APPROVAL SHEET

Title of Dissertation: "The Hardest Part was Writing the Songs, but the Easiest Part
was Motivation": Music-Centered Pedagogy in the College
Composition Classroom

Name of Candidate: Anissa J. Sorokin
Ph.D., 2016

Dissertation and Abstract Approved: *Christine Mallinson*
Dr. Christine Mallinson
Associate Professor
Language, Literacy and Culture

Lucille McCarthy
Dr. Lucille McCarthy
Professor
English

Date Approved: April 6, 2016

ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	"THE HARDEST PART WAS WRITING THE SONGS, BUT THE EASIEST PART WAS MOTIVATION": MUSIC-CENTERED PEDAGOGY IN THE COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM.
	Anissa J. Sorokin, Ph.D., 2016
Directed By:	Dr. Christine Mallinson, Associate Professor Language, Literacy and Culture
	Dr. Lucille McCarthy, Professor English

This qualitative teacher-researcher study examines the benefits of providing students in a first-year English composition course opportunities to use music of their own choosing in two major ways: 1) as the inspiration for and subject of alphabetic texts, and 2) as a major element of multimodal compositions. Through the presentation and discussion of classroom artifacts, student reflections, and field notes, I demonstrate that encouraging students to use music in composing assignments helped instill in them a sense of motivation and confidence that not only translated into a greater sense of self-efficacy in relation to classroom assignments, but also resulted in students' increased desire to engage in self-sponsored composing activities. In addition to exploring the positive effects the integration of music into a composition class had on students' motivation, I reveal how music-centered lesson plans and assignments can be used to help students consider how texts are assembled and organized, and enable them to

identify and apply rhetorical terms and concepts. Additionally, urging students to use or create music as part of multimodal compositions can lead to collaborative composing experiences, opportunities for students to experiment with new modes of composing, chances for students to focus more on global composing concerns than on sentence-level ones, and occasions for students to both pose and solve complex rhetorical problems in creative ways. Though I do not argue that incorporating music into a composition course is the best or only way to teach composition, I do suggest that instructors consider the potential benefits incorporating music into composition pedagogy can offer.

"THE HARDEST PART WAS WRITING THE SONGS, BUT THE EASIEST PART WAS MOTIVATION": MUSIC-CENTERED PEDAGOGY IN THE COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM.

By

Anissa J. Sorokin

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Ph.D. in Language, Literacy and Culture

2016

Dedication

For Joan Beavens, from whom I've learned so much about music, teaching, and friendship.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank the students in this study for sharing their creativity and curiosity with me. Their stories are the heart of this work.

I owe so much to Dr. Christine Mallinson and Dr. Lucille McCarthy, who have guided me patiently throughout this process. Their expertise has shaped this dissertation, but more importantly, their unwavering encouragement has shaped how I teach and mentor my own students. I'm also thankful to the other members of my committee—Dr. Helen Burgess, Dr. Cheryl North, and Dr. Craig Saper—for their influence in this project.

Finally, I'm incredibly appreciative of the family and friends who supported me in this endeavor. My parents have never told me *what* to think, but they have shown me *how* to, and for that, I thank them. Dave, my best friend and husband, has always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself; for that, and for a thousand other things, I am—and always will be—grateful.

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Overture

Introduction

I've always loved the opera. In particular, I have a soft spot for Mozart's *The Magic Flute*—there's sorcery and darkness, but in the end, love triumphs over all, just as it should. But what's *really* exhilarating is the experience of going to the opera. There's something thrilling about those first few seconds before a performance begins. The lights dim, and people shuffle in the plush, velvety seats. Ushers with flashlights whisk late-comers down the aisles. A hush descends over the audience. The conductor raises the baton, and everyone waits with bated breath: the first notes pierce the silence, and the music washes over the theater in waves, drawing everyone into the glittering world on stage. It's immersive and luxurious—a moment of pure delight.

And yet, one of the most enjoyable operas I've ever seen was, from a technical perspective, by far the absolute worst. No fancy sets or costumes. No lush orchestral arrangements. The baritone had no sense of pitch or musicality. The whole thing lasted less than fifteen minutes. But that opera embodied the creativity, hard work, and inquisitiveness of one of my students who, at the beginning of our semester together in an English 100 course, had essentially told me he didn't expect to learn anything. This dissertation is his story, along with the stories of many other students who waded into uncharted territory with me, as I taught an English composition course centered largely on music. In the pages that follow, I demonstrate how incorporating music into a college composition course can motivate students to become stronger writers and multimodal

composers who understand their own composing processes and who enjoy taking creative risks as they tackle communicative tasks both in and outside of the composition classroom.

Background and Personal Stance

My interest in researching the intersections of music and composition has been driven in large part by my own experience as an undergraduate who began college as a jazz voice major. Though I reveled in spending my days in music classes, crippling stage fright, along with the realization that I was out of my depth, led me to relegate music to a hobby rather than a career after my first year. I had always enjoyed reading, so I hesitantly declared English my new major. One of the first courses I enrolled in was a British Literature survey that I expected would be dry and dull. I thought my English courses could never be as inspiring as the music courses I had given up.

Luckily, I turned out to be very wrong. My professor was a soft-spoken, brilliant man who let his students' interests direct their learning. He assigned our class a paper on Lord Byron's *Manfred*; since I still spent a lot of time in the halls of the music department with my friends, I had recently seen a concert flyer advertising Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* as part of a larger program and asked my professor if he knew anything about the piece. He didn't, and he encouraged me to write a paper discussing both Tchaikovsky and Byron's *Manfred* pieces. Years later, I can still vividly recall writing that paper. I spent hours listening to Tchaikovsky's symphony and reading Byron's work, straining to understand whether Tchaikovsky was trying to recreate Byron's narrative, or if he was attempting to evoke more imagistic or emotional connections. I considered Tchaikovsky's instrumentation and Byron's diction, attempting

to make connections between their tones and the emotions they attempted to evoke in their audience. Incorporating music into my assignment allowed me to engage in writing in a way I never had. For the first time, I felt that writing could be both enjoyable and meaningful.

The love for writing I developed during that class later blossomed into a career in teaching college composition. During the last five years, I've had the opportunity to teach composition at a community college, a four-year public university, and a private institution. Though all institutions are different, in my experience, students are not always given the opportunity to experience the enthusiasm I felt during the *Manfred* assignment. Some composition curricula convey ignorance—if not the outright dismissal—of composition research focused on multimodality, an area in which music has the opportunity to play a critical role. For instance, one institution required me to teach students to write four specific types of essays—a personal narrative, a textual analysis, a comparison *or* contrast essay, and a compare *and* contrast essay—based on canonical short stories, poems, dramas, and novels. Getting students to muster some enthusiasm for writing about an antiquated translation of *Antigone,* or encouraging those who profess a profound distaste for poetry to write about their close readings of Emily Dickinson and Langston Hughes, can be a daunting task.

To keep my students engaged and involved in a curriculum many of them viewed with suspicion, if not open distaste, I found myself giving small, sporadic nods to music in order to capture their interest. For instance, instead of merely reading Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A'Changin,' " we listened to the song along with some other selections from the same era in order to better understand the cultural context. Pairing

Weldon Kees' poem "For My Daughter" with John Mayer's song "Daughters" provided kindling for a discussion about society's perceptions of women's emotional strength and resilience. Later, while studying Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* we listened to "The Origin of Love," from the rock musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch,* to better understand Plato's creation myth of the origins of hetero- and homosexual love and the feelings of longing and connection Kundera describes. My students' responses to the incorporation of music into our lessons were so positive that I wondered what a composition course focused primarily on music might look like and what results it might yield; thus, my inquiry led to the curriculum and results discussed in this dissertation.

Though my own experiences have informed and developed my interest in this topic, I have attempted to recognize my own perspectives and interpretations. I have tried to represent students' experiences as fairly and accurately as possible by portraying their experiences through their own words, including those drawn from their assignments, written reflections, and interviews. In the following section, I outline the specific research questions guiding this project and provide an overview of the structure of this work and the major findings presented herein.

Research Questions and Structure of the Dissertation

Research Questions

To investigate how music might be used in a composition class and what effects it might have on students' learning, I designed and taught composition class that foregrounded music both in the inspiration for written works and the production of multimodal pieces. (It is important to note that in this dissertation, I use the term "composition" to refer both to written and multimodal texts; these compositions may be

created by various technologies, including more traditional means of composing, like pen and paper or word processing computer programs, as well as newer technologies that support the production of digitally produced or conveyed words, images, and sounds.) The experience of teaching a musically enriched composition class dovetailed with my research interests in exploring the relationship between music and composition in higher education, leading to the present dissertation study. In particular, I set out to determine the following:

(1) To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' views on composition?

a. To what extent do students view music as a rhetorical tool or device before, during, and after engaging in a musically enriched English composition curriculum?

b. To what extent and in what ways does engaging in a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' views of the composing process?

(2) To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' composing practices?

a. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition course affect students' practices of producing written texts?

i. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched composition curriculum affect students' written text production practices as they write across the curriculum (both in and outside of the composition class)?

ii. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched

English composition curriculum affect students' self-sponsored

written text production practices?

b. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English

composition curriculum course affect students' practices of producing multimodal

compositions?

i. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched

composition curriculum affect students' multimodal text

production practices as they create texts across the curriculum

(both in and outside of the composition class)?

ii. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched

English composition curriculum affect students' self-sponsored

multimodal text compositions?

By investigating these questions, I aim to provide composition instructors with a

better understanding of how music can be effectively introduced into and used in a

composition curriculum. I also anticipate that the answers to these questions will

demonstrate to others—as they have to me—that music is a powerful tool with a great

deal of potential, and my hope is that the pedagogical soundness of using music in the

classroom will be bolstered and enhanced.

Structure of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I attempt to guide readers through the class I taught,

highlighting major findings from my research in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. First

though, I devote the remaining sections of this first chapter to a discussion of the relevant

literature influencing and informing my research. I present some of the social and biological research on the impact that music has on people in order to make the case that music resonates deeply not only with individuals, but also with our species as a whole; its power to be a means of communication makes it worthy of incorporation into a college composition class that is meant to help students become better at expressing their ideas and feelings. Next, I demonstrate that despite music's potential for use in academic subjects such as English composition, music and other arts have recently been devalued in public education; in turn, this devaluation has hindered—if not entirely prevented—some students from learning about music, the arts, and their relevance and application in other academic subjects. Fortunately, plenty of instructors have already used music in their composition classes, and I present an overview of research documenting how music has previously been used in composition classes both as students produce written texts and as they create multimodal texts that rely on a variety of communicative methods.

In Chapter Two, I explain the methods I used to collect, analyze, and present the research findings discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. I explore my orientation as a teacher-researcher, differentiating teacher-research from research in education, and I describe the qualitative research methods I employed to collect data from my students and myself. Because validity and reliability are integral to any research study, I outline the measures I took to ensure quality and truthfulness in my data collection and analysis. Finally, I acknowledge the ethical dimensions of teacher-research and explain how I protected students' right to choose whether to participate in the study, as well how I protect their personal identities in this dissertation as I provide samples of student work.

Chapter Three focuses on the affective dimension of my findings, particularly those findings related to student engagement and motivation. Additionally, I provide readers with an overview of the course's structure, including the unit themes and major assignments; in doing so, I underscore the fact that the element of choice (both in music and assignment prompts) had a positive impact on students' motivation. In turn, students' ability to see themselves as writers and composers increased, and some students even reported being inspired to engage in self-sponsored writing even after our class concluded.

My aim in Chapter Four is to demonstrate how music can help students understand rhetorical concepts like exigency and constraints, as well as how music itself can be used as a rhetorical tool. Additionally, I show how music can be used in assignments designed to help students consider and understand how parts of a text come together to form a coherent whole. Finally, I focus on how asking students to engage in songwriting can help them better understand their own composing process as it applies not only to writing courses, but to courses across the disciplines as well.

In Chapter Five I explore in detail how students incorporated music into original, multimodal compositions. First though, I describe how I introduced multimodal composition theory into my classroom, and I sketch some of the ways I provided scaffolding for my students as they developed their multimodal compositions. After focusing on the different ways three students used music in their compositions, I draw from students' reflections on the course to highlight the ways they anticipate composing multimodally in the future, both in their courses and in their future careers.

Chapter Six re-states the research questions that guided this study, synthesizes the findings presented in the previous chapters, and suggests directions for future research about music and composition. As I close both the last chapter and this dissertation as a whole, I call for a renewed focus on the importance of the arts education and the incorporation of the arts—particularly music—into K-20 education.

But before I turn to a discussion of why music deserves our consideration as a communicative mode, I'd like to account for my choice of format in presenting these results. As noted by Jody Shipka (2011), acknowledging Cynthia Selfe (2009) and Cheryl Ball (2004), those who produce alphabetic texts about multimodal ones may feel a sense of irony in doing so (148). My decision to write an alphabetic text as my dissertation is based predominantly on the fact that writing allows me to think about what I want to say in a way that helps me clarify my thoughts and connect my findings to existing, relevant literature; in turn, it may be easier for others to understand my results and how those results fit within the theoretical and practical landscape I build around them. Additionally, I want my ideas to be easily accessible to those within the larger composition community, and producing a written text is, at the moment, one of the best ways to ensure that they are. Ultimately, my decision to compose my dissertation in this way does not mean that I will not adapt portions of this text in a multimodal way in the future. In fact, when I constructed and defended the proposal that preceded this dissertation, I wrote and performed a song that I composed, which was inspired by and intended as an accompaniment to my alphabetic proposal. As I consider future purposes and contexts for parts of this work, I may find new, multimodal ways to enhance and expand on the results herein.

Why Music?

While using music in a composition classroom may be justified anecdotally for reasons related to students' engagement and motivation, there are other reasons we should consider incorporating music into a wide variety of academic courses, including— but not necessarily limited to—composition. In this section, I first demonstrate how prevalent music is in the lives of students and show that students use music as a way of interacting socially with one another. Next, I provide a brief overview of some of the positive ways music affects the human brain, and present evidence that humans' interpretations of music may be universal rather than merely culturally situated. Finally, I argue that the recent devaluation of arts in education limits students' ability to think and communicate in creative, non-verbal ways.

Music, Music Everywhere

If it seems as though students are listening to a lot of music, that's because they are. In fact, most Americans are. According to a 2014 Nielsen report,

> 93% of the U.S. population listens to music, spending more than 25 hours each week jamming out to their favorite tunes. In fact, 75% of Americans say they actively choose to listen to music, which is more than they claim to actively choose to watch TV (73%). Whether in the car (25%), at work (15%) or while doing chores (15%), we spend big chunks of our time listening to music ("Everyone Listens to Music, But How We Listen is Changing").

The Nielsen report also acknowledges that much of the music we listen to is heard through headphones. While Miraldi (2010) notes that "some critics have claimed that

MP3-player[1] use detracts from users' social interaction" (111), he conducted an empirical study examining college students' motivations for MP3-player use and found no such result. Contrary to the notion that MP3-players reduce the time listeners spend socializing with others, Miraldi discovered that the amount of time students spend listening to their MP3-players could actually encourage positive social interactions among listeners. He found that MP3-player use facilitated post-listening discussions about the music and file-sharing interactions among peers, showing that listening to music promotes an important social function. Students who share their music with others and discuss what they're listening to are actively engaged in communication and are learning about those around them. In a composition course where students are often expected to participate in peer revision exercises, having students build relationships through the sharing of music could be an important means of developing trust, an essential quality for successful peer review (Gonzalez 2000).

Music and the Brain

In addition to fostering social interaction, listening to music has the potential to affect our brains' health in positive ways. Though people who are musically inclined have sometimes been categorized as right-brained, creative types, Daniel Levitin (2006) notes that, contrary to the belief that music is processed in the right side of our brains, music in fact activates regions throughout the brain, both in the right and left hemispheres (9). Thus, listening to or producing music requires the brain to communicate between hemispheres and work in much more complex ways than originally suspected. In addition to engaging multiple areas of the brain, listening to or performing music can also help us

---

[1] Though Miraldi's study focused on MP3 players, and more and more people have begun to use their phones as music players, the potential argument for listener isolation remains the same.

to make strong connections and develop new pathways between synapses. Malyarenko et al. (1996) found that just an hour a day spent listening to music at a certain tempo—about 60 beats per minute—could alter the brain's organization, because the brain spends more time in the alpha state and is able to communicate better. Playing music, as opposed to simply listening, produces even more positive cognitive changes, especially if students begin at an early age. In a study that examined the effects of early musical intervention in training in low-income students, Slater et al. (2015) found that elementary school students who were given music training had stronger aural skills two years after their training and were better able to discern both music and speech than students who did not receive comparable training. While it is unclear whether one semester of college during which students increase the amount of time they listen to and think about music may result in any lasting cognitive changes, the research on music's impact on the brain nevertheless suggests that students would benefit from the incorporation of music widely throughout their schooling at all ages.

The fact that music has the potential to change the brain in positive ways is a good reason to investigate its use in the classroom, but music's potentially universal communicative ability is yet another interesting reason to include music in composition. Many scholars, including Noam Chomsky (2006) and Steven Pinker (1994), argue that language is hardwired into the human brain; perhaps even more interestingly, a recent study featured in the PBS documentary "The Music Instinct" (2009) argues that that the potential to create, understand, and appreciate music is innately built into the brain as well. Although Levitin, who narrates the documentary, notes that many aspects of music are cultural, like preferred scales, instruments, and arrangements, he highlights a study

demonstrating that the emotions people feel in connection with music may not simply be influenced by their culture. To test whether music and emotion were fully and only determined by social and cultural factors, Fritz et al. (2009) contacted the Mafa people, an isolated tribe in Cameroon. Tribe members had no exposure to Western music, instruments, or radio; they had never heard Western musical forms or scales. Researchers recruited participants and then played Western-style pieces that were meant to evoke happiness, sadness, or fright in listeners. The participants were then presented with a range of emotion choices and asked to mark which emotion each piece made them feel. Ostensibly, if culture alone were responsible for determining how people reacted emotionally to a certain piece of music, members of this tribe would not necessarily feel the emotions the music was designed to elicit; for example, a piece that signifies happiness in one culture could just as easily instill fear or anger in listeners from a different culture. Fascinatingly, the study showed that the majority of participants were able to accurately guess the emotion the music was meant to make them feel. The results of this study suggest that our perceptions of music are not *only* related to our culture. Instead, researchers are now considering the possibility that our brains react to music in ways that are universal, at least within the human experience. Therefore, if we can increase students' familiarity with and understanding of music in composition classes, we might have the potential to increase their ability to interact and communicate with people from a variety of cultures.

Education and the Arts

Despite Americans' love of listening to music and the documented positive effects music has on humans' cognitive abilities, music programs in public schools across

the country have suffered during the last decade or so. For example, with the

implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2001, California, the state with the most

public school students in the country ("Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary

Schools"), recorded an astounding 50% reduction of students involved in music programs

during the 1999/2000-2004/2005 school years—the largest drop in student involvement

in any public school program, including physical education and visual arts ("The Sound

of Silence"). Indeed, the erosion of music programs should be considered within the

larger landscape of the deterioration of public arts programs more generally. In March

2011, as part of the continuing resolution passed by Congress, the Department of

Education's forty million dollar Arts in Education program was slated for elimination

("Arts Education Funding Cut in Two-Week Budget Fix"), demonstrating that even the

United States Government sees arts education not as a necessity, but rather as a luxury.

The effects of the recent implementation of Common Core State Standards on arts

programs across the country (in those school districts that have adopted it), remain to be

seen. While there are National Core Arts Standards associated with the Common Core,

they are separated from standards in areas like English and Math, and they are not

included in any formal assessments, such as the Partnership for Readiness for College

and Careers (PARCC) tests[2]. The seeming omission of the arts, including music, as

necessary educational skills could have dire implications for students. As part of a study

commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, Catterall (2009) conducted a ten-

year longitudinal study and found that students who had high levels of arts education and

involvement were more likely to obtain gainful employment and more likely to graduate

---

[2] In no way am I suggesting that music and arts *should* be assessed through a standardized test—I merely mean to demonstrate that music and arts are neither considered critical enough to deserve inclusion with skills like English and math, nor are they considered skills that should be assessed formally at a state level.

with an associates or bachelor's degree than their peers who had experienced limited or no engagement with the arts. Thus, improving students' access to and engagement with the arts has the potential to affect them positively for years to come, and long after they have matriculated out of public education.

Philosopher and arts proponent Elliot Eisner highlights the importance of what education and awareness in the arts can do. In his list of "Ten Lessons the Arts Teach," Eisner (2002) notes three things that can support the use of music to enhance students' composition and communication skills. First, he argues that "the arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition." Composition classes which focus solely on written language are indeed disadvantaging students in that they are limited to what students can accomplish with language. While language is of course an important tool of communication, it is by no means the only tool. More importantly, Eisner's statement highlights the fact that our cognition goes beyond words, and modes like music can help us understand and think about things in a way that words simply cannot. Next, Eisner contends that "the arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. Unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail". This statement is relevant to composition classrooms because there is no "right" way to write. As an instructor, I have seen students enter composition classes hoping to find a magic formula for constructing essays. They are overwhelmingly concerned with mechanical errors and want concrete answers about how to generate "good" writing, seemingly under the unfortunate impression that the key to writing competency lies solely in the placement of

commas. An increased focus on the perception and criticism of texts through a lens that foregrounds that arts might help them understand that writing is indeed both creative and subjective to some degree. Finally, Eisner observes, **"The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world." In liberal arts colleges, students are often asked to take courses in a number of fields, but at the same time they are asked to narrow their horizons and choose a singular focus. They are, in a sense, experimenting with ways in which to view the world and being asked to choose which ones they will employ. By integrating the arts into a composition course, instructors might be giving students a way to explore, negotiate, and communicate some of the ways they are seeing the world, perhaps in ways very disparate from the ones they are accustomed to using.

In short, increased arts education and awareness in higher education can only benefit students. I realize that realistically, it unlikely that universities will begin to force students to take more arts credits, and students who see college primarily as a vehicle for job training and preparation might be loath to spend their time on courses that they see as frivolous and unnecessary. However, most students have to take at least one writing course during their time in college. Writing courses that incorporate the arts—including music—can function not only as places where students can develop their composing skills, but also as a place where they can learn more about the world around them and their places in it.

The College Composition Classroom: Three Real-Life Possibilities

Before discussing the potential of music in the composition classroom, I want to review what takes place in a college composition classroom. Unfortunately, there is no

easy answer—the names, purposes, and outcomes of composition classes vary widely, and instructors have their own philosophies regarding what they teach and why they teach it. While it is impossible to ascribe one single philosophy to all composition courses, in this section I discuss some of the more prominent ideas and authors whose work underpins commonly held assumptions and ideas about the nature and purpose of composition courses in college; I contextualize these theories by demonstrating how they are enacted through real-life composition curriculums I have taught.

All three institutions at which I have taught designate their introductory composition courses differently. At one, the course was titled, "Composition and Introduction to Literature," while another called a similar course "Introduction to College Writing." My current institution simply uses the title "Composition." Though these courses are all intended for first-year students and are generally assumed to serve similar purposes, the course titles reflect their range of goals and concentrations. More broadly, these courses represent three major ways of conceiving of what skills students should learn in a composition course.

The first course title above, "Composition and Introduction to Literature," attempts to cultivate a strong connection between reading classic literature and writing. I wrote of this course briefly in the introduction, noting that the course required students to produce specific types of essays, including personal narratives, textual and thematic analyses, comparison and contrast essays, and a research paper. The preface to one of the required textbooks for this course explains

> All together, the book is an attempt to provide the college student with a
> reasonably compact introduction to the study and appreciation of stories,

poems, and plays—as well as practical advice on the sort of writing

expected in a college English course (Kennedy and Gioia ix).

Notably, the text assumes that the appreciation of literature is a skill that goes hand-in-

hand with academic writing. More specifically, it's important to observe that the course is

geared towards helping students produce the kind of writing appropriate to a college

English (as opposed to any other discipline) course, arguably a particularly narrow genre

of writing. The authors continue:

Reading literature often will provide you with reason to write. At the back

of the book, there are several chapters that give the student writer some

practical advice. It will guide you, step by step, in finding a topic,

planning an essay, writing, revising, and putting your paper into finished

form. Further, you will find there specific help in writing about fiction,

poetry, and drama (Kennedy and Gioia ix).

This excerpt demonstrates the editors' faith in literature's ability to spark ideas in

students that will give them the impetus to put their thoughts down on paper. And indeed,

the notion of putting words to paper is foregrounded, as the authors explain writing as a

linear process resulting in the "finished form" of a paper (Kennedy and Gioia ix).

All in all, what the passages above demonstrate is the idea that the study and

practice of writing is intrinsically connected to the study of English literature. In fact, in

my experience, most students in college have had the bulk, if not all, of their previous

writing instruction during English classes which also focused heavily on literature.

However, Smargorinsky (2006), citing Kinneavy (1971), reminds readers that, for a long

time, "Composition [was] so clearly the stepchild of the English department that it [was]

not a legitimate area of concern in graduate studies…[and was] not even recognized as a subdivision of the discipline" (1). Thus, in academia the relationship between literature and composition has at times been strained, which has the potential to call pedagogy that intertwines the two into question.

In addition to connecting composition to literature, Kennedy and Gioia also clearly value the written word, or, as Patricia Dunn (2001), borrowing from Charles Schuster, phrases it, they acknowledge the "primacy of language" (17). The material about which students are to compose takes only the form of written—what Borton and Huot (2007) refer to as alphabetic—texts. Furthermore, the preface, cited on the previous page, dictates that the kind of attention the written texts should receive ought to take written form, preferably an essay. The overall focus of the written word in this course, "Composition and Introduction to Literature," certainly places written language on the "top rung of the meaning-making ladder" (Dunn 17).

The title of the second composition course I will discuss, "Introduction to College Writing," also immediately indicates that it privileges the written word. However, the institution where it was taught did not require that instructors and students use any particular text for the course, and the description of the class given to students in the course catalog is brief: "Instruction in how to write clear, correct, and effective expository prose; practice in careful, analytical reading of significant literature; training in research techniques." Such a concise description might suggest that teachers were doing similar things and reaching a similar end—teaching students what it means to write in college. However, there are various, disparate definitions of "college writing," and

there are a number of factors that influence compositionists' conceptions of what it means to write in college.

The term "college writing" essentially acknowledges that there is a situational and social component to writing. But how does writing, as an activity, even occur? Some inner-directed theorists such as Flowers and Hayes (1981) focus their attention on the role of cognition in individual writing processes, treating writing as an activity that happens inside an individual while simultaneously looking for patterns that can be generalized. However, outer-directed theorists like Bizzell (1982, 1986), Bartholomae (1986), McCarthy (1987), and Fox (1990), make the argument that students are shaped by the language they encounter, both in their academic and personal lives. At times, outer-directed theorists argue, students experience conflict between discourse communities, or they find themselves in a situation where they do not understand the discourse conventions they are required to exhibit. For outer-directed theorists, an important goal of the composition classroom is to help students understand their own language use as well as the conventions anticipated by the academic community (or communities) they plan to enter.

As I taught "Introduction to College Writing," I tried to employ an outer-directed pedagogy that would help students consider writing as a situational practice. I took a composition studies approach and used Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs' *Writing About Writing* (2014) to introduce my students to the conventions of scholarly writing while simultaneously attempting to help them better understand their own, individual writing processes and products. I was required to assign students a research paper, and I asked them to collect research from discourse communities or communities of practice of

which they were a part; in doing so, I hoped to help them contrast their use of language outside of the college classroom with the kind of language they would be developing in our class. My rationale that my students were learning "college writing" was based on the fact that they were reading critically, researching originally, and writing in a way that asked them to synthesize published research and their own findings into a cohesive argument. While the course was interesting for me, I'm not sure it was particularly inspiring for my students. Even with the enthusiasm I had for the content matter and assignments, the class sometimes seemed to fall flat—despite my best efforts, I simply seemed to fail to get students genuinely invested in their own compositions. While my students' lack of motivation could have been related factors specific to me and my teaching, I also considered the possibility that the content and assignments might have been uninspiring.

While the course discussed in the paragraph above was by no means as prescriptive and restrictive as the course at the first institution I discussed, the final course title I mentioned at the beginning of this section, "Composition," offered instructors and students the most liberal definition of such a course. According to the catalog, the course is "A course in critical thinking, reading, and composing, with an emphasis on integrating academic research and documentation. Students read and produce work for a variety of purposes and audiences, focusing on strategies for researching, organizing, drafting, sharing, and revising." At the moment, instructors do have two required texts—a specialized, highly abridged version of Wardle and Downs' *Writing about Writing* and Bullock and Weinberg's *The Little Seagull Handbook*, but they also have a great deal of flexibility in how and when the pieces are used. Instructors

have the freedom to choose which texts make up the bulk of their course, which allows instructors to maintain a degree of autonomy over their materials and assignments.

It is important to note that the word "writing" is not explicitly stated in the course title; instead, the word "composition" is used. Naturally, composing can include writing, but composing can encompass a much larger number of communicative modes and activities as well. Indeed, the choice to use a variation of the word *compose* rather than *write* encourages the examination and appreciation of the communicative potential of images, sound, theater, and objects, in addition to the written word.

Because this dissertation concerns the use of music in the composition classroom, many of the theoretical underpinnings that guide my pedagogy are based in multimodal composition theory, which assumes that students benefit most when they are taught to create meaning through a variety of mediums (not limited to, but certainly including music). Thus, in the following section I present an overview of multimodality as it relates to composition and illustrate some of the ways that music specifically has been used in English composition courses already.

