What's Going On? Listening to Music, Composing Videos

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Abstract

Based on surveys of 70 students, interviews with 10 of those students, and analysis of 12 PowerPoint music videos those students produced, the authors describe what students hear when they listen to music, and how they use that listening experience to compose videos. The researchers suggest there were three typical patterns for composing -- literal illustrations, associative applications, and background enhancements -- although students also combined these approaches within a single video.

Introduction

The David Byrne-Edward Tufte excerpts in *Wired* magazine in 2003 prompted widespread media discussion about Microsoft's presentation software, PowerPoint. Tufte's "PowerPoint is Evil," an excerpt from his essay, "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint," garnered most of the media attention that fall, in part because his argument seemed more controversial than Byrne's "Learning to Love PowerPoint," and in part because Tufte's short essay is more affordable and accessible than the Byrne excerpt from his large and expensive multimedia work *Envisioning Emotional Epistemological Information*. Byrne's project consists of six PowerPoint music videos, working with stock images and original digital orchestrations, providing a challenging but intriguing model for multimodal composition. For Byrne, the medium was the message, as he demonstrated how the "loud and pushy" software Tufte railed against could be pushed to its limit and become art.

Learning from Byrne, Kevin Brooks used a "PowerPoint Music Video" assignment in the fall of 2003 in the first course of NDSU's two-course, first-year English writing sequence. In his role as Writing Program Director and instructor of new Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), he has gradually helped expand the use of the assignment to twelve instructors in 2005. This paper, undertaken by Brooks and the four first-semester GTAs in 2005 (Michael Tomanek, Rachel Wald, Matthew Warner, and Brianne Wilkening), will focus on the question "what do students hear in a song, and how do they use what they hear?" Our study has taught us quite a bit about how to improve the teaching of the assignment, and we believe our students' descriptions of their processes, their thinking, and their decision-making will be of use to any instructor who wishes to teach "composing with sound," whether through a music video assignment or other multimodal assignments.

Students showed three general strategies for working with music—literal illustrations, associative applications, and background enhancements—but even within those strategies, they took a variety of approaches to the composing process and produced a diverse set of videos. We see the potential for offering some fairly specific composing suggestions drawn largely from the intuitive practices employed by our students.

The scholarly context

Although Brooks developed this assignment quite literally and specifically out of the Tufte-Byrne exchange in *Wired*, it was also influenced by Geoffrey Sirc's *English Composition as a Happening* and "Box Logic," the latter an essay-in-development that Sirc read at North Dakota State in 2002. The assignment was also grounded in the specific scholarship of multimodal composition, and quite literally Anthony Ellertson's essays, "Some Notes on Simulacra Machines," first presented at the same conference at NDSU in 2002 and the more general scholarship of new literacy and new media studies. The music video assignment was not, and still is not, exclusively an assignment about "composing with sound," but this special issue of *Computers and Composition* presented us an opportunity to research and reflect on that specific element of the assignment.

Understanding Sirc's influence is important to understanding this assignment. Some readers will watch the videos produced by our students and will undoubtedly question the absence of critical reflection, perhaps perceive an immaturity of thought behind some of the videos, perhaps even question the seemingly uncritical acceptance of PowerPoint as the primary tool of production for this assignment. But if PowerPoint is a box—constraining, limiting, an acceptable but awkward space in which to deposit one's items—it enables a "box logic" that Sirc describes as a

> grammar which could prove useful in guiding our classroom practice in light of rapidly shifting compositional media: it allows both textual pleasure, as students archive their personal collections of text and imagery, and formal practice in learning the compositional skills that seem increasingly important in contemporary culture. (114)

PowerPoint, when compared with Flash or other "boxes" for composing, allows "an eas[ier] entré into composition, a compelling medium and genre with which to re-arrange textual materials—both original and appropriated—in order to have those materials speak the student's own voice and concerns" ("Box Logic" 113). Students, as we will explain, become immersed in the project, become what Sirc calls "passionate collectors" and they "work with the lived texts of desire (rather than, say, the middlebrow academia of a Jane Tompkins for Mary Louise Pratt)" ("Box Logic" 117). They show their videos to friends and family members, and some imagine themselves doing another video for special occasions or just as a form of self-expression: "life is long, college is short; do we teach to life or college?" ("Box Logic" 113).

Having just tried to justify the lack of critical edge to some of the video products, we must also note that we expected and saw quite a bit of intellectual and technical work going on within the video production process, as well as tremendous student commitment and effort. The emerging scholarship on multimodal composition consistently makes

these same points about engagement and learning. Anthony Ellertson, drawing on interviews with three students who had produced argumentative videos (distinct from our music video assignment) with Flash, says "My experience in teaching Flash is that I have to tell my students to stop trying new things with the program rather than coaxing them to learn it" ("Some Thoughts"). Within the student sections of his webtext, Ellertson's students describe sophisticated compositional techniques, they talk about their awareness of audience, and they explain what they learned about the composition of new media—their own and others. They also reflect on the role music played to give their videos: Travis used a dance song to give his video a beat, Brandon used the refrain from Buffalo Springfields' "For What It's Worth" to re-enforce a central theme in his post 9/11 video ("Stop children, what's that sound? Everybody look what's going down"), and Alex used The Smashing Pumpkin's "Bullet with Butterfly Wings" to express rage and angst in another post 9/11 video. While Ellertson does not provide extensive analysis of how each student used sound and music, he does provide a clear assessment of what he thinks happens when students compose with sound and in new media: "When students can take a song that has meant something to them and combine it with text and images in a way that repurposes the media to deliver a personal message, something powerful has been put into their hands" ("Some Thoughts").

Brooks was initially drawn to the PowerPoint music video assignment, then, because of what he saw in Ellertson's students, what he heard in Sirc's "Box Logic" and other riffs, and what he saw and heard in Byrne's EEEI. But he also believed his students could learn quite a bit about composing and rhetoric, and he believed that students' engagement with new media might also lead to stronger print-based work based on a new literacy or new media experiment. Other scholars have begun to articulate the learning potential of these non-traditional assignments. Jody Shipka concludes her essay on multimodal composing by listing 13 ways in which her assignments can help students meet the WPA Outcomes for composition courses (302). James Paul Gee has generated 36 learning principles potentially found in video games (207-12). A music video assignment used in a composition class is not obviously an intellectually or technically demanding task; our first-year students initially thought the video would only take a few hours to complete, and the new GTAs teaching the assignment were skeptical of its value and rigor. Readers of this essay might immediately see or perceive the intellectual and technical demands of this assignment, but as the WIDE Collective points out in their Kairos webtext, "Why Teach Digital Writing," those of us who teach digital writing also have to be able to communicate and document those challenges. We hope that this study will add to the growing body of literature that describes, documents, and articulates the challenges and learning opportunities in digital compositions and writing new media.

As we and others continue this kind of classroom and assignment-based research, it is going to be important to show and/or talk about the full range of compositions produced to better understand what students are capable of doing and what expectations we as instructors should have for these new media products. Ellertson acknowledges that he interviewed the three students who produced the most sophisticated videos in his class. We also need to remember that the awkward and incomplete multimodal compositions

might still be a positive learning experience. We fall back into the logic of modernist, essayist composition if we can only value the well-wrought urn.

