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Three Ways In: Approaches to Teaching Visual Rhetoric Through Infographics Programs

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Three Ways In: Teaching Visual Rhetoric through Web-Based Infographic Programs

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Introduction

As early as 2004, Carolyn Handa suggested that while composition students may be “technologically sophisticated,” they may be “rhetorically illiterate” (p. 3). While this may be true in some cases, we as composition teachers also find that many of our students are rhetorically aware but need help learning new technologies, or that they are somewhere in between. Though our students come to us with complex literacies across this spectrum, there is no denying that much of the information our students are exposed to is in visual form (Hill, 2003, p. 107). Thus, visual rhetoric has a place in composition courses because the visual is a key aspect of the available means of persuasion, as composition and rhetoric scholar John Trimbur (2000) has contended, and it is intimately relevant to students’ lives. Yet, teaching visual rhetoric has its fair share of challenges. Among those challenges, we are faced with choosing from a variety of theoretical approaches and must consider how to fit visual rhetoric into an already-packed curriculum (Ernster, 2014; Lauer, 2013). We must also decide if students should only analyze visual texts or create their own, and if we ask students to produce their own visual texts, we are faced with another choice: Should we teach students how to use advanced software programs that will allow them more freedom in their designs, or should we focus on teaching them easier drag-and-drop programs (such as Piktochart) that often constrain students’ choices? Finding the right balance between compositional freedom and technological literacy is a complicated concern.

While the field of rhetoric and composition—and particularly the computers and writing community—has explored the teaching of visual rhetoric in many ways, we find value in the pedagogy of visual rhetoric delineated by Charles Hill

(2003) and believe that his framework remains applicable to our contemporary composition courses. Three important elements define Hill's pedagogy of visual rhetoric:

1. Students should be taught to understand the role of images as **cultural artifacts**.
2. Students should be taught to see images as **rhetorical constructs**.
3. Students should be taught the **visual aspects of written text**.

In this *Kairos PraxisWiki* webtext, we use Hill's three-part framework to address concerns like those espoused by Handa about rhetorical illiteracy in relationship to visual rhetoric and design, and we share three assignments of varying scope and sequence that respond to these challenges. Besides learning opportunities to explore and practice visual rhetoric, design, and writing, each assignment offers opportunities for students to explore Piktochart, a web-based drag-and-drop infographic program, which can be used to create infographics, posters, and presentations. Because of its drag-and-drop capabilities, our students generally find it easy to learn. With minimal guidance, students may learn program basics and, by learning through exploration and practice, may develop competence with the program. Each assignment example below increases in scope and stake—from short and ungraded to complex and a significant portion of the grade. With these increases, chances for in-depth teaching of the programs arise, if needed, based on students' capabilities.

Furthermore, web-based programs depend on the use of digital technologies either in or out of class, which bring up questions of accessibility. For our own classes, we taught in computer lab-style classrooms, which provided ample opportunities for composing online. However, certain teaching contexts may rely on other technologies, such as library computers, particularly if not all students have access to computers at home. Also, students in need of accommodations may face obstacles when designing. To address issues such as these, we recommend collaborating with on-campus resources, such as libraries, accessibility or disability resource centers, or assistive technology centers, or allow students to work in teams and share resources. (Note: Currently, Piktochart is only available in its full version on desktop browsers; it is available in view form only through apps for iPad and iPhone.)

Additionally, while the assignments we share in the following sections have been used in the context of a business and technical writing curriculum, we discuss how these assignments could be extended to other curricular needs and courses in our conclusion.

Limiting Choices Inspires Creativity: A PSA Brought to You by Visual Rhetoric

Jenna **Sheffield**

Two-day, ungraded, in-class activity

The in-class activity I share here asks students to create a print Public Service Announcement (PSA) using the web-based infographics program Piktochart. The activity is a precursor to a service-learning project where students create deliverables such as brochures or posters for local non-profits.

Assignment Justification, Goals, and Process

I use this assignment to help students understand visual design concepts inductively, and I find the activity useful because it allows students the opportunity to focus on persuading an audience through design without being constrained by a difficult technology. The activity encourages them to be creative with design choices (such as font selections and color choices) while also concentrating on the practical implications of layout and size decisions, as well as inviting them to think critically about the relationship between text and images. I ask each group to compose the PSA for a different audience, and the conversations we have about the choices they made for their audiences lead to sophisticated rhetorical choices when students begin to create their service-learning deliverables. Thus, this short activity engages students in the following outcomes:

- Responding to the needs of different audiences
- Analyzing genre characteristics
- Exploiting the rhetorical strategies and affordances of a new technology
- Understanding the persuasive capabilities and cultural implications of visual design choices
- Choosing a textual message that appropriately corresponds with a given image

Below, I describe the steps I take to complete this activity in class.

1. *Visual Rhetorical Analysis*: I begin class by explaining Hill's three-part framework to students. Then, using his theory of visual rhetoric as a guide, I ask students (in teams of 2-3) to examine a variety of PSA ads, such as the NO MORE campaign pictured below, and ask them to answer the following questions about the examples:

- How do the images and design elements rhetorically persuade you to identify with the main argument of the

PSAs? (images as rhetorical constructs)

- How do the images, graphics, and/or design choices reinforce or subvert dominant cultural assumptions about the main issue being portrayed in the PSAs? How might the graphics and images chosen exploit our predominantly held values and assumptions in order to persuade us? (images as cultural artifacts)
- How do the visual aspects of the writing (font type, font size, page layout, and so forth) contribute to the overall message of the PSAs? (visual aspects of written text)



Figure 1: Sample PSA Campaign For Students to Analyze

When we get back together as a whole class, we discuss their answers, and students begin to think more rhetorically and critically about PSAs. They often notice that most PSAs reflect a dominant assumption that domestic abuse victims tend to be women being abused by a male intimate partner—an assumption our PSA activity later invites them to question. The "No More" campaign is one of the few campaigns that transcends this with its use of text like "NO MORE: It's Just a Women's Issue" and its depiction of male celebrities, so it is a useful one to show students to help them question other approaches. Students also make important observations about the effects of typography and page layout; they notice the importance of selecting textual messages that correspond with the meaning of images; and they discuss how the designers select graphics, images, and textual messages that persuade audiences by tapping into their values and assumptions. Then, it is time for students to become composers themselves.

