TEACHING AND LEARNING FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION WITH DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
JULY 2002
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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY MUNCIE, INDIANA JULY 2002
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From MAMA to ABD to DDD to GTT.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to begin to define and describe some of the complex intersections between teaching and learning first-year composition with digital portfolios, focusing on the construction, presentation, and assessment processes in one first-year composition course at Ball State University. The study employed a qualitative ethnographic methodology with case study, and used grounded theory to develop a resultant guide to code the data collected through several methods: observation, interview, survey, and artifact assessment.

The resultant coding guide included the core categories “reflective immediacy,” “reflexive hypermediacy,” and “active remediation.” With the guide findings indicate several effective “common tool” digital portfolio strategies for both teachers and learners. For teachers: introduce the digital portfolio as early in the course as possible; make connections between digital portfolios and personal pedagogical strategies; highlight rhetorical hyperlinking and constructing navigational schemes; emphasize scalability; create a sustainable support system. For learners: consider the instructor’s objectives within the framework of the portfolio; synthesize writing process with course content and portfolio construction; include each component of the writing process in the portfolio.
Chapter One

Portfolio Writing Assessment Theory and Research

The intellectual environments offered to children by today’s cultures are poor in opportunities to bring their thinking about thinking into the open, to learn to talk about it and to test their ideas by externalizing them. Access to computers can dramatically change this situation. (27-28)

– Seymor Papert, Mindstorms

Portfolio Assessment in English Studies

Portfolios have been a topic of interest in educational settings for many decades. They have been a primary focus in writing assessment theory and research since at least 1989 (Black, et al. 1). They are selective and purposeful collections of work, emphasizing student self-reflection for both process and product. As such, portfolios can be records of learning, growth, and change, and they can be used for internal or external assessment and presentation purposes. They are extraordinarily diverse. In fact, as Kathleen Blake Yancey suggests in Portfolios in the Writing Classroom (1992), portfolios can function “as cultural artifacts, as collection devices, as instruments of process, as assessment tools, as means of
education reform, as resources for teachers, [and] as pictures of and guides for curriculum” (12).

During the process movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, teachers tended to focus their pedagogy on what students had the most experience in: their own discourse communities. Students were asked to write about topics which interested them. But when called upon to demonstrate writing proficiency, examiners often used assigned topics, time limits, and looked for editing and revision skills. Yancey points out in the introduction to a more recent book, *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives* (1997), that efforts to begin using portfolios on the postsecondary level were more often than not the result of administrative accountability pressures to bridge the gap between student interest and writing proficiency. Portfolios were developed to embrace both “what writers did in class and [. . .] the way students were asked to demonstrate they could write” (1).

In *Portfolios: Process and Product* (1991), for instance, Pat Belanoff and Marcia Dickson document some examples of how portfolios bridge the gap. Topics in this book range from portfolios as tools to test writing proficiency, to assess the functionality of writing programs, to bring practice in line with theory *inside* the classroom, and to demonstrate student and programmatic progress in order to deal with political problems *outside* the classroom. In one example from this collection, Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff relate their experiences with the Portfolio-based Evaluation Program they developed at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. This was a program designed to deal with the
inadequacies of the proficiency exam that was put in place there in 1977, and was the first large-scale writing portfolio proficiency project in America.

Elbow and Belanoff describe the deficiencies of the SUNY proficiency exam clearly and concisely:

when a proficiency exam embodies a university requirement, the whole university can be seen as saying to students, “Here’s a serious matter (single-parent families, care of the elderly, the relation of books in the real world). Tell us what you think about it in approximately five hundred words; we know you can give it the attention it deserves; and then you can go home.” The writing is unconnected to the study of any material and cut off from connection with any ongoing conversation. Is that how we want students to approach serious intellectual issues? (“State University” 5)

Instead, in order to connect writing to sustainable and meaningful study, students were asked to prepare portfolios in class which were then read by outside readers. This model from the early 1980s was designed to refine program-wide content and reliable assessment quality control. Variations were widely adopted by writing programs across the United States.

Indeed, the impulse to adopt portfolio pedagogy in postsecondary writing instruction was derived from this need for meaningful and “authentic” assessment praxis (most notably, Belanoff and Dickson; Burch; Cambridge; Elbow and Belanoff; Ford and Larkin; Glazer and Brown; Hamp-Lyons and Condon;
Hansen; Meeker; Murphy and Smith; Porter and Cleland; Roemer, Schultz, and Durst; Yancey; and Yancey and Weiser). In K-12 settings, however, in addition to authentic assessment, the literature demonstrates a second impulse: teachers report that portfolios are useful to help invite students to present their learning in reflective and creative ways. In *Portfolio Portraits* (1992), Donald Graves and Bonnie Sunstein share perspectives on how portfolios and definitions of “portfolio” should “move, grow, and change as we see what portfolios can do and as we continue to apply them in practice for ourselves and for our students” (xi). In other words, portfolios are useful for evaluation and assessment but they also enable us to document our personal literacy histories, “who we are and who we want to be” (xii). Students can reflect on their own developing learning through the process of constructing a portfolio.

In fact, in one of the most recent English Studies texts to date on portfolio pedagogy in K-12 contexts, *The Whole Story: Teachers Talk about Portfolios* (2001), Mary Ann Smith and Jane Juska present the view that “portfolios invite students to care about their growth” (1). In this text teachers define and re-define portfolios as tools to teach students that education is a journey, that improving one’s writing can be a sustainable process, and that the presentation of interdisciplinary portfolios can help students make personally meaningful connections. This book also highlights how portfolios can promote individualism and student empowerment, how they encourage scalable learning, and how assessment with portfolios can even be enjoyable. These two impulses—the need for an accurate, authentic assessment process and the portfolio as a tool
which invites individual learning—now inform a range of contexts from preschool to graduate study, from individual classes to capstone projects, and from portfolios-as-resumés to student and teacher programmatic portfolios.

In *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* (2000), Alfie Kohn writes that standardized multiple choice measurements and single-sample essay evaluations often reinforce negative learning strategies. In contrast to portfolio-based teaching and learning, students often begin to feel that what happens in the classroom is less important than what happens during the exam (Gill 1-15). In other words, doing well on tests may be the result of something other than quality class participation. And with these more traditional assessment types students have relatively less authority or voice to demonstrate what they have learned (Murphy and Smith 11).

As a result of the portfolio assessment movement, according to the American Council on Education, nearly 70 percent of colleges and universities use assessment tools in addition to single-sample types (Elbow, “Forward” ix). Portfolio-based teaching, thus, offers many benefits to writing instruction in particular. Teachers who do not use portfolios may not have the tools they need to adequately encourage student reflection over multiple drafts or over different rhetorical modes of writing. And because work is collected and bundled together in some way, both teachers and students find it difficult to resist slipping into a metacognitive mindset. This holistic, reflective strategy can be an empowering approach to learning.
Also, portfolios are remarkably flexible. Administrators can look for or request the inclusion of specific contents based on a variety of assessment standards and needs. These standards, in fact, can easily grow out of teachers’ experiences with students within the context of their individual classrooms. In other words, in theory, because portfolios are often all-encompassing, in order to process useful artifacts into meaningful collections, students and teachers and administrators must openly discuss course and programmatic goals and objectives. As such, portfolios can sustain change over a student’s educational career, and can include work across disciplines. It is no longer a question of whether portfolios provide positive results. The question is more along the lines of how and why student learning takes place, because the portfolio “inevitably involves its users in larger issues of teaching, learning, institutional goals, and student individuality” (Belanoff and Dickson xxiii). And as Catharine Lucas points out about portfolio assessment studies, we need “Ethnographic research that ‘looks into’ [. . .] portfolios rather than attempts to prove them worthwhile” (7).

It is clear that portfolio pedagogy both extends and augments writing instruction and assessment through the choices teachers and students have to make. Purpose, audience, revision, criterion sets, rules of ownership, and self-reflection, for instance, must all be considered.

Purpose is as central to portfolio creation as it is significant to writing. Is the portfolio intended to present student progress over a course or over a series of courses? Should it include best works or most representative works? Or should the portfolio reveal writing for a variety of rhetorical situations? Purpose
affects portfolio content immensely. And what about the function of the portfolio? Will it be used for assessing papers throughout the course, or will it serve as a tool for conferencing? Or should the portfolio be designed to help students evaluate their own writing?

Paying attention to audience is equally important when making these decisions. The portfolio may be written for parents, administrators, potential employers, other teachers inside or outside the institution, or even for other students. Furthermore, teachers and students need to know whether portfolio artifacts will be graded separately or holistically with a scoring guide, if peer assessment will play a role, or if any evaluation will be given at all. Ultimately, portfolios are collections of artifacts. But they also represent a series of decisions because the artifacts are purposeful and selective (Murphy and Smith 14).

Both teacher and student must decide the value of revision in terms of purpose and audience. Should multiple versions of the portfolio be created? Should students include multiple drafts of individual papers? Should students demonstrate how they revised their thinking from informal writing exercises to formal writing assignments? Further, there are many opportunities for students to point out how their own revision was the result of paying attention to scoring guides and criterion sets, peer or teacher response, and other self-reflexive activities.

Similarly, students can make direct connections between writing they’ve produced and readings they’ve read. Students can highlight their own critical reading skills while demonstrating an understanding of the rules of ownership.
They might include pictures of art or excerpts from popular culture magazines. Ideally, by paying attention to the many decisions involved in producing a portfolio, both teachers and students spend more time thinking about the steps key to producing good writing.

A portfolio is a metatext, then, with many defining features. It is a *collection* of work. Students, teachers, administrators, and others may be involved in *selecting* specific artifacts. In the process of selecting, many rhetorical decisions and much *reflection* must take place. For instance, the portfolio should demonstrate both process or *development* as well as product. The portfolio should also document students’ *diverse* experiences. Lastly, portfolios *communicate* a sense of who the composer is while serving as a tool for *evaluation*. And these features and the decisions involved in constructing and assessing a portfolio impact the delivery of writing instruction immensely.

To complicate matters further, as Yancey asks, “What happens when we cross electronic with portfolio? Do we get word processing, online, World Wide Web, hypertext? In a word, yes” (“Portfolio” 130). What is the impact of using electronic media and portfolios on teaching and learning?

**Portfolio Pedagogy and Electronic Environments**

Indeed, teacher-researcher interest in how and why student learning takes place has become even more complex in recent years because of new technologies. The many features and dynamics and rhetorical decisions of portfolios—as well as some of their benefits and pitfalls—are migrating to electronic teaching and
learning environments. As a result, a third impulse which informs portfolio pedagogy can now be placed alongside construction and assessment: digital presentation.

The first significant research on digital portfolio presentation pedagogy for postsecondary writing instruction appears in a special issue of *Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing* from 1996. Two years earlier, Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, leaders in the fields of writing across the curriculum and computers and writing, were invited to speak at NCTE’s Indianapolis Portfolio Conference. Their talk resulted in the article “Wedding the Technologies of Writing Portfolios and Computers: The Challenges of Electronic Classrooms,” which appears in Kathleen Blake Yancey and Irwin Weiser’s *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives* (1997). Meanwhile, however, Hawisher and Selfe invited Yancey to produce this special issue of *Computers and Composition*, an issue dedicated to considering the potential of digital portfolios in postsecondary writing instruction.

In the introductory article, “Portfolio, Electronic, and the Links Between,” Yancey relates the state of the union at the time:

Most of my teacher friends who “do” technology don’t “do” portfolios. And most of my portfolio pals who use technology do so for their own purposes; they don’t combine it with portfolios. [ . . . ] What I learned, [though,] as this issue attests is, yes, electronic portfolios are being developed. And yes, again: with the electronic portfolio, we are designing pedagogy whose implications we are
only now beginning to understand, appreciate, and interrogate.

(129-30)

This issue shares a collection of perspectives which document how teacher-researchers were using digital portfolios to teach writing in the beginning stages of the World Wide Web. These perspectives hint at the promise digital portfolios have for extending the power of portfolio pedagogy in the field of composition, but also illuminate many gaps in our understanding about how and why they foster learning.

For instance, Tim Mayers highlights pedagogical benefits for moving back and forth between hardcopy and electronic copies of artifacts. Rebecca Moore Howard discusses the ease of integrating electronic file exchange in computer-mediated classrooms with digital portfolio presentation. For Katherine M. Fischer, the most useful benefit of synthesizing hypertext and portfolio pedagogy is that students must engage in deeper, higher-level thinking—holistically and metaphorically—to develop rhetorically sound and audience-specific navigational schemes. Steve Watkins points out how electronic environments enable students to present portfolios or components of portfolios to different levels or “layers” of audiences. Jo Campbell describes the usefulness of electronic artifact and portfolio archiving over long periods of time; and Cheryl Forbes warns readers about the dangers of teachers “over assessing” and thus taking ownership of students’ digital portfolios. Beverly Wall and Robert Peltier highlight how electronic environments enable students to envision their work as more public. Electronic tools can facilitate discussion regarding the objectives and goals of
portfolios between students, teachers, and administrators, making interchanges more immediate while fostering quality thinking. Brian Huot endorses the potential for electronic and portfolio assessment to be synchronized more seamlessly; and Pamela Takayoshi reminds us that through the process of embracing electronic tools we should constantly deconstruct the criterion by which we evaluate portfolios. Should page design, for instance, play a stronger role in first-year composition?

In each of these articles—as well as in the research on digital portfolios in postsecondary writing classrooms that has followed since—it is clear that we’ve only investigated a tip of the iceberg. The ability to make changes to a document with a computer, for instance, is too easy for some students. How does this impact digital portfolio teaching and learning? Students are tempted to spend much more time editing than “re-visioning,” and we know that revising writing requires a far more engaged thinking process than editing writing (Faigley and Witte; Flower and Hayes; Murray; Perl, “Understanding”; Sommers; etc.). Also, with computers, in my experience, students seem to be more prone to include work in a portfolio without thinking through connections between artifacts in substantial depth. Artifacts can be labeled with discrete filenames, copied into a folder or a directory, and swiftly proclaimed a portfolio. After all, it is far easier to simply copy files or to make hyperlinks than it is to think through the connective properties the links between artifacts signify. How does the process of constructing a digital portfolio impact metacognitive learning?
On the other hand, if each essay, each journal entry, and each peer and teacher response is in some typed or manuscript form, the student is already rereading (and possibly rethinking) artifacts during the portfolio assembly process. In other words, the student must in some small way read the printed artifact in order to identify it; whereas with computers, the student might only need to read the filename (titles on print artifacts are usually more substantive than electronic filenames). Further, with easy access to simple page-design programs and information from the Internet, not to mention the convenience of drawing on databases and people of expertise for research through computers, some students may have too many tools at their disposal. In the least, the sheer number of resources we have for teaching and learning composition can be distracting. The line between writing literacy and computer literacy has always been one written in sand. The interchange between the two needs to be investigated more thoroughly with regard to digital portfolios.

Also, our understanding of “school” itself is changing with portfolios and computers (Hawisher, et al.). Digital portfolios can be made “scalable,” can be submitted and stored electronically, and can be used across disciplines throughout a student’s educational career far more readily than fixed-media portfolios. The term “electronic communication across the curriculum” has been coined to document this phenomenon (Reiss, Selfe, and Young). Networked collaboration in face-to-face, hybrid, and distance learning environments enables students to read, write, interact, and exchange information differently. And principles of technical communication such as visual design and usability testing
are steadily becoming more relevant to composition instruction (see *intercom*).

As a result of the resources and environments we have available to teach writing today, teachers have an increased responsibility and opportunity to balance new expectations of their students’ technological literacy with the content students synthesize and present for assessment (Selfe, *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*).

In “Wedding the Technologies of Writing Portfolios and Computers” Hawisher and Selfe relate three challenges which outline gaps in our understanding. Specifically, they point out that because technologies constantly change there will always be the need for “continuous learning on the part of teachers and those who would prepare English teaching professionals” (312). Ever-changing technologies relates to students’ erratic levels of technological literacy as well. The second challenge is that “Technology is not evenly distributed across schools and universities or even within given educational settings” (316). Creating a system of knowledge and infrastructure in an institution which can pedagogically and physically support and manage digital portfolios is extremely difficult to create and sustain. Differences in local conditions make the “transferability” of both writing and computer literacy extraordinarily difficult. Hawisher and Selfe’s third challenge is perhaps even more significant still: “It is too easy to see computers and writing portfolios as ‘tools.’ We need instead to view them as the richly embroidered artifacts of a culture, artifacts which ultimately embody the values and ideological directions of our society” (317-18). This means that teachers must not only develop the
necessary technological literacy to teach how to construct, present, and assess
digital portfolios; teachers must pay attention to many other underlying factors
like access and the digital divide, the presentation of “self” through computers,
and the motives students have for embracing computer technology.

Steven W. Gilbert, current Director of Technology Projects for the
American Association for Higher Education, shares his philosophy of selecting
specific technologies for research and development in “A Portfolio of Change
Strategies” in Syllabus: New Dimensions in Education Technology (December
2001). In this article Gilbert points out that no institution can embrace every
strategic combination of technology and solve every problem. This is obvious.
But he goes on to suggest that “Each institution needs to develop its own
‘portfolio of strategies’ for improving teaching and learning with technology” (21).
In addition to a “canon of literature,” a “canon of methods” is needed. Each
portfolio should include strategies which are inclusive of every group of learners
in the institution. In other words, there needs to be a common denominator. And
before institutions can make decisions about “key elements of the technological
infrastructure” or curricular improvements, learning how specific teaching
techniques impact learning in specific contexts on the micro level is imperative
(37).

My Research Study
To tackle each of Hawisher and Selfe’s challenges is the life’s work of many
teacher-researchers. Unraveling the intricacies of technological literacy
development alone has literally produced an entire sub-field of scholarship. And while portfolio interface design, university-wide infrastructure support, and sustainable portfolio development are just a few of the research areas currently needed at Ball State University—topics some of the ongoing studies teachers, researchers, administrators, and students in the Teacher’s College, the Computer Science Department, and the Office of Teaching and Learning are currently investigating—these subjects are beyond the scope of my dissertation.

Most pressing to English Studies is that fact that there is a lack of understanding on the micro level of what teachers and students learn when teaching and learning composition with digital portfolios. My study attempts to document some of the complex phenomena which appear to influence student digital portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment in first-year composition at Ball State. It is hoped that this study will contribute to our general understanding of specific digital portfolio implementation strategies as well as related teaching and learning factors. My guiding question: How does the construction, presentation, and assessment of first-year composition student digital portfolios appear to impact drafting, revision, collaboration, critique, and reflective writing? My units of analysis, as such, includes the instructor, students, and student portfolios. In other words, my study examines the writing process in a specific context.

This question has fifteen specific components which correspond to key elements of the writing process; for instance, how constructing digital portfolios impacts the teaching and learning of drafting; how presenting digital portfolios
impacts the teaching and learning of collaboration; and how assessing digital portfolios impacts the teaching and learning of reflective writing.

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Table 1.1. Research Question Components

Drafting is the process of generating a written composition, including prewriting strategies and informal writing that leads to formal writing. Revision involves reshaping and resubmitting drafts. Collaboration includes reading and writing exercises, group project work, and general cooperation amongst students. Critique is the process of exchanging compositions or pieces of compositions and offering commentary. Reflective writing is evaluative writing about one’s own work or effort. The manner in which the teacher designs these processes is just as important as the ways in which students learn through completing them.