Byrne and Tufte, Sirc, and Ellertson most directly influenced the genesis and development of this assignment, but instructors at NDSU typically teach the music video in the context of a whole unit on "new literacy." The music video assignment is a hands-on exploration and experimentation in developing new literacy skills and products, followed by a print-based commentary or proposal that asks students to enter the ongoing discussion about new literacy. Students are asked to read and understand some of the popular literature on this topic, stretching back to 1990s articles--Seymour Papert's "The Obsolete Skill Set"; Melvin Levinson's "Needed: A New Literacy"; Alice Yucht's "Strategy: New Literacy Skills Needed"--up through more recent popular calls for and concerns about new literacy (the Byrne-Tufte debate and Sarah Armstrong and David Warlick's "The New Literacy"). Students are also introduced to the distinction between surface web and deep web (database) searching and are asked to find additional voices in the new literacy conversation. We use material from these essays to emphasize the relevance and pertinence of composing music videos in a composition class—Papert rails against the "obsolete skill set," Levinson advocates a broadened definition of reading and writing to include all kinds of text and all kinds of compositions, Yucht adds "aRt, Reasoning, and Respect" to the traditional three "Rs," and Armstrong and Warlick replace the three Rs with the four Es: exposing knowledge, employing information, expressing ideas compellingly, and ethics. Students are encouraged to draw on their experience composing the music video as they enter into this conversation about new literacy.

The institutional context

The PowerPoint music video assignment is used by instructors at NDSU as the first part of a unit about new literacy. This unit is typically the third unit in the English 110 course, and English 110 is the first course in a two-course composition sequence. NDSU uses only minimal placement procedures, so most first-year students are enrolled in English 110, and students' experiences and abilities are diverse. The instructors who teach the music video assignment also tend to work with music and popular culture as subject matter throughout the course, and the five teacher-researchers identified their course theme as "writing about and with music."

When students start the assignment, however, they have done little or no multimodal composing in class. They may have inserted an image of a musician or band when completing a review, or they may have inserted a personal photo or two into their memoir, but they have not yet worked with mp3 or other sound files in class, and they have not worked with software other than word processing software. The first-year composition program's overriding philosophy is defined as a "genre-based rhetorical approach," so when students encounter the new-to-the-class, but familiar-to-them genre of music video, we instructors do hope that students see that their multimodal composing task will include understanding and working with generic conventions.

We also provided a set of models (standard for our approach) of PowerPoint videos, acknowledging that students are not familiar with how the genre of music video can be remediated to PowerPoint. Three of the five teacher-researchers showed one of David Byrne's videos from EEEI, and all of us showed a set of three videos produced by students in 2004. We chose the three student models because they represented different sub-genres of music videos, and the authors of these videos used different techniques, producing very different products.

1. A traditional music video: animated gifs of The Beatles performing a Death Cab For Cutie song. The video is very clean in its design, making use of bold reds and yellows, a variety of moving shapes, and text to support the chorus, in addition to the animated gifs.
2. A trip video: a school trip to France illustrated primarily with personal photos, set to a French pop song. Most slides were layered with photos and included information about the pictures—a vacation slideshow with textual rather than verbal narration.
3. A conceptual video: a series of images of women, ranging from Hillary Rodham Clinton and Janet Reno to Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears, set to Bette Midler's "I am Beautiful." The student author offered advice to Britney Spears and the other popular culture figures like "Find your Light," and in doing so, the video seemed to imply that the public / political figures are the beautiful ones, and the performers seek after a fleeting beauty.

All three of the videos made use of a full song, a feature that caused some frustration and confusion in 2005. The Technology Learning Center on campus, which had provided support for the project in 2003 and 2004, asked us to be more cautious with fair use guidelines in 2005, so we asked student to use one of the following approaches.

a) A song in the public domain and or a song that was available under an appropriate Creative Commons License.
b) A song the student received permission to use from the artist or copyright holder.
c) Thirty-second loops or splices, in accordance with fair use guidelines.
d) A song of their own creation—an mp3 from their own band, a song created in Garage Band or other electronic composing software, or other unique compositions for which they would be the copyright holder, albeit an unregistered copyright holder.

This complication of the assignment turned out to create a much richer learning experience for all involved, as we will elaborate below. We provided students with an extensive list of websites that provide free, public domain images, and we gave students a similar list of links to public domain / Creative Commons mp3 or WAV files. We asked them to storyboard their video and seek feedback (emulating the peer review process used throughout the semester), and we asked them to read the chapter on Visual Communication in our program's textbook, John Trimbur's *Call to Write*, Brief 3rd Edition, and apply the four basic gestalt principles defined in that chapter.

The four GTAs arranged to have a Student Technology Worker from the Technology Learning Center provide a 50-minute presentation on the advanced features of PowerPoint relevant to this assignment. Students were given two or three class periods in which they could get trouble-shooting help from their instructor or go to the Technology Learning Center to work with Sound Forge (digital audio editing software produced by Sony and only available in the TLC), or scanning, or photo editing. In the new-literacy spirit of do-it-yourself learning, the teacher-researchers tried to create the kinds of guides and support conditions that would allow students to be creative, independent learners.

Danielle Nicole DeVoss, Ellen Cushman and Jeffery T. Grabill have documented the challenges of doing multimodal compositions within an infrastructure than cannot support such work, and as Brooks encouraged wider use of the assignment, he realized the various institutional and technological constraints on such an assignment. NDSU does not have a site license for Flash in the public clusters, so following Anthony Ellertson's lead and teaching music videos through Flash was out of the question. NDSU currently maintains only two Mac clusters, so using iMovie for over 400 students was also out of the question. In 2005, we taxed the Technology Learning Center staff to their limit with 12 sections using the assignment, and we will have to determine if this assignment can be expanded any further. One student we interviewed said he felt constrained by PowerPoint's limitations, and a few students simply went ahead and used Windows MovieMaker because they had access to it, but for infrastructure and pedagogical reasons, we will continue to ask students to compose their music video with PowerPoint.

Finally, it is important to know that the GTAs at NDSU are all provided with Dell 505 laptops, enabling them to easily work with the 44 CDs their students turn in to complete this assignment. If the GTAs had to share a single office computer with a 5:1 GTA-to-computer ratio, the ratio our department had in the fall of 2003, this assignment would become a burden to view, grade, and respond.

Research description

All five teacher-researchers completed our institution's Institutional Review Board training, and we distributed a two-page Informed Consent document on the day the assignment was introduced. The document explained our research to our students, and it asked them to sign and return the document if they would be willing to participate in the study. We received only 70 signed Informed Consent documents out of a possible 207; we think some students might have thought that they would not have to follow the fair use guidelines if they did not sign the Informed Consent. Despite the low return rate, we did not want to pressure or pursue students, in accordance with our own guidelines to keep the research non-intrusive; participation in the study could not result in a reward for students, nor did we want students to think that non-participation would result in some form of punishment or grade reduction.

