CHAPTER 7

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New Media and Online Tutoring

For Discussion

1. Working with your classmates, compile a list of all the composing tools you have used. Start with the earliest (such as crayons, perhaps) and be sure to include as many variations on each tool as you can think of (such as pencils— mechanical pencils, carpenter's pencils, drawing pencils, etc.). When looking at your list, do you notice any "rules for composing" that cut across multiple tools? That is, are there rhetorical principals that apply to writing on a computer or making notes with a pen or drawing with a crayon, etc.?

2. What is your earliest memory of trying to read or write with a digital technology? How did you learn to use it? What, if anything, did this teach you about learning new technologies?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues our exploration of different kinds of projects tutors help writers with and a range of strategies for doing this work. Here, our focus is on digital media, in terms of, first, how it influences the projects writers work on and, second, how it affects the ways tutor offer help, specifically in online contexts. To demonstrate how tutoring in this context draws on many of the same skills described in the previous chapters, we focus on the key concept of **rhetoric**, which explores the ways in which communicative acts create meaning.

We probably don't need to tell you that, nowadays, writers in college produce more than just writing. Across the disciplines and in extracurricular contexts, they work on webpages, videos, podcasts, PowerPoints, and Prezis, for example, that include text, charts, graphs, photographs, animation, audio, and much more. All of these projects and many others are considered **new media**, which we can

define as digital, sometimes interactive, and **multimodal** (Grutsch McKinney 366–67, this book; Lee and Carpenter xiv). Similar to the definition we use in Chapter 5, "multimodal" concerns the different ways information can be communicated through written text, visual means, or sound by appealing to different learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Nearly twenty years ago, scholars in the New London Group argued that these different "modes of meaning" are "Increasingly important" and mapped out their "remarkably dynamic relationships" in a diagram similar to Figure 7.1 (80, 83). Because of this growing importance, more and more writing tutoring programs and the tutors who work in them help writers with projects that combine these different modes in technically sophisticated and dynamic ways.

Tutors not only help writers *with* technology, however; increasingly, they work with writers *through* technology, in equally sophisticated and often multimodal
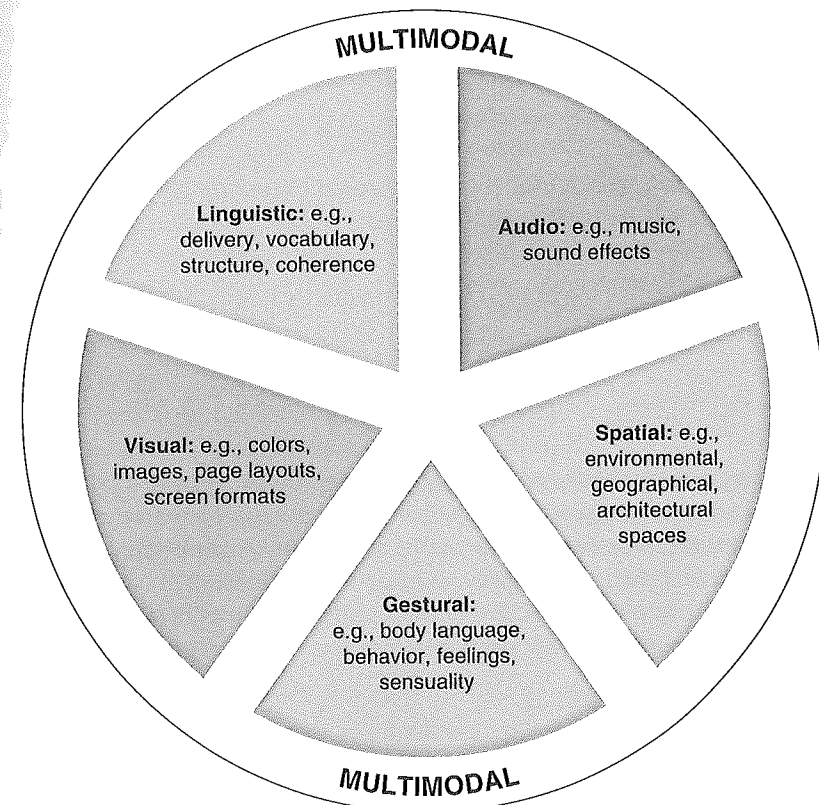
Figure 7.1 Multimodality. (Based on the New London Group, 80, 83.)

ways. Although email has been the most pervasive mode of electronic tutoring since it was first used in the 1980s, now, because of the many new communication technologies available, tutoring online is changing just as quickly as new media projects are, with tutors able to insert audio files of comments into writers' texts or to meet with writers online in real time, by way of instant messaging, video conferencing, whiteboards, and virtual environments.

As a result, writing center scholars interested in technology urge us to try as much as possible to anticipate what's coming next. In their introduction to *The Routledge Reader on Writing Centers and New Media*, for example, Sohui Lee and Russell Carpenter write that "As modes change in student composition, so will the nature of the tutorial itself. Instead of 'outlines' of essays, students may bring in storyboards of their PowerPoint presentation or video project for tutors to look at" (xviii). And in her dissertation on multiliteracy in writing centers, Sue Mendelsohn holds that "ten and twenty years from now, that work will be something else again. As the scope of the work expands to include writing, speaking, visual design, and video, centers will continue to tackle the responsibility of training consultants in visual rhetoric *and* oral communication *and* digital media *and* whatever else lies beyond those" (107). Consequently, because the technology is constantly emerging, much of the advice scholars have to offer tutors in this area is still being developed. The good news, as we discuss below, is that there is a great deal of room for tutors themselves to research and produce knowledge about this work.