Student digital portfolios can be categorized into three forms of increasing technological complexity: offline “common tool” portfolios, online Webfolios using HTML or WYSIWYG editors, and online Webfolios driven by databases. I focus on the first model because it is currently applicable to a larger pool of interested educational professionals, and because it fits well with ongoing portfolio research at BSU. Common digital portfolio construction tools might include 3.5” floppy disks, Zip disks, Microsoft Word®, and Microsoft PowerPoint®. In my experience, these resources are common in the sense that the majority of postsecondary students currently have ready access to them, common in the sense that they
are easier to learn than File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and eXtensible Markup Language (XML) and Application Service Provider (ASP) programs (tools for Webfolios), and common in the sense that they are frequently used to teach writing. And in my exchanges with teachers in the BSU Writing Program, teaching students how to use common tools is recognized by many writing instructors as writing instruction (as opposed to technology instruction). A study involving online Webfolios would be far more contextual and less applicable to others outside Ball State, would include additional complex variables like the impact of publishing work via the Internet on personal voice, and is beyond the scope of my study.

Instead, my study takes a micro level approach and describes the impact of how one form of a common tool digital portfolio impacted the teaching and learning of first-year composition for one teacher and her class in general, and for four of her students in particular. This is a qualitative, ethnographic case study. To examine my research question and its components I observed, surveyed, and interviewed the study’s participants for the duration of one semester. I also analyzed the work the students produced as well as the teaching tools and strategies the teacher developed. In the following chapter I review pertinent literature on process portfolio pedagogy, digital portfolio theory in general, and student digital portfolio practice specifically. The review demonstrates why the categories “construction,” “presentation,” and “assessment” are so important in my study, and it helps explain the appropriateness of my methodology and methods.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

We know that the use of these electronic technologies affects how we read and write, how we teach reading and writing and how we describe literacy practices. However, moving from this recognition that literacy practices differ when they are used to an understanding of how writing, writers and written forms change, is difficult. Such a move is complicated by the growing realisation that writing and technology are not distinct phenomena. (xxi)

– Ilana Snyder, Page to Screen

A Catalog of Sorts

Digital portfolio pedagogy in English Studies is scantily covered in the literature. This is especially apparent where student digital portfolios in first-year composition are concerned. As such, to lay a foundation for my research question, in order to begin to understand “how writing, writers and written forms” are changing with digital portfolios as Snyder suggests, a general review of the history of portfolio writing assessment—and digital portfolio assessment specifically—is appropriate. With such a wide body of literature available, determining the most useful way to present it here is challenging.
The three primary impulses of my study are construction, presentation, and assessment. The literature available for both fixed-media portfolios and digital portfolios can be classified according to these categories. But presenting this research in these categories does not demonstrate the convergence of writing and technology that is significant to my study’s findings. A gap in the literature that my study begins to fill is one of the next logical steps in portfolio assessment research. I must therefore show you progressive steps and trends that lead up to my study. Still, do keep “construction,” “presentation,” and “assessment” in mind when reading this chapter.

My review is presented in order of chronological trend, as Kathleen Blake Yancey gives good reason for in her *College Composition and Communication* article from 1999, “Looking Back as We Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment”:

One way to historicize those changes is to think of them as occurring in overlapping waves, with one wave feeding into another but without completely displacing waves that came before. The trends marked by these waves, then, are just that: trends that constitute a general forward movement, at least chronologically, but a movement that is composed of both kinds of waves, those that move forward, those that don’t. The metaphor of waves is useful conceptually, precisely because it allows us to mark past non-discrete patterns whose outlines and effects become clearer over time and upon reflection—and whose observation allows us in turn
to think in an informed way about issues that might contribute to future waves. (483-84)

By highlighting the conceptual and chronological trends in the literature I demonstrate ways in which writing and technology are converging in the form of digital portfolios. I also demonstrate how my study is part of the next logical step in composition studies for portfolio writing assessment: student digital portfolio presentation.

Yancey includes three “waves” of scholarship in her article. From 1950-1970 writing assessment “took the form of objective tests.” From 1970-1986 teacher-researchers were more focused on the holistically scored essay. And during the current wave, according to Yancey, from 1986 to the present, writing assessment research has largely been centered around portfolio and programmatic assessment (484). Yancey correctly argues, of course, as Kenneth Burke suggests, that there are many sorts of lenses through which we can document the history of writing assessment. She highlights Brian Huot’s twin legs of validity and reliability, and refers to the move from old expert to new non-expert (often labeled “schemata networking” by educational psychologists). Yancey also stresses the shift from product to process, as well as changing writing assessment practices inside the classroom. She writes about how “multiple choice tests standing outside of and apart from the classroom have become the portfolios composed within,” for instance (484).

My review concentrates on the literature of this third wave, what Yancey calls the “new assessment as politics of location” (491). This doesn’t mean that
the first and second waves do not have a place in my review. The most useful pedagogical trends and category sorts always overlap. Still, the divisions that make the most sense for my review of the literature are the process writing portfolio, the digital portfolio, and the student digital portfolio.

It should be noted that there is much research peripheral to my study, for instance, research on portfolio support and template/model strategies, portfolios in other disciplines, entrance and exit portfolios, institutional portfolios, and even much of the literature about Webfolios (portfolios designed to be published on the Internet). This work is interesting but in most cases does not inform my research question directly. In fact, this body of scholarship more often than not complicates this dissertation in intriguing but ultimately misleading directions. And this is the same for much K-12 research that theorizes about the holistic benefits of digital portfolios. For instance, in my study I document what happens in one classroom over the period of one semester. A longitudinal study examining how students change their holistic understanding of their digital portfolios over a college career or across disciplines would provide valuable data, but it would be beyond the scope of my dissertation. Similarly, the authority of the Internet and composing Webfolios for more “public” audiences would provide data that is far from complete in the literature; but this approach would also include more variables than my study can afford. Instead, my study and review focuses specifically on writing assessment theory and research which lays a foundation for the construction, presentation, and assessment of student digital portfolios in first-year composition.
The Process Writing Portfolio

Historically, teacher-researchers have been most interested in the “process writing portfolio,” a collection of “completed works, unfinished work, successful texts, texts that were abandoned, [and] ideas for writing” (D’Aoust 41). This interest generally stems from basic writing pedagogy, encouraging students to play more active roles in their learning (see also Linda Meeker’s “Pragmatic Politics”). And as I discussed in Chapter One, whereas the impulse to use portfolios in K-12 settings initially came from the need for a context-rich tool that was flexible enough for students to demonstrate personal voice, the impulse to use portfolios in post-secondary education came from the need for more accurate and authentic testing strategies (most notably, Belanoff and Dickson; Burch; Cambridge; Elbow and Belanoff, “Portfolios as a Substitute”; Ford and Larkin; Glazer and Brown; Hamp-Lyons and Condon; Hansen; Meeker; Murphy and Smith; Porter and Cleland; Roemer, Schultz, and Durst; Yancey; and Yancey and Weiser). This is a historical distinction, of course, as the interests of both communities have become much more integrated during the last two decades.

But at first, process writing portfolios were developed to fight grade inflation. James Ford and Gregory Larkin used them in the mid-1970s program-wide, for instance, to teach and calibrate instructors’ grading. They also used them to ensure that teachers using unique reading materials and writing prompts would not unwittingly assess student work differently than teachers using regularly adopted readers and more traditional assignments (Ford and Larkin 954). Portfolio assessment generally fosters teacher authority because it tends to
shape writing programs in ways that balance teacher creativity and academic standards (see Weiser, “Revising”).

Peter Elbow, Patricia Belanoff, and other teacher-administrators expanded Ford and Larkin's programmatic emphasis, and in the early 1980s portfolio assessment was often adopted to better solve administrative problems and better teach problem-solving skills to students. Gordon Brossell, in “Current Research and Unanswered Questions in Writing Assessment,” relates this need for well-administered portfolio systems clearly:

We know that for a valid test of writing performance, multiple writing samples written on different occasions and in various rhetorical modes are preferable to single samples drawn from an isolated writing instance. But given the sizable and growing populations of test takers and the increasing costs associated with administering tests to them, the problems of collecting and scoring multiple writing samples are formidable. Until we find ways to reduce testing costs and to improve the validity of the assessments, the whole enterprise is not likely to serve any purposes higher than routine sorting and certifying. (179)

Indeed, reliable, valid, and functionally efficient instructional and assessment tools became a dire need for many institutions in the late-1970s and early-1980s. Rather than simply evaluate students’ single-sample essays, teachers discovered that in addition to writing and revising multiple drafts, reflecting on this process through writing could demonstrate critical thinking (among others, see
Belanoff and Elbow; Ford and Larkin; Mahoney; Murray, “Internal Revision”; and Scholes and Kellogg). Teachers began to ask students to create collections that included multiple writing samples written at different times and in various rhetorical modes.

The discussion about the emergence of process-oriented writing approaches is often traced to Sondra Perl’s essay “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers” (1979) and Maxine Hairston’s “The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing” (1982). Building on these theories, teachers began to use process writing portfolios to allow students to present academic discourse by way of more familiar discourses, to “embrace the contraries” of academic and personal voice (Elbow, “Embracing”; and Elbow, “How”). In other words, teachers asked students to informally reflect on formal writing. Some institutions, such as SUNY-Stony Brook in 1986, because of the influence of basic writing pedagogy and open-entrance policies, as I mentioned in Chapter One, began to augment or replace proficiency exams with process writing portfolios.

Elbow and Belanoff were unsatisfied with the results of the proficiency exam implemented in 1977 at SUNY. This is a very important step in the history of portfolio writing assessment. Elbow and Belanoff began to recognize that portfolios could play the role of “quality control,” teaching process-oriented writing instruction within the context of assessment (“Portfolios” 5). In order to maintain reliability across the program, they adopted a strategy that was even more holistic than a scoring guide: a “communal assessment” team which assessed
portfolios either pass/fail (Yancey, “Looking” 492). This model involves a group “negotiation” process of calibrated grading rather than relying only on less-contextual training strategies.

The portfolio as both an assessment and instructional tool is an important and even more complex issue today. For instance, administrators are using portfolios to test quality control across larger groups. In many states—such as Indiana, Kentucky, Oregon, and Vermont—K-12 teachers create portfolios as part of the teacher certification process (Callahan; Huot and Williamson). Just as some teachers using portfolios in the 1970s and 1980s did so to give first-year composition students more opportunity to reflect on various discourse communities (Gold), teachers today often allow students to use hypermedia as a means to present multiple literacies (Rice, “Composing”).

But another important influence of basic writing scholarship in the history of portfolio theory is the value of community and collaboration. Belanoff and Elbow, for instance, because portfolios can be assessed by groups of teachers, suggest that portfolios fight against teacher isolation (31). Because portfolio rubrics or artifact guides can be designed by both teacher and student, portfolios have long been viewed as tools which foster collaboration. As compositionists placed more value in critique and process over product, so too did portfolio theorists concentrate on the impact portfolio construction has on collaboration (Weiser, “Revising”).

Other large-scale portfolio assessment models in the late-1980s and early-1990s have influenced changes in composition instruction across the
country, such as the portfolio-based basic writing program at Purdue University (Yagelski), the composition course exemption program at Miami University (Allen, et al.; Black et al.), the placement portfolio program at the University of Michigan (Condon, “Building”), the Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis / University of California at Los Angeles consortium (Young), the Electronic Portfolios Project at Georgia State University (Pullman), and the junior portfolio program at Washington State University (Condon, “WSU”). More recently, the Urban Universities Portfolio Project and institutional portfolio programs at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (Hamilton) and Portland State University (Ketcheson) have been demonstrating effective strategies to enhance the intellectual, social, and cultural milieu of students in various institutions. Further, the University of Texas at Austin’s “Learning Record Online,” developed by Margaret Syverson, is a new integrated system and infrastructure that will likely serve as a model for university-wide digital portfolio adoption programs at many institutions across the United States in the near future:

The Learning Record Online integrates research, assessment, and teaching and learning practices for computer-enhanced literacy development. [. . .] This information is now able to be collected and organized using a web-to-database application that includes a selection of student work, prepared over the course of a semester or school year. The Learning Record provides a way of accounting for learning that is richer and more meaningful than standardized
testing, yet provides much more consistency and comparability across student populations than conventional portfolio assessment. It can serve as the sole record of students’ achievement, or it can be used to inform and support conventional grading. For the first time classroom and large-scale assessment are seamlessly matched through the learning record system, allowing teachers and administrators to share best practices for improving teaching and learning. (Syverson)

Currently, for instance, Apple Computer is examining infrastructure needs that institutions like the University of Texas at Austin, Grossmont High School in San Diego, and Ball State University have been reporting, and is developing a “digital locker” or “eBackpack” system using iTools. “Change” and “transformation” are two words often used to describe the *outcomes* of portfolios and other findings in these programs and projects.

In another of Yancey’s collections, for instance, Irwin Weiser suggests that portfolios help teachers and students change the power relations and role of the teacher. In “Portfolio Practice and Assessment for Collegiate Basic Writers,” Weiser points out that teachers become facilitators (89-102). Giving a grade on an essay can be destructive because students often no longer see value in continuing to work with that essay. Instead, if separate artifacts have already received grades by the time the portfolio is being assembled, students can then reflect on their work. The teacher facilitates students’ holistic synthesizing and learning. Indeed, many studies in the late-1980s and early-1990s focus on how
portfolios transform the relationship between teacher and student (most notably Belanoff and Elbow; Elbow and Belanoff, “State University”; and Ingalls).

Ideally, students see classroom teachers as readers rather than primary raters in this model. This somewhat relieves teachers of the pressure to grade, enabling them to concentrate more on the process of writing. In other words, the teacher is theoretically more like a writing facilitator or coach rather than a final audience. This last point is crucial when considering outcomes of digital portfolio student presentations. That is, students generally compose digital portfolios—because of the malleability of the medium—with an eye toward a more authentic audience. In general, I have observed that teachers who use digital portfolios slip into the mode of facilitator or coach more fully than teachers using fixed-media portfolios. In Chapter Five I document some specific reasons why this might be the case.

Jan Bergamini, reflecting about her own teaching, suggests that portfolios have “changed the way we see our students as writers and as people. Because of our work with portfolios, we have altered the way we teach writing as well as the ways in which we talk to each other as members of an English department” (145). Portfolios impact community and collaboration. Kerry Weinbaum, in “Portfolios as a Vehicle for Student Empowerment and Teacher Change,” points out that in her experience the teacher is “no longer [on] center stage. I facilitated, answered questions, and joined reading and writing groups [and] the class had grabbed hold of the reins. They were now responsible for their own learning”
Portfolios also impact personal motivation and self-reflexivity through community and collaboration (Carter and Gradin).

It is clear that the changing roles of the teacher and student impact writing instruction and portfolio assessment in many ways. But teacher-researchers have not adequately investigated how this transforming relationship impacts content learning on the micro level. The complexities are very difficult to trace, perhaps, because the relationship between teacher and student is developing throughout the duration of a course at different rates for different students for different classes. At any given time students’ “felt-sense” of what their teacher does is somewhere between assessor and facilitator. This approach to assessment, one that is always already in the process of cross-checking its reliability, is much different than traditional testing methods. Yancey focuses on this point directly:

It’s worth noting that this model of assessment—one that emphasizes validity at the same time it re-contextualizes reliability—emerged from a different context than the one primarily responsible for shaping earlier assessments. During the first and second waves of writing assessment, the common reference point against and from which reform occurred was the placement exercise, which is conducted as an extra-curricular exercise, one prior to college matriculation. By contrast, in early iterations of programmatic portfolio assessment, the initial reference point is curriculum-based, occurring (like the AP exams) at the end of a
course—where it’s difficult to ignore the program you’ve just delivered, to bifurcate that program from a high-stakes assessment marking the students you’ve just taught in that program. (“Looking” 493)

In other words, in theory, because of the immediacy and context-based nature of process writing portfolio scoring, the process of creating a portfolio and its assessment is a more interconnected and authentic learning experience than meets the eye.

Indeed, the history of process writing portfolio assessment has been one that includes many overlapping trends and steps. First-year composition portfolios are now used for a variety of purposes. They help fight programmatic grade inflation and teacher isolation by contextual-based group calibration or “norming” sessions. This provides content consistency to a certain degree, as well as the means for more authentic assessment praxis, and helps solve other administrative problems such as the cost of administering standardized tests. And they generally teach students rhetorically-minded problem-solving skills while offering them a process-oriented venue for demonstrating critical thinking.

Still, portfolio adoption creates complex problems. There are three “unresolved” theoretical topics, according to Yancey, that permeate the literature, and these topics can be read in connection with the three challenges Hawisher and Selfe offer that I discussed in Chapter One (that technologies constantly change, that technology is not evenly distributed, and that computers and portfolios are more than just “tools”). Yancey’s topics: “(1) the nature of reading
processes and their relationship to assessment; (2) the role of scoring
procedures in an assessment; and (3) what writing assessments can teach us
when they are located in practice” (“Looking” 493). Ultimately, these are topics
that must be investigated by teacher-administrators within the contexts of their
own institutions. How should portfolios be read and assessed? What is the
benefit, for instance, of assessing individual artifacts and then a midterm and/or
final portfolio holistically, concentrating on reflection and connections between
artifacts in the portfolio? Or should the focus be more on the portfolio as a whole
rather than individual artifacts? Perhaps portfolios—as Elbow and Belanoff
hypothesize—should not be graded at all, given their complexities and frequent
focus on personal artifacts. Should they be read by teams of teachers outside the
classroom, and if so how does the perception and role of the classroom teacher
change (see Hamp-Lyons and Condon, “Questioning”)?

In the least, as Yancey suggests, the literature of the third wave “creat[es]
knowledge about assessment, of course, but also about our own practices”
(“Looking” 494). Portfolios provide a means to bridge the gap between the
classroom and the assessment of student work in programmatic contexts. But
just as writing is changing with new writing tools, so too are portfolios changing.
What happens when teachers add computer technology into the mix? In Situating
Portfolios: Four Perspectives (1997), one of the more significant texts on digital
portfolios in first-year composition, it becomes clear that the digital portfolio offers
additional challenges and affords new avenues for teaching and learning:
This portfolio is a new kind of “literacy portfolio,” an e-literacy portfolio perhaps, one characterized more by Cynthia Selfe’s notion of layered literacy than by print discourse. [. . .] Clearly, [the hypertextual] is no weakening of effect, and clearly, the questions generated by this kind of portfolio are numerous and go to the heart of what it is we think we mean when we use the word literacy.

(Yancey and Weiser 5-6)

**The Digital Portfolio**

Teachers investigating digital portfolios tend to write about how the portfolio is a space students can “inhabit” (this is a term Eric Crump—a leader in computer-mediated composition theory—often uses in conference presentations and workshops). In “Wedding the Technologies of Writing Portfolios and Computers: The Challenges of the Electronic Classroom,” for instance, perhaps the most significant article on the subject, Hawisher and Selfe theorize that “Teachers who use these technologies—many educational experts maintain—are capable of changing classrooms into exciting intellectual spaces where students and their texts are privileged” (306). Specifically how these classrooms are changed, and how digital portfolios are privileged, is not adequately demonstrated in the literature to date, however (see Selfe and Selfe).