2. *Composition:* I first spend approximately five to ten minutes showing students the basic features of Piktochart, such as how to insert text, images, and shapes, as well as how to change the sizes and colors of text and shapes. Students generally find the drag-and-drop program very easy to use, but they also work in teams for this activity. Thus, a student with stronger technology skills may take the lead on the composition while another offers advice about layout and design. Since the activity is not graded, this also relieves pressure about learning the intricacies of the program. I ask students to select the "poster" option in Piktochart, which lays out the canvas similarly to the above campaign. This, along with our early genre analysis, ensures students understand that we are not creating infographics but using an infographic program to design a poster.

I hand the students an [assignment sheet](#) that asks them to compose a print PSA on the issue of domestic abuse, an issue that has received much media attention as of late. I provide students a [stock file](#) of images and text they must use to create their PSA. They have 15-20 minutes to compose their PSA, only choosing from the items I have provided in the file. They also pick a "rhetorical situation card," which is a notecard on which I have written different rhetorical situations (audience, context, purpose) for which they will compose their PSA. For instance, one group may be asked to compose a print PSA on the topic of domestic violence for women in their 20s to 40s in a magazine such as *Women's Health*. Another might be asked to envision posting this PSA for a broad, web-based audience on the "About" page of the sponsoring organization's website or to envision their composition as a poster that might be hung across college campuses. I also ask students to take notes about the design choices they make during the process, all the while referencing the visual rhetorical analysis they completed for step 1.

A note about the stock file: While domestic violence is "usually discussed in the context of heterosexual relationships," particularly men abusing women, recent studies reflect the prevalence of same-sex abuse, abuse towards men in heterosexual relationships, and abuse toward transgender individuals (Shwayder, 2013). While the scope of the assignment is not to fully explore these intricacies, since I am asking students to explore images as cultural artifacts, I make selections for the file that may lead them to further question these issues. I select mainly images and text that represent the dominant assumptions students notice in their early analysis, while offering a few more inclusive options for images and text. The goal is to create some cognitive dissonance. For example, one quote is "Domestic violence consists of physical or emotional abuse by one individual in a relationship who is trying to control another." This statement, unlike others that focus on statistics about young girls or women, uses the term "one individual," which doesn't imply a specific gender or sexual orientation, and the content reflects both emotional and physical abuse. Students who pick up on this would hopefully struggle a bit before selecting a photo such as Image 6 in the stock file, where it is unclear if the individual depicted is the abused or the abuser and their sexual orientation is not implied by the presence of someone else in the image. While I was concerned that offering more obvious images (such as a male being beaten by another male) might not challenge students to really reflect on the implications of word choice such as I've just discussed, teachers may wish to select statistics and images that are more broadly encompassing, and I have included some additional options along these lines at the end of the stock file.

I should also note that it is a significant challenge to find good Creative Commons-licensed images to use that do not mainly feature women being physically abused by men. Instructors may use this as an opportunity, however, to further explore how the available images are cultural artifacts representing a dominant perspective that needs questioning.

3. *Reflection*: Once students have emailed me their completed PSAs, I pull the PSAs up in front of the class and ask students to explain the choices they made as they designed their PSAs, using the guided questions that can be found on the assignment sheet. *After* this class discussion, I introduce them to a variety of design principles, including Robin Williams' (2004) CRAP principles (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity) and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's (2006) concepts of visual salience and information value.

Making Connections and Addressing Challenges

When students write reflections at the end of the semester about what they learned in the course, many agree that this early PSA activity was the most useful in helping them learn about how to make the appropriate font selections, image choices, layout decisions, and color selections for a given audience. While this is a simple activity, there are a few key points that I have learned (after trying many different iterations) that seem to make this activity particularly useful for students. One of the most important parts of this lesson plan, in my opinion, is limiting students' choices to the stock file I provide. Strangely enough, I've found that this encourages creativity and inspires students to think more critically about design because they are forced to focus on layout, carefully consider font and color choices, consider the connections between text and image, and so forth, as opposed to finding a striking image on the web and calling it a day. When I taught this without the stock file, students typically adhered to the dominant perspective without questioning it. They also paid less attention to the connotations of font and color choices because they felt the images they used were enough to persuade an audience. Giving them a set amount of options also facilitated better conversations during class discussion because students were all working with the same choices and went through similar problems as they made selections. When I used to teach this assignment without the instructor file, the conversations were not quite as productive because students were working with very different images and content.

Another important part of my approach involves foregrounding Hill's concepts *before* students compose, but waiting to teach them specific visual design concepts until *after* they compose. Hill's concepts remind students to think carefully about the bigger picture, but when it comes to design specifics such as contrast and repetition, students often find themselves practicing these notions when they compose their PSAs without even knowing they are formal design principles. Thus, when I teach them about CRAP, for example, they often realize that these principles are not as abstract as they might have seemed had I introduced the concepts first because the students already employed them in their compositions. The importance of page layout, color connotations, font choices, and so forth, also hits home for students when they see the wide variety (in terms of style and tone) of PSAs that come out of the limited options I provide students to work with.