At the same time, however, it is worth keeping in mind that there is much that is familiar, and in some respects extremely old, about new media and online tutoring—such as the interplay of writing and technology (as old as writing itself), the focus on helping human beings (no matter how cutting edge the technological advances), and the rhetorical (that is, audience-centered and purposeful) nature of this work. In short, even though some of what we say in this chapter might be new to you, if you tutor new media and/or online, you will likely be able to draw on your experiences with

- *Being a reader and audience member:* You know when texts communicate effectively to you and can tell writers about this communication.
- *Tutoring human beings:* New media and online tutoring have a great deal in common with writing-only and face-to-face tutoring.
- *Engaging in new media and online communication:* These technologies are increasingly part of twenty-first-century life and for most of us familiar territory.

If you don't end up tutoring new media or online, we think that learning about both is nonetheless useful because doing so can help you reflect on what you've learned so far about face-to-face tutoring of writing-only ("old" media) texts. Lee and Carpenter, for example, note that "digital communication asks us to rethink our traditional conceptions of writing, authorship, and audiences" (xv). We return to this point at the end of this chapter.

WHAT'S OLD ABOUT NEW MEDIA AND ONLINE TUTORING?

Although there is much that is new about helping writers with and through technology, there is much that is old.

Writing Has Always Involved Technology

Technology is not a new feature of writing but has always been part of it. Mendelsohn offers the following passage by Christina Hass to make this point:

> [T]o see technology as something that is added to writing in certain situations is to misunderstand the essential relationship between writing and technology. . . . Technology and writing are not distinct phenomena; that is, writing has never been and cannot be separate from technology. Whether it is the stylus of the ancients, the pen and ink of the medieval scribe, a toddler's fat crayons, or a new Powerbook, technology makes writing possible. (qtd. in Mendelsohn 56)

As we discuss below, Mendelsohn argues that keeping the technological foundation of writing in mind can make the leap into new media tutoring less daunting.

Tutoring New Media and Online Is Still About Helping People

No matter what the degree of technological sophistication, the job of the tutor is to help human beings. Above all, as Jackie Grutsch McKinney holds in the article we include in Section IV, writing centers should secure "a spot for humans to meet other humans over texts, digital or not" (370, this book). Likewise, Beth L. Hewitt urges us to remember that in online tutoring we are "conferencing with a student, not the writing. There's a human on the other end of the computer" (97). One crucial way that this human element comes into play is in terms of access. On the one hand, the great advantage of online tutoring, for example, is that it provides more opportunities for tutoring to a broader and more diverse range of clientele—including people who aren't on campus because of work or family obligations or people who do better working with a tutor online than face-to-face, perhaps because of learning styles or certain disabilities. On the other hand, due to economic or educational disadvantages (or both), some people lack access to the technology that would enable them to receive online tutoring or to complete new media projects as easily as others. Sometimes, our jobs as tutors include helping writers negotiate this technology.

New Media and Online Tutoring Are Rhetorical

This human aspect of new media and online tutoring in turn reminds us that these processes are ultimately rhetorical in nature. That is, new media projects and online tutoring are human endeavors designed to communicate with other

humans. As a body of theories, **rhetoric** helps us attend to the conditions that might enhance or detract from this communication by mapping out relationships among the speaker/writer/composer (also known as the rhetor); the audience, including the rhetor's readers, listeners, or viewers; the rhetor's purpose, what he or she is trying to accomplish; and the larger context or rhetorical situation of the rhetor, audience, and purpose, which dramatically affects what the rhetor is and is not able to accomplish. Predating writing, rhetoric is both very old and inherently multimodal, a way of accounting for not only the rhetor's words but his gestures and performance as well as how he generated his ideas in the first place ("he," because in classical times the rhetor was nearly always a man). We examine rhetoric in detail here because it is especially helpful in providing basic principles for navigating the ever-changing and always-emerging technologies of new media and online tutoring. However, as we suggest in Chapter 2 when we discuss rhetoric as a conceptual model that has influenced writing centers, you might find that it provides a useful way of reflecting on all of your tutoring.

A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO TUTORING

Rhetoric is a broad category, and there is a great deal to be said about it, but some aspects are especially useful for writing tutors to keep in mind, whether they are working with writers on new media, online, or in face-to-face sessions with writing-only texts.

Rhetoric Aims to Get Things Done

Although rhetoric helps us communicate effectively, it's about more than communicating; it's also about actively accomplishing goals. According to this famous definition by rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer:

> [R]hetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. (4)

To return to the high-stakes example we discuss in Chapter 6, medical school applications aim to change the applicant's current reality (the state of being not yet accepted into the school of her choice) to one she desires (being accepted). To achieve this alteration of reality, the applicant completes and submits multiple documents (of which the statement is but one) that, when successful, compel the admissions committee to mediate, making possible the change she desires by accepting her into the school. In short, Bitzer's definition of rhetoric is useful to keep in mind because it can help tutors and writers stay focused on the ultimate goal of a project.

Rhetoric Is Situational

Bitzer is also known for demonstrating that rhetorical events, such as applying for medical school, take place not just anywhere but at a particular time and place that calls on a particular kind of response, what he called the **rhetorical situation**. Keith Grant-Davie offers this helpful explanation:

> [A] rhetorical situation is a situation where a speaker or writer sees a need to change reality and sees that the change may be effected through rhetorical discourse. Bitzer argues that understanding the situation is important because the situation invites and largely determines the form of the rhetorical work that responds to it. (265)

The rhetorical situation of a medical school application, for example, "invites and largely determines" the personal statement genre, just as, as we discuss in the last chapter, disciplines and courses define the kinds of writing scholars and students do. In fact, genres are key evidence of the importance of the rhetorical situation: genres come about because rhetorical situations repeat, and they help people (rhetors) avoid having to develop new forms of writing each time they want to communicate within this recurrent situation.