Multimodal Composing in the College Composition Classroom

Increasingly, universities are developing programs and policies that place the focus of college composition courses on making students not only skilled writers, but also effective communicators in any situation, able to determine the most appropriate and successful means of conveying information and putting forth cogent arguments. Thus, in a composition classroom, alphabetic texts may not be the only—or even primary—focus. Below, I provide a definition for multimodality and highlight some of the ways composition theorists have engaged with the term.

Multimodality

Multimodality, according to Gunther Kress (2010), refers to the phenomenon of making meaning via many different elements, whether through image, text, song, etc., either individually or in some combination of such elements. Kress views multimodality as a "social semiotic" (2) approach to communication, in which multiple aspects of a text contribute to the text's meaning and the effect it has on the audience that perceives it. He notes that almost every aspect of life is indeed multimodal, for he defines a mode as

> a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making
>
> meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image,
>
> soundtrack, and 3D object are examples of modes used in representation
>
> and communication (Kress 79).

Importantly, Kress' definition of mode underscores the fact that the ways in which we interpret meaning are socially and culturally situated. Thus, a text may be interpreted differently by people with a variety of social and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, as Kress notes in the definition above, music can be viewed as a mode. More broadly, we might think of music as an instantiation of aural mode; that is, like speech, it is a mode of communication that can be heard. Though it is possible to examine sounds, including music, through a social semiotic lens, Steph Ceraso (2014) has argued that a different framework should be employed for understanding aural modes. She observes that when instructors take a social semiotic approach to sound, "…teaching listening often involves teaching students to approach sound as another form of text; sound is simply more content to be interpreted (Ceraso 102). Instead, Ceraso suggests an alternative approach to the way listening is taught:

I offer the concept of multimodal listening to expand how we think about

and practice listening as a situated, full-bodied act. Teaching students to

approach sound as an embodied event, as opposed to something that is

heard exclusively through the ears, can make them more savvy *consumers*

of sound; it can help students understand how sound is manipulating their

feelings or behaviors in different situations (103).

Ceraso goes on to argue that in addition to becoming better consumers of sound, students

who learn to think of listening as an embodied act will, in turn, become better at using

sound to create their own texts (103).

Ceraso's work responds to an earlier call from Cynthia Selfe for increased

attention to aurality in multimodal composition pedagogy. In "The Movement of Air, the

Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing," Selfe (2009) argues that due

to the privileging of the printed word in Western society over the past two hundred years

or so, a false binary has been created that devalues aurality and distances it from the

written word. She argues that this binary has allowed English teachers to "lose sight of

the integrated nature of language arts" (617) as they focus primarily upon asking students

to produce alphabetic texts. As Selfe traces the historical movements that have led to the

current state of composition in universities, she notes frequently that she is not arguing

for the total replacement of traditional written texts with multimodal and new media

compositions that privilege aurality; rather, she contends that universities must begin to

prepare students to work with multiple modes of composing. Importantly, she notes that

writing has come to be equated with intelligence, and she argues that this can be harmful

to students who may be adept in other ways of knowing and communicating (644). Selfe believes that students need

> a full quiver of semiotic modes from which to select, role models who can teach them to think critically about a range of communication tools, and multiple ways of reaching their audience. They do not need teachers who insist on *one* tool or *one* way (645).

And yet, as I noted previously in this chapter when I described my experience teaching for an institution that required me to assign only essays using limited canonical texts, many instructors aren't—whether by their own choosing or because they are required to follow a specified curriculum—offering students an opportunity to expand their composing horizons. Echoing Selfe (2009), James Cercone (2012) observes,

> English Language Arts classrooms—often sites of sterile literary preservation, plot summary, and the five-paragraph essay must change...We are all surrounded by new ways of making meaning, new ways of working in the world (64).

And indeed, as students rely on composition courses to help them better meet the composing tasks in both their academic and professional lives, they will need to be able to communicate using all the resources available to them.

Shipka (2011) also argues for the benefits of multimodal composition pedagogy, contending that when students participate in a multimodal composition curriculum, they "are afforded opportunities to consider how they are continually positioned in ways that require them to read, respond to, align with—in short, to negotiate—a streaming interplay of words, images, sounds, scents, and movements" (21). And asking students to approach

composing tasks creatively may enable them to demonstrate talents that composition instructors who assign only written texts may have overlooked. In her book "Talking, Sketching, Moving," Patricia Dunn (2001) describes some of the methods she has used to teach a multimodal composition. She observes that encouraging students to use non-traditional methods of composing "allow[ed] people to succeed using a format with which they had confidence" (Dunn 38). Thus, in addition to helping students become critical examiners of the multimodal texts that influence their lives, multimodal composition pedagogies encourage students to use their strengths to produce compelling texts that communicate in a wide variety of ways.

Multimodality vs. New Literacies: Differences and Distinctions

Frequently tied up with discussions of multimodality is the concept of new literacies, a topic that, because of its associations with multimodality, bears mentioning here. As William Kist (2005) notes, new literacies[3] are often linked to technology, since things like social media, tablets, and smartphones have impacted both what and how we communicate. Many modern technologies allow users to employ multiple modes of communication, and participants must be able to effectively venture beyond alphabetic texts in order to participate fully.

Though digitally mediated texts frequently incorporate visual and aural modes, new literacies and multimodality should not automatically be conflated. Shipka (2011) explains that non-digital composing acts like writing on objects of clothing or live performances are valid examples of multimodal communication; thus, multimodality does not necessarily entail digital technology. My stance is aligned with Shipka's, so

---

[3] Kist (2005) makes a distinction between New Literacies, which he uses to refer to the notion of literacy as a situated cultural practice, and new literacies, which he uses to refer more to the modern technologies and ways in which students engage with the world (11-12).

26

though much of the music students might use in my composition classroom might be digitally mediated in some way, I don't view music more broadly as an embodiment of a new literacy, nor do I see my work as particularly influenced by or relevant to new literacies research. Still, I recognize the importance of the notion that students must learn to create and interpret a variety of texts, including digitally mediated ones. The following sections describes some of the ways in which composition teachers have used a multimodal pedagogical approach that includes music—sometimes digitally mediated—in order to help students develop their composing skills.

Uses of Music in the Composition Classroom

A growing body of research has explored how music has been used in composition classrooms, but much of it has been conducted with students in the K-12 range. Thus, while some of the overviews of studies that follow here do not relate specifically to courses in higher education, I have included them because they have the potential to be adapted effectively for college students. The most significant divide within this body of literature is in whether music supports the production of an alphabetic text or becomes part of a multimodal text itself. First, I present examples of how music was used both to inspire writing, and then I turn to a discussion of how music has been used to contribute to multimodal compositions.

Brock Dethier (2003), a composition instructor and assistant professor at Utah State University, has been using music to teach freshman composition classes for over twenty years, and he shares his experiences and ideas in *From Dylan To Donne: Bridging English and Music.* Dethier primarily uses music as a catalyst for students to create written texts, explaining that incorporating music into his lessons helps his students to

develop different writing skills. He notes, "Before I ask students to take a critical look at course texts—which they're likely to perceive as alien, highbrow, teacher texts—I have them read critically in a genre many of them treasure: music" (Dethier 2). Dethier argues that students' critical analysis of music develops transferable skills: "As they ponder what [music] means to them and try to determine why it's so important, they develop critical thinking skills that they can use on any 'text'" (4). My own experiences lead me to agree; much of this dissertation focuses on how instructors can capitalize on students' love for music, and I suggest ways in which students can use their preferred music to develop critical thinking skills. Additionally, Dethier explains how he uses music to teach a number of concepts often included as part of composition curriculums, including creating contexts, understanding interpretation, constructing meaning, understanding voice and tone, constructing genres, and understanding multi-step composition processes. Overall, he argues—as I will in Chapter Three—that one of the major benefits of using music in a composition classroom is increased student motivation.

Another aspect of Dethier's pedagogy worth examining is his use of music to teach students about genre. He notes that students who like almost any type of music have at one time or another had to defend the music they like from the criticism that "it all sounds the same" and contends that by "defending the differences in the sameness of various examples of their genre, they at least implicitly defend the concept and value of genre itself" (Dethier 95). Additionally, Dethier notes that students who are asked to consider musical genres may develop a more "sophisticated understanding of what we mean when we say that genres are constructs created by writers, critics, readers, and teachers" (96). Though Dethier seeks to help students become better composers of

written texts, his argument about genre can be applied to any rhetorical situation students face.

Although Dethier's book is specifically geared toward college instructors, teachers of younger students also demonstrate how music can be effectively used for enhancing student inquiry and engagement. Sharon Blecher and Gail Furline Burton (2010) note in their essay, "Saying Yes to Music: Integrating Opera into a Literature Study," that music helps to stimulate "inquiry in its truest and most authentic form" (61). Although at first it seems that Blecher and Burton's study might not be easily transferable to college composition classrooms, given that the authors integrated Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* into a unit on fairy tales taught to elementary school students, many observations the authors make are applicable to students of all ages. Much like Dethier, Blecher and Burton believe that "valuing the music that children bring into the classroom and incorporating it into their work gives students voice in unexpected ways" (44). As I will demonstrate in later chapters, allowing students to choose the music they used in their assignments greatly increased their engagement. Additionally, Blecher and Burton's claim that music allows for "inquiry in its truest and most authentic form" (61) is worth examining more in depth. The authors contend that although the music of *The Magic Flute* was critically important in students' understanding of the fairy tale genre, the study of the opera also sparked students' interest in the biographies of Mozart and other composers, the structure and history of music instruments, and the science of sound, among other things (61). In Chapter Five, I showcase the work of a student who also was drawn to conduct his own research due to avenues of inquiry he developed through

music. Thus, music can lead to multidisciplinary, student-centered inquiry, which may in turn help students discover more about where their own interests and passions lie.

Though Dethier and Blecher and Burton use music to enhance students' print literacy, in *Multiple Forms of Literacy*: *Teaching Literacy and the Arts*, Carolyn Piazza (1999) devotes a section to ways in which music might be used to enhance other literacies as well. Like Blecher and Burton's text, Piazza's book is intended for teachers of elementary school children, but as I will discuss below, many of the strategies Piazza suggests could easily be adapted to college students and might prove to be useful curricular tools.

Piazza (citing Glenn 1992) highlights the fact that music has frequently been linked to free association and creativity, and she notes that these "random associations allow thoughts to meander and emotions and sensory perceptions to surface" (63). She offers an activity that closely mimics freewriting, a concept championed by expressionist composition theorist Peter Elbow (1973) and often used in composition classrooms. During a freewrite, writers are asked to simply allow their thoughts to flow out onto paper without worrying about elements like grammar, usage, structure, or spelling; rather, the focus is on creativity and the development of content. Piazza suggests using music as a basis for a free write. Students are asked to listen to a selection of music and respond in any way they see fit, including through pictures, words, symbols, or mapping (63). This activity can easily be done with college students as well—I did something much like this when I taught Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as part of the first course described in this chapter. Before class began, I asked students to listen to Beethoven's String Quartet Opus 135, Movement 14, referenced frequently throughout the novel

through the question, "Es muss sein?[4]" While students' reactions to the piece varied, they were generally intrigued by the music's dark tone and inquisitive about why I asked them to listen to the piece. Many developed fascinating narratives, imagined or based on their own experiences, which correlated with the music. While some students noted that writing about music freely felt strange, many produced freewrites that helped move them develop an articulated emotional response towards Kundera's novel.

Another interesting activity suggested by Piazza (which I adapted for college students and discuss in Chapter Four) is a musical notebook. In such a notebook, students pay close attention to all the music they hear during the day, including when and where they hear it, as well as what they hear; the thoughts they have when listening to music they enjoy, as well as the activities they do while listening; instances when music is paired with products, events, or particular places; and song lyrics that reflect the human experience (64). As I will demonstrate, asking college students to engage in a similar activity attunes them to the almost constant presence of music in their lives, and helps them consider the rhetorical purposes music serves.

A third idea Piazza presents that uses music in the service of discussing writing is asking students to investigate the rhetoric of melody. While many people suggest looking to lyrics as a means of integrating music into composition classrooms, looking at melody may also be an interesting means of asking students to consider their own compositions. Piazza defines melody as "a series of tones that form a complete musical ideal" and notes that "a musical subject, like a dramatic plot, moves from beginning to end" (66). While I did not engage my whole class in such an activity, in Chapter Four I demonstrate how one of my students did something similar, as she rhetorically analyzed Beethoven's

---

[4] "Must it be?"

Symphony No. 5, discussing Beethoven's musical choices, the purposes they serve, and effects they produce.

One final writing exercise Piazza briefly touches on is songwriting, and although her suggestions focus mostly on literacy strategies for younger students, like recognizing rhyme scheme and alliteration, I demonstrate in Chapter Four that college students can benefit from trying their hand at writing songs. Songwriting is a very specific sort of composing, but songwriters must address many of the same concerns as any writer or composer of other texts. Roseanne Cash, daughter of singer-songwriter legend Johnny Cash, observed in an interview, "In truth, the demands of serious songwriting are rigorous, solitary, and require the same degree of commitment as any other writing" ("The Music of Writing"). And indeed, a songwriter needs to be conscious of tone, setting, and theme, and he or she must organize the song in such a way that listeners are interested in and can engage with it. Because the demands of songwriting are so great, when I asked my students to write a song, I chose not to grade the songs themselves; as I will explain in more detail in Chapter Four, I instead asked them to reflect on the process of songwriting to focus on their composing processes more broadly. In doing so, students became better able to identify processes that worked for them, and their comments about the assignment suggest that they were able to apply what they learned about themselves to other composing situations outside of our class.

Thus, there are a number of ways instructors can use music to help students develop alphabetic texts. Dethier's suggestions operate on the assumption that students' interest in music will bolster their motivation to engage with writing assignments that help them develop a better understanding of elements like genre and tone; my own

research confirms that music does indeed positively affect students' motivation, if they are given choice in the music they use. Though Blecher and Burton and Piazza demonstrate ways that music can be used effectively with younger students, my adaptation of assignments like Piazza's musical notebook idea, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, shows that college students can also benefit from engaging in similar tasks. While Dethier, Blecher and Burton, and Piazza all contribute useful ideas for instructors who plan to use music to help students develop alphabetic texts, the instructors discussed in the following section demonstrate how music can be used in multimodal compositions as well.

Music in Multimodal Compositions

While using music to aid students in producing written texts certainly has benefits, it may also limit the ways and means in which students can imagine communicating. Truly multimodal composition pedagogy asks students to use a variety of available modes of communication. In this section, I first provide some examples of how scholars have highlighted the effects of music when it is part of a multimodal text, and then I discuss researchers who have encouraged students' use of music in multimodal composing assignments.

While Heidi McKee (2006) does not solely address student work or music as a part of composition pedagogy, she makes some interesting points about how music can affect multimodal webtexts, which may help inform the way instructors think about music's role in a composition. In her discussion of Mark O'Neil's multimodal poem "Winter Lyric," McKee pays close attention to the role of music, noting that a drumbeat accompanying the poem "continues to pulse and reverberate, creating on the expressive

plane a sense of inexorableness and a movement inward to some oddly biological rhythm, a feeling augmented by the text" (345). Though McKee makes a strong connection between written text and musical text, she also realizes that music has a specific, inimitable function in O'Neil's work. She writes, "This poem, as with so many web works with an aural component, is interesting to read first without and then with sound because without the soundtrack, the images and text don't convey the full message" (345). McKee's observations demonstrates agreement with Eisner's (2002) argument that words are not the only contributors to what we think or feel—music has the power to carry meaning that might not be received in any other way.

Somewhat like McKee, Halbritter (2006) discusses the importance of music as a contributor of a piece's meaning, but he does so within the context of films. Using the film "The Big Chill" as a case study, and analyzing a student's film based on "Fight Club" but set to the Ronettes' "Be My Baby," Halbritter contends that soundtrack music has the potential to elicit viewer emotions and make points not necessarily able to be made through other means. Because of the importance of soundtracks in films, he notes that we should begin to see "the soundtrack as a semantic partner of the imagetrack, not a subordinate" (319). But perhaps most importantly, Halbritter acknowledges:

> Music, like all forms of symbolic action, never truly stands alone. Brock
> Dethier (2003) suggested that music provides 'a bridge between
> individuals, genres, time periods, and groups' (p. xvi). We encounter
> music in a variety of contexts. Those contexts shape the meanings we
> derive. Furthermore, those meanings have a tendency to adhere to the

pieces of music and color future encounters with the same music in other contexts (321).

The multi-faceted, context-dependent nature of music that Halbritter alludes to has been taken up by other researchers, including Stedman (2011), who in his essay "How Music Speaks: In the Background, in the Remix, in the City," notes that music is:

> …messy! Everything we hear reminds us of something else we've heard; it's all made of layered bits and pieces that are mashed together in ways that speak to some audiences more than others. This is exciting, but it operates nondiscursively, outside the realm of logic. It reminds composers that while their music can speak, what it says is tied up with what others have said before them.

What Halbritter and Stedman note is similar to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism and the idea that every utterance is part of a chain of communication and cannot be separated from the utterances that came before it. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin argues that when listeners hear an utterance, they "assimilate the word to be understood into [their] own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions" (282), much in the way Stedman notes music interacts with listeners. Bakhtin notes that speakers are always attempting to place their words in an "alien horizon" (282) as best as they can, much in the way that musicians send their work into the world, often hoping it will resonate with someone. When students use music as a part of their compositions, they must pay attention to the fact that music will be interpreted in a number of different ways, depending upon who is listening, and where and when they hear it.

In their article "Remixing the Personal Narrative Essay: "The Hardest and the Best Thing I Have Ever Done," Blaauw-Hara and Putman (2011) demonstrate how a traditional assignment can be given new life through the integration of music. Instead of having students write linear narratives about themselves, the authors asked students to write and record a rap about a personal experience. Blaauw-Hara recorded a beat that students could download as a backing track for their rap, and students were able to record their voices over the track. Willing students were even able to perform their rap in front of their peers, and the authors note that "students welcomed the opportunity to write and perform in ways atypical to the standard English class and tended to report that these were their favorite class sessions" (Blaauw-Hara and Putman). Though Blaauw-Hara and Putman asked their students to compose a rap, they suggest that a similar exercise could be done with other genres of music, including pop, rock, and country.

While Blaauw-Hara and Putman's students were encouraged to produce music of their own, some instructors ask students to repurpose pre-existing music. In her article "A New Composition, a 21st Century Pedagogy, and the Rhetoric of Music," Crystal Van Kooten (2011) describes how pre-existing popular music can function effectively as part of a multimodal composition assignment. In a freshman composition class, Van Kooten assigned her students a multimodal essay that asked them to give some attention to the rhetoric of music, which she describes as "one often overlooked and powerful means of persuasion available to composers today." She notes that among music's persuasive capabilities are its ability to "evoke, intensify, and coordinate emotion…develop character, carry an argument, organize a composition, elicit cultural associations, and link to memory, to start." In a video essay that accompanies Van Kooten's online article, one

of her students describes some of the choices she had to make about the music she used in her video. The student shows attention to multiple aspects of music, including tempo, melody, lyrics, and audience recognition, demonstrating that her choices were made not arbitrarily, but rather with rhetorical intention.

Though some instructors may be uncomfortable with multimodal composing projects, fearing that they won't be as rigorous as a written paper, Shipka (2006) argues that multimodal projects can and do require a great deal of effort and skill. In "Sound Engineering: Toward a Theory of Multimodal Soundness", Shipka explains that she asked her students to choose a word from the Oxford English Dictionary and design a project intended to teach the audience the meaning of the word and how its use may have changed over time. One student chose the word "music" and developed a band, seven songs, and a CD as part of his project. He chose the band name "Oblivious Ed" (a nod to the OED) and composed songs correlating to definitions for music given in the dictionary. He recorded the songs with his real-life bandmates and friends, and then designed an album cover complete with liner notes for his finished work. Shipka asked the student to explain his choices step-by-step, and his explanations of his rhetorical decisions prove that multimodal compositions require careful attention to detail, including method and execution.

As McKee and Halbritter demonstrate, music is integral to the texts of which is it a part. Still, as Stedman notes, music is never heard in a vacuum—its interpretation very much depends on context. Instructors like Blaauw-Hara and Putman, Van Kooten, and Shipka demonstrate that music can be used rigorously in multimodal composition courses and present inspiration for how students might use music in their texts.

Looking Forward

In this chapter, I have woven together information and arguments about music's centrality to the human experience, the positive effects music and arts education can have on students' academic (and professional) achievement, and the ways music has previously been used in composition classes to argue that, if instructors have flexibility in the design and implementation of their curricula, they should consider using music in meaningful and creative ways in composition classrooms. I have provided examples of theoretical approaches to composition by discussing three different courses I have taught, and I have positioned myself as a believer in the benefits of multimodal composition pedagogy.

Before I proceed though, it is important to emphasize that I am not contending that using music in composition courses is the only or the best way to teach composition. Using music as part of a composition may not always be feasible, depending on departmental guidelines and resources, nor may it always be appropriate, depending on an instructor's specific goals or comfort level with some of the technologies discussed later, particularly in Chapter 5. In a broad sense, I align my own pedagogical stance with that of multimodal composition scholars, recognizing that the ways in which we communicate are myriad; I believe that composition courses should encourage students to think about the variety of ways in which meaning is constructed and interpreted. My purpose in conducting this study with a focus on music is to direct focus to a microcosm within the universe of multimodal communication. I aim to add to the body of literature about the ways music can be used in a composition course and demonstrate some positive effects of its inclusion on students' learning and motivation. In the next chapter, I provide

details about the structure of my study and the methods I used to collect and analyze my data. Then, in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I demonstrate that a first-year composition curriculum rich in music can help students become more engaged, confident composers, assist them in understanding and writing about rhetorical principles, allow them to reflect deeply on their own composing processes, and use music to compose in ways that allow them to access their own knowledge and expertise, develop and solve problems, and apply creative composing strategies to texts they create both in and outside of the classroom.

Chapter Two

Methods

The Research Site

The Campus Climate

The data collected for this project comes from undergraduate students at the

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), a public honors research university

located on 500 acres near Baltimore, Maryland[5]. UMBC was founded in 1966 and is part

of the University System of Maryland, which includes large, sprawling institutions like

the University of Maryland College Park, as well as the small, historic University of

Maryland at Baltimore. Though UMBC is only a few miles away from downtown

Baltimore, its location near Catonsville, a quaint community with independent businesses

lining a thriving main street and stately Victorian houses set back from tree-line avenues,

gives the university less of an urban feel than might be expected. The atmosphere on

campus is what might be described as a bit quirky—while UMBC is close to

transportation and a major city, the campus itself is fairly isolated. Students must drive or

bicycle into nearby Catonsville or Arbutus for any close, off-campus dining or shopping

experiences. Perhaps that's partly why on campus, one might see students running around

with Nerf guns or ghastly costume wounds, as students take part in an ongoing game of

Humans vs. Zombies. There is no football team at UMBC; rather, the chess team is one

of the most recognized teams on campus, and oversized knights and pawns, along with

the team's many trophies, decorate an area of the student center. On the whole, UMBC

---

[5] In the "Ethics" portion of this chapter, I discuss my decision to identify UMBC as the university at which I collected my research.

students are generally serious about their academics and can often be found studying (or maybe just lounging) outside on one of the campus' grassy hills or by the small pond on the main academic thoroughfare.

UMBC has a reputation for being a STEM-focused institution, but advertises itself as a university that offers students a "strong undergraduate liberal arts foundation that prepares them for graduate and professional study, entry into the workforce, and community service and leadership." In recent years, UMBC has been recognized multiple times by the US News and World Report both for its innovation as well as its quality undergraduate teaching. Students, staff, and visitors are frequently reminded of these accomplishments, which are highlighted in a variety of places on campus, including at the campus' main entrance and in front of the library.

While UMBC is not particularly large, neither is it a small liberal arts college. During the 2012-2013 academic year, when the data was collected, there were 13,637 students enrolled, 7,355 of whom were male, and 6,282 of whom were female. 10,953 of the 13,637 were undergraduates, with 9,371 of those 10, 953 enrolled full-time. Forty percent of students enrolled identified as minorities, with sixteen percent identifying as African-American, seventeen percent identifying as Asian, and five percent identifying as Hispanic. 1,560 first-year students were enrolled, seventy-five percent of whom lived on campus. The average GPA of incoming first-year students was 3.7, and their average SAT score for 1223. Tuition for in-state residents was $19,488.00, while out-of-state students' tuition was $29,891.00.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the university offered 43 majors, 41 minors, and 20 certificate programs. 2,140 students received a Bachelor's degree in 2011-2012

school year, with 856 of those students—almost forty percent— graduating with degrees either in Computer Science or the one of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) fields. Another 695 graduated with degrees in the social sciences, public administration, or psychology. Thus, UMBC awards a relatively small percentage of students with humanities and arts degrees. In a way, UMBC was the perfect setting in which to conduct research about integrating music into a composition, because this study shows that music can successfully be integrated into composition classrooms where many students have little or no background in music.

The English 100 Classroom Climate

During the 2012-2013 academic year, I taught five courses at UMBC, including the section of composition from which this data in this dissertation was drawn. The course I used to collect my data was listed in the course catalog just as any other composition course was—there was no indication that the course centered on music, so students did not select (or avoid) the course because of that. The class was taught in a computer lab in a brand new Performing Arts and Humanities building the university had recently constructed. Rows of shiny new Apple computers faced a whiteboard at the front; a podium with built-in technology options allowed instructors to do things like project the computer screen or zoom in on non-electronic materials with a document camera. The high-tech surroundings made an impression on the students—as students filtered in on the first day, they "marveled at the classroom. A few started up discussions with each other about what a nice new building we were in" (Fields Notes 1).

Twenty-five students entered my class that first day, of whom fifteen (60%) were male, and ten (40%) were female. The majority of those enrolled in this course—almost

42

seventy-five percent—were first-year students, while the remaining thirty percent were

sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Sixty-eight percent of the students were white, while

the other thirty-two percent came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; additionally, two

students in my course did not speak English as their first language. As I had expected, the

majority of students in my course—in this case, seventy percent—were pursuing a degree

or multiple degrees only in STEM fields. The remaining thirty percent of students were

pursuing degrees in the social sciences or humanities, or were pursuing some

combination of degrees.

Methods and Analysis

As I began thinking about this project, I knew that I wanted my research to reflect the

myriad of interesting things that happen in a classroom: conversations among students,

interactions between the instructor and students, in-class activities and discussions,

assignments submitted by students, and the thoughts students have about their own

learning before, during and after the course. Because educational research can be

conceived of and conducted in a variety of ways, I had to consider my own orientation

towards the research and make decisions about the type of data I would collect. In this

section, I briefly introduce two types educational research—research on teaching and

teacher research—and outline the important distinctions between the two; next, I describe

my own orientation towards the research collected for this dissertation. I then outline the

types of data I collected and describe the methods I employed—and, as this is a

dissertation about composition, the composing processes I engaged in—to develop a

comprehensive, well-rounded picture of the kind of learning that took place in my class

during this study. Following a description of my methods, I address concerns of

reliability and validity and the ethics of working with one's own students. Finally, I close by acknowledging some limitations of my study.

Research on Teaching vs. Teacher Research

Though the phrases "research on teaching" and "teacher-research" seem to suggest similar ideas, the underlying assumptions and expectations associated with these two methods of research vary. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain the major differences between research on teaching and teacher-research, arguing that research on teaching generally considers teacher behaviors and student outcomes as cause and effect relationships. In this paradigm, the research is often quantitative and derives conclusions from products like standardized tests (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 6). David Hopkins (2002) highlights the cause-and-effect orientation towards educational research by comparing it to medical or scientific research done in a sterile lab: "Often the phrase classroom research brings to mind images of white-coated (or grey-suited!) educational researchers undertaking research in a sample of schools or classrooms and using as subjects the teachers and students who live out their educational lives within them" (7). While some research on teaching occasionally described as classroom ecology research is more interpretive and cooperative, Cochran-Smith and Lytle note that research on teaching still "often constructs and predetermines teachers' roles in the research process, thereby framing and mediating teachers' perspectives through researchers' perspectives" (7).

Still, not all classroom research is conducted from the outside in. Teacher-research, which Cochran-Smith and Lytle describe as "systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers" (7), places value on teachers' insights and experiences as

44

professional practitioners[6]. Hopkins notes that teacher-research is important for three main reasons: 1) its facility in helping teachers become better, reflexive practitioners and professionals, 2) its focus on classroom curriculum and student learning, and 3) its ability to help develop a paradigm for teacher research that is more appropriate and useful than current, traditional paradigms influencing educational research (31). While Hobson (1996) notes that "researchers have been accustomed to distancing themselves from their work as if such separation would somehow render the work more plausible, credible, perhaps even 'scientific',"(1) teacher-researchers find ways to use their proximity to their research in positive ways, while still acknowledging the potential drawbacks that such a position might incur.

Indeed, teachers' positions of power in the classroom, as well as the means by which some studies have been carried out, have sometimes led to the devaluation of teacher-research. Critics of teacher-research charge that the validity and reliability of data are often questionable, and as Fishman and McCarthy (2000) note, there is a strong clash between teacher-researchers who value primarily qualitative data with those who more strongly favor quantitative data (5). In fact, Fishman and McCarthy themselves identify with two different schools of teacher-research. While McCarthy identifies herself as a "Stenhousian social scientist" who favors reflective inquiry supported by widely accepted methods of data collection and analysis, Fishman calls himself a "Berthoffian zealot" who sees teacher-research as a means of inventing and understanding what one already

---

[6] University professors Fishman and McCarthy (2000) note that even this definition is open for debate, as some see teacher-research as limited to K-12 practitioners. Fishman and McCarthy note that they find the limiting of teacher-research to K-12 teachers artificial, as teacher-research can be conducted with students in higher education, too.

knows (11-13). Thus, even teachers who identify themselves as teacher-researchers can have very different orientations toward the work they aim to do.

