

Exploring Embodiment through the Rhetoric of Health and Medicine: An Arts-Based, Transgenre Pedagogy

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Abstract: This article proposes an arts-based pedagogy that highlights embodiment in first-year composition (FYC). In particular, this pedagogy focuses on “transgenre composing,” or the intersecting of visual art and writing. I argue that, when embraced alongside the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM), transgenre composing facilitates inclusive classroom spaces where embodiment is celebrated. In addition to providing context for this pedagogy in FYC, I also bring in possibilities for adopting this approach in other disciplines, including the social sciences and health professions. Further, to provide tangible representations of this arts-based, embodied pedagogy, I discuss two transgenre compositions: one is an original project that outlines my own embodied experience through RHM, and the other is a student project that was created in an FYC class where this approach was enacted.

To think about rhetoric, we must think about bodies. –Johnson et al. (2015)

While I recognize the embodied nature of the work I do as a teacher, writer, and artist, embodiment is not always acknowledged in the academy. Despite work being done to shift this mindset, students in the writing classes I teach frequently resist writing like they are embodied individuals with embodied experiences. Even when they are encouraged to do so, they ask if they are allowed to use first-person point of view or if they can include stories and details about their lived experiences in their work. This uneasiness about embracing bodies is not uncommon among students who have been taught in traditional classrooms; many have been told their embodied experiences don’t fit with academic writing, so they are hesitant to include them. Christina V. Cedillo (2018) calls attention to this, as well. She writes that, because we are taught to compose “as though communication and reception do not occur through our bodies,” our experiences and perspectives are often devalued in the academy. However, acknowledging embodiment is vital as it presents unique opportunities for composers and “brings to the forefront experiences of specific bodies as they produce and consume meanings” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 46).

Building on this notion, this article advocates for an arts-based pedagogical approach that considers embodiment through the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM). This arts-based approach allows students to intersect various genres within visual art (e.g., painting, collage, photography) and writing (e.g., academic writing, narrative), a practice I refer to as “transgenre composing,” in first-year composition (FYC). I argue that, in embracing transgenre composing, instructors create more inclusive classroom spaces, emphasize writing as an embodied practice, make clear the numerous possibilities in composing, and help students learn important compositional skills. Further, I argue that, in embracing transgenre composing through RHM, instructors (re)establish the body as a knowledge-making site and work against traditional norms in the academy that devalue embodiment

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and ignore bodily diversity. To bolster this argument and provide tangible representations of transgenre compositions, this article brings in an original project that outlines an embodied experience through RHM and a student project from an FYC course that focuses on the student's experience with a medical condition.

What is Transgenre Composing? Why Transgenre Composing?

While “multimodal” broadly refers to compositions that use many modes, I resist using the term to describe the arts-based approach I focus on here because “multimodal” and “digital” are so often equated. “Remixed” is another term used in composition to describe an experimentation with form, and it came about due to “proliferating digital technologies...transforming what it [means] to compose” (Palmeri, 2012, pp. 1-2). I also resist using remixed to refer to this arts-based approach because, like multimodal, the term is frequently associated only with digital composing. An additional term, “multigenre,” coined by scholar Tom Romano (2000), intersects research and experience with imagination through embracing multiple genres in writing (p. 22). In addition to embracing various textual genres, multigenre writing can integrate images like photographs, illustrations, and drawings (Romano, 2000, pp. 3-4). While multigenre writing allows students to bring their unique voices and identities into their work, practice rhetorical thinking, and experiment with genre, the focus is less on artmaking and more on the development and intersection of textual genres.

Rather than refer to this approach as “multimodal,” “remixed,” or “multigenre,” I instead use “transgenre,” a term borrowed from creative-critical scholar and self-identified transgenre composer Ames Hawkins. Transgenre exemplifies an approach that resists binary thinking, works within and across disciplines (e.g., visual art and writing), and blurs the boundaries of genre. This blurring of boundaries through intersecting visual art and writing genres assists composers in “developing new and unique ways to communicate and connect with their reader-viewers” and encourages audiences to “shift their perspective and imagine new meaning” (LaFollette, 2021, p. 7, 10). Additionally, “the visual art doesn’t stand on its own, just as the words aren’t disconnected from the imagery; the two elements create a curated experience for the reader-viewer and break down preconceptions about visual art and writing” (LaFollette, 2021, p. 10). Transgenre is also suggestive of the unique, embodied, and oftentimes messy ways compositions come into existence. For instance, Hawkins’s (2016) “Exhuming Transgenre Ties” asks whether their “desire to mess with form, to cross form, to transgenre” is related to their “complicated relationship with and to gender.” While transgenre can refer to any composition that works within and across disciplines and genres, I specifically use the term throughout this article to refer to work that intersects visual art and writing.

Transgenre composing provides students with opportunities to engage in artmaking and, as Patricia Leavy (2017) writes, “recent research in neuroscience...indicates that art may have unmatched potential to promote deep engagement, make lasting impressions, and therefore possesses unlimited potential to educate” (p. 3). She goes on to say, “Researchers need to ‘come at things differently’ in order to ask new questions or develop new insights. Researchers tapping into the power of the arts are doing so in order to create new ways to see, think, and communicate” (Leavy, 2017, p. 3). When students bring art into the composing process, they tackle their work with new ways of seeing, thinking, and communicating. In doing so, the process becomes more engaging, and students create unique and exciting experiences for their audience(s). Many students come into FYC with a lack of confidence or professed dislike of writing and implementing an arts-based approach is one way for those students to participate in a composing process different than the one they are used to. This has the potential to bring new life to student work and help students think through their work in a different way. As Meghan P. Nolan (2019) notes in “Multiplicity and the Student Writer” (quoting Art Young et al.), “The integration of art in writing pedagogy can ‘provide [students] with opportunities for creative thinking and language use, for gaining new perspectives and generating ideas on the

material” (p. 240). Transgenre composing also challenges traditional norms in the academy. If students have nontraditional experiences in composition, these experiences probably involve the use of digital tools rather than an arts-based approach. In addition, and as I will discuss more later, the intersecting of visual art and writing developed from the Dada and Surrealist art movements of the 1910s and 20s. Just as these art movements were geared toward breaking down limitations in the art world that indicated what art was and who could be an artist, transgenre composing challenges notions in the academy that dictate what writing is and who can be a writer.