Rhetoric Fills Gaps

As Bitzer goes on to discuss, rhetorical situations are made up of several elements, a key one of which is **exigence**, which Bitzer defines as "an imperfection marked by urgency; . . . a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (6). With a medical school application, the "thing which is other than it should be" is, again, the applicant's current reality of not yet being accepted to her target school. However, another relevant way in which scholars in writing studies discuss exigence is in terms of what motivates them to do their research, namely the gaps in the current knowledge that need to be filled (Jolliffe 139). As we discuss in more detail in the next chapter and in Section III, such gaps are useful for you to be on the lookout for as you consider your own research projects. Many of the tutor-researchers whose articles we collect in Section IV discuss their own research exigencies in terms of such gaps.

Rhetoric Aims to Do Things by Reaching Audiences

Another key component of the rhetorical situation that is likely more familiar is audience. In Chapter 3, we propose, with Mendelsohn and Nancy Sommers, that tutors can "dramatize the presence of a reader" (Sommers "Responding" 148), and, in Chapter 6, we discuss Robert Brown's research into how tutors of medical school personal statements "*stand in* for" the target audience (94). These activities are crucial practices in tutoring writing because they can help writers to keep in mind that they aim to communicate with other human beings and need, therefore, to anticipate the very human needs, concerns, and potential objections their audiences might have. However, as valuable as this tutoring practice is for

writers, we probably all recognize, at least most of the time, that the tutor is seldom, if ever, the real audience for the writer's work. As Bitzer holds, the "rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (8). Tutors can act *as if* they are part of an admissions committee, for instance, in ways that can be helpful to writers. But of course they can't actually accept the writer into medical school.

Other Factors in the Rhetorical Situation

A number of rhetoricians, including Grant-Davie, argue that exigencies and audiences aren't all powerful in the rhetorical situation. Rhetors are also seen as another crucial factor and able to influence the situation as well. For instance, from the rhetor's vantage, exigence can be thought of as **purpose**, what the rhetor himself is trying to do with his writing or speaking, not just what the rhetorical situation is calling on him to do. Similarly, although rhetors need to meet the expectations of the audience by adhering to the typical features of a particular genre (such as the medical school personal statement), they usually have room to make the genre their own; indeed, for any personal statement, the writer needs to distinguish herself from other candidates as much as follow any specific rhetorical moves of the genre. Related, an aim of classical rhetoric is to help the rhetor predict some of this dynamic so that he can influence it to his advantage, by thinking about how to appeal to the audience's interests or feelings, through **pathos**, or, related to the personality the medical school applicant shows in a personal statement, how to present oneself effectively, as credible and trustworthy, through the appeal of **ethos**. Ethos is linked etymologically to "ethics" and therefore reminds us of the larger ethical issues that need to be taken into consideration when wielding rhetorical power. It would be an ethical breach, for example, to persuade people of untruths simply because one has the rhetorical ability to do so. Complaints about "political rhetoric" are often about such untruths.

Tutoring New Media and Online—Rhetorically

Below, we address important ways that tutoring new media and tutoring online are inherently rhetorical. In both contexts, writers and tutors are (or should be) concerned with audience, situation, purpose, and self-presentation. We offer strategies for helping you keep these concerns in mind.

For Writing

1. Think of a specific technology, such as a social media platform, that you use frequently. Why do you use this particular technology? What kinds of rhetorical exchanges does it encourage or discourage? How did you learn to use it effectively? Can you discern principles to compose effectively and appropriately for this venue?

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2. (Re)read Jackie Grutsch McKinney's "New Media Matters: Tutoring in the Late Age of Print," included in Section IV. Using some of the concepts for discussing relationships between modes and/or principles of design that are described there, write a description of either a webpage from your own institution or a tutoring program at another institution. How is the visual message reinforced, elaborated, and/or undermined by the elements present?

TUTORING NEW MEDIA

New media projects are in several important ways very different from writing-only texts. For instance, imagine the medical school personal statement we discuss above as a new media project—such as an interactive website with writing by and photographs and video clips of the applicant as well as hyperlinks that connect these different parts so that the admissions committee members can move through the site as they wish—and such differences probably become immediately apparent. With this new media version, the applicant would have at her disposal what David Sheridan calls "a dizzying variety of semiotic [meaning-making] resources (words, graphs, music, photographs, video clips, colors, interactive components)" ("All" 79). As a result, we would want to call the applicant a "composer" rather than a "writer" for two reasons: first, "writing" would be only one part of what she would do for this new media version of her application, and, second, her processes of producing her work would be different from that of a writer since she could start with any of these resources (Mendelsohn 73). In turn, your work as a tutor would be different as well. You would have a far greater range of elements to respond to than you would with a writing-only text. Consequently, you would want to ask questions about design, visuals, and formatting that would consider these elements not as add-ons or lower-order but as essential parts of a whole project that is "greater than the sum of its parts" (Grutsch McKinney 373–74, this book; Sheridan "Words" 341).

New Media Is Rhetorical

Even with all of these very important differences, new media projects, like writing-only texts, are rhetorical. Whether the medical school applicant's personal statement is writing-only or new media, she would be responding to the same rhetorical situation (albeit one in which medical school admission boards allow multimodal new media projects), with the same goal of changing her current reality (not yet admitted) to her desired outcome (admitted). Consequently, Sheridan points out that we can ask the following questions of new media projects just as we would of any text:

- What was the rhetorical context [or situation] that gave rise to this text?
- What exigencies was it meant to address?
- Who was its intended audience?

- What strategies of persuasion are employed?
- What considerations of the ethics of persuasion need to be considered? ("All" 87)

Below, we offer additional rhetorically based questions to ask about new media projects.