To show the diversity of PSAs and demonstrate how Hill's concepts play out in students' decisions, I briefly explain a few examples. The student composition shown in **Figure 2** (rhetorical situation: college campus) below is compelling because the violent image pairs nicely with the striking quote, and the young girl appears to be close to college age. The use of contrast and the color red (connoting blood and danger) for the phrase "9 seconds" aids the persuasiveness for this PSA. The students also implemented effective visual hierarchy by making the message larger than the organization's name because they believed the message was more important than promoting the organization. They chose to keep the text minimal so passers-by on a college campus could fully understand the message. **Figure 3**, on the other hand, has a much more positive tone, portraying women less as victims but more as empowered individuals who can fight against domestic abuse. Figure 3 also employs ethos through the use of a celebrity.



Figure 2: Sample Student PSA Created in Piktochart



Figure 3: Sample Student PSA

Both the images chosen in Figures 2 and 3, however, tend to focus on females being the abused, whereas **Figure 4** (below) is a bit more ambiguous. While Figure 4 (rhetorical situation: *GQ Magazine*) could use a bit of work in terms of design, when this group discussed their choices during our reflection discussion, they made great points. While considering their image choices as “cultural artifacts” (Hill, 2003), they felt that most of the images reinforced the dominant assumption that women are the only victims of domestic abuse. Thus, they chose this image of a woman screaming and shaking her head because they felt her anger could potentially position her as an abuser herself. The woman could also be verbally abusing someone—another often-forgotten aspect of domestic abuse. In turn, this group smartly paired this image with the text discussed above: “domestic violence consists of physical or *emotional* abuse by *one individual* in a relationship who is trying to control another.” Thus, their image selection paired nicely with the text and with their goal of disrupting some dominant assumptions about the issue, which would likely work well for their *GQ Magazine* audience.

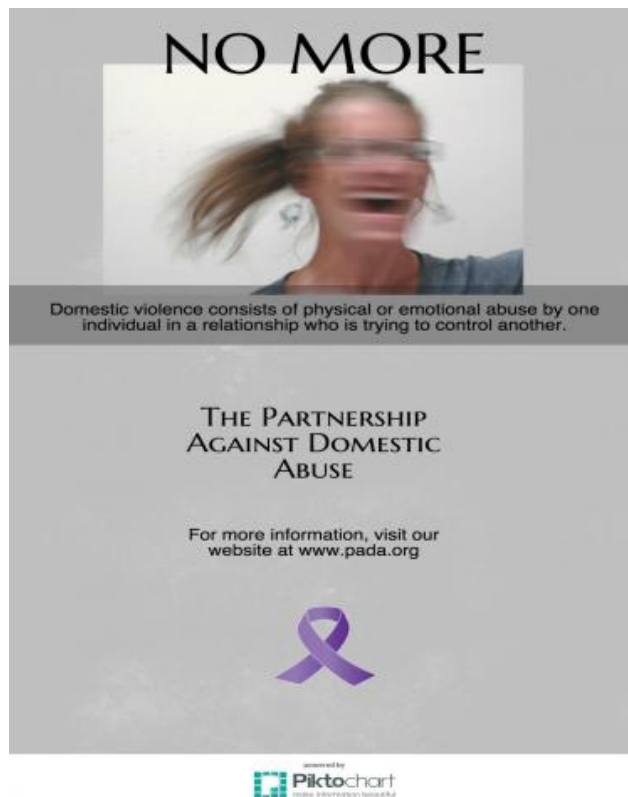


Figure 4: Sample Student PSA

Another group, as shown in **Figure 5**, also noticed that women tend to be depicted as *victims* in domestic violence PSAs when we conducted genre analyses of a variety of already-existing PSAs and images. However, they decided that in order to be rhetorically persuasive for their audience of women in a women's health magazine, they needed to draw on the assumptions and values of that audience by selecting an image that made the audience feel for the woman depicted. Thus, they carefully considered "the psychological processes by which images persuade" (Hill, 2003, p. 119). Perhaps even more interesting, though, is that during reflection, they discussed how they wanted to subvert the assumptions (again, relating back to Hill's notion of images as cultural artifacts) of women as victims by using empowering text. Thus, they selected the slogan "No More" and the phrase "is empowering those who have experienced domestic violence." They also discussed how they made the layout choice to put the "is empowering" text below the image, since readers typically read left to right and then top to bottom. They felt the striking image would begin by evoking a sad feeling, and as viewers are left wondering how to resolve the issue, their eyes would move downward to the message and contact information for PADA.



Figure 5: Sample Student PSA

In terms of how this activity can be helpful for teachers who have faced many of the challenges to teaching visual rhetoric discussed at the beginning of this wiki, this project helps teachers **fit visual rhetoric into a busy curriculum** because it can be accomplished in one to two class periods. Using Piktochart (or similar web-based infographics programs) is useful because teachers do not have to spend a lot of time teaching advanced software such as Adobe InDesign. Some may decide, as I do, to teach a program like InDesign later in the semester, but at that point, students' knowledge of visual rhetoric will be well developed and they can then determine how to put that knowledge to use in the software program instead of letting the technology constrain their design decisions. Thus, for **instructors making the choice between more sophisticated technology and drag-and-drop programs**, this assignment allows them to hone in on visual design without asking students to concentrate on learning a difficult technology at the same time. Learning more sophisticated technologies can be targeted later in the semester once students understand the theory behind composition and design. Using the stock file with limited options also helps with this goal because some students do get very bogged down trying to find good images and statistics and take longer than other groups to complete their PSA draft. While being able to find their own stats and images are important skills, this particular activity is intended to focus on visual rhetoric and design.

