forward, gathering our attention to her, with the following statement:

> Thinking about the possibilities of ways in which ideologies and even material consequences of hierarchies get reified by the little daily practices and pedagogies, do we accept that this idea of technical writing is neutral and not also disciplining and punishing and white supremacy?

When Amina talks, she uses her entire body. Opening her arms when she talks about daily practices and pedagogies, she seems to embrace the entire room. She uses long sentences and doesn't seem to need to

breathe. Her voice is low but carries. She talks in the present perfect, an invitation to draw from the past to join in the moment and see implications for the future.

"I don't think it's neutral at all," Gillian responds. Amina nods, offering encouragement for Gillian to continue, but her question lingers, prompting us to think differently about our approaches to our disciplines, reframing the conversation and inviting us to think more critically. In the silence, Amina presses further.

> I'm wondering, for all of us, is there a way to get toward the technical as political, rather than as skill-based? What about seeing a language people could try on, take on, put on, take off. Is there a way to decolonize that? My guess is that it is just as likely to be a space where we can create a culture of unlearning. Even in the technical languages. Is that possible?

The room is silent, a collective pause. In asking us to rethink common assumptions about the neutrality of technical language, Amina has tapped into a hesitance that is shared by everyone in the room. I glance around and sense a resistance—perhaps to reimagining technical writing as something shaped by ideology rather than as a neutral, objective skill. As Josephine Walwema writes, "Technical and professional communication is not always steeped in bureaucratic hierarchies or capitalistic frameworks," and yet it still carries values that "mediate knowledge, values, and action in a variety of social and professional contexts."[10] The resistance I sense in the room may stem from people encountering the idea that their courses can be sites for unlearning, that writing in their disciplines is just as social, deeply rhetorical, affected by power dynamics, and inherently multimodal as communication in the humanities. By naming it as technical *language*, Amina invites us to see it not as objective or value-neutral but as a discourse shaped by cultural, historical, and ideological forces—subject to critique, reimagining, and even refusal.

Gillian picks up this shift, bridging Amina's provocation with an example of her classroom practice as she prepares students to get their research published in technical journals. She describes how

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[10] This moment of resistance in the room also connects to scholarship on threshold concepts in writing pedagogy, which Jan Meyer and Ray Land define as "akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (412). They tell us, as learners move through a threshold concept, "there occurs also a shift in the learner's subjectivity, a repositioning of the self" (374). This repositioning, they explain, can often cause discomfort or uncertainty.

students often express uncertainty about how to “sound” in their scientific writing—unsure if their audience is their professors, their peers, or the broader scientific community. Rather than treat scientific voice as a fixed code, she explains to students that “this is not the sacrosanct best way of writing about science,” she tells them. “But it’s the way we have to write about it for now.” By naming these standards as temporary and contingent, Gillian offers students a critical lens for understanding disciplinary discourse not as neutral but as historically produced and institutionally reinforced. Her teaching creates space for students to navigate disciplinary expectations while also acknowledging them as sites of power. “If one of you winds up as editor of ApJ [The Astrophysical Journal] one day,” she added, “know that this is absolutely a thing you can take apart.” This comment points toward a long view of her pedagogy, one that asks students to work within existing structures while building awareness and agency to eventually re-envision them. Gillian’s approach gestures toward a critical multimodal stance: it does not discard dominant genres but invites students to consider the language, tone, and modes they are asked to perform. Yet her approach also remains bound, meaning students are encouraged to imagine how these could affect these conventions in the future, but an opportunity to critique or challenge them in the present is missing. Her approach does, though, open a door for critical inquiry and debunks the myth of the neutrality of academic writing. That is, she encourages students to see their writing as part of a negotiated process within their discipline. At the same time, she acknowledges the genre’s rigidity, explaining,

> In STEM writing or scientific writing, there’s all these secret, unwritten rules about what is OK and not OK to say. My colleague and I got a referee report back on a paper once, and the referee slammed us because our ratings sounded folksy and unsophisticated. So it’s hard to decide where that line is drawn. That line can be drawn by a reviewer who’s grumpy about your folksy writing. It can be drawn by somebody who’s trying to write and going, I can’t obey all these rules and write easily. And some of these are ridiculous rules that shouldn’t be rules.

While Gillian identifies the social construction of genre conventions in her field and encourages students to see those conventions as contingent and subject to change, her approach largely remains within the bounds of traditional written discourse. She invites students to explore the varied rhetorical choices

available within scientific writing and helps them see that even dominant genres can be practiced with more creativity and flexibility than they may assume. Still, she stops short of making space in her course for students to compose in other modes that might surface different forms of knowledge or communicative power.

Gillian's approach stands in contrast to Dr. Smith and Amina's call for a more expansive multimodal pedagogy—one that not only critiques dominant genres but also legitimates other forms of expression as valid ways of doing disciplinary work. This omission is particularly interesting in light of Dr. Smith and Amina's invitation to reconsider the presumed neutrality of technical and scientific writing. Both urged us to view disciplinary genres not as fixed or purely functional but as shaped by historical, ideological, and racialized forces—and, therefore, open to critique and revision. Their comments challenge us to reimagine what counts as legitimate communication in our fields and to expand the forms students might use to participate in disciplinary conversations. While they did not use the language of "critical multimodal approaches," their vision aligns closely with such a framework—one that calls on educators to engage the rhetorical possibilities of multiple modes in order to critique, complement, or even challenge the dominant written genres of their disciplines. Gillian's focus, however, remained on teaching students a framework of scientific writing that reinforces the idea that these conventions are the primary, perhaps only, pathways to legitimacy in their disciplines. Or perhaps the only pathway to legitimacy until the students are themselves in positions of power to affect change. Her awareness of these barriers, while critical, ultimately reinforces the primacy of written language in communication in her discipline.

As I consider my analysis and reflections on these conversations, I keep returning to Dr. Smith's encouragement to see opportunities for multimodality to help students better understand disciplinary expectations while also giving them the perspective to question and reshape those expectations. I think about Amina and how she talked about technical writing, pushing us to see it not as neutral but as disciplining, punishing, and rooted in white supremacy. By naming technical writing as a site of white

supremacy, Amina pointed not just to disciplinary convention but to the racialized histories that shape what counts as knowledge, who gets to produce it, and in what form.

For me, this moment clarified the stakes of critical multimodality: it is not enough to introduce students to new modes of expression; we must also help them see how these modes interact with the broader systems of power that shape our disciplines. Scholars like Baker-Bell and Gonzales remind us that language is never just about grammar or clarity—it's always tied up with power and access. Baker-Bell's call for Black linguistic justice pushes us to name how dominant language norms uphold anti-Blackness and to create pedagogies that actively push back. Gonzales, in a similar way, calls for transmodal approaches that center multilingual students' real communicative practices rather than treating language differences as a problem to be fixed. Taken together, their work makes clear that modality—like language—is never neutral. It is a site where legitimacy, authority, and belonging are negotiated.

A quick reminder of the two key barriers my research identified are, first, the dominance of academic language norms that often go unquestioned, and second, the perception that multimodal or critical approaches fall outside the bounds of disciplinary legitimacy. The second barrier—the sense that these approaches don't belong in certain fields because they are not serious or valid academic work—surfaced repeatedly as faculty wrestled with how to balance innovation with institutional expectations.

In Session 7 of the Fellowship, we built on this conversation directly, asking how a critical multimodal framework might inform our approaches to multilingual learners—not by simply translating dominant expectations into different formats, but by reimagining the purposes and audiences of disciplinary communication itself.

Navigating Multimodal Adoption: Barriers and Emerging Practices

The planning and facilitation of Session 7 of the Writing@UW Fellowship was a collaborative endeavor amongst Megan, myself, and Dr. Wei Zuo, an instructional consultant from the UW Center for Teaching and Learning and our guest speaker for the day The three of us met to brainstorm and plan the session, which we decided to split into two parts: Part 1, led by Dr. Zuo, focused on supporting faculty in

working with multilingual students in their courses. Part 2, led by Megan (but designed by both of us), invited Fellows to reflect on how and why they include multimodal assignments in their classrooms. In particular, the activity asked Fellows to identify key course outcomes and locate potential bottlenecks—moments in the course where students routinely struggle or encounter difficulty making sense of disciplinary expectations. *Bottleneck* was a term we adopted early in the Fellowship to provide Fellows with a shared vocabulary grounded in WAC/WID scholarship. We drew it from David Pace and Joan Middendorf's *Decoding the Disciplines*, where it is used as a lens for pinpointing conceptual or procedural barriers that can thwart student learning. By naming these bottlenecks, Fellows could begin to explore how multimodal assignments might help students work through those challenges, not by simplifying the content but by expanding the communicative resources available for meaning-making. We asked Fellows to answer the following questions on a large piece of poster paper in any way they wanted:

> **Poster Session (20 min): Questions this session can answer:**
>
> - Looking at the outcomes in your class, what are alternative ways students could achieve/meet them?
> - What are the different ways that people can communicate, and how can we leverage those? (What does varying the modes and genres of assignments do for students? Why should we think about multimodality?)
>
> **Instructions**: Each person use a piece of poster paper to map out their answers. One way this could show up on the paper (but not the only!):
>
> - In the left column, identify **lesson plans, assignments, activities** that you do in your class. As you list, think about how students move toward the course objectives by completing these tasks. Think about our shared understanding of equity.
>
> - In the middle column, **brainstorm assignments/lessons in different modes/genres** that could similarly accomplish those goals.
>
> - In the right-hand column, describe **how this new intervention could address the equity concerns** you identified in your zero draft, and that emerged in Wei's discussion.

While the syllabus did provide a suggested method for approaching this activity, Megan and I chose not to provide models or templates, intentionally leaving the form open-ended in the hope that Fellows would approach it in ways reflective of their own pedagogical commitments. Through the framing of the activity and the opportunities for discussion it created, I also hoped this activity would prompt Fellows to consider

their broader approaches to the classroom and how a critical multimodal approach could support their goals for equity, justice, and inclusion. We handed out sheets of blank poster paper and asked Fellows to spread out in the room, finding chairs, counters, and whiteboard walls to work against. Some drew columns on their posterboards, while others mapped ideas in clusters or timelines. Fellows worked solo or in pairs, jotting down current assignments, possible alternative modes, and reflections on equity. After about twenty-five minutes, we invited them to participate in a gallery walk—moving around the room to view and discuss one another's posters. The room filled with conversation as Fellows asked questions, took notes, and reflected aloud on the different strategies and pedagogical goals their peers were considering.

To create this activity, I drew on John Dewey's foundational principles of experiential learning. Dewey's approach, which tells us that learners are motivated and retain what they've learned when they are actively engaged in a learning experience, inspired the structure of the poster activity and gallery walk, during which we provided time for Fellows to interact with one another's work, pose questions, and refine their ideas in real-time. I also drew on bell hooks' concept of engaged pedagogy, which centers critical awareness through care, respect, and mutual growth. I wanted to create a space that reflected that—collaborative, reflective, and open-ended—by inviting Fellows to think about how multimodal assignments might support, or even help them clarify, their goals around equity and inclusion. My hope was that Fellows would begin to see a critical multimodal approach not as an add-on but as necessary to the work they already cared about.

Overall, some Fellows embraced the opportunity to rethink their assignments through a multimodal lens[11], some saw the potential for multimodal assignments as an add-on to their more traditional assignments, and others hesitated to make significant changes to their assignments. This activity highlighted for me key barriers to adopting critical multimodal approaches, such as disciplinary

[11] Two Fellows, one from STEM and the other from English literature, adopted a critical multimodal framework in surprising and interesting ways, embracing multimodality as a means to challenge traditional norms and create more inclusive classrooms. These Fellows approach to critical multimodality was so interesting that I detail their work in the Fellowship, and how it affected their courses, in the next chapter.

constraints and deeply ingrained language ideologies that shape Fellows' expectations of what counts as academic work. In this section, I explore the posters and discussions I had with two Fellows during this session of the Writing@UW Fellowship, which highlight barriers that influence Fellows' levels of adoption of a critical multimodal approach.

As I walked around the room, listening to Fellows talk about their posters, I noticed a pattern in how Fellows were considering multimodality in their courses. Eleanor, from the School of Music, who has taught undergraduate students for more than a decade, worked on her poster (Image 1). I stopped to talk with her, nodding as I saw she had written about the two projects she's been working on throughout the Writing@UW Fellowship: a transformation of a traditional research essay assignment into a Virtuoso Chapter, in which students identify a 19th-century performer and write a history that describes and analyzes the performer's musical style, imaging they are writing for an anthology for college-level music students; and a completely new assignment, r/Askhistorians, in which students create a "Reddit post about the myths and rumors" surrounding a 19th-century performer, rumors they could ask Eleanor for but could also find for themselves. She has created three columns on her poster. On the left, her "Current" assignments were listed. In the middle were "Other Modes"—alternative approaches she was considering that meet similar learning objectives. On the right, she labeled the column "Equity." I asked about the "Other Modes" column, and we paused over a note in the center of the poster that reads "could offer multiple options," and I asked what she meant. Eleanor explained that students could perform an on-stage introduction to their research. As we talked, I thought back to our earlier interviews and conversations—moments that underscored Eleanor's openness to rethinking traditional forms of academic work. That willingness was evident in her poster, where she listed possibilities such as a "mixtape playlist" or "online exhibits" as ways students might express their learning. Yet even as she explored these ideas, Eleanor voiced hesitation. She named several factors shaping her current course design: the large class size, only having one Teaching Assistant to support grading and the challenge of assessing multimodal work in ways that feel fair and manageable. She also emphasized her belief in traditional academic writing as a valuable

Image 1: Eleanor's poster for the Session 7 activity for a course in music history. Some of these posters are hard to read, so please see Appendix 6.1 for a type version.

vehicle for critical thinking and student learning. In her Fellowship application, Eleanor described her goal of helping students build self-directed research projects that connect their personal, academic, and

disciplinary interests—work that she framed as grounded in equity and engagement. Here, though, she was grappling with how to hold those values within institutional and logistical constraints. This tension—between pedagogical vision and the structural realities of teaching—is one that surfaced across the Fellowship and one that multimodal approaches ask us to navigate with care. For example, in her Fellowship application, Eleanor wrote,

> There is a disconnect between the degree to which I value writing and the degree to which my students value writing. Many of them see writing as a stale, formulaic process, whereas I see it as a creative process by which we can dream of new ideas and communicate them to other people. I would like to be able to get students to see this more valuable side of writing as well as to help them hone their craft. My course is supposed to culminate in a research paper, since it's part of a longer sequence. I have for a while assigned a research paper in which I pick a selection of topics for the students. I'm interested in refining that paper assignment so that students feel more supported and more independent, if that's not a contradiction.

This desire to see students embrace writing as a creative and generative act is connected to the final column of the poster she created for this session. She put "Equity" at the top and wrote notes such as "grammar not a problem" and "less writing style-specific" and "might be worse—public speaking." These indicate an awareness of both the limitations of text-based assignments as well as the limitations of other modes, or that offering multimodal assignments might not support students who struggle with standardized academic English or who fear public speaking.

Looking back on this poster and conversation weeks later, I now read Eleanor's notes as a gesture toward a more situated understanding of equity in multimodal pedagogy. Rather than presenting multimodality as a blanket solution, her poster surfaces questions about how different modes support or constrain student participation. In the "Equity" column, she notes that certain formats might be "less writing-style specific," or "prob[ably] easier w/ different] languages," suggesting an awareness that rigid expectations can be a barrier for students with varied linguistic backgrounds and repertoires. At the same time, her phrasing—"might be worse, public speaking?"—points to how shifting away from traditional

writing might introduce new challenges, particularly for students who are less comfortable with public speaking. These annotations offered me an important insight: that access and equity are not inherent in the mode itself but depend on how assignments are framed, scaffolded, and supported. Eleanor's approach aligns with a critical multimodal pedagogy in that it centers student experience and recognizes that no communicative form is neutral or universally accessible. I think back to the first day of the Fellowship, when I was introducing my study and interest in multimodality in disciplinary writing courses. Eleanor mentioned that she had assigned podcasting projects in her classes in the past, but in her final interview, she reflected on why she doesn't include multimodal projects like them anymore. "Podcasting is also foreign to everyone," she said, pushing back against the assumption that alternatives to traditional writing are automatically more accessible. "We're going to have those as final projects, so we also need to work with the students on how to do things well." Her hesitation raises an important point: multimodal work is not inherently easier, and students need support for any assigned genre or mode. But this also underscores a missed opportunity. A critical multimodal approach would begin not with a trendy mode like podcasting but with a rhetorical question: What genres and modes do practitioners in music history actually use? Whether it's liner notes, program annotations, archival exhibits, or public-facing essays, opening up the range of communicative forms could allow students to practice the discourses of the field in meaningful, situated ways—without defaulting to either podcasts or traditional essays as the only options. This shift invites multimodality as a means of disciplinary inquiry, not novelty. For Eleanor, equitable teaching means clearly communicating expectations and outcomes regardless of mode: "As long as you're being upfront with the students—how do you get to the final process and what's being asked of you—then there's no reason a podcast is more equitable than a writing assignment." Her comment underscores the importance of transparency in assignment design, but it also reflects a common misconception: that podcasts and traditional writing assignments are fundamentally different in terms of the literacies they demand. In reality, a podcast requires multiple layers of writing and complex rhetorical skills—scripts, outlines, rhetorical framing, audience awareness, and often detailed notes for recording or editing. The distinction, then, is not between writing and not writing but between the types of writing and rhetorical

practices being taught and assessed. A critical multimodal approach would ask what communicative practices the assignment is cultivating, and whether those practices align with the learning goals of the course and the lived experiences of students and practitioners in the field.

This additive perspective was a common one among Fellows: multimodality as a technical supplement rather than a pedagogical orientation. Eleanor's reflections make this tension especially clear. While she values creative and embodied activities during class—such as having students dance to understand the social structures embedded in choreography—she avoids assigning multimodal compositions as final projects. Her comments point to a crucial distinction: multimodality is not automatically more equitable, and more traditional genres are not inherently less so. What matters is how assignments are framed, scaffolded, and assessed and whether students are supported in developing the rhetorical and technical knowledge needed to succeed. Still, Eleanor's framing also reflects a broader pattern I observed across the Fellowship, one in which multimodality was often seen as a creative add-on rather than as a core part of a justice-oriented pedagogical approach, a framing that risk separating multimodal composition from deeper questions about language, power, and access. Critical multimodality, as I argue throughout this dissertation, is not valuable simply because it is different or more engaging—it matters because of how it aligns with broader commitments to equity and transformation.

As Eleanor and I end our conversation, she starts on her gallery walk. I look around the room to see groups of Fellows congregated around each other's posters. The Fellows seem energized and engaged as they talk about each other's work. SJ, a faculty member in the Department of Communication, faces her poster alone in the process of adding bullet points. As I walk toward her, I think about discussions with all the Fellows, which have been a key part of each Fellowship meeting's plan. SJ often speaks about inclusion and equity in her teaching through the lens of access to research writing, emphasizing how it is frequently perceived by students as "a specialized practice, reserved for an academic elite." In her project proposal, she wrote that many of her students—often nontraditional, returning, or otherwise marginalized—view research writing as "a competitive tool, a way to assert intellectual dominance rather

Image 2: SJ's poster about rethinking a communication course that she created during Session 7 of the Writing@UW Fellowship. Please see Appendix 6.1 for a typed version.

than an active and creative process to inform, enlighten, and build empathy." Her contributions throughout the Fellowship consistently center these stakes, calling attention to how dominant models of writing instruction can reinforce exclusion. SJ's poster and commentary reflect a desire to reposition research writing as an accessible, civic, and communal act, one that "expands the perception of writing beyond an activity confined to academia, to one that is an everyday aspect of human interaction." I catch her eye as I walk over, excited to see how she's engaging multimodality in her pedagogy.

I look through SJ's poster (Image 3) and notice something intriguing. When I planned this activity, I talked with Megan about not including a model poster for Fellows. I wanted Fellows to hear about the goals of this activity and then organize the poster in any way that they wanted. All Fellows other than SJ put their current assignments on the left, their multimodal interventions in the center, and their

thoughts about equity on the right. SJ, I see, has followed these headings at the top but has listed many of the new modes under the "Activities" column. Thin blue arrows and a tiny "oops!" at the top tell the reader of this switch. To me, this suggests that SJ has been reimagining her teaching practices and viewing these new modes as integral, rather than separate or additive, to her existing pedagogy: the new modes are at the front of her mind and already integrated into her course. SJ's addition of a "Purpose" section to the poster, which no one else included, reveals her reflective and intentional approach to pedagogy. SJ demonstrates an awareness of the *why* behind her teaching practices. Any shift in her praxis, in this case adopting multimodal elements, is not haphazard or uncritical. For SJ, multimodality isn't an add-on to her pedagogy; it is a shift that aligns with her orientations toward equity and inclusion.

SJ incorporates assignments such as narrative analysis and personal narrative, which align with her equity-oriented goals and invite students to connect academic inquiry with their lived experiences. During our poster-making session, I asked her to elaborate on "Narrative Power Analysis," an assignment listed in the first row of her chart. The purpose, she explains, is to help students develop a statement about a systemic issue affecting their lives or communities. She gestures toward the "Purpose" column she's added—unique among the Fellows' posters—highlighting goals such as isolating a "problem," identifying dominant narratives and assumptions, and surfacing counter-narratives. As she reflects on the assignment, SJ describes how her courses still largely culminate in traditional academic genres, such as essays and discussion posts.

> There's definitely a misalignment with what is assumed to be work and what's assumed to just be … not learning or studying. There's this real sense that learning is an institutional thing. It happens with people who are hunchbacked over their textbooks and in lab coats.

Her comments reflect a broader critique of how dominant educational norms define legitimate learning as apolitical. Even as she invites students to bring personal experiences into the classroom, SJ struggles with the pressure her students feel to adhere to institutionally authorized forms. While SJ's poster shows her efforts to consider nontraditional forms, her concerns are not with the essay itself but with how it often functions in institutional settings—as a genre emptied of its rhetorical richness and reduced to rigid,

depersonalized conventions. I recognize here the risk of constructing a binary between "multimodal" and "not multimodal," particularly when all writing, including essays, draws on multiple modes; what SJ's critique highlights, and what I seek to draw out in this chapter, is not the form itself but the ways certain genres are normalized, standardized, and stripped of their rhetorical complexity in ways that marginalize student voices and obscure the political dimensions of writing. Even forms like podcasts can be flattened by institutional expectations—treated as polished performances rather than situated, rhetorical acts. Without carefully framing, scaffolding, and reflection, podcasting can privilege certain speech styles and production values, rewarding students already familiar with the genre's implicit norms. SJ's concern, I find, isn't really about choosing the right format. It's about pushing back against the institutional logics that frame some ways of communicating as legitimate and others as extracurricular—or that turn genre into a set of static templates rather than a site of rhetorical decision-making. Her pedagogical orientation points toward a critical multimodal approach—not because it prioritizes novelty, but because it raises deeper questions: What counts as knowledge? Who gets to produce it? How are we taught to listen? At the same time, her reflections make visible the pressures instructors face to align with dominant forms, even when their teaching is rooted in equity. That's part of what makes her case so important. It shows how the work of challenging norms doesn't always look like rejection—it often looks like negotiation. Her pedagogical struggle is not about choosing a mode but about reclaiming space within—and beyond—dominant genres for more expansive, justice-oriented practices. Her pedagogical orientation gestures toward a critical multimodal approach because it raises questions about what counts as knowledge, who gets to produce it, and how we listen. Still, her work also reveals a partial uptake, not in commitment, but in practice, as she negotiates between institutional expectations and her desire for more expansive, justice-oriented approaches. This tension, I argue, is not a deficit but a revealing site of friction—where the limits of dominant genres, pedagogical norms, and institutional definitions of rigor become visible. It also shows how institutions discipline not only students but instructors, shaping the conditions under which equity work gets taken up. I could see how the layout of SJ's poster features her "Activities" column, which includes scaffolded assignments such as Narrative Power Analysis, The Story of Self, Us, & Now,

and Decoding a Public Genre, all of which emphasize critical reflection, audience awareness, and rhetorical framing. Yet in the "New Modes/Genres" column, she lists textual genres like "purpose statement" and "problem statement" that strategic negotiation: SJ is reworking familiar academic forms to serve new pedagogical purposes. Rather than signaling resistance, these choices suggest a thoughtful recalibration—an attempt to meet students where they are while nudging the boundaries of what's expected. Her work reflects a partial uptake of critical multimodality—not as a shortfall but as an active, situated effort to balance institutional demands with equity-driven goals. I describe SJ's work as a partial uptake of critical multimodality not because it lacks care or intention, but because the genres she builds around—while thoughtfully scaffolded—remain institutionally sanctioned and linguistically bounded. Her approach supports student access, but it falls short of inviting critique of the genres or the power structures that define them. In this sense, multimodality becomes a method for reaching existing expectations rather than challenging them, much as in the case of Gillian. A partial update, even with well-intentioned, equity-oriented strategies, can reinscribe dominant norms if they don't explicitly name and critique those norms; it's a strategic, situated, and equity-minded use of multimodality, but not yet a fully critical one.

I point to the equity column of her poster, intrigued by the phrase: "curate student experience to dictate what is 'important' and what is 'misaligned.'" SJ explains that this means students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds should inform not just what they write about but also how they write and for whom. Phrases like "amplifying the self as someone impacted by the issue" and "student agency" stand out here, signaling her intent to center students' lived realities. At the same time, the handwritten notes in this column are sparse and exploratory, as though her thinking is still in motion. She encourages students to select their own audiences and communicate in ways that align with their expertise. Yet, as she notes, institutional expectations still require students to demonstrate proficiency in conventional academic forms. Weeks later, in our one-to-one interview, SJ expands on this tension, articulating a dilemma that sits at the heart of critical language pedagogy:

> Writing is a core thing that we all do. It's associated with our livelihoods, our potential for economic mobility. So I was always kind of struggling; should I teach students how to perform good writing? Even if I don't believe in it? If I know it's full of biases and historical prejudices? Should I teach them how to perform that so they can participate, even if it should be changed? Or do we push back and try to break the barrier with this new generation? But what if they can't write a cover letter?