I would classify my own orientation towards the research conducted herein within the paradigm of teacher-research. I am cognizant that my role in the research does not allow me to observe my students and my pedagogy as an outsider. However, like compositionists Shipka (2011) and Van Kooten (2011), I attempt to draw on my own experiences and insights not *in spite of,* but rather *as a result* of my own positioning in order to describe the intentions and outcomes of the course, to explain and interpret the significance of student work, and to reflect and critique my own assumptions and practices, in the hopes that the lessons learned from my own experience may be helpful to others conducting similar work in the future.

Field Notes and Reflective Journal

Two of the most important ways I gathered research about the day-to-day events and conversations occurring in my class were by taking field notes in class every day and expanding those notes into a reflective journal. However, taking field notes as a teacher-researcher proved to be a difficult task. I understand the value of detailed notes and "thick description" (as described in Geertz 1973), but had I tried to take such notes while simultaneously leading a class, either the notes or my teaching would have suffered. Thus, the field notes I kept during teaching generally incorporated short key words, phrases, or questions to consider at a later time. Hubbard and Power (2003) comment on the types of notes teacher-researchers take, in contrast to those notes kept by ethnographers:

> Teacher-researchers we've worked with often have note-taking processes closer to those of writers. A notebook is an essential tool for many writers; in these notebooks they jot down a phrase, a quick sketch of a scene, a wonderful quote from another writer…The notes are incomplete by design, meant to serve as a jog to the memory or a catalyst for more focused writing later (40).

After jotting down notes in class, I transferred what I had written to a document on a computer and attempted to expand the notes by recalling as much detail as possible. Employing a four-category framework identified by Corsaro (1981) and recommended by Hubbard and Power (2003), I examined my raw notes from four perspectives: field notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and personal notes.

Usually a day or two later, after I had written the notes and had a chance to mull them over, I returned to the notes and wrote my thoughts about them in a separate document that I entitled a reflective journal. Hobson (1996) describes teacher-research journals as a place where a research *process* can be "described, drawn, reflected on, analyzed, and put back into use in the classroom (10). As such, I found that journaling was an activity very different from my initial field note collection. My journal entries helped me better understand and interpret the events I had recorded, and they assisted me during the course as I planned lessons and made adjustments to assignments. At the end of the semester, my reflective journal entries helped me notice some of the most important themes worth drawing out and foregrounding in this dissertation.

Document and Classroom Artifact Analysis

Though as a teacher-researcher I employed data collection practices that demonstrate both the acknowledgment and value of my experience, the strongest pieces of evidence that support the findings outlined in this dissertation come from my students' own work. Composition theorists, including Emig (1971), McCarthy (1987), and Shipka (2011) have drawn both inquiry and analysis from the texts composers produce, sometimes with the help of the writers themselves, who may act as expert informers. Throughout the semester, I collected many different kinds of student work, including freewrites at the beginning and/or end of class, documents from group work students created in class, informal homework assignments, formal composing assignments, reflections on formal composing assignments, and reflections on the course itself. A discussion of how I used these items to inform and support my findings follows in the "Analysis" portion of this chapter.

Interviews

In addition to collecting classroom artifacts, I conducted mid-semester interviews—in conjunction with midterm conferences—with my students with two purposes in mind: 1) to allow them some time one-on-one with me to ask questions or get feedback about their assignments, and 2) to help guide me in the midst of the research process. As Hubbard and Power (2003) note, "Many teachers are already master interviewers. If you use workshop formats in your classroom, you spend large chunks of your day questioning and listening to students" (61). Hoping to spend some time listening to my students individually, during the seventh week of class, I sat down in my office

with each student for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes[7]. After asking for consent to tape the interview, I asked a set of semi-structured interview questions designed to focus both on the assignment students were currently working on, as well as students' experiences in the class up to that point. (Had students not given consent, I would not have taped the interview, but I would have asked the same questions. However, all students gave consent to be interviewed.) I chose a semi-structured format rather than a rigidly structured format in order to more closely cultivate a phenomenological interview format that would allow me to "sit back and wait for surprises" (Macrorie as cited in Hubbard and Power 61). The questions I asked during the semi-structured interview were open questions; as Roulston (2010) observes, "Since researchers want to understand the participant's feelings, perceptions, and understandings, open questions are particularly useful in providing a format for interviewees to answer in their own words" (16). After conducting the interviews, I personally transcribed the interviews. Since my research was not focused on the features of students' speech so much as the content of their answers, I only transcribed words spoken. In the following section, I explain how the interviews, along with all of my other data, were analyzed once collected.

Analysis

After the semester ended, I took an inductive approach toward analyzing the data, including my field notes, reflective journal entries, student artifacts, and interview transcripts. Roulston explains, "Inductive analysis is based on the assumption that inferences can be developed by examining empirical data for patterns" (150). That is, an inductive approach to data analysis allows findings to emerge from the data, in contrast to

---

[7] Admittedly, these were fairly short interviews. However, the interviews comprised only a portion of the data I coded, so they were intended to be supplemental to students' assignments and written reflections.

deductive analysis, which relies on data to refute or support existing hypotheses. In fact, as Richards and Morse (2013) underscore, "Qualitative research does not, and should not, use a rigid prior conceptual framework that dictates the nature of the variables to be collected and the relationships among those variables" (219). Thus, I began with an open coding process, simply reading through the data, highlighting patterns or places of interest, and making notes as I read. In order to increase the reliability of my codes, I included an external second coder, whose collaboration I discuss more in the following section on reliability and validity. As I engaged in the open coding process, I began to notice potential themes and began generating a list of conceptual categories that could help me to organize my data:

A. Motivation related to music

B. Motivation related to choice

C. A change in perceptions about music or the act of listening to music

D. Realization that writing is not the only way to communicate

E. Reflections on the writing or composing process

F. Authentic use of composition terms

G. Creativity

H. Skill transfer

I. Challenge

J. Change in self-perception

Once I had coded my data, I sought to discover connections among the codes I had generated. For me, this process involved a great deal of freewriting and drafting. Though

my freewriting occasionally made me feel as though I was producing nothing useful, I was inspired to continue by Peter Elbow (1998), who suggests:

> Keep your topic in mind—or what you think your topic is—and do one or two freewriting exercises…after the exercise, take a few moments or more to rest and think about what you wrote. Think, too, about the digressions you started and perhaps continued. Notice when they occurred and where they took you. Think about their connections. Consider them as paths you should explore (10).

One way that I explored paths and connections I discovered through my freewrites was by thinking about what transitions (not necessarily transitional words or expressions—in this case I'm referring more to conceptual transitions) I would need to use in order to tie paragraphs I had written together for others. Thinking about how to best explain and connect different ideas for an audience helped me clarify my own thinking. At one point, I had paragraphs or whole sections about each of my codes drafted. I cut up the pieces of paper they were drafted on and laid them out on the floor so that I could move the pieces around. As I moved the sections around, I kept notes about how I could imagine linking the sections on a separate piece of paper. An early draft of this dissertation reflected this process but had one major weakness: I had found ways to relate the themes to one another, but I had not yet discovered how to integrate my findings more cohesively, as part of a larger story.

Originally, I had wanted to avoid discussing the class in a chronological manner, because I felt as though a chronological discussion would feel more artificial than a more organic exploration of the themes I discovered. As I later learned, my reluctance to

consider my data as part of a particular narrative framework actually led me into the choppy, narrative-less organization of data I produced in the first draft of this piece. Almost a year after I had written my first draft, I began to understand that the themes that emerged from the coding process were inextricably linked to the chronological narrative of the class. Indeed, by attempting to decontextualize the themes from the chronology of the class, I was actually *imposing* rather than avoiding an artificial narrative. As I came to this realization, I was reminded of Bakhtin's essay, "Forms of Time and the of the Chronotope in the Novel," (1981) wherein Bakhtin argues that in literary artistic chronotope (which he defines as time space),

> …spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history…The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic (85).

Granted, in the passage above, Bakhtin is moving towards a theory of historical poetics – not thinking about the best way to present data. However, from Bakhtin, and from the experience of wrestling with a data set that at times felt overwhelming and unwieldy, I have learned that in any future research I conduct, I will need to embrace the role of time—or at least give it due consideration—rather than attempt to render it invisible and without influence. Thus, in the chapters that follow, I use the chronology of the class as an intentional narrative framework for the data I present and the findings I bright to light.

Research Process Quality

Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research, measures to ensure quality in the research collection, analysis, and reporting process are imperative. Roulston notes that there are a number of terms used to refer to quality in qualitative research, including "validity, reliability, rigor, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and plausibility" (83). In this portion of the chapter, I focus specifically on measures I put in place to ensure validity and reliability in my work. I am aware that the terms "validity" and "reliability" traditionally reflect a positivist framework more frequently associated with quantitative research, and that the appropriateness of their use has been debated among qualitative researchers, including Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maxwell (1992). By using the terms validity and reliability, I demonstrate my agreement with Richards and Morse (2013) who note that "to claim that reliability and validity have no place in qualitative inquiry is to place the entire paradigm under suspicion; such a claim has ramifications that qualitative inquiry cannot afford…" (216). As a composition researcher, I am particularly sensitive to the fact that the field of composition studies has already struggled with recognition as one worthy of rigorous study; I use the terms reliability and validity not necessarily as an acknowledgment that they are the terms best suited to inquiry in composition, but rather as an allowance that I would like this work to contribute to a larger paradigm of research that does value those particular terms.

Validity

Following Richards and Morse (2013), I take note of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition that validity reflects a notion or statement that is "well founded and applicable; sound and to the point; against which no objection can fairly be brought"

(Richards and Morse 95). During this project, I incorporated measures that would ensure validity into the research design. One such measure was the sampling, or rather, the lack of purposeful sampling. Richards and Morse define purposeful sampling as "sampling in which the investigator selects participants because of their characteristics" (221). As noted previously, I originally considered specifically recruiting students who were majoring in music or dance for this class. Had I done so, my results would have had to be considered within the context of that particular sample. Similarly, had I devised some way to let students who were considering enrolling in the course (regardless of their major) know that the course would heavily involve music, a group of students who were predisposed to being interested in music may have registered. Because I made no attempt to recruit a specific set of students for this study, my claims that students of all backgrounds may benefit from the inclusion of music in a composition course are stronger than they would be, had I worked exclusively with students who were aware of what the course would be like before registering.

Another way in which I strove for validity in the research design was by utilizing a wide variety of student work in order to triangulate my findings. By including many examples of student work—for instance, work that students did both in and outside of class, work they produced without previous knowledge of the assignment versus work they had a great deal of time to complete, work that was graded based on assignment requirements versus work graded solely on participation (or not graded at all)—I am better able to claim that my findings (at least those that do not relate to a specific assignment) are neither the result of just one or two selective moments during our class, nor the result of graded activities during which students might have felt compelled to say

what they thought I wanted for the sake of their grade. Furthermore, I enhanced

triangulation by including an outside coder, which I discuss further in the "Reliability"

section below.

Roulston asserts that an additional element of the research design contributing to

validity is the length of the time spent in the field (84). During the course of this study, I

spent four months with students as a teacher-researcher, and my findings demonstrate the

breadth of the data collected within that time frame. While four months is not particularly

long amount of time, particularly when compared to the work some anthropologists or

ethnographers do, four months still gives a teacher time enough to build rapport with

students and understand a classroom's unique ecology. My own field notes and reflective

journal entries, which reflect the day-to-day events within the microcosm of our

classroom also contribute to the validity of this study by demonstrating the evolution of

the course over time.

Finally, as Roulston recommends, in an effort to cultivate validity in this work, I

provided readers with an acknowledgment of my own position and subjectivity in the

first chapter in an effort to demonstrate awareness of my own potential biases (84). As

the designer and investigator of this study, I recognize that my own ideas and values have

shaped what I perceive as significant and interesting; therefore, I would invite readers to

openly share their own insights about the work presented here with me.

Reliability

Though I have decided to use the terms "validity" and "reliability" to discuss the

integrity of my research, I draw on Lincoln and Guba (1985) and contextualize reliability

here as a term reflective of dependability or trustworthiness, particularly as they relate to

the analysis of my findings. The process of coding my data presented an opportunity for me to enhance the dependability of my findings, because coding is a largely subjective act. As Richards and Morse (2013) observe,

> Because qualitative coding is primarily interpretive, two researchers will rarely produce identical coding. Why should they?...differences in interpretive coding indicate only differences in researchers' purposes and perceptions (164).

In order to mitigate some of my own biases, I sought the participation of an external collaborator who has years of experience teaching composition at the university level. She agreed to serve as a secondary coder, and we met at a coffee shop one morning to code some data. Prior to this meeting, I had begun to look through my data for potential themes as they emerged. However, I did not bring any of my notes about those potential codes to this meeting. In order to bring only a manageable amount of material, I brought printed copies of students' reflections. (In hindsight, I probably should have varied the data I brought—bringing only one type of data may have constrained some of the codes we generated together.) My collaborator and I met and began to engage in open coding. We each read the same final reflection, and then discussed what stood out to us. In time, we began comparing and contrasting the reflections with one another, and we were able to draft some codes. There were times when our collaboration matched codes I had already generated independently, but there were also moments when our meeting fundamentally changed a code: for instance, I originally expected to have a theme loosely titled "use in the future," but through my discussions with the secondary coder, this code became more aptly titled "positive transferability," which better highlights a rhetorical

situation or activity, as opposed to a place or time. Thus, working with a secondary coder improved the specificity of my codes and helped me confirm, complicate, and refine the themes which emerged.

Ethics

Collecting qualitative research as a teacher-researcher presents its own set of challenges, most notably collecting high-quality research while maintaining professional integrity. As Hubbard and Power (2003) note, "The research [teacher-researchers] do should never be at the expense of [their] teaching; it should inform and enhance [their] performance as teacher[s]" (40). As I explained earlier in the chapter, I kept field notes during this course, which I then used to contribute to reflective journal entries. Indeed, I discovered that my reflective journal entries helped to guide my lesson planning and the assignments I asked students to submit; thus, the research I was conducting actually helped me become a *better* instructor for my students. As important as teaching integrity is, teacher-researchers must also be mindful to not abuse their roles as authority figures or present any risk to their students. In the following section, I detail the measures I took to ensure that my data collection and reporting methods reflected my commitment to ethical research gathering practices.

Consent

Though I did not recruit a specific group of students for the class or advertise specific details about the course in the course catalog, I did make students completely aware that the course would involve experimental uses of music and that my role in our classroom was both that of a teacher and a researcher. On the first day of class, I explained to my students that I was interested in learning more about how music could be

used to teach a composition course, and I also informed them that I was teaching the course as part of my own dissertation research. Because I provided students with this information during the university's add/drop period, any student who did not wish to continue in the course would have been able to drop the course or transfer into another course without academic or financial penalty.

In addition to explaining what the course was about on the first day of class, I asked students to fill out UMBC's IRB-approved consent forms in which they indicated whether they agreed to give me permission to use samples of their work along with a pseudonym, or whether they wished to prohibit me from using any samples of their work in the dissertation. Before students chose whether or not to allow me to use their work, I stressed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that refusal to consent would not result in any negative consequences, academically or personally. I also informed students that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the semester, and finally I told them that they would be asked to give consent for the use of any recorded interviews or conferences at a later time. All students in the course provided their consent to the use of their assignments and classroom materials.

Student Identification and Pseudonyms

I began this chapter with a description of the college climate, noting specifically that my research was conducted at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, so I feel it is important to explain the reasons I have chosen to identify the university at which these students were enrolled. First, a quick Internet search of my name and a phrase like "English department" would make it clear that I was likely conducting my research at UMBC. Next, UMBC's reputation as a STEM-oriented institution—along with the fact

that the majority of my students were majoring in STEM fields—contextualizes my

research and contributes to the story my findings tell. Finally, I have chosen to identify

the institution because I am proud of my students' work, and I would like readers to

know that UMBC has exceptional students who are willing to take on challenges and

create sophisticated compositions.

As proud as I am of my students, I have kept their individual identities private by

assigning them pseudonyms. While I attempt to give enough information about the

students whose work I discuss to give readers a sense of the students' backgrounds and

interests, I also have done my best to omit or disguise any features or characteristics that

would make a student too easily identifiable.

Limitations

The findings from this study are subject to certain limitations. First, and perhaps

most importantly, this course was taught only one time. Though I had hoped to complete

a pilot of the course and then teach it a second time (with potential modifications), I was

unable to do so, because the English department implemented a substantively redesigned

composition curriculum soon after that that would have made it impossible for me to

teach the course in the same way. (The re-design changed the format of the course,

leading to fewer full-class meetings in favor of more frequent small-group writing

conferences led by both instructors and undergraduate peer writing fellows. While it

would still have been possible for me to incorporate music into my curriculum, the unit

structures and assignments would have had to undergo significant revisions, and I would

have had to devise ways to train and work with the undergraduate writing fellow.

Because the course would be so altered, the second iteration would essentially have been

a brand new pilot study rather than a refinement of the first pilot.) Also, as with any teacher-research study, the results described herein reflect the students I taught. The findings I present are not meant to be a guarantee that instructors using similar lessons will experience the same results; rather, like most teacher-researcher work in composition (see Shipka, 2011; Miller and McVee, 2012; Dunn, 2003), my work here adds another voice and layer to a lively conversation about the tremendously rich and varied experiences composition courses can offer students. Perhaps most importantly, this dissertation demonstrates that, given the opportunity, students themselves will drive rigorous, challenging composing work that expands their possibilities for meaningful, multimodal communication.

Having oriented my readers to the purpose of my study and the literature underpinning my decision to experiment with using music in a composition class, and having explained the way in which I carried out my study, I now turn to a discussion of most important findings from my research. In the following chapter, I introduce the course in greater detail, and I demonstrate the positive impact the incorporation of music had on students' motivation and their ability to see themselves as composers. In Chapters 4 and 5, I lead readers more deeply into the course and highlight student work that demonstrates how my curriculum impacted students' thoughts about composing as well as the compositions students created.

Chapter Three

Feeling: Motivation and Self-Efficacy

Introduction

> I have gained probably the most useful skill; I have learned how to share
> my thoughts and ideas without any shame in mind. The friendly
> environment and warmth have broken that seal restricting me from talking
> to strangers or my professors when I am in need.
>
> —Jason, last day of class

In the epigraph above, Jason, a first-year mechanical engineering major who spoke English as a second language, describes an outcome that certainly was not one of the course objectives I typically list on the syllabus for an English 100 course, but was nevertheless worth sharing. As Jason points out, he was able to overcome both his embarrassment about his communication skills and his hesitation to seek assistance from others. I largely credit the inclusion of music in our course to enhancing what he perceived as being the "friendly environment" and "warmth" developed within our class, and I credit both the incorporation of music and a degree of freedom and choice in relation to assignments as a major factor in promoting the development of students' motivation and confidence.

In this chapter, I explore students' anxieties, motivation, and sense of self-efficacy during our semester together; I do so because these affective aspects of learning have critical potential to impact students' participation and performance in the classroom. In a

meta-analysis involving data collected from 36,626 subjects from all over the world, Seipp (1991) found that high anxiety levels correlated negatively with performance, meaning that those people who felt anxious about a task were more likely to perform poorly on it. Furthermore, when Pintrich and de Groot (1990) studied 173 American seventh-graders from eight science and seven English classrooms, they found that students who reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation towards a task demonstrated higher levels of achievement than those students who reported being unmotivated towards that same task. Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) further showed that, in a study of 102 American ninth- and tenth-grade students, students' beliefs about their academic attainment were strongly correlated with their actual academic achievement. Because the way students feel about their own learning relates to their academic outcomes, I argue that it is just as important to consider students' feelings about a course's content and requirements as it is their perspectives and artifacts, as I will do in later chapters.

In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate the anxiety about writing, and English classes in general, that some students brought with them to this composition course, and I argue that positive feelings about music helped mitigate some students' apprehensions and increase their desire to engage with assignments. Next, I affirm the importance of giving students some freedom with regard to assignment content and form, demonstrating that both music and choice can be powerful elements in helping students find intrinsic motivation. Finally, I emphasize the pleasant surprise students feel about their own writing abilities through a discussion of their reported sense of self-efficacy at the end of the course, and I analyze statements about their desire to incorporate music

into self-sponsored compositions in the future. As a whole, this chapter argues that making direct, varied efforts to incorporate music into a composition class can have positive impacts on students' attitude towards a composition course, their desire to complete and put effort into assignments into that course, and their confidence in their own composing abilities.

Anxiety and Disengagement

I chose to begin this chapter with Jason's affirmation that this course helped him gain "the most useful skill"—learning how to share his thoughts and ideas "without any shame"—largely because of what he told me sixteen weeks earlier on the day we met. In an effort to dispel some of the nervous energy the first day of class creates, I asked the students (as I generally do in my classes) to tell me a little bit about their previous experiences in composition or English classes. After we all introduced ourselves to each other, I asked students write down answers to two prompts: 1) What have your experiences with English or composition courses been like in the past? and 2) What do you hope to gain from this class? In response, Jason wrote the following: "I would like to learn how to express myself and my ideas better…my only concern is that you don't go *full-out rampage* [my emphasis] on my writing skills as teachers have done before." Jason's word choice made me smile, but it also discouraged me a bit—it was obvious that he had received a great deal of negative feedback about his writing ability in past courses, and now he was entering a new situation, my class, not with excited optimism, but with cautious concern. Unfortunately, as I continued reading my students' responses, it became clear to me that Jason was not the only student who felt apprehension about taking this course.

Researchers confirm that writing anxiety is quite common among college students and is also correlated with certain predictors, including gender, GPA, and self-efficacy beliefs. Martinez, Knock, and Cass (2005) conducted a study involving 127 college students taking a variety of courses, including dance and business, at a public American university. They asked students to respond to two surveys—one given a few weeks into the semester, and the other administered ten weeks later—that included questions about their writing practices, both in and outside of the classroom; additionally, students were asked to answer questions about their feelings about their own writing ability. The researchers discovered that students with higher GPAs experienced less writing anxiety that those with lower GPAs, and they learned that students who identified as female were more likely to report writing anxiety than those who identified as male. Additionally, they demonstrated that students with lower levels of writing self-efficacy expressed higher degrees of writing anxiety.

Though neither of the two questions I put to students on the first day asked students if they were feeling nervous about the course, eleven out of the twenty-five students in my class (44%) students nevertheless expressed anxiety about the course or their writing skills more generally[8]. In addition to Jason, who showed concern about how teachers had responded to his writing, two students who said they felt nervous included references to how close family members reacted to their writing or feelings about it. Jessica, a first-year student who had hopes of becoming a high school math teacher, wrote in response to Prompt #1, "I haven't always had the best experience with English classes. A 'math mind' is the way my mother would describe my thinking." Laura, a

---

[8] Though this portion of the chapter focuses on students with writing anxiety, I should also note that four students wrote specifically that they enjoyed English or writing.

junior psychology major, confessed, "I never liked English, writing, or reading. My sister's an English major and can't understand why I never found any interest in it." These two students' statements suggest that family members may play a role in students' writing anxiety or conceptions of themselves as writers. Additionally, four students demonstrated anxiety about the course because of their perceived skills or abilities. Megan, a first-year biochemistry major, noted that she was "a little worried about taking English because I was in French immersion all through grade school, and I was worried I wouldn't have the necessary skills." Finally, four students confided that they simply found no enjoyment in writing. Michael, a first-year computer science major, wrote, "…I would like to maybe somewhat start liking to write about things because currently I don't like writing very much." I was struck in particular by Michael's goal to "maybe somewhat" start liking writing—such phrasing certainly didn't convey high hopes for his enjoying the course, but it showed me that he was open to the possibility of it.

I don't mean to suggest that it is strictly necessary for students to like a subject in order to engage with it or learn effectively, but researchers confirm that it certainly helps. For instance, a 2002 study of 117 Australian eighth-grade students and 104 Canadian ninth-grade students demonstrated that "topic interest was related to affective response, affect was then related to persistence with the text, and persistence was related to learning" (Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff 558), suggesting that interest in a topic does positively impact the learning process. Somewhat surprisingly, early researchers in the field of composition did not attend very much to writers' interest in or motivation for their writing. Much of the early work in composition focused on processes and products—for instance, Emig, 1971; Snipes 1973; Graves, 1975; Flowers and Hayes,

1981; and Perl, 1979 all contributed knowledge about composing by utilizing think-aloud protocols and analyzing written products—with the result that compositionists seem to have overlooked concurrently explored aspects of educational psychology research that might have had the potential to inform or expand their studies. Hidi and Boscolo (2006), tracing the early origins of composition studies, note that only a couple of researchers focused on the issue of writing and motivation; among these were Daly and Miller (1975), who sought to develop an empirical tool with which to measure writing apprehension.

Fortunately, more contemporary composition researchers have increasingly attended to the affective dimension of writing—that is, how students feel about their motivation and abilities. Because I argue here that motivation is an important aspect of composing that should not be overlooked, it is helpful to define a major component of motivation: interest. Interest has been described by Hidi and Boscolo (2006) as

> …a motivational variable, as well as a psychological state that occurs
> during interactions between persons and their environment, and is
> characterized by increased attention, concentration, and affect (145).

Essentially, interest describes the level of engagement a student might feel with a course. In a composition course, a student's interest may be affected by a number of things, including intrinsic like or dislike of a topic, feelings about other people in a classroom, or even the time of day at which a course is taught. The concept of interest itself can be broken down further into two elements. According to Deci (2014), interest has two components: an experiential component, and a dispositional one. The experiential component refers to the way in which a specific person recognizes his or her affect

towards a particular task or object as interest, while the dispositional component refers to the process through which a person desires to interact with activities or objects over time (49). Both of these aspects of interest are important, because they may affect students' success in the goal setting and achievement process. Ainley and Patrick (2006) demonstrate that students' level of interest can affect not only how they fare on discrete tasks (like a single paper or assignment) related to a larger goal, but can also affect students' achievement of a master goal, such as successfully completing a course.

So how can instructors help students feel interested in their assignments? Ainley (2006) suggests that a major way in which student interest has been found to be triggered is through the alignment of students' existing interests with a task's content, noting that "when an individual has a well-developed individual interest or pre-disposition to engage with objects and activities of a specified class, then a simple encounter between person and object is likely to trigger a state of interest" (402). For many students, interest is something that can be triggered through the incorporation of music into a task. As Dethier (2003) notes, there are a number of reasons why music can be a positive element of composition courses, including the fact that students already spend a lot of time thinking and talking about music (ix). Additionally, adolescents also place the importance of music above that of other media. Dethier (2003), citing Christenson and Roberts (1998), refers to a study of more than 600 American seventh-, ninth- and eleventh-grade students who were surveyed about the importance of music in their lives. Participants were asked to imagine they would be going to a desert island and were asked to rank three things they would take in order of importance from the following list: TV set, books, video games, computer, newspapers, VCR and videotapes, magazines, radio, and

music recordings and the means to play At all grade levels, music was among the top three choices; interestingly, as students got older, music became even more important, as it was "selected first by a margin of two to one" (Roberts, Christenson, and Gentile 153). Given that music is so important to young people, incorporating music into academic content would likely increase students' interest in the material.

My anecdotal experience (as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation) had led me to believe that most students really enjoyed listening to music; still, in order to learn more about my students' attitude towards music, during the first week of the course I asked students to freewrite an answer the question, "What does music mean to you?" Jessica, the first-year student discussed earlier who wanted to become a math teacher, described it in this way:

> Music is a soundtrack in my life. A song can be paired with every scene, with every memory. Sometimes an artist can articulate how I'm feeling ten times better than I ever could, and at times it's just easier that way.

Jessica's explanation that she sees music as a "soundtrack in my life" shows that her relationship with music is deeply personal. After all, soundtracks are created with great attention to scenes and characters, and some scholars have even posited that certain songs on a soundtrack amount to an entire film's thesis (see Halbritter, 2006, who argues that the Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want" acts as the driving argument of the film *The Big Chill*). Given that Jessica expressed concern about her aptitude for writing, perhaps it isn't surprising that she states it's sometimes "easier" to look to a musician to help her express herself than for her to use her own words.

Kevin, a junior computer science major, took a slightly more abstract, though no less personalized, view:

> Music is an art form that is comprised of a collection of sounds that are heard in a series of time. It doesn't necessarily have to be instruments or anything of that sort. It could just be noise. The ultimate goal when making music should be, if it sounds good to you, then it's good. Some people may agree that it is good as well, while most will think it's complete shit, but that should make no difference to you. Don't be held back by ungrateful fans and record execs that are just trying to squeeze another buck out of you.

Kevin's distaste for the pressures of commercial popularity that are placed on musicians is evident, and his affirmation that "if it sounds good to you, then it's good," shows that he also believes that music is subjective and personal. (It's also interesting to note that Kevin's definition of music goes beyond what most people might consider "music" to include "noise." Here he hints at a question that I do not seek to address in this dissertation, but that Levitin [2006] devotes an entire chapter to answering: what, exactly, is music?[9])

Still, it was perhaps Anna, a first-year double major in biological sciences and modern languages, whose explanation of what music meant to her struck me the most. She wrote simply, "Music is a form of love. My brain registers it as happiness." Her response was fairly representative of the class' in general, for not a single student

---

[9] If I were to teach this course again, I would likely include an assignment asking students to define music and defend their definition. Such an assignment would require students to differentiate music from other types of sound (or effectively argue its sameness), and might encourage them to grapple with issues of offensiveness and artistic merit.

expressed any dislike for music. In fact, not a single person was even what might be called neutral with regard to music—all twenty-five students in my class wrote about what music meant to them in overwhelmingly positive terms.