Writing Is Multimodal Too

Thinking of new media in terms of rhetoric can help tutors and composers make the leap from writing-only texts to multimodal ones. What can help too is recognizing the multimodality, and especially the visual elements, of all writing-only texts. According to the New London Group, "all meaning-making is multimodal. All written text is also visually designed" (81). Mendelsohn expands on this insight, connecting it to rhetoric:

> [A] purely written document is already inherently a hybrid of language and design. Writing requires choices about fonts, colors, sizes, styles, layouts, margins, and so on. The design conventions of academic writing, reinforced by default settings, can naturalize textual design, making composers forget that choosing one-inch margins, Times New Roman font, double spacing, and so on, are rhetorical choices that make certain arguments rather than characteristics inherent in textual production. (51)

One way to "see" the rhetorical effects of these choices, Mendelsohn suggests, is to imagine what "personalities"—or ethos—different fonts have. What is the personality of **Comic Sans**, for instance? By contrast, what argument "does a font like **Times New Roman**, conventionally used in academic writing, make . . . ?" (52). To return to the example of the medical school personal statement once again, what kind of effect would be created for the admissions committee if the writer used **Comic Sans** font? How might a tutor respond to this rhetorical choice?

New Tools for Tutoring New Media

Becoming aware of these different elements, in both new media and writing-only texts, and being able to comment on the interplay between them adds to our ever-expanding repertoire of tutoring strategies in part by expanding our vocabulary. Grutsch McKinney's article provides an excellent overview of such terms that will be helpful to know when working with writers on new media projects. One such term is **juxtaposition**, a way of talking about the relationships among elements that are otherwise very different, even clashing, but together convey meaning to the project's audience in a manner that is greater than the sum of the individual parts (Schriver qtd. in Grutsch McKinney 376, this book). For example, Grutsch McKinney's analysis of a poster advertising a writing center shows how playful colors and typography can be consciously juxtaposed with a stern message ("Don't let your writing get so out of hand that it has to be put behind

bars") to create an invitation to potential writing center users that effectively and appropriately combines seriousness with humor (377, this book). However, juxtaposition must be used with care. To return to the personal statement example one last time, juxtaposing its serious message with the light-hearted—and comic—associations of the comic sans font would likely undermine the writer's purpose.

Tutoring New Media Projects

Even with the new elements of and vocabulary for new media projects, you'll nonetheless want to employ many of the tutoring strategies that you would use for writing-only texts. These include

- Getting acquainted
- Asking questions about the project and what the agenda should be
- Figuring out with the composer how you should work through her text
- Motivating the composer by listening to her and attending to non-verbal cues
- Taking an interest and praising
- Being conscientious about how you wrap up
- Reflecting

However, because there will be several modalities to work with—not just writing to read but perhaps also visual images or video to look at, audio files and even the composer herself to listen to, and maybe hyperlinks to click—you will work through the text differently and likely have additional questions to ask. Below are examples of such additional strategies and questions.

Questions About the Rhetoric of New Media Projects

Given the foundational nature of rhetoric to new media texts, it makes sense to start with questions related to the rhetorical situation. Sheridan suggests the following, by way of asking composers to tell you about their projects:

- Who is your audience?
- What is your purpose?
- What opportunities are there for using images, sounds, and words to reach your audience and achieve your purpose more effectively? ("All" 75–76)

Teddi Fishman as well as Michelle A. Moreau and A. Paige Normand remind us too that we can ask questions about the applications composers have chosen, since these too are about rhetorical choices (Fishman 63, Moreau and Normand 243).

In addition, some questions you might ask about the relationship of the work to the audience can be drawn from insights from cognitive psychology that have recently been applied to designing new media texts. Moreau and

Normand use the research of cognitive psychologist Richard Mayer, whose "multimedia learning theory posits that messages are easier to retain when they engage more than one sense. Choosing graphs and pictures to accentuate a message is an easy way to make the message more engaging" (242). At the same time, however, they point out that Mayer's research shows that audiences need "multimedia messages that are free from extraneous noise, structured to emphasize the essential message, and poised to generate new ideas" (235). To help composers understand that they might be overwhelming their audience rather than conveying a central message, Moreau and Normand offer these questions:

- What information does your media convey to your audience? . . .
- Is any of your media distracting your audience from your message?
- If you had to spend a dollar for every color, font, line, movement, sound, background design or word, would you make the same investments? (245)

As a follow-up strategy, and if appropriate, they suggest showing the project on a larger screen (if you happen to have access to one) to help the composer see his work from a new perspective (244).

Strategies for Working Through New Media Projects

Because new media texts involve more than writing, responding to them requires more than simply linear, left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading (Pemberton, "Planning" 9). As a result, Grutsch McKinney maintains that it is not usually possible to "read" them in the way that we would writing-only texts. Although discussing the message the composer is trying to convey is important, it would be less than beneficial to set the work aside, as we might with a piece of writing, and focus exclusively on ideas. As Grutsch McKinney puts it,

> The intertwining of multiple modes may be lost if the tutor looks *through* the text or does not look *at* the paper or *at* the screen. Furthermore, there is no way to "read aloud" visual elements or sounds. Consequently, the tutor may just skip over these elements thereby privileging the verbal, perhaps to the detriment of the student. (372, this book)

Grutsch McKinney suggests "talk aloud" as a way of working through a multimodal text with the composer, which Mendelsohn connects to the metacommentary strategy we discuss in Chapters 3 and 6.

With talk aloud/metacommentary, Mendelsohn argues that "we can also help composers by dramatizing the presence of a viewer and a listener of multimodal compositions." In so doing, we can enable them to "develop the ability to anticipate the impact of their choices on audiences" (82). In practice, the tutor "might perform his curiosity" about hyperlinks, for example, "by going back and forth between the two pages several times, testing out the different linked passages" (104). If the tutor becomes disoriented, he would perform this

experience too, to alert the composer to an effect that might or might not be what was intended (105).