In an article called “Computer Portfolios: Windows into the Mind” from a special issue of the *Iowa English Bulletin* on digital portfolios (1995), Lisa Thompson suggests:
Paper portfolios make neat packages of people and often impress those who choose to explore them. Literacy, however, is not this orderly. We speak, sing, perform, play with literacy, too, but these literacies cannot be included in the portfolios with which we are familiar. They cannot be captured on paper. (107)

This point is typical of current scholarship related to digital portfolios: teacher-researchers suggest the usefulness of hypermedia being able to express “self” more accurately, but do not document phenomena from classroom observation (see Cambridge; Campbell; Hawisher and Selfe; Tharon Howard; Lanham; Reiss, Selfe, and Young; Snyder; Wall and Peltier; and Wickliff). Another point often made is that computers are useful tools to collect and manage and assess portfolio artifacts (most notably Kimball; Purves; and Thompson). This is what many presenters focus on at conferences, such as Janice McIntire-Strasburg with “The Flash or the Trash?: Using Web Portfolios to Assess Student Writing” at Computers and Writing 2001. McIntire-Strasburg’s abstract reads:

   The flexibility of online or Web page portfolios offers clear opportunities for students to customize and analyze cross-situational differences in process and use that information to improve their writing across the semester. As an added bonus, it also allows them to view their personal process(es) and fine tune them through varied projects, giving them information that they can apply to situations throughout their writing lives. This paper intends
to explore assessment strategies and opportunities in Web portfolios.

McIntire-Strasburg’s presentation, however, focused on portfolio management and the ability to hyperlink meta-reflective comments to artifacts, but did not examine the impact on the process of writing in any detail. Indeed, there is little close analysis that proves theoretical principles underlying digital process writing portfolios in conference sessions, journal articles, and books. While there are many theories, and even though this is a relatively hot topic in English Studies today, the literature does not specifically examine how portfolio construction and storage using digital tools impacts the writing process.

In The Web Portfolio Handbook: A Guide for Students Creating Web Portfolios (2002), for an even more recent example, Miles Kimballprefaces his forthcoming text by pointing out that best work portfolios are useful in a variety of fields (the manuscript Longman asked me to review does not have page numbers and this text is not yet published; Kimball provided me his permission to discuss his work in this dissertation). Yes, this is true. And Kimball goes on to point out that the Web enables students to showcase their work to authentic audiences; to create powerful, flexible, and exciting portfolios by using multimedia; to more readily market themselves; and to store portfolios efficiently. This is also true. Portfolios in general and digital portfolios specifically enable these things. Kimball’s introduction discusses the technology needed. The first chapter suggests how to plan a Webfolio using different programs. Chapters two and three discuss how to create a digital portfolio using specific technologies and
techniques, including the use of audio and video. And chapters four, five, and six relate how to revise, edit, publish, and publicize Webfolios. But how does this process improve a student’s writing skills?

While this particular text is a useful handbook to teach the technology involved in constructing digital portfolios, Kimball’s audience is not the first-year composition instructor or administrator who is interested in knowing how this tool impacts content-specific learning. Instead, Kimball’s audience is more general, one who is concentrating more on technology than literacy at this point, one who wants to know how to build digital portfolios rather than how the construction process impacts teaching and learning directly. This is emblematic of digital portfolio literature and training. Of the twelve articles in the special *Computers and Composition* 13.2 issue, for instance, ten are primarily focused on sequencing technologies (Yancey, “Special Issue”).

One of the articles from this collection, Pamela Takayoshi’s “The Shape of Electronic Writing: Evaluating and Assessing Computer-Assisted Writing Processes and Products,” does hint at the impact of digital portfolio assessment on the process of writing. In this article Takayoshi discusses how the “seamless” flow of text, hypertextual thinking, and “publishing” words in online environments “carry implications for how teachers read, respond to, and evaluate student writing” (245). There is a large body of scholarship that investigates electronic text and using computers to teach writing. Takayoshi combines a summary of this literature with portfolio pedagogy and Brian Huot’s interest in reliability and validity, and creates four questions which have an implicit role in my study:
1. How do electronic changes in processes and products affect the kinds of writing instructors assign to students?

2. How do those changing expectations affect reader expectations and, thus, assessment?

3. What problems arise when instructors apply traditional assessment and response models to electronic texts?

4. What new, alternative models might address and account for the differences between electronic and print texts? (254)

These questions in and of themselves have become the research questions of many dissertations. Most teacher-researchers, however, answer these questions in terms of their technological implications only. I use them to help focus my study on teaching and learning the writing process.

Although Kimball’s handbook and articles like Takayoshi’s are very useful for many teachers and students across the disciplines, the proliferation and continued enthusiasm for portfolio pedagogy in general—and digital portfolio pedagogy specifically—has led many theorists to warn teachers about adopting portfolios too hastily without thinking through pedagogical ramifications. New media resources are often packaged and delivered without all of the pedagogical concerns addressed. Edward Kearns in a 1993 article in *WPA: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators* warns against “the portfolio bandwagon.” Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon in “Questioning Assumptions about Portfolio-Based Assessment” (1993) encourage readers to consider the impact of portfolios on the entire English Studies curriculum. Edward White in
Teaching and Assessing Writing (1998) suggests that portfolios can only be reliable if they are national; but in “Portfolios and the Process of Change,” a 1999 article in College Composition and Communication, Marjorie Roemer, Lucille Schultz, and Russell Durst argue that portfolios are always already contextual and therefore should be small-scale even in light of burgeoning networking tools which lend themselves to large-scale portfolio systems. And Hamp-Lyons and Condon in Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Practice, Theory, and Research (2000) relate many examples of what happens when the portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment process is not persistently questioned. These many views indicate the need for further study on the micro level.

I have witnessed the digital portfolio “bandwagon” in Illinois, Indiana, Oregon, and other states. But “going electronic” for technology’s sake carries some problems. In what ways should future digital portfolio teachers be warned? What do they need to know?

I am a member of the Digital Portfolio Task Force at Ball State University in the Teacher’s College, a group working through similar questions and attempting to answer them on a university-wide scale as part of a U.S. Department of Education “Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technology Project” grant. The mission of this group is to “develop campus-wide policies and programs for integrating digital portfolios into the teacher education program. [And] to make recommendations to the Teacher Education Committee” at BSU (Stuve, “Information: Digital Portfolio Task Force”). In other words, we are investigating how digital portfolios might work programmatically for teacher
education, and this kind of inquiry is taking place in many post-secondary institutions across the country.

In the March 2002 status report, Laurie Mullen outlines this work specifically, pointing out that “Our institution has identified student digital portfolios as one performance assessment instrument for demonstration of multiple competencies.” She goes on to document how the infrastructure for this work is being investigated on the university level, but hints at the need for further discipline-specific studies:

In recent years, a number of portfolio types have been used on our campus by faculty from a variety of disciplines. The medium of these portfolios has included paper, PowerPoint, and the World Wide Web. Likewise, the specific purpose of the portfolios has varied according to the needs of the discipline and the preferences of the faculty member teaching the course. As the university began to discuss a campus wide portfolio model for teacher education, it was recognized that this cross-disciplinary expertise should be utilized, and that a consensus to emerge as to the type of portfolio best suited for teacher education. (1)

One problem the PT3 Digital Portfolio Task Force at BSU continues to come back to is how to reliably assess portfolios across the program when what is valued in portfolios is often presented in unique ways. In other words, how can a template-like infrastructure be designed that leaves room for individual creativity? A “rubricator” is being developed to embrace these contraries (see Stuve,
“PT3@BSU” for the latest version of the “BSU Teacher Education Portfolio Conceptual Map”). This is the gap that fixed-media portfolios were originally designed to bridge, of course, the gap between assessment and what goes on inside the classroom. But when you add digital technology to the mix, the benefits of the added flexibility and obvious wide-scale accountability possibilities complicate teachers’ notions of a portfolio’s purpose.

What our task force and what teacher-administrators often come back to in order to elucidate what is really important in digital portfolios—even general teacher education portfolios—are discipline-specific goals. Laurie Mullen, Bill Bauer, and Webster Newbold, members of our task force, recently published an online article about three digital portfolio models that are being used at Ball State:

Our Portfolio Task Force has examined three approaches to electronic portfolios that have come in some cases from our collective experiences with smaller scale development efforts with e-portfolios in disciplinary courses. These represent three possible points of approach that highlight strengths which could be incorporated into a general teacher education assessment process, but which also need further refinement and testing in program and course contexts.

These models include the “open-ended Webpage model,” the “template-based Webpage model,” and the “autobiographical’ model for developmental reflection.” It is literature about specific models for specific contexts which best
informs my study. Student digital portfolio research, however, is the most underrepresented category in the literature.

**Student Digital Portfolios**

Barbara Cambridge is the general editor of *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (2001). This collection includes the sections “Student Portfolios,” “Faculty Portfolios,” and “Institutional Portfolios” (see Whithaus). The seven articles in the first section are the most useful to my study. Kathleen Blake Yancey is the section editor for these chapters. She concludes this section by reflecting on general patterns in student digital portfolio literature, includes a hypothesis about the future, and challenges readers with a question that directly relates to my research: “Where student electronic portfolios have worked, why have they worked?” (Yancey, “Digitized Student Portfolios” 83).

For Yancey, digital portfolios help solve the problem of long-term artifact storage. But she goes further, which is something that 90 percent of the literature I have reviewed does not do. She follows up on Hawisher and Selfe’s theory that portfolios “provide a new kind of space for intellectual work and opportunities to connect and represent that intellectual work in new ways” (Hawisher and Selfe 306). Yancey argues that digital portfolios enable students to make connections between ideas in a course, between different disciplines, and between different learning communities more readily than fixed-media portfolios (see also Springfield, “Comparing”).
Yancey shares a heuristic for the design and creation of student digital portfolios, a summary of key points from this section of the book. This heuristic is a list of questions about purpose, reading and writing electronic portfolios, technological literacy needs, and presentation and assessment:

- What is/are the purpose/s?
- How familiar is the portfolio concept?
- Who wants to create an electronic portfolio, and why?
- Who wants to read an electronic portfolio, and why?
- Why electronic? What about electronic is central to the model? And is sufficient infrastructure (resources, knowledge, commitment) available for the electronic portfolio?
- What processes are entailed? What resources are presumed?
- What faculty development component does the model assume or include?
- What skills will students need to develop?
- What curricular enhancement does the model assume or include?
- How will the portfolio be introduced?
- How will the portfolio be reviewed? (84-86)

Some of these questions sound familiar because they serve to outline issues I have already raised in the first two chapters of this dissertation. These questions all fall under the categories “construction,” “presentation,” and “assessment.” As such, they effectively summarize the topics of the literature available on student digital portfolios. As Yancey writes, these questions enable us to bring many of
the concepts of process portfolio pedagogy to a discussion about the design and creation of student digital portfolios (84).

*Constructing* a digital portfolio gives rise to many “teachable moments.” In the literature, teachers hint that creating a hyperlink can be likened to creating a transition between paragraphs or ideas (Jenkins; Landow; Reiss; and Springfield, “Comparing”). Simply put, hyperlinks are like transitions in that they both imply and/or explicitly state relationships between pieces of texts and/or artifacts (Landow calls this the “rhetoric of expectation” with regard to hypertext). And if constructing is like writing, a portfolio’s presentation requires the teacher to address the importance of audience and the rhetorical situation (Barrett; Fischer; and Rice, “Composing”). This includes discussion about navigational schemes.

My study offers useful findings that attempt to describe the process of learning through digital portfolio presentation. Gregory Wickliff highlights presentation, as well as some of the intricacies of digital portfolio assessment, in *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives* (1997) (see also Allen, *et al.*; Hamp-Lyons and Condon; Hult; and Zalatan). Wickliff tells the story of his experience setting up the digital portfolio process, emphasizing methods and strategies he used to prepare students for both student and teacher assessment of their work:

> The effect of collecting all of these exhibits in a single portfolio was to give a definite structure to the students’ arguments for development and for the overall quality of the final product. I told students from the first day of class that incomplete portfolios would
not be evaluated. The threat worked. They went on to save versions of everything that they created. (327)

This “threat” is a pedagogical strategy that Wickliff reports he augmented throughout the semester. Various self-reflective “mini-assessments” became teaching tools which students built into their portfolios, adding supplemental meta-reflection. The “mini-assessment” methods and strategies teachers design and implement for digital portfolios, and the thinking they use to develop scoring guides and other heuristics, are significant components my study documents as well (for more information about related methods and strategies such as “power” in portfolio creation, see Blair and Takayoshi; Kelly; and Mahoney).

The process portfolio literature that examines how students come to construct their work directly informs Yancey’s heuristic for student digital portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment. For instance, in Writing Your Portfolio (1999), Beth Burch discusses the components of a portfolio and how students should come to understand them. She points out that students should know their best and weakest pieces, their strengths and weaknesses as writers, the requirements the teacher has set out for the portfolio, additional/optional artifacts to include, and if there are any physical or arrangement requirements (357-58). Burch highlights the importance of knowing the portfolio’s audience. And when she discusses digital portfolios she emphasizes the importance of reflecting on the media used, how the display impacts the content, and if the portfolio is scalable. Similarly, Yancey highlights the significance of purpose and audience to digital portfolios succinctly: “An electronic portfolio needs to have an
authentic purpose, needs to be social, and needs to be integrated into the academic and intellectual lives of both students and faculty” (Cambridge 84).

Furthermore, portfolio construction and presentation are emphasized in *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research* (1997), Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Stone Sunstein’s text on ethnographic research strategies. There is a connection to be made between reading (or “inhabiting”) the “self” and reading cultures. According to Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein:

> We all read differently. Literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt suggests that a reader’s main instrument for making meaning is the self. And meaning is an intertwining of our past reading experiences, current tastes, attitudes about genres and forms, and history of teachers, mentors, friends, and relatives. [. . .] No one reads exactly as you do because no one has exactly the same experiences. (47)

How teachers construct the requirements of student digital portfolios, such as defining “internal” and “external” linking, navigational schema, and artifact contents, indicates how teachers recognize and foresee different threads coming together (see Jenkins; Reiss; Rice, “Composing”; and Springfield, “Kalamazoo”). In my study I document how throughout a course teachers can find it useful to hint at these connections so that students can begin to read their own experience. Their experience can then be presented through digital media (thinking represented as writing). In fact, the literature often suggests teachers should use dialogue journals for this purpose (Belanoff and Dickson; Carter and Gradin; Gill; Yancey and Weiser). Students’ experience intertwines with new
learning. But the methods and strategies teachers use to accomplish this, especially with writing instruction using digital portfolio pedagogy, needs to be formally observed and documented so that these techniques can be refined, shared, and shaped to benefit others.

Here is one example from the literature that demonstrates this broken link. In a chapter on portfolio assessment in *An Overview of Writing Assessment: Theory, Research, and Practice* (1998), Willa Walcott and Sue Legg point out the importance of providing students a purpose and procedure for creating a portfolio. And they highlight strategies to introduce the portfolio, ordering logical details, the importance of content selection, and student and teacher “interior” and “exterior” reflection and evaluation. However, when they relate how portfolios work as collaborative tools and how they work to aid the revision process, their discussion is limited to “engagement,” the possibility of “exploring creativity,” and conventional “peer-editing” (40-42). In my experience, digital portfolio construction involves other complex factors. The ease of sharing information, the flexibility and malleability of electronic text, and the opportunity to provide layers of meta-reflection call for re-directed teaching methods and strategies (for these reasons, a number of institutions—such as Texas Tech, Utah State, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison—are examining “hybrid” course delivery models programmatically). Walcott and Legg’s discussion is limited because the intersection between technological literacy and writing instruction using digital portfolios has not been fully explored.
The Web Portfolio Handbook: A Guide for Students Creating Web Portfolios (mentioned earlier in this chapter) serves as another example that is worth highlighting again. In this handbook Miles Kimball suggests creating periodic reflections for each essay and class activity. According to Kimball, these reflections alter the process of writing, instilling each writing activity with an authentic reflective component. Each component can be collected and holistically considered toward the end of the semester, as well. The artifacts can easily be connected with hyperlinks. Kimball doesn’t relate what kind of learning takes place in this process, however. Further, there are many additional methods and strategies characteristic to digital portfolio building in the networked writing classroom which impact students’ learning of the writing process. What are these methods and strategies, exactly? And how do they impact writing instruction at Ball State?

In “The ‘Autobiography’ Model For Developmental Reflection” (Fall 2001), one section of the aforementioned article published by members of the BSU Digital Portfolio Task Force in Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy, W. Webster Newbold relates his experience working with digital portfolios and English majors in our department. Newbold uses the technique of centering the digital portfolio around a personal literacy narrative, encouraging capstone course students to use essays and other compositions created for previous classes to explain the narrative. This literacy autobiography is, as Newbold describes it, “a critical retrospective which engages students in reflection about their mental development along with creatively communicating
and defending that reflection.” In the first-year composition course, however, students do not have the same experience or number of artifacts the capstone course students have. A first-year composition portfolio is a different animal. Rather than tracing themes across artifacts, in my experience, first-year composition students tend to focus on writing techniques and strategies within artifacts. This focus fosters much reflection and active learning, however, and is the kind of learning from which first-year composition students in our program benefit.

Newbold’s article convincingly argues for in-depth, summative study of student digital portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment in our first-year composition program, and is worth quoting at length:

To bring electronic portfolios into a position of significant instrumentality in teaching and learning in our department, we would have to evaluate the whole range of work in terms of its quality, in addition to looking, as I did, at how well students reflected on and assembled their reflections in my senior seminar. In other words, we would need to carry out summative evaluation in addition to the mainly formative evaluation I have done thus far. To accomplish this summative individual as well as program evaluation in the English curriculum, a number of significant changes in attitude, expectations, procedures, and administration would be needed. Such changes are already under way in the teacher education curriculum, driven by external political forces as well as
internal desires for reform. Whether we can work in individual departments to prepare the ground for authentic assessment through portfolios is an open question. If we can, we have an excellent opportunity to change the direction and emphasis of college teaching to achieve better guidance of students, more positive attitudes toward learning, more convincing evidence of our own effectiveness, and more concrete demonstrations of the value we add to students' lives.

One purpose of this dissertation is to play a role in investigating whether changing or transforming our undergraduate curriculum to embrace digital portfolio pedagogy generally—and within first-year composition specifically—is valuable. The literature overwhelmingly points to the benefits of using process portfolios as authentic, reliable assessment tools if they are contextually rooted. Portfolio pedagogy capitalizes on student voice while programmatically calibrating teaching praxis. When you add digital media into the mix, this process is altered. My study begins to describe how.