As a matter of fact, fourteen students either noted that initial anxiety or negative feelings they had about taking a composition course were mitigated once they knew music would be heavily involved, or they stated that they were enthusiastic about the course once they knew it would involve music. Christopher, a sophomore computer engineering major, expressed excitement after learning how the course would be constructed. He wrote,

> I signed up for this class thinking that I would only be reading and writing essays on "historical" novels. I was okay with that, but not terribly enthusiastic. Knowing that this is not a conventional composition course excites me. The fact that it is music-based makes it all the better. I hope to expand on what I know about music and its importance. This seems like an excellent way to learn composition while still having an enjoyable experience.

Zachary, a first-year chemistry major, made a similar comment, stating, "At first I was expecting to read and write about stories I cared nothing about. But now that I know we will be incorporating lots of music, I am excited!" Finally, Megan, the first-year biochemistry major who had been worried that she might not have the skills necessary for the class due to her time in French immersion courses, wrote, "After your introduction and explanation of the music component, I feel like this will be one of my favorite courses!" These comments show that instructors may learn a great deal by asking

students about their expectations for a course. In the case of a composition course, students may expect a course similar to one they had in high school, which can be detrimental to their initial motivation, if they disliked their high school courses. However, these students' comments also show that telling students early in the semester what to expect has the potential to change their outlook on a course almost immediately.

Incorporating Music, Building Motivation

In an effort to get students involved in thinking about music right away, I focused the first unit of this course on music and identity. Our class met in a brand new computer lab, so during our second class period together, I asked my students to break into small groups and use the computer to find a video or sound file of a piece of music that they felt represented them in some way. Once they had each found a piece of music, I asked them to play it for their group members. I instructed group members to write down three guesses or predictions about the person who had chosen the song, and once all group members had presented their song, the students were asked to discuss whether the predictions the group members made about each other were true. There were a few reasons I chose this activity. First, I hoped that students would be excited to share their music with one another; after all, as I noted in Chapter One, Miraldi (2010) found that music sharing was an important social activity among college students. Because ice-breaking activities can be uncomfortable, particularly for shy students, I hoped that by sharing music, students would be able to impart something about themselves without immediately having to talk. Additionally, I hoped this activity would help students think about how music might signify something about their identities. Finally, I hoped that this activity would help students develop trust and class cohesion, which could be important

71

to later peer review workshops. (As a case study reported in Gonzalez [2002] found, trust was an important element that helped to build skills in a basic writers' peer review group). While the implementation of this activity was a bit "chaotic", as I wrote down in my field notes that day, students listened carefully to one another's choices (Field Notes 2). Once students began discussing one another's choices, the volume in the room was almost louder than it had been when they were listening to songs—I wrote in my teaching journal later that "the noise level grew, probably because they were so interested in hearing what others guessed about them and making their own guesses about their peers" (Reflective Journal 2).

During the following class, as we reflected on the activity, students noted that some of the predictions their classmates made about them were correct, while others were erroneous. This discussion led us to the broader topic of first impressions, and I asked students to think about whether people's first impressions of their writing might tell other people something about them. My students participated in a fifteen minute discussion in small groups, and as each group then shared their conclusions with the rest of the class, one group noted that a piece of writing has the potential to be "like a snapshot of who you are at a particular time. It's not going to be the same, necessarily, later, but it's probably who you were at some point" (Field Notes 4). Another group tied that statement back to music, noting that some of the songs or bands they used to like were things they didn't listen to anymore (Field Notes 4). I noted in my teaching journal that "students seemed to agree that their writing and their musical choices were both aspects of themselves that were constantly evolving" (Reflective Journal 2).

The activity described above was intended to act as a scaffold for what would be the students' first major assignment in this course: a first-person narrative reflection about a song that had special meaning in their life. Though scholars like Bartholomae (1986) have expressed the concern that teaching narrative essays in college writing courses may not prepare students for the type of writing they will need to do in other courses, I hoped to build some confidence in my students by allowing them to feel like experts on the subject matter they were writing about, even if they were nervous about their actual writing. After all, as Donald Murray (1985) observes, "Writing teachers and writing students share a similar fear. The instructors fear they have nothing to say. The students fear they have nothing to write" (75). My hope was that by engaging students in something of intrinsic interest to them, they *would* feel as though they had something to write. On the day that students handed in their narratives, I asked them to respond to two questions. The first was whether or not they had used music in a composition or English class before. I was surprised to learn that only seven out of the twenty-one students in attendance that day responded that they had. Of those seven, three had used music to reflect on songs, three had analyzed lyrics as poetry, and one had used music in a presentation. The remaining fourteen students did not have any experience using music in an English or composition class at all. In addition to asking whether students had used music as part such a course before, I also asked students to reflect on the process of writing their assignment: "How was the experience of using music in this assignment? What, if anything, made it easy? What, if anything, made it difficult? Is there anything you would change about your narrative? Is there anything else about this assignment you'd like me to know?"

What struck me as I read through my students' responses about this assignment was the lack of anxiety that had been so apparent for nearly half of my students at the beginning of the course. However, their lack of anxiety at this point did not mean that they did not find the assignment challenging. Ten out of twenty-two students who wrote responses noted that they found the assignment demanding. Jessica, who had called music a "soundtrack in her life", wrote, "At first, today's paper was difficult to start. I haven't written in a while and it was definitely a challenge to get the juices flowing. However, once the memory and the song came to me, the paper became much easier." Fluency and self-efficacy also appeared to be concerns for other students, like Kevin and Christopher. Kevin noted, "The assignment went okay. I struggled to get started since it has been almost three years since I have had to write a paper of any kind. The easy part was getting my ideas down. The hardest part was making it sound like it wasn't written by a 12-year old." Here, Kevin's words demonstrate that while his self-efficacy about his technical writing skills may not be very high, he was satisfied with his ability to create content for the assignment. Christopher, however, noted his struggle with the transfer of emotions and ideas, stating, "The essay went well, but it wasn't as easy to complete as I had originally thought. I know how it [the song] impacted me, but expressing those feelings in words was difficult."

Though many of my students continued to wrestle with anxiety during the course of the semester, by the end, they were pleasantly surprised by their own growth and abilities, as I will demonstrate and discuss later in this chapter. For now, I will provide a more detailed discussion of the course curriculum, with particular focus on the freedom students had in choosing elements of their assignments. After outlining my course

curriculum and the choices students had regarding the assignments they completed, I will focus on how students reported feeling about the opportunity to choose both the content and form of their assignments.

Freedom of Choice

Syllabus and Course Design

Integrating music—a topic students already cared about—into the curriculum helped alleviate some of my students' anxiety about writing. At the same time, giving students choices about the tasks they completed and the music they used helped to increase students' motivation. Psychologists have extensively studied the influence of choice on motivation; in fact, Patall, Cooper, and Robinson's (2008) meta-analysis of forty-one studies conducted in the United States and Canada between 1974 and 2004, and including forty-six sample populations of both adults and children, clearly demonstrated that "providing choice enhanced intrinsic motivation, task performance, and perceived competence, among other outcomes" (270). My students' comments about their motivation to complete assignments confirm that choice had a distinct impact on their intrinsic motivation in this course.

I developed this course in a manner that would allow students some freedom of choice, where possible. The course consisted of five distinct units, each designed to integrate music and composition in different ways. As I have noted before, this course was not designed to prove that integrating music in a composition course is the best way to teach composition; rather, my goal was to explore some of the possibilities that integrating music into the composition classroom might afford. In each of the five units, students were expected to develop a particular skill set, and the units were designed to

integrate and build on skills from previous one. In addition to UMBC's departmental composition course objectives, I delineated the following six objectives specific to our course:

1. Use personally meaningful music as a means to enter into traditional writing assignments.

2. Understand how music can be used as a rhetorical device and be able to use music as an argument or as a supplement to an argument.

3. Better understand the process of creating and composing music.

4. Better understand the process of creating and composing written text.

5. Explore connections and divergences in different modes of composition, particularly music and writing.

6. Investigate a cause and use music to create a multimodal text designed to address that cause in some way.

Students achieved these objectives through five units, outlined briefly in Table 3.1 and sections in the following pages, with descriptions of the major assignments culminating each unit.

Table 3.1

Unit	Assignment(s)
Music as a Representation of Ourselves	Personal Narrative
Music and Rhetoric, and the Rhetoric of Music	Formal Rhetorical Analysis OR Analysis of Music in a Setting
The Composing Process	Song and Reflection OR Concept vs. Non-Concept Album Comparison and Contrast
Multimodality	Multimodal Conversion Project
Putting it All Together	Multimodal Presentation Using Music

Unit 1: Music as a Representation of Ourselves

In this unit, students were asked to consider the role music played in their lives, with a particular focus on music's potential to function as an identity marker. Students were asked to think about some of their favorite pieces or artists and to share those pieces with one another, both as a means to help them consider their relationship to songs and artists, as well as to help them build rapport with one another. The culminating assignment for this unit was fairly traditional—students were asked to write a personal narrative about a song that had meaning to them. In this assignment, students had the freedom to choose any song they wanted to use. In this way, the first objective was met, as students used music as a way to complete a writing assignment.

Unit 2: Music and Rhetoric, and the Rhetoric of Music

The second unit of this course was designed to help students learn about rhetorical

principles, but it also allowed them to discover something about the rhetoric of music.

Through readings on rhetoric, basic semiotics, and the structure of musical compositions,

students learned to perceive music rhetorically and began to apply principles learned in

class to homework assignments. One such assignment (adapted from Piazza [1999], as

discussed in Chapter One) required students to keep a 24-hour music journal

documenting every instance of music they heard during that time period, which further

served to provide some of the students with the situation they chose to analyze in their

unit assignment, detailed below. The lessons and activities in this unit helped students

achieve the objectives of understanding music's role as a rhetorical device. We discussed

such questions as 1) "Why is music being played in this particular place, at this particular

time?" 2) "Who do you think the intended audience for the music is? How do you

know?" 3) "What is music contributing to this situation?" 4) "How is music impacting

the behavior of the audience?" At the end of the unit, I permitted students to choose one

of two potential culminating assignments. First, students had the option to write a formal

rhetorical analysis examining a song of their choosing—with or without lyrics, provided

they felt comfortable with the vocabulary available to them if they chose a song without

lyrics. (For instance, I cautioned students who were unfamiliar with terms like tempo and

crescendo that choosing to discuss a piece without lyrics might prove rather difficult.) If

students did not wish to do a formal rhetorical analysis, they had a second option: to

present an analysis of music in a particular setting, with the goal of explaining how the

music in that setting contributed to a specific rhetorical situation.

Unit 3: The Composing Process

In this unit, students learned a bit about the composing process as it applies to a variety of texts, including music. Students read pieces about the writing process by authors such as Mike Rose, Steven King, and Ann Lamott, and they also read pieces about song writing from diverse, contemporary singer-songwriters, including John Legend, Lyle Lovett, Sheryl Crow, and John Mellencamp. Students were asked to reflect on their own composing processes and make connections between their own practices and the readings. The major assignment for this unit also offered students two choices: 1) to write their own song (not graded, to allow students to feel safe in taking a risk), and provide a detailed reflection (graded on detailed meta-cognition and quality of effort) about their song-writing process and an assessment of their product, or 2) to compare two albums; one had to be considered a concept album, while the other had to be a non-concept album. Students who chose this second option were asked to listen carefully to each album and provide an analysis of how the albums were organized, as well as how they differed from one another or were similar in some way. (Students' analyses could take the form of prose, a graphic organizer, or some alternative means, if a student cleared it with me in advance.) The assignments in this unit helped students achieve the objective of better understanding the process of creating and composing music as well as the process of composing a written text.

Unit 4: Multimodality

The fourth unit enhanced students' understanding of multimodality as the term applies to composition studies (see Chapter One). The culminating project in this unit asked students to choose a previously completed project or a project they were currently

working on in another class and to communicate the essence of that project in a different way. I prompted students:

> Your task is to convert the information conveyed in an assignment you have already completed or are in the process of completing (in this class or in any other) into another mode of communication. You can be virtually as creative with this process as you like. You may choose to represent information through visual means, auditory means, written means, etc. Think about the five senses if you get stuck—how else could you convey the information or argument put forth in the assignment you've chosen to work with? Don't feel like you have to limit yourself to one mode--you may use any combination of modes you like or find appropriate.

I did not specifically ask students to incorporate music into this conversion, because music might not necessarily have been a good choice. I also wanted to see how many students would use music on their own and what they would do if they chose to use it. (In Chapter Five, I provide examples of how some students did incorporate music into this assignment, including a discussion of a student who chose to record the song he wrote for the previous assignment.) Upon submitting their projects, students were asked to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their original piece in comparison with their converted product, which helped them explore connections and divergences in different modes of composition.

Unit 5: Putting it All Together

In this unit, students were asked to draw upon everything they learned during the semester to create a multimodal presentation utilizing music. Students were required to

identify a cause they felt strongly about and create a presentation that would persuade their audience to take a particular course of action. Students had the option of presenting live in class or doing something like creating a video outside of class that they would show during class time, but were required to submit a document explaining their rhetorical choices, much like Jody Shipka (2006; 2011) required her students to do. This assignment helped students achieve the goals of understanding how music can be used as a rhetorical device while concurrently allowing them to choose a cause they cared about and create a multimodal text designed to address that cause in some way.

Students' Comments on Freedom and Motivation

In the creation of each assignment, I sometimes gave students more than one option regarding the type of assignment they could complete, but I always allowed them freedom of choice in terms of what music they chose to work with. While I did not specifically ask my students about how they felt about having options presented to them during the semester, in their final reflection papers (which was only given a participation grade—not a grade connected to actual responses), the theme of choice as related to motivation became very apparent.

One question I prompted students to consider in their final reflections was, "In general, were you more motivated to complete assignments for this composition course than assignments in previous composition courses? Why or why not?" Out of twenty-three students who provided an answer to this question, eighteen reported that they felt more motivated in this English class than in previous ones, with the remaining five reporting that they felt similar levels of motivation to previous English classes. Importantly, not a single student reported feeling *less* motivated in this English class as

opposed to previous ones, which suggests that, at least in this particular composition

class, the integration of music was unlikely to have negatively affect students'

motivation.

Though it is important that students in general experienced an increase in

motivation in my class, it is useful to identify what elements students attributed to their

motivation. As I analyzed students' reflections, it became apparent that students

discussed motivation both in terms of assignment content and assignment choice. In their

responses, five students attributed their motivation simply to the use of music, five

students attributed their motivation solely to the fact that they were presented with

choice, and eight students some students highlighted both of those elements. For instance,

Jessica, who originally told me that she "hadn't always had the best experience in English

classes," noted that the freedom of choice this course offered her was integral to her

motivation. She wrote:

> I was usually excited to start each assignment...The assignments were all
>
> engaging because each one was personal and *I* got to write about
>
> something *I* enjoyed. No assignment was ever so structured that it felt like
>
> I just had to go through the motions and get it done, like I have in previous
>
> English classes. Each assignment prompt left enough freedom for me to
>
> select a topic to be excited about and motivated to complete the
>
> assignment.

Jason, the student who was concerned I would go "full-out rampage" on his writing

skills, also responded very favorably to choice. He wrote, "I have enjoyed your

assignments because topics were mostly free of choice, giving us a chance to write a lot about what we feel is most important."

While freedom of choice appealed to students like Jessica and Jason, five students noted that they were more motivated to complete traditional written assignments because they were able to write about music. Kevin, the junior who had shared his struggle to write after not doing so for three years, focused his comments about his level of motivation in the course on the fact that he was able to choose the music he wrote about, as well as the assignment:

> I thought the final cause presentation was fun because it was something I cared about and I enjoyed putting it together, especially the parts that involved music. I probably spent five or six hours downloading videos from YouTube and editing them together to make that little three minute montage over Bikini Kill's "For Tammy Rae," but I had so much fun doing it and was really satisfied with the end product. I know it's not great editing or anything, but I think that it was a powerful song to use with that footage and it got the message across that I was trying to send. And it was fun finding a song that fit well and brought up the right emotions in the people that were watching it. In that, I think the video succeeded, and I was proud of it. But I also liked the papers we had to write. It sounds crazy to me since I've never really enjoyed writing papers, but the ones we wrote in this class were awesome. I mean, when I registered for English 100, I never thought that I would be writing a rhetorical analysis on the Geto Boys' "Mind Playin Tricks on Me"…And I actually got to write a

paper about how much I liked Frank Zappa's "Peaches En Regalia." And

then I got to compare Joe's Garage to Chunga's Revenge. All of those

papers were a blast to write. I was really worried about taking this class,

but it ended up being the opposite of what I expected. I enjoyed doing all

of those papers because they were about something I actually cared about.

I don't know, I guess maybe if I didn't really care for music, this class

probably would have sucked like every other English class I've taken, but

for me this class was special, and I enjoyed what we did and learned.

It's clear that for Kevin, both music and freedom of choice contributed to his

motivation to put forth effort in the course. One thing that surprised me as I read his

comments was how clearly he remembered the assignments he did and the music he

incorporated. In a 2012 online press release for Kansas State University, Psychology

professor Richard Harris notes that a person's interest in a topic has a positive effect on

the brain's ability to remember things ("What's Your Name Again?"), so the detail Kevin

was able to recall about his assignments may be due in part to the interest and intrinsic

motivation he felt while engaging in them.

Though choice and music both had positive effects on Kevin's motivation, neither

choice nor music positively impacted motivation for Laura, the junior psychology major

who "found no interest in English." In her final reflection, she noted

In general, I was not motivated to complete assignments for this class or any of

my other English classes. Especially with writing assignments, I do them because

I have to. I don't write during my free time, and if I can avoid writing I would.

84

The only assignment that I was motivated to complete was Assignment 5, because

I learned about a good cause as well as how to use iMovie.

Thus, though Laura was not any less motivated in this course than in previous English courses, there was no significant improvement in her self-reported level of motivation, either. As I mentioned earlier, Laura did note that her self-confidence improved during this course; her case is interesting, because it suggests that bolstering students' confidence as writers does not necessarily increase the motivation they feel to complete composing assignments.

In addition to asking students about how motivated they felt to complete assignments, I also asked them to think about the time they spent on assignments for the course. Nine students out of twenty-three who responded to this question said that they spent more time on the assignments for this course than on assignments for previous composition courses. Jessica explained that the additional time she spent was related to her motivation:

In general I feel like I spent more time on the assignments from this class

than from my high school English classes, which is really all I have as a

comparison. I really appreciated the layout of this class and the

assignments, so that made me want to put a lot of time and effort into each

one. I always felt like you gave us ample time to complete what you asked

and I never felt like you assigned "busy work." Each assignment had a

rhyme and reason, which I really respected.

Thus, Jessica's enjoyment of the assignments, coupled with her sense that the purpose of the assignments was made clear, contributed to her desire to do her best work.

Additionally, David, a first-year engineering major who had been fairly quiet in class during the semester, surprised me with the following statement:

> I spent more time on assignments in this English course than on assignments in previous English courses. The main reason for this is because this English class and its assignments were centered around music, which is a subject I am highly interested in and want to write about. This caused me to put more time and effort into my assignments because I enjoyed writing about music and how it relates to other things. In previous English classes, I would usually wait until a few days before the assignment was due to start it because I was never truly interested in the subjects I was given to write about. However, this was not the case in this English class because I started most of the assignments soon after I got them.

Though Jessica and David wrote that they spent more time on these assignments than on those in previous English classes, as noted previously, not all students did so. Of the students who did not spend more time than usual, nine stated that they spent about the same time as usual, and five stated that they spent less time. However, some of the comments these students made in relation to the amount of time spent on assignments are worth examining. For instance, Joshua, a first-year Information Systems major who said he spent a comparable amount of time on the assignments in this class as compared to other classes, clarified:

> I believe I spent on average about the same amount of time on assignments in this course than those in previous English courses. Although the nature of

assignments were very different in this course, I do not think they were less

labor intensive or time consuming, but they involved many new techniques

of completing them. In general, they were more diverse and required more

creative and rhetorical abilities.

Finally, some students noted that they spent even less time on the assignments

than they usually did in English courses. Laura, the student whose sister couldn't

understand Laura's lack of interest in English, actually reported spending less time:

In general, I spent less time on assignments in this class than assignments

in previous English classes. I think that this class had assignments that

were straightforward…having options for assignments also made it easier.

We were not forced to write a certain way, and I felt comfortable writing.

Thus, in Laura's case, spending less time on assignments was related to the fact she felt

less constrained than she had in previous writing courses. Therefore, though students may

have spent a similar amount of time or even less time on assignments for my class

compared to previous classes, the amount of time they spent is not necessarily linked to a

lack of interest in the student or a lack of rigor on the part of the assignment. In fact, as

Laura notes, when the elements of choice or interest motivate a student, the student may

actually feel she or he spends less time completing the assignment *because* she or he

wants to do it.

Surprise! Gaining Self-Efficacy and Writing Self-Sponsorship

While interest in a course can affect students' motivation, the complementary role

that self-efficacy also plays in students' motivation should not be ignored. Cognitive

Evaluation Theory, (CET), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), seeks to provide a

framework for understanding intrinsic motivation; in doing so, CET stresses that perceived competence is strongly linked to intrinsic motivation, meaning that when people believe they are able to complete a task, they are more likely to feel motivated to do so (70). As the first section of this chapter demonstrated, nearly half of the students in my course entered with anxiety about their own writing abilities. Fortunately, by the end of the course, students were often pleasantly surprised by their skills and accomplishments, as they noted their ability to conquer writer's block and even considered taking on self-sponsored writing projects connected to music in the future.

Overcoming Writer's Block

One area in which students felt an improved sense of self-efficacy was in their ability to write fluently and to triumph over writer's block. Rose (1985) examines some causes of writer's block, noting that it can be a crippling problem for students who lack heuristics—that is, flexible strategies—to overcome it. As noted in the previous section, Unit 2 of this course focused specifically on some of the composing challenges faced not only by prose writers, but also by songwriters. Maureen, a first-year Biological Sciences major, specifically referenced the benefit of learning more about musicians' writer's block, noting,

> I have tried to write songs in the past, but none of them ever turned out that good. However, the reading we had about how different songwriters got their inspiration really helped me figure out how to get my own inspiration. I had so much fun writing my own song that was meaningful to me.

Maureen's comment suggests that her perception of herself as a songwriter has changed in a positive way. While she begins her statement by referencing songs she had written previously, she notes that "none of them ever turned out that good." By using her previous experiences with songwriting as a contrast to her experience in this class, in which she was able to write a "meaningful" song for her third assignment, she suggests that she feels more confident about her own songwriting abilities.

While Maureen related her comments about writer's block to songwriting, other students also felt they grew more proficient at overcoming their writer's block. At the end of the course, David, the shy engineering major, noted:

> Before I took this class, I felt that I was a mediocre writer with enough skill to get the main point across, but not enough to truly engage the reader in what I was writing. However, after we read about what makes people strong, or not so strong writers, I believe that I learned from the problems that other people have, and I learned how to overcome my own blocks during the writing process.

David obviously sees a clear difference between "get[ing] the main point across" and "truly engag[ing] the reader,"; here, his statement suggests that this class enabled him to identify ways in which he could bridge the gap between the two, leaving him with the skills to be a better writer than he considered himself before.

Finally, Laura, the student who "found no interest" in English at the start of the course noted that she had gained confidence in her own process. She wrote:

> This class has made me more confident about my writing and composing process…Because I felt that I was doing well, I felt more comfortable

writing what I want to write and less about thinking what is "right" to
write. I still feel that both the writing and composing process is difficult
and prefer not to do it, but at least this class has given me more confidence
in my writing.

Laura notes here that part of her new-found confidence was related to "doing well."
Laura did earn an A in the course, but that was due to the thoughtful work she submitted
and received high grades for; in no way did I try to give students high grades simply to
bolster their self-confidence. After all, as pre-eminent developmental psychologist Erik
Erikson (2001) noted, individuals with weak feelings about themselves or their skills
"cannot be fooled by empty praise and condescending encouragement" (124). Laura's
confidence may have been bolstered in part by the fact that she was asked to engage in
assignments that did not only require her to write prose, but rather encouraged to use a
variety of modes to communicate. As I noted in Chapter One, Patricia Dunn (2001)
encourages educators to allow students to express themselves in ways that are
comfortable for them (38). Laura is an excellent example of why we should afford
students opportunities to compose in a variety of ways, for she demonstrated great facility
in communicating in forms other than prose, when given the opportunity. Though writing
prose may still be a core skill for students and professionals, allowing students the
opportunity to see themselves as able communicators through other means has the
potential to change the way they feel about their abilities for the better. Because, as I have
shown earlier in this chapter, students' perceptions of their skills are linked to their
abilities, perhaps students whose confidence is bolstered in one more of communication
will in turn be more likely to attempt and improve on their skills in other modes.

90

Self-Sponsored Composing

While I was interested in students' composing habits and practices within the scope of our course, I also wondered if this course could affect their self-sponsored composing activities. At the end of the course, I asked students to answer the following: "Before taking this class, what kind, if any, of self-sponsored (meaning not required for school) writing or composing activities did you engage in?" Nine students answered that they had not previously engaged in any self-sponsored writing or composing activities, while fourteen students gave examples of non-academic compositions they produced— things like journal and diary entries, letters and poems for family members and significant others, song lyrics, and short stories.

After asking students if they had engaged in any self-sponsored writing on their own before entering the course, I asked them, "Do you think you are more likely to engage in any self-sponsored writing or composing activities after taking this class? Why or why not? And if so, what might you consider doing?" Ten students responded that they were indeed more likely to engage in self-sponsored writing or composing activities. Six of those ten had already reported engagement in some sort of non-academic writing outside of school. However, one of those students said she would have a new focus. Anna, the student who said her brain "register[ed] music as happiness," and already wrote short stories for fun in her own time said, "I will engage in self-sponsored writing more often because I will be able to write about music. I have already begun writing song analyses. I enjoy hearing new music and interpreting the song to find the hidden meaning."

The four students who said they had not engaged in any self-sponsored writing before taking the course and would now do so expressed excitement at the idea of writing about topics important to them, including music. Nathan, an undeclared junior who said that he had done "absolutely no" self-sponsored writing before taking the course wrote, "I actually started planning out a blog. I think it'll be really fun to write about my interests and hopefully share my ideas with others." And David, who said he had never undertaken any self-sponsored composing projects noted that the course had, at the very least, made him open to the idea:

> I am more likely to engage in self-sponsored writing…This is different than what I would have said prior to this class because I did not think I would ever like writing on my own, but that was because I was never given the chance to write about something that interested me. This English class showed me that writing about something you are passionate about can be fun and not constantly feel like a burden with a due date. I am not sure what I might consider doing for a self-sponsored writing activity because I have never looked into it before, but if I find something interesting to write about in the future, I will write about it instead of turning it down like I would have in the past.

Here, David realizes that writing about a subject he liked—in this case music—changed how he felt about writing more generally. In fact, the pleasant experience of writing about music made David more open to the possibility of writing about other things he enjoys.

Still, it was Kevin—the student who so clearly remembered the assignments that allowed him to use the work of Frank Zappa, one of his favorite musicians—who

referenced music most explicitly in his affirmation that he was more likely to engage in self-sponsored writing:

> I definitely want to try more self-sponsored writing after taking this class because I actually see now that it can be fun. There's a bunch of stuff I would like to write. The first thing that comes to mind is writing about music. For example, album reviews, but not lame album reviews like what Pitchfork does, but good ones like Lester Bangs used to write. And just writing about the music scene in general, maybe going to shows and reviewing them or something, maybe about the state of the music industry, I don't know exactly, but something along those lines. Something that has meaning and is actually worth a damn…The problem is when I do start to write for fun I get really discouraged because it always is really bad. Like really, really bad...I don't know, maybe I should keep trying though. I hope I can get better at it, it would be so cool to actually be able to write things like that and get published somewhere, or at least have it online so other people can read it too.

As before, Kevin still struggled with self-confidence in his own abilities. Still, what strikes me most is that his interest in music and his desire to share his thoughts with others gave him the courage to consider persevering, despite his misgivings about his own talents. Naturally, there is no way to guarantee that any of the students who said they might engage in self-sponsored writing in the future will do so. Even so, in a sense, Kevin's words here echo Jason's assessment of the most valuable skill: learning "how to share thoughts and ideas without any shame in mind."

Though some students were open to the idea of producing self-sponsored compositions in the future, thirteen students reported they were not any more likely to engage in self-sponsored composing at the end of the course than they were at the beginning. Michael, the student who had initially said he was open to "maybe somewhat start liking to write," didn't find that this course helped him enjoy writing any more. In his final reflection, when asked if he would be any more likely to engage in self-sponsored writing or composing, he said:

> No, I don't think I will engage in any self-sponsored writing or composing activities after taking this class because this class did not make me like writing any more than I did before. We did many interesting things in this class, and it will definitely change the way I do work in any other composition classes, but I will not do writing on my own because it just does not interest me.

It is interesting to note that, despite my attempt to expand students' conception of composing to include more than just writing, Michael seems to have finished the course primarily thinking about composing as producing a written product. Thus, the incorporation of music into a composition curriculum may not only have no effect on students' motivation to engage in self-sponsored composing practices, but it may also not have a significant effect on what practices students think of when they think about composing. Perhaps a larger educational and cultural shift—one that values and embraces the idea of multimodal composing—is necessary if students are to begin thinking about writing as just one of many ways of communicating.

Conclusion

Zach, the first-year chemistry major who noted that he was excited for the inclusion of music in the class as opposed to "stories [he] care[d] nothing about," noted in his final reflection,

> I definitely put more thought into these assignments than I have for any other [classes], but since I actually enjoyed the topics we had to write about, I was able to think and type quicker, smoother, and clearer. I didn't have trouble focusing.