Her questions reveal a bind that many instructors face: how can we prepare students to navigate institutions that reward dominant literacy practices without reinforcing the very inequities those practices sustain? SJ weighs the value of teaching standardized academic English (SAE) as a pathway to opportunity against the ethical cost of legitimizing practices that are rooted in white, monolingual, middle-class norms. Her use of the phrase "perform good writing" points to a recognition that dominant standards are less about communication than about a gesture toward institutional belonging. The dilemma she poses is not simply about whether to incorporate multimodal assignments—it is about the deeper question of whether teaching SAE endorses a racialized hierarchy of language. To me, SJ's reflections resonate with scholars like Baker-Bell, who argue that teaching dominant English conventions without critique reproduces linguistic injustice; that is, demanding assimilation into standardized forms denies the legitimacy of the wide variety of Englishes students bring with them to the classroom. SJ is not asking whether students can write in SAE but whether they should have to—and what it means to make that pedagogical decision in a classroom committed to equity. She describes writing as "a core thing we all do, tied to livelihood and economic mobility," yet she remains skeptical of the dominant academic frameworks that present good writing as objective or neutral. While she never offers a fixed definition, SJ frames "good writing" as an exclusionary construct that privileges standardization, whiteness, and gatekeeping. Her dilemma, she makes clear, is not theoretical. It is pedagogical, pragmatic, ethical, and urgent.

In our interview, SJ reflects on how she has begun to navigate the dilemma of whether and how to teach dominant genres. She describes gaining new language to "better address power in writing," which allowed her to reframe the question of teaching "good writing" not as a binary between compliance and

resistance but as an opportunity to help students critically engage the systems they are asked to enter. She explains:

> The writing Fellowship was helpful for having conversations about power and writing, and then recognizing all the different ways that I could talk to students about how power comes into the writing practice, which I think helps me bridge the concept and application together. So I can talk about assumptions and values in terms of genre conventions, or the rhetorical context. And so the group gave me that kind of vocabulary. That really helped me free up my dilemma of being like, I have to teach them how to perform good writing. So it kind of helped me move out of my own—I don't know—muck.

The term "muck" here is worth dwelling on. It evokes more than uncertainty; it names the emotional and intellectual weight of trying to teach ethically within a system structured by inequity. SJ's "muck" is the pedagogical tangle of knowing that dominant genres carry power—and that students may need to master them to succeed—while also recognizing that those genres are shaped by histories of exclusion. The Fellowship does not offer her a way out of this dilemma, but it gives her language and community to sit with it more critically. Her reflections mark a shift: not from doubt to clarity, but from isolation to agency, movement that gives her language to talk openly about power in the classroom and to help students name and work through the same tensions she's navigating. SJ's case makes visible to me the layered realities of doing critical multimodal work. Institutional norms, student expectations, and disciplinary standards all carry weight—and they often narrow what feels possible when it comes to teaching writing. Rather than framing multimodality as a fix or alternative, SJ approaches it as a space of negotiation—where questions of access, equity, and justice must be actively worked through. Her commitment to "moving through the muck" is not a resolution but a practice: an ongoing refusal to teach writing as neutral and a willingness to help students see how language participates in systems of power. Whether or not SJ decides to incorporate more nontraditional genres into her courses feels almost beside the point. What matters more—and what makes her approach resonate with a critical multimodal framework—is the deeper shift in how she thinks about language, power, and pedagogy. Her reflections mark a movement away from teaching writing as neutral or standardized and toward naming the ideological work genres do in academic spaces. If her

classroom doesn't yet fully break with institutional expectations, it still opens space to question them—and that's the work of critical multimodal writing pedagogies.

Making Room: Language, Multimodality, and Justice

My analysis of these moments in the Writing@UW Fellowship, in which faculty grapple with the power-laden norms of academic writing and language expectations, continually reminds me of bell hooks' insistence that to foster pedagogical growth, we must create spaces that are engaged and holistic, where everyone involved in the learning process grows and is empowered by that growth. hooks' framing of education as a liberatory practice provides a lens for understanding the stakes of my work: to transform disciplinary writing classrooms into spaces that embrace critical multimodality not as a tool for novelty, engagement, or genre practice but as a framework for confronting the racialized, ableist, and monolingual norms that govern what counts as legitimate writing. This means moving beyond multimodality as a supplement to dominant forms, and instead, seeing it as a way to reimagine the purposes, audiences, and power dynamics of academic communication itself. These moments might look on the surface like a limited interaction with a critical multimodal approach to writing. My analysis is shaped by rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe), which pushed me to pay attention not just to what faculty said or produced but to how they worked through tensions, reframed their own questions, and reconsidered their roles as teachers. What might look like hesitation or constraint on the surface often pointed to something deeper—a reckoning with power, legitimacy, and risk. Across the Fellowship, I saw faculty wrestle with challenges to adopting a critical multimodal approach—challenges that were less about tools or formats and more about the language ideologies that shape how equity gets imagined and enacted in their classrooms. These tensions were often tied to how Fellows understood the barriers to multimodality in their fields and how the unwritten rules of their disciplines shaped what and how they taught. Gillian, Eleanor, and SJ each engaged this tension in distinct ways. Gillian's use of multimodality to reduce student anxiety about writing in technical genres contrasts with Amina's invitation to see the technical as a site for unlearning and resistance. Eleanor's cautious experimentation with different forms of student expression reveals both

a curiosity about expanding what counts as academic work and a keen awareness of the institutional and disciplinary constraints that shape how writing is taught and assessed. SJ's thoughts on whether to teach dominant genres like the cover letter—even while she critiques how they can be exclusionary—also highlight this tension: how to equip students to navigate systems of power without reinforcing the very hierarchies those systems uphold. These moments illuminate the negotiations faculty make as they work to reconcile their equity-oriented goals with the constraints of their institutional and disciplinary contexts. When brought together, these moments point to the urgent need for adopting critical multimodality in disciplinary writing spaces, not as a mere enhancement to existing practices but as a transformative approach that orients us toward challenging the systems of power that define what counts as legitimate writing and who gets to be recognized as a legitimate writer.

In my research, I found that dominant norms governing communication in disciplinary writing spaces remain deeply entangled with histories of white power—histories that shape not just what is said but how knowledge is produced, valued, and circulated. These are not merely historical legacies; they are active systems reinforced in everyday teaching through assignment design, assessment practices, and institutional definitions of rigor and legitimacy. This, to me, begs the question: where does transformation start? As Audre Lorde told us nearly 50 years ago in *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, "It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." Or when Kynard writes, "American schools and universities, through their scholarship and instructional designs, have often upheld a racial status quo alongside a rhetoric of dismantling it. These were not the workings of contradictory and confused individuals merely locked within their space and time" (19). From these scholars, I see that it's on us, educators and educational space creators, who can promote true institutional transformation. By grounding pedagogies in critical multimodal literacies, disciplinary writing contexts can move beyond reproducing inequitable systems to foster transformational spaces that value and legitimate diverse ways of knowing. We must, as hooks advocates, see education as a practice of freedom. I thus call for the

adoption of multimodality as an essential aspect of a critical approach to education. By centering critical multimodal literacies, disciplinary writing programs can foster pedagogical practices that validate diversity, not merely teach students to comply with existing systems. The work of dismantling oppressive structures begins with us. And critical multimodality offers the tools to begin that work.

Chapter 4
Critical Multimodality in Action

When our scholarship fails to consider, and when our practices do not ask students to consider, the complex and highly distributed processes associated with the production of texts (and lives and people), we run the risk of overlooking the fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice.

–Jody Shipka, *Toward a Composition Made Whole* (13)

I started to see how video communication is itself a form of writing. That's an example of where I see multimodality having an empowering application for multilingual students. That's a racial equity issue.

–Nora, in her post-Fellowship interview

I like bringing it down to something formulaic. How do you find flexibility from there [a formulaic structure]? For what students have done—it is useful to have a structure to go off of. But what if that doesn't work for everybody? How do you let them wiggle around that?

–Nick, in a Fellowship discussion

One thing I've discovered through this research on critical multimodal approaches to writing in WAC/WID contexts is that disciplinary faculty take up critical pedagogies in ways shaped by their fields, their students, and their evolving commitments to equity, justice, and inclusion. No two pathways look the same, but across these differences, pedagogical change is always negotiated—through disciplinary histories, institutional pressures, and individual values. In Chapter 3, I examined several moments in the Writing@UW Fellowship that illuminated how participants in my study navigated these negotiations as they engaged or resisted a critical multimodal approach in their pedagogies. These moments weren't just

about barriers or resistance; they were about how faculty made sense of multimodality in relation to disciplinary norms and teaching contexts. I found that Fellows initially conflated it with digital tools or creative add-ons, but as they encountered its rhetorical and justice-oriented dimensions, some began to shift their pedagogical reasoning. Others continued to wrestle with institutional expectations or dominant language ideologies that made multimodal work feel peripheral or risky. These negotiations often led to what I call partial uptakes—moments of both constraint and possibility that reveal how dominant writing practices endure, even as cracks begin to form. In this chapter, however, I take a different approach by looking at moments when a critical multimodal approach was embraced, possibilities were explored, and pedagogical change began. This chapter focuses on two cases of pedagogical movement toward a *critical multimodal literacies pedagogical approach* to explore how disciplinary faculty members in my study engaged and reworked their writing classrooms to engage with critical multimodality.

Throughout this work, I call for a vision of critical multimodality that challenges a binary placing writing as either multimodal or not. That is, a critical multimodal approach to writing pedagogies insists that any given genre can be critically interrogated, taught and shaped by pedagogical framing and approaches to the classroom. Rather than treating academic genres as existing in binaries that place them critical or not, rigid or not, creative or not, I argue that even conventional forms—like the lab report—can become sites of justice-oriented, multimodal inquiry when taken up with that intention. The two pedagogical shifts I analyze range from a fuller and more intentional leaning toward this approach to a partial uptake; yet, both signal meaningful changes in how writing is positioned within the disciplines not as neutral or purely technical but as political, situated, and open to change.

These instructors, one from the humanities and one from STEM take up a critical multimodal approach to their disciplinary writing classroom in distinct ways that revealed for me how even small pedagogical shifts could signal deeper transformations in how faculty relate to critical approaches to writing and communication. Their cases illustrate how a critical multimodal approach, even when taken up partially or unevenly, can begin to reenvision writing instruction in ways that incorporate rhetorical awareness, equity, and critical engagement while also revealing how disciplinary assumptions and

institutional structures shape what kinds of communication are recognized as legible, valuable, possible. Nora, a professor of literature, and Nick, a professor of mechanical engineering, each took up elements of critical multimodal literacies in ways molded by their disciplinary norms, pedagogical commitments, and institutional constraints. Their differing engagements reflect the ideological and structural forces that shape what kinds of writing are valued, by whom, and to what ends. These cases help illustrate how instructors can begin to align their teaching with values of justice, inclusion, and critical engagement and how we might expand the institutional conditions that make such alignment more possible.

I first examine the case of Nora, a professor in the English department who fundamentally reimagined her literature courses through a critical multimodal approach. Nora had long been committed to equity through the content and questions explored within her courses, explaining that her "classes prioritize texts that engage with race, racism, and postcolonial, decolonial, colonial experiences and perspectives." But through considering a critical multimodal approach to her pedagogies, she explained, she is "now thinking much more about the ways in which teaching and speaking and classroom dynamics are just as important as the content when it comes to advancing equity" and that she began to "see how video communication is itself a form of writing. That's an example of where I see multimodality having an empowering application for multilingual students." I go into this change in much more detail in the section titled "Making It Visible: Envisioning a Literature Class Through a Critical Multimodal Approach", but in short, by taking up a critical multimodal approach, Nora expanded her commitment beyond what she taught to how she taught it and what assignments she asked from students. As Nora moved through the Fellowship, she began to envision her assignments and approaches to her classroom through a critical multimodal lens as a way to fundamentally reapproach the ways students engaged with her course. Her journey offers insight into how disciplinary faculty members engage in pedagogical transformation when given the space to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of their writing practices.

I then turn to Nick, from mechanical engineering, who engaged with aspects of a critical multimodal approach to disrupt disciplinary norms in his field. Early in the Fellowship, Nick expressed

frustration with lab reports, a staple of a course he had inherited, arguing that they were too formulaic to support the student engagement, critical thinking, and awareness of the real-world stakes engineers face. He wanted students to develop a deeper understanding of the rhetorical situations, ethical stakes, and material consequences of engineering decisions, and he felt that lab reports did not leverage those understandings effectively. By the end of the Writing@UW Fellowship, Nick had replaced lab reports with a series of assignments that asked students to compose for a variety of audiences, with different stakes, and from different situated perspectives. While Nick talked about this change favorably, and while this change does leverage parts of a critical multimodal approach (namely its attention to student agency and the relationships among form, audience, and purpose), it also reveals a language ideology in which some forms of writing inherently limit critical thinking while others inherently leverage it. In the section named "Revising a STEM Course to Incorporate a Critical Multimodal Approach," I look at how Nick began questioning whether certain genres—like the lab report—reinforced values that did not align with his course goals. I call Nick's reenvisioning of his course a partial uptake of a critical multimodal approach because it rethinks the function of writing as multimodal and rhetorical but does not take up power, language advocacy, or racial justice. Nick's revisions and engagements with critical multimodal pedagogies illustrate one way disciplinary faculty can begin to envision courses that invite students to engage with disciplinary content through a broader range of communicative practices.

Both Nora and Nick[12] saw a critical multimodal approach as offering new ways to engage students, and their experiences highlight the diverse ways in which institutional expectations and disciplinary conventions affect what is seen as possible in disciplinary writing courses. By juxtaposing these two cases, I illustrate how disciplinary writing classrooms can challenge hierarchies of knowledge production and offer new pathways for more inclusive writing instruction across the university. These two

[12] Early in this project, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants in the Writing@UW Fellowship, well before I knew which faculty members would be focal points for my analysis. Once I decided on Nora and Nick, I realized that their pseudonyms are the titular characters in the 2008 indie rom-com *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist.* This wasn't intentional and I considered renaming them, but then I decided that an accidental cinematic crossover might be a fun twist for a project about multimodality.

stories offer a closer look at what uptake can look like and how even partial uptake and transformation can tell us something about what becomes possible when we rethink our approach to teaching writing.

Making It Visible: Envisioning a Literature Class Through a Critical Multimodal Approach

Nora, an English professor who has been teaching literature courses for more than three decades, looked up as I walked into the conference room in the University of Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the site for the Writing@UW Fellowship. She'd been working with Eleanor, an associate professor from music history, on an activity Megan and I had designed for Week Three. The topic of this workshop was about aligning learning goals and outcomes in a multimodal approach.

I smiled. "How's it going?"

Nora tapped the end of her marker against her blank poster paper as she looked up at me. "Could you repeat the instructions on …" she paused, collecting her thoughts. "What is the difference between a goal and an outcome?" There was an uncertainty in her voice that suggests this distinction feels slippery, just out of reach. Sitting down beside her, I was struck by the quiet deliberation of someone actively rethinking her pedagogical framework in ways that had yet to arrive on paper. I had gotten to know Nora over the last several weeks. She doesn't rush to write, just as she doesn't rush to speak. When she does, her words arrive with thoughtfulness, precision, and care. What I saw on her blank page in this moment was a thought in action, a pause marking the beginning of something shifting.

Clarifying that distinction between learning goals and observable outcomes was the focus of an early scaffolding activity in Session 3 that preceded the pair workshop portion of the Fellowship session. I designed the activity to prompt Fellows to reflect on the broader learning goals driving their teaching, the specific learning outcomes they wanted students to reach through the course, how their current assignments connected (or didn't) to those learning outcomes and goals, and then to consider how multimodal assignments could help students meaningfully engage with the course outcomes. On the surface, this activity asked Fellows to weave together all aspects of their course design, but a secondary

Rebecca Taylor made this in 2024 for the Writing@UW Fellowship at the University of Washington.
You can share it with anybody, anytime.

Multimodal Assignment Design & Plan Guide

What is the Goal?	What is the Outcome?	Form & Function: High-Stakes Assignments	Process Toward the Goal: Low-Stakes Assignments
Goals go beyond your course. They are ways of thinking, being, and interacting with the world that you see as important for students. Students may not meet these goals in your course, and they may not meet them for years after leaving university (if ever). You and your course, though, can help place students on a path toward meeting them. Goals may or may not be discipline specific, but it may help to think about the ways of thinking that are important for someone in your discipline. What types) of thinking do you want students to develop?	An outcome is a measurable and, importantly for your course, assessable demonstration of learning. These appear on your syllabus. These are tangible and specific, and they often answer these questions: What must students be able to do by the end of the course? How can you tie your assessment rubrics to this performance? What specific skills do you want students to develop? How can they show you that learning?	What large "final project" (if any) do you want students to do? How does this project/assignment connect to the Outcomes for your course? How are you supporting students with diversity of body, mind, linguistic background? Racial and linguistic justice? **Q's to consider** What types of communication do people associated with the discipline create? How does the public access information in the discipline?	These are low stakes (ungraded or low points) opportunities for students to learn the content and practice the skills necessary to complete the high-stakes assignments and meet the learning outcomes for your course. How can you help students understand the unique ways of knowing and writing in the discipline? How can you increase opportunities for students to develop these skills and knowledge? What about students with diversity of body, mind, linguistic background? Racial and linguistic justice?
Your Responses			

Image 3: Heuristic created for the Writing@UW Fellowship activity on course goals, learning outcomes, and scaffolded assignment sequences. Please see Appendix 5 for a full-size version.

hope I had was that by teasing apart what Fellows wanted students to learn from what Fellows were actually asking students to do, Megan and I could create space for Fellows to be able to more clearly recognize when their assignments reinforced dominant norms and when those assignments opened space for more inclusive, justice-oriented practices. This activity was central to my research questions, which explore how disciplinary faculty engage with critical multimodal literacies: what motivates faculty to take up multimodal approaches, how do faculty navigate institutional and disciplinary barriers, and what do their pedagogical decisions reveal about the ideological forces that shape writing instruction across the curriculum?

For this session of the Fellowship, I designed a poster-making activity (Appendix 6) and heuristic (Image 4 and Appendix 5) that adapted Wiggins and McTighe's *backward design framework* for our context, which I hoped would encourage Fellows to first identify big-picture goals and then work backward to create specific and tangible course outcomes. It was my hope that this activity could then

facilitate a deeper connection to how a critical multimodal approach can work for and within these pedagogical decisions to expand access, validate multiple ways of knowing, invite students to draw on their fullest cultural and linguistic resources, open up a broader range of audiences and impacts for student work, and challenge rigid definitions of academic success.

Session 3 followed a simple format: it was a think-pair-share that included a short introductory intake segment and then substantial time for Fellows to workshop their ideas in pairs, followed by a gallery walk of all Fellows' posters. Megan and I gave a short presentation on the distinction between learning goals and outcomes, and then we talked briefly about assignment sequencing and design, and I handed out and explained the heuristic. We then paired Fellows, intentionally putting people together based on disciplinary similarity to foster mutual understanding and shared teaching values, particularly around course outcomes and assignment design, but different enough to offer each other an outsider's perspective. That disciplinary distance, we hoped, could help surface assumptions, encourage reflection, and make space for more critical dialogue than might emerge in more closely aligned pairings. After the presentation portion of the session, we handed each Fellow a poster paper and gestured toward the colorful mound of scented markers on the table. We encouraged Fellows to spread out and find space to talk with their partner as they mapped on their poster paper the ways their course goals, outcomes, and assignments aligned (or didn't yet).

Nora uncapped her lime-scented green marker and started to write as we talked about the distinction between broad learning goals and concrete, measurable course learning outcomes. She wrote "intellectual creativity" on the top left, under the heading "Goals." On the right, she wrote, "solid knowledge of literary material." She looked up at me again, making an instant connection between this goal, outcome, and a favorite assignment: Text Merge. I remember reading about this assignment in her intake survey, where she described it as a way to foster students' confidence in their ability to communicate ideas and reflect on their meaning-making processes. Designed to foreground creativity while encouraging close reading and synthesis, Text Merge asks students to engage with course material in unexpected, genre-disrupting ways (see Nora's prompt below).

Text merging:

This reveals what happens when one text is interrupted or disrupted by another text. It consists of combining language from two different texts into another creation, to produce a poem, prose, or nonsense piece. Always it seems to illuminate both texts in new and surprising ways. Try combining related or distinctly different selections, both in form and/or content.

For this course's text merge activities, choose a passage from two of the texts studied to date in the class. Merge the language from both "word banks" into a new piece of writing. You don't need to use all the words from each selected text. NB: you cannot add new words or change the tenses of the original.

Write a Metacognitive Reflection after completing your text merge in response to the following questions:

- What were you aware of experiencing or noticing?
- What was in your mind as you did this?
- How did you make your choices?
- What if anything happened to the first text extracts when disrupted by the second text? To the second text when interrupted by the extracts from the first text?

You are required to post both your text merge and your metacognitive reflections on Canvas, together.

Grading criteria: you will be assessed on the basis of your adherence to the exercise instructions.

Image 5: Screenshot of Nora's Text Merge assignment, copied from her pre-Fellowship syllabus, which she talked about during Session 3 of the Writing@UW Fellowship.

The assignment begins with students selecting a central course text and identifying keywords, phrases, or lines that resonate with them. Nora asks them to find aspects that don't just resonate thematically but tonally, rhythmically, or emotionally. From this process, they construct a word bank that consists of fragments of the original text that serve as raw material for further composition. They then locate a second text of their own choosing and compose a new piece that merges the two. Students might interweave lines from each source, remix structures, or embed one text within the frame of another, ultimately creating something hybrid such as a poem that pulls words from a novel and imagery from a song, a visual layout that collides literary and pop-cultural references, a dialogue that uses character voices from very different texts. Nora intentionally leaves the final form open, encouraging students to experiment with structure and modality based on their own interpretive instincts. Her goal is to interrupt students' expectations of what "literary analysis" looks like and open space for affect, intuition, and personal connection.

“I want it to feel unfamiliar,” she told me as we talked about the Text Merge assignment. She described the assignment’s intentionally disorienting design, explaining, “I want them to have to think differently. To make meaning in ways they haven’t before.”

When I asked why that kind of experimentation matters, she paused.

“Oh. Right. I don’t think this is actually hitting any of my outcomes,” she said, laughing.

I remember feeling a sense of alarm: Did I ask the wrong question? Why is Nora balking at keeping a nontraditional assignment in her course when she talked so excitedly about it just a minute ago? Then I realized that it isn’t that she thinks the assignment is flawed or even that it exists outside her pedagogical framework, which she is now being asked to articulate. Rather, what is happening is that Nora isn’t fully connecting how the assignment aligns with the outcomes that she’s brainstorming on the poster paper; the outcomes column on the poster at this stage is still blank, as she is in the process of connecting her assignments with her desired student outcomes. What I see in this moment, though is Nora grappling with her pedagogical instincts and a critical multimodal framework–a framework that asks her to see experimentation, affect, and rhetorical play as central to student learning.

When Nora’s applied for the Writing@UW Fellowship, she described her project[13] as an all-encompassing revision to her writing-integrated literature class in which she could “expand my understanding of Writing activities and classes as an instrument for advancing social equity.” Many Fellows came into the Fellowship knowing precisely what their Fellowship project would be, but Nora wrote expansively about equity, wanting to expand understanding and being curious about connecting her course with students with multilingual backgrounds. She wrote,

[13] All Fellows were required to complete a Fellowship project, which Megan and I loosely defined as a pedagogical intervention into their disciplinary writing course. Fellows were encouraged to think broadly about their interventions/projects so that they could determine what type of work would best fit their course.

> Coming to UW with a UK background, I had no training or experiencing of teaching Writing or of teaching to students not majoring in English, and have in recent years, tried to educate myself, as well as learn from consultation with Joan Fiset, a local writing coach, creative writer, and veteran high-school English teacher. In recent years, inspired by Joan, I've begun incorporating some (right-brain oriented) writing activities and assignments in my Writing classes and also upper division classes. I've found that expansion very productive and interesting. I'd like to expand my understanding of Writing activities and classes as an instrument for advancing social equity. My current approach to equity has been more contents-based than process-oriented; my classes prioritise texts that engage with race, racism, and postcolonial/decolonial/colonial experiences and perspectives. Inter alia, I'd like to learn more about how to excite and motivate STEM students; how to engage with increasing numbers of students for whom English is not a primary language.

Nora wrote about arriving at the University of Washington (UW) with "no training or experiencing of teaching Writing or of teaching to students not majoring in English" and spending the last several years self-educating by consulting with a local writing coach. She expanded on her self-directed approach in her intake survey for this research project, which she filled out a week before the Fellowship began. She explained that she also borrowed colleagues' syllabi and experimented with multimodal assignments, which she felt could help students gain "confidence in their ability to communicate ideas, self-awareness and capacity for self-reflection about their own processes of meaning-making, and knowledge about literature's ability to mediate social, economic and political issues." In this self-directed learning, I saw a pedagogical agency in how Nora actively sought resources to construct her own framework for writing instruction, leading her to incorporate "low-stakes and right-brain/creative writing assignments because I believe they are effective and empowering learning tools for students."