Why Embodiment?

An (Embodied) Experience, Part 1

In 2006, I had the first in a series of four surgeries that would take place over the course of seven years. I had sustained an injury to my right hand and needed reconstructive surgery, but after the limited success of the surgeries, I tried to come to terms with the reality that chronic pain and limited mobility were never going to go away. The limited function in my right arm became part of my new “normal” and I adjusted my life accordingly. I avoided crowded places (so people wouldn’t accidentally bump into my arm). When I met new people, I shook hands with my left hand instead of the right. I held my right arm close to my body, bent at the elbow, the best way I knew to keep my injured limb protected from the outside world. The injury impacted every aspect of my life, including my writing and teaching practices. Because of this, I began brainstorming ways to make embodiment a more central focus of my pedagogy.

Considering the Body

A. Abby Knoblauch (2012) writes that “embodied knowledge—specific material conditions, lived experiences, positionalities, and/or standpoints” emphasizes “difference instead of erasing it in favor of an assumed privileged discourse” (p. 62). Considering the body—all bodies—questions the assumption that there is one true embodied experience. Recognizing all bodies and their knowledge-producing power celebrates difference and creates space for marginalized experiences. Further, a pedagogy that embraces embodiment “recognize[s] and foreground[s] bodily diversity so that students learn to compose for accessibility and inclusivity” (Cedillo, 2018). Not only is an embodied pedagogy more inclusive, but ignoring bodies implies a “seemingly utopian belief that place and body do not matter. That the academic, the intellectual, can transcend such material matters. But...there is no such disembodied place of nowhere” (Knoblauch, 2012, p. 58). Here, Knoblauch refers to the value placed on the mind over the body in the academy, but they are not separate entities. Celeste Snowber (2016) notes that “the mind and body are so connected, that in fact, the mind ceases productivity in response to the body being cramped. When there’s no room to breathe, the mind can become narrow” (p. 7). Our bodies, which include our minds and intellect, are inevitably part of the work we do as composers; existing in a body is complex and the way we live and move in the world is inseparable from the other elements that make us who we are as people. As Snowber (2016) states, we don’t just have bodies, we are bodies (p. 7).

An embodied pedagogy also helps students gain important compositional skills. In FYC courses, many of us teach students to be rhetorical thinkers and, in doing this, adopt process-focused approaches (that highlight the importance of drafting, revision, and reflection) and underscore audience awareness. For instance, with a focus on embodiment and, particularly, RHM, instructors could help students develop rhetorical thinking through practicing rhetorical appeals. Students could appeal to ethos (e.g., by focusing on a specific lived experience), pathos (e.g., by connecting with the relatability of existing in a body and experiencing injury or illness), and/or logos (e.g., by expressing the scientific

and medical processes behind treatment and recovery). Further, when students practice rhetorical thinking through embodiment, the mind-body connection discussed by Snowber (2016) is emphasized and diverse embodied experiences are shared. As a result, students can actively work against a “lens of exclusionary norms” to create more open and inclusive spaces within the academy where a multitude of embodied experiences are celebrated (Cedillo, 2018).

Why RHM?

Jennifer Edwell, Sarah Ann Singer, and Jordynn Jack (2018) note clear connections between composition and health, writing that several scholars, including Arthur Kleinman, Arthur Frank, and Rita Charon, have pointed to “writing as a mode of healing” (p. 50). They also write about the concept of *techne* and that it can bring together RHM, the medical humanities, and medicine (p. 50). While the definition of *techne* has been contested, Edwell, Singer, and Jack (2018) focus on a definition that privileges the “process of producing or bringing-forth” and they discuss “health *techne*” as a concept that considers “the individual patient’s body and its social, material context as the primary focus” (p. 51-53). These ideas are all central to the pedagogical approach I advocate for. The process of producing and making should be privileged over product; learning takes place in the process, and, through RHM, students can learn more about their embodied subjectivities and the ways those subjectivities have impacted how they live in and interact with the world, how they compose, and how they navigate various spaces and situations. And, like me, they might find transgenre composing to be therapeutic and healing.

When I think of my own lived experiences through RHM, I consider those interactions, conversations, and exchanges I had with my care team to manage my injury and recovery. I’m referring to the many surgical and post-surgical reports I was provided. I’m referring to the language I use and the rhetorical choices I make when I’m composing about my injury. I’m referring to the nuanced ways I communicate about my altered body. And, of course, I’m referring to the ways my embodied subjectivities impact my writing, artmaking, and teaching practices (i.e., using adaptive equipment to hold writing utensils and paint brushes, adjusting the way I type and use a computer, using specific markers for classroom whiteboards). Ada Hubrig (2019), referring to the work of Jay Dolmage, writes that we should use “our bodies significantly and [make] rhetoric significantly bodied” to work against the ways the body has been “stigmatized and perceived as the antithesis of knowledge” (p. 142). Through RHM, I’m working to reorient the body as a knowledge-producing site and, in making clear the rhetorical power of the body, actively working against norms that devalue embodiment and ignore bodily diversity. Virtually everyone can recall an experience they have had with health and medicine, so embracing RHM can prompt students to consider the ways their bodies have failed them or have required medical intervention (e.g., because of injury, illness, surgery, a mental health condition). As a result, this pedagogical approach creates space for everyone to consider the ways they have been impacted by health and medicine and to compose those lived experiences through artmaking and writing.