Zach's assertion that his enjoyment of the assignments he was working on allowed him to focus on his schoolwork is of no small importance. In a 2013 article, renowned psychologist Dan Goleman points out, "The more focused we are, the more successful we can be at whatever we do. And, conversely, the more distracted, the less well we do… Focus is the hidden ingredient in excellence—hidden because we don't notice it." In turn, we might think of focus as an attribute related to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow, which he defines as a state of

> optimal experience [where] the information that keeps coming into awareness is congruent with goals, [and] psychic energy flows effortlessly. There is no need to worry, no reason to question one's adequacy. But whenever one does stop to think about oneself, the evidence is encouraging: "You are doing all right" (39).

Zach's acknowledgment that he was able to think more clearly and smoothly when he composed his assignments for this class aligns with Csikszentmihalyi's assertion above that, when people reach a state of flow, they feel good about themselves and their

accomplishments. Thus, the incorporation of music into a composition class provided a means through which Zach was able to find the ability to focus and turn his learning into a moment of flow.

As I have argued in this chapter, the affective dimensions of students' learning—including their anxiety, motivation, interest, and feelings of self-efficacy—all have very real implications on how they may fare in an academic task. My students' comments on the positive impact that the inclusion of music had on alleviating their anxiety demonstrates that incorporating music into composition course may help them focus positively on that course almost immediately. Offering students challenging assignments that can be personalized bolsters their motivation to compose both in the classroom and on their own time. In turn, as students accept composing challenges and rise to meet them, they may begin to see themselves as competent and even skilled communicators.

While this chapter focused primarily on students' feelings about their composing, the following chapter will provide a closer examination of how students' ideas about writing and music changed during our semester together. In particular, I will examine changes in how students thought about the composing process and how their own processes changed, as well as how they listened to music and understood its communicative properties. As students learned more about the messages they receive through music on an almost daily basis, they also learned how to take advantage of music—either through existing songs or through the development of their own—to use it for their own communicative ends.

Chapter Four

Thinking: Connecting Music to Textual Organization
and the Composing Process

Introduction

> I walked into this class thinking that I knew exactly what this course was
>
> about, and why I don't care about writing, and why it's irrelevant for my
>
> field and career. It turns out that composition is the same thing as coding
>
> for me, and the process we use to compose essays is the same process I
>
> use to code. I was not only able to enhance my writing skills, but also my
>
> composition, therefore, programming skills.
>
> —Greg, last day of class

I breathed a sigh of relief (and even felt a little bit like saying, "I told you so!") as I read the excerpt above, from Greg's final reflection. Greg, a senior computer science major, was one of twenty—out of only twenty-five—students in my class who was majoring in a STEM field. While professionals in STEM fields do plenty of writing, my anecdotal experience as a first-year composition instructor had led me to believe that many students majoring in STEM fields didn't necessarily see composition as a course that was important to their major. While Greg was tactful enough not to tell me outright at the beginning of our time together that he didn't think he needed to be there, he hinted at his lack of need for the course and his perception of the course's rudimentary nature. On the first day we met, when I introduced students to fact that the course would heavily involve music and asked students what they hoped to get from the class, he wrote, "1)

Get my advisor off my back, 2) Be able to write better cover letters, 3) New music! Get out of my Zeppelin/Pink Floyd rut, 4) GPA Boost :).” While the course did help Greg achieve all of these things, it also allowed him—and his fellow students—to think about the music and its rhetorical functions, the structure of a variety of different texts, and the composing process from a new perspective.

Though my focus in this chapter is not chiefly about the effects this course had on students majoring in STEM fields, the issue of whether students majoring in STEM fields understand the importance of composition or are receiving adequate instruction in it is one that’s been taken up recently in popular publications. For instance, in a 2015 *Chronicle Vitae* article, Theresa MacPhail, an assistant professor at the Stevens Institute of Technology, observes that students majoring in STEM fields in her courses seemed to be under the impression that they wouldn’t be doing much writing or composing in their careers. In an effort to learn more about what types of composing activities in which STEM professionals engage, MacPhail interviewed three technology professionals who all acknowledged that writing and communication skills are a crucial part of their success. The comparatively recent surge in STEM initiatives is addressed in a 2014 article in *The Atlantic* which asks, “Is the US Focusing Too Much on STEM?” In this piece, science writer Alexandra Ossola suggests that metrics showing American students falling behind in STEM competencies, coupled with fears about American economic competitiveness, are part of what’s fueled the current obsession with STEM education. Rather alarmingly, Ossola notes that Michael Teitelbaum, a research associate at the Harvard Law School, concedes that “if students spend more time on math then they’re spending less time on something else.” Regrettably, for many students, that “something

else" is often the arts and humanities. Fortunately, educators like associate chemistry professor Loretta Jackson-Hayes have noted that in order to be successful scientists and engineers, students need solid training in communication and critical thinking. In her 2015 *Washington Post* article, "We Don't Need More STEM Majors. We Need More STEM Majors with Liberal Arts Training," Jackson-Hayes argues for the benefits of a comprehensive liberal arts education and notes that that "the ability to draw from other disciplines produces better scientists."

In order for all students, regardless of their major, to become effective communicators, it is helpful for them to be able to both describe and analyze a variety of texts, their purposes and functions, and their effects on an audience. In my course, I sought to use music as a means of helping students understand rhetorical concepts and ideas; a large part of accomplishing this goal lay in asking them to listen more carefully to messages they were already receiving through music. In this chapter, I first focus on how inviting students to listen more consciously to the music they encounter can help them understand rhetorical concepts like exigency and constraints, as well as how music itself can be used as a rhetorical tool. To illustrate, I present evidence from journals students kept about the music they heard in a day-long period, and I share the ways in which those journal entries facilitated enriching class discussion. Next, I explore how students can learn to apply abstract ideas and terms to a concrete musical text they enjoy by presenting a student's rhetorical analysis of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. I then turn my discussion to focus on students' understanding of how various parts of texts come together to form a coherent whole by highlighting a student's analysis of two Frank Zappa albums: the concept album *Joe's Garage,* and the non-concept album, *Chunga's*

Revenge. Finally, I examine what students say about their composing processes, explaining how giving students the option of writing a song can enhance their understanding both of rhetorical principles and the ways in which they create and revise their texts. As a whole, this chapter aims to connect and explore the ways in which using music in a composition curriculum can help students better understand and reflect on both their individual composing processes and the way the texts they and others create operate rhetorically.

Listening to Music, Listening for Music: Connecting Music and Rhetoric

Most of us are exposed to music on a daily basis, even if we don't really acknowledge it. At Starbucks, music plays as patrons wait in line for their morning coffee. At the gym, music thumps over the whir of elliptical machines. We hear music in the background as we run errands to the grocery store and the bank, and we might end the day in a restaurant or bar that features live music. In the second unit of the course, I wanted students to become more aware of the music they not only consumed consciously, but also experienced subconsciously, on a daily basis. Most importantly, I wanted them to understand that music isn't necessarily just innocuous background noise—it is an intentional form of communication worthy of analysis.

Sound studies scholars refer to the sounds (including music) heard in a particular situation as a soundscape, a term coined by R. Murray Schafer (1977). Much like a landscape, a soundscape can include both natural and human-made features. In situations like the ones described above, music becomes a composed feature of a soundscape. Sometimes constructed features of a soundscape even become an integral part of a space's design. For instance, in his article, "Sounds Like the Mall of America:

Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space," Jonathan Sterne (1997) argues that

> In places like the Mall of America, music becomes a form of architecture. Rather than simply filling up an empty space, the music becomes part of the consistency of that space. The sound becomes a presence, and as that presence, it becomes an essential part of the building's infrastructure. Music is a central—an architectural—part of malls and other semi-public commercial spaces throughout the country…(23).

Sterne acknowledges that listening is not necessarily active in nature, noting that it can be a passive activity, too (25). In fact, he claims that the music played in the common spaces of the mall is meant not "to be listened to, but to be heard" (30), highlighting his conception of listening as a purposeful act, versus the less intentional act of hearing. He further contends that the music played in different parts of the mall has different purposes. For example, he explains that the type of music heard in the common areas is meant to be part of the (carefully curated) background and is purposely unobtrusive; in contrast, in stores like Victoria's Secret, the music played becomes an important part of the store's ambiance and brand promotion (31-37). Citing Gordon Bruner (1990), Sterne also notes that music has the potential to increase the amount of time a customer spends in a store, which can in turn affect a customer's likelihood of purchasing something (30). Thus, he argues that music is rarely, if ever, simply a neutral part of an environment—we can always look for reasons behind its inclusion in a soundscape, which is precisely what I encouraged my students to do in the second unit of our course.

As we began the unit, I paired readings about rhetoric—such as Keith Grant-Davie's "Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents" (1997), with readings about music from books—such as Daniel J. Levitin's (2006) *This is Your Brain on Music* and Anthony Storr's (1992) *Music and the Mind,* and readings about the rhetoric of music—including Crystal Van Kooten's "A New Composition, a 21st Century Pedagogy, and the Rhetoric of Music" (2011). My intent was to give students the framework and vocabulary necessary for them to begin making connections between rhetoric and music so that they could begin applying what they were learning to music in their own lives. As students began to focus on what they were hearing on a daily basis and why, I encouraged them to think how rhetorical terms like exigency, rhetor, audience, and constraints might apply.

For me, the relationship between music and exigency is of particular interest. Lloyd Bitzer (1968) defines exigency in this way:

> Any *exigence* is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an
> obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it
> should be. … An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive
> modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be
> assisted by discourse (221).

If we agree with scholars like Sterne (1997) that music is indeed a form of communication, and that its presence or lack thereof has the potential to affect the course of action audience members take (Bruner 1990), then I would argue that the mere fact that music is being played in a given setting suggests an exigence. Recent discussions of exigency in music, however, seem to focus more on lyrics or genres, rather than the existence of music in a setting itself. For example, Lawson's (2015) "The Blurred

Exigence of Robin Thicke's Blurred Lines," examines how the popularity of "Blurred Lines," despite outcry over its derogatory lyrics, demonstrates ambiguity regarding cultural exigency. Bradley's (2013), "Decoding Dubstep" provides a discussion of some of the sociologic factors leading to the genre's inception and impressive fanbase, arguing primarily that the genre is a response to young people's desire to feel connected to one another. While examining exigency as it relates to songs or genres of music is important work, my goal in this unit was to help students focus on the exigency leading to the *presence* of music in a setting.

To accomplish that goal, as well as to get students to recognize just how much music they were hearing in their daily lives, I asked students to keep a record of every instance of music they heard in a twenty-four hour period. All twenty-five students in the class reported that they heard music within that time frame. Students noted intentionally playing music in some unsurprising places, such as in their cars or on their own devices while doing homework. But additionally, students showed an awareness of hearing music that wasn't actively chosen by them. For example, five students counted phone ringtones and alarms as instances of music, three students noted other people humming or singing aloud in a public place, and two students even remarked upon the muffled sounds heard through earbuds of other students who were listening to their own music in places like elevators.

After students completed their twenty-four hour music journals, we discussed the results of those observations in class. As we did so, I recorded in my field notes that students began a rich discussion about how hearing a song in a setting can create a particular mood in that setting or set a tone for interactions that occur (Field Notes 6). For

instance, Megan (the first-year biochemistry major who had been in a French immersion program) noted the presence of music in training sessions for the school sports team of which she was a member. She speculated that the upbeat, positive music playing in the background was designed to elicit constructive interactions from team members, who would encourage one another to complete difficult exercises. Drawing on that discussion, other students added what they knew about mood and tone as it related to literature. As they thought about how music could affect the conversations taking place in a space, students questioned whether elements of literature, like dialogue, impacted the tone of a work, or if the tone of a piece impacted the dialogue; as the students reflected on these questions in light of their music journals, they began to wonder if interactions already occurring (or expected to occur) in a particular place helped define the music that would be played in the space, or if the music played in a space contributed to determining the types of interactions that might happen there. Though as a class we never settled on an answer, our discussion demonstrated that they were beginning to think about music as more than just background noise.

Our class readings, activities, and discussions were designed to scaffold students' end-of-unit assignment. I gave students the choice of either expanding on one of the instances of music they heard in a setting and writing an analysis of why and how it was used, or writing a formal rhetorical analysis of a song (with or without lyrics). Twelve chose to write a rhetorical analysis of a song, and thirteen students chose to analyze music in a particular setting. Only one student of the twelve who completed a rhetorical analysis—Alison—chose to write about a song without lyrics, but her analysis

demonstrates clearly that music can help students think critically about rhetorical concepts.

Alison was a senior music major, and on the first day, when I explained to the class that we'd be using a lot of music during the semester, she wrote,

> This class was not what I was expecting at all, but I am really excited about it and am so glad I happened to choose this section. I am a music major…majoring in performance. I'm also a senior so I feel that my experiences with music/theory/history are going to make the projects really fun…Music is a tough field to succeed in and I think this class will help me branch out more as a musician and see what else I can do with my music.

During the following class, as she responded to my questions about what music meant to her, Alison revealed,

> Music means everything to me. I seriously can't live without it; I would have nothing left. It's the only thing I'm good at. I never stop listening. Even when I'm practicing, I have music in the background. Music is an escape. I play because I don't think about anything else. It's a stress reliever. It's almost a religious experience, playing in an orchestra. I play to get that feeling, that nothing is happening but music, that I no longer exist.

Perhaps it was in part Alison's experiences playing in an orchestra that led her to undertake a rhetorical analysis of one of the most famous orchestral pieces in the Western world: Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. In her analysis, Alison focused much of her

discussion on the rhetorical concept of constraints. As Grant-Davie (1997) notes, the term "constraints" has usually been interpreted to mean limitations on the rhetor:

> prescriptions or proscriptions controlling what can be said, or how it can be said, in a given situation. However, this commonly held view of constraints as obstacles or restrictions has obscured the fact that Bitzer defines constraints more as aids to the rhetor than as handicaps. The rhetor "harnesses" them so as to constrain the audience to take the desired action or point of view. This view of constraints seems useful, so I see them as working either for or against the rhetor's objectives (272).

On the day that we discussed this article in class, I noted that "students seemed to have a hard time with [the Grant-Davie article]. I'm not even sure all of them did the reading" (Field Notes 5). Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised to read Alison's essay, which showed that she not only understood the concept, but was able to apply it to a musical context as well. In her rhetorical analysis, she argued:

> The constraints in Beethoven's Fifth are numerous. At that time, there was a very specific way that most symphonies seemed to be composed, and the Fifth goes against some of the "rules" that were in place. These constraints that were in place, surrounding typical symphonies, did help focus Beethoven's symphony in a structured manner. The first movement is like most typical opening movements at that time; it had an exposition, a development, a recap, a coda, everything was in place. However, Beethoven used this symphony to go against some of the constraints that were usually in place. For example, there is no clear third and fourth movement. The third

movement goes *attaca* in the finale (without stop) and in the middle of the

finale, the third movement theme suddenly reappears for several lines. At that

time, most symphonies had a clear four movement structure and Beethoven

broke against that constraint. In the end, the fact that the finale comes out of

thin air from the third movement makes it that much better and emphasizes

the triumphant quality of the D major chord.

Here, Alison cogently discusses how Beethoven's selective use of musical constraints

affects listeners' perceptions of his piece. In particular, her statement that the "triumphant

quality of the D major chord" is emphasized as a result of the constraint Beethoven

breaks illuminates what Grant-Davie's (1997) contention that rhetors have the

opportunity to strategically harness constraints for their own purposes.

Later in the paper, Allison continued her discussion of constraints, noting:

Another constraint that Beethoven went against was the themes and motifs

throughout his symphony. Usually a symphony had one dramatic theme and

one more melodic one throughout each movement. While this is true,

Beethoven continued to use his four note motif throughout his entire

symphony. When it was first premiered, critics even complained that the

symphony was way too repetitive and had no creativity. Eventually though,

breaking this constraint worked extremely well for Beethoven, as this

symphony is regarded as one of the most memorable pieces of the classical

world, probably because of the recurring motif.

Again, Alison provides evidence that she understands the constraints of the genre she is

writing about, but she shows that also is able to discern when the disregard of a constraint

107

works in favor of the rhetor (whom she identifies as Beethoven in this piece). Notably, Alison also seems to realize that harnessing constraints is a risky proposition—the breaking of a particular constraint may not be immediately appreciated, but later may prove to be positive.

In addition to Alison, another student reflected on the effect of broken constraints—though in this case, perhaps more social in nature than strictly rhetorical. Margaret, a first-year interdisciplinary studies major, elected to complete an analysis of music in a setting rather than a formal rhetorical analysis of a song. The main portion of Margaret's assignment was actually about how music was used in the television show *The X Factor,* a reality pop star competition that required competitors to perform songs in front of a live audience. Margaret began her discussion by explaining that music was used in a variety of situations on the show, which had just begun a new season. She noted:

> They're still only airing the audition cycle, but that only increases the amount of songs heard within this amount of music. There's obviously the songs sung (if you can call it that at times) in auditions, the opening theme of the show, other music added in by the editors of the show to set up some sort of mood for the audience, and even a cacophony of other songs being rehearsed or sung by large audiences everywhere but on the stage.

Here, Margaret establishes that music appeared within very different contexts within the same overarching text. Margaret continued her analysis of how the myriad moments of music featured on the show functioned for a variety of purposes:

The songs being auditioned are definitely central to the experience as this is what the show is about: a singing competition. However, the editors may add songs to add a certain attitude, whether it be humor, like a funny song or an emotional song to gain sympathy from the audience towards the performer's backstory, or even a mocking tone if it is the original artist's version of the auditioned song (with the original being a much better one at that). This season of the show also seems to be trying to have a scripted, reality-show approach behind the camera, by attempting to make storylines, like about the judges' love lives, an effort of publicity. So sometimes, they may add songs that apply to those moments, or even make it completely silent except for the talking to make the mood seem serious since the music appropriate to a situation doesn't just play like it does in movies and on TV. (Life generally doesn't have a soundtrack unless your headphones are glued to you.) The opening theme is also a necessary component as it's something that the audience can instantly identify the show with. There are many singing competitions on TV right now, so playing the theme in the beginning, before and after commercial breaks, and at the end, alert the audience that the show is on, specifically *this* show. It's short enough to not be too much, but fast paced and loud enough, and pop/techno/rock enough that it makes a statement as those are some of the trendiest genres of music, and so the audience probably automatically associates this amount of "trend" with a good show. There aren't any lyrics, so this song can be internationally applicable without

having to translate it, something that would also be a costly expense. In

addition to the attempt of the show producing a storyline with the judges, I

believe they've tried to immerse the audience in the experience by

showing them the whole audition process, like going up to get your

nametag or then a number of contestants talking and rehearsing in the back

rooms. If I recall correctly, these moments on *American Idol*, another

singing competition, would typically only occur if something very

interesting happened, especially if the person auditioning was quite a

character. With *The X Factor*, they seem to try to show how "real" it is,

and while the practicing may seem peripheral, the reason for it, as this

footage is kept in by the editors, is central since they've purposely kept

that in to allow the TV audience that be part of that experience.

Margaret's analysis demonstrates that she has given consideration to how music is being

used strategically in a number of ways, including to set a particular tone, to tell a story,

and to brand and differentiate a show from a number of similar, competing shows. In

many ways, her discussion relates back to Sterne's (1997) observation that music is used

to brand the physical space of a store, like Victoria's Secret. In this case, however, music

is used to define a different sort of space: a televised one. Margaret's critical discussion

of the ways in which music functions displays her comprehension that even on a show

that foregrounds music, it is the background music, driving the branding and identity of a

show, that contributes just as much—if not more—to the audience's perception and

understanding of that show.

Though Margaret's analysis of music on *The X Factor* was sufficient to meet the requirements of the assignment, she included some additional thoughts at the end of her essay, based on a personal experience. She recounted in beautiful detail a recent time when she had been walking across the campus to an office and was nearing a pond, noting that

> …during that walk, I was completely surprised to suddenly hear someone playing a quick paced piece on a violin. Even more, I was confused because I had no clue where it was coming from. It was a nice day at that point, enough so that all the benches in front of the pond were occupied. But no one was looking at a specific location; they were all minding their own business. It seemed like people walking by didn't even notice, so at one point, I was wondering if I was hallucinating. Thankfully, as I got closer to [the office], my eyeglass-less-self noticed a blurry figure of a girl playing the violin on a bench in this little garden area in front of the office.

Margaret's observation that no one seemed to be paying even the slightest bit of attention to the music occurring in a space where one normally doesn't hear music brings to mind sociologist Erving Goffman's (1955) notion of "civil inattention," which essentially holds that people may ignore one another in public places to maintain feelings of order and safety. Indeed, the violinist may have appreciated the inattention, as Margaret notes that the musician did not appear to be attracting attention or breaking social constraints intentionally. Though Margaret herself attempted to grant the violinist civil inattention as well, she noted her surprise at the unexpected effect music had on her in that particular moment:

I'm astonished by how memorable this experience was as I can

recount so much of it, even though I did not end up putting it into my

notebook until the next morning (and only writing the time and event).

[Was] that not a perfect combination with good weather, fresh air and the

almost-pretty scenery of a murky pond and overgrown garden? I

personally think it was. The music itself was upbeat too and melodic. It

felt more like spring with that song rather than an almost-autumn late

afternoon. It also personally brought back memories of when I played the

violin. I may not play it anymore, but it will always be the instrument

closest to my heart…

[Music] definitely wasn't central to this setting, but instead

peripheral as it was so unusual for this area…I think because society is so

used to hearing music with a purpose to mold emotions, when something

happens by coincidence, you can't help but appreciate it more and its level

of innocence. Maybe…random occurrences are better because you don't

know what type of emotion [rhetors] want you to have, so you can at least

be allowed some sort of surprise in that sense… I think the best situations

[of hearing music] are by surprise.

Here, Margaret displays an almost cynical acknowledgment of music's rhetorical

abilities, as she notes that people understand that music is often used to "mold emotions."

While I may agree with Margaret's assertion that hearing music unexpectedly has the

potential to make it more special, I do take issue with her pronouncement that music

"wasn't central to this setting," which I noted to her in my comments. In the moments

Margaret wrote about, music did indeed become central *to her*. Music helped her travel in time, as it transformed an autumn day into a spring one, and it awakened memories of a time when she played the violin. In some ways, Margaret's experience mirrors one of the most famous moments in literature. As Proust (1913) wrote after tasting a petite Madeleine at afternoon tea one day:

> An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated,
> detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of
> life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity
> illusory - this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of
> filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me
> it *was* me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Whence
> could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was
> connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely
> transcended those savours, could, no, indeed, be of the same nature.
> Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend
> it?

Though Margaret's transportative moment was driven by music and not taste, music's power to enchant and transport us to another time and place—whether a rhetor is using it for such purposes intentionally or not—is precisely why it is worthy of our attention as a communicative mode.

As we finished the second unit and students began to consider *why* they might be hearing music as well as *how* that music might be working rhetorically, I asked them to look more closely at how texts are knit together and to analyze what gives texts a sense of

unity. In the following section, I demonstrate how asking students to listen to entire albums can enhance their understanding of how various parts of texts interact with each other, as well as how listening to albums as a whole can be a novel and enlightening experience for students who consume much of their music through mediums like radios, online streaming services, or digital music players.

Textual Coherence and the Composing Process

As we began our third unit, I engaged students in discussions about music, the writing or composing process, and the way that portions of texts come together to form a coherent whole. My rationale for combining these topics reflected one of the main lessons I wanted students to take from the course: good writing (or any kind of composing) rarely—if ever—happens perfectly, the first time, in a fluid manner. An articulate, organized whole is often the result of the development and rearrangement of frenetic, seemingly disconnected parts. Furthermore, the process through which these parts are created may be stunted and difficult. As Anne Lamott (1995) remarks in her essay "Shitty First Drafts" (one of the readings I assigned my students in this particular unit):

> Very few writers really know what they are doing until they've done it. Nor do they go about their business feeling dewy and thrilled. They do not type a few stiff warm-up sentences and then find themselves bounding along like huskies across the snow… For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts (21).

In addition to reading the rest of this essay, students familiarized themselves with pieces about the writing and composing process from authors like Stephen King and Junot Diaz. To help students understand the similarities between different kinds of writing and composing, I also had them read short explorations of the songwriting process from musicians like Kenny Chesney, John Legend, and Sheryl Crow. In one class, we watched a short video about one method of songwriting, and students were asked to attempt the method themselves as homework. In my field notes, I wrote that at first, students were "incredulous" (Field Notes 11), with many saying that they had never written a song and weren't sure what to write about. To alleviate some of their apprehension, we did a couple of brainstorming activities in class in order to help them develop a theme or to draft some first lines. Many students still left class dubiously; however, the next time our class met, I noted that "the first few minutes of class had such great energy! Students were talking with each other about their song homework before the class even began. I noticed a few students sharing their lyrics with one another" (Field Notes 12). Given my students' apprehension about songwriting on the day it was assigned, I think both my students are I were pleasantly surprised to find that many of them enjoyed the challenge of this homework assignment; in fact, so many of them enjoyed the homework assignment, that seventeen out of twenty-five chose to write a song as their unit assignment, as I will discuss in the latter portion of this section.

As we discussed the process by which texts, including songs, are composed, I also drew students' attention to different ways of arranging texts through the example of music albums. In particular, I was interested in having students think about the

differences between albums considered concept albums[10] (albums where all songs

contribute to some overarching narrative or theme) and those that are not considered

concept albums. In class, we discussed features of narratives, such as characters, conflict,

and setting. In my field notes, I commented that "while most students seem familiar with

these concepts, they don't seem to have really thought about them in relation to their

favorite songs and albums. It'll be interesting to see if any choose to explore these ideas

further in the final assignment for this section" (Field Notes 13).

In fact, eight students did complete this assignment. The assignment prompt asked

them to choose two albums (it's important to note here, in light of the previous chapter's

focus on motivation and choice, that students were allowed to pick whichever albums

they wanted to use) and describe the structure of the albums, either through prose, an

outline, or some sort of graphic organizer. Then, students were asked to analyze their

observations, with particular attention to what effect, if any, the differences in structural

choices had on the text as a whole. Finally, they were asked to comment on whether they

deemed the text successful—a term I asked them to define in this instance—and why.

Kevin, the junior computer science major who earlier in the semester had

expressed concerns that his writing often sounded like a "12-year old wrote it," chose to

do this particular assignment and made some important observations as he compared and

contrasted Frank Zappa's concept album, *Joe's Garage,* to Zappa's non-concept album,

Chunga's Revenge. One of the first things Kevin noted about the albums that

demonstrated a major thematic difference between the two didn't even have to do with

---

[10] Some examples of concept albums include The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band,* David Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, and Marina and the Diamonds' *Electra Heart.*

the lyrics or songs on the albums themselves; rather, Kevin focused first on one of the album's covers. He observed,

> For example, inside the record jacket of *Joe's Garage,* it is not just the song lyrics you see. Each song title is preceded by a scene number, almost as if you are reading a play. Also, *Joe's Garage* was released as two different records. Act I was released in September 1979 as a single LP, and Acts II and III were released in November 1979 as a double LP. Splitting the release of the album into two different records that included three different acts and describing the songs as scenes was clearly Zappa's way of trying to distinguish this album as a concept album whose primary objective was to tell a story. It should also be noted that the band was listed as "The Cast" on the inside of the record, with their many different characters listed. The lyrics are also preceded by the character's name so that you know who is speaking.

In contrast, Kevin noted that *Chunga's Revenge* "lists the band by the instrument they're playing, just as any non-concept album would. It was released as one record and doesn't feature any back-story." By including details about how these albums were presented, Kevin shows an awareness of these texts as wholes, including visual elements that help to organize and contextualize sonic information for audiences.

Later, Kevin's analysis brings attention to the emotional effect created by the tragic narrative in *Joe's Garage*, which, as Kevin explained,

> tells a great tale about the dangers of dogmatic thinking…One of Zappa's reasons for doing this concept album was that at the time, the Iranian

Revolution of 1979 had just taken place and rock and roll music had been

outlawed there. This served as a reminder that while we make fun of and

scoff at the idea of this being reality, Zappa knew very well that this is a

reality in some parts of the world, and that if we weren't careful it could

happen to us, which is why he fought the PMRC hard later on in the '80s.

Though he does not explicitly state it here, Kevin clearly understands the exigency of this

album, as he identified a moment in time where discourse was necessary in an attempt to

change a situation. As he analyzed the narrative arc of the story, Kevin focused on what

he considers to be the most important portion of the album:

In "Watermelon in Easter Hay," the Central Scrutinzer is talking about

how Joe 'goes back to his ugly little room and quietly dreams his last

imaginary guitar solo…' This is about the time when one of the most

beautiful guitar solos in the history of rock music begins to play. It isn't

just one of Zappa's best. It truly is one of the best solos ever

recorded…but it isn't Frank Zappa playing the solo, but rather the main

character of the album, Joe. This is the beauty of the whole idea and what

really characterizes this as a concept album. If you are listening to the

album from start to finish, this is Joe's final masterpiece as he spirals into

depression and conforms to this dystopian society where music is illegal.

In the passage above, Kevin links the success and impact of this album specifically to the

album's characters and storyline, which demonstrates that he understands the careful

placement of certain sections of a text has an impact on the work as a whole. Although in

my final comments on this assignment, I told Kevin that he might have done more to

state explicitly how the songs on *Joe's Garage* were knit together differently than the songs on *Chunga's Revenge,* Kevin's efforts at exploring why and how certain parts of a text work nevertheless demonstrate his attempt to critically examine texts at a micro- and macro-level.

