

# Chapter 18. If These Walls Had Ears: Applying Sound Rhetorics Through Audio Tours

Lance Cummings, Hannah Lane Kendrick,  
and Devon Peterson

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA WILMINGTON

This chapter presents a reoccurring applied learning project, Virtual Tours and The House Museum, where students create virtual tours for local house museums in a core professional writing class, ENG 314 Digital Composing. The University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) lies only a few miles from a historical riverfront, a site for many historical buildings and house museums from the 18th and 19th centuries. This chapter will describe how students use theories from rhetoric and digital composition to produce digital content for these community stakeholders. Though most students' final projects produced a video tour for a museum house, the class takes over half the semester to practice analyzing digital texts related to museums, while playing around with different modes, including sound. This chapter will specifically focus on an assignment that asks students to "remediate" client texts and/or previous projects into an audio tour that focuses on a specific audience mentioned in our client introduction.

Funded by UNCW's Quality Enhancement Program, Experience Transformative Education through Applied Learning (ETEAL), I was required to incorporate and implement "high-impact" practices as described by The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE, 2013) and The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). The purpose of deploying these best practices in applied learning is to help students better "integrate theories, ideas, and skills they have learned in new contexts, thereby extending them" ("What Is Applied," n.d., para. 1). From a rhetoric and writing perspective, applied learning's focus on student inquiry and reflection ties closely to the goals of activity theory that place the responsibility of determining the goals of a project on the students (Shipka, 2006). For example, the first four principles provided by NSEE require students to set their intention, prepare and plan, and then reflect on their experience, giving students ownership of the project (National Society for Experiential Education, 2013).

In the case of applied learning, a specific client is consistently consulted, lending what NSEE called *authenticity*—a real world context that provides meaningful reference points for the project, primarily the stakeholders and audiences involved (National Society for Experiential Education, 2013). Working with sound, though, emphasizes the embodied aspects of this "real world context." In "Composing for

Sound: Sonic Rhetoric as Resonance,” Mary E. Hocks and Michelle Comstock (2017) laid out the importance of “fully embodied listening practices” to help students produce more complex multimodal projects. This includes listening to the environment, not just considering how the human voice sounds. In a project like this, the historical environment and space are equally important. Students are required to visit the house museum multiple times, listening and observing the space around them, inspiring many of them to “listen” historically through the archives to learn more about these contexts. A video or written tour can also drive students to explore these embodied experiences, but focusing on sound helps them think more deeply about how to invoke these experiences in different kinds of audiences. After being constrained by a sound-only project, students can take what they learned and use sound to enhance a more multimodal project, like a video tour.

Accessibility has always impacted the range and quality of these sound projects. In some ways, this assignment assumes that the class is taught in a lab or a laptop classroom with access to sound-editing software. With support from the UNCW administration, we remodeled one of our computer labs into a laptop classroom, where students sit in “pods” with personal laptops around a larger monitor that can be used to display their work. Because this assumes that students own a decent laptop with access to the appropriate software, we acquired funds to provide backup computers that students can use when needed. The UNC system has also negotiated a deal with Adobe that gives all students access to Adobe’s Creative Cloud Suite, allowing them to practice using Adobe Audition (one industry standard for sound editing).

That said, “high fidelity” is not necessarily my primary outcome for these projects. I want students to connect sound production to rhetoric, while also reflecting on their digital composing process. This does not require a high-quality project, though we all strive to produce something useful for our client. Having students work in well-chosen groups allows them to pool their resources, skills, and talents to eventually produce something that our client might find useful (and that students can put in their professional portfolio).

## Assignments and Sequencing

In order to allow the students to explore this real-world context and become experts of museum rhetorics, the entire semester focuses on examining different kinds of digital texts produced by different museums from all over the country and abroad. For example, one of my favorite digital texts is a tour of the Louvre on YouTube by VisitParisRegion (2010, see <https://www.youtube.com/visit-parisregion>), which embodies the viewer in several different ways by providing first-person views of different kinds of people enjoying a variety of experiences at the museum. Students also play around with different modes before embarking on the final project. This includes an analysis of a museum text, a photo essay, and a sound remediation. The following assignment prompts lay out this scaffolding:



*Figure 18.1. Photo collage of Latimer House. Hannah Lane Kendrick.*

1. Virtual Tours and The Latimer House
2. Analysis of Multimodal Text
3. Photo Essay
4. Audio Remediation
5. Intention Essay
6. Proposal
7. Critical Reflection

The audio remediation is a key component to this process. Constraining students to work with sound alone helps them think about ways they can in-

voke a more embodied experience without depending on visuals or video. This is also where students often see the potential for different audiences, such as children, nonprofits, garden fans, and more. They then take what they learn in this project and usually expand on it in their final project, which is usually a video tour.