With regard to concerns about **assessment**, when students begin working on their client deliverables for our service-learning project, I ask them to write a reflection where they discuss how Hill's principles went into the design of their deliverables. This helps connect the earlier lesson to the service-learning project, and it helps me grade their projects by getting more information about the decisions that were a part of their process. Instructors might also consider using Hill's concepts to create rubric categories for visual projects.

Using Infographic Software to Teach Visual Résumés

Kristin Winet

Week-long assignment, graded for completion



This lesson, which is well placed at the beginning of a professional writing curriculum because of its inductive approach to design and emphasis on establishing rapport among classmates, introduces students to design principles in a low-stakes assignment. In this lesson, students are required to write an **email of introduction** to their instructor in order to practice their email etiquette skills, and then they translate that information into an engaging **infographic**—what I call a **visual résumé**, or, more specifically, a "visually-driven summary" of their academic lives and past experiences—that they will use to introduce themselves to the class. As students share their work, I guide them through a **rhetorical analysis** of the choices they made at the intuitive level and we discuss potential ways to improve the design. At the end of the semester, students revisit the concepts they learned by making a visual résumé about themselves and then create a **professional résumé** appropriate to their intended professions that they can use to apply for future jobs, scholarships, or

graduate school.

Because the second part of this assignment requires students to translate information from a text-based email to a more visually appealing infographic, this lesson directly responds to Hill's framework in that it teaches students to both 1) understand the role of page design in professional contexts and 2) to see their visual résumés as rhetorical constructs that should respond intimately to a particular audience, context, and purpose. As an introduction to the breadth and diversity of technical writing assignments they will encounter throughout the remainder of the semester, it also calls on students to consider the following:

- *Issues of Context:* Students are able to consider how an author's purpose—and ultimately how that purpose is delivered through a medium—can critically alter the way an author creates a text for an audience.
- *Issues of Writing Process:* Because students draft two separate documents (an email and an infographic), they are challenged to recognize that all steps in the writing process should be adapted for unique rhetorical situations.
- *Issues of Technology:* Because students are asked to “play” with software with which they are previously unfamiliar, students are challenged to confront their nerves and fears about using new programs.
- *Issues of Document Design:* This lesson specifically asks students to engage with design principles and grapple with notions of readability, accessibility, usability, and design.

Assignment Justification and Steps

According to a [recent article](#)  on Mashable, “the amount of time a recruiter spends looking at your résumé is roughly six seconds—the length of a Vine video” (Fankhauser, 2013). In eye-tracking studies, researchers have determined that within those first six seconds, a document's visual design often determines whether or not the résumé will be given serious consideration or read more thoroughly. To respond to this call, many web-based infographic software sites, including [Piktochart](#) , have promoted the idea of using their software to create visually stunning infographic résumés that will help candidates get noticed in a pile of less-attractive, more formulaic résumés (Gonzalo, 2015). Though not all students will use visual résumés while on the job market, students enjoy taking a principally text-based genre and repurposing it as a way to introduce themselves to their new classmates.

As a gateway assignment, this week-long activity is an excellent starting point for teaching students basic assumptions about design by using their own lives and experiences as fodder for their choices. Additionally, it emphasizes that in addition to learning a new software relatively quickly, it shows that they already possess many of the skills they will need to know before they jump into their community partnerships later in the semester. Like Jenna's assignment above, it affords students time to play with Piktochart, and it allows both experienced and beginning designers the chance to create an engaging visual representation of themselves to an unfamiliar audience. It teaches them to understand the affordances of different software programs that they might be asked to utilize in their professional lives, regardless of their intended profession, and emphasizes the ubiquitous nature of design in our everyday lives. As students work, they must consider elements of visual rhetoric—even if they are not attuned to it at a conscious level—such as whether they want to showcase their lives as a timeline, in overlapping circles, in left-to-right text boxes, or in another way, and it gives them freedom to experiment with other design elements. While this portion of the assignment does not ask students to create a professional job résumé (we do this later in the course), students use this assignment to think creatively about placement, color, composition, proximity, and expression through visuals, all important skills that they will be able to take with them no matter which field they decide to enter.

Part One: Email of Introduction

This assignment builds upon information I help students generate using an email exercise. The email activity also allows me to start the semester on a positive note with each student and to give them a chance to practice their email etiquette. Students use class time to craft a personal email of introduction to me about their lives, their course goals, and their overall experience with technology. I ask them to reflect on the following questions in their emails:

Personal Information:

- Who are you? What are your hobbies, passions, and interests?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your major and how did you come to choose it?
- What is something interesting about you?

Course Goals:

- What are some of your personal goals for this course?
- What job and volunteer experience(s) do you have that will help you in this course?
- What types of writing and research projects have you worked on in the past?

Technology:

- What technologies are you familiar with and which ones do you still want to learn?

- What technologies will you use in your future career?
- What kinds of software and hardware do you frequently use?

The emails should be written professionally and with an engaging but concise subject line, begin with a professional salutation, offer a brief overview that summarizes the email's purpose, offer well-organized paragraphs that utilize bolded section headers, and end with a friendly close and signature line. Emails are assessed based on completion and adherence to the prompt. Although analyzing the students' emails is somewhat beyond of the scope of this Wiki, here is one example of a student's email of introduction, which effectively uses traditional email etiquette and answers the prompt in a respectful and friendly manner.

Example 1: Student Letter

Mrs. Winet,

I'm a senior here at the University of Arizona majoring in Nutritional Sciences and Pre-Veterinary Medicine, with a subsequent minor in Biochemistry. In 2012 my life was a lot different; I was able-bodied and working as a professional skydiver/wingsuit instructor at Skydive Arizona in Eloy, the largest and most famous dropzone in the world. I was fast-tracking to the US Army Golden Knights parachute team and was two weeks away from joining when I was injured during a practice jump before a national competition. I impacted the ground at speeds of 100 mph, shattering my back and suffering a spinal cord injury, with immediate and permanent paralysis from the waist down.