Another student who chose to complete this assignment made an interesting observation about what he learned from it in his final reflections. Nathan, the undeclared junior who said the course had given him the motivation to begin his own blog, noted that the album comparison assignment forced him to listen to the music he chose more closely than he ever had before. Nathan compared Drake's album *Take Care* to Kanye West's album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, and acknowledged,

> I had never looked at an album in such an in-depth manner where I analyzed not only the lyrics, but the deeper meaning of each song and their connections together. When each song is heard out of context, you are only able to appreciate a certain beat or certain lyrics, but most of the time it just sounds like your everyday mainstream rap. When I had the opportunity to examine the album as a whole and dive into the world Kanye created, I truly began to catch the dark story he was weaving.

Here, Nathan reflects critically on what we might think of as just one instantiation of soundbite culture. Jeffrey Scheuer, author of *The Sound Bite Society* (2001), argues that television has significantly affected how Americans understand political information, because it is a medium that tends to focus on short, decontextualized bits of information. In a sense, when students listen to the radio, purchase songs a la carte from iTunes, or listen to mixes of songs on digital music players, they are listening to sound bites, as the

songs are decontextualized from their original situations. Nathan's comment demonstrates that asking students to listen to an album as a whole may be an entirely new—and worthwhile—experience for them.

Kyle Stedman (2013) reflects on the relationships tracks on an album have to one another in his essay "Making Meaning in Musical Mixes." Though Stedman reflects on his own composing process as he created a mix CD for himself, he calls attention to the fact that the arrangement of songs on an album deserves consideration. Stedman encourages readers:

> When engaging in the *rhetoric* of making mixes—because that's what I'll claim, that composing a curated collection of cuts is something like rhetorically composing an oration—I hope you'll ask yourself, "What kinds of seeds am I planting for my listeners by choosing these specific tracks?" (The piece ends with questions to ask yourself as you compose mixes on your own).

Though Nathan did not make his own mix for this project (though that's certainly a project that students could do in the future for a composition course) he did learn that song arrangement does matter. If students realize that individual tracks can be interpreted differently within the context of a whole album, perhaps they will also better understand the importance of moving away from sound bite culture and considering other types of information in their original context.

Songwriting and the Writing Process: An Unexpected Impact

Those students who chose not to complete an album comparison instead chose to take on the task of writing a song and reflecting critically on their writing process.

Truthfully, I never expected the enthusiasm for songwriting that the students demonstrated, especially—as I discussed above—after they had expressed so much hesitation about the process when we discussed it in class. So, I was surprised when seventeen of twenty-five students chose to write a song for this assignment. Of those seventeen, four even observed at the end of the course that the songwriting assignment was their favorite assignment during the entire semester. As I noted in the previous chapter, I did not grade the actual song my students wrote, because I wanted them to feel free to experiment and take risks. What I did grade was a reflection they submitted about their process and an assessment of what, if anything, they thought turned out well in their song and what, if anything, they were unhappy with or would do differently if they were to do it again. While I was proud of all students' attempts at songwriting, in the following section, I will focus on the experiences of three very different students: Alison, the music major whose rhetorical analysis of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony I highlighted earlier in this chapter; Greg, the computer science major whose quote I featured at the beginning of this chapter; and Jessica, the first-year math major whose mother described her as having a "math mind." These students' experiences and reflections demonstrate that a songwriting assignment can benefit a wide range of students with very different musical backgrounds and abilities.

Because of her experience and familiarity with music, Alison was able to approach this assignment in a way many of her classmates could not: she was able to compose actual music for this assignment, as opposed to only lyrics. Actually, Alison was the only student in the class who chose this assignment who did not compose any lyrics at all, focusing instead on instrumental music. In her reflection about her

121

composing experience, Alison noted that she already had some experience in writing

music:

> My brother programs computer games at [company] and in his own small
>
> company that I sometimes write music for, which is what I decided to
>
> focus on. Lately in the gaming world, horror games have been on the rise,
>
> especially very simple ones that can be programmed. An example would
>
> be the recent game *SlenderMan*, which is an extremely simple and short
>
> game. The music composed for that game is really just long chords and
>
> then some percussion as the game intensifies.

Alison went on to explain that for this assignment she decided to make her own music,

meant to accompany a horror game:

> I basically decided I would compose for a horror game that would be a
>
> little bit more than just long chords; I definitely wanted to write a specific
>
> theme. Obviously with creepier music, the key had to be minor, so I ended
>
> up picking C minor. The piece I composed was sort of an overview of
>
> what the whole thing would sound like. The first couple bars would be the
>
> introduction music, possibly when the game loads and the main menu
>
> screen comes up. Then I focused on the theme, *me-re-do-ti*, which would
>
> be the main theme throughout the game. I did modulate to E*b* major in the
>
> middle in case the game called for a situation in it that was more hopeful,
>
> but mainly stuck to the minor theme and then ended.

It is clear from Alison's description that she has given consideration to composition

elements such as genre and narrative structure as they relate to a mode other than

writing—music. For example, by noting that the theme is mostly minor (because it's a horror game), she acknowledges that minor keys are suitable for tense situations. Then, as she comments on the possibility of hope in a horror narrative, she demonstrates that the change to a major key would be appropriate to signal a change in mood. While these are not distinctions that those with no musical background might make or understand, the concept is so familiar to Alison that she does not provide elaboration or explanation.

Even though Alison was obviously very comfortable working with music, she did express some difficulties in composing music for this project. When asked what challenges she faced in the creation of the assignment, she wrote,

> Some of the difficulties in writing this small piece were that I do not have my piano with me and I wasn't feeling particularly inspired. I didn't really know what to write; I feel like I started off okay, thinking about a potential horror game, but…I feel that if I had a chance to expand more and actually sit down and write each separate piece it would probably be better…I guess this is a good start for expanding on each, but it's hard to say because sometimes I just completely start over. It was also tough composing because I didn't really know what I was writing for. Besides that I was focusing on a horror theme, I didn't have much to go on. Usually I sit down with my brother and take notes on what exactly is happening in the game and what is going on graphic-wise, what instruments to use, the whole storyline, etc. I don't program games so it is hard to just kind of imagine what would be going on by myself.

Here, Alison demonstrates that her lack of knowledge about the rhetorical situation for which she was composing made her task difficult. If I were to give students this assignment again, I might ask them to specify a rhetorical situation for themselves; for instance, I might ask them to consider things like where the song might be featured or performed, or who the audience might be. Doing so would not only make students' songwriting task a little easier, but it might also increase their awareness of the importance of considering audience and purpose in any composition. Alison actually recognized that she might do the same for herself, if faced with a similar task later. In her reflection, she noted that if she were to do the assignment over again, she "would probably pick a certain section of the game to compose, such as when the player is running from something or it's a creepy flashback, or anything more specific." Thus, Alison and I both learned something about the importance of helping students to define a clear rhetorical situation.

In contrast to Alison, Greg had no formal training as a musician, nor did he play any instrument even as a hobby. Still, when asked what music meant to him, he had this to say: "Music is a way to keep my head up. It makes me happy and sometimes when I'm in the middle of programming or emailing I'll have to take a break and just nod my head and hum to some song." When given the choice between comparing albums or writing a song and reflection, Greg chose the latter. His song, which he described as a "compiler rap," is shown below:

"Token Streams"

Screaming up to life, billions of electronic bits,

Appearing so randomly, yet designed practically,

124

A program, an entity, an intangible device,

The programmer is careless, but the work is done is flawless,

The compiler turns a sequence of precisely planned ideas,

 Into nanosecond bursts of atomically small currents,

No time for mistakes when your heart beats four billion times   a

second,

And there ain't no rest for the C language compiler.

[Chorus]

 It starts with G-Flex, a syntax analyzer

Then gets used by YACC, an assembly compiler,

It will not be the same for a newer architecture,

But when speed is all that matters, compilers live forever

There is no simple for a C-P-U compiler,

No matter what the math is, no matter what the logic,

Some elementary function like x is eight plus two,

Must be made to load combine and allocate,

The instruction count of this exceeds fifteen to power two

Each instruction lives on a byte size twenty-one log eight base two,

Each opcode has bytes numbered down to thirty-two,

The memory allocation requires stack pointer manipulation too,

When all is computed finally, and the transistors show no life,

The answer ten is stored, and it spins to work again

[Chorus]

The language is comprehensible to those of the computer side,

The compiler is arcane to those who have not lied,

The flex file system is insane to those who have their mind,

The bison declarations are a clusterfuck to be completely right,

The calc dot tab dot h file puts war and peace to shame,

The compiled object files serve their purpose and give a name,

The final compilation has more flags than are memorizable,

The executable lies waiting, assembly lines reaching forever far,

The dumbass made an input error, this machine will choke and die,

But that's just the life when you choose to be a C

In Greg's critical reflection, he explained that his approach to writing his song was inspired by his work as a computer scientist, noting,

I am a computer scientist and programming enthusiast, and surprisingly enough, I found these backgrounds to be monumentally beneficial in writing a song. When I write a line of code, I must make sure that the line not only says what I mean to say, but that it also is syntactically well-formed as to not generate an error, and that it makes sense in the context of the other lines around it. After all, there is no purpose in writing code that the compiler cannot understand, or that reverses the effect of the line before it. In writing a song I chose to follow the same three rules as I would follow if I were writing an artificial intelligence program to play

126

chess. I tried to ensure that every line in the song had a purpose and

conveyed the meaning I had in mind, that the line would be rhythmically

appealing and not end on an awkward syllable, and that it in some way

rhymed with or related to a line of the song before or after it.

In this explanation, Greg discovers and makes clear the parallels he was able to draw

between one type of composing and another. The fact that Greg was able to forge these

important connections demonstrates the value in asking students from a variety of

backgrounds—whether they know anything about music or songwriting or not—to try

their hand at composing a song.

Greg also noted that he wanted to bring an element of comedy to the song, saying:

I wanted to incorporate the comedy element into a song as much as I

could, but part of my work was already cut out for me, because of how

peculiar of a topic compilers is to write a song about. I felt that it would

almost be a parody/joking song… I decided that my song should be a rap

about compilers and compiler design that naturally produces a comedic

effect because of *what* it is.

It is important to note here that the complexity of comedy often goes un-discussed in

first-year composition courses. In fact, comedy is not something that we as a class ever

discussed during the course. However, Greg is thinking deeply about how comedy *works*,

and how his composition can be comedic. Furthermore, his instincts are good: as Mel

Helitzer and Mark Schatz, authors of *Comedy Writing Secrets* (2005) note, "imagination

allows you to realign diverse elements into new and unexpected relationships that

surprise the audience—and surprise makes people laugh" (8).

In addition to thinking about the effect he wanted his song to produce, Greg worked to make his song structure reflect the topic about which he was writing. He explains:

> The way that the verses broke themselves off seemed very natural with the story of the compiler…the first one is an overview of the compiler and what it does…the second verse gives a start to finish procedure of the process in how a single core ALU would work with the operating system to produce a simple mathematical computation (x=8+2)…I chose to make every line of [the third] verse start with "The <feature> where <feature> is a chronological walk through the upper level of software compiler, as opposed to the second verse which is a walk-through of the lower level hardware architecture.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I'll note here that I know nothing about compilers, but I can understand that Greg has attempted to create verses that each focus coherently on one aspect of the song's topic. Thus, Greg demonstrates that he is cognizant of *why* he arranged his verses the way he did. As Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli (2010) note in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors,* asking students why they have made a particular choice is an important way of guiding them towards the goal of becoming independent writers (19). Here, Greg has already explained why he structured his verses the way he did, showing that his song was the result of informed rhetorical choices. Though Greg's discussion of his rhetorical choices focuses on a song, there's no reason to think that he wouldn't be able to apply the same critical thinking skill to a paper for a humanities class, or a report for a future employer. Still, an interesting addition to this assignment might be

to ask students explicitly how they can apply what they learned about songwriting to other types of compositions.

In addition to commenting on his verses, Greg also provided some reflection about his chorus, noting that the first draft of his song did not contain one at all:

> I had originally based the song on older rap songs by Grandmaster Flash or Biz Markie that do not always have as distinctive chorus or verse, but seem to just be a constant stream of words. Upon re-reading what happened over the weekend after I had gotten my comments and criticisms from my classmates, I decided that my song seemed "naked" without something to connect the verses, and that it needed something to cover it. I confirmed this when I was trying to sing the song, and kept noticing how awkward it sounded without a chorus to connect the verses…At this time I decided to add a chorus into the song, and since it seems to be the standard, I peppered it between all the verses and after the final verse.

What stands out to me from Greg's reflection is the importance of two more tenets of Writing Center theory: the necessity of reading one's work aloud, and the importance of peer feedback. As Ken Bruffee, a pioneer of collaborative learning techniques, states in his (1973) article, "Collaborative Learning: Some Practical Models," asking students to read their work aloud and talk about it is a powerful means of helping students understand what audiences need and expect (641). Greg's comment that singing his song made him realize that it was "awkward" to do so without something to connect the verses demonstrates that he was able to make a significant revision based on this insight. Furthermore, Bruffee asserts that when students read their work aloud, "listeners become

increasingly capable of detecting lack of clarity, organization, logic, and substance, a development which eventually leads to the ability to write clearly, coherently, and logically themselves" (641). He continues, "When one student tells another that he can't understand what's heard, that criticism sticks" (641). As Greg recalls, it was originally the feedback he received from his classmates that made him consider adding a verse, showing that in this case, peer feedback stayed with Greg and resulted in a major, positive revision.

Alison and Greg's comments demonstrate that a songwriting assignment can be a good learning experience for students with very different musical backgrounds, and reflections on the assignment from other students support that claim as well. Out of the seventeen students who chose this assignment, seven wrote specifically in their assignment reflections about the fact that they found that the task was difficult or that it had unfolded in some way that was unexpected; still, six of those seven ended up being pleasantly surprised with their final products. (The student who was not pleasantly surprised with his final product noted, "Writing a song is honestly one of the most difficult things I have ever done in English, and I still believe [my song] is below par work." I advised him not to be too hard on himself since it was a first attempt!) Two students who were pleased with their final products students specifically mentioned that the assignment allowed them to see themselves as "creative." One of those students, a first-year information systems major named Joshua, wrote:

> I believe this assignment was labor intensive although enjoyable at the same time. I enjoyed the process of songwriting, because it allowed me to be creative and original…The experience of songwriting was revealing in

many ways, because it showed a creative and expressive side in myself

that I have not known before.

As I observed in the previous chapter, students may not always readily see themselves as composers. In their article "Reading and Writing Without Authority," Penrose and Geisler (1994) demonstrate that first-year students in composition courses may be reluctant to think of their own experiences or ideas as worthy of being written about. Joshua's statement that songwriting allowed him to be "original" shows that he was able to move beyond his experiences in "an information-transfer model of education that clashes with current constructivist views of knowledge" (Penrose and Geisler 515). Tasks like songwriting not only provide means to enhance students' rhetorical skills, as demonstrated by Alison and Greg, but they may also offer students the opportunity to see themselves in a new light—in this case, a creative one.

Another student who was particularly surprised by her songwriting experience was Jessica, who titled her reflection "The 180 Degrees of Songwriting" and noted,

When I sat down to start my third unit assignment, I imagined I'd be

turning in not only a completely different song, but also a completely

different paper to accompany it. I thought my paper would be about my

logical and methodical writing experience and my perfectly structured

rhyming song. In a rather surprising turn of events, my reflection will

instead tell the story of my radical topic change, my out-of-order verses,

and my inconsistent structure and half-rhymes.

The rest of Jessica's reflection explains how she went about writing her song and where she ran into stumbling blocks. She included a hard copy of her drafts with her reflection,

complete with guiding questions she asked herself as she brainstormed ideas, words and lines crossed out, and arrows moving certain portions of the song to other areas. What struck me most about Jessica's reflection, though, was her last paragraph:

> Throughout this song writing experience, I learned a lot about my own writing process. It is okay to go into an assignment, or a problem in general, with a plan as long as you are willing to be flexible. By allowing myself to veer off my intended course, essentially doing a complete 180, I ended up with a final product that I feel truly encompasses what I intended to accomplish.

Jessica's words confirm what Mike Rose (1980) examines in "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writers Block,"—namely, that students who approach writing tasks with heuristics for writing rather than rigid rules are able to write more freely and easily. In Jessica's final reflections on the whole semester, she returned to the impact this experience had on her composing process more generally:

> Our song writing assignment definitely had the biggest effect on my writing process. As I reflected on the song I wrote, I realized that even thought it was a complete 180 from where I started (my "pre-write") it was still good and accomplished my mission. From that assignment I learned that a pre-write was just that, a starting place, and didn't necessarily have to line up with where I ended up.

By taking on a composing task she had never tried before, it's possible that Jessica was able to give herself a little bit more freedom to experiment than she might have given

herself with a more familiar assignment. Completing a composing task outside her

comfort zone allowed her to learn something important about her composing process that

she can apply to any assignment in the future that requires her to write.

Conclusion

As revealed in this chapter, using music in the composition classroom has the

potential to help students grasp how texts work, and how they can assemble effective

texts of their own. I have demonstrated that asking students to listen not only *to* but also

for music can improve their ability to think critically about the music they are exposed to

on a daily basis, as shown by my students' productive class discussion about their

twenty-four hour music journals. In turn, as students learn to be more cognizant of music

as a form of communication or a method of persuasion through considering music as part

of a soundscape, they may be better able to respond to it more consciously; furthermore,

they may be better able to use music for their own rhetorical purposes, as I will suggest in

the following chapter. Additionally, by considering traditional rhetorical concepts in

relation to music, students have the opportunity to apply difficult, abstract ideas to

describe something concrete that they enjoy, as Alison demonstrated in her analysis of

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. As students learn about how texts operate rhetorically,

they may also benefit from thinking about how seemingly diverse parts of texts become

coherent wholes, as Kevin illustrated in his comparison of Frank Zappa albums. Finally,

as students learn about how texts are created by others, asking them to turn their attention

to their own composing processes through an assignment like writing a song may help

them learn valuable lessons about their own processes and abilities. As Joshua and

Jessica's reflections about songwriting demonstrate, asking students to write songs can

help students discover strategies for composing and may help students see themselves as creative thinkers whose ideas are worth sharing.

In the following chapter, I turn my attention to how students used music as part of their own compositions. Drawing on theories of multimodal composition by scholars like Jody Shipka (2011) and Patricia Dunn (2001), I demonstrate how students can use music to reconceive and reformulate assignments or projects they have already completed. In particular, I show that students can use music in ways that allow them to expand on their previous knowledge, make written texts more meaningful, and challenge themselves in creative ways that hone their critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Chapter Five

Doing: Using Music in Multimodal Compositions

Introduction

> I used to feel in school that there were really only two ways to
> communicate an idea or an assignment, and they were to write a paper or
> give a speech. After taking this class, I feel that there are more than just
> these two. There aren't many opportunities to convey a message in a
> different mode, but there should be. In the future, I will look to doing a
> project in a different form rather than just writing or speaking.
>
> —John, last day of class

On the first day of class, John had described himself as "more of a math person
than an English person," and had noted that "this is as far as I will get in English in
college." Like many of my students, John didn't see himself as much of a writer or
composer, perhaps because his composition abilities had been assessed primarily on the
basis of his writing, an area in which he didn't have much confidence. Indeed, as Patricia
Dunn (2001) observes in *Talking, Sketching, Moving,* in school, writing is often
privileged as a way of knowing and communicating. However, Dunn (2001) makes the
argument that "we should have greater expectations for all our students, resisting the urge
to use one way of making knowledge—writing—as a gauge of their intellectual
capabilities" (1). Following Dunn, during the teaching of this course, I sought to give my

students opportunities for demonstrating their abilities to communicate in ways that went beyond the written, alphabetic texts.

As I begin to discuss the way in which I approached multimodality with my students and the composing tasks I set for them, I feel it is important here to clearly reiterate my beliefs about multimodal composition. As I noted in Chapter One, scholars like Selfe (2009) note that though we should prepare students to compose multimodally, it is not necessarily the case that students' compositions should always be multimodal, or that they should involve a particular mode. Furthermore, I am in full agreement with Shipka (2011), who expresses concern

> that a narrow definition of technology, coupled with the tendency to use terms like multimodal, intertextual, multi-media, or media-rich as synonyms for digitized products and processes will mean that the multimodal, yet-to-be imagined hybrids…will be severely limited by the texts, tools, and processes associated with digitization (10).

In addition to cautioning readers not to conflate multimodal composing with digital composing, Shipka (2011) also notes that scholars may have

> a tendency to label as multimodal certain texts or artifacts, whether they are digitally based or comprised of a mix of analog components [as] a text-dependent or textually overdetermined conception of multimodality, thereby limiting potentials for considering the scope, complexity, and pervasiveness of multimodal practice (12).

Therefore, though I will be discussing student texts as discrete entities in this chapter, I am well aware that the complexity of multimodality extends far beyond the

136

ways in which I may use the term in this chapter. I also admit that focusing on one component of a multimodal text (in this case, music) might contribute to an analysis that feels artificial and decontextualized. I would ask readers to remember that because of the goals I had for this course relating to the potential for using music in the classroom, I did not necessarily approach the idea of multimodality with my students in the same way I might have done if I were teaching for a different purpose. Throughout the semester, I aimed to make clear to my students that the idea of multimodal composing means much more than simply creating something like a Powerpoint presentation or a website as opposed to writing a paper, and I did my best to help them understand that all communication is inherently multimodal—multimodal is not simply a term that we use to describe a finished composition.

That being said, in order to highlight the ways in which music can function as part of a multimodal text, in this chapter I will be exploring three student projects that incorporated music. First, I will describe how I scaffolded my students' learning to prepare them to engage in multimodal assignments. After exploring the ways in which students used music in multimodal composing assignments in the classroom, I use samples of student work to answer one of the research questions set forth in the first chapter: To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum course affect students' practices of producing multimodal compositions? Finally, I bring into focus what students said about how they plan to use some of the multimodal composition techniques they discovered, including ways of incorporating music into texts, in the future.

Scaffolding Multimodality

  To help my students think about composing as more than simply writing papers, I spent the second half of the semester introducing them to multimodal composition theories and asking them to complete assignments that allowed them to demonstrate their facility with communicating in ways other than via alphabetic texts. As I prepared my students to take on multimodal assignments, we discussed readings from scholars of multimodality and multimodal composition, including Gunther Kress (2010), Carey Jewitt (2010), Jody Shipka (2011), Cynthia Selfe (2009), and Crystal Van Kooten (2011). One of the first ideas I wanted my students to become familiar with was that

> …language is a part of the multimodal ensemble…[and] is widely taken to be the most significant mode of communication… [M]ultimodality, however, proceeds on the assumption that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which have the potential to contribute *equally* [my emphasis] to meaning (Jewitt 14).

  The idea that the definition of multimodality extends to a wide range of information that comes together to form a "multimodal ensemble" is one with which my students struggled more than I had expected. After one of our first in-class discussions about multimodality, I wrote in my field notes that

> …students seemed a little confused about some of the terminology and ideas being discussed, particularly in the Jewitt reading. I think they're struggling with the term semiotics, and I'm not sure they're finding it easy to think deeply about just how much information we receive from

different mediums. I'm wondering if thinking more deeply about the five

senses can help them (Field Notes 18).

During the next class, as a warm-up activity, I asked my students to get into groups.

Students were given a blank chart, like the one below, which I asked them to discuss and

fill out together. (The actual chart they were given was much larger, so they were able to

write in the spaces comfortably and at length. Some students also added comments on the

back of the chart, if they ran out of space, or on a separate piece of paper.)

Examples	Features to Consider	Places Present	Potential Strengths	Potential Drawbacks	Other Ideas
Visual					
Auditory					
Gesture					
Tactile					
Olfactory					

If the categories on the chart above seem rather broad—for instance, one might

argue that anyone with the ability to see will be getting visual information anywhere,

which might lead to putting in the word "everywhere" under "Places Present,"—that was

largely my intention. Asking students to focus on discrete places where they might be

receiving visual or auditory information helped them realize that they are receiving such

information everywhere, all the time. Fortunately, during this activity I observed

"students pointing out to one another just how broad these categories are and how each

one is deeply integrated into our lives" (Field Notes 19). As I looked through my

students' charts after the class, I was encouraged at the detail they had incorporated, and I

noticed that students were also focusing on the subjectivity of how certain information in a mode might be interpreted. For instance, within the "Gesture" category, three groups noted that gestures are culturally subjective; one group in particular wrote under the "Potential Drawbacks" column that "gestures have different meanings among cultures, and some gestures require context to be understood."[11] In addition to the subjectivity of gesture, students also pointed out that music—which all categorized under a larger auditory umbrella—was also "really subjective" and might "require sequence to make sense." (My students' characterization of music as solely auditory is likely something that I would ask them to reconsider now, if I were to teach this course again. At the time I was teaching this course, Ceraso's (2014) "(Re)Educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences," which is discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation and explores the many ways in which bodies actually experience music, had not yet been published. Given the chance to repeat this course, I would certainly add Ceraso's article to the syllabus and ask my students to think about music as a visual and kinesthetic experience in addition to an auditory one.)

In addition to scaffolding students' learning through readings, in-class activities, and collaborative assessment practices, the practical question of how to enable students to carry out composing texts through means other than writing had to be taken into consideration. As noted previously, though I do agree with Shipka (2011) that it is a mistake to link multimodality intrinsically to digital mediums, I do think that giving

---

[11] When I asked them why they categorized this as a drawback, they told me that they were referring to the fact that gestures wouldn't necessarily provide the same meaning universally. I, in turn, asked them if they could think of anything that *would* provide the same meaning universally. As we were near the end of class, they did not spend more than three or four minutes talking about that question, but they did not come up with an answer that satisfied all group members before class ended.

students the tools they need to compose with digital technologies is important. Cynthia Selfe (2007) makes the realistic argument that

> In an increasingly technological world, students need to be experienced and skilled not only in reading (consuming) texts employing multiple modalities, but also *composing* in multiple modalities, if they hope to communicate successfully within the digital communication networks that characterize workplaces, schools, civic life, and span traditional cultural, national, and geopolitical borders (3).

However, with limited time and resources, finding ways to help students learn to use multimodal technologies can be challenging. When I organized the syllabus for this course, I planned to devote some time in three separate class periods to working with digital technologies that students were interested in learning more about. Because the course was taught in a computer lab with Apple computers and the ability for the instructor to project a screen on a whiteboard at the front that all students could see, I was able to fairly easily implement some technological instruction during class time. Choosing what programs to expose students to depended upon what I wanted my students to be familiar with, as well as what students wanted to learn and who was familiar enough with certain programs to present overviews to the class. Because I wanted students to have the option of working with sound, particularly music, and because I had experience with using Audacity, a sound editing program, during one class period I provided students with a forty-five minute workshop on how to use the program. Additionally, two student volunteers who had facility with image editing and movie making each spent about forty-five minutes on separate days instructing their peers in the

basics of two additional programs: Adobe Photoshop and Apple's iMovie. All together, time during three separate class periods was allocating for teaching students to use digital composing tools.

I hoped that by exposing students to some technological options for composing, they might feel confident enough to utilize some of those technologies for their fourth assignment, which I termed the "Multimodal Conversion" assignment. A portion of the prompt I gave students stated:

> For this assignment, you will need to work with an assignment or project from a previous or concurrent class. Choose something that interests you, since you'll be revisiting it! Your task is to present the information and/or argument conveyed in your initial assignment in another way. You can be virtually as creative with this process as you like. You may choose to represent information through visual means, auditory means, written means, etc. You may use digital technology, or you might choose to create a painting, choreograph a dance, or play a song. If you get really stuck, think about the five senses—how else could you demonstrate to people what you showed in your initial assignment? Don't feel like you have to limit yourself to one particular way of conveying the information, too— you may use any combination of mediums you like or find appropriate.

Following Shipka (2011), I asked students additionally to submit a written document explaining their choices, describing their process, and assessing their product. In an effort to make students active participants in the assessment process, I asked them

to participate in designing a rubric that would be used to assess their products. As Borton and Huot (2007) observe,

> Assessment is an important component of learning to compose with rhetorical effectiveness. When we help students learn to *assess* their own compositions and the compositions—the texts the others create, we are teaching them valuable decision-making skills they can use when *producing* their own texts (109).

As we began to discuss their multimodal conversion assignment, students met in groups and were asked to detail what kinds of elements they would take into consideration in the assessment of multimodal projects. Students argued that elements such as clarity, creativity, organization, and effort should all be considered, though groups assigned different weights to these criteria. Once each group had drafted a rubric, students were asked to view some multimodal compositions found on websites like www.remediatethis.com and to use their own rubrics as assessment tools to evaluate those compositions. After doing so, students were asked to make revisions to their rubrics in order to reflect any elements they thought were missing or needed to be somehow changed. Once I had feedback from all of the groups, I assembled a rubric that incorporated elements from each of the rubrics the students had submitted.

Before I move to a discussion of some of the assignments students submitted, it is important to note that, for this assignment, students were not explicitly told that they had to use music in some way. This decision was made intentionally, as I wanted to see if any

students would use music voluntarily. Out of twenty-five students who submitted this assignment, seven did use music in some way[12].

Composing with Music: Three Samples of Student Work

John: From Paper to the Studio

John, the sophomore mechanical engineering major who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, chose to build on his third assignment from the class—for which he chose to write a song—as a means of completing the fourth assignment. John noted in his final reflection that he had "always been big into music," so perhaps it is unsurprising that he chose to expand on his song when given the opportunity. During a mid-semester interview which I recorded, John and I talked a little bit about music's role in his life. Though he hadn't mentioned it before in class, John shared that he was a musician, noting,

> Well I listen to a lot of music, but when I was a kid I played piano for a
> couple of years and then I moved to guitar and then I played some bass,
> but I haven't played in like a couple months now. Just got busy. Gotta start
> it back up. My stepbrother plays a lot of instruments too, so…

John's familiarity with instruments and his good relationship with his stepbrother both helped him as he decided how to undertake the fourth assignment.