In both her Fellowship application and intake survey, Nora frames her assignments through the language of "right-brain," which introduces a binary that warrants further attention. The terms "right-brain" and "left-brain" may function here as shorthand for creative versus analytical thinking, a distinction that risks reproducing the very divisions a critical multimodal approach aims to trouble. As scholars such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue, all communication is inherently

multimodal, drawing on combinations of modes to make meaning in context. Similarly, Shipka emphasizes that multimodality is not defined by the inclusion of visual or digital elements alone but by the rhetorical work those modes do. From this perspective, academic writing itself is already multimodal: the arrangement of arguments, citation systems, tone, and even formatting are all choices that carry rhetorical weight. Nora doesn't explicitly frame academic writing as more rigorous or valuable than creative or multimodal work; however, her invocation of "right-brain" as a category for these assignments subtly positions them as separate from, and perhaps outside of, the core academic tasks of the course. This framing reflects a common tension in WAC/WID settings, where multimodal work is often seen as creative, fun, extra rather than integral. While Nora's assignments create openings for student agency, expression, and meaning-making beyond the traditional essay, her language gestures toward a more expansive understanding of writing but does not yet fully articulate how these forms function rhetorically or politically in her disciplinary context. This binary risks reinscribing the hierarchies that a critical multimodal framework seeks to dismantle; by associating only multimodal work with creativity, instructors may unintentionally marginalize the rhetorical labor and intellectual complexity that students bring to these forms. Rather than treating multimodality as a fun break from the essay, critical multimodal pedagogies invite us to expand how students are invited to make meaning within and across those genres.

Nora wrote in her intake survey and Fellowship application that she was not trained in writing pedagogies and had to seek out support, and she entered the Fellowship with a strong sense of purpose and a desire to make her classes more equitable. Her early emphasis on creativity as distinct from academic work revealed the kinds of binaries many instructors must work through. The Fellowship gave her the space and language to begin troubling that divide.

I refer to Nora's response to a critical multimodal literacies pedagogical framework as a sustained and intentional engagement with a critical multimodal approach because of her final revised syllabus and final interview with me at the end of the Fellowship, both of which I detail in this section. Her uptake built over the course of the Fellowship, but I point to areas that demonstrate that the groundwork for a critical multimodal approach was something she brought with her into the Fellowship. That is, when she

was asked in the intake survey for my research whether there is a prevailing definition of "good writing" in her field, Nora offered a reflective and questioning response:

> I see a few prevailing definitions, that are not necessarily aligned. Professional good writing in my discipline may be defined as (variously) writing that displays outstanding scholarship, original conceptualisation or theorisation, intellectual risk-taking, rigorous analysis and argumentation, persuasive interpretation of primary materials, lucid and accessible prose. I have seen scientific and social-scientific professional (published) writing that to my outside eyes appears to be more descriptive than analytic, to be written in sentences and paragraphs that lack focus, concision, and are written with passive voice. Presumably it is considered good writing because it has been published by reputable academic presses?

From this, I see that even before the Fellowship began, Nora showed signs of being attuned to the ideological and disciplinary construction of writing standards. When she points to "(published) writing that to my outside eyes appears to be more descriptive than analytic, to be written in sentences and paragraphs that lack focus, concision, and are written with passive voice), she was already questioning the assumption that publication alone signifies quality, suggesting an ability to see how disciplinary norms are upheld and reproduced. This capacity to question what counts as "good" writing laid a foundation for her later engagement with multimodality and opened her to critique dominant writing norms.

In both her intake survey and Fellowship application, Nora wrote about her commitment to equity, which she had previously pursued by incorporating a diverse range of authors and perspectives into her course readings. In early Fellowship sessions, she described her primary course goals in terms of engagement and inclusion, often framed around values like "encouraging student voice." But as the Fellowship progressed, she began to see how those goals, while meaningful, didn't always translate into clear indicators of student learning. It wasn't until she was asked to articulate course outcomes during Session 3 that she began to see how multimodal assignments could serve not just as creative outlets but as structured, assessable means of achieving equity-oriented outcomes, which I saw after the Session 3 workshop ended and I collected everyone's work.

When I returned to Nora's poster (Image 6) during my analysis, I gained a deeper insight into how she used this activity to map her course. With her ideas now laid out visually, I noticed things that had been hazy during our conversation. The completed poster surfaced a tension I hadn't fully seen in the

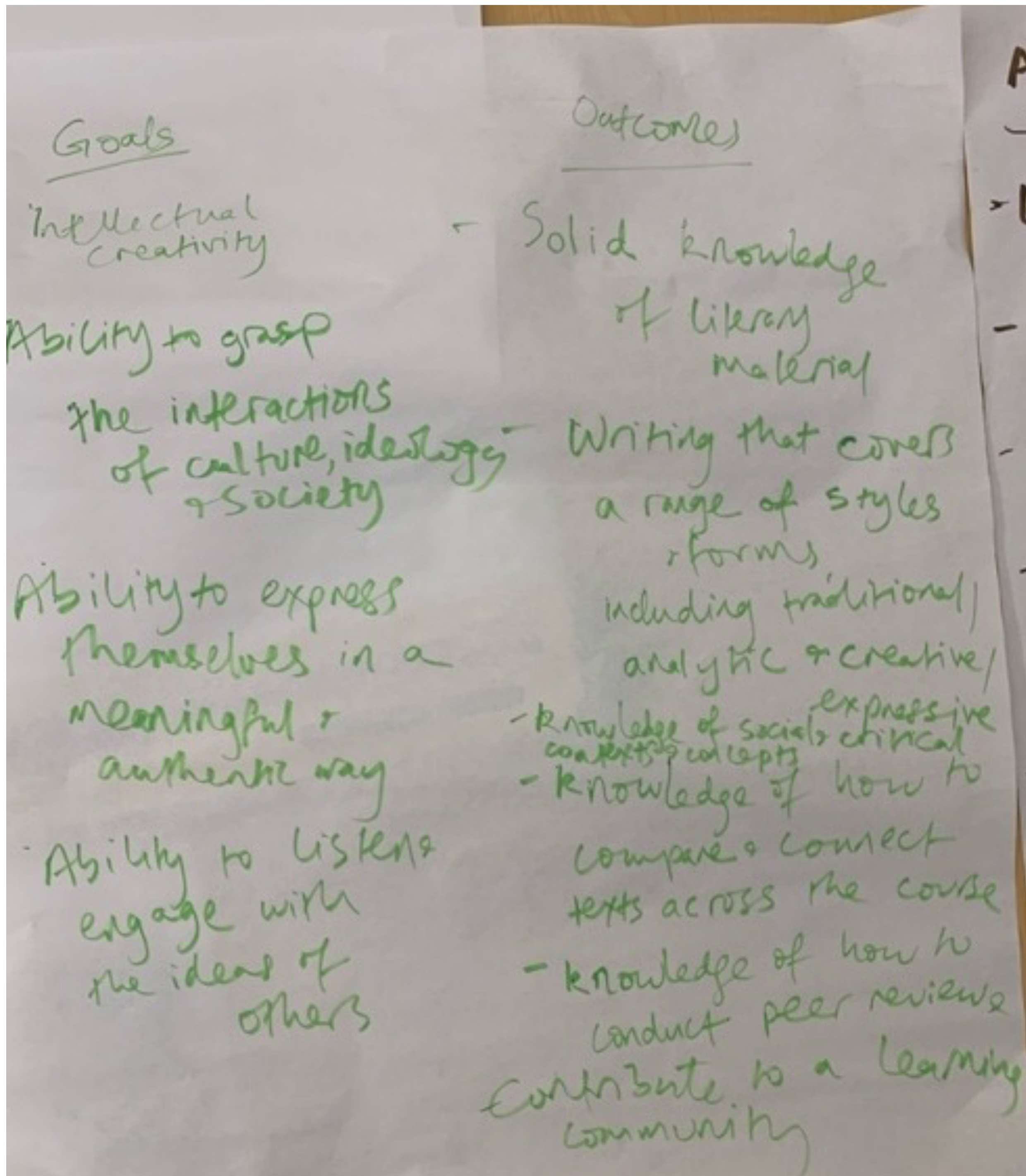

Image 6: Nora's final poster from Session 3 of the Writing@UW Fellowship. Please see Appendix 7.1 for a typed version.

moment. On one side, Nora names “intellectual creativity” as a central goal, something she clearly values and wants to cultivate in her classroom. But on the other side, her learning outcomes emphasize more traditional academic metrics: mastery of literary content, familiarity with “writing that covers a range of styles & forms, including traditional, analytic, & creative.” Creativity, something she wrote about in her intake survey and application as deeply important to her, appears as a broad aspiration (“intellectual creativity” appears under Goals), as well as a tangible outcome (writing in a creative style appears under outcomes). This layered representation of creativity—both as a broad learning goal and a measurable course outcome—reflects the balancing act Nora is performing as she is grappling with translating her pedagogical commitments onto the poster, revealing how the process of articulating goals and outcomes can surface underlying assumptions about what counts as meaningful learning.

Yet the physical layout of Nora’s poster, with “intellectual creativity” placed on the far left under goals and “solid knowledge of literary material” on the far right under outcomes, bring up a tension that I only fully recognized after the session. The spatial arrangement mirrors a conceptual divide between creativity and knowledge acquisition as if they are separate pursuits, parallel and never intersecting. Creativity appears on the side of broad aspiration, while the measurable, outcome-oriented side emphasizes mastery of content and traditional forms of academic writing. While creativity does appear under outcomes—in the phrase “writing that covers a range of styles and forms, including traditional, analytic, and creative”—its placement at the end of the list frames it as an add-on rather than an integrated mode of interpretation. The phrasing suggests a hierarchy in which traditional and analytic writing are central while creative work remains peripheral. Nora clearly values creativity—her Text Merge assignment is explicitly designed to foster student confidence and self-reflection through multimodal experimentation. But at this stage in the Fellowship, creativity still seems adjacent to, rather than embedded within, her articulated vision of academic work. This moment on the poster highlights how creativity is still operating as a tool to support more traditionally valued outcomes rather than being fully recognized as a legitimate site of analysis and meaning-making in its own right.

A week after Session 3, Nora, Megan, and I met on Zoom for Nora's mid-Fellowship interview to talk about her Fellowship project and the progress she has made thus far. She again turned to the Text Merge assignment, and I was relieved to hear her excitement about it had been revived. "It's clear from what they write," Nora explained, "that [the text merge assignment] does enrich their analytical understanding, so it advances the traditional writing process." She continued, "But it also, hopefully, allows them to be creative. I think that's another aspiration of the exercise, that it gives them confidence in their own creativity as writers, as well as illuminating their understanding of the literary texts." In this moment, Nora directly frames creativity as a scaffold toward traditional writing in a way that mirrors our conversation and her poster from Session 3. She frames multimodality as a precursor to academic inquiry, reflecting an ongoing negotiation of multimodality in her pedagogies. This framing of multimodality being something that prepares students to "advance the traditional writing process," rather than as writing itself, reveals the durability of academic norms around genre and legitimacy. Multimodal composition, in this view, is positioned as developmental, something that builds students' confidence, fosters engagement, and supports their understanding of course texts, but ultimately leads toward, rather than fully is, academic writing. This orientation aligns with broader tendencies in writing instruction to treat nontraditional genres as pedagogically useful but epistemologically secondary, a kind of fun alternative from or training ground for the more recognized and sanctioned forms like the analytical essay.

At this moment, however, about halfway through the Fellowship, Nora talked plainly to Megan and me about a problem she has begun to actively grapple with: a "pedagogical struggle with what place to give traditional essay writing. How do I want to connect that genre to the other kinds of writing that they do?" This uncertainty signals a shift in her thinking; rather than treating the traditional analytical essay as the natural culmination of her course or the genre toward which everything else should scaffold, she begins to interrogate its centrality. In this way, the analytic essay is no longer assumed to be the default form of academic engagement; it becomes one genre among many that need justification and recontextualization. "I've been thinking about chucking the midterm and the final," she told us, "and just having a series of shorter writing assignments throughout the class." This now-verbalized hesitation—

specifically about requiring a traditional analytical essay as a midterm assignment—marks Nora's emerging willingness to reimagine how student learning might be demonstrated. What I found striking here is not just Nora's thought about dropping the midterm and final from her course requirements but the broader pedagogical values that encourage this reconsideration. Her thinking reflects a shift: rather than viewing the traditional essay as a standard to be upheld; she begins to see it as one option, an option that may or may not align with the kinds of learning and expression she hopes to cultivate in students who take her course. Her comments reflect a turning point; that is, the essay is no longer a fixed endpoint, but instead is something she can negotiate. She is making space for the rhetorical possibilities that multimodality invites, even if those possibilities remain under construction. Nora's articulation of her "pedagogical struggle," or the difficulty of deciding what place to give traditional essay writing, signals an understanding of these tensions. She is not rejecting the essay, nor is she fully subsuming creative work into traditional academic expectations. Instead, she is actively negotiating a third space, one where the boundaries between genres, modes, and academic values are still being worked out. Her comments point to a liminal stage in her pedagogical development, where the promise of multimodality is clear, but its status as rigorous intellectual work remains unstable in her framing. When I asked her specifically about multimodality in her course, she said,

> I'm just so excited about multimodality, and I really feel the need to have some guidance and training and how to incorporate [it]. A student just sent a presentation in video form, which I'd said was an option because she didn't want to present in front of the class. And but she's majoring in computer science, and she knows how to do videos, and I don't, but I would love to start. Yeah, that could be just so liberating for them. And for me, for me to be using more videos, as you suggested, and it just never occurred to me.

At the midpoint of the Fellowship, Nora shows a moment of pedagogical risk, and it's also where the liberatory potential of multimodal practice begins to take root. At this stage, though, she still seems tethered to a hierarchy of discourses in which the traditional academic essay, often aligned with standardized academic English and institutional legitimacy, sits at the top. Other forms, including multimodal or exploratory writing, appear to function as preparatory, supplementary, or affective rather

than as intellectual work in their own right. What I found exciting in this interview, however, is Nora's growing recognition that these assumptions are not fixed. Her uncertainty about whether the midterm-plus-final structure is "the right path" signals a shift, an emerging understanding that learning outcomes, including those tied to analysis, interpretation, and synthesis, do not require a singular genre to be effectively realized. In questioning the centrality of the essay, she opens up space to consider how a variety of communicative choices, including multimodal projects, can serve as legitimate sites of meaning-making, each with its own rhetorical possibilities.

During our post-Fellowship interview in which Megan, Nora, and I met to talk about Nora's experience in the Fellowship, I noticed immediately how her pedagogies had clearly shifted from a focus on content coverage and formal literary analysis to audience-centered, multimodal, and socially engaged writing. First, these shifts could be seen in the new syllabus she sent Megan and me. Nora's new syllabus expanded the options students have for their final project to include the Public Communication Paper (Image 7). This new assignment option asks students to write four short pieces, each drawing on a different course text and each composed in a genre and mode aimed at a specific public audience, explicitly inviting students to imagine writing as intertwined with social engagement. Among Nora's revised options are composing a Facebook post to reach parents, a speech directed at policymakers, or a campaign for Instagram or a union platform. Unlike the options in her earlier version of the course, which were bound by her classroom, the Public Communication Paper asks students to consider modality and audience together outside of the classroom space, challenging students to think and consider and compose for audiences beyond the university. In this shift, I also see how is Nora challenging the hierarchies of composition that position academic writing at the top. In our earlier conversations, Nora grappled with

Public Communication Paper option.

As with TIPS, you produce four short papers (or equivalent), of 500 words minimum each, with each paper focused on a different literary text from the course. You may not write about a text that you explored in your mid-term paper. You may use the same selected genre for all four, or choose different genres for some or all. The genres mentioned below are merely suggestions.

Prompt:

Is there another audience that would benefit from the ideas, concerns, and insights contained in this fictional material?

Into what format might you translate this literary material to reach that audience? In other words, how could you communicate an idea from the fiction into a different genre — and which genre would you choose?

For instance,

What if you want to reach parents of school-age children?

… You might create a campaign through a school's parent-teacher association or an infographic.

What if you want to reach voters in rural communities?

… You might make a campaign poster or write a speech.

What if you want to reach teachers?

… You might create a Facebook post or a union platform.

What if you want to reach politicians?

… You might write a letter to the Secretary of Education or a member of Congress.

What if you want to reach teenagers?

… You might create an Instagram campaign or a pop song or a school play.

Image 7: New option for students' final project in Nora's course.

how to balance traditional essay writing with more exploratory modes of expression. In her course revision, Nora is creating a structure that legitimizes alternative forms—not just as creative add-ons and fun extras but as valid modes of analysis and interpretation. The Public Communication Paper reframes students' communicative choices as situated, rhetorical, and purpose-driven, asking them to engage literary texts and real-world applications.

After our final interview Nora was over, Megan left the Zoom call so Nora and I could talk one-on-one about multimodality. She spoke directly to the pedagogical change that she had gone through in the Fellowship, telling me,

> I feel as if I'm still very much in the early stages of absorbing and processing and applying this, but multimodality made me think that writing could be delinked from the physical production of words on a page. That writing could be more broadly seen as a form of communication. It's expressive communication, which can take different forms. And that the writing and the reading are so intertwined. There's this trio of terms now that multimodality has made me reconsider. Writing can create new ways to read and to think and reading can involve listening as much as it can involve looking at words on a page. Reading can cause writing to become a collective form of meaning-making.
>
> I'm still struggling, to be honest, with a kind of residual attachment to a narrow definition of writing, but it's changing. Several of my students in the winter quarter gave presentations that involved videos, including one presentation from a student whose first language is not English and who had been very self-conscious about speaking. But she gave this amazing video presentation and then wrote really compellingly about it. And I that's where I started to really see organically how video communication is itself form of writing.

By the end of the Fellowship, Nora is interrogating how genre expectations shape what kinds of knowledge are recognized as legitimate. The analytic essay still holds value for her—it remains an option in her revised syllabus—but that value is now contingent and dependent on what it allows students to do, rather than what it represents academically. This underscores how multimodal pedagogies are not just about bringing new forms into the classroom but about revisiting the assumptions embedded in all forms.

But even as Nora becomes more critical of these structures, she acknowledges how ingrained they are in academia. When we talked about graduate school admission requirements and award contents, she admits, "I fear that if I were asked to judge an essay again, I would probably resort to rewarding what comes easiest, which is how legible is this as a conventional piece of analytic process. Does it footnote all its sources." In this, Nora recognizes how easy it is to default to convention in these moments, relying on metrics of academic writing because they are familiar and institutionally accepted. As she grapples with these tensions, Nora recognizes that ease should not dictate pedagogical choices, saying something that resonates with me long after our final meeting, "but that should not be what governs our teaching choices." She also sees the implications of not challenging conventional approaches to writing when she

explains, “But I don’t want to be in that position. You could make such a strong argument that it’s not just unethical but that it violates equity. But takes guts to say, this is ideologically saturated with racism.” This tension between recognizing inequity embedded in traditional assessment practices underscores the challenges of enacting equity-driven pedagogical change.

For her pedagogies overall, Nora told me how talking and working with a critical multimodal lens affected the ways she defines writing. “I started to see how video communication is itself a form of writing,” she said, describing a student whose first language is Chinese and who created a powerful video project. “She’s a freshman. I know there are others in the class who are struggling to gain confidence to express themselves in English writing. So that troubles me.” This experience of working with a multilingual student on their video essay pushed Nora to see multimodal composition not as a supplemental practice or creative add-on but as a critical intervention to her classroom. “That’s an example of where I see multimodality really having a very empowering application for multilingual students. That’s a racial equity issue.” Overall, Nora’s shift in perspective aligns with a growing body of scholarship that positions multimodal composition as enacting racial and linguistic justice in writing spaces. Shipka, Palmeri, and Kathleen Blake Yancey argue that multimodal approaches challenge inherited norms that privilege monolingual writing and maintain hierarchies that place text-based genres as more worthy and valid than other forms of communication. These norms are not neutral, as Baker-Bell reminds us. They are bound in white language supremacy that delegitimizes the expressive and rhetorical practices of Black, multilingual, and other historically marginalized students. Nora’s recognition that video and other forms of communication can serve as valid, and even more empowering, forms of writing echoes this call to disrupt the racialized boundaries of academic discourse. Multimodal composition is also central to translingual approaches, which ask instructors to attend not only to what languages students bring into the classroom but also to what modes they use to make meaning. Bou Ayash critiques the way institutional habits often lead instructors to default to familiar genre expectations, even when those expectations are misaligned with their values around equity. Nora, through the Fellowship, begins to challenge that impulse not only by offering multimodal options but by foregrounding them as central to

learning and expression, exemplifying a critical multimodal approach, an approach that does not merely diversify modes for their own sake but recognizes how meaning-making is shaped by race, language, power, and access.

By our last interview, Nora's reflections had moved beyond critique of inherited writing norms that limit student expression to concrete action towards justice-oriented pedagogical redesign. She told me, "When I next teach my writing class, I'll spend several weeks starting the class unlearning. This five-paragraph essay is not going to go away, so we need to just tackle it head-on. Part of me resents having to spend any time explaining to them, but it has to be done. It's just ongoing, which can limit their expressive potential." In imagining how the five-paragraph essay might be approached through a translingual and multimodal lens, she begins to treat it not as a fixed genre to uphold or reject but as a site for critical unlearning and expansive possibility. Nora sees unlearning as a necessary pedagogical intervention, an intervention that does not erase the essay's presence but reframes it in ways that allow students to approach writing more critically and expansively.

Nora's pedagogical shift from assigning traditional forms out of a sense of obligation to treating writing as a space for reflection, critique, and choice reveals the possibilities that emerge when instructors critically examine their teaching to make space for students to explore meaning-making in multiple modes. While she has long assigned traditional academic writing in response to institutional pressures, she began questioning whether these constraints were limiting student engagement and learning, and whether continuing to prioritize them conflicted with her commitments to equity. These realizations became central to her pedagogical shift, leading her to rework her syllabus to incorporate multimodal composition as a way of expanding what counted as writing in her classroom. By inviting students to select modes that resonated with their identities and communicative strengths, Nora reframed writing as collective and multimodal, which became a shift that reflected her growing belief that she told me about in that final interview, that "teaching and speaking and classroom dynamics are just as important as the content when it comes to advancing equity." She described how, even while encouraging exploratory and reflective writing, she had continued to assign a traditional analytical essay as the central project in her

course, explaining that she had "continued to make that mandatory, but now I'm not convinced that it's the best way to go." As she worked through the heuristic and reviewed her outcomes, she began to name a growing discomfort with the form itself, saying, "I have doubts about the general utility of traditional [academic essays]. I feel they encourage a very traditional understanding of competence, composition." The Fellowship helped her articulate what had been an undercurrent in her teaching for some time, the feeling that her assignments were reinforcing the very genre conventions and exclusionary language ideologies and racist institutional knowledges she hoped to move beyond. "I am more and more convinced," she says, "that we cannot continue with the old traditional systems." Reflecting on what new possibilities might emerge in her class, she added, "I'm just so excited about multimodality, that it could be so liberating for them [students]. And for me."

Revising a STEM Course to Incorporate a Critical Multimodal Literacies Pedagogical Approach

The energy in the room during Session 7 of the Writing@UW Fellowship is lively as Fellows laugh and swap stories about classroom experiences that echo the case studies Megan and I have asked Fellows to discuss. These case studies are fictionalized student scenarios designed to prompt reflection on how issues of equity, linguistic justice, and multimodality show up in teaching. Nick, an assistant professor of mechanical engineering, has been paired with Gillian, a professor in astronomy. They've chosen a case I wrote that features Kinzy,[14] a senior undergrad in STEM who "hates writing" and doesn't see the point of practicing it. Kinzy plans to work in a lab after graduation and is confident she can rely on AI tools or hire an online editor if she ever needs to write in her career. In the share-out session that followed the pair discussions, Gillian explains that Kinzy feels familiar; she and Nick chose this case because they both have had similar conversations with students in their own courses. Gillian talks about a similar sense of frustration with trying to help students understand the importance of writing in their

[14] While I do not have transcripts of Nick and Gillian's pair discussion about the fictionalized Kinzy case study, the case and all others are included in Appendix 7 because it informed the scenario in which Nick shared the Challenger story, a moment that shaped my understanding of how he conceptualized the stakes of writing in engineering contexts.

fields, and she asks Nick to share with the larger group his example of how he gets students to understand the stakes of effective engineering communication.

Nick nods. "The engineering letter from the Challenger disaster."
The momentum in the room, which feels a little giddy from talking about students, case studies, and classroom experiences, suddenly slows as everyone turns to him, curious, as I am, about the connection between space shuttle disasters and writing. Nick tells us the story:

> The engineers who worked on the Challenger warned their supervisors about the O-rings. They wrote a letter saying there was a problem, that something could go wrong. But they downplayed the severity of it, used lots of colloquial language, and weren't explicit about what the problem actually was. They were like, 'Ah, our engineers aren't really sure and it's a jump ball if something goes wrong, and we think we should delay.' And they [NASA] were like, 'Nope.'

Personally, I remember the *Challenger* disaster—my teacher at the time told me that it was a technical failure. Nick's explanation during this session of the Fellowship was the first time I'd heard that it was also a communication failure. The engineers had raised concerns about the O-rings (rubber seals that they knew became brittle in cold temperatures), and they sent a letter to NASA to recommend a delay. But their warnings were softened by hedging and technical jargon that didn't convey any sort of urgency. The launch went ahead, and seventy-three seconds later, the shuttle broke apart, killing all seven crew members. Nick's explanation reframed the story—not just as a mechanical failure but as a failure of engineering communication with catastrophic consequences.