Since then, there's been a lot of inner reflection and thought. My focus has shifted from athletics to academics. I will always be an athlete and have goals to reach the Paralympic level in mono-skiing, but at this point in my life, I want to give back to others. Growing up, when someone asked me what I wanted to be when I was older, I would say "A veterinarian." So, naturally, I have rekindled that dream and start the application for Veterinary Medical Colleges in May. The University of Arizona just approved their vet school, something they've been fighting for for a number of years. Maybe it's fate, maybe it's the stars aligning, but I find it interesting that all of this would happen now that I'm actively searching for it.


This is my second to last semester, and English 308 is a requirement. With that said, I look forward to a slight detour from my science-heavy course load and am excited to learn more about effective communication. Success as a future veterinarian relies on scientific prowess, brains, abilities, and the ability to communicate well. Every day at clinic, I'll be speaking with many different people: coworkers, customers, business people, doctors, and others. Tailoring my message to fit the target audience and target situation is an absolute necessity.

I'm a very visual person and have spent most of my life experimenting with and learning various art programs. Although I feel I'm proficient with words, design is a strength of mine. I'd love to learn how to incorporate more design elements into my documents, all-the-while maintaining a concise and professional tone.

I look forward to the rest of the semester.

Student Name

Part Two: Visual Résumé

For homework, students are asked to take the information they provided in their emails, condense it, and translate it to a visually engaging infographic—what I have dubbed a visual résumé due to its emphasis on the presentation of details about each student's life and ambitions—to quickly and effectively teach the class about themselves, their goals, and their comfort level with technology. I do not give them a lot of parameters with this assignment other than they must translate the information appropriately to the new rhetorical situation, and use a program like Piktochart to construct their résumés. I also emphasize that they should choose (and then manipulate) template designs that they believe reflect them as a person, a student, and a future professional. Though I do not give them an assignment sheet in class, I have created a full lesson plan for public use [here](#) .

During the next class period, students bring printed copies of their infographics, get into groups of three, and introduce themselves using their infographics. Then, they choose one to share with the class. Using a document camera, I project the chosen infographic onto the board and ask students to discuss, as a class, responses to the following questions:

1. What is your initial impression of this person? Why?
2. What is your eye drawn to first? Is this the most effective choice, given the rhetorical situation?
3. What do you like best about this person's design? Why?
4. If you could improve on ONE aspect of this visual résumé, what would it be and why?

By asking students to think inductively and then critically about design, they are not only more responsive to our next class lecture and discussion—Basic Design Principles—but they feel more confident and at ease with using technology to create rhetorically appropriate documents.

A Brief Analysis of Student Examples

In this section, I will share and then briefly discuss several examples of the visual résumés that students have produced for this assignment. As you will no doubt notice, there is a similarity to each of their designs, as each used one of Piktochart's available templates as starting places for their designs; however, you will also notice that there are critical differences in the ways the students have placed, rearranged, and selected the information they wish to present.

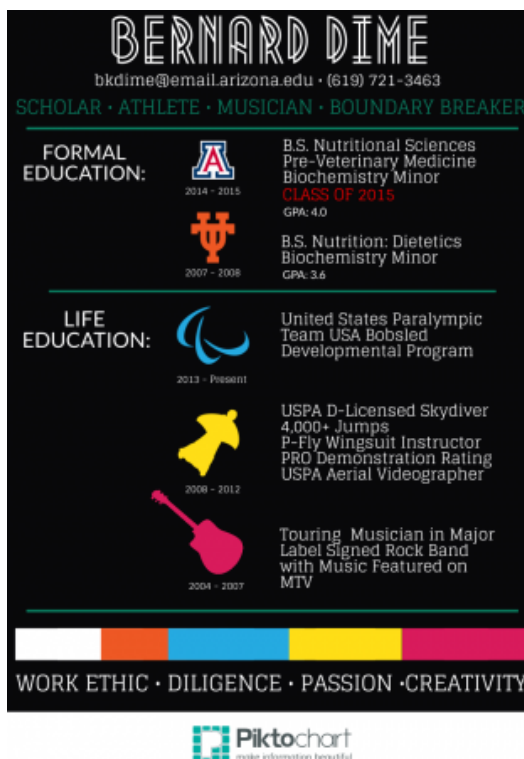


Figure 6: Sample Student Infographic

This first example, which stemmed from the email I included above, demonstrates the basic tenets of a visual résumé—it outlines the student's name, his contact information, and both his formal education and additional skills (which he titles "life education"). In an interesting departure from his original email, this student also chose to scaffold the information with two rows of words, the first a row of nouns that describe him and the second a row of nouns that describe his work ethic. Though the color at the top (dark green) is somewhat difficult to read, our eyes are drawn to these strings of nouns, helping us conceptualize this student's personality by his own analysis of his strengths and frame the content of the document. His use of brightly colored icons against the black background, too, helps us "read" him at a glance, which is a key tenet of successful infographics. As a persuasive document, this student has clearly succeeded in presenting himself as a diverse, creative individual with a number of interests and strengths.



Figure 7: Sample Student Infographic

In this example, we have a horizontal version of an infographic in which the student relies on a monochromatic color scheme, a sans serif font, and a tri-column layout, to emphasize his clean approach to creativity and design. The student's name is prominent, and his headers, which are colored, bolded, and in all capital letters, easily draw the reader through the various parts of the document. Through his organizational design, we first read that he is a veteran (a fact he clearly wishes his readers to know before reading his other main points), and, by the large image of the literary magazine logo in the bottom middle, we can tell that he is proud of his first publication. Interestingly, he does not mention that he is at work on a novel-length work or that he is interested in pursuing a career as a technical writer (two important points I gleaned from his email to me), emphasizing instead a row of photographs under the header "Things I Miss." Though the left-hand side of the document does not use space all that effectively, this infographic does suggest a certain set of values and functions as a real cultural artifact infused with larger meanings.