For this context, I include only the first and fourth assignments, giving readers the initial context as presented to students and the soundwriting aspect in the audio remediation.

## Virtual Tours and the Latimer House (Assignment 1 of 7)

All writing is recursive . . . digital composing is no different. Good digital composers go back and forth between theory and practice. In other words, they compose and experiment, but also think about how they compose and experiment. The heuristics and theories we've engaged in thus far are useful tools for thinking about digital composition. Now that we've explored those ideas, we will begin to move towards composing a multimodal text for a specific client. In this case, we will be composing a short introduction video/tour for the Latimer House, using the expertise we've developed thus far.

### Applied Learning Project Overview

We will be spending much of the rest of the semester exploring the different modes of digital composition and how they might apply to this specific context and help produce a good text for our client. Each week will look specifically at a mode and experiment with different means of production. This exploration will culminate in a 2–3-minute promotional multimodal text for our client. Though our client expects videos, you may, in consultation with me, consider other emerging genres.

Even though our project has the following distinct stages, it is important to remember that these are intertwined throughout the process and certain aspects will be foregrounded at specific times. In other words, we will be researching non-profits like the Latimer House at the beginning of the project, but it may be important to continue that research in later stages of the process.

### Phase I – Intention Essay (50 points)

An intention reflection is where you consider your expectations for this project. After doing some research on nonprofits and the Latimer House, you will write a 300–600-word essay that reflects on how the knowledge you've attained thus far will help you with this applied learning project and what kinds of impact this project may have on our community and on your own personal educational experience.

### Phase II – Application Essay (50 points)

After exploring the different modes, you will reflect on how you applied specific theories in rhetoric and digital composition, as well as how these might be

further applied in your final project for the Latimer House. You will further reflect on the kind of impact these kinds of application may have on our community and on your own personal educational experience.

### **Phase III – Drafting (150 points)**

Once we've prepared ourselves sufficiently for this project, you will compose your multimodal text for the Latimer House collaboratively with three to four of your peers. You will receive points for each stage of the composing process and for interacting with our client.

- Proposal (25 points)
- Draft (25 Points)
- Client Visit (50 points)
- Final Draft (100 points)

### **Phase IV – Critical Reflection (50 points)**

After revising and discussing our projects, each of you will individually write a 600–800-word critical reflection on the project and what you've learned. We will also gather input from our client.

## **Audio Remediation Assignment Prompt (Assignment 4 of 7)**

Understanding aural elements of digital composition and how they work rhetorically is critical to the creation of effective texts in today's web-driven world. The goal of this project is to explore the nuances of audio and video, familiarize yourself with editing apps, and experiment with different ways of deploying these elements of multimodal rhetoric. We will also be thinking about how established texts can be “remediated” or transformed by changing modes and media.

### **Assignment**

Review the different assets that we've collected from our museum client, including tour scripts, videos, websites, etc. Thinking of a specific purpose, focus, and/or audience, develop a 30–60-second audio “tour” that remediates one of these assets by describing or telling a story about a specific aspect, room, or object from the Latimer House. Your goal is to make an argument or reveal a specific perspective of the house using only audio. This will involve writing a script and producing your clip in Audio Audition. You should also use at least one soundtrack (sound effects, music, etc.). You will then write a short reflection describing your remediation and how you applied aural aspects of rhetoric. Be sure to reference specific course material. You want this to be detailed and concise. Good versions are usually 300–500 words.

### **Criteria**

A full rubric will be added to the assignment in Blackboard.