We distributed hard copies of a pre-assignment and post-assignment survey to those willing to participate, although we have not drawn from those surveys as extensively as

we initially planned. We each compiled the survey results from our own sections of English 110, and then shared those results on our project wiki. The survey results give us the big picture: what kinds of videos students produced, how they handled the music, what they heard in the music, their experience using music in other projects, their time commitment to this project, their composing processes, their use of models, their knowledge of copyright, what they learned about writing from composing a video, what they learned in general, and their overall recommendation for us.

Each teacher-researcher identified three students from his/her class who might be willing to participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview; we identified students who showed a range of commitment and interest in the assignment, rather than just interview the students who really excelled on the assignment. Of the 15 we invited to be interviewed, 11 made arrangements to meet with us and follow through. We also made sure that we did not interview our own students, giving students (we hoped) an opportunity to speak more freely about their frustrations, concerns, and problems with the assignment. We transcribed the interviews and shared them with each other after the semester was completed. The interviews gave us a more detailed look into the composing process of 11 students, the kind of intellectual and technical challenge some students saw in the assignment, the stories behind some of these videos, what they have done with their products, and what some students intend to do with their new skills. The interviews were able to give us a clearer sense of what students heard in the music they chose than any of the survey questions we had asked, so we have drawn extensively on those interviews and minimally on the surveys. We ended up not using the video of one student who was interviewed, and we ended up including two videos from students who were not interviewed, hence the totals we report in the abstract: 10 students interviewed, 12 videos analyzed closely.

We collectively viewed sample videos to get a sense of what students outside of our classes did with the assignment, and we also used these common viewings to help us agree on categorizations for the videos. In synthesizing and shaping the results we report on and analyze, we have not simply reported what students told us in their interviews; we have also interpreted and made some judgments about the degree of difficulty and level of execution in videos. We have tried to limit those kinds of assessments, but we also have to acknowledge that our hermeneutic strategies are not neutral. Our answers to the questions, "What do students hear in a song, and how do they apply that knowledge in their videos?" are derived from what we think is a productive mix of student reflection through surveys and interviews, and teacher-researcher analysis of final products based on extensive viewings of 200 videos, and intensive viewing of 12.

What's going on? Listening to music, composing videos

If compositionists are increasingly going to develop assignments that ask students to compose with sound, we need to understand what students hear in music (and other sounds), and how they might work with those songs and sounds. Just as we all struggle to encourage and help students to read carefully, new media composition instructors might have to understand what it means to listen carefully or listen creatively. We also

want to know what we should teach about listening. We offered our students the very general advice that a song could either shape the music video or the song could function as support to a textual-visual presentation, but going into the assignment, we had no better sense of how students listen to songs and use music.

We found that our general suggestions were somewhat useful, but our surveys and interviews revealed a wide range of strategies for listening actively and working with lyrics, stories, beats, themes, and moods. Of the 70 students who participated in the study, we found that 11 students produced videos that literally or very closely illustrated the lyrics of a song or songs, 21 produced videos that we identified as a loose, associative application of a song, and 38 used songs to set the mood or provide a background enhancement for their video. See Table 1 for elaborations on these categories.

TABLE 1: Three general uses of songs and music.

Use of music and explanation	**Number of Uses**	**Examples**
Close, literal illustrations of songs. Lyrics and images are closely co-ordinated. The images typically reinforce the lyrics, but some videos add humor or have personal significance.	11	Chris Ellefson, "A Musical Presentation." Amanda Houkum, "You're My Little Girl."
Associative applications of music. Images and text are related to the song's lyrics, but the video maker had his or her own story or point to make beyond simply illustrating the song.	21	Brooke Jameson, "Fire" Stephanie Midgarden, "Eating Disorders."
Background enhancements. The music, often instrumental, supports the video's mood or tone, but does not shape or direct the video	38	Kellie Aldrich, "The Human Spirit." Destinee Zamzow, "Costa Rica."

In trying to write about these videos and how the students used sound, we also realized that some videos used such a mix of strategies that the video should probably be labeled "mixed methods." We didn't account for this category as we classified the 70 videos, but we have included one clear example of a mixed method approach in our gallery, Nathan Kroh's "American Idiot." Some of the other videos could be described as mixed methods as well, but for the purposes of this study, all videos, including Kroh's, have been categorized as literal illustration, associative application, or background enhancement.

Although we are focusing on the question of "what do students hear in a song, and how do they apply what they hear?" we should also emphasize again that the models we showed our students in the fall of 2005 were models that we labeled by genre (traditional music video, trip video, conceptual video), rather than by use of music. These examples implicitly gave the 2005 students different models for how to use music, but we had not yet formulated the terms of literal illustration, associative application, background enhancement, or mixed methods. It is only based on our study of 70 videos, and our interviews with 10 of those students, that we have been able to formulate some clear

ideas on what students hear in a song, and how they apply that knowledge.

Literal illustrations of music

The literal illustration of music in a video, particularly the illustration of lyrics, is perhaps the most obvious and easiest way for a student to approach the listening and composing tasks of this music video assignment, but from our perspective as teachers, it also seemed the most simplistic and problematic. Madeleine Sorapure has identified literal illustrations as one of the two most common problems she sees in her students work: "some students seem inclined to match modes, so that, for instance, a Flash project will have a song playing in the background while on the screen the lyrics of the song appear along with images depicting exactly what the lyrics say." What we found from our analysis is that surprisingly few of the videos matched modes—only 11 of 70—and what we found from the interviews is that even students who chose this approach did not do so simply in order to complete the assignment quickly and easily. Two of the three we interviewed listened carefully to a variety of songs before settling on their approach, and all of them found the interpretive, compositional, and technical components of the assignment to be challenging. While literal illustrations of a song's lyrics does not seem to take advantage of the kinds of layering of meaning, the kinds of "productive tensions" (Sorapure) possible in new media, our research suggests that the intellectual and technical demands are not significantly different from the other approaches—associative applications and background enhancements—we have identified, and when done well, literal illustrations of music can produce engaging and meaningful multimodal compositions.

One way in which literal illustrations can become challenging as an approach to content and as a technical composition is through the splicing together of multiple songs to create a coherent whole. Chris Ellefson closely illustrated lyrics from five different songs in a project he called "A Musical Presentation." In the first section of this video, when Modest Mouse sings "walked away to another place," Ellefson splits the screen and shows people walking, backs to the camera; when Death Cab for Cutie sings, "I opened my eyes," Ellefson shows an extreme close-up of a pair of eyes; when Cold Play sings, "In a haze, in a stormy haze," he shows the word "haze," and then a picture of a massive lightening storm. Ellefson also uses two instrumental-only sections in the video, the first "Passenger Seat" by Death Cab for Cutie in which he shows a number of pictures of cars and roads, and "I Heard You Looking" by Yo La Tango that he illustrates with panoramic shots of the universe, natural environments, and some cityscapes.