Perhaps because John hadn't had much opportunity to play music in the months prior to our class, the third and fourth assignments together proved to be John's favorites,

---

[12] Though this chapter focuses primarily on the students who did use music in their multimodal conversion assignment, I should note that the students who did not use music produced a wide array of creative multimodal texts, including the conversion of a historical essay into a play, the conversion of an essay about O. Henry into a complex, layered image crafted in an image editor, the conversion of an essay about dressage into a series of hand-drawn illustrations, and the conversion of an essay comparing Roy Hobbs in "The Natural" to King Arthur into an animated GIF Tumblr.

since they gave him a chance to enjoy music as part of his academic pursuits. In his final reflection, John wrote,

> [Assignments 3 and 4] are my favorite assignments because they go together. In Assignment 3 I had to write a song and talk about the songwriting process. That was really fun for me. In Assignment 4, I took the song I wrote in Assignment 3 and recorded it with me singing it. This was also really fun to do. I love making songs, so this was right up my alley.

In his third assignment, John drew inspiration for his song from a videogame he loved: The Legend of Zelda. The lyrics to his song are presented below:

> "The Legend"
>
> I heard the news when I awoke today
>
> That evil was here to stay
>
> I may be young but I am brave
>
> For this kingdom I must save
>
> It's dangerous to go alone
>
> So I took a sword and thing I own
>
> Now that my mind is free of doubt
>
> I got on my horse and rode out
>
> Across the lands I shall ride
>
> Journey so far and wide
>
> Many mountains I will climb
>
> To save the princess in time

With my arrows and master sword

The triforce shall be my reward

Ganondwarf, I must duel

To save the land of Hyrule

I will cross many seas

And defeat all my enemies

Ganondwarf's evil gang

Will meet my sharp boomerang

With my bombs and handy tools

All who face me are just fools

Once all evil is beat

Then my story is complete

Across the lands I shall ride

Journey so far and wide

Many mountains I will climb

To save the princess in time

With my arrows and master sword

The triforce shall be my reward/Ganondwarf, I must duel

To save the land of Hyrule

Triforce of courage give me power

To save Zelda from her tower

Triforce of courage give me power

To save Zelda from her tower

Across the lands I shall ride

Journey so far and wide

Many mountains I will climb

To save the princess in time

With my arrows and master sword

The triforce shall be my reward

Ganondwarf, I must duel

To save the land of Hyrule.

As Shipka (2011) acknowledges, unconventional compositions like the one above might be viewed with skepticism and suspicion by instructors and administrators, or even students and parents, who either might not be familiar with multimodal composition theory or might believe that students should only be producing alphabetic texts in an English composition course. Recalling a time during which a workshop participant—an instructor scheduled to teach a course in a campus' living-learning community—made a joke "signaling discomfort with the kinds of texts I was proposing students might produce," Shipka elaborates, some people might wonder, "'How is *that* college-level academic writing?' 'How can *that* possibly be rigorous?', or 'How can allowing students to do *that* possibly prepare them for the writing they will do in their other courses?'" (2). In the case of John's song writing and recording experiences (which did include writing about and reflecting on the process), I would argue that his experiences with these assignments were both valuable and rigorous. First, in his final reflection, John focused on how the experience of songwriting helped him better understand his own writing process both for songs (a self-sponsored writing activity he engages in) and academic

papers. When asked if and how the course shaped the way he thought about the writing or composing process, John wrote,

> Yes. This class made me think about how I compose and write a song.
> This class helped me with my writing in different ways. One way was it
> showed me how close writing a song is to a paper and that you can use the
> same methods of songwriting on paper writing. It also taught me the more
> interested I am in the subject, the easier it is to write a paper. Depending
> on the assignment, I might treat a paper as a song when I write it. Then I
> would use all the methods of songwriting I use to help with my paper.
> Even if I only do this to help make an outline, this class would have been
> helpful.

Thus, John demonstrates that the experience of writing a song has taught him techniques that he can transfer to other writing, including writing done in different academic contexts.

In addition to helping John learn strategies for composing outside of our English course, the content in John's song demonstrates sophisticated thinking. In writing the lyrics to the song as part of the third assignment, John was already involved in a conversion and extension of sorts. James Gee (2003) has written comprehensively about the educational benefits of video games, including their positive impact on motivation and their ability to help students develop problem solving skills. Gee argues that video games can be a jumping-off point for other educational activities:

> In field studies we are conducting at the University of Wisconsin, we have
> watched seven-year-olds play *Age of Mythology,* read about mythology

inside and outside the game on websites, borrow books on mythology

from the library, and draw pictures and write stories connected to the

game and other mythological themes. This is education at its best, and it is

happening at home, outside of school (2).

John's ability to adapt a video game into lyrics to a narrative ballad demonstrates

his use of a number of skills. First, John had to consider the point of view from which to

write the song. Then, he had to choose what features of the video game were most

important to include in the ballad itself. The class was not a poetry class, and John makes

no claim to be a poet, but he did his best at structuring the song in a way that

demonstrates a rhyme scheme and stanzas that make an effort to conform to a ballad

structure.

In the actual recording of the song, John also demonstrates valuable skills,

including collaboration. In finding the resources (help with the melody, a recording

studio) John had to collaborate with others. He wrote,

The hardest part of this project was recording. My stepbrother helped on

guitar for this project so finding a time we both could record was hard.

Then my one friend was going to record it for us but then he didn't have

time we had to record it ourselves. Once we started recording it took a few

hours until we were happy with the final product.

And indeed, collaboration is an important part of composing. In her article "Crafting a

Music Community: Making Music and Musicians in Concert," Joyce Reenste Walker

(2015) explores the community-oriented process of "musicking," a term she borrows

from Small (1998) that highlights the relationships among people making music and

argues that the meaning of the act is embodied within those collaborative relationships. Walker links musicking to the art of crafting, an area of practice and inquiry which in turn has been related to multimodal composing and rhetoric by scholars like Hammer and Knight (2015), who examine circuitbending as a "collaborative performance between humans and nonhumans," and Novotny (2015), who examines crafting as an "embodied relational practice which often is central to the memorization of bodies that have passed on or have yet to come to into existence" (www.harlotofthearts.org). As she discusses musicking as a form of crafting, Walker (2015) notes:

> Thinking about "musicking" as a crafting activity does offer us a chance to visit borderlands where crafters must be collaborators and where the activities of producing artistic artifacts can be brought about through relationships between humans that extend beyond the boundaries of the craft activity…This matters because our individualistic American/Western culture makes it all too easy for us to enact understandings of craft activities as solitary, individually centered, and done in isolation from outside influences (of people or tools).

Unfortunately, John didn't write much about his interaction with his stepbrother and the process they engaged in as they recorded the song, so it is difficult to demonstrate precisely what, if anything, he would say he learned about the composing process from the activity. Nonetheless, by converting the song he had written as an alphabetic text into a sonic one, John at least was given the opportunity to negotiate a composition with a peer and experience the "sense of 'bringing together' that happens at the end, when the

whole song is completed, is actually created through the use of digital tools that blend all the separate sounds into a coherent whole" (Walker).

Regrettably, John also didn't elaborate on how he decided on a melody for the song, or discuss any challenges he faced when laying down the vocal track, so it is difficult to assess whether the rigor of the recording process itself was appropriate for a college course. When listening to the song, one notices that the dynamics and guitar part build in a way that reflects the narrator's journey and growing resolve; I would have liked to know more about what, if any, connections John was able to discuss between the lyrics of his song and the guitar and vocal parts he created for it. I also would have appreciated more information in the document that accompanied his recording about how he chose a melody or how he made decisions about elements like tempo and instrumentation. (John's grade of a B- for this assignment reflected some of the information that was lacking.) Still, if one goal of college composition courses is to prepare students for composing both in other academic courses and eventually outside of the university setting, then collaboration and negotiation are important skills to foster. In creating this project, John demonstrated the ability to generate a project idea, reach out to potential collaborators, deal with an unexpected setback, and finish a final product within a given time frame. Still, John did not convey as much information about how he converted his project as I would have liked to see. If I were to teach this course again, I might spend more time helping students create process reflections that include more detail.

Megan: Making Autobiography Meaningful

I introduced Megan in Chapter Three as a student who had some reservations about her writing due to the fact that she had been educated in a French immersion

program. As she described, she chose to convert an assignment from a class other than our own:

> My original assignment was an essay I had to write about an extracurricular activity I do. I of course wrote about swimming because I am a competitive swimmer and spend 90% of my time at the pool. The essay talked about how I got involved in swimming, what I like, what I dislike, and how it has influenced my life.

When asked why she chose to convert this particular assignment, Megan said, "I chose this assignment because swimming is such an important part of my life and because I wanted to take this assignment further and actually make something more meaningful with it." Megan's assertion that she wanted to "make something more meaningful with it" is a statement worth examining. In *Towards a Composition Made Whole,* Shipka (2011) writes about a student, Muffie, who completed a multimodal project involving dance. Shipka points out that as Muffie worked on her project, she did actually write. However, Muffie's writing fulfilled an "instrumental function," and Shipka notes that the student's "written products were not ends in and of themselves; that is, they were not the final product she turned in to me, or even necessarily part of it" (82). Though the assignments Megan and Muffie were tasked with doing were different, they share an important characteristic: both Megan and Muffie felt that written text was not the strongest, most effective way to convey their meaning. The writing Megan was working with to create her project may have served a different function than the type of writing Muffie engaged in, but it was still instrumental: Megan took the opportunity to use her written text as a

jumping off point to create a product that she felt would be more representative of the significant role of swimming in her life.

In the document that accompanied her project, Megan wrote about the project's purpose as well as how she decided what to create. She noted,

> My project is supposed to convey how swimming is a big part of my life. It also conveys what being a swimmer actually entails as well…I instantly thought of videos I have of me swimming at various meets and thought about how I could use those to help explain my essay. I considered picking songs that described my life through swimming as well, but decided that would not convey everything I wanted to get across.

Thus, Megan shows that she thought critically about different ways of communicating her ideas. In this case, she decided that music would not be sufficient to convey every aspect of the story she wanted to tell.

When describing some of the challenges she encountered when making the project, Megan noted the difficulty she experienced in imaging her audience's needs:

> The hardest part of the project was making sure I was conveying the message clearly so that my audience would understand, and not just myself…I also took the time to synchronize all the videos and pictures to the music so it wasn't just a big group of pictures without meaning. I put a lot of effort into making sure the video flowed well and conveyed my message. My project demonstrates creativity because I used multiple modes to convey my message. I used video, pictures, music, memes, and sounds to help convey the message throughout my project.

In this excerpt, Megan demonstrates that she gave lengthy consideration to how the elements she was combining contributed to a cohesive narrative. Notably, Megan highlights her attempt to "synchronize all the videos and pictures to music so that it wasn't just a big group of pictures without meaning"—suggesting that she sees music as the glue that holds the project together and contextualizes the images for the audience. Megan further explained:

> Music was a big part of my project. Without the music it was really just a bunch of slides with pictures and videos of my swimming, but once I added the music it totally changed the feeling of the assignment. The music I chose was upbeat and about determination and success, so it helped convey what I was trying to get across with my pictures. I think the music contributed a lot with the setting the tone of the project and also contributed to the understanding and clarity of the message of the assignment.

Megan's use of the words "tone" and "clarity" reveal an understanding of how music can operate as a rhetorical device; in this case, she points out that music allows her audience to understand the attitude she, as the author, takes toward the events shown in her autobiographical narrative.

The skills Megan developed as part of the multimodal conversion assignment were ones that she planned on using in the future, according to her final reflection. When asked what skills, if any, she gained from the course, Megan wrote the following:

> A skill I gained from this course was how to use multimodal presentations and music to effectively convey a message or meaning, rather than writing

a paper. I think this is a very useful skill to have, especially because the Internet is starting to overtake actual written things and multimodality makes up the majority of the social networking world. Being able to convey messages effectively using pictures and sounds is a skill I have learned from this course and it is a skill I will be able to use throughout life. Using music effectively in presentations is also a good skill to have acquired because the music you choose affects how the audience perceives your presentation. If you choose the wrong song, they might get the wrong impression or message from your presentation. In the same way directors choose music to make the audience feel the right emotions during certain scenes, we should do the same when choosing music for presentations.

Megan's assertion that the multimodal composition skills she learned will be particularly applicable to the "social networking world" is appropriate, given the ubiquity of social networking platforms. In September of 2015, Facebook announced that it had over 1.1 billion active users; as of January 2016, YouTube claims over 1 billion active users each month. Indeed, as Kathleen Yancey (2009) notes in her essay, "Writing in the 21st Century":

> With digital technology, and especially Web 2.0, it seems, writers are everywhere—on bulletin boards, and in chat rooms, and on email, and in text messages, and on blogs responding to news reports, and indeed, reporting the news themselves as I-reporters… We can and should respond to these new composings and new sites of composings with new energy and a new composing agenda.

Incorporating multimodal projects into the composition classroom is one way for instructors to ensure that they are responding to the changing landscape of composition. Helping students learn about and allowing them to practice with a variety of digital composing tools enables students to create stronger, more persuasive texts both in the classroom or as part of their students engage in self-sponsored composing activities.

Aside from the pragmatic application of digital technologies Megan learned about through our class' attention to multimodal composing, what I notice most in her statement on the previous page is her attention to higher order, or global concerns—that is, elements like thesis statements, organization, and support (Ryan and Zimmerelli 2010). On the first day of class, when I asked students what they'd like to get from the course, Megan wrote, "I do hope to come out of this class with better writing skills as they are nowhere near perfect…I would specifically like to learn better sentence structure and grammar. I am from Canada so I know we spell a few things differently than here!" While there is nothing wrong with Megan's original goals, they fall under the umbrella of lower order, or local concerns. As she asserted,

> Using music effectively in presentations is also a good skill to have acquired because the music you choose affects how the audience perceives your presentation. If you choose the wrong song, they might get the wrong impression or message from your presentation. In the same way directors choose music to make the audience feel the right emotions during certain scenes, we should do the same when choosing music for presentations.

Megan's remarks show an increased attention to clarity and coherence, and audience. For students like Megan, who may otherwise typically find themselves worried about

156

sentence-level issues, creating multimodal compositions provides the freedom to think more about communicative goals and less about potential mistakes in spelling and grammar.

Greg: Personifying Programming Languages

Greg, the senior computer science major whose compiler rap I highlighted in the previous chapter, also found a way to bring his computer science knowledge into our composition classroom for the fourth assignment. He described the original assignment he was using for his conversion and explained his reason for doing so in this way:

> The original assignment was to create an LSR(1) parser/compiler that would be capable of processing source code written legally with the defined grammar, and produce mathematically correct answers. I chose that assignment because compiler theory is my strongest topic, and I thought that it is easiest to transition something that you know very well, as opposed to something you are shaky on, even if it is a large transition (for example compiler to opera).

When I asked Greg to clarify his original assignment for me, he simplified it in this way: "The original project was to create a new programming language that could be understood by the CPU. To do this I needed to create a compiler to translate my new language to the CPU language." When Greg first came to me with the idea to convert his computer science project into a different format, we decided to meet in my office to brainstorm some potential ideas. During the course of our meeting, he explained some of the idiosyncrasies of various programming languages—C++, Python, etc.—to me. My knowledge of computer programming is extremely limited, so I asked him what I thought

157

might be a strange question: had he ever felt those languages possessed particular personalities? After considering the question for a moment, he answered that yes, he thought that perhaps they did.

The next time we met as a class, Greg told me that he had thought about doing something with the genre of opera, a genre which he admitted he had very little familiarity. In the document that accompanied his assignment, he explained his reasoning for experimenting with opera:

> I thought about what would be the furthest possible media from a compiler that I could realistically do, in order to test my knowledge of the subject, and as somewhat of a puzzle for me to try and solve. There were more "out there" things like interpretive dances, but I didn't think I had the athletic ability for them. As soon as I got the idea of a compiler opera in my head, I loved it and started running with it. It was a bizarre enough concept for me to gladly say that I was adopting it, and I loved the non-mechanical way that I was forced to tackle a very mechanical and algorithmic topic.

In the passage above, Greg demonstrates his own proclivity for problem solving, observing that in this case, the assignment provided allowed him to create a challenge for himself. Though I have plenty of misgivings about the way higher education is sometimes viewed as merely a stepping stone towards employment, here I think it is appropriate to note that the United States Department of Labor acknowledges that problem solving is one of the most important skills employers look for in potential employees ("Problem Solving and Critical Thinking"). In fact, in a portion of the

Department of Labor's website, a large portion of an online "Skills to Pay the Bills" workbook is devoted specifically to activities designed to enhance problem solving abilities. Greg's approach to this assignment allowed him not only to solve a problem, but also to define one for himself.

One of the biggest tasks Greg designed for himself was familiarizing himself with the genre in which he was attempting to participate. When asked what the most challenging aspect of the assignment was, Greg wrote:

> The hardest part was writing the songs. I knew very little about what an opera actually was when I started, and had to do some research so I could closer match opera style. The easiest part was motivation (surprising for me). I loved this project and spent a lot of time on it.

Greg's aside that experiencing intrinsic motivation was "surprising" for him is actually rather sad, as it demonstrates that, at least in English courses, he has become accustomed to not being interested in or enjoying his work. Importantly, like many of the students featured in Chapter Three of this dissertation, Greg displays innate curiosity and intrinsic motivation to conduct research—two things I hoped my assignments would cultivate in students. Though students may be motivated by external factors, like getting a grade and graduating, intrinsic motivation is critical to retaining new information and ideas. As Alfie Kohn (2011) notes, "Knowledge is less likely to be retained if it is acquired so that one will perform well on a test, as opposed to learning in the context of pursuing projects and solving problems that are personally meaningful" (2). Greg's statement on the previous page that his project was a "puzzle for me to try and solve," coupled with his

assertion that he "loved this project and spent a lot of time on it," suggest that Greg is likely to remember and retain what he learned from completing this assignment.

In order for readers to get a better sense of exactly what Greg did to personify programming languages as part of an imagined opera, I include the foreword he provided to his assignment below:

The Cunning Linguists

A Short Dramatic Opera, written and performed by Greg

Character	Language	Song
King Assembly	x86 Assembly Language	"Bow Before Me"
Java the Obese	Java Programming Language	"Too Big To Fail"
C the Great	ANSI Standard C Language	"Faster Than You"
Python the Pure	Python Programming Language	"Simplify"
Greg the User	He's a Human	"None Will Do"
Greg the Champion	G189 Programming Language	"Take the Best"

Overview

In King Assembly's opening song "Bow Before Me," the King states that all languages must be tailored to please him, that no language has any use without him, and that he must be appeased. He asks all the languages to state why they should be used.

Java is an obese character, who is able to perform any task if he adds more modules and patches to himself. Throughout the song it becomes clear that when he is fully functional, he is too slow to be helpful.

C is an athletic, tough character who claims that he is strong enough and fast enough to handle any task. Throughout the song it is shown that his methods of saving time can destroy needed files or kernel modules.

Python is a "beautiful" language, the only female of the languages. She claims that her design and personality is the simplest way to program, but her song will show missing components of the language for "simplicity."

Greg the user will then come on and sing in a solemn tone about how no language offers what he needs, and that the headaches given to him are too much to handle. He then decides to make a new language named after himself that will fix the flaws of Java, C, and Python.

Greg's final song is not about settling, and getting what you need. He goes through all the languages listed before, and says ways that he does not have the flaws of the languages. Finally he offers up a praise of King Assembly for allowing him to compile and run properly.

While Greg noted his lack of experience with opera, it's clear from this foreword that he has undertaken some research into stage performance, as he introduces his audience to his assignment with the type of information that might be found in a program or a prologue. In the document that accompanied his opera, Greg wrote that part of the reason he chose opera was because "operas are all about music, so the music serves as a way for me to express what the characters (languages) feel, and what emotions they have about their strengths and weaknesses." Greg's explanation in the foreword of the

characters, language, and song contextualizes the songs that follow for audience members, particularly those who might not be familiar with programming languages. Greg personifies the programming languages with details like physical attributes, such as obesity or athleticism, which adds an entirely new dimension to audience members' understanding and conception of programming languages, whether they are familiar with them or not.

When asked to reflect on how his conversion project related to the original project from which it was adapted, Greg reflected on some of the choices he faced when deciding what to include and what to foreground:

> My project is supposed to convey that when designing your own programming language, you are not bound by conventions of existing programming languages, but you can take what you like from the languages you like, and leave what you dislike (to some degree). I feel that expressing specific implementation details of writing assembly code from an arbitrary sequence of tokens wouldn't fit in an opera well. I intentionally chose to leave that out rather than write a song about it, because I thought I could more interestingly convey the ideas of why I was creating the assembly in the way I did.

Though Greg's conversion project allowed others to understand his project in a new way, Greg also observed that the project helped him understand his own work better. He noted, "[The project] was a fun puzzle for me, and I feel like it helped me better understand why I wrote my compiler the way I did when reflecting." As I have mentioned, Greg was majoring in computer science, so the Multimodal Conversion assignment enabled him to

reframe what he was learning in his major's courses within the context of a composition course. The ability for students to feel that their instruction in composition reflects their own interests and pursuits is critical; in "A Literacy Pedagogy for Multimodal Composing," Miller et al. (2012) observe that "many students desperately want to see school as connected to who they are and are becoming, but a striking majority of even the most successful students today feel that school is devoid of connection to their 'real life' [Lenhart, Madden and Hitlin, 2005]" (116). Perhaps part of Greg's motivation to engage in this assignment in the way he did is related to his ability to incorporate aspects of his "real life" into his work. By encouraging students to bring their interests and skills into multimodal compositions, they not only learn lessons related to composing, but they also learn to see their other pursuits and projects from a new perspective.

Composing Multimodally in the Future

Though this chapter has thus far been devoted to demonstrating that students can find rigorous and creative ways to use music as part of multimodal projects within the classroom, one of the major questions I sought to answer as part of this project was whether or not students felt they would consider composing multimodally in the future, whether for other classes or in their careers. In particular, I was interested in whether they felt there would be a place for music in their later compositions. As part of their final reflections, students were asked to discuss whether they felt the course would have any effect on how they would approach and complete multimodal composition tasks in the future (including in other courses, in a job, or for personal enjoyment). Of twenty-three students who answered the question, nineteen—82.6 %, a strong majority—stated that the course would affect how they approach multimodal tasks in the future.

One of the most frequent comments students made about how they envision utilizing the skills they learned was that they felt they would be more likely to incorporate music into multimodal presentations, including presentations created in programs like Powerpoint and Prezi. Wyatt, a sophomore biological science major mentioned that the addition of music to a presentation might make the presentation "more appealing and memorable so that people will actually care," while Eva, a first-year anthropology major wrote,

> In my career, I am sure to be put in a position to create a presentation. What I have learned is that to convey a message succinctly and effectively to an audience is to combine several modes of communication. Ones that come to mind would be text, pictures, and perhaps music. Text has the task of conveying the details while the pictures and music are used to capture the attention of the audience while working with the text to make the presentation effective.

While Wyatt and Eva observed that music can enhance a presentation and make it more appealing to the audience, John, the student whose song about *The Legend of Zelda* was highlighted in this chapter, argued that a strategically chosen piece of music could be used to actually take the place of text or accompanying narration: "This class has taught me how to effectively use music in the background of a PowerPoint or video. With the right song you don't even need to talk about the subject. I will definitely use these techniques in other courses." John's belief that "with the right song you don't even need to talk about the subject" can act as an extension of Stedman's (2013) observation that arranging songs for a listener is like planting seeds—meaning grows from the careful

selection of tracks. However, composers must be cautious about assuming they can predict the way their song choices (and how those choices fit in among the other aspects of a presentation) will be received. As Stedman (2013) notes:

> In the end, my claim is that in concert with a rhetor's arrangement of musical tracks—and sometimes against those purposes—sonic juxtapositions develop their own meanings for individual listeners, like vines that were planted but grew in unpredictable directions (Stedman).

Though John's statement doesn't refer to mixtapes or juxtapositions of sounds, his assertion about what "the right song" can accomplish might be true—he just may need to understand that the seeds he thinks he is planting may not grow the way he expected. If I were to teach this class in the future, I might spend more time having students compare their reactions to certain songs or pieces of music, in hopes that they might be surprised by the diversity of their interpretations.

Still, some students seemed to realize that using music could in fact become a liability. In addition to writing about the positive impact well-chosen music could have as part of a composition, students also observed that the incorporation of music be counterproductive if done poorly. Zach, the first-year chemistry major mentioned in Chapter Three, noted,

> This class showed me examples of how music enhanced *and subtracted* from a presentation. I think that, if used in the right way, adding music to a presentation can be very effective and add another dimension to any presentation. If I ever have to do a presentation for a job, then I will definitely make it a multimodal composition.

Alison, the senior music major whose work was featured in Chapter Four, noted that the experience of seeing other students' attempts to use music as part of class projects helped her realize that music could be an effective element of a composition, but only if used judiciously. She observed, "Incorporating music can definitely help a presentation (and hurt, as well). I'm sure I will have to do presentations for a future job or in grad school, and watching some of the presentation, I learned more of what to do and what not to do."

Though most students who wrote that they would be likely to compose differently in the future merely speculated about tasks they might be faced with in the future, Greg shared a particularly interesting real-life example of how he was already putting into practice some of the skills he gained in the course. As a senior, Greg was already in the process of applying for jobs in the computer science field. In his answer to whether or not he would compose differently in the future as a result of this course, he wrote about a job application he had submitted:

> In several ways this class has changed the way that I think about different modes of presentation. It has transformed the idea in my mind that only the traditional mode of communication can be used to convey an idea. As an example, instead of submitting a typical resume to a pseudo-government firm that I was applying to over break, I decided to submit an example Trojan Horse virus that I had tailored for this purpose, and explained why this kind of attack would need to be guarded against to ensure their mission statement.

Naturally, there are plenty of times when students will need to produce alphabetic texts, and when producing multimodal compositions simply may not be an option. However,

the number of students who answered that they would compose differently in the future as a result of taking this course suggests that giving students the chance to learn about and experiment with ways of composing—including those that involve music—can change the way they approach composing in the future.

In the following, final chapter, my goals are threefold: first, I synthesize and reaffirm the most important findings from Chapters Three, Four, and Five underscoring the ways in which music's integration into a composition curriculum can have a positive effect on students' motivation, students' understanding of how texts work and how they are created, and students' success in incorporating music into their own multimodal compositions. After revisiting some of the more significant theoretical and practical elements of my findings, I suggest avenues for future research, including how music might be used in STEM courses and in Writing Center work. Finally, I close with a new meditation on the question "Why music?", which I discussed in Chapter One, in hopes that readers will agree that music is valuable not only as a vehicle for the teaching of composition, but also as a very human expression and art in and of itself.

Chapter Six

Finale

Introduction

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I presented two multi-part research questions, which I then addressed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. In this final chapter, I revisit my initial research questions and synthesize some of the detail provided in earlier chapters. Next, I will consider some limitations of this study as well as some areas for future research. I close with some thoughts on why, in a time when composition teachers are asked to meet growing expectations and demands from students, parents, administrators, and employers, music is worthy of holding a place in composition courses, and perhaps even other content courses within the academy.

Synthesis of the Research

The research questions I outlined in the Chapter One were:

(1) To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' views on composition?

      a. To what extent do students view music as a rhetorical tool or device before, during, and after engaging in a musically enriched English composition curriculum?

      b. To what extent and in what ways does engaging in a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' views of the composing process?

(2) To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' composing practices?

        a. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition course affect students' practices of producing written texts?

                i. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched composition curriculum affect students' written text production practices as they write across the curriculum (both in and outside of the composition class)?

                ii. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' self-sponsored written text production practices?

        b. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum course affect students' practices of producing multimodal compositions?

                i. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched composition curriculum affect students' multimodal text production practices as they create texts across the curriculum (both in and outside of the composition class)?

                ii. To what extent and in what ways does a musically enriched English composition curriculum affect students' self-sponsored multimodal text compositions?

When I originally drafted these questions, I didn't expect that one of the most important findings I would discover would have to do not so much with students' views

of music as a tool or device, or students' views of *how* to compose, but rather with how students viewed their own motivation to complete assignments along with their ability to do so (framed in Chapter Three as self-efficacy). While my anecdotal experience using music in composition courses had led me to believe that students responded positively to the inclusion of music in my courses, I thought using music to increase student engagement was just a nice perk; however, in coding my data, I came to realize that students' motivation and self-efficacy were central to why and how music might be useful in a composition course.

Thus, the majority of Chapter Three highlighted the fact that most students in this study voiced very strong, positive associations with music, even going so far as to define music as "a form of love." Many students reported an increase in their levels of motivation, both at the beginning of the course, when they discovered the course would incorporate music, and at the end, when they reflected on their motivation throughout the semester. Additionally, Chapter Three focused on students' sense of self-efficacy and demonstrated that allowing students like Laura, who didn't necessarily think of themselves as writers or composers, to use music in some way—something they cared about and enjoyed—could instill in them a sense of confidence and capability that translated not just into greater self-efficacy for school assignments, but also resulted in students' desire to participate in self-sponsored composing activities as well. Importantly, as Greg's programming language opera (discussed in Chapter Five) demonstrates, music motivates students in ways that encourage them to develop their *own* composing puzzles. Through both posing and solving composing challenges, students may be better poised to think creatively about how they can communicate in a variety of contexts in the future.

And indeed, some students noted that they might use music to drive some self-sponsored composing challenges in the future. In the last section of Chapter Three, I addressed the question of how and to what extent students reported they would engage in self-sponsored composing in the future. As I noted, ten students said that they were more likely to engage in self-sponsored composing activities than they were at the start of the course. Interestingly, students' ideas about future potential self-sponsored composing activities were focused on writing activities, like blogs or music reviews—no students explicitly stated that they were more likely to engage in multimodal self-sponsored composing activities in the future. It would be useful to learn more about why this was the case. Perhaps students were so used to thinking about composing as creating alphabetic texts that they didn't think about other kinds of composing when they answered this question, or maybe they simply enjoyed writing about music so much that they could easily imagine doing so in the future.