**Table 18.1. Rubric for Audio Remediation Assignment**

Category	Criteria
Remediation	Remediation shows an in-depth exploration of specific rhetorical, design, and Adobe skills. Makes significant and meaningful changes to original audio.
Reflection	Reflection states a clear thesis that describes learning or achievements of this project. For example, how did you use the affordances of this mode of meaning rhetorically? References specific details from the composing process, class, or the remediation itself.
Course Material	Clearly applies course material to remediation. Makes use of specific ideas and principles from recent and previous readings. All material is cited.

## Sample Student Projects

Though we've done our best to track down the sound assets and cite them for these sample projects, we found this process very difficult. Before this project, we go over fair use, copyright, and Creative Commons. All of these projects make use of sound files found via the Creative Commons search at <https://search.creativecommons.org>, which led us to many assets (if not all) found at Freesound ([freesound.org](https://freesound.org)). Since this project was for experimentation purposes only, students did not keep track of these files or provide citations. That said, I recommend incorporating this element in future iterations, so that students can practice this important element of digital composing.

Most of these samples focused on remediating a video tour created by the office manager of the Latimer House, Travis Gilbert. This video summarized several of the tour's speaking points for a general audience. During client visits, students looked for ways to rework some of these ideas for different audiences and purposes. The audio remediations tended to focus on transforming this text.

1. "Entrance to Latimer" by Hannah Lane Kendrick: Hannah uses the audio tour to introduce a scavenger hunt around the house based on Travis's original video.<sup>1</sup>
2. "Creepy Latimer" by Devon Peterson: Devon created this creepy introduction to Latimer in order to play with the power of sound to change our perceptions of a place like Latimer. This was inspired by the Latimer family's upcoming Halloween event.
3. "Character Tour" by Mike Egan, Devon Peterson, Sharryse Piggot, and Devin Wensevic: This audio tour puts the listener in the presence of one of the main characters of the house: Zebulon Latimer.

---

1. Four student examples (audio or video files and descriptive transcripts) can be found on the book's companion website.

4. “Restoring the Slave Quarters” by Shannon Bradburn, Hannah Lane Kendrick, Kendall C. Rogers, and Tyler L. Young: This is one of the final projects given to our client. Students visited the house museum several times to do archival research and talk with our client. The end product was a video showing the importance of preserving slave history at the Latimer.

## Reflection

**Devon Peterson:** It can be tricky to understand the rhetoric of sound and how it’s applied during the composition process.<sup>2</sup> We are constantly surrounded by noise, even when it is the sound of silence.

*[pause]*

Effective audio is often felt, not heard . . . like a sudden, loud crash makes you jump.

*[loud crashing sound (bone666138, 2013)]*

Or birds chirping signal safety and reassurance.

*[birds chirping pleasantly (InspectorJ, 2016)]*

**Lance Cummings:** I am Lance Cummings, Assistant Professor of English at University of North Carolina Wilmington, and that was one of my professional writing students, Devon Peterson, describing her experience working with sound in our digital composing class where we focus on an applied learning project that asks students to create a virtual tour of one of the many house museums in Wilmington, North Carolina—in this case, the Latimer House. You may notice Devon’s focus on what Hocks and Comstock (2017) call “embodied listening” or “rhetorical engagement with sound” (pp. 136-137) that includes more than just voice. In other words, extending our listening practices beyond the spoken word will create what they call “increasingly complex and sonically rich multimodal projects” (Hocks & Comstock, 2017, p. 137). Applied learning, where students work with a client to produce real-world texts, supports the goals of embodied listening by lending authenticity to the experience and allowing students to craft rhetorically meaningful projects that use sound in complex ways. In this case, authenticity is the embodied experience of working with a specific location and with specific stakeholders, allowing students to develop a strong sense of how sound can affect audiences and their perceptions of space and time.

Imagine the last time you visited an interesting and unfamiliar place, like a museum, historical home, or just a new and fascinating location. You must remember looking around, taking it all in—that is what I remember seeing my

---

2. The audio version of Lance Cummings, Hannah Lane Kendrick, and Devon Peterson’s reflection can be found on the book’s companion website.

students do during our client visits to the house museums. It might be easy to ignore the sounds in these places with so many visually interesting things to see, but having students focus only on sound for one project allows them to practice this embodied listening.