Additional Context for Transgenre Composing

An (Embodied) Experience, Part 2

A few years after my last scar tissue removal surgery, I started waking up in the night with pain that would sear up my arm from my hand and wrist. These painful jolts would be followed by tingling sensations that felt like my arm was asleep, but it took more than just a few minutes for the feeling to go away. I tried wearing the braces I had been given by my surgeon over the years, but nothing seemed to help. I finally decided to return to my orthopedic surgeon for the first time in several years.

It was at that appointment that he told me many people experience chronic pain and instability following hand surgery and that sometimes the only way to manage is to undergo a joint fusion. That summer, I had the joint fusion surgery. X-rays showed the rod that extended upward toward the tip of my thumb, the plate, the screws. The recovery was even longer than it had been with the other surgeries, and I was in a cast (and eventually a brace) and a sling for months. The incision became infected. There was chronic swelling. And eventually, after many months, my body healed, but it was different than it had been before. To grapple with these differences and to process everything my body had undergone since the initial injury, I turned to artmaking and writing.

Art as a Teaching Tool

As mentioned, art is a powerful tool in teaching and learning. With transgenre composing, students are encouraged to experiment and take risks and, in the process, practice rhetorical thinking through selecting, creating, and arranging materials. Proponents of multimodal composing (through a digital lens) have long argued for the benefits of allowing students to choose their composing form and work outside the traditional confines of academic writing. While art-based approaches in FYC are still gaining momentum, they have been discussed and used by several writing studies scholars. For example, Patricia Suzanne Sullivan's (2012) *Experimental Writing in Composition: Aesthetics and Pedagogies* has an entire chapter on collage. Jody Shipka's (2019) chapter "On Making" in *Exquisite Corpse: Studio Art-Based Writing in the Academy* contains several original collages and drawings, and Jason Helms's (2017) e-book *Rhizcomics: Rhetoric, Technology, and New Media Composition* notes that creating comics is to "write from the middle, between modes." In *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Shipka (2011) writes that "many scholars have stressed the importance of flexibility, adaptation, variation, and metacommunicative awareness" (p. 83). These are all important and necessary skills for composers to obtain and they can be practiced and learned through transgenre composing.

Like experimenting with digital tools, transgenre composing allows students to learn and practice new skills, compose for a particular situation and context, and "consider how material, social, geographical, technological, economic, institutional, and historical 'realities' (or differences) impact what one is able to accomplish as well as the potentials one is able to imagine" (Shipka, 2011, pp. 83-84). Further, as "writers and artists engage in the composing process (as they transform and rearrange materials on paper, on screen, on canvas), they may often find themselves redefining their problems, generating new ideas and imagining new goals" (Palmeri, 2012, p. 30). This freedom of expression offered through an arts-based approach provides students with opportunities to rethink and reimagine their work. Shipka (2011) highlights this freedom, rethinking, and reimagining when she writes, "In maintaining that courses support purposeful choosing while fostering communicative flexibility and critical reflection, I argue for the importance of curricula that treat all modes, materials, methods, and technologies (both old and new) 'as equally significant'" (p. 85). Transgenre composing encourages this choosing, flexibility, and reflection through an exploration of visual art and writing, helping students to think and communicate in new ways.

With opportunities to approach their work in new and different ways, students can create interesting and unique tensions between visual art and writing that prompt reader-viewers to think differently about what they are seeing. As mentioned, transgenre composing and the melding of visual art and writing genres has its roots in the Dada and Surrealist art movements. Those movements were focused on creating new realities, and in works that included visual art and writing, the elements didn't always seem to fit together. Rather, tensions were created to encourage reader-viewers to see the content in new and different ways. Examples of these tensions can be seen in the surrealist collage novels of Max Ernst. In his book *The Hundred Headless Woman*, originally published in 1929, a collage featuring a woman submerged in a fish tank is accompanied by the caption, "Physical culture, or: the death you prefer" (Ernst, 1981, p. 113). The caption doesn't merely illustrate the

image but rather challenges reader-viewers' perceptions, encouraging them to reimagine what they are seeing.

While Dada and Surrealist work shifted perceptions and created tensions, it also provided "an alternative to academia's privileged corpus—serious, rigorous, linear, alphabetic discourse" (Hanzalik & Virgintino, 2019, p. ix). In challenging these expectations, Dada and Surrealist artists created space for "play, collaboration, community, imagination, and artistic innovation" (Hanzalik & Virgintino, 2019, p. x). They also resisted highbrow attitudes in the art world by breaking down "barriers...[that] gave certain people access and privileged particular styles and forms" (LaFollette, 2021, p. 10). This is illustrated by the "exquisite corpse" activity many Surrealists took part in. In this activity or "parlor game," each participant added an image or word to a collaborative work of art, typically in response to a prompt (Hanzalik & Virgintino, 2019, p. viii), and the resulting visual often conveyed imaginative and fantastical imagery. While projects like these wouldn't have been traditionally accepted as art, they emphasized that art is "inseparable from everyday life" (LaFollette, 2021, p. 10) and should be accessible to everyone.

Critiquing the Limits

Just as Dada and Surrealism broadened the possibilities for artists and art, transgenre composing creates opportunities for composers of all stages and abilities by "breaking down preexisting expectations and creating space for alternative forms" (LaFollette, 2021, p. 8). In experimenting with alternative forms through intersecting visual art and writing, students take part in the play, imagination, and artistic innovation experienced by Dada and Surrealist artists. Moreover, and as I discuss in the next section, giving students the opportunity to choose the genres, forms, and materials they work with allows them to "integrate their own embodied subjectivities, identities, and experiences into their work" (LaFollette, 2021, p. 13). In this process of engaging with and integrating their embodied subjectivities, composers take part in the Dada and Surrealist tradition of questioning limiting binaries like "'academic' vs. 'creative' and 'scholar' vs. 'creative writer'" (LaFollette, 2021, p. 13-14).

