Engage Critically with the Digital Realm

Despite the continued prevalence of the myth of the “digital native,” many of our students are mainly proficient at using digital technology for entertainment and tend to accept unexamined approaches to finding and evaluating knowledge gleaned from digital sources. The incorporation of multimodal digital narrative assignments and activities can bring a range of benefits to your students and to your classes, bridging the perceived gap between disciplinary work in the classroom and the students’ digitally-infused lives. We can help our students engage critically with the digital realm and empower them as active, reflective producers rather than passive consumers of digital multimodal narratives. When designing a digital multimodal assignment, here are five basic suggestions:

1. Start small. Don’t begin by re-designing an entire course or a major assignment if this is your first venture into digital multimodal composition. Choose an activity or assignment that you already want to change and decide if this approach could help you move toward your desired learning outcomes better than the previous one.

2. Establish clear outcomes. What do you value primarily in the assignment? Choose a clear priority, whether it is technological proficiency, critical literacy, reflection on digital creation, rhetorical literacy, creativity, or another focus. Choosing that priority early clarifies the focus for evaluation.

3. Scaffold. Build in small steps with clearly defined parameters, expectations, and due dates. Breaking it down helps clarify your priorities as well as technical needs, and it helps students engage fully in the process with a more realistic sense of both expectations and their performance.

4. Don’t assume. Many students will not have experience in these areas, despite being inseparable from their phones and computers. They may feel anxious about being asked to undertake a project that is different from what they’re used to. Don’t underestimate how much they can benefit from bringing your disciplinary training to their approach to digital content and creation.

5. Collaborate. Attend workshops, work with colleagues within and across institutions, and look at suggestions through social media, websites, print media. Chat with faculty across disciplines as well as in your own area; you can find ideas to adapt and advice from many sources. Often talking through your ideas on an assignment will help clarify its structure.

Have fun! Students engagement may increase as they find themselves both intrigued and challenged by a new approach to the assignment.

References:

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