To date, no studies exist which examine how the construction, presentation, and assessment of student digital portfolios in first-year composition directly impact stages in the writing process. But the literature points to a convergence of process portfolio pedagogy and digital media. How does using “common tools” like Microsoft Word® and Microsoft PowerPoint® to construct digital portfolios impact how students draft and revise their work? Is the instructor teaching writing through the process of presenting how to select,
manage, and arrange artifacts for a digital portfolio? What do students learn about writing when they collaborate and critique their digital portfolios? To answer these questions, I have conducted a multi-modal analysis of data gathered from overlaying various research methods. A description of these methodologies and methods is presented in the following chapter.
Chapter Three

Methodology and Methods

When writing assessment is located within practice, its validity is enhanced, to be sure. But equally important, it reflects back to us that practice, the assumptions undergirding it, the discrepancy between what it is that we say we value and what we enact. It helps us understand, critique and enhance our own practice, in other words, because of its location—in practice—and because it makes that practice visible and thus accessible to change. (494)

– Kathy Yancey, “Looking Back as We Look Forward”

The Problem

After assessing many first-year composition digital portfolios, I have discovered that student success varies widely. The body of scholarship surrounding process portfolio literacy instruction reveals three areas of focus which examine why: construction, presentation, and assessment. Construction comprises technological literacy instruction, presentation can be defined in terms of navigational schemes and audience awareness, and assessment includes scoring guides and self-evaluative reflection. My experience and review of the literature has led to my sharpening a research question that guides this
dissertation. It is important to rearticulate my question and its specific components in order to discuss the methodological theory and practical methods my study employs, as well as the assumptions that underlie my interest in this topic.

My research question examines a number of writing processes: *How does the construction, presentation, and assessment of first-year composition student digital portfolios appear to impact drafting, revision, collaboration, critique, and reflective writing?* My unit of analysis, as such, includes the instructor, students, and student portfolios. In other words, my study examines the writing process in a specific context. Table 3.1 categorizes the fifteen specific components of my research question. I focus my research on these intersections for both teaching and learning; for instance, how constructing digital portfolios impacts the teaching and learning of drafting; how presenting digital portfolios impacts the teaching and learning of collaboration; and how assessing digital portfolios impacts the teaching and learning of reflective writing.

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Table 3.1. Research Question Components

I use all of these research components to guide what sort of data is important to record rather than as a coding heuristic, because the writing process is ultimately an integrated process. That is, for instance, we are always already collaborating when drafting or revising when reflecting and so on. I was not limited to these
specific components, but used them simply to remind me about the scope of my
dissertation. The resultant coding guide that presents itself through the process
of grounded theory therefore enables me to relate significant findings that draw
from my specific research question components but are also more holistically
rooted in the process of writing itself. It is for this reason that my research
question components do not ultimately serve as the resultant coding guide itself:
the components identify how the data might relate to the process of writing, but
the resultant coding guide inquires how the writing process and digital portfolio
construction, presentation, and assessment processes interrelate.

Still, it is necessary for some quick definitions, here: drafting is the process
of generating a written composition, including prewriting strategies and informal
writing that leads to formal writing. Revision involves reshaping and resubmitting
drafts. Collaboration includes reading and writing exercises, group project work,
and general cooperation amongst students. Critique is the process of exchanging
compositions or pieces of compositions and offering commentary. Reflective
writing is evaluative writing about one’s own work or effort. The manner in which
the teacher designs these processes is just as important as the ways in which
students learn through completing them.

Underlying Assumptions

In *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices*
(1997), Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter point out the importance of
reflecting epistemologically on research questions like mine:
So what’s wrong with treating research questions as a starting point? Nothing, when the political and ethical positioning of the questions is made manifest. A lot, when the framing of the research questions appears to make them neutral or innocent. At times, the focus on the question as the motivating factor can block new research avenues, by restricting researchers to asking the same questions, or the same types of questions, again and again (what we have seen happen in much of the research in computers and composition). Disciplinary breakthrough comes when the form of the question itself is challenged, and that can only occur, we argue, by installing methodological reflexivity [...] into the very act of framing the questions. (5)

My question is certainly not “neutral or innocent”; I have framed it this way for specific reasons. It is important to examine these reasons. My study purposefully describes how digital portfolio pedagogy “appears to impact” both teaching and learning processes in first-year composition. As such, this is a descriptive or summative study more so than it is a formative approach.

My area of investigation includes composing skills and practices; that knowledge can and should be based on descriptive observation rather than variable testing (as in a true experimental study paradigm) is one assumption of my study. Further, I am favoring a bottom-up approach where interpretation is suggested by data and valid inferences can be made through systematic evaluation of that data. Of course, this qualitative approach is a classic analytical
strategy. And I rely on a constructivist understanding of knowledge creation, wherein knowledge is created by people whose actions can be studied (as opposed to a positivist view that knowledge exists on its own, waiting to be discovered).

There are many underlying pedagogical and operational assumptions that must be addressed, as well. For instance, I am assuming that using portfolios to teach literacy is a productive strategy. I am also assuming that the ever-increasing use of technology in the field of composition warrants continued study of student digital portfolios. My review of the literature in the previous chapter provides a strong foundation for the value of portfolios and paying attention to technological literacy in first-year composition instruction. Likewise, I am assuming that key components in the writing process include drafting, revision, collaboration, critique, and reflective writing. Again, the field of composition studies has convincingly proven that these topics are important in both the writing process and portfolio praxis. I am going one step further by assuming that the process model is a reasonable basis for “discovering” my data and organizing my research preliminarily before using grounded theory, and by suggesting the process model also includes key components of digital portfolio teaching and learning.

An important part of literacy instruction in general, after all, is making connections between artifacts. Instructors sequence readings and assignments for specific purposes. Each formal writing builds on what students learned in the previous assignment. Portfolios are tools which enable students to present
various connections between artifacts like these, such as learning between drafts or learning by reflecting over similarities and differences between assignments. Students can also use portfolios to reflect on how working with peers and peers’ papers help them think about revision. And if fixed-media portfolios can aid the writing process, then I am assuming that it stands to reason that constructing, presenting, and assessing *digital* portfolios can as well.

But digital portfolio instruction, because of the need for teaching and learning specific technological and other mediating literacy skills, involves additional writing experiences. These experiences must be investigated in specific contexts because portfolio pedagogy is by its very nature context-based. As such, the problem I analyze is context-specific and what I describe may not necessarily be the case outside this context. In other words, what “appears to impact” teaching and learning in my study may be the result of a specific setting and my approaches to documenting and making sense of observable phenomena within that setting.

**Methodology**

In order to investigate these processes, I need to gather data about teaching and learning with digital portfolios. In other words, I need to do empirical research. Janice Lauer and William Asher define empirical research as “the process of developing systematized knowledge gained from observations that are formulated to support insights and generalizations about the phenomena under study” (7), including the classification, organization, and interpretation of
observations. Lauer and Asher highlight four general principles of empirical research: it involves making comparisons; it requires the use of measurement instruments which are by their very nature imprecise; it enables practitioners to make teaching and administrative decisions; and it involves many complex dimensions of human behavior (7-8). Considering how these principles impact my research is important.

The first principle of empirical research, according to Lauer and Asher, is that knowledge is discovered through comparison (7). One set of comparisons which seems obvious to make in my area of study is the teaching and learning similarities and differences between digital and fixed-media portfolios. Studying these similarities and differences is problematic, however (see Emily Springfield’s 2001 article, “Comparing Electronic and Paper Portfolios”). Phenomena resulting from teaching and learning with either fixed-media or digital portfolios can not be easily distinguished from portfolio pedagogy in general. Comparing these portfolio types reliably would require a relatively large experimental study using exact variable testing with quantifiable control groups. Such a study would need to include many randomly selected subjects and would be most accurate if longitudinal. This is beyond the scope of my work at this time. But another useful comparison is between students’ digital portfolios. How an instructor teaches with digital portfolios can be examined in the context of how her students learn with them, as well. My study documents teaching and learning processes.

The second principle of empirical research that Lauer and Asher highlight is that measurement instruments are inexact (8). Instruments can be reliable and
valid, but they will never definitively present everything that takes place. Further, teaching and learning environments are highly complex. And my question calls for documenting and measuring phenomena for which I did not have specific categories at the beginning of my study. Components to my research question now enable me to pay attention to specific areas, but I did not know what the qualities of the data I collected would be until after I collected it. Whereas quantitative research attempts to define observable phenomena and then interrelate or compare known variables using statistical variances, qualitative research is more often used to study individuals, small groups, or whole environments in order to first identify these variables (23).

Qualitative methodology allows knowledge and knowledge categories to emerge from human situations; it is more open and less limited to predetermined categories that might encourage hierarchical or simplistic analyses for complex phenomena like portfolio composing and assembling. In other words, qualitative methodology enables me to be in a position to discover useful insights that I would not have been able to see or document quantitatively. These insights, in turn, enable me to develop an efficient coding heuristic. No guide exists which does not limit my data collection. For instance, I document related experiences and stories of my research subjects and hypothesize how this information impacts other data. This is one of the primary challenges Hawisher and Selfe offer that I discussed in Chapters One and Two. A quantitative approach or even a pre-existing coding guide limits the potential for these data connections.
Limitations of measurement instruments help elucidate limitations and benefits of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

Lauer and Asher’s third principle of empirical research is that it uses the results from measurements and comparisons to make practical teaching choices, such as alternative pedagogies, learning environments, and curriculum design improvements (8). In this study I record experience and complex social factors that appear to impact learning. In order to assess pedagogy, the environment, and the curriculum, however, and in order to offer recommendations on how to maximize their potential, immersion in the teaching and learning situation is absolutely crucial.

The best way to manage immersion, generally, is to take an ethnographic stance. With an ethnographic research model I look at subjects and their artifacts in context, as Lauer and Asher suggest: “to understand human behavior which occurs in a natural setting, one must view it as a part of that environment” (39). Portfolio pedagogy depends on the context of the learner, the teacher, the tools available, and the standards required. And ethnographic research strives to collect as much in-depth data as possible. Still, even though general data about the teaching of the class is necessary to begin to answer my research question, specific data about the learning of the course material by way of portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment is needed as well. As Catharine Lucas points out about portfolio studies, we need “Ethnographic research that ‘looks into’ [ . . . ] portfolios rather than attempts to prove them worthwhile” (7). In addition to a descriptive, ethnographic stance, then, case study is also a helpful
model. The case study is a research methodology which enables the researcher to closely examine a small number of subjects. The ethnographic case study approach enables me to organize and carry out an examination of specific phenomena within a larger teaching and learning context.

Being immersed in the research setting is a reflection of Lauer and Asher’s fourth principle of empirical research. Lauer and Asher point out that people and environments change over time (8). As a result, human behavior creates many variables to my research. In my own teaching experience, for instance, I have found that my teaching methods and strategies are most effective if they are flexible and can change according to the rhetorical situation and specific needs and interests of the class. Good teaching is student-centered. But flexible teaching can be problematic for those with research agendas. A predetermined system of categories to classify the data collected, for instance, needs to somewhat predict potential classroom changes as well as their causes in order to have a large enough scope. However, as I am interested in documenting change itself, I need an approach to guide me from raw data to useful data categories. But the two general approaches to the analysis of qualitative data most commonly used in empirical research studies like mine are unsatisfactory.

Oftentimes researchers convert qualitative data into crudely quantifiable forms to conditionally test a hypothesis. The data is coded first and then analyzed and theorized. But the coding heuristics that are currently available are designed for fixed-media portfolios or for interactions involving technological
literacy. There is currently no classification system designed to code data that cross-references the first-year composition writing process and the construction, presentation, and assessment of student digital portfolios. And as I mentioned in Chapter 2, to use or generate a prefabricated guide would restrict and limit my study to be something less accurate.

The second general approach is for the researcher to create theoretical suppositions and then slightly adapt them to reflect coded properties. What is needed in English studies, however, rather than more relatively vague theoretical ideas, as I’ve also written about in Chapter 2, is in-depth research on the micro level that describes what is happening to teaching and learning first-year composition with digital portfolios. Instead, grounded theory (a recursive combination of these two approaches) provides the bridge my study needs.

Grounded theory is a proven means of “discovering theory from data” (Glaser and Strauss 1). In “Grounded Theory: A Critical Research Methodology,” Joyce Magnotto Neff explains that this approach to developing a coding structure orders and examines conceptual relationships in order to generate theory (125). This involves a recursive process or “constant” comparison method of data collected, identifying and narrowing categories according to specific properties. Each reading of the data becomes more structured, elucidating “generalizable” categories and theories. Neff suggests that a starting point is to read the data to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomena documented. Next, the researcher should re-read the data and take notes. Important observations should be recorded. After the second reading, a description of points that can be
identified as significant patterns should be compiled as a memo (129). (These memos are more holistic, of course, than the post-class session reflections I use in my research journal.)

Grounded theory enables me to see patterns across the fifteen components of my research question. For this reason my research question components do not adequately serve as a coding guide. The components are helpful in discovering pertinent data, but not for making sense of the data as a collection. For instance, my data suggests that the impact of digital portfolio construction appears to be related to making transitions between ideas in the drafting process. Relating this in terms of its distinct categories is less significant and complete then relating it the larger process writing context. As the data collection and coding proceeded, the categories and the memos accumulated and objects of study surfaced. I then began to code the data in an even more structured way. I outline my final coding heuristic later in this chapter, and as I present the data in Chapter Four I further explain how I arrived at each core category through open and axial coding.

In other words, this coding procedure can be divided into three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Figure 3.1). In the open coding stage, I went to the data to begin to determine categories of occurrences in my study. I labeled pertinent general types of activities and then began to separate these activities into general categories. Once the data were collected and the list of applicable categories complete, I began axial coding. In this stage I determined distinct properties which signified each category. This enabled me to
create what grounded theory calls “core categories,” primary groups that I use to name sections or significant connections within the data. With the core categories in place, I moved to the selective coding stage. Here I reviewed all the data I collected again and looked for examples of teaching and learning the writing process with digital portfolios which did not fit my core categories. This process (Figure 3.1) enables me to attribute the remaining pertinent data to core categories, and to begin to theorize how exceptions to the categories impacted my study.

![Grounded Theory Coding Stages](image)

Figure 3.1. Grounded Theory Coding Stages

Through these three coding stages I articulate significant theories which directly relate to and are traceable from the data.

Thus, given my question’s fifteen components and the contextual-based topic of student digital portfolios, three established empirical research tools have been most useful within an overall qualitative methodology: ethnography, case
study, and grounded theory. Qualitative methodology enables me to more fully
document the complexities involved in my study. Ethnographic methodology
helps me gain a more complete and reliable view of interactions and behaviors
that took place in a class of which I was a part. Case study methodology offers
additional opportunities to select, study, and discuss more specifically focused
data. And grounded theory provides a strategy for developing, classifying, and
coding patterns in the data. These research methodologies have their own
theoretical limitations, just as the specific data collecting methods I use have their
own practical limitations.

1. Theoretical Limitations of Ethnographic Case Studies

In “Ethnography and Composition: Studying Language at Home,” a chapter in
Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan’s collection on methods and methodology,
Beverly J. Moss describes the goal of an ethnographic study: “to study, explore,
and describe a group’s culture” (Moss 155). As I have already mentioned, to
accomplish these goals, the ethnographic researcher must become a member of
the group while establishing a position that allows for reliable study and reflection
about the group. This enables the researcher “to take pictures of the community
(through fieldwork) and be in the picture at the same time, something that other
research methods frown upon” (154).

My research question and the methods I used to document its
components required that I be part of the group I study. I observed, interviewed,
recorded activities, collected and assessed writings and other portfolio artifacts,
surveyed, and became familiar with the in-class routines of the subjects I investigated. It was my responsibility before data was collected to make my participant-observer position clear to those involved, including the limitations and biases that would come with collecting and analyzing data. And I did so. The tacit relationship between the participant-observer and his subjects is one that always requires careful reflection.

For instance, the presence of the investigator in ethnographic research impacts how the subjects negotiate their work. And the point of view I write from impacts my findings. As Kirsch suggests in “Methodological Pluralism: Epistemological Issues,” the “rhetorical stance of research reports contributes as much to the making of knowledge in composition research as does the methodology used. In the end, any research report is a form of narration, a story about a selected set of observations” (265). Case studies also have the problem of generalization. Traditionally, experimental studies with random samplings which specifically compare and contrast measurable situations have been recognized as more “scientific,” based on the assumption of statistical generalizability (moving from a random sampling to a larger population). It is assumed that the data collected from these studies can be readily generalized and applied in other venues. But the case study, as Kirsch and Sullivan point out, contextually “seeks the assent of the reader, primarily through a depiction of the learner that corresponds to individuals the reader has known” (7). In other words, in order for others to make use of my findings, my study needs to be reviewed by readers within the framework of both the context of my study and their own
teaching and learning environments. In so doing my naturalistic study has
generalizability. My inquiry is just as rigorous and important as any other model.
That is, my findings come from my observations about a very specific
pedagogical approach to computer-mediated writing instruction, a lens that must
be shaped in order to look at how these findings might relate in other contexts.
My study embraces analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization.

In “The Narrative Roots of the Case Study,” Newkirk reflects on how
researchers can reliably move from a single case to a whole population. In a
case study, the researcher sorts through a large collection of descriptive
information, and writes about incidences which are characteristic of many other
like observable phenomenon (132). This is very important: my findings relate
what happened in the classroom I studied rather than what I would like to have
seen happen. What results in this model is a glimpse at reality (or at least a
relatively strong version of it) as compared to more experimental “context-less”
studies. But even though case study researchers often set up coding procedures
and systems of inter-rater reliability that result in findings that read like research
reports, I recognize that the data I present in the next chapter makes a subjective
narrative. I write what I saw from my own perspective. As Newkirk advises:

To write a case study that works, the writer needs to see the data in
terms of one of a variety of culturally grounded narratives. The
writer “author-izes” the data, and in doing so faces the same
problem that confronts the biographer or historian who, according
to Scholes and Kellogg, “is looking for aesthetically satisfying
patterns in the people or events he considers as potential subjects for his work” (217). To create these aesthetic patterns, the writer must also assign moral weight to the actions of characters, for as Hayden White has effectively argued, we cannot “narratize” without moralizing (27). Real events do not conclude as narratives do; and they could only seem to consummate in conclusions through the imposition of some moral framework that allows us to feel satisfied by the ending. (135)

I keep Newkirk’s advice in mind as I collect and process the data. And it should be noted that in order to make my study work I needed to collect as much data as possible within the scope of the study, and then look for patterns. If I had looked for patterns as I collected data I might have “seen” evidence which was not really there. I would not be following grounded theory methodology. In the least, I might have misdirected what I was determining as useful to include in my field notes.

Case study narratives are often transformative because researchers want to highlight student growth and learning. In other words, researchers often write about the changes which take place during a study instead of documenting each step fully. It is easier for observers to recognize change than it is to recognize routine. Researchers often write more about positive changes than negative outcomes. But it is significant to note how specific teaching methods and strategies, for instance, do not promote student growth and learning. Routine can
be illuminating. I present methods and strategies that both appeared to meet and not meet the objectives of the course I studied.

2. Practical Limitations of Research Procedure

The subjects of my study include one first-year composition teacher and four students in one English 103 networked writing classroom at Ball State University. English 103 is the first of two semester-length composition courses required, and according to *Ball Point: The Ball State University Writing Program Handbook*, it is an “introduction to composition focusing on composing, revising, and editing a variety of writings” (Papper, et al. 77). The teacher I asked to participate in the study was selected based on scheduling, her willingness to teach with portfolio, and my dissertation committee’s recommendations. This section was taught over a 75-minute period twice a week. In my experience, 75-minute periods twice a week are more conducive to digital portfolio instruction than 50-minute periods three times a week. The added time is useful to sustain focus on the holistic act of portfolio building. Further, this particular section met during a time that fit my schedule and was conducive to my pre- and post-class debriefing and reflection time.