Tutoring New Media Presentations

If you tutor in a program that provides help for composers of oral presentations, you might well receive specialized training in how to do this work. However, even if you work in a program whose primary (even exclusive) mission is to help *writers,* you might find yourself tutoring someone on a presentation. In such a case, since project and presentation are inextricably linked, it would be unhelpful to tell the composer that you could work with her on one but not the other. Below are suggestions based largely on Moreau and Normand's helpful discussion of oral presentations and related new media.

Most important, everything we say above about rhetoric applies to oral presentations, not least because rhetoric originated as a way to support public speaking. As a result, you'll want to help presenters anticipate the needs of their audiences. As we discuss in Chapter 4, writers sometimes need help shifting from what Linda Flower calls writer-based to reader-based prose. Similarly, Moreau and Normand point out that tutors might need to help presenters "make the transition from [a] speaker-centered presentation to an audience-centered presentation" (240). Along these lines, Russell Carpenter and Shawn Apostel suggest that it can be helpful to record the presentation so the presenter can hear (or see) what he sounds like from another perspective (163).

In addition, as described in Table 7.1, Moreau and Normand provide a number of general questions tutors can ask presenters, no matter what modalities or programs they use.

Tutoring PowerPoint Presentations

One program you might well encounter as you work with presenters is the market leader in presentation software, PowerPoint. Because this program includes several ineffective features (which have led some to call it "Evil" [Tufte qtd. in

Table 7.1 Questions for Presenters (from Moreau and Normand 243, 241).

For presenters who don't yet have drafts, ask:
- What are the main claims in your presentation?
- What visual aids do you need to support your claims?
- What is the organizational pattern? (For example, linear, specific to general, general to specific, spatial.)

For presenters with drafts, ask:
- What do you want your audience to get out of your presentation?
- How will you keep your audience engaged and interested?
- What would help your audience learn this information?

Alley 106]), we offer cautions as well as suggestions here. Related to Mendelsohn's point about program defaults and rhetorical choices, PowerPoint is notorious for making choices for presenters that do not lead to rhetorically effective presentations. Michael Alley, a professor of engineering communication who specializes in presentation slide design, maintains that the slides produced by PowerPoint's defaults "stand in direct contrast with what research has found would help audiences understand and remember the content" (108). Chief among these problematic defaults are

- Bulleted lists, which frequently do not show the connections between items listed
- Wasted space and increased "noise" created by decorative templates
- Overly large headlines that prevent composers from conveying as much information as they could in the limited space they have
- More words on individual slides than audiences can process (110, 114, 138, 111).

About this last problem, Alley cites research demonstrating that when audiences try to read a slide with too many words, they experience "cognitive overload," which leads to low comprehension "even below the comprehension rate of having no slides at all" (111). Therefore, tutors of PowerPoint presentations should suggest to writers that they not let this program make important rhetorical decisions for them and alert them to the fact that they have the power to override the defaults themselves.

An additional problem with PowerPoint is that it can tempt a presenter to use the text on each slide as notes for his talk. Moreau and Normand point out that not only does reading from a slide lead to a less than dynamic speaking style—for instance, "a lack of eye contact and flattening pitch" (240)—but it is also another potential source of cognitive overload. Drawing again on Mayer's findings as well as those of other researchers, they hold that audiences process information best when they both hear and see it—for instance, by looking at a graph while listening to an explanation about it. However, "if they see the graph, hear an explanation, and try to read the same explanation textually," they are less likely to retain the information (237).

With these limitations in mind, Moreau and Normand suggest asking the following questions of presenters who use PowerPoint:

- Is your audience going to read the text on your slide or just look at it for reference?
- Will people be able to pay attention to what you are saying while they read your slides?
- What function does the text serve?
- What does your audience need to see in order to understand your ideas? (241, 247)

While these concerns specifically address the limitations of PowerPoint, much of the advice about visual arrangement, attention to audience, and how the message of the visual text relates to the message of the presenter are equally applicable to many other multimodal programs, applications, and texts.

Concerns About Tutoring New Media

New media initially raised concerns for writing center staffs because, in the dramatic increase in modalities that these projects offer when compared to writing-only texts, some scholars felt that they threatened to make too many demands on the already limited resources of writing tutoring programs. As Michael Pemberton wrote in 2003, "If we diversify too widely and spread ourselves too thinly in an attempt to encompass too many different literacies, we may not be able to address any set of literate practices particularly well." In other words, "we have to ask ourselves whether it is really the writing center's responsibility to be all things to all people" ("Planning" 21). In addition, such diversification requires that tutors have at least some specialized knowledge, and many writing center scholars argue against this expertise for the same reason that they argue against the kind of specialist tutoring we discuss in Chapter 6, due to worries that specialized, expert tutors can end up being overly directive or forgetting the larger rhetorical concerns of the project (Mendelsohn 106).

However, in the decade since Pemberton raised these concerns, many scholars, directors, and tutors have nonetheless taken on the challenge of working with new media. Just as some writing centers and writing fellows programs offer tutoring in specific disciplines, so too do some tutoring programs, often called **multiliteracy centers**, focus on serving new media composers by providing tutoring in technology and design. Because technologies have improved so rapidly that they have increasingly large and familiar roles in all of our lives, even programs at institutions that don't have the resources to offer such specialized support can now work with composers who need help with their new media projects. Furthermore, as tutors and scholars have gained experience in this area, they have come to see that there is a middle ground just as in the disciplinary specialist/ generalist debate. Mendelsohn suggests that the new media tutor's role should be "not to know how to use every piece of technology that composers walk in the door with, but to help them develop . . . strategies to answer their own questions. . . . In other words, the [tutor] needs to help the composer learn to find answers, not to have an answer" (107). Even scholars who promote technically trained tutors, such as Fishman, support generalist strategies, which tutors "can employ on the occasions when they do not know the answer to a student's technology question and must puzzle it out with them, on the spot" (67). This is similar to what we discuss in Chapter 6 about how tutors need to negotiate and be upfront about the specialized knowledge they do and don't have about writing in specific genres and disciplines.