"It was both a badly written letter and a letter that was ignored," he tells us. The engineers knew the risks, but they didn't make those risks legible to the people with the power to stop the launch. This understanding that writing in engineering has real-world consequences was foundational to the work Nick chose to do on his course during the Writing@UW Fellowship. Nick came to the Fellowship with a pragmatic orientation toward communication and a deep investment in student learning. Unlike some Fellows who began with a clearly articulated equity agenda, Nick was primarily focused on improving clarity, critical thinking, and student engagement in student writing. However, through the Fellowship, he

began to question the dominant genres of his field—particularly the lab report—and to reconsider how writing might function beyond the transmission of technical information. As he reflected on how engineering education often sidelines rhetorical awareness in favor of correctness and efficiency, Nick started to explore how multimodal composition might open up space for students to grapple with the ethical, social, and material consequences of engineering practice. His journey reflects a shift from emphasizing precision and form to recognizing writing—and communication more broadly—as political, situated, and inseparable from the values engineers bring to their work.

In this section, I examine how Nick's evolving engagement with multimodal composition reveals both the possibilities and tensions of integrating a critical, equity-oriented writing practice into a STEM context. I trace how his approach to writing moved from emphasizing accuracy and procedural documentation to supporting rhetorical decision-making and real-world problem-solving. This shift, which I describe as a partial uptake of a critical multimodal literacies framework because he adopted multimodal genres and emphasized rhetorical awareness but did not yet engage multimodality as a means of disrupting dominant language ideologies or expanding linguistic justice, led Nick to replace the lab report with genres like technical memos, letters to managers, white papers. Although his redesigned course continues to center on traditional written genres, Nick's new approach positions writing as a site of inquiry and ethical responsibility rather than as a neutral tool for reporting results. His partial uptake of critical multimodal pedagogies underscores a key possibility in my research: that genre critique and professional alignment can serve as accessible starting points for instructors navigating toward critical multimodal practice.

Nick applied for the Fellowship because he knew something in his course wasn't working. He was grappling with a course he had inherited, what he called a "Frankenstein class that somebody came up with 20 years ago that hasn't really changed." A lecture course with lab sections designed for undergraduate mechanical engineering students, the class is supposed to help students develop both a theoretical and applied understanding of the mechanics of materials such as bending, flexibility, and fracture with the end goal being, as Nick explains, for students to "understand why materials work the

way that they do." Nick explained in his Fellowship application that the biweekly lab reports that were required of students followed a rigid structure in which students summarized experimental results, explained procedures, and presented data, and Nick observed that students tended to "just fill in the blanks" without engaging deeply with the implications of their lab experiments. He felt that students didn't "focus enough on the technical writing" associated with lab reports, and he wanted to move toward "a different focus for the writing aspect of the course, one which is ideally integrated into the labs but that gives students room to explore more modern issues in engineering (climate change, renewable energy, pollution, habitat destruction)." In Nick's first interview, he talked with Megan and me about his Fellowship plans, which initially included revising the lab reports because, as he stated, they "feel like busywork" and students rarely went beyond surface-level description. He hoped to adjust the reports by altering their structure, adjusting the prompts, or scaffolding them differently so students would think more critically about the implications of their work.

Megan and I also asked all Fellows to complete an initial Fellowship questionnaire, and Nick's responses provide insight into how he was beginning to rethink the role of writing in his classroom. He wrote:

> **What issues or bottlenecks is this alteration of your course working to address? How have you identified this issue, and/or does it apply differently to different students?**
>
> I'm trying to get students to think more critically about material properties, why they are different in various materials systems, and why they are important to understand. The current course has students conduct lab experiments and write reports based on those findings. It causes most students to focus on the material property analysis but not think critically about why the properties exist or, importantly, what to do with them. A small minority of students do take deeper insights away from the course, but the current structure of assignments is not conducive to critical thinking.
>
> **What materials will you be creating / revising for this project? Please list all anticipated materials that you might include as part of your project deliverable (e.g., syllabus language, assignment prompt, rubric, scaffolding prompts, reading assignments).**
>
> The lab reports will be significantly simplified to require less writing, new short writing and/or reading assignments will be created, and a larger written report on materials use

> and design will be developed. This new project will require students to provide a preliminary design report then revisit and revise that document over the course of the class with their learnings throughout the course. Accordingly, there will be major revisions to the syllabus to revise the writing and critical thinking expectations for the class, new rubrics for these assignments will be created, and the workflow of the course will be reevaluated to ensure students have sufficient time to absorb course concepts.

What's interesting in Nick's response is how he expressed a need for students to do "less writing" in lab reports because he felt the writing tasks had become formulaic and disconnected from students' actual understanding of engineering concepts. Early in the Fellowship, Nick wrote about his existing approach to writing and its ineffectual connection to getting students to "think more critically about material properties." His early idea to reduce writing in his course reflects that he is looking to create a reallocation of effort, an attempt to streamline tasks to make space for deeper conceptual engagement. He envisions a shift in workload, simplifying traditional reports while introducing other writing and reading assignments, a new larger report, and an iterative revision process. I found this initial stance interesting and important to my research because it demonstrates that his first instinct was not to move away from lab reports entirely (even though he does get rid of them by the end of the Fellowship, which I discuss later), but rather to make lab reports more efficient and aligned with his course's learning outcomes and broader goals for students. This initial stance is significant because it shows that while Nick was dissatisfied with how the lab report functioned in his course, he did not immediately abandon it. Instead, he attempted to restructure it—to make it shorter, more purposeful, and better aligned with his course outcomes. As he explained, "lab reports document empirical findings. Students go through a series of 'why' statements to help them dig deeper into the ways things work together." On the surface, this structure could support inquiry. But in practice, Nick found that "it ends up being very prescriptive," and students don't spend "a lot of time actually writing and thinking about the material." In this early moment, Nick was not yet engaging multimodality as a critical framework but was beginning to rethink how writing, in the lab report specifically, could better support understanding in engineering. He was rethinking how both he and

students approached writing in the course, and he was beginning to explore ways writing could be aligned more directly to be an integral part of the learning process.

By the end of the Fellowship, rather than reimagining the lab report, Nick eliminated it altogether, replacing it with assignments like white papers, a letter to a manager, a technical paper, and a project proposal. These new genres asked students to compose for specific audiences, adopt distinct rhetorical positions, and engage with socially urgent topics like climate change and infrastructure design. These weren't simply new genres layered onto old content; they reflected a shift in how Nick was beginning to conceptualize engineering communication as rhetorical, multimodal, and socially consequential. Yet his decision to discard the lab report, rather than critically rework it, reveals a persistent binary that also surfaced in Nora's case earlier in this chapter: the assumption that some genres are inherently multimodal—open, flexible, creative—while others, like the lab report, are fixed, rigid, and beyond transformation. This binary obscures the reality that all genres are multimodal—lab reports included. Even so-called "traditional" forms make meaning through spatial, visual, linguistic, and procedural modes, often in highly structured and discipline-specific ways. By treating multimodality as a feature that exists only in nontraditional genres, instructors risk overlooking the ideological work embedded in all communicative forms. A critical multimodal approach does not simply add new genres to a course or swap out genres; it invites both students and faculty to interrogate how all genres—traditional and experimental alike—are shaped by disciplinary histories, language ideologies, and communicative norms.

What I found notable here is that Nick's critique of lab reports points to the ways that genre expectations, especially when left uninterrogated, can constrain rather than support pedagogical aims. Near the end of the Fellowship, Nick met with Megan and me to talk about his Fellowship project, when he articulated a broader critique of the lab report as a genre. While he acknowledged that it is "a type of writing that is used in engineering," he noted that it is "done by a smaller subset of people" and "not as widely used" as other forms of professional communication, such as technical articles and memos or emails. This reflection signaled an early shift in how Nick was beginning to frame writing—not just as a classroom task but as a situated practice with real-world consequences. When we discussed how his

assignments might support critical thinking, he emphasized wanting students to "write in ways that will be broadly useful for engineering careers," a goal that reflects emerging rhetorical awareness. Rather than teaching writing as a decontextualized skill, Nick was beginning to think about genre as tied to professional identity, communicative purpose, and disciplinary context. His desire to balance "direction but flexibility" also suggested a willingness to move away from rigid templates and invite students to make rhetorical decisions, a move that laid the groundwork for his later partial uptake of a critical multimodal approach. This moment, in which Nick begins to question the usefulness of the lab report for achieving his course's learning goals, is significant for my research because it illustrates one potential way faculty can begin pedagogical transformation: by questioning the efficacy of a genre in a way that results in a reimagining the broader communicative goals of a course.

My research examines how such moments open space for faculty to reconsider writing not as a static form tied to disciplinary tradition but as a rhetorical, multimodal practice that can support more inclusive, reflective, and socially responsive approaches to teaching. At this point in his interrogation of the course, Nick was beginning to recognize that the lab reports his students were producing weren't fully engaging them in the kind of critical thinking necessary to meet the real-world stakes of engineering. The disconnect, as he was coming to see it, was between the procedural, fill-in-the-blanks nature of the genre and the deeper analytical reasoning he believed engineers needed to practice. He saw himself as responsible for helping students not only run tests on materials but also understand why those materials behave the way they do—and how communicating results clearly and ethically can have real consequences, as in the case of the Space Shuttle disaster he referenced in the Fellowship discussion. This reflection on lab reports reveals what I call a partial uptake of critical multimodal literacies: Nick begins to interrogate an existing genre for efficiency but gradually reimagines writing as a generative tool for inquiry, ethical responsibility, and public-facing communication in contexts that matter.

In Session 4 of the Writing@UW Fellowship, which asked Fellows to work with the connections between formal writing assignments and multimodal composition, Fellows were invited to reflect on how writing is defined and practiced in their disciplines. During our discussion, Nick responded to a question

about disciplinary writing norms by articulating a tension he was beginning to notice in his own teaching. He explained to the group:

> I feel like the engineering side de-emphasizes writing for the sake of trying to get the correct formulations of things. If you build the bridge, [it] isn't going to fall down. Until we started all of these [Fellowship] discussions, I hadn't thought about the language of engineering as much, philosophically.
>
> These are the words we're using to describe, and so trying to convey [to students] that words have meaning. We give them a definition, right? Maybe to make information density possible so that if I need to convey a very highly technical idea, I can do it in a few words. So we try to try to get that across the students, but also in engineering, there's not enough emphasis on writing in general.

Nick's reflection during Session 4 offers a revealing glimpse into how he was beginning to reconsider the role of language in engineering education. As Fellows discussed the goals and genres of formal writing assignments, Nick shared how the Fellowship had prompted him to think about writing in his field in new ways; when he explains that "engineering side de-emphasizes writing for the sake of trying to get the correct formulations of things" and that he had not thought of "language of engineering as much, philosophically," he is expressing a view of language as a neutral conduit for technical information rather than as a rhetorical and meaning-making resource. This moment reveals how disciplinary norms shape not just what students write but how they are taught to think about writing as precise and largely invisible. A critical multimodal framework can trouble these assumptions by recognizing all writing as situated, multimodal, and bound up in social and ideological contexts, even within fields like engineering, but his comments also mark an early shift in his thinking as he starts to acknowledge the communicative dimensions of language in engineering. His perspective in this comment, however, also reflects a raciolinguistic ideology that can subtly shape writing instruction, reinforcing inequities under the guise of neutrality. As Ghanashyam Sharma argues, reductive views about language and writing are pervasive across disciplines and are particularly contradictory in STEM contexts, where a paradox exists, that "in spite of persistent monolingual ideologies in their fields, faculty and students speak many languages,

bring linguistic resources from different cultural and national backgrounds, and must constantly engage in border-crossing communication" (44). This is where a framework of critical multimodality can intervene. A critical multimodal approach does not reject technical genres or clarity outright; rather, it asks instructors to examine how language, mode, and form are never neutral, and how genre expectations can either reproduce or disrupt exclusionary norms. Nick's comments reflect an initial awareness that engineering language is "philosophical," but he stops short of recognizing how this language encodes values, power, and privilege—insights that are central to moving from surface-level multimodality to justice-oriented writing pedagogies. Indeed, this mindset can perpetuate monolingual ideologies that frame standardized academic English as the default or only legitimate form of academic communication, erasing the rhetorical and cultural value of other language practices (Bou Ayash; Horner; Inoue). This can likewise reinforce the expectation that students conform to dominant language norms rather than valuing the linguistic diversity they bring to the classroom. In positioning communication as secondary to getting the "correct formulations," traditional engineering education can reinforce a hierarchy that prioritizes efficiency and precision at the expense of deeper engagement with language. This distinction becomes important when viewed through a critical multimodal literacies framework: when Nick talks about words having singular meanings, his focus remains on helping students communicate more clearly within existing disciplinary forms rather than questioning or reimagining how engineering knowledge is constructed and validated. By bringing disciplinary norms that render writing invisible or purely instrumental to light, though, Nick begins to take up rhetorical genre awareness but not the broader commitments of a critical multimodal literacies approach. A critical multimodal framework asks more profound questions about power: Whose ways of knowing are centered? What modes of expression are seen as legitimate? And how might shifting modes also shift which identities, communities, or epistemologies are recognized in academic and professional spaces? Although Nick begins to expose the inequities embedded in STEM writing expectations, he stops short of exploring alternative modalities or rethinking what "effective" communication might look like through a justice-oriented lens. While Nick brings up the inequities embedded in STEM communication, he doesn't explore how shifting modes

might open new possibilities for justice-oriented communication. That gap—between identifying a problem and imagining alternatives—became a central focus of Session 7.

Session 7 of the Writing@UW Fellowship built on the Fellowship's ongoing focus on equity and linguistic justice by inviting Fellows to dig into the real-world implications of these concepts. Megan and I invited Dr. Wei Zuo, an instructional consultant from the University of Washington Seattle's Center for Teaching and Learning, to co-design this session with us, and together we talked about ways to prompt reflection and conversation about linguistic justice and multimodal engagement, ultimately deciding to situate our session in recognizable classroom situations. In the first half of the session, we asked Fellows to consider how their course materials reflected particular language ideologies and assumptions about academic communication. In the second half, we invited Fellows to explore how approaching course content through a critical multimodal lens might expand access to meaning-making, support student agency, and challenge exclusionary academic norms. To support the second half's goal, I designed an activity that asked Fellows to visually map onto large poster paper the connections between their existing course assignments and their goals for equity and linguistic justice. From there, Fellows were invited to consider how multimodal approaches, or perhaps entirely new assignment designs, might more effectively support those goals.

Nick's work during this session offered a concrete example of how he was reimagining his teaching in light of conversations in previous Fellowship sessions—though, as I show next, his approach also revealed the limits of his uptake of critical multimodal literacies. In the poster activity, I asked Fellows to visualize the relationship between their equity commitments and their assignment designs, encouraging them to surface tensions, gaps, and possibilities that might not be as visible when working solely within text-based or institutional templates. The shift to visual composition was intentional. By stepping outside of conventional text-based frameworks, I wanted Fellows to externalize their thinking in ways that foregrounded the spatial, visual, and relational dimensions of their assignment logic and its alignment (or misalignment) with justice-oriented teaching goals. This composing process itself, I hoped, could model the kind of critical engagement Megan and I hoped to see in Fellows as we encouraged them

to treat multimodality not only as a finished product but as a way of constructing and communicating knowledge. Nick's response to this activity offers a window into the partial uptake of these ideas and the tensions that emerged in applying them to his own disciplinary context. In the poster he created during the learning activity (Image 8), Nick outlined ways he might expand how students access and process new

LPs, Assignments Activities

LP

Moving through different topics in MoM seqentally but trying to tie them together

Assignments

Homeworks (both numerical conceptual and coding) on course topics,

Lab reports on data analysis

Activities

Hands on "intuitive" examples in lab to build understanding

Flipped class w/ Poll Ev and problem solving in class

Small group problem solving/ conceptual discussions

New Modes + Genres

Drawing

Conceptual sketches of various physical phenomena

Design sketches for components of a part or object

Labeling what stuff is made of (give them a picture)

Building?

Hands on assembly of simple components

Creating something out of easily available materials to figure out when it will break (spaghetti and marshmallow tower)

Writing

Open ended writing assignments (make anything describing a concept, can writing a song)

Address Equity Concerns

Creating more open ended assignments removes some of the need for rigid structure but places more need for clear expectations

Using other types of assignments (drawing + building) puts people on more level footing (maybe) in terms of their prior experiences

Image 8: Poster Nick created during Session 7 of the Writing@UW Fellowship. Please see Appendix 7.1 for a typed version.

information. Under the section “New Modes + Genres,” he listed “Drawing” and “Building?”—the question mark signaling his ongoing exploration of how best to integrate multimodal work into his classroom.

In earlier discussions, though, Nick highlighted correct technical formulation in engineering, and he shared that writing was often de-emphasized in favor of content mastery. Assignments in his courses traditionally focused on precision and correct solutions, placing clarity over reflection or rhetorical flexibility. His inclusion of alternative modes, such as drawing and building, suggests a shift in thinking—one that gestures toward reimagining what counts as disciplinary knowledge and how it can be expressed. However, this move remains tentative. What is still not fully articulated are the specific learning goals these multimodal approaches are meant to support or how they would be scaffolded to meet the needs of students across language backgrounds and learning preferences. That said, elements of Nick’s poster do illustrate a desire to make learning more inclusive and student-centered. Activities like “conceptual sketches of various physical phenomena” and “creating something out of easily available materials” open space for different ways of thinking and doing. Producing “design sketches for components of a part or object” invites critical engagement with the relationship between function and audience. These assignments can open space for students to consider personal experience and prior knowledge, offering multiple entry points into complex engineering concepts. For example, sketching a physical process could allow a student to work from a visual or spatial mode of reasoning rather than relying on a verbal explanation. In his work on his poster, Nick shows how he’s thinking about what assignments might not just assess understanding but cultivate and deepen it.

Nick entered this session already questioning the effectiveness of lab reports in engineering education, but at this point, the lab reports remain under the “LP: Assignments Activities” column. While he had talked about lab reports insufficiently leveraging student learning, particularly in fostering critical thinking about material properties and real-world applications, he continued to consider them a valid part of his course at this time. This is, however, the last time that lab reports show up as a part of Nick’s

planning for his course. This session gave him the opportunity to map out potential revisions to his course, outlining alternative genres that could better facilitate student engagement.

Partial Uptake and Rhetorical Reorientation in STEM Writing

Months later, I sit in the back row of a rectangular lecture room in a basement that doesn't feel large enough to fit 50 people, let alone the 90 Nick told me it's designed to hold. It's been an entire summer since the Fellowship ended, and we're in Week 1 of a new quarter, the quarter in which he is piloting his new course revision. I emailed him before the quarter started to see if I could attend one of his classes because I'm curious about his new assignments, and he graciously agreed. I'm a little early, and as I pull out my notebook, I see Nick and the course's teaching assistant standing at the front of the room, working with the laptop and projector as students file in and find seats. Class starts and Nick opens with a bang.

He opens a slide with the engineering memo from the *Challenger* space mission, which doesn't have the shuttle or NASA or any other identifying information on it. Nick doesn't describe the memo to students—he just looks out at the room as everyone reads.

"Oh, no," says a student sitting near me, reading the screen. Their friend looks over in confusion.

"What's wrong with this letter?" Nick asks. Several hands shoot up across the room.

"It's written for the wrong people," one student says.

"Yes," Nick smiles and draws out more information. "How do you know that?"

"Too much lingo," A voice comes from near the front.

"Yeah, people might not understand what the problem is," says another.

"Any guesses what it's from?" Nick asks.

One student calls out, "*Challenger*."

Nick nods and explains that the letter was sent to NASA to prevent the *Challenger* space shuttle from taking off. He talks about the rhetorical situation, about making the right choices to get your point across, and how important it is as engineers to know how to "communicate in different ways. For different people."

And then Nick plays us a video. On the screen, physicist Richard Feynman sits behind a heavy wooden desk, surrounded by members of the Presidential Commission investigating the *Challenger* explosion. Without fanfare, Feynman holds up a small strip of rubber. He explains that he holds a small piece of the same material used in the shuttle's O-rings, the component that failed, leading to the tragic shuttle explosion. The material, he explains, is supposed to remain soft and pliable even in cold temperatures. Then, with quiet confidence, he reaches for a glass of ice water. He drops the material in. A beat. Then he pulls it out and attempts to bend it, but it won't bend. It's stiff, rigid. No jargon, no spreadsheets, no technical memos—just a glass of water and a failed material.[15]

Nick turns off the video and turns back to the students. He asks them for differences between the two communicative methods. No one answers, and Nick moves on to talk about the writing assignments students will do this quarter in class. I'm struck by the silence, though. The memo, the Feynman clip, the invitation to compare modes of communication—it all paves the way for a conversation about the stakes of writing, of how form and audience shape not just clarity but consequence. But the students don't bite, and Nick doesn't press. The moment passes.

In curating this moment, Nick demonstrates that communication in engineering is not value-neutral. The ways that knowledge is presented, and to whom, matters. Yet this awareness doesn't fully translate into an explicit conversation. The shift is meaningful but, for me, incomplete.

By this point, Nick has fully redesigned his course, doing away with lab reports and introducing a series of new writing assignments. For my research, witnessing this moment underscored one aspect of a partial critical multimodal approach toward his course: his teaching now foregrounds real-world, rhetorical engagement with professional genres while not yet engaging with questions of power, language ideology, or how dominant norms shape what counts as legitimate communication. In spotlighting this Feynman moment for his students, Nick was signaling that effective engineering communication may mean communicating differently, sometimes outside the bounds of traditional genres or modes. That

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[15] In past years, Nick had students interrogate the letter, but this was the first time he showed the Presidential Commission video with Richard Feynman.

orientation toward rethinking both how knowledge is communicated and who it must reach is at the heart of the critical multimodal literacies framework this dissertation forwards. By using physical demonstration alongside verbal explanation, Feynman viscerally illustrated the failure that led to the Challenger explosion in a way that made a technical issue accessible to non-experts, demonstrating the problem in a way that was immediate, unmistakable. What made the demonstration effective wasn't just rhetorical precision; it was the modal shift—the decision to make a visual and tactile argument. Nick's use of this example in class had powerful pedagogical potential: it surfaced a moment where students could reflect on how meaning shifts across modes, audiences, and genres. Yet his engagement with that potential remained limited: he didn't ask students to analyze what the memo's failure to persuade reveals about institutional language norms or how Feynman's intervention reframes expertise or audience. In this sense, Nick's use of the Feynman example reflects a partial uptake of critical multimodal literacies: he foregrounds rhetorical and modal awareness but not yet the deeper questions of power, ideology, or justice that the framework calls for. Still, this moment marks a meaningful shift. By staging the Challenger memo and the Feynman demonstration side by side, Nick signals to students that how something is communicated can matter as much as what is communicated. That glimpse becomes the foundation for the assignment sequence that follows.

Nick moves on to introduce the quarter's first assignment: a White Paper (Image 9). Students are asked to choose a materials-related engineering problem and explain it using both writing and visual elements. In the prompt, Nick tells students to "write to a general audience and keep your language clear and accessible"—a move that pushes back on the idea that engineering communication is only meant for other engineers. By asking students to translate complex engineering concepts into writing for a non-expert audience, he encourages them to develop a rhetorical repertoire that emphasizes audience awareness and rhetorical flexibility, reinforcing the idea that writing in engineering is not just about documentation, but about meaning-making. In asking students to integrate visual schematics, diagrams, or models into their White Papers, Nick is also demonstrating an understanding that communication in STEM is rarely confined to alphabetic text. These assignments mirror professional engineering practices,

This is the first in a series of writing assignments that will culminate in an engineering project proposal. For future assignments, you are welcome to use and build upon the topic you choose here or to switch to a different topic.

The White Paper

Assignment: Write a 1-page paper describing a real-world problem involving the mechanical behavior of materials. Write to a general audience and keep your language clear and accessible.

Purpose:
- Explore a current issue involving materials selection.
- Practice simplifying complex technical issues to make them easily digestible.

Instructions: Your paper should explain the following:
- **The Problem:** Clearly describe a current real-world problem.
- **Why It Exists:** Discuss the reasons or causes behind the problem.
- **Who It Affects:** Identify the people, communities, or environments impacted by this issue.
- **Solutions Needed:** Suggest what could be done or what is needed to solve or mitigate the problem.
- **Peer Review:** Have at least one other student read and comment on your assignment. Provide a 1 paragraph summary (as a comment in Canvas) on what you changed based on the peer review.

Writing Style: You can choose any writing style you're comfortable with—formal or informal. Feel free to use everyday language, humor, and even emojis.

Example Topics:
- Deteriorating public infrastructure (e.g., bridges, roads)
- Plastic and microplastic pollution
- Innovations in making lighter weight airplanes
- Developing more sustainable building materials
- Radiation resistant materials for space habitats
- Materials for next generation nuclear reactors

Image 9: New White Paper assignment in Nick's redesigned mechanical engineering course.

where visual and written elements often work together to persuade, inform, and clarify. While Nick doesn't call this assignment multimodal, I see that it aligns with a critical multimodal literacies approach by expanding what counts as academic communication. It asks students to think carefully about how meaning is made—not just through words but through the interplay of modes that are affected by audience, purpose, and rhetorical context. I see a connection between the White Paper prompt and the rhetorical flexibility he talked about in class. Students are invited to "use everyday language, humor, and even emojis," a line that subtly but meaningfully broadens the scope of what counts as legitimate academic communication in engineering. The inclusion of emojis functions not as a novelty but as a strategy to foreground tone and accessibility. In this way, the assignment invites students to explore how

language and visual elements co-construct meaning and to consider how diverse communicative practices can challenge narrow definitions of professionalism in STEM fields.

Next, students complete a Letter to a Manager (Image 10), which asks them to write a persuasive, professional letter explaining the significance of their chosen engineering problem and persuading their manager of their ability to solve it. By structuring their writing around stakeholder impact, material properties, and potential solutions, students must not only demonstrate technical knowledge but also make a rhetorically compelling case for why their proposed solution matters. The assignment shifts the focus

The Letter to a Manager

Assignment: Write a 2-3-page letter to your manager describing the background and significance of a problem involving the mechanical behavior of materials you are interested in solving.