Figure 8: Sample Student Infographic

In this example, we can see how cultural representations of gender play out quite emphatically and how those biases affect student work. This student has chosen to present herself the way she has been taught that women in the West should be presented: in pink, with bubbles, cursive font, and with images of such female icons as Marilyn Monroe and Frida Kahlo. Like the other examples, the student's name is prominent, displayed against a background of repeated and inverted representations of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Though in her email she states she is from Mexico in the first sentence, she instead relies on imagery to suggest her Mexicanness in her infographic—a compositional choice highly related to concepts of identity, belonging, and heritage. Additionally, though she did not know the name for it at the time, her visual résumé relies on the same visual techniques popularized by Andy Warhol and long understood by typographers and graphic designers—repetition and anomaly—to suggest prominence of one idea over others.

Turning Visual Résumé Infographics into Professional Résumés

At the end of the semester, students have the opportunity to revisit their visual résumés in light of their intended profession's conventions. As mentioned above, not all employers value visually based résumés; some industries, such as aerospace engineering companies, have very strict layout requirements and a hierarchy of information that is long-established and accepted across the field. On the other hand, other industries like graphic design, public relations and marketing, advertising, and some technology start-ups, often place high value on a potential employee's design savviness and expression of individuality in a résumé. Therefore, students must consider their original design choices, analyze what they would do differently for a job résumé, and use their new-fangled design skills to create an appealing résumé that will be valued by their potential future employers.

To effectively translate their visual résumé infographic into a useable document in the professional world, I ask students to do the following:

1. Find examples of résumés in your intended field.
2. Analyze the conventions of these résumés as "cultural artifacts:" What is being valued? What information is emphasized? What information is not?
3. Return to your visual résumé infographic. What information can you include in your professional résumé? What information do you need to add?

4. Construct a new résumé appropriate for your specific field and be able to justify your design choices.

Below is an example of how Bernard, whose email and visual résumé infographic we viewed above, took concepts he learned at the beginning of the semester and created a professional résumé that he will use to apply for part-time jobs in local nonprofits while he pursues his graduate degree in veterinary medicine:



Figure 9: Revision of Student Infographic into Professional Resume

From his initial visual résumé to his final professional résumé, it is obvious that Bernard has taken to heart such concepts as visual hierarchy, simplicity and concision, composition (including font and color), alignment, and the power of graphical representation. Though we have blurred out specific information due to privacy requests, it is clear that his final work shows a dramatic improvement from his initial infographic, which could have benefited from some knowledge of alignment, page space, the use and placement of icons, and an adherence to a simpler, more easily readable monochromatic color scheme. This document clearly shows his level of professional skills, his life experience, and his unique approach to design, particularly in the way he has broken his computer-related skill sets into levels represented by how many circles have been filled in with blue.

As a further extension of this, I ask students to reflect on how their process changed from the first assignment (the visual résumé infographic) to the final one (the professional résumé). Here is what some of the students wrote in their reflections in my Spring 2014 class:


- *"I am learning that technical writing is about effectively sharing ideas with an audience and that is what visual design does. It requires different fonts, different materials and different layouts, all in order to effectively communicate with the reader. How wonderful and surprising!"*
- *"As I learned, sometimes, the power of visual aids are much stronger than just the letters and words, it not only attract more people, but also let people think deeper instead of just reading the words."*
- *"This last week of activities and assignments have been a nice change of pace from my other classes. I've learned a lot in general, about myself, and about my peers. Now to convince someone to let me publish a book that can only be read online...."*

As a "gateway" assignment, this is an effective and fun way to introduce students to the act of translating alphabetic texts into compelling visual arguments. Students enjoy this assignment because it allows them time to play with an unfamiliar software, to express themselves creatively, and to get their feet wet in the world of technical writing. Responding to Hill's pedagogy of visual rhetoric, students learn design inductively and they begin to understand visuals as cultural artifacts and rhetorical constructs, and they see the power of the visual aspects of written text.

Quick Reference Infographics of Student-Community Nonprofit Relationships

Marisa Sandoval Lamb

Unit-long assignment set, graded for content and design

This [unit-long assignment](#)  asks students to create a quick reference infographic that illustrates a community nonprofit organization—a professional entity participating in a course-long service-learning partnership with the class—in relationship to its local community. The infographic puts the students' partner, the community nonprofit organization, into context by illustrating its mission within the local community; the infographic serves as a communication medium for a target audience, a relevant local audience who is new to the organization and needs information about it—who they are, what they do, and why they do it. Using web-based infographics programs or other software programs to create the infographic, this assignment, which is graded for content and design, asks students to demonstrate their rhetorical and technical knowledge of visual rhetoric developed through scaffolding activities, such as those presented by Jenna and Kristin above, in concert with the community partner in the course-long service-learning partnership. While the infographic is the unit's pinnacle assignment, the scaffolding activities provide important opportunities for developing, practicing, and demonstrating rhetorical awareness. Scaffolding activities include analysis of the rhetorical situation, analysis of genres, practice using various composing technologies, and practice writing in specific genres and for specific audiences, as well as teaching students how to respect and write in the voice of their community partner. Using this assignment or parts of this assignment allows instructors to teach visual rhetoric and design through an entire unit or term, extending the conversation through multiple curricular requirements and pedagogical contexts. In line with Hill's pedagogy of visual rhetoric, this assignment emphasizes that students should see images as rhetorical, cultural artifacts and understand the visual aspects of written text, as I will discuss more below.