For Writing

1. Transform a traditional writing-only text that you have produced using other modalities and media, such as a webpage, a Prezi or PowerPoint Presentation, or a podcast. Reflect (in either mode) on the ways in which the meaning of your text evolved as you transformed it.

2. Transform the discussion of one of the tutoring strategies for working with new media described above into another mode with the purpose of sharing it with your colleagues. In a mode of your instructor's choosing, explain the rhetorical choices you made to adapt the message to your specific audience.

ONLINE TUTORING

Like working with new media, online tutoring, too, has raised concerns for scholars and tutors. In this case, however, the concerns have to do with how tutors should deal with too few, rather than too many, modalities. That is, as Jeanne Smith and Jay Sloan put it,

> Within the workings of a live tutorial, both tutor and student have ready access to a complex body of information encoded in a range of communicative acts— the written text being shared, the conversational exchanges that take place, the displays of body language—all of which are more easily read and interpreted face-to-face. (5)

By contrast, depending on the method employed, online tutoring limits much of the tutor's and writer's access to the "complex body of information" found in live, face-to-face tutoring sessions. Most limited is **asynchronous tutoring**, in which the writer submits the text (for instance, by email or some other online interface) and, at a later point in time, the tutor responds with written comments that are returned to the writer, for him to read on his own. Offering a fuller range of modalities is **synchronous tutoring**, in which writer and tutor communicate together at the same time, whether by way of instant messaging or video conferencing, sometimes while both are able to view and manipulate the writer's text. However, even the best technology will impose some limits on the information that can be shared between tutor and writer. Consequently, the writer might not be able to fully articulate what she needs help with, and the tutor might not know for sure whether the writer understands his questions or suggestions. Maintaining some of the skepticism he voiced about tutoring new media, Pemberton compares the shift from face-to-face to online tutoring to "moving the writing center conference from an IMAX theater to a grainy black-and-white, thirteen-inch television screen" (Foreword x).

Advantages of Online Tutoring

At the same time that many have concerns about online tutoring, writing tutoring programs increasingly offer this service because of the advantages it provides. As we mention at the beginning of this chapter, online tutoring provides access to writing support that some writers would not have otherwise. Moreover, some tutors and writers prefer the limitations of asynchronous tutoring because it allows the writer to submit work when he is ready and gives the tutor time to think through her response and to get help from other tutors or her director if necessary. In addition, instant messaging and other forms of synchronous tutoring can encourage writers to write during sessions, which can help them generate text that they can use for their projects. Finally, online tutoring almost always produces a record of the session, giving writers notes that they can easily refer to later and providing the tutor with potential data for research projects.

Undergraduate tutor-researcher Bill Chewning explores nearly all of these advantages as he recounts his work with a writer in a hybrid of face-to-face and different kinds of online tutoring. Chewning found that the online environment was more effective at encouraging Lana, who had been struggling with several assignments, to start writing: she was able to complete freewriting toward one of these papers and submit it to Chewning through an online message board, because it was "done on her own time, 'when she felt like it'" (57). And Chewning and Lana in turn discussed this writing through email and instant messaging. It is important to note that Chewning felt that their face-to-face work gave him insights into Lana's writing process that he would not have had they worked together solely online, and, ultimately, it was the combination of both face-to-face and online tutoring that led to their success. Nonetheless, he concludes that

> [O]nline tutorials offer freedoms for both tutors and tutees, particularly in terms of when contributions to the process can be made by either party. This type of freedom is beneficial not only for reasons of scheduling, but it also allows tutors and tutees to address issues from places where and times that they feel most comfortable or "ready" to take on particular tasks. (59)

What Chewning doesn't comment on directly but demonstrates in his article is that the online component of his work with Lana also resulted in a rich set of data. As a result, he was able to go back to this writing later, both to report to his director on the results of the pilot project he conducted and to help him prepare a submission for the journal *Young Scholars in Writing*. Likewise, Beth L. Hewitt and Ben Rafoth highlight research opportunities created in this context. Hewitt, for instance, recommends that tutors use the records produced by online tutoring to conduct "self-audits" in order to reflect on their work and to develop research questions (156–57). Similarly, in his chapter on tutoring multilingual writers online, Ben Rafoth reports on the results of a study he conducted with online tutors in his center, for which Rafoth and his tutors collected writing

samples from multilingual writers and asked these writers to complete a survey and participate in interviews (150).

Strategies for Online Tutoring

Depending on the kind of software and procedures that your writing tutoring program uses, some of the tutoring practices we have emphasized throughout Section II might take very different forms in online sessions from those of face-to-face tutoring. In asynchronous online tutoring, some of these practices—getting acquainted, asking questions, negotiating priorities for the session, and analyzing the assignment/context, for example—might well be initiated in a form writers complete before submitting their writing for feedback. Tutors, in turn, will need to engage in other tutoring practices on their own and in their written comments—including making statements, analyzing the assignments, reading the writing, prioritizing, offering their perspectives as readers, wrapping up, and reflecting—perhaps by following a basic template in which they identify areas of strength to praise and two or three key areas for writers to work on. In synchronous online sessions, and, again, depending on the software being used, a great many more of these tutoring practices will be possible. However, as Pemberton points out, even the best technology will impose limits—for instance, on how easily you and the writer will be able to get acquainted and negotiate priorities and how much you can understand about the writer's nonverbal cues.

