Aiming Introductory Composition Course Design
Towards Transmedial Digital Literacy
- Ida Yoshinaga, UHM & HonCC
The “digital native” (aka millennials)


- Born after 1980, ages 16-34
- Lower skills scores than counterparts in 15-22 comparative nations
- Skills measured are literacy, numeracy, & problem-solving in technology-rich environments

Linda Dishman, "These are the Biggest Skills that New Graduates Lack,” Fast Company (5/17/16)

- Millennials have these employer-desired skills:
  - SEO (search engine optimization)
  - Foreign language
  - Coding

- They lack these job skills:
  - Critical thinking
  - Problem solving
  - Attention to detail
  - Writing proficiency

- Born after 1980, ages 16-34
- Lower skills scores than counterparts in 15-22 comparative nations
- Skills measured are literacy, numeracy, & problem-solving in technology-rich environments
Solution: Embed Digital Literacy into ENG 100 Course Design

- Teach basic writing genres in sections themed towards media and digital literacy issues.
- Introductory (warm up) sessions make students conscious of the aesthetic connections between media form and rhetorical situations.
- With each successive paper, increase the political stakes as the assignment design’s sophistication level rises.
Who is Ida?

- Lecturer in English at UHM & HonCC
- Former Writing Committee (Writing-Intensive/W-Focus) chair at LeeCC, oversaw WI course proposals
- Former Writing Assessment coordinator at LeeCC, co-designer of the first fully online, cross-disciplinary, student writing assessment project (which won the Wo Innovation in Learning Award) in the UH system
- MAs in Sociology & English, ABD in English (UHM), dissertation focuses upon transmedial narrative in the digital era (fantasy/sf genre) training as media scholar
CLASS SECTION THEME: Digital-era composition for new-media audiences in the “convergence” era.

In this class, we will exercise our interpretive, critical-thinking, and compositional skills, to explore how writing practices have fundamentally changed in this era because of information-and-communication-technology (ICT) media.

Introduction

Through media participatory exercises, you will write increasingly longer analytical pieces about the digital-age frameworks of meaning, in which the majority of today’s professional writers produce and distribute non-fictional texts. These writers include: public intellectuals, journalists, bloggers, media pundits, documentarians, business managers, scholars, community organizers, government officials, lobbyists, scientists, service providers, researchers ... and maybe even YOU!
Syllabus Outcomes, in addition to ENG 100 Course SLOs

By the semester’s end, you should be able to—

- Understand writing as a technology that restructures thought.
- Use commonplace ICT software to create media that effectively make or support arguments.
- Compose effective arguments that integrate words, visuals, and digital media.
- Evaluate formal and design features of different kinds of text.

[adapted from Purdue U. Introductory Composition program]

- Demonstrate rhetorical awareness of how technologies shape composing processes and outcomes.
- Remediate writing for one form into another with a different rhetorical context.
- Navigate the dynamics of delivery and publishing in digital spaces.
UHM ENG 100 sections

✓ Assignment of MIT media scholar Henry Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture* as core text

✓ Students review sociopolitical & cultural issues on what it means to communicate via ICTs in the digital era

✓ HonCC students: Lecture on these topics &/or adapt them into assignment design examples
Tier Writing Genre Mastery

with ICT Media Concepts & Paper Prompts

Writing Genres & Digital Media Concepts

- **PAPER 1**
  - Genres: Information, Description, Analyses
  - Concepts: Media/Digital Literacy, Grassroots Expression

ICT-Specific Paper Prompts

- Select an ICT &—using informative, descriptive, and analytical writing on its form—demonstrate how users might practice media/digital literacy on it, towards grassroots expression
Tier Writing Genre Mastery
with ICT Media Concepts & Paper Prompts

Writing Genres & Digital Media Concepts

- PAPER 2
  - Genres: Evaluation, Comparison-Contrast
  - Concepts: Democracy, Public Interest

ICT-Specific Paper Prompts

- Compare & contrast 2 ICTs—using a specific set of evaluative criteria—on which one might offer more democratic potential, working towards the public interest
Tier Writing Genre Mastery

with ICT Media Concepts & Paper Prompts

Writing Genres & Digital Media Concepts

- PAPER 3
  - Genres: (Peer-reviewed) Article Analyses, Literature Review, Policy/Proposal
  - Concepts: Equity, Equality, Justice, Fairness; Social Institutions

ICT-Specific Paper Prompts

- Propose & support a proposal for an institutional policy using 1 or more ICT towards increasing equity, equality, justice, or fairness in a major area of social organization

- [Institutions: Healthcare, sports, media, economy, religion, school, government, etc.]
Examples of tiered exercises: Introduction

- Prompt: “Write a personal ad, using either yourself, someone you know, or a made-up person, who’s looking for a date.

- Do this for 2 different ICTs, and explain why you chose a different rhetorical approach (language, audience, style, examples/details) for each ICT.”

- Discussion & sharing of examples allows for students to demonstrate their built-in cultural knowledge of various ICTs (e.g. Craigslist v. eHarmony v. Match.com v. Facebook) & who the audiences are.

- Gives an immediate sense of sociopolitical stakes of writing, as well as media literacy.
Examples of tiered exercises: Paper 1

Prompt: “Describe then analyze how a specific ICT works, with attention to how a media-literate person would use it. For instance, any secret tips, advice, hints, codes (“Easter eggs”), for “hacking” this ICT, that a newbie might not know?

On the other hand, describe/analyze what a media-illiterate person, such as a first-timer or non-millennial (for instance, someone of your prof’s generation), might use on this ICT.”

Again, this allows students to exhibit their cultural & generational knowledge about ICT platforms, as well as their media literacy.

They are made to think about rhetorical diversity of ICT users: Some who are media-literate, some who are not. And the stakes that might be involved if one is not media literate.
Examples of tiered exercises: Paper 2

- **Prompt:** “Choosing a controversial case study or news issue, assess how a specific ICT might help society build towards the public good or democratic outcome, or might make society more oppressive, elite, or non-democratic.

- **Examples:** Media stories about social media-related censorship, spin/marketing, exploitation, advocacy, public consciousness raising, education, protest, activism, bullying, discrimination, private interests, etc.

- **This exercise was designed to help students think critically about digital media, beyond the surface or official versions of narratives posted on corporate or governmental websites/apps/etc.**

- **Students are made to use specific criteria to evaluate “the public good” and “democracy,” reflecting on cultural values**