Sullivan (2012) also outlines the importance of questioning restrictive traditions, expectations, and binaries when she notes that non-traditional composing forms, like mixed-genre work and collage, "critique the limits of normative forms of writing associated with academic discourse by invoking the liberating and critical power of art" (p. 2). Transgenre composing reflects this as it embraces artmaking and critiques "normative forms." Additionally, through non-traditional approaches like transgenre composing, "students may be allowed to express their unique individualities, articulate marginal or underrepresented social realities, and/or critique the limits of dominant sociopolitical discourses and the institutions that perpetuate these discourses" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 2). This is especially true through RHM because every student's approach will be unique and will express differing realities and experiences. This sharing of diverse embodied experiences works to disrupt prescribed norms in the academy and create space for new ways of composing.

Tara Roeder (2019) furthers this notion of creating space for new ways of composing when she writes, "With its inherently interdisciplinary approach to meaning-making, the field of composition and design calls into question the silo-ization of the academy and rigid prescriptions about textual construction" (p. 124). Jay Dolmage (2012) highlights these "rigid prescriptions" in the academy, as well:

The dominant discourse surrounding the teaching of writing focuses on texts and thoughts, words and ideas, as though these entities existed apart from the bodies of

teachers, writers, audiences, communities. As a discipline, broadly speaking, we in composition and rhetoric have not acknowledged that we have a body, bodies. (p. 115)

Students experimenting with transgenre composing are actively pushing against norms that state what a composition should be. A transgenre approach reminds composers that they are embodied and that “being personal means bringing their judgments and interpretation to bear on what they read and write, learning that they never leave themselves behind even when they write academic essays” (Sommers, 1993, p. 425). In considering their embodiment through RHM, students bring “their judgments and interpretation to bear” on experiences connected to health, injury/illness, and/or recovery. Doing so allows them to see clear connections between their minds and bodies and that embodiment is a necessary component of one’s composing practices.

Modeling and Enacting an Arts-Based, Transgenre Pedagogy

An (Embodied) Experience, Part 3

A fused joint is limiting in many ways. While the fusion eliminated much of the pain and instability, it created other problems (i.e., a lack of grip strength, limited flexibility, tenderness where the titanium is nestled in bone), and I have had to approach life differently since the fusion. I am a writer, but writing utensils are too small for me to write comfortably, so I use adaptive attachments to make holding onto a pen easier. I struggle with making my hand move in a turning motion, so starting a car or locking a door with a key can be tough. I can’t lift heavy items. I can’t bend my wrist in the same way. My joint fusion has become part of who I am, part of how my body interacts with the world and with other people. To use Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki’s (2012) words, “[My] body is [my] primary medium” and “without our bodies—our sensing abilities—we do not have a world; we have the world we do because of our particular senses and experiences” (p. 3).

A Transgenre Composition: ANATOMY OF THE WRITER and “New Anatomy”

Several years after the joint fusion surgery, I took to artmaking and writing as tools for grappling with chronic pain and a body that no longer worked in the same way it used to. I dug through files of old paperwork and came across the reports from the initial reconstructive surgery, the scar tissue adhesion removals, and the joint fusion, and these reports became the catalyst for a collage series. The series (see Figures 1-4), which is titled *ANATOMY OF THE WRITER*, contains redacted surgical reports, x-rays, anatomical images, and other found materials. Further, this visual art series was created while writing an essay titled “New Anatomy.” The essay, which is included as vignettes throughout this article in the sections titled “An (Embodied) Experience, Parts 1-3,” focused on living in a body altered by injury and surgery (the original version of the essay can be found in Appendix A). Together in this article, the visual art and the essay vignettes act as a transgenre composition; the elements don’t exist separately, but rather work together to create meaning. While the visual art and the essay were originally published separately¹, I bring them into this article to enact what the Dada and Surrealist movements worked toward in intersecting visual art and writing: to encourage reader-viewers to interpret work in new ways. The individual collages that make up *ANATOMY OF THE WRITER* are archives of medical documents, x-rays, and found materials, and these elements are often arranged haphazardly; there are blurred backgrounds and overlapping materials, and images are frequently obscured. This assemblage exemplifies the complicated and chaotic nature of injury, surgery, and recovery and, when juxtaposed with the essay vignettes, reader-viewers experience a fuller, more intriguing account of my embodied experiences.

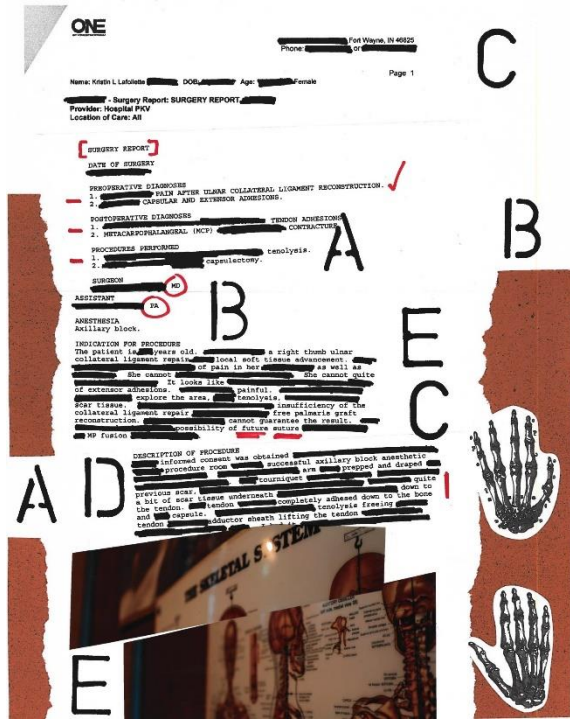


Figure 1: ANATOMY OF THE WRITER, Part 1.



Figure 2: ANATOMY OF THE WRITER, Part 2.



Figure 3: ANATOMY OF THE WRITER, Part 3.



Figure 4: ANATOMY OF THE WRITER, Part 4.