Purpose:

- To generate interest in the problem from your manager.
- To demonstrate expertise in the topic and convince your manager that you are the right person to tackle this problem.

Instructions: Your letter should include the following elements:

- **Problem Background:** Describe the cause of the problem and why it is important.
- **Stakeholders:** Identify who is affected by this problem.
- **Materials:** Discuss the mechanical properties that are relevant or needed to solve the problem.
- **Broader Impact:** Make a compelling case for the benefits of solving the problem.
- **Potential Solution:** Provide a potential design or approach to address the problem.
- **Peer Review:** Have at least one other student read and comment on your assignment. Provide a 1 paragraph summary (as a comment in Canvas) on what you changed based on the peer review.

Writing Style: The letter should be written in a clear, professional, and respectful tone. The intended reader (manager) can be real or imagined.

Notes:

- **Audience:** Your goal is to persuade. Use clear arguments and evidence to build a compelling case for why the problem is worth solving and why you can solve it.
- **Organization:** Structure your letter logically. Start with the problem, then move on to stakeholders, material properties, and finally your solution.
- **Evidence:** Include relevant data or references to support your points about the significance of the problem and your proposed approach.
- **References**: You should include citations to relevant papers or articles where you have gotten your information. These do not have to be academic references.
- **Format:** You should use standard fonts (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc.), 1” margins, 1.15 line spacing and a font size of 11.

Image 10: Letter to a Manager assignment in Nick’s newly redesigned mechanical engineering course.

from writing as passive documentation, one of the reasons Nick dismissed the lab report, to writing as purposeful, situated action. This turn reflects a key tenet of critical multimodal literacies: that communication and mode choice are not neutral but tied to systems of power, professional gatekeeping, and epistemological legitimacy. By prompting students to compose for an audience that holds decision-making power, Nick invites them to consider not just how to communicate effectively but how engineering knowledge circulates, gains authority and impacts communities. The importance of real-world impact and rhetorical agency signals a move toward a more justice-oriented pedagogy—one that treats communication as a site for intervention rather than transmission.

Third in the sequence is the Technical Paper (Image 11), which asks students to write a professional report to a technically minded colleague outlining their approach to solving an engineering problem. Students must use technical language appropriate for someone with a similar disciplinary background to detail material selection, testing methods, relevant standards, and a proposed design solution. The inclusion of a "design and testing visualization" reflects an understanding that engineering communication operates across modalities and that visual representations are not ancillary but essential tools in how ideas are conveyed and understood. By requiring students to compose figures or schematics alongside their writing, Nick foregrounds the rhetorical functions of multimodal design in STEM fields. Framed as a site of peer exchange and critical feedback, the assignment reflects a growing commitment in Nick's course to treating communication as situated, purposeful, and multimodal—core tenets of a critical multimodal literacies approach.

The Technical Paper

Objective: Write a 3-4-page paper to a colleague detailing your approach to solving an engineering problem related to the mechanical behavior of materials.

Purpose:

- Receive feedback on your design or methodology from a colleague by clearly presenting the technical aspects of your solution.
- Refine your approach and ensure that it meets professional and industry standards.

Instructions: Your paper should include the following elements:

- **Materials Selection:** Describe the potential materials you would use, highlighting their beneficial mechanical properties. Include sources for the information on these properties.
- **Testing and Standards:** Identify the tests you would use to measure the mechanical performance of the materials or design. Specify the relevant standards these tests follow and explain how the results will inform your final design.
- **Design and Testing Visualization:** Include a figure or schematic that illustrates your proposed design solution and/or test setup.
- **Peer Review:** Have at least one other student read and comment on your assignment. Provide a 1 paragraph summary (as a comment in Canvas) on what you changed based on the peer review.

Writing Style: The paper should be written in a professional and direct manner, suitable for a technical audience.

Notes:

- **Audience:** Since your audience is a colleague, include appropriate technical details and terminology relevant to your discipline. Frame your paper to encourage constructive feedback and be open about uncertainties.
- **Clarity of Design:** Clearly explain the rationale for your material choices, testing methods, and standards. Ensure your colleague can follow your thought process and logic.
- **References and Standards:** Include references to authoritative sources and standards to back up your choices. This will add credibility to your proposal.
- **Format:** You should use standard fonts (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc.), 1" margins, 1.15 line spacing and a font size of 11.

Image 11: New Technical Paper assignment in Nick's mechanical engineering course.

Finally, students bring all their communicative choices together in an assignment that asks them to develop a proposal for a public or private agency, outlining their problem and solution. The Proposal (Image 12) asks students to "write a 6-page proposal to a private or public agency or company on an

The Proposal

Objective: Write a 6-page proposal to a private or public agency or company on an engineering project involving the mechanical behavior of materials.

Purpose:
- Develop your skills in crafting a professional proposal that convincingly presents a problem and your approach to solving it.
- Prepare for real-world scenarios where clear communication of technical projects to stakeholders is crucial.

Instructions: Your proposal should contain the following elements:
- **Problem Statement:** Describe the cause of the problem and its significance.
- **Stakeholders:** Identify who is affected by this problem and why it matters to them.
- **Potential Benefit:** Provide a compelling argument for the benefits of addressing this issue.
- **Proposed Solution:** Outline your proposed design solution, including the rationale for why it will work. Describe the materials that you would use and provide a rationale for why they should be used. Support your argument with relevant references.
- **Risk Management:** Identify potential risks in your design and what will be done to address them. This can include additional testing that must be done or proposing alternatives either in the design or materials selection.
- **Visual Aids:** Include at least two figures, tables, or schematics to describe your design and present any relevant preliminary data.
- **Resources and Timeline:** Provide a detailed list of the time, resources, and budget needed to complete the project.
- **Peer Review:** Have at least one other student read and comment on your assignment. Provide a 1 paragraph summary (as a comment in Canvas) on what you changed based on the peer review.

Writing Style: The language should be clear, professional, and tailored to the intended audience of the proposal. Note that a proposal to a technical agency may require more in-depth explanations than one to a general business audience.

Notes:
- **Clarity and Organization:** Ensure that each section of the proposal is well-organized and clearly labeled. This helps the reader follow your argument and locate information easily.
- **References:** Use credible sources to back up your claims, especially when discussing material properties and the expected performance of your proposed solution.
- **Visuals:** Make sure that figures, tables, or schematics are clearly labeled, easy to understand, and directly relevant to your proposal content.
- **Format:** You should use standard fonts (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc.), 1" margins, 1.15 line spacing and a font size of 11.

Image 12: Prompt from the final project in Nick's mechanical engineering course.

engineering project involving the mechanical behavior of materials." Students must demonstrate not only technical knowledge but also the rhetorical skills needed to persuade an external audience that their

proposed solution is both necessary and feasible. As the assignment states, students are expected to "develop your skills in crafting a professional proposal that convincingly presents a problem and your approach to solving it" and to "prepare for real-world scenarios where clear communication of technical projects to stakeholders is crucial." These instructions make clear that writing in this context is not just about reporting information but about advocacy—students must frame the problem's significance, identify its impact, and present a compelling, well-supported solution.

The Proposal assignment also foregrounds multimodality: students are required to "include at least two figures, tables, or schematics to describe your design and present any relevant preliminary data." Rather than treating visual elements as supplementary, this requirement positions visual modes as central to how meaning is communicated in engineering. This approach subtly reinforces the idea that visuals aren't an add-on to "real" writing; they are writing. By asking students to account for real-world constraints, justify their choices, and integrate multiple modes of meaning-making, the Proposal marks a shift in how communication functions in Nick's course. Writing is not simply a way to report results; it is a tool for inquiry, persuasion, and social responsibility. Students are expected to not only describe technical specifications but also consider questions about impact, stakes, and audience, or, what the problem is, who it affects, and why it matters. Still, the assignment stops short of asking students to explicitly examine those structures—how communicative forms get legitimated in engineering, whose language practices are valued, and how genre expectations might reinforce exclusion. A fuller enactment of a critical multimodal approach would invite students to question not just how to communicate effectively but what counts as effective communication and who gets to decide. This might include discussions of the racialized and gendered histories of the White Paper or engineering proposals or other genres of technical writing, or explorations of how multilingual and multimodal practices can surface insights that traditional lab reports overlook. Rather than positioning technical genres as endpoints, a critical multimodal approach would frame them as one option among many—open to critique, redesign, and rhetorical flexibility depending on context and purpose.

Nick's course doesn't fully take up that invitation—but his redesign makes room for it. By pushing students to compose across modes, audiences, and genres, he opens a crack in what often feels like a tightly sealed disciplinary space. The Proposal doesn't resolve the tension between convention and critique, but it offers a glimpse of what becomes possible when genre expectations are brought into view and students are positioned not just as technicians but as communicators with something meaningful to say. As I explore in the next chapter, faculty development spaces like the Writing@UW Fellowship are essential to creating the reflective, relational, and institutional conditions under which such shifts can take root and grow.

Nick's evolving pedagogy demonstrates how faculty can begin to shift entrenched disciplinary practices and language ideologies. However, both his and Nora's cases underscore the importance of the conditions that make such shifts possible. These were not isolated moments of insight. Both faculty members encountered opportunities to reflect, reimagine, and complicate their assumptions about writing, language, equity, and justice. The Fellowship served as more than a backdrop; it provided the scaffolding, community, and critical framework necessary for this kind of pedagogical transformation. In the next chapter, I shift focus—not away from critical multimodality itself, but from individual cases of uptake—to examine the professional development space that made such pedagogical transformation possible. I consider how professional development spaces can create the relational, intellectual, and institutional support necessary to sustain equity-driven work across disciplines.

Chapter 5

Implications for Critical Multimodal Literacies in WAC/WID Contexts and a Call for Institutional Change and Faculty Support

This project started with a set of questions that grew out of a tension I'd long felt as a writing teacher. I knew how first-year students were taught to write—and why—because I was part of a field shaped by critical pedagogy, linguistic justice, and equity-oriented frameworks. But I didn't know how faculty across the disciplines approached writing or how their pedagogies aligned (or didn't) with those same values. How do faculty across disciplines think about writing, what happens when we invite them to think differently, and what might they teach me / us about writing? What might a critical multimodal approach open up—for students, for teachers, for institutions? I asked these questions not from a place of judgment but from a place of curiosity—and deep gratitude that this group of faculty members let me listen in, that they welcomed my questions, and that they were willing to reflect candidly on their practices, challenges, and values.

Throughout this dissertation, I've followed those questions into classrooms, workshops, interviews, and course materials, looking closely at how faculty engage with multimodality and what their practices tell us about the larger systems they're working within. I've argued that writing pedagogies grounded in critical multimodal literacies can challenge narrow ideas about language, knowledge, and power. Critical multimodal literacies open space for students to draw on their full communicative repertoires—not just to express themselves in fun, innovative, and new ways but to interrogate the structures that determine whose voices and modes are centered in academic settings. For faculty, this approach can create opportunities to reflect on how writing is taught and assessed and how those choices align with or challenge dominant institutional norms. A critical multimodal pedagogical approach pushes against the assumption that academic writing is neutral or universal, showing instead how it reflects and reinforces specific cultural values and histories. And in this chapter, I argue that this can happen only if

institutions are willing to support this work in meaningful ways. In this final chapter, I do two things. First, I return to the questions that guided this research project, and I outline how I've engaged them, what this project contributes to writing studies and WAC/WID, and where I see the work going next. Then, I shift toward institutional takeaways—what I think needs to happen if academic institutions are serious about building writing ecologies grounded in equity, racial and linguistic justice, and inclusion.

If we want to create writing ecologies that are truly grounded in equity, justice, and inclusion, we must rethink what kinds of pedagogical support we offer to faculty across the university, as well as how we offer it. Pedagogical development programs can't simply provide faculty with new multimodal tools or strategies for multimodal engagement. Instead, pedagogical development must create space for reflection and change that challenges the deeper norms baked into how writing is taught and valued across disciplines. This call for more substantive pedagogical development spaces includes, but isn't limited to, critical multimodal work. That is, through this dissertation, I've shown how a critical multimodal approach can surface the racialized and hierarchical assumptions embedded in disciplinary genres. But the larger takeaway from this research—and what I turn to in the second half of this chapter—is that this work can't happen in isolation. Faculty need time, community, and institutional structures that support the slow, sometimes uncomfortable work of shifting their language ideologies and writing pedagogies. In this section, I speak directly to faculty developers, writing program administrators, and other campus leaders who shape teaching and learning conditions. I draw on moments from the Fellowship that didn't fit neatly into my earlier analysis but helped clarify what it might take to make sustainable change—and where our current structures fall short.

Rethinking Writing Pedagogy Across Disciplines

This dissertation began with my curiosity about how multimodal literacies are taken up in disciplinary writing spaces and how I might support multimodal approaches as opportunities that instructors could harness to create classrooms rooted in equity, inclusion, and justice. I have argued that writing pedagogies in higher education too often reproduce dominant norms that privilege monolingual

ideologies and center white histories of knowing and doing. By focusing on how disciplinary faculty members engage with critical multimodal literacies through the Writing@UW Fellowship, my research responds directly to this problem and demonstrates how faculty development spaces can become sites for challenging these assumptions and reimagining what writing can be. My study thus addresses a gap in the literature at the intersection of multimodal composition, critical literacies and pedagogies (broadly), antiracist approaches to writing, and WAC/WID. While scholars like Selfe, Shipka, Horner and Min-Zhan Lu, and Gonzales have argued for reimagining writing instruction through multimodal frameworks at these intersections—particularly in first-year composition—there's still relatively little research on how disciplinary faculty learn to take up this work themselves. That matters, especially because WAC/WID is often where students learn what "counts" as good writing in their fields. Fodrey reminds us that the future of WAC depends on "sustainable applications of knowledge" and long-term support for multimodal transformation—not just new assignments but new ways of thinking about writing across departments. My research responds to this call by examining how disciplinary faculty engage with critical multimodal literacies in a structured faculty development context. In this work, I shed light on the pedagogical and institutional factors that shape their responses: what opens possibilities for change and what constrains it. By documenting how faculty navigate tensions between their equity goals and the norms of their disciplines, I offer insight into how this kind of change happens. This dissertation offers both a theoretical framework and grounded examples of what that kind of reflection can look like in practice. The Writing@UW Fellowship gave faculty a space to wrestle with questions about genre, audience, power, and equity in their own classrooms. It didn't promise a single "right" way to teach writing. Instead, it created room for conversation—for asking hard questions and sitting with the tensions that come up when values, habits, and institutional expectations don't align. What faculty took from the Fellowship varied, and that variation matters. When we ask not just what they took up but why, we get a clearer picture of the pressures shaping their choices: the expectations of their departments, the language of their course outcomes, the models they've seen, the values they bring with them, and what they believe is possible. When we take those tensions seriously, we can stop framing hesitation as apathy. What looks like

resistance is often something else entirely: a response to deeper constraints. Naming those constraints—whether they're about time, training, institutional structures, or something else—is part of the work. And it's how we start to build faculty development spaces that support more inclusive, responsive, student-centered writing instruction.

In this section of my final chapter, I organize key insights around a series of guiding questions rather than presenting a traditional list of findings. This choice reflects the exploratory nature of my research and the spirit of inquiry that shaped the Writing@UW Fellowship. The research questions that guided this study—what drives disciplinary faculty to take up critical multimodal approaches in their classrooms, what challenges they encounter, how they navigate those challenges in relation to institutional and disciplinary norms, and what a critical multimodal literacies framework might offer to broader equity efforts—remain active and unfinished. Returning to them here allows me to surface what I've learned while acknowledging that this work continues. These questions still animate my thinking and point toward future collaborations, institutional change efforts, and research. Framing this chapter around them helps me honor the complexity of pedagogical change while offering concrete insights and a generative launching pad for those who hope to support it.

Why is research on critical multimodality important? Why is the Writing@UW Fellowship, or other interdisciplinary professional development spaces, the ideal place to do this research?

Researchers in writing studies and WAC/WID should ask questions about critical multimodality in disciplinary writing spaces because doing so helps surface the ideologies that shape what writing is, who it is for, and how it gets taught. A critical multimodal approach insists that all writing is already always multimodal and that it never neutral; that it is always shaped by power. Understanding how dominant norms around genre, language, and communication are taken up or resisted by faculty can help illuminate the often-unspoken assumptions that guide instruction. These assumptions about what counts as legitimate writing, which modes are valued, and whose voices are considered credible can reproduce inequity by privileging dominant language practices and marginalizing multilingual, multimodal, and nontraditional student voices. Once these patterns are made visible, they can be questioned and

reimagined. That's why professional development spaces like the Writing@UW Fellowship matter: they offer a rare opportunity for faculty to reflect critically on their own pedagogical choices in conversation with others. For example, in Chapter 3, I detail how Nora, a professor of English literature, entered the Fellowship with a deep commitment to racial justice and equity in her course content—she regularly assigned texts that centered themes of colonialism, racism, and cultural resistance. Through our discussions about multimodality, multilingualism, and racial justice, however, she began to see a disconnect between her values and her assessment practices. Specifically, she came to recognize how her reliance on traditional essay genres—especially the five-paragraph essay—might constrain students' ability to respond authentically or draw on their full rhetorical repertoires. As she revised her course, she began incorporating more open-ended, multimodal assignments that allowed space for exploratory thinking and alternative forms of expression, reframing writing as a site of possibility rather than performance. Nora's experience helped crystallize the questions that animate this dissertation: What drives faculty to consider multimodal approaches in their classrooms? What challenges do they encounter? And how do they navigate those challenges in relation to institutional norms, disciplinary expectations, and their own commitments to equity? Her case offers a glimpse of what becomes possible when faculty engage with a critical multimodal pedagogical framework—one that, as scholars like Baker-Bell and Kynard remind us, demands that we confront the racialized and hierarchical norms that shape academic writing and ask how our teaching might interrupt rather than reproduce them. Research questions about critical multimodality are vital because they compel us to examine what is made possible—and what is limited or excluded—by writing pedagogies that do not critically interrogate what counts as writing, who it serves, and who is privileged by the forms it assumes. As Kynard reminds us, classrooms are not outside systems of racial, linguistic, and epistemic hierarchy. They are part of them. Critical multimodality is a way to ask how all forms of communication are shaped by power and to explore the material, embodied, and affective dimensions of expression that traditional academic genres often suppress (Shipka). Research on CML directs our attention to how writing assignments and

disciplinary conventions either support or obstruct learning goals that are rooted in equity, inclusion, and justice.

In WAC/WID spaces, identifying how faculty members take up or resist critical multimodal pedagogies offers insight into the institutional and ideological conditions that shape what change looks like—and what resists it. These questions help surface how faculty navigate tensions between disciplinary expectations and student needs, between established genres and experimental forms, and between content mastery and inclusive pedagogy. A critical multimodal literacies approach, as I have defined it throughout this project, foregrounds the ideological work of writing and asks faculty to see their pedagogical choices as shaped by power—as ethical and political acts. Through the Writing@UW Fellowship, I saw how faculty members started to reflect on and respond to the values embedded in their assignments. They began to recognize the limits of dominant genres and reimagine writing as a more open, student-responsive practice. This kind of rethinking isn't just about what gets taught—it's about how writing is conceptualized across departments and institutions. These questions matter not only for individual instructors or courses but for broader conversations about institutional responsibility, access, and transformation. They help us imagine pedagogies that are not only more flexible or creative but also rooted in justice.

What is a critical multimodal literacies pedagogical framework, and why is it crucial?

A critical multimodal literacies framework is a pedagogical approach that understands writing as always multimodal, always shaped by power, and always embedded within social, cultural, and institutional contexts. It insists that writing is not simply a means of communication but a site of ideological struggle where dominant norms about language, modes, genre, and knowledge get reinforced or contested. This framework draws on multimodal composition, equity and inclusion, linguistic and racial justice, critical pedagogies, and WAC/WID scholarship to ask not just what students are asked to produce but why those forms are privileged, who benefits from them, and who is marginalized. Rather than treating multimodality as a digital add-on or a set of tools, a critical multimodal approach calls attention to the full range of semiotic resources students draw on to make meaning while also encouraging

faculty to design writing assignments that expand possibilities for expression, particularly for students whose rhetorical and linguistic repertoires have historically been devalued in academic spaces. This framework can help faculty reflect on how disciplinary expectations shape their teaching and how writing assignments might better align with equity goals and expand the diverse knowledges, ways of life, and audiences that matter in our classrooms. As I show in this dissertation, engaging with this approach—even in partial or exploratory ways—can encourage instructors to reconsider dominant definitions of writing, rethink their assessment practices, and make space for more inclusive and justice-oriented forms of student expression.

What might a critical multimodal literacies framework contribute to critical language advocacy, institutional transformation, and equity-oriented writing practices across campus?

A critical multimodal literacies framework doesn't only influence individual classroom choices. It also offers a way to think systemically about writing, language, equity, and justice in higher education. Because this framework challenges dominant definitions of writing and asks educators to reconsider how meaning is made and valued, it can support institutional efforts to reimagine assessment, curriculum, and faculty development. As my research shows, disciplinary faculty who engaged with this approach began to see how their pedagogical practices were shaped by broader institutional norms and how those norms might be reworked to better support student expression and learning. Nora, from the English department, recognized that her well-intentioned, equity-driven content was undercut by writing assignments modeled on graduate-level genre norms. Nick, from mechanical engineering, began to see scientific writing not as objective or neutral but as an epistemic practice, one that shapes how knowledge is constructed and circulated in his field. This shift aligns with Jody Shipka's call to examine the material, embodied, and ideological dimensions of communicative acts and broadens what counts as legitimate writing in academic spaces.

This dissertation shows how writing pedagogies, when informed by critical multimodal principles, reflect—and have the potential to reshape—the values, ideologies, and power structures that define teaching and learning in higher education. In the Fellowship, faculty members' engagement with

multimodality revealed entrenched assumptions about what counts as legitimate communication, whose language practices are valued, and how student knowledge is recognized and valued. These tensions are not merely issues of classroom practice; they are reflections of deeper institutional structures. Nora's interrogation of the five-paragraph essay and her pedagogical move toward including more nontraditional assignments pushed against inherited definitions of academic writing. Faculty Fellow SJ spoke candidly about the role writing plays in students' futures, talking about the tensions she felt between preparing students for academic success in her home discipline of communication and beyond. These moments underscore how writing instruction can function as a gatekeeping mechanism—one that can be challenged when instructors begin to view pedagogy as a site of justice-oriented intervention. As Baker-Bell and Kynard remind us, antiracist pedagogy requires confronting the institutional reproduction of racialized language norms and recognizing classrooms as political spaces, and a critical multimodal approach supports this work by foregrounding rhetorical agency, linguistic justice, and pedagogical transformation—not as isolated classroom choices, but as responses to broader institutional conditions.

Beyond individual classrooms, a critical multimodal literacies framework functions as an institutional intervention by highlighting the need for sustained faculty development and interdisciplinary collaboration in writing across the curriculum contexts and department-level conversations to support more inclusive, reflective, and justice-oriented approaches to teaching writing. Faculty members such as Eleanor, Nora, and SJ expressed a desire to support student expression through multimodal means but pointed to a lack of opportunities to explore these practices in the community as rationales for why they didn't. The Writing@UW Fellowship addressed this need by creating a collaborative space where instructors could critically examine writing pedagogy through an equity-focused lens. While not all participants transformed their pedagogies, many took important steps, such as reframing writing not as a fixed standard to uphold but as a rhetorical and justice-oriented practice. Through sustained, interdisciplinary, and critically framed professional development, participants began to examine their assumptions about writing, learning, and disciplinary norms.

How are questions and practices of equity and inclusion taken up—or hollowed out—in institutional contexts? How do systemic inequities shape writing instruction in higher education and what role do WAC/WID programs and professional development spaces play in working towards more just and inclusive university-wide writing ecologies?

Scholars such as Sara Ahmed and the authors of Sustainable WAC helped me analyze these dynamics in the context of my own research. Sara Ahmed's scholarship on institutional diversity, particularly her work in *On Being Included*, is especially helpful here, and she challenges the idea that equity and inclusion are endpoints that can be achieved through creating faculty positions labeled for diversity or adding a diversity statement, which, she argues, can become toothless gestures if they are not enacted with full integration of equity and justice into our pedagogies, programs, and systems. Ahmed argues that these token gestures are too common across the academy and that true equity and inclusion require ongoing, active engagement with the systemic structures that perpetuate inequity and exclusion. Her "resistance to the casualization of the commitment to diversity" (132) informed our work in the Writing@UW Fellowship, particularly in how Megan and I sought to ground readings and conversations on learning goals, lesson plans, and daily activities in equity-oriented frameworks. We wanted both the Fellowship and its participants to adopt an approach to equity that was sustained and intentional. By "sustained and intentional," I mean, following Ahmed, an ongoing and structural integration of equity concerns into the pedagogical design and writing practices we supported rather than treating equity as an optional add-on. In the context of WAC/WID, this meant interrogating the ways that disciplinary writing norms often reify dominant, exclusionary language practices. For example, rather than hosting a standalone diversity-themed session, we embedded equity discussions into every workshop by asking faculty to critically reflect on how their writing assignments positioned students' linguistic and cultural knowledge — whether assignments reinforced standardized academic English expectations or allowed for multimodal, multilingual expression. In this way, our approach aimed to resist what Ahmed describes as the "casualization" of diversity by making equity central to reimagining how disciplinary writing itself could be taught and assessed.