Below, we describe strategies drawn from Rafoth's and Hewitt's research that apply to both asynchronous and synchronous tutoring. Specifically because of the limitations that online tutors (and writers) face, most important is being selective about and prioritizing the kinds of feedback you can offer. Also useful for dealing with these limitations is rhetoric, especially in terms of helping writers feel "listened to" (even when actual listening isn't possible), confident about the help they receive, and clear about what the tutor is trying to convey.

Be Selective and Prioritize

A major finding of the study that Rafoth and the tutors in his center conducted, which Hewitt's research supports, is that prioritizing what to work on in online, and especially asynchronous, sessions is crucial. For example, written comments—even a lot of them—can't substitute for all the information conveyed in the kind of face-to-face interactions that Smith and Sloan describe. For the writers Rafoth and the tutors in his center studied, "making lots of comments" proved to be overwhelming: "[W]here should the writer begin? What was the tutor's most important comment? The answers to these questions were hard to find in the tutors' feedback" (152, 151). After reviewing the data from their study, Rafoth and the tutors realized the value of "not merely writing less but writing more selectively" (152). Hewitt's research supports Rafoth's findings. For a variety of reasons, writers disregarded 30 to 40 percent of the online comments they received (134–35).

Based on their studies, Hewitt and Rafoth offer the kind of advice we outline in Chapter 3. Just as you might in a face-to-face session, Hewitt suggests reading for global, or higher-order, concerns first and limiting the number of issues you comment on, whether you're working in an asynchronous or synchronous environment (46, 91, 135). Rafoth holds that writers who get feedback "ranging from minor editing to global revision, often make the editing changes but not the global revisions" (156). Further, when working with multilingual writers who ask for help on sentence-level concerns, Rafoth recommends—just as we do in Chapters 3 and 5—reading the writing "more for meaning than for errors" and focusing on problems that interfere with the writer's ability to convey this meaning. "Unless a word, phrase, or sentence is clearly preventing the writer from conveying a key point, let it go and focus on those places where key points are getting lost" (154–56). If there are many points in the writing where the meaning is unclear, "pick one or two and focus on them, leaving the rest alone." And if you decide to comment on a sentence-level problem that does not interfere with meaning, be sure to tell the writer how much you would prioritize this issue in relation to others (156–57).

Rhetorical Strategies for Online Tutoring

Thinking rhetorically in the online tutoring session can be a powerful way to make up for some of the interpersonal dimensions that are lost due to the mediation of technology. Although Hewitt and Rafoth do not use this term, rhetoric is nonetheless apparent in their emphasis on communication and what Hewitt calls "practical ways . . . to enact caring and to present a human face in online settings" (61). In particular, their research-based advice about these communicative, interpersonal elements corresponds to the rhetorical appeals of pathos and ethos. In addition, their emphasis on being clear has much in common with purpose.

Pathos. As we mention above, pathos is a term from classical rhetoric used to describe how rhetors (e.g., writers, composers, and speakers) appeal to the interests and feelings of their audiences (readers, viewers, and listeners). Although the term might be new to you, the related strategies for making this appeal probably won't be since we offer many in Chapter 3 when we discuss ways to build rapport with, engage, and motivate writers. Similarly, Hewitt encourages tutors to establish a personal connection with the writer in online tutoring sessions through a number of familiar strategies, holding that we should be sure to

- Greet the writer
- Use his or her name
- Ask "open-ended and contextually genuine questions"
- Ask writers "whether they have their own questions"
- Praise "genuine strengths"

- Check in often to make sure the writer understands: "Synchronously, one might say, 'Does this make sense?' or 'Please tell me what I just said using your own words.' Asynchronously, one might say 'In other words,' and then rephrase or otherwise define . . ." (57, 92, 123).

Ethos. Perhaps less familiar is ethos, which is used to describe how rhetors present themselves in their work, particularly in terms of how they use this self-presentation to help them persuade or engage their audiences. Hewitt calls this the "conferencing voice or tone" that one can create with written comments as well as through visual and design elements (63). Visual elements and text design—such as font choices and formatting, text boxes, bullets, or numbers—can, in addition, convey the priority of your concerns and help writers with certain kinds of visual or cognitive disabilities. As Moreau and Normand do, Hewitt cautions against going overboard with these elements, however, since they can distract the writer from what you want to communicate to him about his work (131–32).

Hewitt offers additional strategies that simultaneously address self-presentation and concern for the writer. She suggests that tutors "be personable by being genuine, specific, thoughtful, and self-engaged in the conference and the student's writing" (124). Moreover, she maintains that we can show that we are attending to the writer's needs "by frequent reference to the writing, the assignment, or something that's been shared," and, when offering written comments, using emoticons and other "cues [to] designate interest" (122, 57, 63). Hewitt reminds us that a writer too can have an online ethos. She warns that when a writer's self-presentation suggests a lack of interest in the session, we should keep in mind that this effect might be created instead by limited time, discomfort with online environments, or weak typing or spelling skills. Given our usually limited knowledge about what the writer might be doing or feeling on the other end of an online session, she urges us to believe that the writer *is* interested. Such an attitude might in turn help to draw in a writer who is not (58).