RHM in/as Arts-Based Pedagogy

I used this pedagogical approach for the first time in ENG 101 Rhetoric and Composition I, the first of two required classes in the University of Southern Indiana's FYC sequence, during the Fall 2019

semester. My discussion here will be focused on the first assignment in the course, which was a personal narrative (a full assignment description can be found in Appendix B). At my institution, ENG 101 is focused on “literacy and the self,” so the personal narrative project served as a gateway to two other major projects (a rhetorical analysis and an argumentative essay) that asked students to consider their embodiment through RHM (e.g., by focusing on an article and/or topic connected to their embodied experience). For the personal narrative, students were asked to outline 1) how and why they became a student in their discipline and 2) how their education connected to their career goals. These discussions were to be framed by embodied experience(s) through RHM (students were provided with guiding questions, which I discuss more in a moment).

In addition to writing a four-page essay articulating their journey, students were also required to create a piece of accompanying visual art; while the genre of writing was already selected (i.e., narrative), students were able to craft their visual art using any genre or combination of genres (e.g., drawing, painting, collage, photography, crafts). When the class first began, I introduced and provided justification for the course’s focus on embodiment and RHM through visual art and writing (i.e., a focus on process and rhetorical thinking, creative-critical thinking, and bringing fresh perspective to their work). We discussed that, while the academy has attempted to disembodify composers, composing is an inherently embodied process and that composing with embodiment in mind challenges the notion that bodies do not belong in the academy or that academic writing can only look a certain way. Many students expressed it was the first time they had been permitted to think about embodiment, especially through RHM, in a writing classroom and, while most were excited to engage in the process of considering embodiment, several were resistant to the idea of artmaking.

This resistance related to assessment as many students expressed concern about how the assignment would be graded or if they were creative or artistic enough for an arts-based project. I explained that they would not be graded on their abilities as artists, but rather on their articulation of the rhetorical thinking that influenced their artmaking. In Derek Owens’s (2019) “Workshops, Crits, and the Arts of Response,” several art students shared “horror stories” about their experiences with having their art critiqued. In addition to sharing their stories, they also suggested alternative and more helpful approaches to critique, including “formalized peer feedback,” “greater equality in faculty/student interaction,” and “explicit rubrics” (p. 204). I tried to implement all of these in my own pedagogy to assist students with any discomfort associated with artmaking. For example, we had a designated “studio review” day in class where students shared their artwork and rhetorical thinking with their classmates and received feedback. I also shared some of my own original artwork with the class to facilitate “greater equality in faculty/student interaction.” While transgenre composing gives FYC students the opportunity to consider their embodiment, it will likely be a completely new approach for them. Because of this, it’s important for instructors to clearly explain, justify, and model what students are being asked to do.

In *On Multimodality*, Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes (2014) point to the importance of modeling non-traditional work for students: “One way to pay more serious attention is to work with visuals ourselves. We have done so, modeling for our students and others in the field our reflections through photo manipulation of our self-representations, our figurations, and our desires” (p. 118). Transparency with new approaches is so important because most students have experienced traditional writing courses where they read, do research, and/or compose essays. Most have probably never been asked to embrace artmaking in an academic writing classroom, so students might question if their artwork is “good enough” or they might feel uneasy about putting their lived experiences through RHM on display. As Smith et al. (2017) write (referring to an embodied rhetorics class they taught), “We tried to make the class environment a place where students were encouraged to be vulnerable. As instructors, we modeled this by telling our own stories and carefully, critically

framing our responses to other people's stories" (p. 48). An embodied, transgenre approach requires students to be open and vulnerable, and it's important for instructors to share this same openness. One of the projects I shared with my FYC class was a map of my experiences as a high school and undergraduate student studying medicine and working in various hospital and clinical settings, and I encouraged students to ask questions about the rhetorical thinking that went into creating the piece. When the roles were switched and the students were tasked with "assessing" my work, they expressed a better understanding of the assignment and were able to see articulations of rhetorical thinking. Many of them also mentioned that seeing my artwork inspired them to take a more creative approach with the assignment.

Since students expressed concern about the assessment of their projects, I provided them with a rubric (see Appendix C) that showed they were being assessed on thoughtfulness and the articulation of rhetorical thinking, not on artistic skill. To provide a clear overview of their rhetorical thinking, students were required to include a "visual justification paragraph" at the end of their essay. They were provided with guiding questions to respond to in the justification, which included:

- How does your visual art component work with and alongside your written component to communicate your personal narrative? How does the visual art exemplify your story/journey?
- Why did you choose the form you chose for the visual art and how does the form contribute to the meaning of your project? How does that form best reach your audience?
- Why did you use the materials you chose (e.g., images, colors, words)? Why did you assemble the materials in that way?

The projects were assessed using five criteria: essays were assessed on formatting, development, and organization while the visual art was assessed on thoughtfulness and rhetorical thinking. Overall, the project was worth 50 points, and each category on the rubric was out of 10 points.

Prior to beginning their projects, students were provided with the following questions to prompt their thinking and guide them as they considered their embodiment through RHM:

- How have your unique embodied experiences (as they relate to medicine, medical intervention, being labeled as "othered" or disabled, having an "invisible" or "visible" disability, etc.) impacted you?
- How have your embodied experiences contributed to where you are today? How have they impacted your current educational goals and your future career endeavors? How do they impact your artmaking and writing processes?
- How can you best communicate your embodied subjectivities through RHM? What language will you use? How will you approach this project differently with RHM in mind?

As students considered these guiding questions, I noted that they should only share what they were comfortable sharing. The choice of what to include in their projects was entirely up to them, but they were reminded that all experiences and subjectivities would be respected and celebrated without judgement.