**Devon Peterson:** Show, don't tell. How many times have you heard that? In our audio tour, our group wanted to vividly recreate the drawing room for someone completely absent from the house. This forced us to change how we address the audience. If it was one person listening in, where would they be in the house? Who were they and what would they care about? Looking at the house from different lenses and perspectives made us think about the different historical "characters" or figures that had lived there. We decided to focus on the drawing room from the perspective of the once owner, Zebulon Latimer—played by Michael Egan.

**Michael Egan:** *[quote from Sample 3 on the companion website; classical violins play in the background]* Welcome to my home! Come in. Come in. Please, let's retire to the drawing room.

**Devon:** Not only was Michael the only masculine voice, the tone of his script was written haughty and more conversational, distinguished from the rest of our more feminine voices.

**Lance:** Funny that Devon uses the phrase "show, don't tell" for a completely audio project, right? Being in a space like the Latimer House helped students see that there are multiple ways of seeing the different objects in the house, requiring them to think about how to make that happen in audio . . . in this case, by bringing in different voices. Probably what fascinated me the most, as a scholar who loves archives, is how this drove students to explore local archives at the museum and in the UNCW Library, which was not required at all for this project. Most groups made extra trips to explore the different stories and how those might be transformed into rhetorically complex projects.

**Hannah Lane Kendrick:** Digging through the archives at UNCW was a very impactful part of the researching process for the video. We had gathered a lot of important site documents and records, but it was all from the house. We were told by another worker at the Latimer House that the archives held extra information that the house did not have. Zebulon Latimer, the homeowner, kept many documents. He started a church in Wilmington and most of the contents in the archives were from the church. We did not know what to expect when we went to the archives, but I believe they held around 13 different boxes of information. It was so interesting! . . . and a bit overwhelming to thumb through pages of historical documents, old church papers and programs, and confirmations. When we gathered information at the Latimer House, one particular slave had some letter writings and documentation. Her name was Hannah, and my group and I focused the majority of the video on her and her story. At the archives, we found Hannah's confirmation date from 1860 and this further solidified that she existed at the Latimer House and attended the church. The archives help us to verify the



information and we were able to more effectively listen to the stories from a historical perspective.

**Lance:** Sound became a way to connect the audience to people they discovered in the archives. Hannah Kendrick's group wanted to highlight the lives of enslaved people—something that doesn't always come through in house museum tours.

**Hannah:** Our group noticed how often the stories of enslaved people were missing from the many narratives told in local house museums. My group and I decided to tell their story, focusing on how we could bring an emotional experience to our listeners. Sound made this possible for us and helped to establish a mood of deep caring compassion by giving voice to a particular slave's writings.

**Kendall Rogers:** *[quote from Sample 4 on the companion website; somber music plays]* My dearest mistress. I was pleased to learn from your letter of August 24, that you and your family are all well. I hope that you have all spent a pleasant summer and are benefited from the trip. I'm sorry and hope that you do not think I was not glad to hear from you, as it has been so long since I've received your letters. Mary has been quite sick and I was not very strong and the weather so warm, then moving in a few months.

**Hannah:** We hoped the music would give a sense of togetherness, while also emphasizing key textual moments like the listing of slave names.

**Tyler Young:** *[quote from Sample 4 on the companion website; somber music plays]* Listed here are just some of the many enslaved peoples of color who contributed to the Latimer household in some shape or form. Their names and legacies are also preserved by Wilmington's Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. However, there is one that we are privileged to know more about than the others. And her name was Hannah.

**Hannah:** With emotions at a heightened level by the end of the video, we were able to emphasize why our audience should care one last time.

**Tyler:** *[quote from Sample 4 on the companion website; optimistic guitar music plays]* The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society is a nonprofit corporation. Money raised through memberships, donations, and events fund educational programs and the maintenance of the archives and the Latimer House. Your addition to the Society for your generous donation would be a vital investment into the past and a crucial step in the sowing of the seeds for the future.

**Lance:** Students quickly discover that making these connections with sound is easier said than done.

**Devon:** The layers of sound need to be cohesive, so we experimented with different background music before we discovered that perfect sound . . . which can be difficult when working with fair use music. Anything that ran on too short of a loop can become distracting and eventually annoying.