The instructor had prior experience teaching with portfolios, but she had never taught any digital type. As such, she was most representative of teachers interested in using portfolios in first-year composition in our program. Logically, a teacher who has more experience using digital portfolios is less likely to attempt to develop new portfolio teaching strategies, and therefore less likely to be able
to reflect on the impact of the strategies. The more experienced digital portfolio instructor, in other words, would have had a larger amount of tacit understanding than the instructor familiar with fixed-media portfolios but less experienced using digital portfolios. This level of experience in my teacher subject is important to my study. In the next chapter, in order to capture and present the whole story, I relate more information about the context and participants of my study, including information about the instructor and the student subjects in the particular section of first-year composition that I studied.

Once I read my introductory script (Appendix C) and had informed consent (Appendix D), I selected the four student participants with the aid of the revised “Writing Computers and Literacy Initiative Computer Usage Survey” (Appendix E). The WCLI survey was created by Carole Clark Paper, Windy Rachal, and I and has been administered to students in the BSU Writing Program in the past. I revised it for this study because specific information in the original survey—high school attended, address, programs used during class, class expectations met, and family’s level of computer expertise—is not needed. I added the statement that I include in the informed consent form: “Your participation in this study is voluntary. Also, even though it is important to provide your name on the questionnaires, that is only for the purpose of comparing your questionnaire to other work and observations, and your name will never be published alongside any of your material or observations that I collect.” The permission forms let every student know the purpose of the study, and that participation in the study was optional and in no way had any impact on grading.
I used the revised WCLI survey to select two students who appeared to be “experienced” using computers, and two students who appeared to be “less experienced” using computers. It was important that the study include both groups because in my experience construction, presentation, and assessment teaching strategies are generally received very differently by students with different technological literacy backgrounds. Two students were selected for each group to increase pattern-matching reliability and to protect the study from being drastically influenced by a student dropping the course or opting out of the study. This is one strategy I use to compensate for using relatively few subjects. Further, four students are included because I could manage observing four students and one teacher in a class for the duration of a semester. It is unrealistic to accurately document detailed interactions and behaviors for additional numbers of subjects. In other words, this design follows a replication—as opposed to a sampling—logic; that is, in order to increase the potential for patterns, I study multiple subjects.

A limitation of selecting one teacher and four students in this way is that it is difficult to analyze how the teacher’s previous experience teaching with portfolios impacts her understanding of the value of teaching composition using digital portfolios. The teacher did not remember many details surrounding previous portfolio instruction experience, even when asked through questionnaire and interview. The teacher-subject’s experience is a very important factor, of course, in this study. However, because my study isn’t an experimental or longitudinal one, wherein I am necessarily studying the value of a particular
faculty development training module or a teacher's pedagogical growth over time, it is more useful to examine what my teacher-subject learned throughout one semester. In general, it can be said that the teacher-subject is not particularly skilled or unskilled with portfolio instruction, as this is part of the criteria by which the teacher was selected. But when subjects are not selected randomly, researchers are always in danger of prejudicing studies. Involving more teachers in the study would have added more complex variables, because context and setting is so important in portfolio-based pedagogy.

Further, in addition to considering how my participant-observer stance may have limited the quality of the data I collected, I need to forefront some decisions I made about which data I collected. I attempted to document through note-taking, for instance, everything that potentially related to portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment as well as the writing process. My question and question component guide was used only to remind me of the scope of my data collection. It in no way had any connection to the resultant coding guide that presented itself through grounded theory. Of course, although I used five data collecting methods to help triangulate the data, it is always possible that something significant was missed. This is a danger in any study.

**Methods**

I attended each session once I had the informed consent (Appendix D) of every student in the class. I recorded observable occurrences in my research journal that related to teaching and learning the writing process and digital portfolio
construction, presentation, and assessment. I also collected and later analyzed the instructional materials the teacher offered the students, administered surveys at the beginning and toward the end of the study, observed the subjects in the classroom, interviewed the subjects outside the classroom, and analyzed student work assessed by the teacher. Furthermore, I took field-notes and kept a research journal that included my post-class session reflections.

Let me first explain each of these methods in a little more detail here, and then share a more detailed description of my category-building process and the core categories I arrived at through open, axial, and selective coding with grounded theory. My findings and their significance can be found in Chapters Four and Five.

1. Data Collecting Strategies

**Instructional materials.** I collected and reviewed the syllabus, all readings, informal and formal writing exercise prompts, writing handouts, and portfolio instructional materials that the teacher provided the students.

**Teacher and student questionnaires.** I asked each participant in the study to complete a questionnaire toward the beginning and toward the end of the semester. This was not for statistical generalization purposes, however, because I did not have a random sampling. Instead, these questionnaires aided me in determining which particular behaviors during the class impacted teacher and student understanding significantly. For instance, in the teacher questionnaire
(Appendix B) I ask “What is your understanding of the nature and function of digital portfolios?” The teacher changed her view considerably because of some very specific student reactions during the semester. I asked a similar question in the student questionnaire (Appendix F) as well. Subjects were given as much time to complete the questionnaire as they needed.

Classroom observation, note-taking, and post-class session reflections. I took copious notes pertaining to the fifteen components of the research question. I documented which instructional materials the teacher distributed or asked students to review each class. After each class I wrote my general reflections about the day’s observations, focusing on the drafting, revision, collaboration, critique, and reflective writing processes. Although it was very tempting, I did not offer advice as a “portfolio expert” throughout the duration of the course. To do so would have compromised the participant-observer relationship and the reliability and validity of my findings. After all, it is rare that teachers in our program have techno-rhetorician specialists as aides. Of course, the researcher’s very presence in a study affects the dynamics of the environment in many unobservable ways. For instance, at the time of the study I was working with Laurie Mullen and the BSU Teacher’s College as part of a portfolio task force (Stuve, “Information”). The teacher-subject of my study was aware of the work I was doing and most likely changed some of the ways in which she valued digital portfolio pedagogy as a result of my presence in her classroom. Still, in the final chapter of my dissertation I wanted to be able to share the significance of my
findings in a way that might be applicable to future first-year composition sections across the board. And I wanted to observe a relatively authentic classroom situation as objectively as possible.

Subject interviews. I interviewed the instructor outside of class every other week throughout the study. I interviewed each student after the midterm and before the final period of the semester. I spent a few minutes at the end of each class asking the teacher some clarifying questions, and recorded this information in my field-notes. These reflection times were particularly useful during key sessions when the portfolio was introduced, and when students were working on their introductory reflection letter/essays. The subject matter of the interviews revolved around the components of the research question. And I used the questions Kathleen Blake Yancey offers in *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (Cambridge 2001) to ignite discussion for both teacher and student interviews. Yancey’s heuristic “moves from the concepts of portfolio and purpose to the nature of the medium to the kinds of resources that are required” (84). In other words, they get at what I categorize generally as the construction, presentation, and assessment of writing process portfolio pedagogy:

- What is/are the purpose/s?
- How familiar is the portfolio concept? Is the familiarity a plus or a minus?
- Who wants to create an electronic portfolio, and why?
- Who wants to read an electronic portfolio, and why?
• Why electronic? What about electronic is central to the model? And is sufficient infrastructure (resources, knowledge, commitment) available for the electronic portfolio?
• What processes are entailed? What resources are presumed?
• What faculty development component does the model assume or include?
• What skills will students need to develop?
• What curricular enhancement does the model assume or include?
• How will the portfolio be introduced?
• How will the portfolio be reviewed? (84-86)

Part of these meetings also included discourse-based interviewing; that is, I questioned the teacher regarding the purpose of her instructional materials, and I compared her perspective to that of the student subjects. Classroom observations about specific behaviors were also a source of teacher and student interview questions.

Artifact analysis. I collected and evaluated copies of ongoing student work and the teacher’s assessment of that work. The ongoing work and assessment of that work includes informal and formal writing as well as students’ final digital portfolios. I related my impressions of the work in my research journal, but focused on artifact analysis heavily after the semester ended before creating my coding system.
2. Category-Building and Coding Through Grounded Theory

One systematic and reliable approach to coding data that is collected from instructional materials, teacher and student questionnaires, classroom observations, subject interviews, and assessed artifacts is grounded theory, “the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis” (Glaser and Strauss 3). Grounded theory capitalizes on a coding procedure and a sense of theoretical style at the same time, and it is “designed for provisional testing, not discovering, of hypotheses” (102). In other words, in this model theory is derived from the data which both fits and defies core categories. My research question asks how constructing, presenting, and assessing first-year composition student digital portfolios appears to impact the writing process. My question involves describing what is going on more so than it does making theoretical hypotheses.

Grounded theory also works well with ethnographic case study methodology in general because the logic behind case study is that each subject often either “(a) predicts similar results (a literal replication), or (b) produces contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (Yin 46). And as a methodology, grounded theory works well to meet the specific construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability demands of meaningful case studies (Newkirk 18).

Construct validity refers to the verification of the correct operational measures for my study’s key concepts. Those critical of case studies often suggest that investigators use “subjective” operations to collect data. I used multiple sources of evidence when collecting data and established a chain of
evidence through my research journal. Using multiple sources helps validate my work through triangulation (Yin 33).

Internal validity is particularly important in case studies as well. Internal validity points out causal relationships that allude to conditions which necessarily lead to other conditions; it is “the ability of the researcher to make cause-and-effect statements about criteria differences among groups as the result of treatments or conditions” (Lauer and Asher 283). For instance, I triangulate the data by looking for pattern-matching occurrences from the information I acquired through my questionnaires, observation notes, and interviews. Also, I report important factors to consider in the teaching and learning process which take place outside the context of digital portfolio pedagogy yet within the realm of first-year composition. For one example, in addition to considering the use of the Insert > Comment feature in Microsoft Word®, I observed that students often learned to think more reflectively due to other techniques like research journals.

But there are other factors which may impact internal validity. That is, for instance, internal validity is often used in true and quasi-experiments, to suggest that one phenomenon resulted because of one specific treatment. My study is a descriptive study: there are no conditional treatments being added, therefore my study may have a few problems with internal validity. Here is an example: the first statement student-participants responded to in the questionnaire is “Using computers to write first drafts of essays is useful” (Appendix F). But one can write drafts without having a digital portfolio in mind. Interrelated is the fact that there is a good deal of inference that takes place in a case study. Where it is not clear
why an occurrence took place, I made calculated inferences. Because I documented what was happening in the classroom as these unclear occurrences took place, however, I believe my inferences are accurate and the approach internally valid. Still, offering alternative explanations of occurrences which defy core categories is important. One example that I discuss in the next chapter is how a particularly effective collaborative exercise between students was not directly related to any observable teaching methods and strategies. It turned out that some students had worked together outside of class the day before on a project for another course. Successful collaboration, of course, can always be the result of unobservable outside-class activities and highly complex social dynamics.

External validity is important in empirical research if useful and valid generalizations are to be made. External validity “refers to the generalizability of research results across subjects, treatments, conditions, and criterion variables” (Lauer and Asher 283). Four student-participants were included in order to increase the potential for pattern-matching occurrences. Similarly, reliability refers to the theoretical replication ability of a case study given the exact same case—including subjects, experience, time frame, access to available technologies, and other contextual tools. For this reason, I wrote down each question I asked in the first of each set of interviews so that I would ask each student to comment on the same basic topics.

I have kept construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability in mind through the three-step recursive process of open, axial, and
selective coding in order to group and categorize significant literal and theoretical replications. As a result, the constant comparing method has enabled me to uncover three distinct core categories. The following teaching and learning “resultant coding guide”—including three core categories and seven categories—works well for describing attributes of first-year composition digital portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment writing activities (see Figure 3.2). My unit of analysis, really, is the complex intersection between teaching and learning first-year composition with digital portfolios.

Figure 3.2. The Resultant Coding Guide

During the open coding stage, prior to arriving at my coding guide, I created a number of general categories based on like occurrences or observable
behaviors with which to begin to sort the data. The open coding stage categories included the following (“productive” relates to the goals and objectives the teacher outlined in the syllabus):

1. meeting course objectives (or not)
2. making a personal connection (or not)
3. making an academic connection (or not)
4. understanding the content (or not)
5. understanding the technology (or not)
6. helping others with writing (or not)
7. helping others with technology (or not)
8. making a connection between content and portfolio project (or not)
9. reflecting productively on personal writing (or not)
10. reflecting productively on others’ writing (or not)
11. giving/receiving productive teacher feedback (or not)
12. reflecting on technology in terms of content (or vice versa)
13. seeing work holistically (or not)
14. seeing work (content or technology) as scalable (or not)
15. using productive pre-writing strategies (or not)
16. making positive revision or editing improvements (or not)
17. following directions the first time (or not).

I went back to the data again and reflected on my general categories. I was struck by how each of these categories (as well as the data that didn’t necessarily fit into any category) either corresponded to using or seeing
technology in one way or another, or the process of moving from reflection to reflexivity to action. And in thinking about the context and manner in which the course was taught, this came as no surprise. But something unique did present itself: in many ways the medium was fueling the content. That is, the technology (or students’ approach to it or general fear revolving around it) seemed to impact the message. The course did, after all, involve popular culture, which relies heavily on new media.

The core categories “reflective immediacy,” “reflexive hypermediacy,” and “active remediation” in Figure 3.2 are labels I developed to describe the interaction between content and the reception of technology by combining the conceptual writing process theory of Duncan Carter and Sherrie Gradin with the perceptual new media theory of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. In other words, my recursive analysis of the data I collected created this union between writing praxis theory and new media technological literacy theory. I developed these terms through axial coding, and teased out specific attributes of each core category. Later, during selective coding, I was able to rethink the data which originally did not fit within my original general categories and see how it fit within the core category’s attributes.

That is, in Writing as Reflective Action: A Reader (2001), Carter and Gradin arrange their text as they frame their view of effective composition pedagogy: a recursive and synergistic process that begins with reflection and moves through reflexivity to action (see Rice, “Companion”). Carter and Gradin define reflection as the “careful, ongoing consideration of a subject,” and
emphasize that it is centered on the self or the individual (2-3). Reflexivity, according to Donna Qualley in *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry* (1997), is “a response triggered by dialectical engagement with the other—an idea, theory, person, culture, text, or even an other part of one’s self” (qtd. in Carter and Gradin 3-4). Reflexivity in the context of first-year composition instruction is considerably more complex than reflection because it involves “trying on” the position or perspective of some “other,” and then critically looking back at one’s own initial position in a new light (3-5). (It should be noted that the concept of “reflexivity” in other contexts, such as educational psychology, may refer to something different.) But for English studies, reflexivity involves considering audience and persuasive appeals. And action goes even further; action refers to doing something with rhetorical and authentic zeal (5-6).

For most students these three terms can be conceptually likened to the process of writing itself: drafting (Reflection); revision, collaboration, and critique (Reflexivity); and reflection (Action). For most teachers these three terms can be conceptually likened to classroom activities: reading and discussion (reflection); informal writing such as dialogue journals (reflexivity); and formal writing (action). Simply put, reflection, reflexivity, and action define the writing process and the intersections of teaching and learning.

Conversely, “immediacy,” “hypermediacy,” and “remediation” correspond to technological literacy issues. In *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000), Bolter and Grusin argue that new media achieves its value because it rivals or refashions older media types in some way (see Blakesley, “A Review of
Remediation: Understanding New Media”). In the context of my study, theoretically, it is the juxtaposition of the potentialities of digital portfolio presentation and assessment alongside traditional linear text composing or compilation processes that provides perceptual growth (see also Springfield, “Comparing”).

Bolter and Grusin define transparent immediacy as the “style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium [...] and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation” (272-73). Immediacy is the visual or perceptual embodiment of the concept of reflection; “the desire for immediacy is the desire to get beyond the medium to the objects of representation themselves” (83). Whereas immediacy involves hiding the medium in an attempt to reflect on the whole composition, hypermediacy forefronts the medium in an attempt to make readers hyper-conscious of the tools being used. Perceptually, the effect enables the reader and the writer to focus on the message the medium is presenting as well as the message the content is presenting. This is similar to Carter and Gradin’s use of reflexivity. Lastly, Bolter and Grusin relate remediation as a techno-centric term adopted from educational principles:

The word remediation is used by educators as a euphemism for the task of bringing lagging students up to an expected level of performance and by environmental engineers for “restoring” a damaged ecosystem. [...] We have adopted the word to express the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or
improving upon another. This belief in reform is particularly strong for those who are today repurposing earlier media into digital forms.

Remediation is often used in English studies with regard to converting novels or nonfiction to a “more interactive” hypertextual form. But its application in my study is particularly useful. The use of digital media as a perceived “restoration” tool to improve content quality and presentation design is a particularly effective “anticipatory set” strategy.

I discovered a successive process of complex thinking qualities and relationship in the data, and by overlaying and combining Carter and Gradin’s writing process concepts with Bolter and Grusin’s technological literacy perceptual ideas I was able to categorize them. That is, reflective immediacy, reflexive hypermediacy, and active remediation are core categories that represent varied levels of critical engagement which are put into action by different teaching strategies and techniques. I identified different instances of each core category through axial coding (afforded through grounded theory), and in completing the selective coding stage I was able to recognize specific sub-categories within each core category (see Figure 3.2).

I decided to represent my resultant coding guide as a Venn Diagram rather than in tabular form. The core categories, like the writing process itself, have components which slip into and draw from one another seamlessly. For instance, reflective immediacy is a core category which signifies teaching and learning properties that do not consider the impact of the digital medium but
focused on self-awareness or individual growth. The reflexive hypermediacy core
category includes phenomena I observed which focus on the medium and in so
doing enabled the teacher and/or learner a perspective that reflected on the self
objectively. And the third core category, active remediation, denotes instances in
which the teacher and/or students view one media construction, presentation,
and/or assessment type as decisively better than another. The third core
category also signifies data which indicates that the digital format directly impacts
writing content.

Seven somewhat overlapping categories, thus, make up the attributes of
my core categories:

1. Meeting personal expectations

2. Meeting others’ expectations

3. Applying knowledge rhetorically

4. Rethinking teaching/learning for self

5. Offering teaching/learning support

6. Writing or brainstorming ideas

7. Recognizing scalability.
I developed these seven categories by considering ways in which the seventeen distinct types of behaviors could be connected. That is, I saw that the data equated to the core categories reflective immediacy, reflexive hypermediacy, and active remediation. But each core category includes technological and contextualized behaviors. In other words, my core categories include portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment processes—as well as the writing process itself—for both teaching and learning. I was then able to determine seven specific categories that could be attributed to each core category from my seventeen open coding categories (see Figure 3.3).
In other words, I moved from the data to open coding categories to core categories to "attributed" categories. These categories are not hierarchical in order of importance. In fact, as Figure 3.3 and the Venn Diagram suggest, many categories overlap.