He explained his process of listening as he was preparing for the assignment. "I was listening to my iPod Shuffle and things were coming through and it was like, oh this would be a good song to use. I could find images that could illustrate this. That was how I selected those." He admitted in his interview that his process was "pretty random," but he also said that in making a video "you interpret things like lyrics and songs and by doing that you can find images and things to go with the music and try to make it go to the song. You're trying to communicate things without text." Ellefson also said that he thought about making an abstract video, but he decided to illustrate the songs literally because he thought that "people would think that would be neat [and because] I didn't

want them thinking I was really really weird." As experienced viewers of text and video, teachers may prefer the complexity of associative applications, or even the quirky abstractness of David Byrne's EEEI PowerPoint compositions, but as teachers of rhetoric, we can admire Ellefson's sense of audience and desire to establish a specific ethos.

Chris Ellefson also explained in the interview that he was a very active music collector, and had bought a lot of music in the last four years, giving him easy access to a large music collection he could work with. Kyle Johnson, who composed a video called "Garth Brooks Mixture," said in his interview that he didn't listen to a lot of music and the Garth Brooks CD from which he pulled all three musical clips was one of the only CDs he owned. While a small collection of music does not necessitate a literal illustration approach to this assignment, it seems like a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that students who are interested in and invested in music might hear and see more possibilities in a song, and more possible combinations of songs, than casual listeners. Johnson's video is the kind of literal illustration that most teachers would probably see as problematic, but knowing Johnson's limited interest in music helps explain his approach.

He used clip-art images to closely illustrate three Garth Brooks clips, "Thunder Rolls," "Two Pina Coladas," and "The River." When Brooks sings of the "city's looking like a ghost town," the screen shows clip art images of ghosts; when Brooks sings about thunder, Johnson employed clip-art images of clouds and lightning; when Brooks sings of Pina Coladas, Johnson employed clip-art images of Pina Coladas. Even in the role of re-mixer or new media composer, Johnson does not try to add his own point of view or message to the videos. Based on the clip art image of a large #1 (i.e. Garth Brooks is #1) and the two thumbs-up that appear on the first screen, this video can be understood as a celebration or a fan's video. He described his process in an interview:

> I just listened to the whole song and tried to figure out what 30 second clips I could use out of them and then the images I just found on the Internet and used what the song was talking about—like the pina coladas I just found a few of those and the hands and stuff. And I guess the organization went, well, "The River" is my favorite song, so I put that first, and next would come "The Thunder Rolls," then "Two Pina Coladas," so I put it in the order of my favorites.

He told Michael Tomanek that he found the assignment to be technically and intellectually challenging, and while this particular video does not show a lot of rhetorical awareness or compositional experimentation, Johnson also said that he would only add music to future PowerPoint presentations "if it helped what I was trying to get across." As a first-time video maker and not much of a music fan, it seems that the close, literal illustration of three Garth Brooks clips provided Johnson with some guidance for working in a new and unfamiliar genre, composing with materials that were not familiar to him.

Literal illustrations of songs tends to result in what Sorapure calls "leveling of the modes," which limits the use of "productive tensions" that tend to make new media

composition interesting. Literal illustrations also seem, on the surface, to require the least amount of thought, planning, and imagination. Amanda Houkom, however, described a methodical and sophisticated composing process in which she printed off the lyrics to "You're My Little Girl" by Go Fish, and then line-by-line looked for ways to illustrate the lyrics for her video, also titled "You're My Little Girl". Houkom described her composing process as one in which translating the song into video heightened her understanding of the song and challenged her to think of ways to illustrate abstract concepts:

> I printed it out. I knew when I thought of the song, "ohh, that's a perfect song, because you know there are pictures of little girls out there, cuuute little girls, and I was like "this is going to be the cutest video in the world. just, yeaa, happy little girls!" Then I printed it out and I started writing it out, and I realized "this is a little darker than I thought" because the verses are all sad, but the chorus is happy. I think it balanced out. I had trouble with some of them. How do you find a picture of a neglectful father? How do you illustrate that somebody is not there when they should be?

She went on to describe her search for the right image to illustrate these lyrics, which included finding "the perfect" video of hands sliding down prison bars that she could have purchased for $175, but she settled on a still image of a man in prison. Amanda did end up purchasing eight photos for $1 each; she was intent on not just settling for adequate images to illustrate this song that had so much meaning for her and her family.

> [T]his song ["You're My Little Girl" by Go Fish] is very important to me because my uncle used to sing it to my cousin, when she was a little girl, and she died when she was 2. My uncle and my cousin were in a train accident, and they both died. And this band actually came and played at the benefit for the son, for the family, they came and played this song for them. And the little girl at the end of the video is my cousin, the last picture with the butterfly is my cousin. We actually refer to this song as Dani's song.

Her image choices led to a video that, for most viewers, seems quite literal, although she also used pacing and timing strategies that make even this literal video a demanding and engaging viewing experience. She uses many more images per slide than Ellefson, for example, and in her interview, she articulated a clear sense of how to use literal illustrations by off-setting the image and lyrics slightly to increase the dramatic effect: "I designed it [the typical slide] so that the picture would come up—you would see these dramatic, forceful pictures, and then you would hear the words, and I thought that made the video more dramatic, more emotional." She attributed her understanding of how to use music for dramatic and emotional impact to many years of singing and choir participation. She also used no text, avoiding the excessively literal illustration of hearing and seeing specific lyrics. She said "I thought about [using text], but . . . I realized that when I saw videos with text in them, they looked cheesy. Even on MTV, it looks stupid."

Of these three videos, we see in Houkom's process and product a more sophisticated approach to the assignment than we see in Ellefson's and Johnson's videos, but all three students listened closely to the music they worked with, and they demonstrated—albeit to various degrees—the kind of passionate collecting that Sirc looks for in his students and that we hoped to see in our students. While the excessively literal illustrations of songs, in which the text of lyrics accompanies the song itself, make little use of the layering of meaning that new media can support so well, we also found that literal illustrations like Houkom's serious video are as successful in understanding the medium and multimodal composition as any of the 70 videos we viewed and categorized. She avoided the excessively literal strategy of putting the lyrics in the video as text, she illustrates lyrics with multiple images rather than a single image, and she approached each slide with a sense of how to get the most emotional impact out of the timing and arrangement of images, music, and lyrics. Particularly successful literal videos might require that students can hear and recognize interesting music and lyrics—a great discussion point for a brainstorming session prior to the assignment—and then develop and employ a repertoire of composing techniques that can result in a visually sophisticated video.

Associative applications of music

What we are calling associative applications of music took on quite a few forms, but generally this use of music means that students understood the meaning of a song or songs—they understood lyrics, messages, and even moods—but students worked with their own text and image choices to create a video product with their own clearly expressed meaning. Drawing on Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics, we suggest the final new media composition elements are "inter-dependent, where words [lyrics] and pictures [images and text supplied by students] go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone" (155). We classified 21 of the 70 videos as predominantly associative in their application of music. They are clearly distinct from the literal illustrations in which a song's lyrics drive the video's image and text selections, and associative applications are distinct from the use of background music in videos in which the video maker's own story or experience shapes the video's content. As a category, associative applications consistently embrace the kind of thinking and compositional skills writing teachers tend to value—a good understanding of source material combined with one's personal message or argument, avoidance of reliance on source text, and avoidance of superficial treatment of sources as mere background information. This analogy to the research paper, however, does not confine associative applications to serious topics, although three of our four featured videos do strike a serious tone.