*["Pop Goes the Weasel" played on a music box (cgrote, 2012)]*

House music didn't fit our frame . . .

*[house dance music clip with thumping bass (frankum, 2017)]*

. . . but classical music was perfect.

*[relaxing piano music (orangefreesounds, 2016)]*

**Hannah:** I did not realize going into this project that there were so many elements to sound. From pitch, to tone, to evoking mood to the listeners, it all comes together to form an effective multimodal project. But working with sound just in simple ways changed the way I looked at this project. I can say with full confidence that our video would not have had the same effect had it not had sound elements. Working with Travis, our client, made our experience seem more real. Interacting with Travis, visiting the Latimer House, asking questions, collecting research, and gaining insights and ideas helped us better understand how sound should work with our projects.

**Lance:** In other words, participating in an applied learning experience helped students rhetorically listen to their audiences and stakeholders in embodied ways, whether with clients, audiences, or even historical figures from the past.

As a part of the applied learning experience at UNCW, students are required to do several reflections throughout the course. I try to emphasize how reflection connects theory and practice, especially in multimodal composing. To become an effective multimodal composer, one must play around with the different tools, modes, and genres. Reflecting is what helps us figure out what is working and what is not. Even though we are working with real stakeholders, there needs to be a safe place to play—that's why I do these mini-projects that allow students to play around with just one mode—like sound.

**Devon:** So much of this was a matter of trial and error. It was hard to find what would work until we found what didn't and learned why. By the deadline, even after all the editing and reframing and rerecording, our final product fell short of our aspirations. It is too long and clunky. The transitions between narrators are indelicate. In other words, it does not sound professional. Which is fine, this is an amateur audio tour. One created by students who, in working with a real client, were able to begin again a cycle of learning that is an ongoing rotation of theory and experiment.

**Lance:** Working within an applied learning experience helped students delve into the rhetorical complexity involved with professional writing projects, while also allowing them to play around with their understanding of that complexity by

interacting with our client, researching archives, and exploring different kinds of sounds for their projects. Applied learning brings an authenticity to soundwriting that extends beyond just the classroom.

Remember that space you visited at the beginning of this audio? Think about what sounds you might have missed . . . what perspectives . . . or even what stories. If those walls had ears, what would they know? This could be the start of your next sound project.

## References

- Arola, K. L., Sheppard, J., & Ball, C. E. (2014). *Writer/designer: A guide to making multimodal projects*. Bedford/St. Martin's.
- bone666138. (2013, September 8). Crash [Audio file]. *Freesound*. <https://freesound.org/people/bone666138/sounds/198876/>
- cgrote. (2012, April 11). Pop goes the weasel music box.WAV [Audio file]. *Freesound*. <https://freesound.org/people/cgrote/sounds/151320/>
- frankum. (2017, January 30). Red - hard lead techno house [Audio file]. *Freesound*. <https://freesound.org/people/frankum/sounds/378665/>
- Hocks, M. E., & Comstock, M. (2017). Composing for sound: Sonic rhetoric as resonance. *Computers and Composition*, 43, 135-146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2016.11.006>
- InspectorJ. (2016, March 10). Bird whistling, A.wav [Audio file]. *Freesound*. <https://freesound.org/people/InspectorJ/sounds/339326/>
- Kuh, G. D., & O'Donnell, K. (2013). *Ensuring quality & taking high impact practices to scale*. The Association of American Colleges & Universities.
- National Society for Experiential Education. (2013). *Eight principles of good practice for all experiential learning activities*. <http://www.nsee.org/8-principles>
- orangefreesounds. (2016, March 18). Piano melody [Audio file]. *Freesound*. <https://freesound.org/people/orangefreesounds/sounds/340075/>
- Shipka, J. (2006). Sound engineering: Toward a theory of multimodal soundness. *Computers and Composition*, 23(6), 355-373. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2006.05.003>
- VisitParisRegion. (2010, November 30). Visit the Louvre Museum [Video file]. *YouTube*. <https://youtu.be/xJxH-QuJeXo>
- What is applied learning? (n.d.). UNCW.edu. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170825070209/https://uncw.edu/eteal/overview/appliedlearning.html>