Looking back at my notes about these moments during the analysis stage of my research, I often reflected on how instrumental Ahmed's insistence on consistent critique, reflection, and resistance was to my approach to my research. She writes that "the very idea that diversity is about those who 'look different' shows us how it can keep whiteness in place. If diversity becomes something that is added to organizations, like color, then it confirms the whiteness of what is already in place" (33). Ahmed's critique of institutional diversity efforts, particularly that diversity work can uphold exclusionary practices by maintaining whiteness as the unspoken norm, provided a lens through which I could analyze the systemic barriers faculty brought up when we talked about their efforts to create equitable and inclusive learning environments.

WAC/WID scholars have increasingly called for systemic approaches to equity and inclusion. Michelle Cox, Jeffrey Galin, and Dan Melzer's *Sustainable WAC*, for example, emphasizes that writing initiatives across the curriculum must be designed not simply to extend writing instruction but to challenge the structures that marginalize students based on race, language background, disability, and other axes of difference. Drawing on Critical Systems Thinking for their Whole Systems Methodology, they argue that WAC/WID programs must recognize that they are embedded within broader networks of power and inequality, networks that have been shaped by histories of exclusion. Their book outlines a process for intentionally designing programs to resist reproducing those inequities by being rooted in systemic critique. This perspective complements Ahmed's perspective on casualized diversity efforts by highlighting how curricular initiatives like WAC can reinforce systemic inequities unless they are imagined with equity at their core. Cox, Galin, and Melzer's work thus sharpened my analysis of the Fellowship data, helping me see that promoting critical multimodal literacies is not simply a matter of encouraging new kinds of assignments but also requires rethinking the systems that shape how writing is taught and valued across disciplines. In other words, a critical multimodal approach cannot treat multimodality as an isolated pedagogical innovation within an otherwise unchanged disciplinary system. It must engage systemic questions: whose communicative practices are privileged or marginalized? How are institutional structures affecting what counts as legitimate writing? *Sustainable WAC* helped me

recognize that for a critical multimodal literacies approach to foster equity, it must be embedded within broader efforts to redesign writing instruction, assessment, and faculty development around principles of inclusion and justice.

Taken together, the work of Sara Ahmed and Michelle Cox, Jeffrey Galin, and Dan Melzer offered me a lens for understanding how systemic inequities shape writing instruction in higher education. Each scholar approaches different facets of academic exclusion — Ahmed through institutional critiques of casualized diversity work and Cox, Galin, and Melzer through the structural limitations of WAC/WID programs — but they converge on a shared insight: that equity and inclusion cannot be achieved through surface-level interventions. Instead, meaningful change requires a deep interrogation of the systems, ideologies, and practices that define whose ways of knowing, communicating, and meaning-making are valued. These frameworks were fruitful for my research because they helped me interpret faculty participants' struggles not as isolated pedagogical challenges but as reflections of larger systemic forces that constrained possibilities for truly inclusive writing pedagogies. Building on these insights, I argue that a critical multimodal literacies approach must center equity not as an add-on but as a foundational principle — one that is both pedagogical innovation and systemic transformation across writing programs and curricula.

Ultimately, this project invites writing studies scholars, faculty members, and others in WAC/WID contexts to reconsider the role disciplinary faculty can play in shaping more inclusive and responsive futures for writing instruction. My findings stress the ways in which a critical multimodal literacies framework can support both pedagogical and institutional change. My findings also point to a need for continued investment in faculty development, cross-disciplinary dialogue, and research that centers equity, language advocacy, and multimodality across academic spaces. In the next section, I offer recommendations for how we might build on my findings to support further sustained, collaborative efforts toward just and inclusive writing ecologies.

Recommendations for Future Research in Critical Multimodality

This study offers several possibilities for future research that can build on and expand this work of supporting disciplinary faculty in developing equity-oriented, justice-driven writing pedagogies. Because this project was localized and limited to one academic year with faculty from only seven disciplines, future studies might examine how critical multimodal literacies are taken up across a wider range of institutional and departmental contexts. Coordinated efforts, perhaps in partnership with a Center for Teaching and Learning, for example, could explore how faculty in different disciplines engage with the intersections of multimodal composition, critical pedagogies, equity, inclusion, antiracist pedagogies, and linguistic justice. This kind of research would deepen our collective understanding of how institutional structures, professional development, and disciplinary norms shape the adoption of more inclusive writing practices and how we might better support sustained pedagogical change across campuses. Other potential avenues for future research could consider the following:

- First, there is a need to explore how critical multimodal approaches to writing pedagogies unfold in other institutional contexts beyond the University of Washington Seattle. The Writing@UW Fellowship provided a unique, interdisciplinary, and supportive space for faculty development, but future studies might investigate how similar initiatives function in different types of institutions (community colleges, private colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions, and so on), where faculty development structures and student demographics differ significantly. This type of work could show how institutional conditions affect the uptake of critical multimodal literacies. Future questions might ask:
    - How do institutional contexts that affect things like faculty workloads, access to professional development, and student demographics affect the ways faculty engage with critical multimodal pedagogies?
    - How do faculty at minority-serving institutions, private colleges, or community colleges adapt critical multimodal approaches to reflect the linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences of their students?

  - In what ways do institutional values and definitions of "rigor" affect the legitimacy of multimodal work in disciplinary writing courses?

- Second, future research might build on this study by more closely examining the role of threshold concepts in shaping how faculty understand multimodality, equity, and writing. As articulated by Meyer and Land, threshold concepts are ideas that are transformative, irreversible, and often troublesome. In Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming What We Know*, threshold concepts in writing studies are cited as liminal spaces that reshape how people think about literacy as well as how they approach writing in their classrooms. In that text, Cheryl Ball and Colin Charlton, Kevin Roozen, Heidi Estrem, and Andrea Lunsford, and explain threshold concepts like *all writing is multimodal*, *writing is a knowledge-making activity*, *writing is a social and rhetorical activity*, and *writing addresses, invokes, and/or creates audiences* and my research suggests that some faculty in the Fellowship were encountering these concepts—sometimes for the first time—in ways that disrupted their assumptions about what writing is and how it should function in their courses. For example, conversations about genre and assessment often revealed that multimodality was understood as a technical add-on rather than a rhetorical choice until participants began to see writing as more than a product—something embedded in power, discourse, and identity. Future research could examine how specific threshold concepts support faculty in moving from surface-level incorporation of multimodal tasks to more critical, justice-oriented frameworks for teaching writing. Identifying which concepts are most generative—or most difficult—for disciplinary faculty might help shape future faculty development or curricular design in ways that deepen engagement with critical multimodal literacies.
- Finally, researching the ways in which students respond to and experience critical multimodal pedagogies in courses redesigned by faculty members who have participated in programs like the Writing@UW Fellowship would also provide valuable insight into critical and multimodal classrooms. While this dissertation focused on faculty members' perspectives and institutional

dynamics, student voices are essential to understanding how these pedagogical shifts actually play out in the classroom. Future questions might ask:

- How do students interpret and navigate multimodal assignments that challenge traditional writing norms?
- In what ways do multimodal approaches impact students' sense of rhetorical agency, especially among multilingual, first-generation, or nontraditional students?
- How do students describe the relationship between multimodal composing and their ability to engage with course content or express their identities?

A Call for Institutional Change and Faculty Support

While the first half of this chapter focused on findings that directly respond to my research questions about critical multimodality in disciplinary writing spaces, this section explores broader findings on the role of sustained writing pedagogical development for faculty members in the disciplines that has relevancy beyond critical multimodal approaches. Engaging with critical multimodality often required instructors to grapple with threshold concepts—those transformative ideas that, once understood, change how a person perceives a given concept, idea, or even field. Meyer and Land describe threshold concepts as core ideas within a discipline that, once understood, lead to a fundamental shift in the learner's perception of the subject. When faculty are asked to reconsider foundational assumptions about writing, language, or assessment, the resulting disorientation can be intense. This liminal state, where familiar practices no longer feel adequate but new approaches have not yet taken hold, can also be challenging for those facilitating professional development. Supporting pedagogical change means guiding others through moments of uncertainty and resistance, which requires both intellectual flexibility and emotional care. For many participants, grappling with pedagogical threshold concepts, especially those tied to equity, inclusion, and justice, was not immediate or linear; this grappling demanded time, dialogue, and space to sit with discomfort. This section explores how professional development spaces like the Writing@UW Fellowship created conditions for that kind of slow, reflective engagement. Also,

during the Fellowship, it became clear that disciplinary faculty members are not only open to rethinking their writing pedagogies, but many are actively craving sustained opportunities to do so. Their insights, questions, and evolving practices pointed to something beyond the scope of a single workshop or intervention: a need for long-term pedagogical support grounded in equity, inclusion, and justice.

Earlier in this dissertation, I talked about a barrier to the adoption of a critical multimodal literacies framework into disciplinary writing contexts being the persistence of dominant language ideologies that continue to privilege standardized academic English. Another barrier to the adoption of a critical multimodal literacies framework into disciplinary writing contexts appears to be due to a lack of programmatic support for multimodal curricula. Take, as an example, a 2005 nationwide state-of-the-field survey created by Dan Anderson, et al, who investigated how composition curricula was being affected by emerging trends in multimodal composition. They found that instructors across the country did not have "comprehensive, cohesive, or effective" opportunities for professional development in multimodal pedagogy, a finding that is mirrored more than 15 years later in Chen Chen's 2021 exploration of the field through a similar nationwide survey. Chen identifies sporadic programmatic support for instructors interested in a multimodal approach, leading the majority of these instructors to seek out ideas and materials from peers and colleagues. Specifically, Chen's data show that while attitudes toward teaching multimodality have improved (only 8% of instructors now see it as a low priority, compared to 83% in the 2005 survey), the implementation that the original survey sought was inconsistently adopted. More than 80% of respondents reported that multimodal instruction occurs at the level of individual instructors rather than programmatically, and many still rely on self-teaching or peer collaboration for pedagogical support, a finding that is directly supported by Nora, both in Chapter 4 and in my findings below. This disconnect between institutional values and material support highlights the need for more structured, sustainable professional development in this area.

In this section, I respond to this call by making a small but intentional case for more fully integrating critical multimodal approaches into professional development in WAC/WID contexts. Not as a one-time workshop or set of best practices published on a writing program website but as a fundamental

commitment that allows faculty members to grapple with new definitions of writing that include new modes, as well as the time, space, and community to deeply consider the pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional dimensions of teaching writing. My research shows that Writing@UW did significantly more than merely convene faculty members to talk about writing—it created a space for pedagogical risk-taking, collective reflection, a teaching community, and institutional critique. Throughout the Fellowship, many faculty members articulated that they rarely had the opportunity to reflect deeply on their pedagogies, in general, and their writing pedagogies, specifically. Nick, for example, told us that he didn't learn how to write until he started writing his dissertation and that he was never taught how to teach writing; by the end of the Fellowship, though, Nick had transformed his course to consider a more expansive view of writing. Fellows' experiences such as these point to what becomes possible when disciplinary instructors are given time, language, and support to revise how they teach writing. It's important, also, to note that every one of the seven Fellows, either during the post-Fellowship interview or in their post-Fellowship survey, pointed to the value of having dedicated time and space every two weeks to talk about their writing pedagogies. Fellows shared with us that the Fellowship sessions weren't just informative of writing theories or best practices; rather, the gatherings created the conditions for revision, experimentation, and reflection that many participants said they rarely had in their day-to-day work. Eleanor explained,

> This Fellowship has provided space and structure to do this work as well as a great community for providing feedback. Like many of my students, I need deadlines, structure, and constructive feedback in order to do better work.

Gillian told us how much she valued cross-disciplinary dialogue,

> It's been particularly valuable to hear from other Fellows in very different subject areas who incorporate everything from physical movement to detailed lab report roadmaps in their classrooms.

And Alice explained how much she appreciated the Fellowship offering new ways to think about language and writing, saying,

> Most of the material and discussion in the Fellowship was new and useful. I'm an English learner, and this Fellowship gave me ideas about the roles of writing, and the creative possibilities for using writing. It was really helpful to meet people in similar situations but from all over the place.

Taken together, these faculty show how space, time, and community can support the kinds of pedagogical transformation that might feel impossible when attempted in isolation. These reflections also illustrate how professional development spaces like the Fellowship foster a sense of shared purpose that many faculty members reported missing in their day-to-day teaching lives. Professional development spaces that prioritize sustained inquiry over quick fixes are what these faculty sought—a space that invited faculty to rethink not just what they teach but how and why. Even in supportive contexts like the Fellowship, faculty described the difficulties in aligning their pedagogical goals with institutional expectations, which underscores that meaningful change is often slow, negotiated, and uneven. One of the clearest examples of how faculty navigated competing pedagogical commitments and institutional pressures comes from Nora, who openly reflected on the rationales behind her assignment design choices during her final reflection on the Fellowship. Her response reveals both a desire to support nontraditional writing practices and a continued reliance on conventional academic forms shaped by external expectations. As Nora put it,

> I continue to assign traditional academic writing assignments mainly to cater to graduate school admissions policies (that favour traditional writing submissions). I assign low-stakes and right-brain/creative writing assignments because I believe they are effective and empowering learning tools for students, and because I have received advice on how to implement them. If I were to receive instruction or templates on how to introduce online writing and composition, analogue visual compositions, audio compositions and videos, and felt that they could be assigned in a way that did not involve a great deal of additional time and labor on my part, then I would gladly incorporate them.

Nora's reflection offers a window into a tension that came up often in the Fellowship: while she expresses enthusiasm for multimodal assignments, she continues to privilege traditional academic writing in response to institutional pressures, such as graduate school expectations. Her openness to integrating

nontraditional modes, at this point early in the Fellowship, was explicitly tied to whether she could access templates or guidance that would minimize additional labor. On the surface, this might seem like a call for practical resources and templates – plug-and-play materials that incorporate multimodal elements. But what it reveals more deeply is a pedagogical threshold she has not yet fully crossed. What Nora names as a matter of labor or logistics is also a matter of orientation; that is, adopting a critical multimodal approach means shifting how we understand the purpose of writing, the role of student agency, and the forms that knowledge can take in academic spaces. Professional development spaces should not just offer resources and templates. They must support faculty in rethinking the underlying values that shape their assignment design and assessment practices. The work is not about adding more to the teaching repertoire; it is about seeing differently, re-envisioning the ways our classrooms can challenge dominant assumptions about what counts as academic work, and re-orienting toward justice, inclusion, and equity.

In addition to creating space for reflection, the Fellowship also made visible the institutional norms and pressures that often go unspoken in faculty conversations. Several participants used the Fellowship as an opportunity to name tensions they had previously felt but hadn't articulated publicly. Nick's reflections throughout the Fellowship also point to a lack of institutional support for writing. During a discussion during Session 7 of the Fellowship, he spoke candidly about the structural mismatch between institutional expectations and available resources:

> The institution admits students who we know won't have the preparation they need. And then we don't give them the support to catch up. It's frustrating because it's not the students' fault. But we also don't have the resources to scaffold things properly. I need more time, more access to tutoring, better tech—something.

Here, Nick surfaces another tension that came up throughout the Fellowship: faculty members feel an expectation to uphold a perceived standard of writing without having the time, resources, or support to scaffold students into those expectations. What's important about this moment isn't just what he said but how the Fellowship created space for him to say it. Pedagogical development spaces like this one enable faculty members to identify institutional pressures, disciplinary norms, and language ideologies that often

remain unspoken, and then begin to envision what needs to change to better support both students and instructors. Through structured discussions, shared readings, and interdisciplinary dialogue, the Fellowship provided Nick with both the language and conceptual tools to articulate the tensions he experienced in his teaching. Importantly, this kind of development space also offered a community of practice in which faculty members like Nick could acknowledge constraints without resigning to them; a space where he could imagine incremental changes that didn't rely solely on increased resources but on reimagined pedagogical values. Nick also expressed a strong commitment to professional development as a necessary part of this equation. During Session 1 of the Fellowship, Nick explained:

> I don't have a background in writing instruction. I want to do this well, but I know there's a lot I don't know. Even things like how other STEM faculty evaluate writing—there's no standard. I'd benefit from learning more about what's considered fair or useful feedback in STEM writing. And also, how to scaffold things for students who are still learning the basics.

This openness underscores yet another key insight: many faculty are not resistant to new pedagogies—rather, they are navigating new terrain without a map. Nick's comments suggest that what's needed is not a repository of assignment templates or grading rubrics but a deeper, institutional commitment to pedagogical development that provides faculty with access to conversation, scholarship, and a community of practice. He is calling for a sustained space to build knowledge, reflect with colleagues, and adapt his pedagogies in ways that are both innovative and context-sensitive. SJ's experience echoes and expands this point. In her Fellowship reflection, she described how the Fellowship helped her confront the limits of her own disciplinary genre knowledge and "gave entry points to move beyond that," noting that she "liked the support; the community." She contrasted this environment with her departmental context, where conversations about writing often stalled or felt constrained:

> There was an openness [in the Fellowship] that really modeled the kind of exchange that could happen when you're talking about writing practices. That doesn't get addressed when you're among your colleagues in your department.

SJ's comment suggests that the intellectual and emotional climate of interdisciplinary development spaces can offer a rare kind of permission: to speak candidly about writing, to examine assumptions, and to approach pedagogical change as a shared, iterative process. In her case, the Fellowship not only provided tools and strategies but also modeled a relational and reflective approach to pedagogies that felt markedly different from the dynamics she experienced in her home department. Both Nick and SJ remind us that fostering deep pedagogical change in WAC/WID spaces is not solely a matter of individual faculty members' will; it requires institutional structures that support the sustained development, collaboration, and care that this work demands.

While I provided a fuller account of the Writing@UW Fellowship Session 3 in Chapter 4, I return to it here because it marked a key moment when I recognized the importance of pedagogical development spaces that support faculty in making meaningful shifts in their teaching. In that Session, Megan and I asked Fellows to map the ways their course outcomes led the development of assignments and scaffolding activities (or didn't) and encouraged Fellows to brainstorm multimodal approaches to meet those outcomes. As I said earlier, one of the most significant contributions of the Fellowship was the space it created for faculty to critically reflect on how their pedagogical decisions—especially around assignment design and assessment—are shaped by institutional expectations and disciplinary norms. At the same time, though, these spaces made room for pedagogical uncertainty and discomfort. Rather than smoothing over those moments, Megan and I sought to treat discomfort as part of the process, an opening for deeper reflection and critical engagement. The workshop on the difference between learning goals and learning outcomes during Session 3 highlighted the value of structured development opportunities that invite instructors to reexamine their approaches to course design. Megan and I designed the session to prompt Fellows to consider how their course aims and assignments work together to shape students' experiences with writing and to encourage a multimodal approach to course design itself. What faculty members

expressed during the Fellowship echoed patterns I noticed in the broader research literature: that the work of reimagining writing pedagogy often happens in isolation, without sustained institutional support. Nora discussed this session in her exit interview, saying,

> I felt ill-equipped to suddenly start thinking and improvising, but at the same time, there was something very satisfying in that. Part of that satisfaction was seeing other people's work, and I think this collective engagement and learning that comes from sharing ideas and responses with other people is valuable.

Nora's experience of feeling "ill-equipped" during this activity illustrates the transformative potential of working through threshold concepts in a supportive environment, and she describes how the shared struggle built a shared space for honest reflection and learning. Eleanor likewise spoke about Session 3 in her post-Fellowship interview, telling us,

> I really liked the planning session that helped me think through the different stages, relating genres and modes to bigger goals and outcomes. It was really nice to get to talk to people about the stressful parts of teaching the anxieties about not doing it correctly. I feel like a lot of times when I talk about pedagogy with people, I have to sort of put on this posturing of, I'm the best at it. All my students love being in class with me. And yeah, which also makes it harder to improve because it's harder to talk through stuff that's not working.

These conversations, and others like them, helped surface pedagogical tensions and uncertainties, but they also created space for vulnerability—moments when faculty could drop the posture of expertise and instead reflect honestly on pedagogical uncertainty. In doing so, participants like Nora and Eleanor were able to critically examine not only their assignments but the institutional and emotional pressures that shape how teaching is discussed and practiced. For some, this meant recognizing how well-intentioned goals were still reinforcing dominant norms around language, structure, or audience. For others, it meant articulating a desire to support diverse communicative practices but realizing they lacked the tools or shared vocabulary to do so. Session 3, in this way, became a site for unpacking how writing is shaped by institutional pressures and disciplinary assumptions—and how faculty might intervene.

These findings, while brief and in need of more sustained analysis, underscore the need for systemic change in professional pedagogical development spaces to support deeper inquiry into pedagogical choice. In these spaces, I advocate for a sustained grounding in the transformative potential of multimodality in creating more inclusive and equitable educational spaces. Across the Fellowship, faculty members expressed a desire to better support students' diverse communicative strengths, yet many struggled against institutional structures, unclear expectations, and limited access to sustained professional development. Their reflections pointed to a recurring tension: they wanted to rethink writing in their courses but lacked the language, time, and support to do so meaningfully. These findings illustrate that the challenge is not faculty resistance but the absence of a framework and infrastructure that would allow this work to take root and thrive. Crucially, professional development spaces like the Writing@UW Fellowship can decenter the assumption that change must come from top-down mandates. Instead, they affirm that meaningful transformation happens when faculty members have space to ask difficult questions, share vulnerabilities, and co-develop strategies in community. The Fellowship's cross-disciplinary design amplified this impact by allowing participants to see how writing—and the ideologies attached to it—are shaped not just by personal preference or field-specific tradition but by broader institutional structures. In this way, the Fellowship modeled the kind of recursive, reflective, and relational learning that it also encouraged faculty members to foster in their classrooms.

Finally, the cross-disciplinary nature of the Fellowship modeled what institutional change could look like across departments and programs. The interventions supported by professional development spaces like Writing@UW offer a vision of disciplinary writing spaces as sites where multimodality, linguistic justice, and inclusive pedagogies might be foundational and transformational shared commitments. This vision of writing is one that supports faculty members through long-term, equity-driven development that fosters collaboration across departments and that resists the tendency to silo writing instruction within English departments or writing expertise within Composition Studies. This vision insists that critical multimodal pedagogies must be part of the institutional fabric, a shared

responsibility supported by policies, programs, and leadership that recognize their transformative potential.

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Appendix 1

Bank of Interview Questions for Participants

General

- What is your discipline?
- How long have you been involved in your discipline?
- What excites you about your field?
- What writing course(s) do you currently teach?
- How does this context differ from other teaching contexts you've experienced?
- How many years of teaching experience do you have?

Teaching Writing and Writing History

- What draws you to teaching writing and what is your history of teaching writing?
- Have you been trained/taught to implement writing (broadly defined, including traditional conceptualizations of writing as well as multimodal literacies) in your courses?
    - Where have you received such training?
    - What can you tell me about how that experience prepared you or didn't prepare you for teaching writing in your discipline? How is teaching different than what you expected?
- In what ways do you consider your experiences as a student to inform your pedagogy?
- Please indicate the types and genres of writing that you have assigned to students in your writing course(s). [Low-Stakes Writing (Reflections, Journals, etc.), Essays, Reports, Research Papers, Discipline-Specific Writing (text-based writing assignments), Creative Essays, Online Writing (Blogs, Wikis, Websites, etc.), Online Compositions (Online Posters, Infographics, Social Media Posts/Campaigns, Digital Storytelling, etc.), Other Analog Visual (Posters, Artwork, etc.), Audio Compositions (Podcasts, Interviews, etc.), Videos (Video Essays, Social Media Videos, etc.)
- What informs your decision to assign these types of writings to students?

Writing and Language Ideologies and Knowledges in the Disciplines and Beyond

- Please describe the kinds of writing that students and professionals do in your discipline (including genre, audiences, and style).
- Building on the above, with respect to writing, what do you feel is most important for students to know and be able to do in your discipline or beyond?
    - What do you feel is most important to communicate about writing for your students and why?
- In your experience, how has writing changed in your discipline, and what has affected those changes?
- Is there a prevailing definition of "good writing" in your discipline?
    - Whose writing is included or excluded from that definition?
- Have you already done work toward antiracism or linguistic diversity in your teaching, department, or department/program curriculum?
    - What does that look like?
- How are you positioned in your department/program to influence the culture of writing and/or writing pedagogy?
- In your department, program, or discipline, where do opportunities exist to challenge linguistic racism, and to be an agent of change? Where do you wish you had more support?
- What challenges do you foresee in supporting linguistic diversity and language justice in your discipline?
- What changes do you want to make in your pedagogy or curriculum?

- o What support do you need to make those changes?

Sharing Examples to Ask for Examples

In my discipline, we have done a lot of work that focuses on language and power (for example, how certain ways of communicating are valued such as Standard English or devalued in ways that might reinforce racism or inequities or how some genres can be more or less exclusionary, accessible, relevant, and valued by different audiences). I'm wondering how you think about language use and writing and audience in ways that are linked to questions of equity, inclusion, and justice.

Multimodality and Critical Multimodal Literacies

Here are a few definitions of multimodality: Multimodality refers to the combination of multiple sensory and communicative modes, such as sight, sound, print, images, video, music, and so on, that produce meaning in any given message (Dressman, 2019). Applied to university education, multimodal composition has been tied to pedagogy as the need "to prepare students to participate in the global-digital world by expanding the means of communication in which students are educated (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Yet others consider multimodal composition as a way for students to "consider a wide range of digital and non-digital modes, materials, and media throughout their compositing process" (Lutkewitte, 2104, p. 3).

What thoughts do you have about how this looks in your classroom/program/discpline, and how do you consider and define multimodality?

Multimodal composition has a wide range of applications in the classroom. Some courses in my discipline have low-stakes assignments in which students are asked to draw their perceptions and ideas as they learn new concepts; some ask students to create podcasts as a final project, asking them to really dig into the research students have done, even asking them to incorporate interviews with stakeholders in their research.

Can you think of examples from your courses/department/discipline?