Brooke Jameson started her video, "Fire," by literally illustrating the first verse and chorus of Jo Dee Messena's song of the same title, but then she moved away from that approach based on her evaluation of the song's lyrics and her desire to put her own meaning into the video. She said, "I could've kept going along with the song, but I didn't like the lyrics of the second verse as much as the first." After more or less literally illustrating the first verse and chorus she started to use inspirational quotations from Ghandi, Garth Brooks, Jonathan Winters, and this one from Eleanor Roosevelt: "You must do the thing you cannot do." Jameson explained that she wanted the video to be

motivational and the song was easy to work with because "it had . . . the concept I wanted to work with." She also mentioned that she was a percussionist in high school band and rarely pays attention to lyrics, but this assignment got her to listen carefully, work with the lyrics, and co-ordinate the music, images, and concepts she wanted to work with. Jameson's transition from the literal to associative approach highlights one of the ways in which an associative application can work closely with the overall theme of song but give the student-composer room to shape her own message.

Wyatt Brossard's video "Hope and Adversity: Finding Hope in Adversity" splices five songs, three that lyrically and musically emphasize adversity, two that emphasize hope.

> I started out with adversity, like the song by The David Crouter Band ["End of October"] is kind of about adversity, and I showed some poverty situations and then I went to a different section about 9/11 and showed some pictures of the chaos that occurred on that day [set to Green Day's "When September Ends,"] and then Hurricane Katrina [set to "I Can Only Imagine" by Mercy Me]. And so that was three of them, adversity.

Brossart explained in the interview that he initially had intended to illustrate Alabama's "Angels Among Us" with pictures from the Iraq War, but because he did not get copyright permission from them, and because he did not actually own that Alabama song, he took the approach of splicing together five songs. He said "I still kind of used the same thing [concept] except I added the adversity in there too." What Brossart seemed to be listening for in music was not specific lyrics he could illustrate, but concepts from the songs as a whole that he could apply to his own composition.

Some students heard both lyrical and musical relevance in songs that they then adapted to tell their own story. Stephanie Midgarden used two songs by Christina Aguilera that are about finding inner beauty and resisting external pressures to be perfect, or to be somebody other than who you are. Her video entitled "Eating Disorders" is more specific in its message than Aguilera's songs; she incorporated images of unnaturally thin models and women standing on scales and looking in mirrors saying, "I'm too fat," "My nose is too big," My arms are too flabby." Midgarden said, "I tried to set the tone for some let downs because my PowerPoint was not necessarily a happy one. Secondly, I set the mood as dramatic. The story was to get the message across which was that eating disorders are out there, and it's not all about the skinny disorders either." Rather than use a simply instrumental background, Midgarden's choice of Aguilera's songs adds a second layer, a more general but familiar message to find your inner beauty, to the final video.

One of the model videos we shared with our students was a music video documenting a trip to France that used a French pop song as background music—the song set the mood and tone, but did not add to the video conceptually, at least for our non-French speaking students. But Beky Morgan's video, "Prerogative to Have a Little Fun," showed us ways in which songs that are not associated with the time or place of the trip could be applied. In making choices about her musical selection, Morgan drew on the lyrics of specific songs to illustrate particular events on her trip to France—moving the songs from a

potential background role into an inter-dependent relationship with the images. The video opens with individual pictures of her and her traveling companions posing and voguing, set to Bette Midler's "I'm Beautiful," followed by pictures of them dancing with attractive young men at a nightclub set to The Weather Girls' "It's Raining Men," and another section of photos from a day at the beach, including some teasing toplessness, set to Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun." This video is a fascinating compilation of popular culture—from the voguing poses to the National Lampoon Vacation motifs to the appropriation of the songs themselves—all illustrating what was also presumably an educational and enriching vacation.

This kind of MTV-like product, which also happens to have a number of spelling errors and a misattribution of Madonna as the artist behind "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," perhaps worries some instructors about where students will take their new media compositions. But Morgan also said in the interview that she spent 40 hours on the video, that she was going to give a copy to her trip-mates, and that she hoped to do more videos like this one for her family. In the context of Sirc's "Box Logic" and the notion that "college is short, life is long," Morgan seems to have learned a genre that she can imagine a use for beyond the classroom. And perhaps also in the spirit of Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad is Good for You*, this "bad" video seems to have been "good" for the student in that it engaged her intellectually and technically and it resulted in a product she is proud of.

Associative applications of songs and lyrics may have the most potential to encourage the kinds of compositional skills we are often trying to teach in first-year composition: understand a source or a song, but apply it in a way that supports or extends your argument or point. Associative applications that rely on splicing together songs add another dimension: understanding sources, ordering and synthesizing sources, and creating a coherent whole out of disparate parts. We might see a certain kind of disconnection in the applications of certain songs, and we might wish our students would take on more substantial subjects, but part of being a generous reader, viewer, and listener to new media compositions, "no matter how awkward-looking or-sounding" as Anne Wysocki suggests (23), might involve seeing and hearing the effort and joy that goes into such compositions.

Background music as enhancement

Of the 70 videos considered for this study, just over half (38) used music in a way that we considered to be primarily background enhancements for a story, argument, or experience that the student composer wanted to express visually and textually. By "background enhancement" we mean that the music and/or lyrics did not shape or direct the video's argument, narrative, or story, but instead helped create or re-enforce a mood. Students could have found any old song and plopped it into PowerPoint, then illustrated that song closely or loosely, without having to think much about the relationship between the music, lyrics, and what they were producing visually. But in conducting our interviews, we found that students who used what we are calling background music had well-considered, thoughtful reasons for why they chose the music they did, and what its role

would be as background music. They showed strong instincts for what it means to compose with sound, and how to compose with background music.

Kellie Aldrich knew that she wanted to develop a video on the power of "The Human Spirit," and then she went looking and listening for a song to support her concept. She found "Concerto for Two Violins in A-minor" by J.S. Bach in one of the public domain sites we recommended. "I wanted something that was upbeat and lively--kind of with a punch. I was trying to show the positive aspect of the human spirit. You know, the liveliness of it. And the power of life and what people can do." Each slide in the video illustrates a different power: the power of motivation illustrated with athletes and students graduating; the power of courage illustrated with Rosa Parks and images of exploration; the power of dreams illustrated by Martin Luther King Jr., a moon walk, and what appears to be a Mount Everest climbing team, etc. Because the music functions as a background enhancement, Aldrich did not have to match up images or themes with lyrics, drawing instead on its tempo and, we would add, its cultural capital as classical music. The technical execution of such an approach may not be as demanding as some of the literal illustrations or associative applications, but the careful musical selection and thoughtful project as a whole results in a strong composition. Bach plays in the background, a lively piece of music that expresses the power of creativity and the human spirit in its own right, enhancing the visual and textual messages Aldrich has assembled.