Why We Do This Assignment: Unit Goals and Objectives

Ideally, this assignment was designed for and taught in a technical writing course, but it could be adapted for a first-year composition course (see unit component descriptions for more ideas for adapting the assignment). This assignment achieved curricular goals—particularly those related to visual rhetoric—and worked to establish a meaningful understanding of our participation in a service-learning partnership. Furthermore, for the purposes of this course, this unit provided a rhetorical understanding of the complex partnerships in which students work, particularly when working with a community-based non-profit client to create professional documentation and other media. Regardless of the specific context and approach to this assignment, students practice the following goals and objectives:

- Analysis of rhetorical situations, including speaker, purpose, audience, and context
- Analysis of genre, including genre characteristics and purposes
- Project management, including identification and explanation of scope and sequence
- Creation of design template, including text, graphics, and formatting
- Composition and organization of textual and graphic elements
- Composition and production of a rhetorically situated quick reference infographic
- Creation and execution of usability testing
- Collaborative work on technical communication documents

What This Assignment Requires: Unit Components

The following sections outline and describe the five assignments in the [unit](#): the documentation memo, design template, quick reference infographic, usability test and report, and reflection letter. The sequence of this unit relies on a continued analysis of rhetoric, development of rhetorically situated visuals and writing, and reflection on the writing process. Following, I will present a few examples of student-created quick reference infographics and explore the variety of ways in which students approach this assignment.

Documentation Memo


The first component of this unit is a one-page documentation memo. The primary purpose of the documentation memo is for students to analyze and document the speaker and audience's needs in relation to students' identified purpose in creating the infographic. A second purpose is to give students the chance to outline the scope of their project and to formally request approval for the project from the instructor. Additionally, this memo challenges students to consider not only the product, but also the process of developing a rhetorically situated document.

Design Template

The second component of this unit is a design template. The purpose of the design template is for students to provide specific page layout and design attributes for creating their infographic. This design template allows students to explore their own design aesthetic while applying design principles to meet the previously identified audience's needs. Following design and layout principles discussed in class, students will develop a design template to include both thumbnail sketches of their quick reference infographic layout and a listing and/or depiction of their chosen design attributes. Here, all students explore visual rhetoric while testing their creativity and application of design principles in a lower-stakes manner, which may be considered a rough draft before composing a final draft. Before and while students

develop their design templates, lessons on formal design principles and elements, such as Robin Williams' CRAP principles, can be taught and practiced in a low-stakes manner in activities like those discussed by Jenna and Kristin.

Quick Reference Infographic

The third and most significant component of this unit is the quick reference infographic. The quick reference infographic should be developed in the infographic genre in terms of content and design (please see our [handout](#)  on the infographic genre), and it should blend in the informative attributes of a quick reference card or data sheet. The infographic should be targeted for a relevant, local audience who is new to the client organization, and it will illustrate the client as an organization and explain its relationships to the local community as students perceive and portray this to the best of their abilities. Please see the examples below for a discussion of how students approach this assignment differently, where students use their infographics to illustrate their partner using basic shapes overlaid with text; simple graphics depicting demographic groups served by the organization; and/or arrows demonstrating movement, among other elements. Also, in this portion of the assignment, technical writing students will practice writing definitions, descriptions, and instructions (related to the partner) in addition to practicing visual rhetoric and design. Students may create this assignment using web-based infographics programs, such as Piktochart or Easel.ly, or other software programs, such as those in Microsoft Office or Adobe Creative Suite.

Usability Test and Report

The fourth component of this unit is a usability test and report. The purpose of usability testing is to collect information about the effectiveness of technical communication documents and ensure that they achieve their purposes. Usability testing provides an opportunity to find problems with logic, reasoning, and formatting and revise for effectiveness, as well as catch and fix proofreading and editing errors.

Reflection Letter

The fifth component of this unit is a formal reflection letter. Students' reflection letters will be a rhetorical analysis formatted as a formal letter that examines their attempts to communicate with their audience by reflecting on various argument components. The unit may be graded as individual assignments or as a portfolio, choices that depend on the instructor and writing program outcomes specific to the course. For me, I have graded individual assignments and as a portfolio; individual grades demonstrate the importance of each piece at the time it is completed, while submitting all assignments as a portfolio demonstrates the value of the entire process and the steps to completing all aspects of the unit.

What It Looks Like: Examples of Student Work


The following examples of quick reference infographics demonstrate the variety of students' understanding—or developing or misunderstanding—of the assignment and its underlying concepts of visual rhetoric, the infographic genre, and their relationship with our community partner. For these examples, students worked with [Old Pueblo Community Services](#)  in Tucson, Arizona.

Figure 10, below, demonstrates how students may make an infographic or quick reference card in the form of a flyer. While the document is visually appealing and experiments with layout and paper size, it all but ignores the rhetorical situation of the client—specifically, it relies on cute, cozy imagery that represents stereotypical houses, but forgets that, for example, the vast majority of affordable housing in Tucson do not have (green) lawns, let alone pitched roofs to shed snow. It also lacks adherence to the genre of an infographic.



Figure 10: Sample Student Infographic in the Form of a Flyer

A more effective quick reference infographic is seen in **Figure 11**, as the example moves beyond the more established flyer genre and incorporates color blocking, as seen in the basic infographic genre. Here students attend to design principles and elements, including a color palette that modernizes the original's outdated desert-brown scheme to a brighter, higher contrast color scheme and allows for white space and includes simple graphics to supplement written text, which develops into an aesthetically pleasing document. It also uses graphics and data consistent with an infographic genre. However, this document relies heavily on text over graphics, which may alienate certain viewers because it demands a motivated reader as an audience, whereas higher contrast and increased graphics could draw in viewers to then become readers.