I began this chapter by re-articulating my research question while highlighting the intersection between the writing process and my review of the pertinent literature. I pointed out the underlying assumptions of my research question, related theoretical and practical limitations of my research methodology.
and methods, and discussed my data collecting strategies and the process by which I generated the themes and concepts in my resultant coding guide. In the next chapter I begin by introducing the context of the study, including the course goals and objectives as outlined by the instructor. I then relate the data I collected for each of my subjects, including the four student-subjects and the teacher-subject. In Chapter Five I share my views on how my study’s data might be significant for the delivery of first-year composition.
Chapter Four

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

[T]o understand the role of data in theory-building, we should not ask “what the data means” but ask “how is it used to make meaning” within the researcher’s interpretive act. (300)

– Linda Flower, “Cognition

In this chapter I relate the data gathered from each of the methods described in Chapter Three as they correspond to the resultant coding guide I developed by using grounded theory. I begin by sharing background information regarding the course and context of my study—including the course description and objectives—because this information gives the data a frame of reference. As an ethnographic study it is important to know the general approach the instructor took to teach the first-year composition course I observed.

Next, I relate information collected from instructional materials, teacher and student questionnaires, classroom observation, subject interviews, and individual artifact analysis with regard to reflective immediacy, reflexive hypermediacy, and active remediation. That is, I present and analyze the data for each subject with reference to the core categories. I discuss each student’s
portfolio holistically, as well. I begin each subject’s section by introducing her relevant experience and approach to the class.

Chapter Four, thus, is divided into three sections: the course context, the teacher-subject, and the four student-subject case studies with their portfolios. It should be noted that the data is meant to be considered within the context of a particular first-year composition course at all times. Further, my presentation and analysis of the data is but one interpretation. In the next chapter I share the significance of the data. A good place to begin here, however, is with my research question: How does the construction, presentation, and assessment of first-year composition student digital portfolios appear to impact drafting, revision, collaboration, critique, and reflective writing? As described in the previous chapter, I selected one instructor and four students in one English 103 course to begin to answer my question. I have assigned pseudonyms to my subjects.

The Course Context

The instructor, Sarah, subtitled her English 103 section “Common Culture” on her syllabus (Appendix H). It is important to keep this in mind because the popular culture content the instructor relied upon required complex reflection skills on the part of the students. Sarah pointed out in numerous interview sessions, for instance, that her students often had trouble thinking through popular culture issues because the students were “traditional eighteen and nineteen year-olds.” Sarah suggested her students’ relative lack of popular culture critical reflection
and “life experience” likely impacted ways in which her students valued their portfolios.

In order to gain some popular culture knowledge, the syllabus required the students to purchase three texts: (1) Michael Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure’s *Common Culture: Reading and Writing About American Popular Culture* (3rd edition), (2) Donald Murray’s *The Craft of Revision* (4th edition), and (3) the online version of *Ball Point: The Writing Program Handbook* (edited by Carole Papper, Carmen Siering, and me at the time). The underlying premise to Petracca and Sorapure’s text—which is the reason the instructor used to adopt this book and focus her class around writing in popular culture issues in the first place—is this: “By reading, thinking, and writing about material they find inherently interesting, students develop their critical and analytical skills—skills which are, of course, crucial to their success in college” (xi). The instructor’s description of the course in the syllabus attempted to put these skills into perspective for her students:

More than likely, when you’re hanging out with your friends, one of the things you enjoy discussing is popular culture—the great new CD you just got, last week’s *South Park* episode, or even what that girl in your biology class was wearing. Popular culture is all around us, bombarding us with thousands of messages a day about who we are, who we should try to be, who we should admire, what values we should have or reject, what to buy, how to live. Yet most of us are not actively engaged in questioning the messages we’re receiving. This class will try to change that. We will become
conscious of what some of those messages are. We'll question them. We'll talk and write about them. Because analyzing popular culture with a critical eye allows us to begin to become our own person, one who can see beyond the manipulation of the advertisers and the producers of popular culture to live an examined life of conscious choices.

In considering these texts, we will learn techniques for critical inquiry at the undergraduate level and forms and processes for writing in college, including the use of computer technology. We will complete a number of in-class writing exercises; learn techniques for writing about both written and electronic texts; develop processes for drafting, editing, and revising written work; review grammar rules and style tips; and learn strategies for conducting research and properly documenting sources. Along the way, we will engage in a number of discussions that will help us to understand the goals and forms of undergraduate writing as well as understanding the choices that the authors of our texts have made in the writing process.

As such, the instructor's course description—and the reason why I included the description in its entirety here—builds on the concepts of reflection (thinking about popular culture), reflexivity (becoming conscious of popular culture’s messages to determine one’s own positioning within that culture), and action
(discussing and writing about positive and negative influences of popular culture on individuals and society).

The progression of the course in this way is the primary reason the coding guide that emerged through grounded theory involves the concepts of reflection, reflexivity, and action. I discussed reflection, reflexivity, and action in Chapter Three with regard to Duncan Carter and Sherrie Gradin’s text, *Writing as Reflective Action: A Reader* (2001). I have worked with these concepts for many years; however, the data elicited their use for my resultant coding guide. My study’s grounded theory prompted me to combine these three writing concepts with Bolter and Grusin’s three technological literacy concepts.

Throughout the semester the teacher asked the students to read articles from chapters about popular culture criticism, advertising, television, popular music, movies, sports, and leisure (see the syllabus, Appendix H). On the first day of class she told the students that the purpose of thinking critically about pop culture issues is to “Study what the messages are so that you can make informed choices in college and in life.” The instructor used Donald Murray’s text and *BallPoint* to introduce writing concepts, to have students analyze specific writing samples, and to teach the importance of revision. Specifically, the instructor highlighted Murray’s “active reading” inquiry process, which involves—as the instructor explained it—reading until you understand, evaluating the argument, and forming one’s own response. For Murray, there are four specific steps to this process: (1) prepping by considering clues like the title and who the author is, (2) asking questions and interacting/interrogating the text with marginalia on a first
reading, (3) annotating some reading, and (4) answering one’s own marginal notes and formulate a personal response with a third reading (The Craft of Revision 1-30). The instructor modeled and relied on Murray’s steps throughout the semester to teach students how to think and read critically.

She listed the following course objectives on the syllabus. These objectives serve as a heuristic for the teacher’s assessment of student performance, artifacts, and final portfolios (the instructor created her own portfolio rubric and I will discuss her process and the value of the rubric in the next section). Through her course, students were to:

- Develop critical reading and thinking skills while considering the form and content of popular culture in a variety of texts and contexts
- Become active rather than passive learners and participants in classroom discussions and activities
- Understand college writing as a process of answering challenging and socially relevant questions for specific audiences, rather than as isolated acts of parroting generally-known information back to an instructor or filling pages with empty sentences and phrases
- Exhibit a basic understanding of the form and content of a thesis-based essay
- Practice and improve writing skills through the use of invention techniques, planning, multiple drafts, peer response, revision, and editing and mastering the use the computer-assisted techniques to accomplish those goals
• Learn to conduct basic research in a subject of interest and how to use a university library for locating and retrieving materials from a variety of sources

• Summarize, paraphrase, quote, and integrate source information, ideas, and opinions accurately and effectively into papers while citing sources appropriately with MLA style documentation

• Become effective, critical, and diplomatic readers of peers’ work

• Recognize and respond to basic demands of audience, including focus, organization, and development through examples, detail, and evidence

• Establish a personal voice in one’s writing

• Present finished texts conforming generally to American standard written English.

While these objectives fit within portfolio pedagogy generally, it is noteworthy that there is no specific mention of many important objectives portfolio pedagogy often focuses on; such as thinking and presenting work holistically, making connections between artifacts, and equating personal (outside academe) and public (inside academe) interests. Toward the end of the semester in an interview with the instructor it became clear that she felt her original objectives were less integrated with portfolio pedagogy than they needed to be in order for the students to more successfully negotiate writing instruction with portfolio construction and presentation.

My study did not include researcher intervention, however. That is, observable phenomena were not tested; they were simply observed. And even
though the instructor—in my opinion—may not have capitalized on the most current portfolio pedagogy research, it should be noted that Sarah graciously volunteered to be involved in my study. For that I am thankful. Sarah volunteered to be observed while trying a new and fairly complex teaching strategy.

The syllabus pointed out that students were to complete eleven “informal writes” (10% of the final grade; one informal write could be dropped); a library quiz and tour (5%); three response group reports and revision plans (10%); three sets of peer responses, which included a “self-assessment journal” (10%); and a final portfolio, which included a “Portfolio Writer’s Statement” (65%). The instructor’s general approach to teaching the portfolio, which included making it worth 65% of the final grade, provided some interesting dynamics. And while it was difficult to remain objective, my findings indicate some positive results of her approach as well as some negative outcomes that she herself reported after the course ended.

For instance, the instructor introduced informal writes to her students on the second day of class. On her handout (Appendix I) the instructor pointed out the purpose of the informal writing exercises clearly: “The purpose of these writes is to practice the skills we learn in class, including critical thinking and reading, without the high stakes of the formal essays. They will also serve as catalysts for classroom discussions, so you may be called upon to read portions of your informal writes in class.” The informal writes were structured “freewrites” that were to be completed outside of class. They could be turned in typed, written by hand, or on disk. Most students hand-wrote their informal writes. Consequently,
they did not keep their informal writes as artifacts to be included in their final digital portfolios. According to the teacher and two of the student-subjects, the portfolio, however, became the “high stakes” component to the course. It provided a significant amount of both useful and distracting stress.

A second example can be seen with the teacher’s adoption of Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff’s “Mini-Workshop: A Writing Skills Questionnaire” from *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing* (473-75); a holistic self-assessment guide for the informal writes. The guide helped give students a sense of structure throughout the course. The first section—which includes attitudes toward writing, generating, revising, and peer feedback—was completed during the first-half of the semester. The second section—which focuses on collaboration and awareness and control of the writing process—was completed by students toward the end of the semester. Elbow’s guide was used by one of the four students as a heuristic for organizing her final digital portfolio. The instructor did not provide students with a portfolio assessment guide ahead of time or suggest a heuristic for portfolio organization, although the instructor used such a guide for her final analysis of students’ work (Appendix J). However, the last informal write was a midterm self-assessment guide that the instructor had each student use to prepare him/her for a student/teacher personal conference. Two of the four student subjects made use of this particular informal writing in their final portfolios. I tape-recorded the conferences and they highlight some interesting connections between how the teacher presented the portfolio
project and how students constructed their portfolios. Again, I discuss these
connections later in this chapter.

As is required of all English 103 sections at Ball State, the instructor
included an online library quiz and tour as part of her course (“English 103”).
Library work took place during the fifth week, before the first formal writing
assignment was due. Basically, the students learned where pertinent information
relating to common research projects could be located, as well as strategies to
finding information online. The library tour and quiz was not a significant
component to my study.

However, the instructor emphasized three response group reports,
revision plans, and self-assessment journaling that coincided with three formal
writing assignments (Appendix K). Students were assigned to groups of four;
these groups remained the same throughout the semester. Students did write a
diagnostic essay (which also served as an informal write) as well as a “Portfolio
Writer’s Statement” essay (Appendix O), but the three primary papers of the
course underwent extensive drafting and reflection exercises. The teacher
provided her own analysis using her own essay evaluation guide (Appendix L).
The three assignment prompts are detailed in Appendix M: the first assignment
asked students to describe and analyze ways in which they were different from
their families (reflection); the second assignment called for an analysis and
interpretation of a text that examined gender and sexual identity (reflexivity); and
the third assignment required students to do some library research and analyze
and interpret the role language plays in shaping identity (action).
For each major paper, the instructor required a first draft, a second draft with a peer report and revision plan, and a final draft. The first and second drafts—and their related materials—were submitted in a paper folder. The teacher referred to these folders during class as “portfolio folders.” She did not mention, however, anything else about the digital portfolio other than the fact that the students would be doing one toward the end of the semester. The final drafts for all three essays were due as part of the final digital portfolio. In other words, in addition to an introductory letter of reflection for the final portfolio, the instructor reviewed all final work in the portfolio as new work. It is for this reason that the final digital portfolio was worth 65% of the final grade. As mentioned earlier, the instructor designed her own portfolio assessment guide (Appendix J), and this guide is very illuminating. I analyze the instructor’s guide in the next subject of this chapter.

The perspectives and general background the teacher and each student-subject brought to the specific course offering I observed is very important as well. My study, after all, is a micro-level analysis of the intersection between teaching and learning first-year composition with digital portfolios. The intersection itself is my unit of analysis. As such, the scope includes the entire process of writing. Paying close attention to observable phenomenon in just one section reveals a lot of data. I suggest further directions of study in the next chapter, but it’s important to know that each aspect of the process of writing as I have categorized them—drafting, revision, collaboration, critique, and reflective
writing—could and should become their own studies with regard to student digital portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment.

The Teacher-Subject (Sarah)

At the time of the study, Sarah had been teaching first-year composition for twelve years. Sarah was ABD for a degree in postmodern and feminist literature. A reflective practitioner, Sarah outlined her course material before and after each day’s session in order to refine her teaching. Sarah regularly uses a variety of texts; she had used *BallPoint* and *The Craft of Revision* prior to this course, but *Common Culture* was new to her.

Sarah often mentioned that because of the nature of the content she found valuable to teach in first-year composition—reading and writing about American popular culture—many students often found her courses especially challenging and packed with information. Throughout the course she would point out the rhetorical decisions authors were making in the reading selections, and how they might relate to rhetorical decisions students might make in their own writing. As such, Sarah valued lecture and modeling close reading processes more so than writing workshops. She would often ask students to do a reading, point to the thesis of the writer’s argument, and then analyze points that support the claim. Sarah modeled this process for the first-half of the course, and began to push students to do this more on their own after midterms.

While Sarah was familiar with Microsoft Word®, Microsoft PowerPoint®, and using Web pages in her teaching (such as Purdue’s Online Writing Lab and
BSU’s WebCat Library System), she had never sequenced such tools to create
digital portfolios. For instance, at the beginning of the semester, Sarah did not
know how to hyperlink, the importance of file management for paperless
assessment purposes, or the value of digital metareflection. She would often turn
off the teacher’s computer and projection unit, raise the projection screen, ask
students to turn off their computers, and then write on the whiteboard. In fact, she
did not use the teacher’s station to project information onscreen until after
midterms. However, because of Sarah’s experience with American popular
culture, and because she used articles that focused on visual imagery, music
videos that sequenced *the medium and the message as message*, and movies
which examined urban legends, she was able to make some connections
between new media technologies and popular culture literacy instruction.

Sarah also had some prior experience teaching first-year composition with
fixed-media portfolios at another institution, and she initially conceptualized the
value of the digital portfolio similar to that of the fixed-media type. For instance, in
both cases she made the portfolio 65% of the final grade, yet dedicated class
time to it only during the last week or so of class. Still, her own philosophy of
teaching demonstrates she values Elbow’s work (Sarah had taught with Peter
Elbow and Pat Belanoff’s 1995 edition of *A Community of Writers: A Workshop
Course in Writing* for three years, a book that lends itself to portfolio-based
pedagogy). But even though Sarah took a highly process-oriented, workshop
approach to teaching the three essays of her course, involving more peer work
and critical revision than most teachers I’ve observed in our program, she took a
relatively product-oriented approach to portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment. In interview Sarah reported that her experience using portfolios in general had been more product-oriented than she new Elbow and other teacher-scholars in the field were advocating.

For instance, on the portfolio assignment handout Sarah distributed two weeks before the end of the semester, she wrote in the introduction that “You are going to submit your final portfolio on computer disk this semester. The advantages are obvious, but it might take a little extra time to learn a few tricks in MS Word to meet all the requirements (you must use MS Word 2000 or 98)” (Appendix O). The assignment called for four distinct parts, aligned in the same way her previous courses’ fixed-media portfolio assignment were (Appendix N). That is, the assignment required a reflection essay and then the final drafts of the three essays that were required in the course. Students could include other material that helped them produce or lead up to each final draft, but Sarah definitely privileged the final product in this model. Some teachers would call this type of collection a “working portfolio,” one that includes every artifact from the course. Yet one of the key tenets of producing process-oriented models is to select specific work for inclusion, and then include metareflection about that decision-making process. While there is room for such reflection in Sarah’s model, it was not emphasized.

To examine more directly what Sarah did emphasize, I present in the following section the relevant data using the overlapping categories that make up reflective immediacy, reflexive hypermediacy, and active remediation (see Figure
3.2). Sarah’s approach to teaching first-year composition with digital portfolios involved all three core categories. For the most part the instructor did not use technology. Ways in which she did and did not use the available technology limited considerable chunks of what I was initially hoping to study, such as collaboration. She focused on examining media in popular culture, however, in order to examine the self (reflective immediacy). Also, she encouraged students to be critical of new media so that they may realize their own prejudices and stereotypes and see their own subjectivities more objectively (reflexive hypermediacy). And she often compared visual and textual media, encouraging students to examine how the differing media types persuade audiences differently (active remediation).

I used Kathleen Blake Yancey’s questions—as well as some of my own—as a heuristic to gain some of the data in this chapter through interview and survey (Yancey, “Digitized”). Specifically, I used the following questions in the context of teaching first-year composition using digital portfolios:

1. What is/are the purpose/s?
2. How familiar is the portfolio concept? Is the familiarity a plus or a minus?
3. Who wants to create an electronic portfolio, and why?
4. Who wants to read an electronic portfolio, and why?
5. Why electronic? What about electronic is central to the model? And is sufficient infrastructure (resources, knowledge, commitment) available for the electronic portfolio?
6. What processes are entailed? What resources are presumed?
7. What faculty development component does the model assume or include?

8. What skills will students need to develop?

9. What curricular enhancement does the model assume or include?

10. How will the portfolio be introduced?

11. How will the portfolio be reviewed?

In some ways, of course, my questions prompted Sarah to consider digital portfolio planning and integration into her course. For instance, when asked what skills she felt her students would need at the beginning of the semester, she replied “I hadn’t really considered that I’d need to teach them a lot of technology stuff, to be honest.” No doubt my question and the presence of a portfolio researcher/“computer person” in class prompted some thinking about the technological literacy skills her students’ digital portfolios would require. Some teachers spend a lot of time, in fact, teaching students how to use the technology, separating the technology from the content. Sarah ended up rethinking the portfolio assignment some, and did spend part of one class session teaching hyperlinking and file management. I discuss the significance of her methods below.

I also used some of Yancey’s questions with my student-subjects in an attempt to see if there was a difference between what the teacher thought the students were getting and what the students felt they were getting. There were many distinct differences of opinion, of course.
Data that I collected surrounding the instructor’s teaching throughout the semester can be categorized specifically using the categories of my resulting coding guide, thus:

1. Meeting personal expectations

The most important element of any teaching and learning experience in order to sustain focus and make it worthwhile is finding that experience personally meaningful. In general, the instructor found the process of teaching with a digital portfolio personally engaging because it was something new to her, and because it helped her—potentially—to reach students in another way. Two of the four students in my study, for instance, found constructing digital portfolios personally meaningful. Not surprisingly, the two students who did not find the experience useful were the two who had little background using computers for educational purposes. But these two students did not find portfolios useful for another reason, too: they did not recognize the digital portfolio’s applicability and scalability outside first-year composition. It is significant, however, that even though my teacher-subject does not routinely rely on computers heavily in her teaching, she did find using digital portfolios helpful.