As I moved to Chapter Four, I sought to address the two sub-questions beneath the first research question, focusing on how students saw music as a rhetorical device and how students' composing processes were affected by the frequent integration of music into a composition course. First, I provided an overview of literature exploring how music becomes part of a soundscape; in particular, I drew attention to the fact that, as Sterne (1997) shows, music can be an intentional part of a soundscape designed to elicit a certain reaction from hearers. Next, I demonstrated how asking students to keep a 24-hour music journal—an adaptation of an assignment idea from Carolyn Piazza (1999), as discussed in Chapter One—helped students to become more aware of how often they were exposed to music, as well as what purpose the music in a situation might be serving.

Following this exercise, students were given the choice of completing a rhetorical analysis of a song or piece of music, or an analysis of how music functioned in a setting. As Alison's rhetorical analysis of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* and Margaret's analysis of music heard on UMBC's campus illustrate, students were able to apply rhetorical concepts, such as constraints, to the way we understand and interpret music.

The second half of Chapter Four demonstrated that asking students to engage in songwriting or an analysis of how a concept album's parts came together to form a coherent whole. As Kevin's contrastive analysis of Frank Zappa's *Chunga's Revenge* and *Joe's Garage* demonstrates, students who are asked to concentrate on how an album's songs relate to one another may gain an enhanced understanding of the way parts of a text relate to one another. Asking students to compose a song and reflect on their songwriting process also has the potential to help students think about a text's organization and flow. As Greg's comments about his compiler rap demonstrate, students who do composing in very technical backgrounds, like computer science, may be apply to apply elements of their own composing process to songwriting. In turn, as students like Greg consider their songwriting process, they may be able to take lessons learned from that activity and transfer an enhanced understanding of their own composing process to other types of compositions they engage in as well.

In Chapter Five, I turned to an exploration of how students used music in their own multimodal compositions. Through an analysis of John's song recording project, Megan's autobiographical video, and Greg's programming language opera, I demonstrated that students can benefit in a number of ways from using music in multimodal compositions. As John revealed, transferring the song he had written from an

alphabetic text to a sonic one allowed him to engage in "musicking" (Small 1998) and highlighted the collaborative nature of composition. Megan's conversion of her alphabetic autobiography to a video that incorporated song lyrics she chose carefully allowed her to gain some proficiency in what Yancey (2009) describes as a "new composing"; additionally, as Megan moved her attention away from alphabetic text and focused on a multimodal one, she learned to focus more on global concerns than on local ones. Finally, Greg's programming language opera illustrated that students can—and will—establish very complex problems for themselves to solve in creative ways. As Greg imagined personas and crafted songs for programming languages like C++ and Python, he added a new layer to his own understanding of those languages. Greg's desire to set up and solve a composing challenge creatively resonates with Alfie Kohn's (2011) observation that learning is most meaningful to students when it inspires them.

Taken together, Chapters Three, Four, and Five provide a comprehensive picture of how music has the potential to shape how and what students compose as well as how they think and feel about the act of composing. As I have maintained throughout, I am not arguing that incorporating music into a course is the best or the only way to teach composition. Instead, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how composition instructors can engage students through music, and how students can benefit from the motivation and creativity the inclusion of music inspires.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Though, as an instructor, I was encouraged by the success I had with using music in this course, I understand that other instructors may wonder if the methods and assignments described here, in addition to any enhancements or extensions of their own,

173

would work for their students. It's a fair question—as I noted in Chapter Two, one of the most significant limitations to this study is that the course curriculum was only taught one time. Additionally, the students I taught do not represent students in all higher education settings: my students were, by and large, traditional students majoring in STEM fields at a four-year institution. The classroom I taught in provided us with a variety of digital composing tools, and many students were already comfortable and familiar with those technologies. The course itself was taught in a department where experimentation and inquiry is encouraged, and instructors have a significant degree of autonomy over what they teach. In short, I taught this course in a setting that made it not only possible, but easy for me to do so; having also taught at other, very different institutions, I recognize that I was fortunate to be able to conduct this research in a place that valued my ideas and pedagogical independence.

However, if I happened to find myself at an institution that was skeptical about the implementation of this course, there are a few things I would highlight to administrators in an effort to argue for the benefits this course could offer. First, I would point to the wide body of multimodal composition literature, particularly those studies discussed in this dissertation, supporting the benefit of teaching students to compose in a variety of ways. Additionally, I would underscore the fact that this course did indeed involve a significant amount of writing as well as other types of composing. In fact, if I were to teach this course again, I would likely ask students to develop a portfolio of their work over the course of the semester, perhaps in the form of a website where they could upload both their multimodal compositions as well as their reflections about those compositions. That way, those skeptical of a curriculum like the one described herein

could observe ways in which students' assignments met departmental or institutional learning outcomes and could read or hear what students say they learned in their own words.

Though the fact that this course was only taught once does potentially make it more difficult to convince administrators of its practicality, the fact that it was taught only once reveals wide avenues of potential future research, some of which could simply attempt to replicate or add nuance to the findings presented here. For instance, though I noted in the introduction that I decided against recruiting students who were performing arts majors or minors in hopes that my results would be more applicable to instructors in a wider variety of teaching situations, I can't help wonder what possibilities might lie for using music to teach composition to students who are more knowledgeable about music or have some formal training in it. If I were to teach this course again, I might reach out to the music, dance, or theater departments and attempt to recruit students for a particular section. Comparing and contrasting the work and reflections of a class of performing arts majors with the work of students predominantly majoring in STEM fields might lead to some interesting findings. For instance, would students who were knowledgeable about music feel able to take the kinds of creative risks non-musician students did, or would prior training in music lead to students feeling more confined in what they thought they could (or, more likely, should) do? In addition to learning about how such students would approach assignments that allowed them to compose music, teaching such a course to a group of students who had experience in composing music might allow for an assessment of the music students actually composed, rather than only students' reflections about their composing processes. Grading the music students write would add legitimacy to the

argument that music is a means of communication equally as important as written communication. Thus, repeating a similar course to the one described here with a different population could allow for expanded assignments and assessments and could lead to a deeper understanding of how different students respond to a musically-focused composition curriculum.

In addition to thinking about how music is used in composition courses, I also wonder how music might be utilized in other content areas, particularly in fields where it would be uncommon to think about incorporating music or other elements that might be thought of as more creative or artistic. In particular, Greg's acknowledgement in Chapter 5 that his programming language opera helped him, as he put it, better understand why he wrote his compiler the way he did, made me wonder if the research in this dissertation might be useful to those in STEM fields.

In fact, recently there has been a move to shift the focus from STEM to STEAM. The Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), sponsored by the National Science Foundation, explains the *From STEM to STEAM* initiative accordingly:

> In this climate of economic uncertainty, America is once again turning to innovation as the way to ensure a prosperous future. Yet innovation remains tightly coupled with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – the STEM subjects. Art + Design are poised to transform our economy in the 21st century just as science and technology did in the last century. We need to add Art + Design to the equation — to transform STEM into STEAM. STEAM is a movement championed by Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and widely adopted by institutions, corporations and

individuals. The objectives of the STEAM movement are to transform research policy to place Art + Design at the center of STEM, encourage integration of Art + Design in K–20 education [and] influence employers to hire artists and designers to drive innovation.

Though naturally RISD's focus is on visual art and design as opposed to music, music and performance (including theater and dance), have the potential to be excellent partners for students in STEM fields as well. RISD's acknowledgement that STEAM initiatives are important beyond K-12 education is also refreshing, considering that at many higher education institutions, students only have the opportunity to take a limited number of courses outside their major. Perhaps as educators focus on STEAM initiatives in K-12 education, involvement from higher education institutions like RISD will translate into a more opportunities in the arts for students pursuing their undergraduate degrees in any field.

The move from STEM to STEAM has been gaining momentum for some time, and scholars have already used musical topics as a means of generating an understanding of STEM topics in fascinating ways. In his 2003 book *Metaphor and Knowledge: the Challenges of Writing Science,* Ken Baake uses the musical term "harmonics" to explain the impact of word choice in technical and scientific writing. Baake (2003) notes that a word like "rules" may mean something very different for a biologist as opposed to a political scientist; he relates scientists' word choices to the concept of harmonics, which refers to the fact that when a note is played, additional notes (sometimes called overtones) also are played—they may simply be more difficult for us to hear. Through this metaphor, Baake (2003) notes that though a scientific writer may choose one word,

that word's additional meanings may resonate in unexpected ways. Baake's use of

metaphor underscores the point that both musicians and technical writers alike must

always be conscious of what they're saying (and playing); in using a metaphor like

harmonics to describe science writing, Baake demonstrates that seemingly disparate

fields like science and music performance may have more in common than one might

expect.

Finally, I have also reflected on the potential to bring the lessons I learned from

this project into Writing Center work. Less than a year after I collected the data for the

present study, I took a position as the Writing Center director at my university. Instead of

teaching composition, I now teach courses associated with writing center tutoring.

Frankly, I have not yet used music in any way to teach either of my writing center

tutoring preparation courses, but I have recently begun thinking about how using music in

some way might add another dimension to tutor training, or how writing center tutors

might use music in some way to work with their peers as they are tutoring. There is a

small but growing body of writing center literature associated with multimodal

composing and writing, but none of it explicitly addresses assisting students creating

multimodal texts with music. That's likely because the theory underpinning what

multiliteracy centers might be, as well as what they could or should do, is still in the

fairly early stages of development. A 2012 issue of *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*,

was dedicated to addressing multiliteracy in writing centers, but none of the featured

articles even used the word music; rather, the focus seems to be more on multimodal texts

as a whole, like videos or websites. In another major writing center publication, the

Writing Lab Newsletter: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship, a search of the

archives reveals that music is conspicuously absent from conversations about the work
centers do with students.

However, writing center professionals seem to be noticing potential connections
between the music and the work they do. For instance, the 2015 Southeast Writing Center
Association conference gave rise to a CD entitled *Write it Like Disaster: A compilation of
music by writing center staffers, professionals, and allies*. As Scott Whidon, the director
of the Transylvania Writing Center noted,

> More and more conversations I have (and observe other artists having)
> with engineers and producers is quite similar to conversations between
> student writers and writing center staffers. Furthermore, every time I go to
> a conference, I meet someone else who does music (as an at-home hobby,
> as a weekend player, in a vocal ensemble or choir, or in other kinds of
> music)…("Write It Like Disaster").

Here, Whidon highlights the fact that both creating music with others and tutoring writing
are collaborative activities. Given the similarities between "musicking" (as discussed in
Chapter Four), and writing center work, it would seem possible for writing center
scholarship to benefit from increased attention to music, both as it's created and used as a
part of multimodal texts.

Fortunately, there is one example of writing center administrators paying attention
to how music operates as a part of a text. However, the article focuses on the role of
music in a multimodal text the writing center itself produced, as opposed to how writing
centers can help students use music in multimodal texts. At the University of Wisconsin-
Madison, the writing center staff developed a series of podcasts about MLA citation style

for students. In doing so, Vee et al. (2009) found themselves discussing how the music

they chose to include in the podcasts reflected their goals as a resource:

> Imagining our writing center's "brand," we negotiated issues like bumper
>
> music—judging samples as "too fast," "too stuffy," or "too much
>
> banjo"—and found ourselves reassessing and redefining our ethos in the
>
> process (1).

Thus, the authors demonstrate that the choices they made about the music they chose to

include were important rhetorical ones. In fact, the paragraph above shows that not only

did the authors see music as a mode through which to convey their center's identity;

music also became a catalyst that helped the authors refine and shape their center and its

mission. While the authors' discussion of music's role is limited to how they used music

in their own composition, it is encouraging simply to see writing center literature

recognize music as a communicative mode. In the future, perhaps some of the findings

this dissertation contributes to the field of composition can be used for the furthering of

writing center scholarship as well—I hope to develop some links between what I have

explored here and the different, yet related work that I do in my university's writing

center.

Why Music? Why Not Music?

In this dissertation, I have explored some of the research regarding music's effect

on people biologically, educationally, and socially. I have endeavored throughout to show

how using music in my university-level English composition course brought students a

deeper understanding of writing and multimodal composing, and I've done my best to

demonstrate how music even helped one student become a better computer scientist. But

in the end, I would ask readers to reflect on this: why should music need to rely on its contributions to any other discipline in order to be valuable? Framing music's worth in terms of its utility in helping students feel good about their composing abilities, or championing music's value in the context of STEAM initiatives suggests that music is most important when it is in the service of something else. But I believe that music is vital for its own sake. The way that music makes us feel is a deeply important part of the human experience. So instead of asking, "Why music?", we should ask, "Why *not* music?" As I began this story with my favorite opera, *The Magic Flute,* it seems only fitting to end with it as well. In Mozart's masterpiece, the Queen of the Night gives Prince Tamino a flute made from the wood of a thousand-year-old oak. Her ladies-in-waiting tell him it will help him save the Queen's daughter, the Princess Pamina, who has been kidnapped by a dark sorcerer. The ladies tell Tamino:

> This flute will confer great power upon you,
>
> to transform the sorrows of mankind;
>
> the mourner will become merry,
>
> the bachelor a lover.

Tamino and the ladies then sing together:

> A flute like this is worth
>
> more than gold or crowns,
>
> for by its power will human joy
>
> and contentment be increased.

Perhaps—just perhaps—that's the most compelling argument for music of all.

Bibliography

Ainley, Mary. "Connecting with Learning: Motivation, Affect and Cognition in Interest Processes." *Educational Psychology Review* 18.4 (2006): 391-405. Electronic.

Ainley, Mary, Suzanne Hidi, and Dagmar Berndorff. "Interest, Learning, and the Psychological Processes that Mediate Their Relationship." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94.3 (2002): 545. Electronic.

Ainley, Mary, and Lyn Patrick. "Measuring Self-Regulated Learning Processes Through Tracking Patterns of Student Interaction with Achievement Activities." *Educational Psychology Review* 18.3 (2006): 267-286. Electronic.

"Arts Education Funding Cut in Two-Week Budget Fix." *Arts Action Fund.* n.p. March 3 2011. Web. October 7 2011.

Baake, Ken. *Metaphor and Knowledge: The Challenge of Writing Science.* Albany: SUNY Press, 2003. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Ball, Cheryl. "Show, Not Tell: The Value of New Media Scholarship." *Computers and Composition* 21 (2004): 403-25. Electronic.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *Journal of Basic Writing* 5.1 (1986): 4-23. Electronic.

Bitzer, Lloyd F., and George Campbell. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric.* 1 (1968): 1-14. Electronic.

Bizzell, Patricia, et al. "College Composition: Initiation into the Academic Discourse

      Community." *Curriculum Inquiry.* 12:2 (1982): 191-207. Electronic.

Bizzell, Patricia. "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?" *College*

      Composition and Communication 37.3 (1986): 294-301. Electronic.

Blaauw-Hara, Mark, and Putman, Kevin. "Remixing the Personal Narrative Essay:

      'The Hardest and the Best Thing I Have Ever Done.'" *Currents in Electronic*

      Literacy Spring (2011). Electronic.

Blecher, Sharon and Gail Furline Burton. "Saying Yes to Music: Integrating Opera

      into a Literature Study." *Literacies, the Arts, and Multimodality.* Eds. Peggy

      Albers and J. Sanders. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

      2010. 44-66. Print.

Borton, Sonya C., Brian Huot. "Responding and Assessing." *Multimodal*

      Composition: Resources for Teachers. Ed. Cynthia L. Selfe. Cresskill: Hampton

      Press, Inc., 2007. 99-111. Print.

Bradley, Laura. "Decoding Dubstep: A Rhetorical Investigation of Dubstep's

      Development from the Late 1990s to the Early 2010s." Master's Thesis.

         Florida State Univeristy, 2013. Electronic.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Collaborative Learning: Some Practical Models." *College*

      English 34.5 (1973): 634-643. Electronic.

Bruner, Gordon C. "Music, Mood, and Marketing." *The Journal of Marketing* (1990):

      94-104. Electronic.

Bullock, Richard, and Francine Weinberg. *The Little Seagull Handbook*. New York:

    W.W. Norton & Company, 2011. Print.

Catterall, James S. *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art: The Effects of*

    Education in the Visual and Performing Arts on the Achievements and Values of

    Young Adults. London: Imagination Group Books, 2009. Print.

Ceraso, Steph. "(Re) Educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning,

    and the Composition of Sonic Experiences." *College English* 77.2 (2014): 102.

    Electronic.

Cercone, James. "Being Great for Something: Composing Music Videos in a High

    School English Class." *Multimodal Composing in Classrooms: Learning and*

    Teaching for the Digital World. Eds. Suzanne M. Miller and Mary B. McVee.

    New York: Routledge, 2012. 63-79. Print.

Chomsky, Noam. *Language and Mind.* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University

    Press, 2006. Print.

Cochran-Smith, Marilyn and Susan L. Lytle. *Inside Outside: Teacher Research and*

    Knowledge. New York: Teacher's College Press, 1993. Print.

Corsaro, William A. "Entering the Child's World: Research Strategies for Field Entry

    and Data Collection in a Preschool Setting." *Ethnography and Language in*

    Educational Settings (1981): 117-146. Print.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* New York:

    Harper and Row, 1990. Print.

Daly, John A., and Michael D. Miller. "The Empirical Development of an Instrument

to Measure Writing Apprehension." *Research in the Teaching of English* 9.3 (1975): 242-249. Electronic.

Deci, Edward L. "The Relation of Interest to the Motivation of Behavior: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective." *The Role of Interest in Learning and Development*. Eds. Ann Renninger, Suzanne Hidi, and Andreas Krapp. New York: Psychology Press, 2014. 43-70. Print.

Deci, Edward L., and Richard M. Ryan. "The General Causality Orientations Scale: Self-Determination in Personality." *Journal of Research in Personality* 19.2 (1985): 109-134. Electronic.

Dethier, Brock. *From Dylan to Donne: Bridging English and Music*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2003. Print.

Dunn, Patricia. *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing.* Boynton/Cook Heinneman, 2001. Print.

Eisner, Elliot. "Ten Lessons the Arts Teach." *National Art Education Association.* n.p. n.d. Web. 7 February 2016.

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers.* 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

Emig, Janet. *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders.* Illinois: NCTE. 1971. Print.

"Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Region, State, and Jurisdiction." *National Center for Education Statistics.* n.p. n.d. Web. 5 February 2016.

Erikson, Erik Homburger, and Robert Coles. *The Erik Erikson Reader*. New York:

    W.W. Norton and Company, 2001. Print.

"Everyone Listens to Music, But How We Listen Is Changing." *Nielsen.* n.p. 22

    January 2015. Web. 28 January 2015.

Fishman, Stephen and Lucille McCarthy. *Unplayed Tapes: A Personal History of*

    Collaborative Teacher Research. New York and Illinois: Teacher's College Press

    and NCTE, 2000. Print.

Flower, Linda and John R. Hayes. "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing." *College*

    Composition and Communication 32.4 (1981): 365-387. Electronic.

Fox, Tom. "Basic Writing as Cultural Conflict." *The Journal of Education* 172.1

    (1990): 65-83. Electronic.

Fritz, Thomas, et al. "Universal Recognition of Three Basic Emotions in

    Music." *Current Biology* 19.7 (2009): 573-576. Electronic.

Gee, James Paul. "What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and

    Literacy." *Computers in Entertainment (CIE)* 1.1 (2003): 1-4. Electronic.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books, 1973. Print.

Goffman, Erving. "On Face-work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social

    Interaction." *Psychiatry* 18.3 (1955): 213-231. Electronic.

Goleman, Dan. "The Four Basic Moves to Strengthen Focus." *Psychology Today.* n.p.

    7 October 2013. Web. 5 February 2016.

Gonzalez, Casey. "Building Trust While Building Skills in a Peer Writing Group."

    Journal of Teaching Writing 18 (2000): 56-69. Electronic.

Grant-Davie, Keith. "Rhetorical situations and their constituents." *Rhetoric*

      Review 15.2 (1997): 264-279. Electronic.

Graves, Donald H. "An Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old

      Children." *Research in the Teaching of English* 9.3 (1975): 227-241. Electronic.

Halbritter, Bump. "Musical Rhetoric in Integrated-Media Composition." *Computers*

      and Composition 23.3 (2006): 317-334. Electronic.

Hammer, Steven, and Aimée Knight. "Crafting Malfunction: Rhetoric and Circuit-

      Bending." *Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion* 1.14 (2015).

      Electronic.

Helitzer, Mel, and Mark Shatz. *Comedy Writing Secrets*. 2nd ed. Cincinnati, Ohio:

      Writer's Digest Books, 2005. Print.

Hidi, Suzanne, and Pietro Boscolo. "Motivation and Writing." *Handbook of Writing*

      Research. Eds. C.A. MacArthur et al. New York: Guilford Press, 2006. 144-157

      Print.

Hobson, David. "Beginning with the Self: Using Autobiography and Journal Writing

      in Teacher Research." *Teachers Doing Research.* Eds. Gail E. Burnaford, Joseph

      Fischer, and David Hobson. Mahwah, NJ: Routledge, 1996. 1-17. Print.

Hopkins, David. *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*. Buckingham: McGraw-

      Hill Education, 2002. Print.

Hubbard, Ruth Shagoury and Brenda Miller Power. *The Art of Classroom Inquiry.* 2nd

      ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. 2003. Print.

Jackson-Hayes, Loretta. "We Don't Need More STEM Majors. We Need More

STEM Majors with Liberal Arts Training." *The Washington Post.* n.p. 18

February 2015. Web. 5 February 2016.

Jewitt, Carey, Ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. New York:

Routledge. 2009. Print.

Kennedy, X. J., and Dana Gioia, Eds. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry,*

and Drama. 10th ed. (Custom edition for Anne Arundel Community College.)

New York: Pearson, 2009. Print.

Kinneavy, James L. *A Theory of Discourse.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971. Print.

Kist, William. *New Literacies in Action: Teaching and Learning in Multiple Media*.

New York: Teacher's College Press, 2005. Print.

Kohn, Alfie. *Feel Bad Education and Other Contrarian Essays on Children and*

Schooling. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011. Print.

Kress, Gunther. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary*

Communication. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Lamott, Anne. "Shitty First Drafts." In *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing*

and Life. New York: First Anchor Books, 1995. 21-26. Print.

Lawson, Jesse. "The Blurred Exigence of Robin Thicke's Blurred Lines." *Social*

Science Research Network n.p. 4 August 2014. Web. 5 February 2016.

Levitin, Daniel J. *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human*

Obsession. New York: Penguin Group, 2006. Print.

Lincoln, Yvonna S., Egon G. Guba, and Joseph J. Pilotta. *Naturalistic Inquiry*.

Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1985. Print.

MacPhail, Theresa. "The Importance of Writing Skills in Tech-Related Fields."

Chronicle Vitae. n.p. 23 July 2015. Web. 5 February 2016.

Malyarenko, T. N., et al. "The Development of Brain Electric Activity in 4-Year-Old

Children by Long-Term Sensory Stimulation with Music." *Human*

Physiology 22.1 (1996): 76-81. Electronic.

Martinez, C. T., et al. "Pain and Pleasure in Short Essay Writing: Factors Predicting

University Students' Writing Anxiety and Writing Self-Efficacy." *Journal of*

Adolescent & Adult Literacy 54.5 (2011): 351-360. Electronic.

Maxwell, Joseph. "Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research." *Harvard*

Educational Review 62.3 (1992): 279-301. Electronic.

McCarthy, Lucille Parkinson. "A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student

Writing Across the Curriculum." *Research in the Teaching of English* (1987):

233-265. Electronic.

McKee, Heidi. "Sound Matters: Notes Toward the Analysis and Design of Sound in

Multimodal Webtexts." *Computers and Composition.* 23.3 (2006): 335-354.

Electronic.

Miraldi, Peter Nello. *Influence of College Students' MP3-Player Motives on Their*

Social Interaction. Doctoral dissertation, Kent State. 2010. Electronic.

Miller, Suzanne M. et al. "A Literacy Pedagogy for Multimodal Composing:

Transforming Learning and Teaching." *Multimodal Composing in Classrooms:*

Learning and Teaching for the Digital World. Eds. Suzanne M. Miller and Mary

B. McVee. New York: Routledge, 2013. 114-129. Print.

Morse, Janice M., and Lyn Richards. *Qualitative Research Design*. 3rd ed. Los

Angeles: Sage, 2013. Print.

Murray, Donald. *A Writer Teaches Writing.* 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

    1985. Print.

Novotny, Maria. "Craft as a Memorializing Rhetoric." *Harlot: A Revealing Look at*

    the Arts of Persuasion 1.14 (2015). Electronic.

Ossola, Alexandra. "Is the U.S. Focusing Too Much on STEM?" *The Atlantic.* n.p. 3

    December 2014. Web. 5 February 2016.

Patall, Erika A. et al. "The Effects of Choice on Intrinsic Motivation and Related

    Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis of Research Findings." *Psychological Bulletin* 134.2

    (2008): 270-300. Electronic.

Penrose, Ann M., and Cheryl Geisler. "Reading and Writing Without

    Authority." *College Composition and Communication* 45.4 (1994): 505-520.

    Electronic.

Perl, Sondra. "A Look at Basic Writers in the Process of Composing." *Basic Writing:*

    Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators. Eds. L. Kasden and D.

    Hoeber. Illinois: NCTE, 1980. 13-32. Print.

Piazza, Carolyn A. *Multiple Forms of Literacy: Teaching Literacy and the Arts*.

    Prentice Hall, 1998. Print.

Pinker, Steven. *The Language Instinct.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994.

    Print.

Pintrich, Paul R., and Elisabeth V. De Groot. "Motivational and Self-Regulated

    Learning Components of Classroom Academic Performance." *Journal of*

    Educational Psychology 82.1 (1990): 33. Electronic.

Proust, Marcel. *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way* (1913). *Project Gutenberg.* n.p. 21 March 2009. Web. 7 February 2016.

Roberts, Donald F., Peter G. Christenson, and Douglas A. Gentile. "The Effects of Violent Music on Children and Adolescents." *Media Violence and Children.* Ed. Douglas A. Gentile. Connecticut: Praeger, 2003. 153-170. Print.

Rose, Mike. "Rigid Rules, Inflexible plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer's Block." *College Composition and Communication* 31.4 (1980): 389-401. Electronic.

Roulston, Kathryn. *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010. Print.

Ryan, Leigh, and Lisa Zimmerelli. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2010. Print.

Schafer, R. Murray. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. New York: Knopf, 1977. Print.

Scheuer, Jeffrey. *The Sound Bite Society.* New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Seipp, Bettina. "Anxiety and Academic Performance: A Meta-Analysis of Findings." *Anxiety Research* 4.1 (1991): 27-41. Electronic.

Selfe, Cynthia. "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning." *College Composition and Communication* 60.4 (2009): 616-663. Electronic.

Shipka, Jody. "Sound Engineering: Toward a Theory of Multimodal Soundness." *Computers and Composition* 23.3 (2006): 355-373. Electronic.

Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. Print.

"Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success." *Department of Labor.* n.p. n.d. Web. 5 February 2016.

Slater, Jessica et al. "Music Training Improves Speech-in-Noise Perception: Longitudinal Evidence from a Community-based Music Program." *Behavioural Brain Research* 291 (2015): 244-252. Electronic.

Smagorinsky, Peter, Ed. *Research on Composition. Multiple Perspectives on Two Decades of Change.* New York: Teacher's College Press, 2006. Print.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening.* Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998. Print.

Snipes, Wilson Currin. "Oral Composing as an Approach to Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 24.2 (1973): 200-205. Electronic.

"Sound of Silence." *California Music Project.* n.p. 2004. Web. 28 January 2015.

Stedman, Kyle. "How Music Speaks: In the Background, In the Remix, In the City." *Currents in Electronic Literacy* Spring (2011). Electronic.

Stedman, Kyle D. "Making Meaning in Musical Mixes." *Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion* 1.9 (2013). Electronic.

Sterne, Jonathan. "Sounds Like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space." *Ethnomusicology* 41.1 (1997): 22-50. Electronic.

Storr, Anthony. *Music and the Mind.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992. Print.

"The Music of Writing." *University of Pennsylvania Gazette.* n.p. 26 June 2007. Web. 5 Feb 2016.

Van Kooten, Crystal. "A New Composition, a 21st Century Pedagogy, and the

      Rhetoric of Music." *Currents in Electronic Literacy* Spring (2011). Electronic.

Vee, Annette, et al. "Podcasting the Writing Center: Notes on Design and

      Production." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 34.1 (2009): 1-6. Electronic.

Walker, Joyce Reenste. "Crafting a Music Community: Making Music and Musicians

      in Concert." *Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion* 1.14 (2015).

      Electronic.

Wardle, Elizabeth, and Douglas Downs. *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*.

      New York: Bedford/St.Martin's, 2014. Print.

"What's Your Name again? Why it Might Not Be Your Brain's Ability but Your

      Lack of Interest That Causes a Bad Memory." *Kansas State University.* n.p. 20

      June, 2012. Web. 5 Feb. 2016.

"Write It Like Disaster: A Writing Center Music Project." *Writing Lab Newsletter*

      Blog. n.p. 18 February 2015. Web. 5 February 2015.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Writing in the 21st Century." *National Council of Teachers*

      of English. n.p. 2009. Web. 5 February 2015.

Zimmerman, Barry J., et al. "Self-Motivation for Academic Attainment: The Role of

      Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Personal Goal Setting." *American Educational*

      Research Journal 29.3 (1992): 663-676. Electronic.