A Transgenre Composition: Student Example

While most of the ENG 101 class approached the personal narrative assignment enthusiastically, I want to focus here on one project (I will refer to the student who created the project as Hannah). RHM informed Hannah's project as she shared that she always dreamed of pursuing a degree in medicine to become a surgeon, but a neurological condition that caused her hands to shake made it

so that she had to choose a different educational and career route. She used her neurological condition as the catalyst for her visual art, which communicated the many medical careers she could still pursue despite her condition. Her visual² took the form of a collage and she used a combination of personal images (like photographs), medical images (like scans and x-rays), and text. “The Road Ahead” was written across the top in green lettering with red stripes on either side and it was set up like a map. There was an isolated road with mountains in the background and six different “destinations” outlined in staggered circles. Each circle introduced a different choice, including paramedic, trauma nurse, surgical technician, and radiologic technician, and shared the pros and cons of each option through career-specific tasks and requirements. In the paramedic circle, Hannah noted that the job would allow her to be the first on the scene at emergencies and that the position didn’t require the dexterity of a surgeon. Similarly, the surgical technician circle stated that she could still be an integral part of surgeries, preparing operating rooms and assisting with equipment, without performing the surgeries. Using RHM, Hannah was able to consider her lived experiences, the impact of those lived experiences, and options for her future. She expressed uncertainty about the future, but also shared excitement about the possibilities she had to choose from. While some of Hannah’s essay focused on the sadness she felt at having to let go of certain career goals, her visual art celebrated that there were other career options she was excited about. One didn’t merely illustrate the other, but the visual art and writing worked together to tell a full story of her embodied experiences.

Applications Beyond Writing Studies

While this article focuses on using this approach in FYC, it is interdisciplinary and applicable to almost any discipline or classroom situation where instructors wish to implement creative assignments with an emphasis on embodiment. This approach can be particularly helpful in communications, the social sciences, ethics, culture studies, and medicine because these fields require strong interpersonal skills. In a social work or psychology course, for instance, students could be tasked with thinking about the complex experiences of those living with mental or physical illnesses. Because many social work and psychology students will have future careers working in clinics or hospitals, having empathy for their clients or patients will go a long way in helping them to be successful practitioners. See below for an arts-based assignment students could complete in a social work or psychology course:

- Write about an embodied experience you had with mental or physical illness by responding to some or all of the following questions:
 - Why did you choose to discuss this experience? What medical intervention was involved with treating/managing this illness or injury?
 - Think about the language you used to communicate about this experience. Why did you communicate about it in that way?
 - How can an exercise like this help you to be a better, more effective care provider in the future?
- Create a work of visual art to represent this experience. This can be a drawing, a painting, a photograph, a collage, or something else altogether.

When introducing the visual art component of the assignment, students would be encouraged to move past creating a mere illustration of their writing. The visual art and writing are not mirror images of one another; rather, the elements work together to convey a complex human experience that wouldn’t be communicated in the same way with just the visual art or just the writing.

In addition to this writing assignment, an arts-based, RHM approach can be used in other, more discipline-specific assignments. To build from the above example, there are several common careers associated with degrees in social work and/or psychology, including counseling and therapy. When working with a new client, counselors and therapists typically schedule intake appointments where they gather information about a client's history and concerns. Since intake recording is a common form of writing that many future social work and psychology students will need to do well, it can serve as the basis for the following arts-based, transgenre assignment:

- Using a template, develop a fake intake form based on an imaginary client. Once complete, exchange forms with another student.
- Read the intake form provided by your classmate and create an artistic representation of your treatment plan. If applicable, you can also write about the role of art in your proposed treatment plan (e.g., by encouraging the client to engage in activities like painting or drawing).
- After developing the artistic representation of the intake, write a brief paragraph interpreting your artwork. What does the artwork mean to you, and how does it represent an appropriate treatment approach for this client?

An assignment like this allows students to practice rhetorical thinking and writing within their discipline. Further, it reorients students to the humanistic nature of social work and psychology and the importance of compassionate care.

Transgenre composing can be helpful for students in medicine and the health professions, as well. A friendly bedside manner is important for any practitioner in the medical field, and an arts-based approach is one way to (re)focus medicine on the humanity of the profession. The following assignment encourages students in medicine and the health professions to recall an experience they had with illness or injury and how it affected them:

- Write about an embodied experience you had as a patient in a clinical or hospital setting by responding to some or all of the following questions:
 - How did you feel over the course of your illness/injury and recovery?
 - How did your care team approach you? What were those interactions like?
 - How can considering your own embodied experiences through RHM help you become a better practitioner in the future?
- Create a work of visual art to represent this experience. This can be a drawing, a painting, a photograph, a collage, or something else altogether.

In the visual art component, students might represent the illness or injury, the recovery process, or experiences with healthcare professionals. Regardless of what they choose to represent in their visual art, I would encourage students to be as creative as possible: How can intersecting visual art and writing tell your story in an altogether new and different way?

To provide a more discipline-specific assignment example, students in medical school are expected to understand and engage in the research process. It's important, then, for undergraduate pre-medicine students to have ample research practice. The assignment outlined below could be implemented in a medical humanities course to help these students hone their primary research skills while also integrating artmaking:

- Perform a primary study: Develop survey and/or interview questions that address an element of patient care and/or patient experience. (For example, you might focus on patient

wait times in clinical settings and the impact they have on patient care). Find participants, gather data, analyze the data, and complete a write-up of your results.

- Use key findings from the survey and/or interview responses to create a collage. While you might use individual responses in the collage, you should also bring in additional visual elements to represent what the responses indicate about patient care. Ultimately, the collage will serve as a sort of snapshot and visual representation of your data that you will share with the class during an informal presentation.

This assignment brings a sense of humanity to medicine as it considers patients and their experiences, and it also intersects visual art and writing so that the results of a primary research study are more concise and accessible. Additionally, the assignment asks students to interpret interview responses and represent them with visual art.

Toward Pedagogical Activism

After years of grappling with injury, surgery, and recovery, it's impossible for me to ignore how my embodiment impacts who I am in all areas of life. While my injury has changed the way I approach activities I used to complete without a second thought, it has also changed how I approach teaching, writing, and artmaking. I am the creator and composer I am *because* of my body, and I can't separate who I am as a teacher, writer, and artist from the body I exist in. A space that celebrates all bodies and the ways they share and produce knowledge is an inclusive space. To acknowledge embodiment and to include it as a central focus in one's work and pedagogy challenges the dominant paradigms in academia that have persisted for years. In this way, an embodied pedagogy is *activism*.