In fact, the instructor’s personal expectations, as she described them during an interview and on my survey, was to continue to better herself as a teacher and to learn new ways of meeting students’ academic needs. When I asked her “Who wants to create an electronic portfolio, and why?” in interview she replied:
I gotta tell you: I’m really excited about learning more about how to do this and working through it for myself. I’ve always wanted to create a computer-based teaching portfolio. I’ve seen others do it around here, in our department, and I think it’s a great way to present information, stuff we do. Stuff we want to do. Who we are. But, I’ve never had time. It’s all about time.

But to answer your question, Rich, I’d have to say that the people who want to create [electronic] portfolios are . . . well . . . those who have to for a class or some other thing, like a job. It’s time consuming so people don’t usually just up and do one without a purpose. I know I haven’t. I put my syllabus online last year, but that’s about it. Now I have a purpose. On the one hand, the purpose is your study. On the other hand, I really want to learn. But I betcha it’s like most things: once you do it you’re glad you did it.

[. . .] But that’s the system. I mean, we have to give people a purpose for something, that’s our job as teachers, because what we teach is not just literature [Sarah, here, is referring to a conversation we had about “hidden curricula”]. So I guess what I’m saying is that I’m glad I’ve been given a reason to do; because I’ve always wanted to do it, and kind of like Web pages, I bet there are a lot of freshman who haven’t created portfolios or Web pages and want to but haven’t had a reason to make them. See what I mean? I guess I feel good about giving them a reason, because I think it’s
something they need to know. How to present their stuff—their
writing, their ideas, their whatever they’re doing in class. Or even
outside of class, maybe. Probably not for my class though. I mean,
I want them to stick to writing. I have too much to do [to look
through everything].

In my first interview with Sarah I also learned that for her using digital portfolios
meant taking class time away from lessons that could be “more content focused,”
not to mention increasing prep time. She said that “while there’s value for
evaluating everything in an electronic portfolio at the end for more accurate
assessment, [in our program, currently] there’s no release time to prepare for this
or to assess these large compilations. It’d be great to get a grant to do this in a
more complete and full way. But something has to give.” Sarah was teaching five
sections of first-year composition, while commuting fifty-five minutes from
Indianapolis to Muncie. Time was a very important factor.

Furthermore, Sarah had never assessed papers electronically. She
figured that to do so throughout the course—even though assessing everything
electronically may in some way lead to more readily available artifacts—would
not pedagogically be worth her time given the number of students she was
teaching. As a result, she accepted and accessed all work in hardcopy form
during the semester. And during the final portfolio assessment process she read
most student work electronically (she mentioned she printed out about a third of
the papers in the end), but handwrote her feedback using her own portfolio
assessment guide (Appendix J).
In fact, Sarah pointed out to me after a number of class sessions that she had planned on talking a little more during class about how material related to that day’s lecture could be shaped or presented in one way or another using a digital portfolio, but that she felt her students needed more time focusing in on “the content” of the course instead of “worrying” about the portfolio. She said that “there’s an advantage of seeing [for the student, her work] as a whole, but that it’s hard to take advantage of this because there’s no time left at the end [of the semester].” That is, while Sarah felt using digital portfolios to teach first-year composition was personally meaningful, she ultimately did not initially see them as something “that can be integrated well” with the content of the course. For Sarah, the portfolio was ultimately not the content of the course.

As a result, she did not present how to construct a portfolio until a week before it was due. During interviews student-subjects pointed out that not being able to work on their portfolios all semester didn’t concern them, however. The students figured that the less class time the instructor dedicated to the portfolio project, the less important it was to her, ultimately, grade-wise. In some ways this was true—the teacher did not focus on metareflection in the portfolios when assessing them. Instead, she concentrated on the third and final drafts presented by the students.

Indeed, the purpose of the portfolio to the teacher appeared to be more for packaging. Packaging is very important in digital portfolio pedagogy. In Sarah’s view, portfolios could potentially decrease the amount of time the instructor typically spent at the end of the semester arranging all of her students’ final work
in order to assess it more holistically. In an interview at the start of the course I asked her “How will the portfolio be reviewed?” and she replied:

   I will probably look at final drafts, think about if it’s passing work, then think about their letter, and then think holistic. I plan to let each student’s work do the talking, so to speak, to tell me the story of each paper within the context of the entire course and the objectives I’ll give them in the syllabus.

However, the instructor noted after the semester came to an end that during the final grading period when she felt crunched for time she did not use the hyperlinks students created. That is, she would simply access each specific artifact that she needed to grade through File > Open through her word-processing program rather than wade through the students’ individual navigational schemes (which oftentimes did not work because the teacher did not spend much time teaching students the necessarily technological literacy skills).

In my own analysis of each student-subject’s portfolio with regard to the instructor’s portfolio assessment guide notes, it is clear that the reflective and visual elements that Sarah felt were so important prior to beginning the course were generally overlooked by both student and teacher in the end. Time and lack of comfort accessing in electronic environments were primary reasons, but the portfolio assignment’s focus and design as a packaging tool only rather than a reflective presentation tool is certainly another important factor.
2. Meeting others’ expectations

The time-intensiveness of integrating something as significant as a digital portfolio into the curriculum impacted other observable phenomena, too; specifically, the teacher meeting the students’ expectations. I mentioned earlier that the instructor, for instance, designed the requirements for the digital portfolio (Appendix O) similar to ways in which she designed fixed-media portfolio assignments (Appendix N) that she had used in previous course offerings. When asked about this similarity in an interview, the teacher pointed out that she felt her own background with portfolios was consistent with how portfolios were used at Ball State, and that “I think there is [or should be] some added flexibility in how English 103 teachers use portfolios because it’s optional.” While portfolios are required for the basic writing courses, English 101 and English 102, using portfolio pedagogy in English 103 and/or English 104 is currently optional for instructors in our program. Again, I am very thankful for Sarah’s willingness to participate in the study because her courses were not required to use portfolios.

Results from the teacher survey (Appendix B), however, indicated something more complex. I administered the survey twice. The three questions I asked were:

1. What is your understanding of the nature and function of digital portfolios?
2. Do you believe digital portfolios impact the content of teaching in general?
   If so, how?
3. How can or does a digital portfolio impact how you teach first-year composition?
When I first asked Sarah to complete the survey, toward the beginning of the semester, she suggested that portfolios are a tool for gathering and collecting student work, that they enable students to see their work more holistically, and that they can be used—but often aren’t—for program-wide calibration and assessment purposes. What is significant is the fact that even though Sarah did not make use of more metareflective features of digital portfolio pedagogy—in terms of technologies used and classroom time dedicated—she answered my survey question much differently after the semester ended.

When I asked her “What is your understanding of the nature and function of digital portfolios?” after she had taught first-year composition using digital portfolios, she replied:

The nature and function of digital portfolios is very similar to that of paper portfolios, I think, in some important ways. First, they serve as tools which get students going. That is, in order to complete the portfolio, which is given a high percentage of the final course grade, students must make sure they include all the necessary components. This, alone, has a lot of value. To make sure they have everything students have to look back at all their work. I like to make students re-write everything at the end, too, and portfolios are helpful for that.

But—and this is something I want to try next year—the electronic format enables students to do something else that paper portfolios can’t. Students can make connections between drafts and
between essay types more easily. Know what I mean? Here’s what I mean: one expectation I have [Sarah is referring specifically to the first two objectives of her syllabus (to “Develop critical reading and thinking skills while considering the form and content of popular culture in a variety of texts and contexts,” and to “Become active rather than passive learners and participants in classroom discussions and activities”)] is that students think about the connections between popular culture issues and how their [sic] learning to write what they’re learning to write. I expect them to become critical thinkers and demonstrate that critical thinking effectively. In the past, I’ve found that it’s difficult for students to do that with paper portfolios. They have a portfolio writer’s statement, but it’s disconnected (literally and figuratively) to everything else. I want to do more computer stuff like chat and integrate that, too. That’s one way to use computers in a more collaborative—at the same time—way that can fit into the digital portfolio. Or that it’s a way, I think, that students could see the portfolio as something that is produced all semester long, through chat or some sort of archived email system I mean.

And I found out something really cool at the end—that the digital portfolio can be seen in terms of one big essay. Their portfolio writer’s statement is the thesis, and everything else helps prove that thesis. This provides a way for students to demonstrate
their critical thinking really well, to meet my expectations as well as what I take to be the writing program’s [expectations].

Sarah’s growth in understanding the nature and purpose of a digital portfolio came through her one semester’s experience using the digital portfolio. Like many things, in order to learn how to use something one must first use it. I get the sense that Sarah’s next attempt at using digital portfolios will be a lot different.

For example, I asked Sarah “What skills will students need to develop?” at the beginning of the semester. In our interchange it became clear that she expected students to learn or already know how to do two primary things: 1) to think reflectively and 2) to think and be able to present work visually. At the beginning of the semester the instructor thought students could already think both reflectively and visually well enough to the extent that she did not consider spending as much class time on these two skills as she later reported she should have. Toward the beginning of the semester she often spoke to me about this in terms of popular culture; that even though students were living and experiencing popular culture every day, they could not easily be critical and objective about it. Toward the end of the semester, however, Sarah saw that the digital portfolio could be in some ways a representation or manifestation of that fact. That is, she discovered that she could prompt students to critically reflect on artifacts in a digital portfolio that grew throughout the course, and in this practice they might “see” ways in which they are not reflective with regard to popular culture issues. I
call this phenomenon reflexive hypermediacy: using the medium of digital portfolios to see course content or “self” more objectively.

One example of why this point is significant was triangulated by how Sarah replied to my second survey question, “Do you believe digital portfolios impact the content of teaching in general? If so, how?” Sarah referred to her portfolio assignment handout specifically, suggesting that she would likely change the focus of the assignment in the future in order to capitalize on the digital portfolio as content itself rather than just a tool to sequence content:

Well, originally I thought not really. And I didn’t spend a whole lot of time on it. There’s just so much in my class that I need to have students read and do, that it was hard for me to think about spending time during the semester on the portfolio. And that’s what you have to do, I now know, in order to make the portfolio be more like the content of the course. Students need more reflection time. Students also need to think more about visual design because that is part of what a digital portfolio is supposed to be I think. I can see my writer’s portfolio statement being worked on throughout the course, maybe after each peer group report and revision plan. I’ve just never done that. They impact learning in the end because students see all their work [as] one thing. Or, they see how stuff relates. The portfolio, in that way, if there was enough time, could impact learning during the semester. I can’t grade everything,
though. I just can't do it. But now I see that *that* can be the content, really, too, the portfolio, in addition to the readings and writing.

I also asked Sarah during an interview session to follow up on an email she sent me about the day she was introducing the portfolio to her students. It did strike me as odd to wait until that late in the semester to share the details of the portfolio assignment. I later discovered it was because the assignment hadn’t yet been created, and Sarah hadn’t worked through all the technological literacy skills she felt her students would need to know in order to make her grading process reasonably timely.

It should be noted that Sarah felt her duty as a teacher was to grade everything the students produced. As such, she tried to limit what could go into the portfolio to the artifacts of the course, and she felt the need to frame the form of each students’ portfolio succinctly and uniformly. In my own experience I have learned that one of the more significant lessons students can learn from using digital portfolios in first-year composition is designing their own navigational schemes; this is a meaningful exercise in audience awareness. I discuss this point further in Chapter Five with regard to juxtaposing and embracing personal voice and required academic discourse.

Contrary to what Sarah learned after the semester ended, in an email sent the final week of the semester, Sarah wrote:
Date: Tue, 04 Dec 2001 16:42:25 -0500

From: [Sarah]

To: rarice@bsuvcc.bsu.edu

Subject: Portfolio Lesson Plan

Rich,

Here is my lesson plan for today's and tomorrow's presentation of the final portfolio preparation:

Day Twenty-nine
- Grammar Workshop
  - Cover examples of sentence errors, following the "Grammar and Style" handout I wrote.
  - Cover examples of agreement errors.
- Plurals vs. possessives
- Take questions on other grammar issues.
- Portfolio Preparation
  - Formatting documents (BallPoint ch. 9)
  - Handout: Final Portfolio
- Read and discuss.
- Demonstrate:
  - How to rename and copy files to another disk.
- How to rename and copy files to another disk.
- How to insert comments
- How to insert hyperlinks
- Sample
- Cautions:
  - Make sure you double-check that all links work and the disk has the files on it before you turn it in.
  - Make sure you have named the files according to the key on the handout.
  - If you cannot figure out the digital method of submitting the portfolio, use the same strategy, but you may turn it in a folder.

We'll see how it goes!

Three things caught my attention with regard to Sarah’s email message to me. First, Sarah intended to present and teach students how to construct their digital portfolios in one or two class periods. And she intended to lecture on a number of other things during these sessions as well. Sarah ended up talking the first day about grammar and the second day about the portfolio assignment. In other words, Sarah spent roughly seventy-five minutes or so teaching students how to generate something that ultimately was worth 65% of the students’ final grade. Students submitted their digital portfolios during the final examination period, five days later.
Second, Sarah did not build in much time for generative questions or
trouble-shooting. Perhaps more accurately, she did not allow any time for
questions or trouble-shooting. I asked her about this strategy in an interview after
the semester ended and Sarah said that she did not feel she could answer many
technology-related questions quickly and succinctly and that she felt her students
would work through the problems they might have on their own. I call this the
“sink or swim” training model. In some cases this model is effective. But, as is the
case with good research paper pedagogy, in my opinion, good portfolio
pedagogy involves giving students time to reflect on the content and the
rhetorical decisions involved in the project. Because the instructor included the
note that if students absolutely could not figure out the technology they could
submit a paper version, twelve of her twenty-two students in the section I
observed submitted a fixed-media portfolio. The four students I was case
studying each created a digital portfolio.

A third significant point about the instructor’s email message to me
regarding her portfolio assignment class plan is that even though on the portfolio
assignment prompt she wrote that “the advantages [of the digital portfolio type]
are obvious,” she only spent twenty-two minutes during the semester showing
models which demonstrated and focused on some of the benefits. Arguably, the
more important benefits pedagogically to using a digital portfolio rather than a
fixed-media portfolio are achieved through the process of building the portfolio
rather than presenting it. Simply put, the advantages were not that obvious, to
her or to her students. Three months earlier I asked Sarah in an interview “How
will the portfolio be introduced?” to see if she was thinking about this from the start of her class, which is something I also discuss the importance of in the next chapter. She replied:

Models . . . maybe? Do you have some? I don’t have any. Last year [with fixed-media portfolios] they reprinted and never revised, just stuck in the same draft as a new third draft. This time I really want them to revise for the final product. So, I guess when I introduce the portfolio this time around I’m going to emphasize final revisions. They [students] are disorganized though, and keep few of their drafts. Not sure how this will work.

Presenting models of portfolios to students before the students have time to work through inherent presentational design problems for themselves—particularly with digital portfolios because of the visual design and use of hyperlinking and navigational schemes—is truly an art form. Models can give students ideas and a general feel for the scope and expectations the teacher has, but some students benefit from working through digital portfolio development for themselves. Even though my student-subjects did not report that they were too worried about their teacher’s expectations of them for the portfolio assignment, according to Sarah the final digital portfolios were not what they could have been. And I agree.

Here are some of the fieldnotes I took during the day Sarah presented the portfolio assignment handout to her class on December 3rd. These line items are useful to read here in order to get a feel for the expectations Sarah was trying to lay out and meet for her students (she was predicting specific kinds of questions
from her students, including file management and arrangement, as mentioned in her email to me):

- write an essay that discusses your accomplishments in this course
- the documents that support your thesis are the artifacts you include
- you don’t want to include everything, necessarily
- think about the main things you’ve learned, struggled with
- think about your midterm self-assessment
- look at the list of course objectives on your syllabus
- you might also look at that min-workshop checklist, different skills
- think about what you want to pick out as your main accomplishments, at least three if not more than that
- which documents, in addition to the final drafts of your three formal papers, help you demonstrate what you’ve learned?
- look at the 2nd paragraph of Brooke’s model
- the hyperlinked drafts are “supporting documents”
- in talking about that one paper she mentions the first draft, the style, grammar….a couple of things and a couple of documents, plus the final draft, that she includes in the portfolio
- teacher showed contents of Brooke’s portfolio, to show the naming convention
- student asked if she is grading the portfolio writer’s statement and/or the essays again (teacher chooses both)
- explained the portfolio in about 23 minutes
- copy all files you’re going to use to a disk (you can rename files by right-clicking, or save as and then delete the original). Asked people if they understood, they all agreed. Numbers for the essay assignment, letters for the draft.

- rename files according to the scheme

- teacher pulls up an essay, in order to explain how to do hyperlinks. To insert a hyperlink, we just simply highlight the term, the name of what it is, we go up to the insert button, click insert, and all the way at the bottom, it says hyperlink. Now, this is basically like how you do an attachment to an email. It’s asking what you want to link to it. You click on browse, you go find the file, and you click okay. It puts the name in the box, and then you’re done. Now you have a hyperlink, when I click it comes up. There it is. I have back buttons now, too. So any questions on how to put in the hyperlink?

- Teacher made the special point that students should find the file that’s on their disk, not the version on their hard drives

- Teacher pointed out how you can re-edit comments, various ways to view them, as well as how to insert comments. Students are to put in the “pertinent” comments from their peers using Insert > Comment

- Comments go on the draft that the comment was about
- You talk about the comments with the portfolio writer's statement, and the teacher will link to that particular essay from there.

- Fresh disk, one that hasn’t been stepped on or licked by your dog

- You’ll want to double-check every link, make sure all the documents open, because if you give it to me and it doesn’t work, I can’t give you a grade. And you will be in administrative limbo-land (won’t be taking English 104). Might be useful to take them to a second computer and test it there. **** Need to make sure the documents are in Word 2000 or 98…if it’s some other weird thing (teacher means software program), then you have to use Rich Text Format.

- Only need peer reviews if they’re pertinent for your paper.

- Teacher is allowing students to make a contingency plan, they can turn in a paper version if the e-version doesn’t work.

- Put a proper disk label on it, with your name on it, and section number

- Today is Wednesday. They turn these in on Monday. Students weren’t given practice time. Sink or swim. They were shown this, given a model, and given the requirements page. Teacher didn’t have them practice during class.

The third question I asked Sarah in my survey was “How can or does a digital portfolio impact how you teach first-year composition?” She said that producing a portfolio impacts planning tremendously. She confessed that she did
not know the steps involved in teaching digital portfolios in order to maximize their potential. It is apparent from the notes I took during the day she presented the portfolio project to her students that Sarah still doesn’t know everything. Of course, no one does. My study is an attempt to describe some of the interactions between teaching and learning with digital portfolios in order to relate some of the more significant steps.

Sarah told me, however, that she will plan her course differently in the future in order to demonstrate more clearly the “electronic benefits of connecting stuff” in the students’ digital portfolios. Referring to other drafts, peer comments, and the revision plan in her portfolio assignment prompt for each essay node, Sarah suggests that “You [the student] don’t need to include all the materials, just those you discuss” (Appendix O). She pointed out after assessing final work that she felt this was not only a poor statement to include in her assignment, but that “it made the impact the portfolio could potentially have on what the students learned, I suspect, overall, something less than what it could have been.”