- What draws you to teaching multimodal composition?
- What priority does teaching multimodal composition hold for you?
- What role should the production of non-textual composition play in a writing course? Why?
- Are any concepts being displaced in order to teach multimodal composition?
- What challenges do you envision as you consider multimodal approaches in your courses?
- What goals do you have for students in your course, and how can a multimodal approach support those goals?

Equity-oriented Pedagogies

- How do you approach diversity, equity, and inclusion in your pedagogy?
- When you think about ways equity, inclusion, and diversity inform your pedagogy, what stakes do you see for your students and the work that happens in your discipline?
    - o How do those stakes inform your pedagogy?
- How do student affordances in a multimodal classroom differ from those in a classroom focused on traditional conceptualizations of writing?
- What are the Learning Outcomes for writing in your department/program currently?
    - o What might Learning Outcomes for writing classes informed by linguistic justice look like?
    - o If the two currently differ, what could help bridge the gap?

Resources

- Please describe any resources, such as a textbook or supplementary materials, you use to support your pedagogical goals for students, especially in writing and/or multimodal composition. I'd love to hear about how you use these and why. (For follow-up if not discussed: does it help students define multimodality, learn to analyze, learn to compose, etc.)
- What resources would be helpful for you and other faculty members as they incorporate multimodality in their courses?
    - What resources would not be helpful? Why?
- Outside of this workshop series, where do you turn for support or information about how to plan and integrate writing and multimodal assignments into your classes?

Appendix 2

Application: Writing@UW Fellowship

Thank you for applying for the UW Seattle Writing@UW Fellowship. This Fellowship is designed to collaborate with, learn from, and support disciplinary faculty members who would like to be part of a teaching community as they develop a deeper understanding of the fundamental relationship between writing and learning.

This two-quarter Fellowship takes place during Winter and Spring 2024. Fellows meet every two weeks for workshops, plenary talks with guest speakers, and other activities designed to support faculty as they consider ways to integrate writing more deeply into their courses. This Fellowship seeks to support faculty members' use of a variety of writing assignments in their course to as a way to increase student learning while also leveraging criticality, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their classes.

To be eligible, applicants should either:

- currently teach an Additional Writing (W) course and would like to revisit their writing assignments to integrate writing more purposefully throughout their course, considering equity-oriented writing assignments and assessment strategies, or
- have a W course in development and would like to learn about and integrate equity- oriented writing pedagogies into their course while developing a deeper understanding of the UW guidelines for teaching W courses.

To qualify for this Fellowship, applicants must have unit/department/college sponsorship for their involvement (please notify them of this requirement with enough time for them to complete it by Dec. 4). Applicants must also be willing to have their W course observed by Writing@UW administrators either during or after the Fellowship.

1. Name (First and Last)

2. Email

3. Title (e.g., Associate Professor, Teaching Professor)

4. Unit (department, school, and/or college)

5. These are the requirements for the Writing@UW Fellowship:
    - I regularly teach or am currently developing a W course in my unit/department/college that is run at least once per year.
    - I am a faculty member at UW Seattle.
    - I am available to be on campus for required workshops and events within the timeframe of this Fellowship: Winter and Spring 2023-2024.
    - I am willing to have Writing@UW administrators observe my W course during the 2023-2024 academic year (if applicable) and in the future.
    - I understand that attending all Writing@UW Fellowship workshops and events is necessary to fulfill the requirements of this Fellowship.

6. Are you able to commute to the UW Seattle campus to participate in the Fellowship? If not, what access needs do you have to participate in the Fellowship in person?

7. Sponsor Letter. Please notify your unit director or department chair of your interest in applying for the Writing@UW Fellowship, and ask them to email a note of sponsorship (a short paragraph will do!)

8. Please attach your CV.

9. Please attach a copy of your syllabus for the W course you currently teach. (If you are developing a new W course, please attach a rough description of that course.)

10. Please briefly describe writing in your discipline. This can be what writing looks like in professional contexts related to your discipline, or what writing assignments look like in your W courses. (~1 paragraph)

11. Please briefly describe your learning goals for students in your W course. (~1 paragraph).

12. Briefly, what are your reasons for applying to this Fellowship, and what ideas do you have (if any) for a potential project? (~1 paragraph)

Appendix 3

Intake Survey

Thank you for being willing to participate in Rebecca's dissertation research project, and thank you for taking this survey!

This survey is part of a larger research study that seeks to identify and better understand best practices and models for establishing a writing Fellowship program, especially how such a collaborative professional development model can serve as a vital space for supporting language advocacy, linguistic justice, and equity-oriented multimodal writing pedagogies across the academy.

Please contact the primary researcher with any questions.

This survey should take 15 minutes to complete.

1. Why do you teach writing? Or, what draws you to teaching writing?
2. Describe the kinds of writing that are common in your discipline. Please consider writing produced by professionals, academics, and students in your discipline, and consider various genres and audiences.
3. Please indicate the types and genres of writing that you have assigned to students in your writing course(s). (Low-stakes writing (reflections, journals, etc.), Text-based writing assignments (essays, reports, research papers, discipline-specific writing), Creative Compositions (text-based stories, narratives, plays, etc.), Online Writing (Blogs, wikis, websites, etc.), Other online Compositions (online posters, infographics), Other analog visual (posters, artwork), Audio compositions (podcasts, interviews), Videos (video essays, social media videos)
4. What informs your decision to assign these types of writings to students?
5. What goals do you have for students in your course(s)?
6. How do you measure success for your students?
7. In your experience, is there a prevailing definition of "good writing" in your discipline? Does this definition differ from other definitions of "good writing" that you have seen in other disciplines or contexts?

Demographic Information

8. In what academic discipline do you primarily teach?
9. How long have you been involved in your discipline? In what capacities?
10. How many years of experience do you have teaching writing?
11. How have you learned about methods and methodologies for teaching writing?
12. If you have used a specific text or resource, please provide the name.
13. What is your name? (If you have opted to be known via a pseudonym, please use that pseudonym here.)

Critical Multimodal Literacies -- A Definition and Example

Multimodality refers to the combination of multiple sensory and communicative modes, such as sight, sound, print, images, video, music, and so on, that produce meaning in any given message (Dressman, 2019). Applied to university education, multimodal composition has been tied to pedagogy as the need "to prepare students to participate in the global-digital world by expanding the means of communication in which students are educated (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Yet others consider multimodal composition as a

way for students to “consider a wide range of digital and non-digital modes, materials, and media throughout their compositing process” (Lutkewitte, 2104, p. 3).
Multimodal composition has a wide range of applications in the classroom. For example, in Rebecca’s classrooms, she includes low-stakes assignments in which students are asked to draw their perceptions and ideas as they learn new concepts. She often asks students to create a podcast as a final project, asking them to interview key stakeholders, synthesize scholarship that informs their topic, and consider different audiences for their research. She views these assignments as encouraging students to take advantage of all the available means to create a persuasive and informative “text.”

Part of Rebecca’s research explores how multimodal composition is tied to equity-oriented writing pedagogies, and she’s curious about how faculty in the disciplines might work with multimodality in their writing classrooms.

Are you interested in talking more specifically about ways you might consider multimodal composition in your courses?

Participation in a Focal Group
The purpose of this focal group is to better understand the value of centering critical multimodal literacies frameworks in disciplinary writing spaces.

More specifically, the objective of this research is to better understand how University of Washington faculty members in the disciplines who teach writing courses consider multimodality central to their investments in equity-oriented writing pedagogies, and to better understand how a critical multimodal literacies framework can support disciplinary faculty members in creating equity-oriented writing pedagogies grounded in critical multimodal literacies.

Rebecca is looking for focal-group participants who will either

- meet with her one-to-one once or twice during Winter and Spring Quarters to discuss multimodality and workshop multimodal projects for their course; or

- meet with Rebecca in a small group with 2 or 3 other participants once or twice during Winter and Spring Quarters to discuss multimodality and workshop multimodal projects for their course.

Which type would you prefer?

Appendix 4

Writing@UW Fellowship - Syllabus

Fellowship Organizers
Megan Callow, Associate Teaching Professor & UW Seattle Director of Writing
Rebecca Taylor, Predoctoral Instructor

Meeting Schedule and Location
All SPRING meetings will take place in Gerberding 100 from 11am-1pm on:

- April 24
- May 8
- May 22
- Debrief meetings with co-facilitators, to be scheduled individually

All WINTER meetings took place in Gerberding 100 (the main area of the Center for Teaching and Learning) from 2-4pm on:

- Jan 12
- Jan 26
- Feb 9
- Feb 23
- March 8

We plan to meet roughly every other week for a total of 10 meetings, two hours each, over the course of winter and spring quarters (about 5 meetings each quarter). Refreshments will be served at each meeting. Additionally, you are invited to meet once each quarter (or more if you wish!) individually with Megan and Rebecca - see The Project section.

Fellowship Website
All our readings are linked at our website.

Overview
Welcome to Writing@UW Fellowship! This program is designed to support faculty who teach courses that satisfy the Additional Writing (or "W") requirement. After conducting research on the state of the W at UW, we have determined that as an institution there is lots of room for improvement in how W courses are designated and supported by departments, schools, and colleges. W course faculty (including some of you!) gave lots of ideas for the kinds of supports that would help them teach their W courses better, including:

- A central repository of resources on teaching particular kinds of writing, including assignment design and effective approaches to grading and feedback
- More extensive training and support for TAs in W courses
- Better / destigmatized / discipline-specific campus supports for student writing
- Material supports for faculty working to improve their writing instruction, ranging from course caps to salary support
- More enlightened departmental cultures around the value of writing
- Transparency around what other teachers of writing are doing
- Greater capacity for responding to students' particular incomes and needs
- Strategies for supporting students who experience(d) trauma or racism

There are so many important needs here, and this Fellowship attempts to address many of them, though many of these shifts will require a lot more institutional resources than any one faculty learning community can compensate for. Still, our hope is that by spending some serious time together deliberating about the nature of knowing and communicating in our disciplines, we will be able to bolster support for teaching writing on campus. To that end, here are the learning goals for this Fellowship.

Learning Goals

- Understand the ecologies of writing education that students experience at UW, including C and W courses, writing supports, and extracurricular writing
- Understand and adhere to guidelines for teaching W courses
- Identify and communicate (to students) your learning goals for writing
- Understand and teach writing as rhetorical, contextual, and a process
- Use writing as a means to leverage criticality, equity, inclusion, and belonging in your classes
- Develop tools, strategies, and materials for effective writing instruction, including assignment design, research, academic integrity, and assessment
- Complete a project that enhances writing instruction in your course (see The Project section)
- Create a community of teachers, building confidence, self-efficacy, and long term mutual support
- Become an advocate for writing in your department or program

Meeting Structure and Participation Expectations

As described above, we will meet (generally) biweekly for two hours. We will have assigned readings, and will come prepared to discuss them in light of our respective contexts, disciplines, and goals. Our meetings will involve whole- and small-group discussion, guest speakers, freewriting, brainstorming, and workshopping. In the calendar we will include all the details you need to come prepared. It will be intense work, but you will be boosted by good company, caffeine, and treats!

During spring quarter our group meeting schedule may become less regular as you implement your project.

Full attendance and participation is expected and is a requirement to receive the stipend. Of course, life happens, and if you must be absent from one session, please let us know so we can catch you up. If you must miss more than one session, we encourage you to participate in a future quarter.

The Project

As part of this Fellowship you will design and implement a project that will serve as an intensive alteration of or addition to your W course. We want the project to serve your needs, so you will design it with the support of Fellowship leaders and other colleagues in the program. Projects might include:

- An overhaul of one or more scaffolded assignment sequences in the course
- The design of a new W course that fills a department need, or fulfills one of your intellectual interests
- The creation of a new capstone (or other) project that is more up to date, or responsive to the needs of graduates and/or industry
- A revision of your approach to writing assessment, with new activities and materials that you can integrate with all writing assignments
- A curriculum or training for TAs who are grading writing in your larger W course
- A discussion series in your department on writing instruction
- Other ideas are encouraged!

While the timeline for project design will be fluid, we believe it will be helpful to first spend some time reading and discussing important concepts related to disciplinary writing. So, while we will start

brainstorming projects from Day 1, we will begin workshopping more intensively around mid-winter quarter after working through some foundational concepts around discipline-specific writing pedagogies. Then, in spring (or fall) quarter you will implement your project and report back to the group to engage in a cycle of self-assessment.

Because everyone's projects will be different, we ask that you set up an individual meeting with Megan (mcallow@uw.edu) and Rebecca (rjtaylor@uw.edu) somewhat early in winter quarter. That will help us understand and better support your needs, and tailor a project timeline for you.

We will also encourage optional participation in the CTL's Teaching & Learning Symposium as an avenue for sharing our work with the larger teaching community! (Deadline for proposals: Jan. 26th)

The Study

One of the Fellowship facilitators, Rebecca, is a Language & Rhetoric graduate student in the English department who is studying Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID), with a special focus on multimodal pedagogies and equity. She has identified this Fellowship as an ideal dissertation research site, and she will be collecting – with participants' consent – different streams of data along the way, including notes and recordings of group and individual meetings, freewrites, teaching materials, and interview responses.

We hope you will consent to participate to whatever degree you feel comfortable, but please rest assured that your participation in the study is NOT required in order to participate in the Fellowship. You can read more about her study here, and Rebecca will contact you soon to answer any questions and seek your consent for participation.

Calendar

Winter Session 1 (Jan. 12) - Alphabet Soup: Navigating W and C Ecologies at UW

Session Type: Discussion & Guest Speaker

Talking points:

- Introductions & Goals
- Overview of the C, W, and other writing at UW with guest speaker Stephanie Kerschbaum (professor of English and Director, Program in Writing & Rhetoric)
- Writing to learn, Writing to engage, Writing in the disciplines
- Relationships between writing and disciplinary knowledge

Pre-Session Readings (Please read prior to meeting):

Bean, J.C. & Melzer, D. (2021). Ch. 2: How writing is related to critical thinking. In Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom (pp. 17-38). Jossey-Bass.

Vieira, K., Heap, L., Descourtis, S., Isaac, J., Senanayake, S., Swift, B., Castillo, C., Kim, A. M., Krzus-Shaw, K., Black, M., Ọládipọ, Ọlá, Yang, X., Ratanapraphа, P., Tiwari, N. M., Velarde, L., & West, G. B. (2020). "Literacy is a Sociohistoric Phenomenon with the Potential to Liberate and Oppress."

(Re)Considering What We Know: Learning Thresholds in Writing, Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy, 36–55. https://doi.org/10.7330/9781607329329.c002

Recommended / Optional Readings:

Anson, C. M. (2015). Crossing Thresholds: What's to know about Writing across the Curriculum. In L. Adler-Kassner & E. Wardle (Eds.), Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies (pp. 203–219). University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.7330/9780874219906.c0013

> This chapter provides a helpful overview of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement in light of 5 key concepts: writing as disciplinary activity; the social/rhetorical nature of writing; writing to learn vs. writing to communicate; shared goals and responsibilities; writing as situated and problems of knowledge transfer; and a developmental view of student writing.

Middendorf, J., & Pace, D. (2004). Decoding the disciplines: A model for helping students learn disciplinary ways of thinking. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2004(98), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.142

> This article describes a framework for helping students engage in discipline-specific thought and practice. See the helpful heuristic on page 3.

Itinerary:

- Introductions (name, department, W course) & Ice breaker: When you tell people what field you are in, what are some common misconceptions about your discipline? (20 min)
- Think-pair-share: What were 1 or 2 questions or resonances you had with the reading? How do these observations resonate with your own approach to teaching and learning? (20 min)
- Reflective writing: According to Middendorf & Pace, identifying bottlenecks to learning are an important first step to understanding the unique flavor of learning in your course (which is essential to strategizing why and how to assign writing). Without even thinking about writing assignments yet, spend 5-10 minutes jotting down some of the particular concepts or habits of mind that your students really struggle with in your course. What are they just not getting the hang of? What would you like to see them do better?
- Sharing out from freewrites (20 min)
- Break 5-8 min
- Stephanie Kerschbaum presents learning outcomes for 131, and discusses the kinds of knowledge we can expect students to have after their freshman composition course
- Teaching and Learning Symposium!

HW
Given what we've read so far along with your reading for next time, what kinds of knowledge are you teaching in your course (not necessarily writing related)? For next time, please bring a list of your course learning goals, either as they are currently written or lightly revised based on today's discussion or readings.

Also, set up a meeting with Megan & Rebecca to discuss your project!

Winter Session 2 (Jan. 26) - Write to Ignite: Writing for Learning and Engagement

Session Type: Discussion & Workshop
Talking points:

- Using writing to foster learning, engagement, and critical thinking
- Designing and scaffolding assignment sequences
- Profiles page for Writing@UW web site?

Pre-session readings:

Bean & Melzer, Ch. 5: "Informal, Exploratory Writing Activities"

Palmquist, M. (2020). A Middle Way for WAC: Writing to Engage. The WAC Journal, 31(1), 7–22. https://doi.org/10.37514/wac-j.2020.31.1.01

Recommended / Optional Readings:

Anderson, Paul, et al. "How To Create High-Impact Writing Assignments That Enhance Learning and Development and Reinvigorate WAC/WID Programs: What Almost 72,000 Undergraduates Taught Us." Across the Disciplines, vol. 13, no. 4, 2016, pp. 1–18, https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2016.13.4.13.

> This article shares findings from a large-scale study about effective approaches to writing instruction. Of particular interest are the constructs described on pp. 5-6: Interactive writing processes; Meaning-making writing tasks; and Clear writing assignments.

Anson, C. M. (2017). Writing to Read, Revisited. In A. S. Horning, D.-L. Golnitz, & C. R. Haller (Eds.), What Is College Reading? (pp. 21–39). https://doi.org/10.37514/atd-b.2017.0001.2.01

> This chapter "explores ways that teachers in all disciplines can engage students in deeper and more intellectually meaningful reading through imaginative, carefully designed low-stakes writing-to- read assignments in a variety of genres" (from abstract). Recommended for those who want to cultivate better reading skills and habits in students.

Itinerary:

- Ice-breaker - 10-15 min.
- Check-in re: Fellowship project. Have you sat down with R & M yet? Is there a project under development? 10-15 min.
- Crowd-sourcing reading discussion questions - 20 min
- Write a question that has arisen after doing readings on a post-it
    - Collect and run discussion using these
- Breakout group work sessions:
    - Relationship between learning goal(s) and overall assignment structure/design. How does the assignment structure reflect the learning goals you have for the assignment and course as a whole? How might your learning goals be refined to better capture what you want them to know or do?
    - Use Bean & Melzer repository of assignment ideas and connect with some of your course learning goals.
- Work in a pair or group for 20 min; share out for 10 min

- Scaffolding and support. What do students need to know to complete their major (or minor) assignments, and how will you teach it?
- GRR Framework
- Work in a pair or group for 20 min; share out for 10 min
- Touch on inter-relationships among learning goals, assignment design, and assessment approaches

HW:
- Make sure you have met with Megan and Rebecca before session 3
- To session 3, please complete your project description

Winter Session 3 (Feb. 9) - Beyond the Written Word: The Many Faces and Forms of "Formal" Writing

Session Type: Discussion & Workshop

Talking points
- Thinking about "high-stakes" writing assignments that matter – to your field, to your course, and to your students
- Introduction to multimodal composing and multimodal compositions

Pre-session readings

Bean & Melzer, Ch. 4: "Formal Writing Assignments Situated in Rhetorical Contexts"

Wysocki, R., et al. (2019). On Multimodality: A Manifesto. In Lee, J.C. & Khadka, S. (Eds.) Bridging the Multimodal Gap. Utah State University Press (pp. 17-29)

Recommended / Optional Readings:

Yancey, K. B. (2004). Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key. College Composition and Communication, 56(2), 297–328. https://doi.org/10.2307/4140651

> In 2004, Kathleen Blake Yancey delivered this address to the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (arguably the most influential annual conference in the field of writing and composition). She later annotated this write-up of her speech, which makes a case for writing teachers to have a more capacious definition of writing, one that includes digital literacies to meet the demands of an ever-evolving and online world. Recommended for those wanting to gain a deeper understanding of how the field of composition has been changing in the last 20 years.

Shipka, J. (2011). "Introduction: Multimodality and Communicative Practice." Toward a Composition Made Whole. University of Pittsburgh Press (pp. 1-16). https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjqkk

> As the world becomes more digital, Shipka asks writing instructors to not forget about the analog. She veres away from compositionists and writing instructors who say the future of communication is based in modern technology, instead asserting that we define "technology" too narrowly when we think of it as only handheld devices and computer interfaces. Instead, she says,

we need to consider a definition of technology that embraces other cultural tools. Recommended for those who want to think outside the box. (She talks about one of her students writing a final project on a pair of ballet shoes, for example.)

Itinerary

- Recap of Fellowship/project timeline
- Introduce your field multimodally
- Reading response & discussion
- Hands-on Workshop: Connecting Goals to Outcomes to Assignments, and Brainstorming Multimodal Ways to Achieve them All
  - Showing awareness of various literacies as a means for conceptualizing scaffolding. What are the various literacies involved in the assignment sequence?

HW

- Read and annotate the required texts
- Have your project ready to workshop

Winter Session 4 (Feb. 23) - Writing and Difference: Teaching Toward Justice

Guest Discussant: Maya Smith, Associate Dean for Equity, Justice, and Inclusion (CAS)

Pre-session readings:

PWR Antiracist Praxis Statement

Jankens, A., Walker, C., Jimenez, L., Krupansky, M., Linder, A. E., Mixon, A., & Varty, N. G. (2023). A Dual Mission: Antiracist Writing Instruction and Instructor Attitudes about Student Language. Across the Disciplines, 20(1–2), 56–88. https://doi.org/10.37514/atd-j.2023.20.1-2.04

Zamel, V. (2015). Strangers in Academia. College Composition and Communication, 46(4), 506–521.

Optional/Recommended Readings

Alvarez, S. P, Wan, A., & Lee, E. (2022). "Workin' Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing." In D.L. Driscoll, M. Heise, M.K. Steward, & Vetter, M. (Eds.) Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 4, (pp. 1-17).

Baker-Bell, A. et al. (2020). This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice! Conference on College Composition and Communication. Retrieved from https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/demand-for-black-linguistic-justice

Itinerary

- Discussion with Maya Smith
- Share-out of project descriptions
- Offer suggestions for formative questions to ask

HW

- Bring a revised assignment prompt that comes out of your project, and be ready walk us through it as if we were students

Winter Session 5 (March 8) - Assessment Reimagined: Equity at the Heart of Evaluation

Talking Points

- Assessment, equity in assessment, alternative assessment frameworks, assessing multimodal projects
- Rhetorical / criteria-driven feedback
- Responding to student writing effectively and efficiently
- Alternative feedforward methods
- Supporting TAs in responding to student writing

Pre-session readings

"Beyond the Red Ink: Teachers Comments Through Students' Eyes" 9 min. YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rNT-2PAGUA

Anson, Chris M., et al. "Big Rubrics and Weird Genres: The Futility of Using Generic Assessment Tools Across Diverse Instructional Contexts." Journal of Writing Assessment, vol. 5, no. 1, 2012. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/93b9g3t6

Micciche, L. R. (2004). Making a case for rhetorical grammar. College Composition and Communication, 55(4), 716–737. https://doi.org/10.2307/4140668

Itinerary

- Discuss spring plans
- Project check-in
- Discuss readings
    - Roll-a-question: We'll roll dice to decide our discussion topic. Our topic will be pulled from a list of six (or twelve) reading-response questions.

HW

For the Teaching & Learning Symposium Showcase, please submit the following to Megan and Rebecca by March 29th:

- A revised syllabus for your W course (as a pdf, please)
- Project description + reflection on the revision process (~150 words)
- Reflection on the Fellowship (~150 words)
- Optional: writing prompt for a project or similar

Spring Session 1 (April 24) - Building Rubrics / Equitable Assessment Techniques

Pre-session readings:

Bean & Melzer, Ch. 12: "Using Rubrics to Develop and Apply Grading Criteria"

Bean & Melzer, Ch. 16: "Alternatives to Traditional Grading: Portfolio Assessment and Contract Grading"

Itinerary

- Schedule progress reports for project implementation
- Overview of key points (10 min)
- Rebecca discusses collectively generated rubric (10 min)
- Solo time (15-20 min): Consulting your assignment prompt and existing rubric, convert the rubric you brought into a different format that you are interested in pursuing. Use the discussion questions below to prompt you if you get stuck.
- Break (10 min)
- Pair work (15-20). With your partner, share:
  - What was the old rubric, and what is the new format and why did I pick this one?
  - How does restructuring my rubric reflect the learning goals?
  - To what degree is this student-facing (or is it really more for me)?
  - Will this rubric streamline my grading processes?
  - What are the benefits and sacrifices am I making with this new rubric?
  - What questions / concerns do I still have?
- Full group discussion (45 min): share out

HW

- Optional: send a rubric to Megan and Rebecca for feedback
- Schedule exit interviews for the week of the 20th and 27th
- Prepare for project implementation discussions

Spring Session 3 (May 8) - Thinking Across Modes, Thinking Across Languages

Schedule

11:00-11:05
The foundations we've laid lead us to this moment where we can start applying what we know about writing and its possibilities for learning and for equity in our classes. We want to offer a shared definition of equity now as throughline between teaching multimodal writing and supporting I/M students: "Equity pedagogy is an approach to education in which teachers develop teaching strategies and cultivate classroom environments that better support all students, especially those who have been disadvantaged in school and the outside society" (Banks & Banks, 1995) (Read more here.)

11:05-11:10
Fellow update!