Ever since my injury and initial visits with my surgeon, I have been interested in RHM and the language and communication surrounding health, the medical field, and medical care and intervention. In the ENG 101 class where I first adopted this arts-based, RHM approach, I didn't expect students to embrace it so fully (because many were initially concerned about their creative abilities and assessment), but most of them did. They were excited for the opportunity to talk about what interested them, to share their experiences, and to acknowledge the complexities of their embodiment, and students in the class focused on a variety of experiences through RHM. While Hannah focused on a chronic, incurable neurological condition, one student talked about how a knee injury resulted in him not being able to play soccer again. Another student discussed having mononucleosis as a senior in high school and how the months-long recovery changed how she approached her schoolwork and social life. All these scenarios engage with RHM, and students can use artmaking and writing to communicate these lived experiences and how they have played a role in who they are as students, composers, and people. In the years to come, my hope is that pedagogical approaches like this one will work to

emphasize the role of the physical body in all rhetorics, to complicate the ways bodies are understood to work and perform as rhetorical agents, and to intervene in the ways bodies both inscribe and are inscribed upon. Just as we call for bodies to be seen for their multiplicity as conglomerates of intricate layers, forces, and parts, so too should we experience rhetorics...We are all moving, breathing, thinking, rhetorical bodies. (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 42)

Appendix A: "New Anatomy"

Note: Below is the original version of the essay that was published in *Vox Viola* (Issue 2). The vignettes shared throughout this article are adapted from this original version.

I

The first time I saw a doctor for the injury, I was seventeen years old and nearing the end of my junior year of high school. The doctor touched his hand lightly to my wrist, moved my fingers and watched the tendons tense and loosen. He asked me to touch my index finger to my thumb and hold it there tightly; he put his own index finger in between the loop I'd made with my finger and thumb and broke through it easily.

"It's a UCL tear," he said.

My mother and youngest brother were in the room with us.

"What does that mean?" my mother asked.

He explained the tear, said it was common and that I'd need surgery, but that I'd be out of a cast by prom. He showed us an "Anatomy of the Hand" poster on the wall, pointed to a bit of tissue holding the bones of the thumb together. The text read *ulnar collateral ligament - UCL*.

The doctor asked me to hold my pinky finger and thumb together while flexing my wrist forward.

"See?" he said, pointing to a tendon protruding from my wrist. He asked my mother and brother to make the same motion with their wrists. We could see their tendons, too.

The doctor told us that particular tendon is present in only 85-90% of people, but that it doesn't actually contribute to arm or grip strength. He said that, if my UCL was too damaged, he would have to harvest the tendon in my wrist for the repair. I went home and looked the injury and surgical procedure up online: 1) Also known as Skier's thumb, Gamekeeper's thumb, or Stener lesion, 2) Can be disabling and lead to chronic pain if left untreated, 3) *Can be disabling, can lead to chronic pain*. I couldn't find much information beyond that. While there were some sites that talked about the injury itself, I couldn't find much on the surgical repair, the recovery period, the long-term prognosis.

II

My initial appointment was in April, but by October, I still hadn't had the procedure to fix the injury. We had tried occupational therapy first, but it didn't relieve the instability or pain and, as a result, I knew I wouldn't be able to play during my senior year softball season. After therapy failed, we were ready to move forward with the surgery, but at the end of October, my father was in a serious accident that almost took his life. His recovery was long and difficult, so my surgery was put on hold again.

We eventually scheduled the surgery during winter break of my senior year of high school, a couple months before my eighteenth birthday. After the procedure, I woke up in a thick cast and my entire arm was numb from the nerve block. A nurse removed my IV and left the room. Hot blood poured down my arm from the IV site and my mother held pressure as she called for the nurse. Later, my mother helped me dress, helped me place my right arm carefully in a blue mesh sling.

Ten days later, the stitches came out. My hand was still covered in the marker lines from the surgery, the word "yes" written in purple marker on my skin so the doctor knew which hand to operate on. Therapy was difficult, and I found out I had a latex allergy after my skin blistered and swelled when my hand had been wrapped in latex-containing compression wrap. Despite spending weeks in post-op therapy, scar tissue adhesions began forming, and my movement and healing were limited. I had another surgery six months after the initial repair to remove the adhesions and then started intense therapy again to keep them from returning.

But they came back. A year and a half after the first adhesion surgery, I had surgery again to remove more scar tissue adhesions. I was back to dealing with chronic instability and pain and was regretting the time I lost during the months of occupational therapy, wishing I had just moved forward with the

surgical repair right after my first consultation with the doctor. My grip strength was minimal, and I had limited use of my hand, even though I've always been right-hand dominant. The pain became so intense at times that I altered many typical day-to-day tasks: turning the key in the car ignition, starting a load of laundry, picking up a glass of water, opening a door. I would often walk with my elbow bent and my right hand held tightly against my chest so I wouldn't bump it against anything and so no one would run into it on accident. I had a brace I wore any time the pain or swelling flared up, and I ended up wearing it more and more often as time went on. I had to use thick pieces of foam around writing utensils in order to write without pain. I started teaching myself to use my left hand for most tasks. The injury had become disabling, and I had chronic pain and numbness that would radiate up my arm as I slept.

Five years after the initial surgery, I returned to my doctor for help.

"A joint fusion," he suggested. "That might be the only thing that will help the instability and pain."

He pressed into my thumb MCP—metacarpophalangeal—joint, asked me to move my thumb to the best of my ability.

"Your joint isn't that flexible," he noted. "The fusion shouldn't have that much of an effect on your mobility."