Erich Wilkerson, who said in the interview that he listens to classical music while doing homework, spliced six pieces of classical music, including the theme to "2001: A Space Odyssey" to create clear sections or epochs throughout his ambitious video, "History of the World." When asked how important it was to him, using a scale of 1 to 10 (not important to very important), Wilkerson said "10, because I had nice images . . . okay, that tells a nice story, but if I add music to it I feel that it makes the audience feel what you're trying to convey a lot better." He went on to say that working with the music was the most challenging aspect of the assignment for him "because you have to find the right music for the right image and the right mood you want to set up to tell the point or the idea you are trying to confer." Wilkerson, who identified himself as a PowerPoint expert, also commented on the technical difficulty of working with sound: "The only thing that caused me trouble was doing the timing for the music because the slide timings were a little bit off. Then when I attached the music to it I had to splice each part to one big thing instead of attaching it to each slide because then it would start off, so that was one of the more difficult things." Wilkerson's project and reflections show us that a student composer's use of background music can involve careful selection, arrangement, and co-ordination of sound with images and text, and that the technical demands of such composing can provide an appropriate challenge even for a student with advanced software skills.

A less ambitious approach to background music can be seen and heard in Krista Gullickson's video, "Free Falling," about the day she went skydiving, set to the chorus of Tom Petty's "Free Falling." This use of background music enhances the central theme of the video, but because the chorus is limited in its lyrical content, because it simply repeats, and because it is pulled from a song that is about bad boys breaking good girls'

hearts, the effect seems adequate, but not as interesting as the choices Aldrich and Wilkerson made. Gullickson looped the chorus to stay within fair use guidelines and to extract the meaning she wanted from the song "I'm free, free falling," but she did not explore other musical options that might have supported her narrative throughout. For example, "Free Falling" enhances the actual skydiving slides, but other songs and lyrics might have helped her tell the story of getting ready, and might have expressed the exhilaration she undoubtedly felt after the dive. We were not able to arrange an interview with Krista, but in her pre- and post-assignment surveys she was clear about the fact that she would be using "Free Falling" only as a "backdrop" to complement the slides.

Destinee Zamzow made a video to illustrate a school trip to Costa Rica, and unlike Beky Morgan's associative application of American pop songs to events on her trip to France (discussed in the associative applications section of this webtext), Zamzow told us that she chose "songs from artists that were big there:" three songs by Sean Paul and one song by Shakira, all with strong Latin American sounds and beat. Not having to closely match lyrics and images, and not having to build a particular theme or point within the video, did allow for Zamzow to produce a fully developed, nicely executed video. But perhaps because the assignment didn't provide her with much challenge, she also gave the assignment a luke-warm evaluation. Zamzow said "I wasn't really challenged intellectually or technically by the assignment; . . . I don't know if I really learned anything from this assignment." Some uses of music as background probably offers the path of least resistance for this assignment, but background music, carefully chosen, and especially when spliced, can be an integral and sophisticated part of composing with sound.

While Wilkerson demonstrated one of the most elaborate and sophisticated uses of music from among the 70 participants, Aldrich, Gullickson, and Zamzow made less interesting, but still appropriate choices for their subject matter. Aldrich's musical selection of Bach supports her celebration of the human spirit video, but the use of a single mp3 file does simplify the assignment and turns more of the composition's control over to the musical artist, rather than asserting control through splicing. Gullickson and Zamzow both had strong narratives to tell of a single day's adventure and an extended trip. Gullickson's loop re-iterates the theme of the skydiving adventure, although the use of a single loop removed from the context of the song itself adds less to the video than Zamzow's four spliced musical choices that work on what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin would call the "logic of immediacy" (21-31). Zamzow's musical choices help re-create the trip within the limitations of the medium and genre, while Gullickson's loop just emphasizes the central theme of her video, and had no other connection to the event.

The use of background music in this music video assignment, and other multimodal compositions, seems initially to present minimal challenge and perhaps even less careful listening than a close, literal illustration of a song's lyrics. What we found, however, was a range of approaches, from the simple single loop to the elaborate multi-song splice, and in our interviews we heard our students articulate clear and thoughtful reasons for why they chose their background music. Other students have reported similar, careful consideration. In the "Scholarly Context" section of this webtext, we summarized the use

of music in three videos produced by Anthony's Ellertson's student. Cheryl Ball's student, Hillary Cook, who is featured in "Reading the Text: Remediating the Text," describes her careful selection of the Enya song "Storms in Africa:" "[it] kept the melancholic tone in the beginning but got to a climax right as the word 'hope' appeared at the end [of her video poem]. I tried to time it this way on purpose, to emphasize that though we all encounter rough times, we can't lose hope for the future." Although Ball initially tried to dissuade Cook from using Enya, Ball comes to see and hear that "Storms of Africa" is indeed a "strong addition to the movement and feel—and purpose—of the text." Students in various courses working on various multimodal compositions, consistently articulate specific reasons for why they make the compositional choices they do. The more we teacher-researchers can learn from our students and describe their choices, the greater the range of options we will be able to suggest to future students, and the more informed their future choices will be.

Mixed methods

In suggesting these three approaches to composing with sound—literal illustrations of songs, associative applications, and background enhancements—we are describing a continuum of strategies in which the song moves from central, guiding role in a video to background actor. These are by no means hard and fast categories. Within each category, we describe a range of approaches, from Chris Ellefson's quite literal illustration of lyrics like "In a stormy haze" with images of storms and the word "haze," to Amanda Houkom's more evocative, yet still literal, "You're My Little Girl." Brooke Jameson's video starts out as a literal illustration of the first verse of Jo Dee Messina's "Fire," but the video evolves into an associative application, as Jameson continued to work with the theme of "Fire," but added her own significant content. Videos that primarily employ music as a background enhancement range from a single 30-second loop playing multiple times in order to re-enforce a theme, as in Krista Gullickson's "Free Falling," to Erich Wilkerson's multi-spliced "History of the World." The one video in our gallery we have not discussed elsewhere illustrates just how mixed and porous these categories can be. Note, all PowerPoint video shows must be downloaded rather than clicking on the following links.

We initially labeled Nathan Kroh's "American Idiot" as a "literal music video" (i.e., his is one of the 11 we counted as literal in Table 1) because the process he described in his interview made it sound like his approach to the assignment was a literal illustrations of lyrics. He explained that he worked largely from memory of song lyrics: "I didn't pick songs I had a deep love for, I just picked lyrics that I could work with and act out literally. I was just going for funny." Kroh said that he knew Queen's lyrics, "I want to ride my bicycle," so he decided to use that song and illustrate it with pictures of himself on a motorcycle, which in-and-of itself is not a very faithful literal interpretation, but seems to have been close enough for his purpose. "Literal," for Kroh, can be interpreted loosely.

What we see in Kroh's work is all three of the identified strategies we have been describing. The video starts with Green Day's "American Idiot" to establish a theme and set the tone for his video—background enhancements—although "American Idiot" might

also be a badge of honor that Nathan is associatively applying to himself. He uses Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust" to support pictures of him doing chores, and he uses The Bare Naked Ladies "It's all Been Done" to show us the chores done, although the lyrics to that song are about the challenges of artistic creativity. Both of these applications are what we call background applications, much like Krista Gullickson's use of "Free Falling" to support her sky diving video. The lyrics make a point relevant to the student video, but that point is considerably different than the lyrical intent of the whole song. Nathan's use of the Beastie Boys' "Girls," however, is a much closer match—a literal illustration of the song's lyrics "all I really want are girls," with both the song and Nathan's videos expressing this desire with a whimsical tone. The video unfolds with a mix of narration, music, and personal photos—some edited, some composed, some from his family collection. Unlike Beky Morgan's trip video, Kroh did not have any particular trip, event, or story to tell. Instead, he constructed a story, he presented a humorous video that is ostensibly about his life: self-proclaimed average American teenager, which happens to correspond with "American Idiot."