11:20-11:50
International students (Wei)
Successful & less successful experience teaching international/multilingual ss (think-pair-share) (10 mins)
Read International and multilingual students, discussion on takeaways as well strategies for teaching international/multilingual ss (15 mins)

11:50-12:20
Multimodality

- Zero Draft (3 min): Identify a few equity concerns you may have with your class; do any specific situations or interactions come to mind? Consider what we have just talked about with Wei. Zero draft for 3 minutes.
- Poster Session (15 min): Questions this session can answer:
- Looking at the outcomes in your class, what are alternative ways students could achieve/meet them?
    - What are the different ways that people can communicate, and how can we leverage those? (What does varying the modes and genres of assignments do for students? Why should we think about multimodality?)
    - Instructions: Each person makes three columns on a piece of poster paper.
    - In the left column, identify lesson plans, assignments, activities that you do in your class. As you list, think about how students move toward the course objectives by completing these tasks. Think about our shared understanding of equity.
    - In the middle column, brainstorm assignments/lessons in different modes/genres that could similarly accomplish those goals.
    - In the right-hand column, describe how this new intervention could address the equity concerns you identified in your zero draft, and that emerged in Wei's discussion.

12:35-12:45
Case Studies
Pairs work together. They choose one of the case studies and talk about their responses, taking into consideration earlier activities and discussions about multilingual learners and multimodality and equity.

Questions
- Consider the work you did in your poster. How could you revise your classroom practice, assignment structure, or inclusive plans to address the case?
- How do the activities about multimodality and multilingual students affect your ideas?
- Do these approaches fit your class goals and learning outcomes?

12:45-12:55
Discussion (the "share" of think-pair-share) Questions
- Consider the work you did with your poster – how do those different modes afford expanded ways of knowing?
- How do they facilitate greater access to all students who have various ways of learning?
- What did this moment (working in community, brainstorming on poster, zero draft) afford you that a more conventional written or spoken response didn't?
- How does this "work" in your specific context? What does equity look like in your discipline?

Optional/further readings:

For background on Cope & Kalantzis's project, including how they define multiliteracies:

Cope, Bill, and Kalantzis, Mary. "1. Background to the Multiliteracies Project," in Multiliteracies and Learning by Design: Meaning Making and Literacy Learning in the Era of Digital Text. YouTube, uploaded by Education at Illinois, March 6, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_zfgB7n1yT9RohZn1ev49XY88l_EyCN

Cope, Bill, and Kalantzis, Mary. "6. Multiliteracies Pedagogy: Learning by Design," in Multiliteracies and Learning by Design: Meaning Making and Literacy Learning in the Era of Digital Text. YouTube, uploaded by Education at Illinois, March 6, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kDoPllbUvQ

Great resources for incorporating a multimodal framework:

“Teaching Multimodal Composition,” Sweetland Center for Writing, University of Michigan, n.d. https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/guides-to-teaching-writing/teaching-multimodal-composition.html

Appendix 5

Rebecca Taylor made this in 2024 for the Writing@UW Fellowship at the University of Washington.
You can share it with anybody, anytime.

Multimodal Assignment Design & Plan Guide

What is the Goal?

Goals go beyond your course. They are ways of thinking, being, and interacting with the world that you see as important for students. Students may not meet these goals in your course, and they may not meet them for years after leaving university (if ever). You and your course, though, can help place students on a path toward meeting them. Goals may or may not be discipline specific, but it may help to think about the ways of thinking that are important for someone in your discipline.

What types of thinking do you want students to develop?

What is the Outcome?

An outcome is a measurable and, importantly for your course, assessable demonstration of learning. These appear on your syllabus.

These are tangible and specific, and they often answer these questions:

What must students be able to do by the end of the course? How can you tie your assessment rubrics to this performance?

What specific skills do you want students to develop?

How can they show you that learning?

Form & Function: High-Stakes Assignments

What large “final project” (if any) do you want students to do? How does this project/assignment connect to the Outcomes for your course?

How are you supporting students with diversity of body, mind, linguistic background? Racial and linguistic justice?

Q’s to consider

What types of communication do people associated with the discipline create?

How does the public access information in the discipline?

Process Toward the Goal: Low-Stakes Assignments

These are low stakes (ungraded or low points) opportunities for students to learn the content and practice the skills necessary to complete the high-stakes assignments and meet the learning outcomes for your course.

How can you help students understand the unique ways of knowing and writing in the discipline? How can you increase opportunities for students to develop these skills and knowledge?

What about students with diversity of body, mind, linguistic background? Racial and linguistic justice?

Your Responses

Appendix 6

Agenda for Session 3: Beyond the Written Word: The Many Faces and Forms of "Formal" Writing

Warmup
Share an artifact from your field.

Part 1: From Goal → Outcome
Educational theorists and instructional designers distinguish between goals and learning outcomes as a way to make a course more specific and targeted.

Goals are big, broad, and lofty. They are ways of thinking, being, and interacting with the world that you see as important for students. Students may not meet these goals in your course, and they may not meet them for years after leaving university (if ever). You and your course, though, can help place students on a path to understanding them. Goals may or may not be discipline specific, but it may help to think about the ways of thinking that are important for someone in your discipline.

Key Question: What type(s) of thinking do you want students to develop?

A Learning Outcome is a measurable demonstration of learning. These are tangible, specific, scaffold-able, and assessable. An outcome determines the assignments, tasks, in-class activities, and homework assignments you create for student learning.

Key Questions: What must students be able to demonstration knowing how to do by the end of the course? What specific skills do you want students to develop? How can they show you that learning?

To Do
Each person writes their learning goals on a piece of poster paper. Then, use Bloom's Taxonomy or the Revised Taxonomy to identify learning outcomes that are embedded in those goals. Write those on the poster and connect them using arrows, drawings, a chart, whatever. Then add your current assignments to the poster, identifying ways they connect to the outcomes and goals.

Each person creates their own poster, but as you think about your course, you and your partner can ask each other:

- What types of assignments do you see as being generative for reaching these outcomes?
- What about students with other ways of knowing? Differences through bodies, minds, and linguistic backgrounds? How do we envision diversity as we think about measurable outcomes?

Share out

Break

Part 2: From Outcome → Assignment

Set aside the goals and outcomes for a second while we think about genre and audience. This is a continuation of the conversations we've been having in our last session and in our one-to-ones. We've talked around these genres, so this is an opportunity to get them all down in one place.

To Do

With your partner, please talk about communication in your discipline:

- What types of communication do people in your discipline routinely create?
- What audiences do people in your discipline routinely write for or about?
- Who typically writes about your discipline? What types of communication do people associated with your discipline create?
    - Consider as many forms and audiences as possible. Consider: How does the public access information about content in your discipline?
- What are some common disciplinary forms/genres/conventions that are purposefully designed to be accessible & inclusive for different audiences?
- What forms are commonly taught in your discipline? How do these forms connect to broader academic, professional, and public audiences?

Choose several of these forms/genres and brainstorm measurable outcomes. For inspiration, consider the learning outcomes you identified earlier and look around the room for what others shared.

Work together to tease apart discrete skills embedded in those genres, making sure that the skills you identify are measurable using either taxonomy.

- What written genres allow students to meet these outcomes?
- What audiences can students authentically reach?
- What opportunities exist for non-text-based assignments that support students achieving these learning objectives and diverse audiences?

Share Out

Part 3: Scaffolding Assignments

Draw on the readings and activities we have done to this point – in Session 2, we talked about low-stakes and writing-to-learn activities, and in the readings we've been asked to think about reasons to incorporate multimodal activities and assignments into our courses.

Consider the assignments you have identified on your poster(s), and link them to the taxonomy (either Bloom's or the updated Bloom's).

Together, brainstorm in-class activities, low-stakes writing assignments, and low-stakes multimdal assignments that can help scaffold the skills you are looking for students to develop.

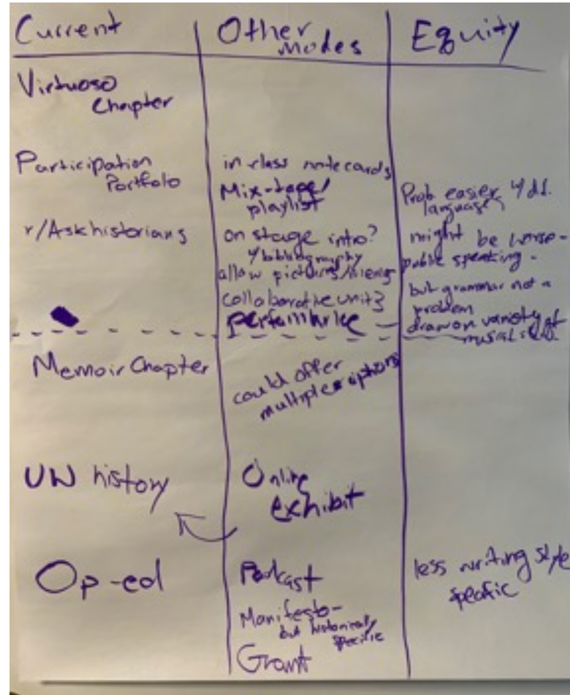
If any ideas fit your course outcomes or goals, add them to your poster. Use arrows to connect to learning goals and outcomes.

Consider creating sequences of activities and assignments that build off of each other.

Final Share Out

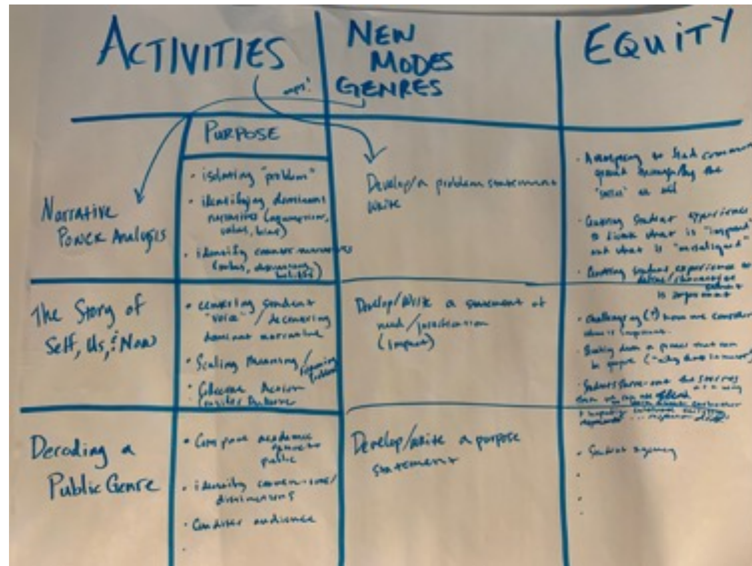
Appendix 6.1

Eleanor's Poster for Session 3



Current	Other modes	Equity
Virtuoso Chapter		
	in-class notecards	
Participation Portfolio	Mix-tape/playlist	Prob. Easier 3/diff languages
	On stage intro?	Might be worse
r/Askhistorians	w/bibliography	public speaking –
	allow pictures/memes	
	collaborative unite 3	but grammar not a problem
	performance	draw on variety of musical skills
Memoir Chapter	Could offer multiple	
UW history	Online exhibit	
		Less writing style specific
	Podcast	
Op-ed		
	manifesto – but historically specific	
	Grant	

SJ's Poster for Session 3



	Activities (oops!)	New Modes Genres	Equity
	Purpose		
Narrative Power Analysis	• isolating "problem" • identifying dominant narratives (assumptions, values, bias) • identify counter-narratives (values, observations, beliefs)	Develop a problem statement Write	• Attempting to find common ground through/by the "stories" we tell • Centering student experiences to dictate what is "imposed" and what is "misaligned" • Centering student experience to define/characterize what is important
The Story of Self, Us, & Now	• centering student "voice" / decentering dominant narrative • Scaling meaning / framing problem • Collective Action • Consider Audience	Develop/Write a statement of need/justification (impact)	• Challenging (?) how we consider what is important • Breaking down a process that can be opaque ("why does it matter") • Students share-out the stories as a way then we can to learn about each other
Decoding a Public Genre	• Compare academic genre to public • identify conventions/distinctions • consider audience •	Develop/write a purpose statement	• Student agency • • •

Appendix 7

Agenda for Writing@UW Session 7: Equity and Multimodal Literacies

Pre-session readings/videos:
Cope, Bill, and Kalantzis, Mary. "6. Multiliteracies Pedagogy: Learning by Design," in *Multiliteracies and Learning by Design: Meaning Making and Literacy Learning in the Era of Digital Text. YouTube*, uploaded by Education at Illinois, March 6, 2019.

Optional/further reading:
For background on Cope & Kalantzis's project, including how they define *multiliteracies*:
Cope, Bill, and Kalantzis, Mary. "1. Background to the Multiliteracies Project," in *Multiliteracies and Learning by Design: Meaning Making and Literacy Learning in the Era of Digital Text. YouTube*, uploaded by Education at Illinois, March 6, 2019,
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_zfgB7n1yT9RohZn1ev49XY88l_EyCN

Great resources for incorporating a multimodal framework:
"Teaching Multimodal Composition," *Sweetland Center for Writing*, University of Michigan,
https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/guides-to-teaching-writing/teaching-multimodal-composition.html

Schedule

Intro: 11:00-11:05

Fellow update! 11:05-11:10

Supporting international students 11:10-11:40
- One ice-breaker activity (5 mins)
- successful & less successful experience teaching international/multilingual ss (10 mins)
- Read CTL page on supporting International and multilingual students: https://shorturl.at/azEGS. Discussion on takeaways as well strategies for teaching international/multilingual ss (15 mins)

Multimodality 11:40-12:10
- **Zero Draft** (3 min): Identify a few equity concerns you may have with your class; do any specific situations or interactions come to mind? Consider what we have just talked about.
- **Poster Session** (20 min): Instructions: Each person use a piece of poster paper to map out their answer. One way this could show up on the paper (but not the only!):
    - In the left column, identify **lesson plans, assignments, activities** that you do in your class. As you list, think about how students move toward the course objectives by completing these tasks. Think about our shared understanding of equity.
    - In the middle column, **brainstorm assignments/lessons in different modes/genres** that could similarly accomplish those goals.
    - In the right-hand column, describe **how this new intervention could address the equity concerns** you identified in your zero draft, and that emerged in Wei's discussion.
    - Questions this session can answer:

- Looking at the outcomes in your class, what are alternative ways students could achieve/meet them?
- What are the different ways that people can communicate, and how can we leverage those?
- What does varying the modes and genres of assignments do for students?
- Why should we think about multimodality?

Case Studies 12:10-12:30
Pairs work together. They choose one of the case studies and talk about their responses, taking into consideration earlier activities and discussions about multilingual learners and multimodality and equity. Consider the work you did in your poster, and CTL's suggested strategies.

- How could you revise your classroom practice, assignment structure, or inclusive plans to address the case you chose?
- How do the activities that we have brainstormed about multimodality and supporting multilingual students affect your ideas about this case?
- Do these approaches fit your class goals and learning outcomes?

Case 1

Name: Yao
Bio:

- 19 years old
- She/her pronouns
- Comes from China
- First time abroad

Yao is an undergraduate in her first year at UW. She is from mainland China, and this is her first time abroad. She is aware that she may not fully understand what her teachers and classmates say in class. She finds it difficult to understand cultural and historical references as well as things that make them laugh, but she is trying her best to listen carefully and catch up. However, on the first day of classes, Tao learns that one of her classes requires a group assignment which involves group discussion, writing a paper, and a presentation with her peers. Tao attempts to make friends with her classmates, but some of them already know each other through the FIG program. Tao worries she is already falling behind in the class because not only does she not use English as the first language, but also she does not know her classmates that well.

Case 2

Name: Tommy
Bio

- 19 years old
- He/him pronouns
- Come from Eastern Washington
- First one in his family go to college

Tommy is in his first year at UW. As the first one in his family to go to college, especially a prestigious university like UW, he and his family are all very proud. Tommy comes from Eastern Washington, and he feels excited to live in Seattle for the first time. On the first day, in one of his classes, the professor announces that there will be a portfolio project that includes a final paper and an oral presentation as two key parts of the course assessment. This is a high stakes assignment, and Tommy is dreading the idea of

having to write a final paper in APA style and speak in front of the class. Tommy finds that navigating through the university resources is very difficult, given that the campus is huge and he is not familiar with the university education system. He is not sure of where he should go or what he could do to get support to finish this assignment, and he worries that this assignment will lead to his failure in the class.

Case 3

Name: Kinzy
Bio

- 22 years old
- She/her pronouns
- Local student
- In a STEM major

Kinzy is a senior in a STEM major. During your first one-to-one conference with her, she tells you that she was nervous about signing up for your course because it has a W credit attached. Ever since high school she has hated writing classes, and she has avoided taking her W credit because she hates it so much. When you talk with her more, she tells you that she has always hated writing, that she doesn't see the point because she's going to work in a lab after she graduates, and that she is confident that she can pay an online editor or use AI to help her write if she needs to in her career. She tells you that she works hard on assignments but doesn't see the point of learning how to convey that learning in writing.

Case 4

Name: Lem
Bio

- 20 years old
- They/them pronouns
- From Northern California
- Wants to get into the Foster School of Business

Lem came to UW specifically for the Foster Business School and is taking your class to fulfill a requirement. In your first one-to-one conference, they tell you that writing has always been easy, so they're not nervous about the writing component. They're taking the class for the fun of learning the content. They are always the first to turn in assignments, and after a few, you start to see that they are not really working with the material in the way you'd like; even though their writing style is engaging, the ideas are rather surface-level and distant from the deeper understandings you're trying to have students develop.

Case 5

Name: Lucy
Bio

- 20 years old
- She/her pronouns
- Local student

Lucy is the first student in the classroom every day, stays after a few minutes every time she has a question, and is always on-task, eager, attentive, and an engaged group leader. During your first one-to-one conference with her, she expresses her eagerness to learn and her love of writing. You're surprised in a few weeks, then, to realize that Lucy hasn't turned in a single homework assignment. All of her points are coming from in-class activities. You contact her via email, and she responds (choose your own adventure here):

1. By disclosing that she has ADHD that presents itself in executive dysfunction. Every time she sits at a screen, she stares ahead for hours without typing anything. Eventually she gives up and hopes that her in-class participation will enable her to pass the course.
2. By sending a one-line response explaining that she has two part-time jobs and family responsibilities that keep her too busy; she can't take fewer courses because she'll lose her scholarship, and so she needs to triage something and your course is it. She's banking on being able to pass the course through in-class work alone.

Case 6

Name: Amrit

Bio

- 20 years old
- She/her pronouns
- Comes from Bellevue
- Daughter of Indian parents who work in medicine and tech

Amrit is an engineering major who grew up in Bellevue and went to a prestigious public high school there. She is a very attentive, if quiet, student. She comes to all her classes and sits in the front row, attentively taking notes on her tablet, but appears very reticent to participate in small group work. For the weekly reading response, where students are asked to reflect on a particular disciplinary topic in the news (e.g., the 2007 Mississippi River bridge collapse, or news about a musical performance, etc.), you are starting to suspect that Amrit's responses are partly, if not completely, generated by an A.I. tool of some kind. The text is flat-sounding, the ideas are unoriginal, and the organization is simplistic. You want to address this before the major project in the class begins.

Case 7

Name: Chen

Bio

- 19 years old
- She/her pronouns
- Comes from China
- First time living abroad

Chen is a cheerful, enthusiastic student in your W course. She comes to every class and clearly has a group of friends in the course with whom she animatedly speaks Mandarin when they chat before and after class. She participates willingly and raises her hand often to speak. When Chen speaks aloud, and when you read her written assignments, you find her spoken and written English extremely difficult to understand. In particular, her English syntax (word order) renders the ideas almost impossible to parse. You have taken to giving her vague but encouraging responses to her verbal comments in class, but would like to start responding to her writing more supportively before higher-stakes writing assignments start to become due.

Case 8

Name: Vin

Bio

- 21 years old
- They/them pronouns
- Comes from the midwest
- Anthropology major

Vin took one of Professor Chapman's anthropology courses and has fallen in love with the discipline, and with university life by extension. They are also exploring their own gender identity, and feeling inspired and liberated by the freedoms and possibilities of living in such a liberal city (their hometown in Wisconsin was repressive, and their parents are loving but very conservative). Vin brings curiosity and enthusiasm to your course that you cherish– class discussions are always more critical and other students appear more engaged thanks to Vin's example. Vin has great ideas, but their writing is rife not only with surface-level errors, but is often conceptually disorganized and has more issues with usage and syntax than you can feasibly "correct." They appear unaware that their thoughtful, nuanced, critical ideas are not "translating" to effective written assignments.

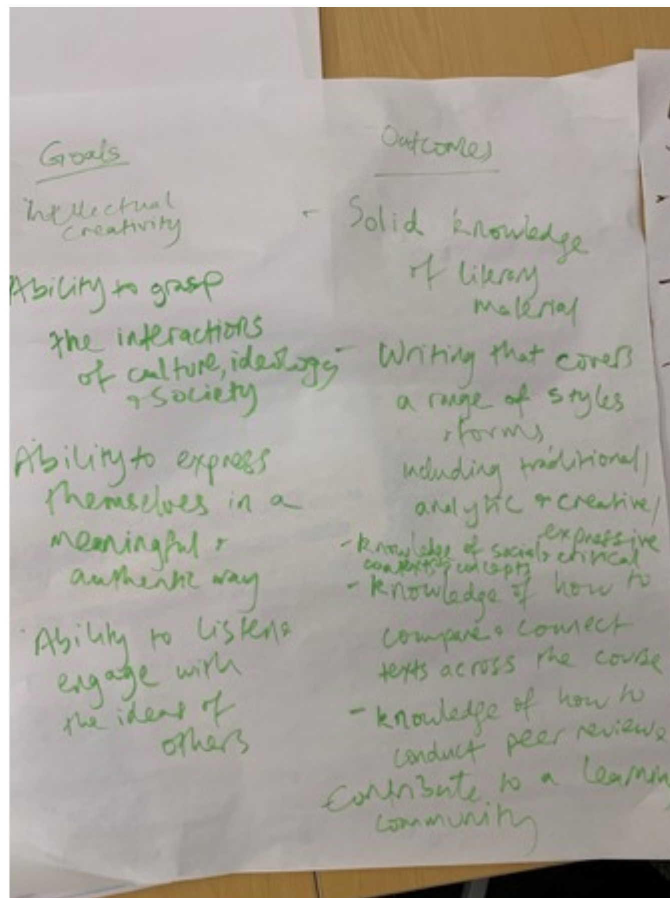
Discussion / Share-Out 12:30-12:50

Consider the work you did with your poster – how do those different modes afford expanded ways of knowing? How do they facilitate greater access to all students who have various ways of learning?

- What did this moment (working in community, brainstorming on poster, zero draft) afford you that a more conventional written or spoken response didn't?
- How does this "work" in your specific context? What does equity look like in your discipline?

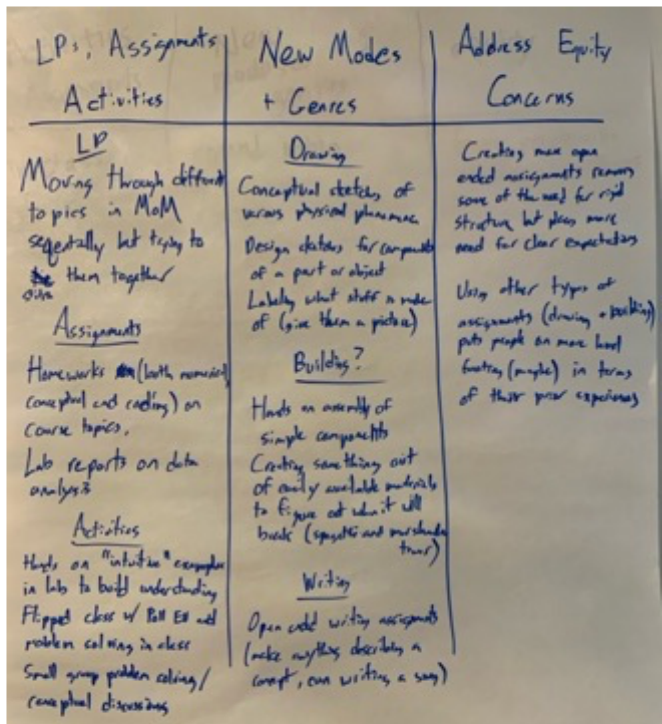
Appendix 7.1

Nora's Poster for Session 7



Goals	Outcomes
intellectual creativity	- Solid knowledge of literary material
ability to grasp the interactions of culture, ideology & society	- Writing that covers a range of styles & forms, including traditional/analytic & creative/expressive
Ability to express themselves in a meaningful & authentic way	- Knowledge of social, critical, contexts & concepts
Ability to listen & engage with the ideas of others	- Knowledge of how to compare & connect texts across the course
	- Knowledge of how to conduct peer review & contribute to a learning community

Nick's Poster for Session 7



LPs, Assignments Activities	**New Modes & Genres**	**Address Equity Concerns**
<u>LP</u> Moving through different topics in MoM sequentially but trying to stich them together	<u>Drawing</u> Conceptual sketches of various physical phenomenon	Creating more open ended assignments removing some of the need for rigid structure to places more need for clear expectations
<u>Assignments</u> Homeworks (both numerical conceptual and coding) on course topics, Lab reports on data analysis	Design datasets for computer of a part of object Labeling what stuff in modes (give them a picture)	Using other types of assignments (drawing & building) puts people on more level footing (maybe) in terms of their prior experiences
<u>Activities</u> Hand on "intuitive" examples in lab to build understanding	<u>Building?</u> Hands on assembly of simple components	
Flipped class w/ Poll Ed and problem solving in class Small group problem solving / conceptual discussions	Creating something out of easily available materials to figure out when it will break (spaghetti and marshmallow tower)	
	<u>Writing</u> Open ended writing assignments (make anything describing a concepts, even writing song)	