Purpose. As much as you'll want "to enact caring and to present a human face" in online tutoring, you'll simultaneously need to ensure that you are clearly communicating the ultimate purpose of your feedback. As Rafoth discusses, these two goals can initially seem at odds. He describes a tutor's comment that, because it aimed to be "reassuring and comforting," distracted the writer from "the real need for revisions" (158). Reiterating a point offered in Chapter 5 about the ways that conventions of politeness and indirection that are valued in the United States are far from universal, Rafoth holds that the multilingual writers in his study heard "tentativeness or hesitation in phrases like 'you might want to think about . . .' or 'I wonder if . . .'" As he says, "We might think we sound polite and nondirective, but writers might hear wishy-washy" (157). Related, if you discuss your lack of familiarity with the topic, you might well "sow seeds of doubt in some

writers' minds." Rafoth points out that "Writers assess their tutors' trustworthiness" in online sessions, and, as a result, tutors need to offer honest feedback, "plainly and confidently" (157).

Hewitt's research suggests that most writers prefer direct statements in online sessions, especially over suggestions that take the form of questions. Writers she surveyed were often confused by such suggestions-in-the-form-of-questions, which can be read exclusively *as* questions rather than as they were intended, as advice about changing the text. For instance, the suggestion-question "Have you thought about starting a new paragraph here?" might lead a writer to respond with "no" and move on, not realizing that the tutor is trying to communicate a need for revision (105–11). Instead, Hewitt maintains that tutors should state suggestions directly, with, for example, "I suggest that you . . ." (115). You might notice that this advice seems to contradict Johnson et al.'s recommendation in Chapter 6 that tutors should take a stance of "provisionalism" rather than the kind of certainty Rafoth and Hewitt suggest. In part, this difference is a function of the online session: in face-to-face sessions, especially with writers and tutors of the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds, there are more ways for both to ensure that they have communicated effectively. But as we discuss below, these online examples also reveal some important, if subtle, insights about any writing tutoring situation.

For Writing

1. If your tutoring program currently offers online tutoring, arrange to use it for a piece of your own writing. Before you do so, however, reflect on what you anticipate the differences between online and face-to-face tutoring experiences will feel like from the point of view of the writer. After working through the feedback you receive, compare your initial reflections with the actual experience. How might this experience help you and your program better prepare writers for their online tutoring sessions?

2. Perhaps as a point of comparison with the previous activity, trade hardcopy drafts with a peer and tutor each other on this writing. Afterwards, reflect on how it felt to respond and receive feedback in this manner. How did this experience differ from any tutoring sessions you have had, either with your peers or other writing tutors?

REFLECTING ON OUR CONCEPTIONS

At the beginning of this chapter, we propose that as much as new media and online tutoring take us into new territories, they also help us reflect on and gain insights into the more traditional aspects of our work. To return to the quotation we offer from Lee and Carpenter above, "digital communication asks us to rethink

our traditional conceptions of writing, authorship, and audiences" (xv). Below are a few of the ways that such conceptions might be rethought.

New Insights into Writing and Authorship

New media and online tutoring enable us to reflect on and gain new insights into writing and authorship. Mendelsohn's observation about font personalities, for example, reminds us that writing is always visual, always something to see. Such visual dimensions are aspects of writing that we can attend to and alert writers to as well. Moreover, writing *is* technology and cannot exist without it. Yet some people do not have access to what might appear to some of us to be even the most basic technological understanding—of, for instance, spell check and indentations in MS Word. As people who help people with writing, we might need to help writers with technology too. Furthermore, authorship is no longer limited to writing, and new media highlights how messy and fluid composing processes are.

New Understandings of Audience and Rhetoric

The ways in which new media and online tutoring help us to reconceptualize audiences leads us to reacquaint ourselves with rhetoric, even for situations that do not feel (and perhaps ultimately are not) rhetorical. Much of academic writing does not seem to have an authentic rhetorical situation, exigence, audience, or authorized rhetor. To combat such inauthenticity, faculty sometimes assign new media projects precisely because they capture some of the rhetorical urgency that we can see in texts in the "real world." However, even when you tutor a writer who has produced a term paper simply to fulfill a requirement, you can help to create a situation that approximates an authentic rhetorical situation: as a reader and potential or stand-in audience member, you can enact a real need to understand what the writer is trying to say. And as we play this role of the reader, the rhetoric of online tutoring reminds us that we need to be aware of how we present ourselves and attend to the writer's needs in face-to-face situations as well.

New Conceptions of the Modalities of Tutoring

Both new media and online tutoring remind us of how very many modalities there are to take advantage of in our work with writers and composers. In face-to-face sessions, these include all the modalities that the New London Group says are part of multiliteracy—linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modalities, as well as combinations of these. As we tutor, many of us speak, listen to, see, or move ourselves, each other, and objects around us in a variety of ways. These modalities include those online. If a face-to-face modality doesn't work, we might be able to shift to an online forum such as email or instant messaging as Chewning did with Lana. Likewise, in online sessions, it might be possible to shift to another mode as well—to exchange emails or set up a time to talk on the phone, to video conference, or to instant message.

For Inquiry

1. If your tutoring program uses asynchronous tutoring, in which writers submit writing that tutors write comments about, collaborate with other tutors on developing "templates" for writing comments. Hewitt suggests an overall structure might include

    1. A greeting,
    2. A statement about the strengths of the writing,
    3. Your suggestions for revision,
    4. Information related to one or more of these suggestions,
    5. A closing statement (129).

    For suggestion 4, you might interview experienced tutors about common problems they see and try to locate online resources that address them. See Kavadlo as well as Ryan and Zimmerelli (79, 86) for more extensive examples.

2. If your tutoring program offers online tutoring, research the demographics of the writers who access this service. When you compare these users to your student body demographics, who is using the service and who is not? Conduct a case study of either the most frequent users of online tutoring or a group of writers who are present on your campus but underrepresented among users of online tutoring. (You can find information on designing and implementing case studies in Chapter 11.) How can your center better meet this group's needs, either to attract new users to the service or to better serve current users?