Kroh's video shows us that a project does not need to work with a single strategy, and his comment that "I was going for funny," reminds us that the purpose, not the method of composing with sound, should give the project its sense of direction. Our first set of questions to students with this and other multimodal compositions should be "What do you want your video to do? What do you want it to say? How do you want your audience to respond?" and then we can suggest methods of achieving that goal or purpose while composing with sound, including the use of mixed methods.

Conclusion: what have we learned?

Could the videos produced in fulfillment of this assignment have been more intellectually rigorous, more self-aware, more carefully edited and executed? Definitely. But as they are, they show a wide range of strategies for composing with sound, a much wider range than we suggested or taught. Can we as instructors offer guidance to students composing with sound? Definitely, as long as we don't make the mistake of limiting their choices, boxing them in when in fact we want them to employ the creative spirit that drives the box logic Sirc has described. Our research team, as teachers of this assignment, have learned that we and anyone else who might teach a variation on this assignment, can offer our students more direction, or more prompts, than we did in the fall of 2005. Rather than simply suggest that students start with a song and illustrate the song, or start with a concept and support that concept with music, we can offer them the general categories of literal illustrations of songs, associative applications of songs, background enhancements through songs, and mixed methods. These strategies can be suggested along with the range of genres we have already identified (the traditional video, the trip video, the concept video -- categories that would benefit from additional analysis and definition, but that is another article.

One of the ways in which we and others will be able to draw more educational value out of this assignment is to use the kind of post-assignment self-analysis that Jody Shipka suggests for multimodal composing tasks. Shipka makes strong arguments for seeing the complexity in these tasks and in acknowledging that "students are able to prove that,

beyond being critically minded consumers of existing knowledge, they are also extremely capable, critically minded producers of knowledge" (292). Where we have asked the students simply to reflect on their time commitment, their experiments with PowerPoint, and their use of visual composition strategies, Shipka suggests that students articulate their goals for a multimodal composition, then explain how their composing choices were intended to meet those goals, as well as why they made those choices rather than other choices (289-90). The students in our study were generally able to provide these kinds of explanations during the interviews, and revealed, in cases like Amanda Houkom and Erich Wilkerson, methodical and careful composition strategies. Rich Rice, in his collaboration with Cheryl Ball, expresses a concern that "Students who use presentation or form to schmooze the audience, but do not themselves understand the rhetorical affect or even why they're presenting what they are presenting, limit their opportunity to learn." What we found in our students, and see in the work of other students discussed in others' scholarship, is a high level of understanding on the part of students, an understanding that we have tried to tap into through this research.

If instructors want to try and ensure that students use some of the more demanding tasks and strategies that we saw employed in this assignment, certain multimodal composing tasks could be required.

1. Splicing and remixing of music was a new and demanding task for those students who worked with multiple clips. Selecting 3-5 clips, yet still producing a coherent whole, demands careful consideration of the clip selection, the arrangement, and the co-ordination of the music with the images and/or text.

2. Privileging, even requiring, the associative approach over literal or background uses of music would force students to acknowledge the meaning and intent of the song(s) being used, and then require a careful and coherent match between their own purpose and the original song's message. We have suggested that this approach is analogous to incorporating research into a print-based essay—a task we know that most students find difficult and demanding.

3. Assigning "degrees of difficulty" to certain tasks can give students a range of tasks to attempt, and such guidelines can give instructors a clearer sense of how to respond to student work accordingly. Literal illustrations and background enhancements can demand careful and nuanced literal illustrations, they can demand precise co-ordination between the movements of a Concerto and the movements of images or text on a screen, and the careful choice of music can bring a variety of moods, tones, tempos, and cultural associations to a particular video. Of course a difficult task for one student is not always a difficult task for another student, so students and instructors would have to work out individualized "degree of difficulty" grading contracts.

The field of composition, as it considers the implications of "composing with sound," is perhaps rediscovering an underutilized set of hermeneutic strategies students may already have developed. Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly argued for "Listening as an Act of Composing," although even in 1986 they worried that students' "headphones attested to

their comfort with the passive sort of response to music that lulls a hearer" (29). Our interviews with student composers, and the reflections of students in Ellertson's and Ball's work, suggest that there is much more going on than passive reception of popular music. We can see that students generally listened carefully to lyrics -- and listened actively in the sense that they listened for images and concepts to illustrate directly or themes or motifs to play with. Composing with sound assignments might be able to build off of this willingness upon the part of students to listen carefully, whether as the basis for analytical assignments, for other kinds of multimodal composing assignments, or as an analogy for teaching close reading.

We also learned from our surveys that 53 of 60 students put in more time on this assignment than they put into the other assignments in the course, 7 put in the same amount of time, none said they put in less time; ten did not respond to this question, perhaps not wanting to acknowledge that they put in less time. Not all students indicated on the survey how much time they put into the assignment, but only 13 said they spent less than 10 hours on the assignment, and 27 said they spent between 10 and 15 hours on the assignment. While putting all this time and effort into a small assignment might not be what instructors think is in the students' best interest, we think that writing teachers need to recognize what kinds of assignments elicit commitment and effort and build assignment sequences around those kinds of assignments. We have collected additional information through surveys and interviews that suggest that students found the assignment both technically and intellectually challenging, but that topic needs further exploration and definition. We also found students regularly commenting on the fact that they learned quite a bit about fair use guidelines and copyright law, a topic we hope to elaborate on in a future publication.

The technologies that support composing with sound are becoming increasingly stable and affordable, making it likely that opportunities to do music videos in any number of software programs, podcasts, or any kind of audio recording that blends music and dialogue, will seem increasingly feasible. Music is so clearly important to our students that we overlook an opportunity to engage students with innovative assignments when we choose to only analyze music, or not include it in our courses at all. Students bring to the tasks of composing with music some strong, intuitive skills that if exposed and tapped can potentially lead to stronger text-based compositions as well.

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PowerPoint Music Video Assignment

Length: 2-3 minutes
Value: 100 points

I am asking you to make a music video as the first step in writing with music and writing about new literacy issues. The genre is probably familiar to most of you, and quite flexible in terms of its style, conventions, purpose, etc. By giving you a familiar and flexible genre to work with, I hope that you will be able to see, think about, and try-out the "new literacy" issues you will be reading about, then writing about.

I am asking you to use PowerPoint to put together a music video because PowerPoint is easy to use (relative to video editing), you are likely to use PowerPoint in other classes, and because a finished PowerPoint presentation will likely fit on a 250 MB zip disk or CD; a video would need to be burnt on to a DVD or CD.

The actual content of this music slide show is wide-open. I will show you examples that range from fairly abstract combinations of sounds and shapes to tribute videos related to 9/11 to personal stories told through PPT. My hope is that you have fun with the assignment and develop some of the following skills.