Later at home, I found even less information on MCP joint fusion surgery than I did on UCL repair surgery. While I found papers published in medical journals detailing the procedure itself (in jargon that was difficult to understand), I couldn't find any information from actual *people* who had had the surgery and who had gone through the recovery process. Despite this, I moved forward with the fusion, not sure what to expect. After the surgery, I was in an even bigger cast, the X-ray showing a plate with three screws and a rod extending upward toward the tip of my thumb. The day the cast came off, the nurse cut layers of gauze and elastic wrap off, cracked open the plaster underneath, revealed my swollen hand covered in black and purple marker and the yellow tint of lingering betadine. After, I was fitted with a plastic splint with a Velcro strap, my hand first wrapped in gauze to keep the surgical scar and the surrounding skin clean and protected. To make the splint, the therapist dipped a piece of white plastic in hot water, pressed the plastic into my fresh and healing wound as she molded it around my thumb and hand and wrist.

III

The recovery from the joint fusion was slow and painful. Even now, several years later, I still feel a dull ache beneath my skin from time to time, the metal implants more noticeable than they should be. I feel twinges of pain in the long bones of my right arm, just a few inches up from my thumb, like cells are moving and growing and multiplying. The meat of my thumb on the palm of my hand is still chronically swollen, my thumb unable to move away from my index finger in an L-shape. I can see each of the four surgical scars as they wrap around my thumb in different ways, surrounded by tiny, raised bits of scar tissue that mark where the sutures were.

After having gone through four surgeries over the course of seven years, I decided to document my journey with traumatic injury, surgery, and recovery by writing a post on my blog. It had been two years since the fusion surgery, and many people began commenting on the post (which I called "What I Learned from Orthopedic Surgery") and sharing stories about their own surgeries and resulting limitations. While writing the post had been therapeutic in helping me process my own journey, the stories shared in the comments were even more refreshing. Others had been through injuries and surgeries similar to mine, could understand the constant nagging of chronic pain, the lengthy recovery process that was never really quite over, the process of developing new ways of being and existing in the world.

In 2017, almost two and a half years after I wrote that post, I received a Facebook message from a man in England named David. He told me he found my post while searching for information about MCP joint fusion surgery online, said he was struggling post-surgery and took to the internet to find information about post-op experiences. He found my blog post and, subsequently, my social media information and decided to reach out. While others had previously shared their stories about various injuries and surgeries on my post, David was the only other person I had “met” who had an MCP joint fusion surgery like me. Over the messenger, he told me about the symptoms he was experiencing post-op, and we proceeded to chat for several days about our experiences with the injury and with surgery, rehab, recovery.

While it had been more than four years since I had had my joint fusion surgery, the experience of creating this support group with David was healing. He understood my new “normal” in ways others couldn’t: the strange way you approach simple tasks (like turning a key), the lingering ache just beneath the skin, the swelling of skin and flesh in the heat of summer, having to explain to someone why you can’t shake their hand. Even though life has changed for me and there are things I’ll never be able to do again, I’ve created connections in the process and have learned to appreciate the way my body works now: the way my left hand has adapted and compensated and taken up tasks, the way metal on/in bone has formed a new anatomy.

Appendix B: Personal Narrative Assignment Description

Project #1 is a personal narrative, and the project will have a written component (4 pages) and a visual component. In the written component, you should outline how and why you became a student in your discipline and how your education connects to your future career goals. Because our class is focused on the theme of embodiment and rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM), your narrative should be framed by this. For example, consider the following:

- How have your unique embodied experiences (as they relate to medicine, medical intervention, being labeled as “othered” or disabled, having an “invisible” or “visible” disability, etc.) impacted you?
- How have your embodied experiences contributed to where you are today? How have they impacted your current educational goals and your future career endeavors? How do they impact your artmaking and writing processes?
- How can you best communicate your embodied subjectivities through RHM? What language will you use? How will you approach this project differently with RHM in mind?

The visual art component will provide a visual representation of your embodied journey. The visual art can be anything, including a drawing, painting, collage, or poster. Be creative and remember that your visual art is not being assessed on artistic ability, but rather on the articulation of your rhetorical thinking. As such, you must have at least one paragraph in your essay that provides an explanation of your visual art (this paragraph counts toward the 4-page length requirement). Consider the following questions as you write your explanation paragraph:

- How does your visual art component work with and alongside your written component to communicate your personal narrative? How does the visual art exemplify your story/journey?
- Why did you choose the form you chose for the visual art and how does the form contribute to the meaning of your project? How does that form best reach your audience?
- Why did you use the materials you chose (e.g., images, colors, words)? Why did you assemble the materials in that particular way?

This project is worth 50 points and will be assessed using five criteria worth 10 points each (refer to the project rubric): formatting, development, and organization (written component) and thoughtfulness and rhetorical thinking (visual component).

Appendix C: Personal Narrative Assessment Rubric

| Criteria | Description | Points/Comments |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Written Component | | |
| Formatting | MLA style is used correctly throughout (i.e., header, heading, margins, spacing, font/size, quotes, citations) | /10 Comments: |
| Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essay meets the minimum length requirement • It adheres to the assignment prompt • It includes clear, well-written paragraphs (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion) | /10 Comments: |
| Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essay is easy to follow and understand • Paragraphs transition smoothly from one to the next • Each paragraph maintains focus on a particular point • The narrative easily moves forward in a way that makes sense to readers | /10 Comments: |
| Visual Component | | |
| Thoughtfulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The visual is creative and represents the written component of the project in some way • It is submitted as a physical artifact or in a format that can be viewed on Blackboard | /10 Comments: |
| Rhetorical thinking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-written visual justification paragraph is included • The paragraph clearly articulates the rhetorical decisions made in creating the visual by responding to the guiding questions in the assignment description | /10 Comments: |

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Notes

¹The visual art was published in *Chronically Lit* while the essay was published in *Vox Viola*.

² Hannah's visual is not included here in order to protect her privacy as it contained identifying details and photographs.

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