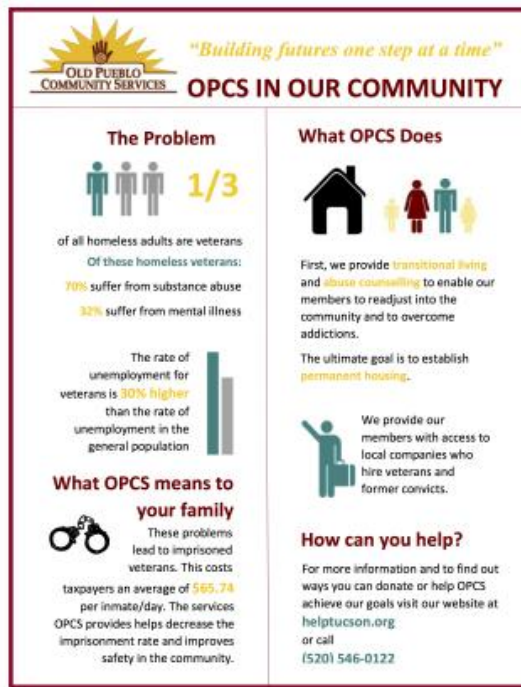


Figure 11: Sample Student Infographic Moving Beyond Flyer Genre and Incorporating Color Blocking

In **Figures 12 and 13**, the final products attend to more—or all—of the assignment requirements and follow genre characteristics beyond text boxes and basic graphics to sequences, charts, and graphs. While the final product may not be as cleanly and carefully designed as Figure 11, these examples are rhetorically savvy because they are purposeful, audience-centered documents. Both examples focus on their audience and speak to them directly: Figure 12 was designed as a postcard, where the backside included contact information and space for addressing and stamping the card for distribution; here, students focused on the actual dissemination of the document—how the audience would read it in the real world. This intimately relates to Hill's notion of images as cultural artifacts, as these students are carefully thinking about the function of and way readers will use this document. Figure 13 relies on graphics that demonstrate sequence and graphics over alphabetic text, which more successfully and quickly delivers their message—"get involved" for specific results. This notion draws on Hill's emphasis on the persuasive elements of visuals and text. Furthermore, Figure 13 interprets the mission of our community partner and portrays that vision with the motto "Hopeless to Hopeful." This is especially meaningful to the audience, as it gives purpose to the speaker—the nonprofit—in reference to the audience, and it demonstrates the relationship the speaker and audience could have with one another.



Figure 12: Sample Student Final Project



Figure 13: Sample Student Final Project

Overall, this unit allows students to “get to know” our community partner and play with visual rhetoric and design. Through careful scaffolding of assignments and daily activities to practice composing quick reference infographics, students who had little or no design and technical writing experience demonstrated their ability to compose rhetorically savvy documents. Most of all, students enjoyed working collaboratively to compose, and many reflected on the value of their group dynamic to progress through the unit and apply creativity to their composing processes.

To improve this unit, I would recommend emphasizing the value of understanding—truly understanding—the community partner as an organization with unique characteristics in relation to the local community. For example, in my experience, many students did not visit the partner’s offices as part of their research about the organization, though they were required to (a problem that arose from our contact’s availability, or lack thereof, due to extenuating circumstances). Despite this, some students did not attempt to make up for this by researching through alternative means and, therefore, did not understand the identity and mission of the partner in relation to the community, which became problematic for the success of their final products, something many students recognized and accounted for in future work with the partner. As a result of observations such as this, I did revise the unit following this to account for these needs. For teachers who intend to use this unit in a service-learning partnership, I recommend spending plenty of time conducting rhetorical analysis of (or even with) the partner early in the unit, such as during the documentation memo phase, to represent the partner accurately and respectfully.

Conclusion: Toward an Integration That Works

As we have suggested above, instructors can also translate and adapt these ideas from business and technical writing courses into first-year composition or other advanced composition classrooms. Some ideas for integrating infographics into a curriculum to teach visual rhetoric include asking students to do the following:

First-Year Composition:

- Create public arguments using a web-based infographics program (to include PSAs, flyers, posters, data sheets)
- Use infographics for brainstorming or visual organization mapping for essays
- Transform a textual literacy narrative into a visual map of their lives
- Translate arguments or research essays into infographics for easy reference
- Compose an infographic for a particular grammar or punctuation lesson

Advanced Composition:

- Create a series of PSAs that correspond to a current social issue
- Compose an infographic for a particular “writing style” lesson
- Analyze infographics online as sources of networked rhetoric
- Create charts/graphics for reflection letters, memos, and essays


Integrating Hill’s three-part framework for a pedagogy of visual rhetoric remains a central concern to our work as technical and professional writing teachers, and we find the assignments we have shared—from a short, in-class activity to a unit-long service-learning project—to be useful ways of helping students see the persuasive and cultural impacts of visuals. We are also mindful of the fact that, as Claire Lauer (2013) reminded us, there remain a number of challenges associated with incorporating visual rhetoric into an already-packed curriculum and there are a number of theoretical approaches instructors can take. By offering a number of approaches to the teaching of visual rhetoric through infographics that vary in commitment and depth, we hope that we have responded to these concerns. While our approaches differ, a few threads remain consistent. We see web-based infographics programs as tools to help students learn visual rhetoric. We encourage our students to move beyond being analyzers of visuals to composers; we teach

visual design concepts as being grounded in rhetoric; we encourage low-stakes experimentation and play with new technologies; and we suggest that this type of "play," when geared toward a particular audience, can help students inductively learn formal design principles in a way that transfers to the creation of a variety of professional and technical communications documents.

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