General new literacy skills (some of which might seem old):

- Finding (or making) relevant images and text—improving your search skills.
- Combining images, text, and music into a coherent whole: multimodal composition.
- Visual thinking and expression—figuring out how words and images go together, how you make transitions with images, etc.
- Aural thinking and expression—listening to music and lyrics, working with music and lyrics to produce your own video.

PowerPoint skills:

- Working with templates, or better yet, designing your own template or creating a unique look for each slide (not wizard)
- Importing images (clip art and pictures from files)
- Using the drawing tools
- Using animations
- Co-ordinating transitions and moving elements
- Working with music files: converting them from mp3 to WAV files, embedding them in PowerPoint.
- Saving as movie.

Technical Tips:

- Start by going to the Sponge Website (http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/sponge/) and select the project "Creating a Slide Show or Music Video in PowerPoint." View the various help documents at this site.
- Consider using images as backgrounds for each slide: doing so will automatically size the image, and allow you to write overtop of the image easily.
- You can convert mp3 files to WAV files by downloading Audacity or use SoundForge, available in IACC 150.
- If you link MP3 files to your PPT file, just remember that you will need to put the MP3 file and the PPT file in the same folder, and then turn in the whole folder (either Zipped and emailed or burnt to a CD).
- Look for or ask for help throughout the project: the STS staff will be able to help you, you can find various tips and tutorials online (use your search engines), and your classmates will be a great resource.

Criteria: The finished product is not as important as the process of trying this video out, so the criteria emphasize time commitment, experimentation, and a just a bit about execution.

1. Evidence of time commitment. I am giving you a week and a half to do this assignment, and based on my time commitment formula, a complete effort would be about 13 hours. A good effort would be 10 hours, an adequate effort would be 7 hours, and a minimal effort would be 4 hours. A well-developed project is the most obvious way to show this time commitment, but you can also show it in the form of draft files, files for collected images, time spent at the Technology Learning Center (ask for a note from the TLC employee), etc.. If you are particularly skilled at PPT, and can produce an excellent project in under 10 hours, consider helping out those without as much experience.
2. Evidence that you have experimented with a wide range of skills and features (see lists above): use a variety of kinds of images, experiment with text (although be aware of the limitations of font types), try out different transitions, etc..
3. Evidence that you understand some of the concepts of visual communication we cover in class or that are covered in *Call to Write*, Chapter 19.

I will ask you to assess your own work on this project, and while I will not necessarily give you the grade you request, I will talk to you if I don't see the evidence of effort, experimentation, or understanding of visual communication. I might even give you a better grade than you ask for—occasionally students are too modest to ask for the grade they deserve.

PPT Music Video Research: Post-assignment questions

Name: _____ Instructor: _____

Date: _____

Please take as much time as necessary to answer each question in as much detail as possible. There are 10 question on the page—six on the front side, four on the back side. If you need more room to answer a question, please feel free to use a separate sheet. Put your name, instructor, and date on that separate sheet. You are not required to complete this survey, but your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated.

1. What song(s) did you end up using in your PPT Music video, and how did you use it, musically and lyrically?

Song(s) and artist(s): _____

Musically (tone, mood, rhythm, instrumentation, era, genre):

Lyrically (story, images, concepts, messages):

2. Did you follow your initial plan (including but not limited to the storyboard) closely, loosely, hardly at all? Please circle the appropriate word and provide a brief explanation.

3. If you had composed with music before (i.e. used music in a video, a website, a movie, or other multimedia project) before, did you learn anything new about composing with music from this assignment? Write N/A (not applicable) if you have not composed with music before.

4. Please describe the thought process and problem-solving tasks that this assignment required. E.g. did you start with a song and try to illustrate it, or did you start with a concept and try to find a song that matched. How did you go about compiling and arranging images, particularly in relation to your music? What software and hardware did you use? Did you seek help? From whom? Etc.

5. Was there a model or models you drew on at any point in the process? Please explain what role, if any, a model had in shaping your product.

6. What, if anything, did you learn about US copyright law and fair use guidelines while working on this music video assignment? Do you plan to change any of your downloading practices, whether legal, illegal, both, or neither?

7. What ideas or concepts relevant to composing a video seem relevant to composing a traditional print text essay?

8. How long (in hours) did you work on your PPT Music Video? Compared to other assignments in this course, did you a) put in more time, b) about the same amount of time, or c) less time? Please circle the appropriate description, and explain why you put in more, the same, or less time.

9. Thinking not just about composing with music and making a video, what, if anything, did you learn from this assignment?

10. Would you recommend that the English department continue to teach the PowerPoint Music Video Assignment? Why or why not?

Interview Questions for PPT Music Video Research Project

Instructions for interviewers:

Conduct the interview in a quiet place to aid with recording. Ask for permission to record; if the student says "no," just take the best notes you can. I would also recommend that you do take notes even if you record, just in case the recording is poor. Some notes will tell us all we need; we will try to be selective about direct quotations.

Before the interview, read survey results for the student you are going to interview, and look for gaps you want to fill in. You might even ask direct follow-up questions based on what he/she wrote on the survey. If the student has answered any of the questions below in considerable detail, consider skipping that question. Start by trying to make the student feel relaxed and comfortable. Tell the student that

1. the interview should take 30 minutes or less,
2. the interview will be transcribed and shared among the research team.
3. he/she can pass on any question
4. that the research team will invite him/her to respond to our use of the interview before we publish the article.

Questions for Interviewees:

What did you think or feel when this assignment was introduced? Were you excited, nervous, neither, a bit of both? Why? Were you excited because it wasn't an essay?

How would you rate your overall competency and comfort with computer technologies: beginner, intermediate, expert? Please tell me a little bit about your background with computers.

Would you have rated your knowledge of PPT as beginner, intermediate, or expert before the assignment began? How would you rate it now?

Had you worked with electronic music files much? Downloading, burning, mixing, sharing? Do you think you will work with electronic music files more now because of this assignment?

Would you consider yourself an active or passive listener of music? What is your level of engagement with music? Are you passionate about it? A casual listener? Neither?

Please describe how you started the project: with a song or a concept? Why did you start where you started?

Did you consider many options, or did you know exactly what you wanted to do right away? If you considered many options, what were the other options, and why did you settle on your particular song or concept?

Please describe your composing process in as much detail as possible. In particular, please described how you worked with your song or songs, but also talk about your choice of images, the organization or arrangement you used, the technical problems you encountered (if any), the feedback and help you received along the way.

Did you work with any models during the process, and if so, how did you use them? How did they influence your final product?

What was most difficult: composing with a) music, b) images, c) words, or the combination of elements?

When you compare the challenges of putting together your content (deciding on a topic / theme, deciding on organization, deciding on a song or songs) with the challenge of working with technology, would you say this assignment

a) challenged you intellectually
b) challenged you technically (to develop better skills)
c) both?

Ask for an elaboration on the answer, and ask the student if they would consider themselves as concrete, hands-on learner or more of abstract, reflective learner?

What, if anything, did you learn about composing with text from composing a video?

Has this assignment given you any ideas for how you might use music or sound in other kinds of compositions? Future PPTs, websites, videos, even text-based essays?