Professionally, Sarah expressed informally during post-class conversations that she expects to be required to produce a teaching portfolio of her own in the future and that she envisions a day when including students’ digital portfolios within her own portfolio will be useful. I call this “a portfolio of portfolios.” She felt that in addition to meeting students’ expectations for “learning content that is connected or ‘demonstrateable’ in terms of electronic computer tools,” she herself will likely be expected to connect her teaching content to her
teaching with technology skills; and that digital portfolios are certainly one way to do so.

3. **Applying knowledge rhetorically**

Whereas the first two categories above are rooted in reflective immediacy (not necessarily using technology but still exploring the self) and reflexive hypermediacy (directly considering the medium to look at the self more objectively), the third category corresponds to active remediation (considering how the medium specifically impacts or even *is* the message). Category three is a difficult category to distinguish because, ultimately, in the class I observed “medium” refers to more than technology. In fact, medium vary rarely denoted technology in terms of classroom resources in the data. Medium made up much of the popular culture content matter. That is, the impact of media on others through rhetorical communication is largely the subject of American popular culture studies. For instance, the teacher asked her students to read selections about Barbie, view images of men and women in advertising, and consider representations of subcultures in music videos and film genre criticism. In each of these topics the ways in which content is conveyed is part of if not *the* message itself.

I call category three “applying knowledge rhetorically” because the data in this category all suggest ways in which the medium (largely popular culture content) can be reshaped to fit other situations given different circumstances. In the next chapter I relate how this is significant in teaching first-year composition
with portfolios. In this section, though, I’d like to discuss two extended examples. On the first day of class the teacher asked the question “Why study popular culture?” in the first place. She mentioned there are basically three kinds of popular culture: high, folk, and mass. Students brainstormed examples, and the teacher wrote the following subjects on the board: politics, feminism, music, food, clothes, gay couples, spending money, animals, and lifestyle choices (where we live). Sarah suggested that subjects such as these can be seen as either an element of “commodification” [sic] in our society or mainstreaming. According to Sarah, most if not all cultural phenomenon are rooted in economics or consumerism and then only later become societal norms.

During the second week of class students read Marilyn Ferris Motz’ essay “‘Seen Through Rose-Tinted Glasses’: The Barbie Doll in American Society” (Petracca and Sorapure 15-21) in connection with Donald Murray’s notion of active reading. In the essay Motz suggests that Barbie’s influence on society is problematic, and that the doll and her accessories still convey outdated ideas which are detrimental to young people’s personal self-images. In an informal write, Sarah asked her students to answer the questions on page 21 in the text. The last two are the most significant to my study:

- If Motz is right that Barbie represents an outdated and potentially detrimental image of women’s lives, why do you think the doll continues to sell more and more successfully every year?
• To what extent do you think that the values represented by Barbie—“wealth, beauty, popularity and leisure” (18)—are still central to success in America?

Students found it ironic that, indeed, the outdated Barbie doll still had significance in contemporary American culture. More specifically, prompted by the instructor, students saw this example and the questions about Motz’s essay as an opportunity to write about objects in their own experience similar to Barbie. For instance, one student-subject from my study, Kaliah, suggested that certain cars can signify some of the same values that Barbie signified. In other words, the teacher urged students to make remediated connections between Barbie and a “technology” they used today, and to actively critique the implications. For Kaliah, the SUV she drove to Ball State and on the weekends around Muncie with her friends gave her a certain social status, just as the kinds of clothing Barbie wore symbolically gave children who played with Barbie a certain social status. Kaliah’s car became the subject of discussion on quite a few occasions during the semester.

For instance, Sarah asked her students to read Jack Solomon’s essay, “Masters of Desire,” a few weeks later (Petracca and Sorapure 46-60). Sarah told me in an interview that she wanted students to learn to “pay attention to pictures and images in society. After all, our world today bombards us with these images. This is how we get our information [. . .] the TV, the Internet, email.” The Solomon piece is one typical of what Sarah required her students to read: it is written by an academic for academics, it is relatively lengthy and she only
discussed it during one class period, and its thesis is rather complex. Sarah did do an excellent job highlighting the important claims of each of the articles the students read, modeling, as I mentioned before, critical and active reading.

In “Masters of Desire” Jack Solomon uses semiotics to analyze contemporary American culture. The article is a selection from his book, *The Signs of Our Time* (1988). I’d like to share my research journal notes here in full so as to show, generally, the depth and complexity of using popular culture to teach first-year composition, as well as Sarah’s general approach and how it relates significantly to my study. Her approach was to ask students to read and then challenge their reading in very critical ways. Sarah also made it a point during each class session to prompt students to be both reflective and reflexive. I took extensive notes for each class session, but in most cases the detailed content of the course ended up being tangential to my study other than the subject of the content itself (the persuasive appeals of popular culture) and how the teacher taught the students how to get at the content (through reflective, reflexive, and active reading).

As class began, Sarah wrote the following words for her students on the board: *paradox, semiology/semiotics, sign, icon, egalitarian, populist, phallic, fecund,* and *new realism.* These are key words in Solomon’s text. As part of active reading Sarah taught students how to write in the margins and look up all key words and concepts. There are many messages that fall under the “applying knowledge rhetorically” category; messages which can be considered in terms of digital portfolio.
construction. Sarah alluded to some of the same types of messages throughout her lecturing on different assigned readings, for instance, that defining a thesis as something that is an argument and “has to cover what everything covers”; that symbols and language are always already a rhetorical (perhaps even consumer-based) technology; that persuasion does not necessarily have to be in full (the degree of persuasion is “the interesting thing”); that everything is a “status symbol” of sorts, including visual literacy and document design; that popular culture—and therefore all media—teaches us ways to conform in order to be equal and part of the masses; that advertising is all about targeting appeals; and that all knowledge is formulated by socially constructed symbols.

Each of the messages coming out of Solomon’s article is specifically related to writing and can be generally related to the process of creating portfolios. That is, what we teach when we teach first-year composition is the art of rhetoric. In a typical English 103 course rhetoric includes appealing to a reader’s sense of logic, emotion, and authority in the right amount at the right time through reflection; persuasion; argumentation; and research. Advertisers use the same tools (logos, pathos, ethos, kairos and rhetorical/conventional forms).

By examining and even “deconstructing” what advertisers do, Sarah taught students what writers do: apply knowledge rhetorically. How writers do what they do can take many forms. Most frequently—in our culture in any case—writers include a thesis. In the syllabus one of Sarah’s primary objectives is to have students “exhibit a basic understanding of the form and content of a thesis-
based essay.” And as she pointed out during class with regard to Solomon, a thesis “has to cover what everything covers, it can’t just be a piece of it. It also has to make an argumentative statement.” When I asked Sarah “What is your understanding of the nature and function of digital portfolios?” in both survey and interview, she said that the entire portfolio could be considered one large thesis-driven essay. The thesis, in the case of a portfolio, could be the reflective introductory letter. She pointed out how this works in her view with regard to her portfolio assignment handout regarding the portfolio writer’s statement:

For each of the three final essay drafts included in your portfolio, explain the primary challenges you face with each paper and how your revisions attempted to solve these challenges. Take into consideration the degree to which you met the guidelines of the assignment, the amount of revising you may or may not have done, the strengths and weaknesses of the final draft, and the degree to which you demonstrated the necessary skills required.

In other words, Sarah perceived the portfolio writer’s statement to be the kind of technology in a portfolio that Solomon pointed out advertisers use in popular culture: one that includes a persuasive, encompassing thesis; integrates to a degree socially-constructed artifacts common to the masses; and demonstrates a certain amount of conformity in order to target a specific audience. I kept coming back to something Sarah said in an interview at the start of the course in response to “How will the portfolio be reviewed?” Sarah said, “I plan to let each student’s work do the talking, so to speak, to tell me the story of each paper
within the context of the entire course and the objectives I'll give them in the syllabus.”

4. Rethinking teaching/learning for self

Category four has elements of both reflective immediacy and reflexive hypermediacy in that the data in this category most often demonstrates ways in which the subject reflected on the process of teaching and learning—perhaps a “technology” itself—to see personal growth (see Figure 3.2). Category four is different than category one (meeting personal expectations) because the data revealed that personal growth was not always expected.

I have already highlighted instances wherein the instructor wanted to rethink some tools that she had created, such as her portfolio assignment handout for digital portfolios in light of its similarity to its predecessor, the portfolio assignment handout for fixed-media portfolios. I’d like to relate other significant “rethinking teaching/learning for self” observations: Sarah often changed her own personal notes, invoked viewpoints about digital portfolios of students from other sections, and began to rethink her peer group report and revision plan guide (Appendix K).

When I introduced Sarah to you I mentioned that she is a reflective practitioner, outlining her course material before and after each class session in order to refine her teaching. Keeping a teaching journal is something every good teacher usually strives to do at one point or another, but it’s very difficult to sustain. One useful thing about Sarah’s schedule was that she did not have
many preps. She did not teach the digital portfolio in all five of her sections during the course of my study. But, because she taught the digital portfolio in much the same way she taught fixed-media portfolios (a “working-portfolio” model that included new essays more so than a metareflective model which typically emphasizes reflection over revised material), there were few differences between her sections. She used her schedule to her advantage: she created an outline for each class period to focus her teaching and keep each of her sections on track, she took things out and added things to her outline as the day’s lesson for each section was given, and she asked students from her other sections what they thought about them.

I would like to have been able to gather the changes Sarah made to her daily outlines, as well as her metareflection over her own reflective praxis. Of course, because of her schedule and the fact that I didn’t know about her outlines until long after the semester began, I was not able to gather this data. I did ask Sarah about her teaching process generally, however, and if her thinking about presenting or assessing the digital portfolio had impacted her growth as a teacher as her lesson plans changed. Specifically, in an interview at the end of the semester, I asked Sarah “What curricular enhancement does the [digital portfolio] model assume or include?” She replied:

It’s funny you should ask me that, Rich. You know about the lesson plans I keep. I’ve been refining those for a long time—years, in fact. I snip pieces from here and there, from previous years’ courses. It changes a lot, because I include different readings and such. But
I’ve noticed a couple of things about how they’ve changed since I’ve started thinking about your study. I know, I’m not supposed to change anything based on your study. But there are a few things. [. . .] For instance, it didn’t occur to me until the last few weeks that I was teaching the portfolio without teaching the portfolio. [I prompted Sarah with “What do you mean, exactly?” here.] Well, what I mean is I kept asking them to think about connections between essays they read. I ask them to do that with things they’ve written in the end. But, what I should have done is make them do that more in their informal writes, all along. I’ve been changing that in my outlines as I look back through them. Maybe next time I’ll do that.

Later in the interview I asked her again about what specific curricular enhancements she could see with the digital portfolio. She pointed out that using digital portfolios helped her learn some new technical skills as well as how to teach and integrate technology into her teaching a little more effectively.

But she suggested something else that really made my fourth data category viable. Sarah said that even though she felt flustered and frustrated in trying to consider how to manage teaching with a digital portfolio, she felt more accomplished. In some ways this is something that fits under category two, meeting the expectations of the department. But, I think it’s significant here, too. Sarah reflected:
I’m not sure if this is a “curricular enhancement,” but it sure is something I liked. To be honest, I didn’t do much with the electronic portfolios. Certainly not as much as I could have. And that worried me, every day. But as I reworked my outlines and spoke with students from my other classes, they were impressed. I mean, I was rethinking my outlines and would ask my other students what they thought about digital portfolios. I asked them the questions that you ask me. Hope that’s okay. And, well, they were impressed that I was doing something state-of-the-art. When I asked them what did they think electronic portfolios were, some said they were using them in other classes, like nursing and music. [. . .] One student before class even showed me her portfolio for music. I told her about things she might want to connect to or include, things from our class about popular culture. She loved it.

What strikes me most about Sarah’s point here is that she took pride in being able to speak knowledgably about technology. She may have not known exactly how to negotiate the technology, but she knew how to talk about it, and was beginning to see pedagogical potential. Also, and I don’t think this is a stretch, Sarah hints at the possibility for interdisciplinary work in the above quotation from that final interview. It is possible that in her view teaching with digital portfolios can elicit a more well-rounded, cross-curricular awareness. I did ask her about interdisciplinary studies and portfolios specifically once after a class session, midway through the semester, and she did not see the relevance at the time.
Sarah also felt that her peer group report and revision plan (Appendix K) could be revamped. She required each student to report on the productivity of peer work for each paper. The process, really, included reflection, reflexivity, and action in the sense that each student had to reflect very specifically on his or her own writing process for each essay; reflexively consider “the comments and suggestions for improvement you got from your peer editors and from me”; and actively list out specific changes made to previous drafts and revision suggestions for specific paragraphs of the next draft. Because of the sheer number of students she regularly has and her relative inexperience and lack of comfort supporting the use of computers to teach and learn writing, she did not ask students to use computers in group work. At the end of the semester, still, she did not feel computers were necessary either. But, she did suggest that with point number four on the peer group report and revision plan she could offer more helpful advice.

During the second essay, the “Analysis and Interpretation of a Text for Representation(s) of Gender or Sexual Identity” paper, while students were in groups during one class session, I asked Sarah specifically about point number four on the report and plan form. Point number four asks students the following: “Between the peer editing session and the day you are preparing this portfolio, what specific changes have you made to your drafts to address the advice given on peer day? Once again, refer to specific sections and paragraphs in your draft to describe the revisions you have made.” I asked her what the point’s main purpose was. She said that in theory it was primarily an attempt to force students
to reflect on their own writing and group processes, but that in reality it’s to remind them that they need to make changes to drafts based on advice given from peers. In other words, point number four is purposefully intended to keep students accountable and to encourage them to critically engage with both their peers and their own texts. Sarah suggested, however, that it would be nice if this form were somehow electronic or required students to write on the computer. Like many of her students’ informal writes, much work was unavailable because it was on paper and not stored electronically. It is important to note that Sarah did not intend this to mean that she should embrace a paperless classroom. It does mean, however, that she was rethinking her own teaching strategies based on the delivery of the report form and, perhaps, the digital portfolio as well.

5. Offering teaching/learning support

Category five is closely related to rethinking teaching and learning for self, but it also involves specific action (helping others) and results in seeing media (remediation) in a different way. That is, in the process of providing teaching and learning support, I observed some subjects learn ways in which the medium impacts the message. The larger picture here is one that includes both faculty development and support infrastructure. While these topics are beyond the scope of the data I collected in my research, there is room in Chapter Five for my suggestions about how the pertinent data relates to both sustainable training and scalable infrastructure.
To start, I asked my teacher-subject in the interview toward at the end of the semester “What [digital portfolio] processes are entailed? What resources are presumed?” Sarah replied that during the semester she wished she had a body of experts to go to who could help students “see” connections between papers more clearly. In fact, she said “I would have been able to reconceive [sic] both when and to what extent I could have used the portfolio during class all semester long.” In other words, for instance, if there were digital portfolio expertise in the Writing Center, the Learning Center, or elsewhere at Ball State that students could go to, teachers might be able to rely on digital portfolios more synchronously throughout the semester.

Without such support, as Sarah suggested, the likelihood that she would get too far behind in grading student papers was too great. That is, if instructors spend too much time fielding technological literacy questions that a support team could take on, an arguably more important component of the course—timely teacher response on informal and formal writing—would be compromised. Sarah said, “I pushed it [the digital portfolio] back a little, probably too much, in favor of sharing too much content, popular culture content.”

Sarah indicated another support resource she could have used, too: she did not know how to integrate pieces of the digital portfolio into her course seamlessly, and reported that help organizing her class (either with direct instruction or sample syllabi) would have been useful. I wanted to jump in because I did have the experience from which Sarah could have benefited. Of course, sharing this information would have compromised the validity of my role
as researcher within the context of my study. Still, it can be said that a well-designed and well-implemented digital portfolio model must assume the teacher has received considerable faculty development time. Integrating and then using digital portfolios is not an easy task.

Because Sarah did not introduce the portfolio assignment handout until relatively late in the semester, in effect, she removed the possibility for occasions where she would need to provide technical support for her students. She did so, in my opinion, however, at the cost of not reaching the full potential of digital portfolio pedagogy. On three occasions during class I noted that a student from the class I was observing asked to see an example of how to construct a digital portfolio technically, because the teacher mentioned that everything in class was to build up to the final portfolio. In each of these instances, however, the teacher said that if there was time toward the end of the class session or after class she would demonstrate the required technological literacy skills. There was never time. Sarah never made time. Instead, when students spoke with her toward the end of class sessions or after class, she took the time to create examples with the students which helped explain the day’s popular culture content in students’ personal contexts.

There is one other “teachable moment” or valuable teaching strategy the instructor did not capitalize on: Sarah did not involve the students in the creation of the portfolio scoring guide. Sarah did not even show the students the guide prior to her scoring them. She simply mentioned during class that she would be using a guide based on the requirements outlined in the syllabus. The Portfolio
Assessment Guide (Appendix J) that she developed is similar in some ways to the Essay Evaluation Form (Appendix L) students saw for each formal writing, however. Specifically, the essay evaluation form uses a 0 to 4 scoring guide for the sections “Focus/Argument/Strategy,” “Development/Evidence/Organization,” and “Style and Mechanics.” The portfolio assessment guide scores from excellent to good to competent to inadequate to poor for specific points which correspond to what Sarah looked for in each essay. That is, the portfolio assessment guide asks “How well does the portfolio demonstrate your ability to”:

- Exhibit a basic understanding of the form and content of a thesis-based essay. Does the portfolio demonstrate that you can narrow a topic to develop an effective thesis statement? That you can choose an effective strategy for organizing and developing the body of an essay to support that thesis?
- Apply the principles of the writing process through invention, drafting, peer response, and multiple revisions. Does the portfolio demonstrate that you have drafted and revised your formal work effectively? Are topics and paragraphs developed fully and presented in a logical and strategic order? Have reader suggestions been considered and addressed? Have you mastered the use of computer-assisted techniques to accomplish these tasks? Have you been an effective reader of others’ work?
• Make rhetorical decisions in order to produce an academic essay with effective strategies for a particular audience. Does the portfolio demonstrate your familiarity with the concepts of rhetorical context? That you understand college writing as a process of engaging in an intellectual dialogue with other students and scholars? That you have developed a personal voice appropriate to your audience?

• Conduct basic research in electronic and print resources. Does the portfolio demonstrate that you can recognize the kinds of sources you’ve looked at? Can you locate sources on your own that are tied to something you’ve read? Have you made appropriate decisions regarding the relative quality of materials?

• Read critically, identifying the rhetorical strategies & evidence that other writers use. Does the portfolio demonstrate that you understand the parts of an essay, can understand what you read, that you can summarize texts fairly?

• Use and synthesize info from sources. Does the portfolio demonstrate your ability to synthesize and organize sources and your ability to analyze the differences between them? Does it show that you can use sources to provide both confirming and contrary views as you develop your own assertions?

• Use style and citation conventions appropriate for an academic audience. Is the style formal, as it should be? Does the portfolio
demonstrate that you know how to introduce sources smoothly and cite them according to MLA guidelines?

• Apply the rules of Standard Written American English. Does the portfolio demonstrate that you can edit your manuscripts effectively to eliminate spelling errors, grammatical errors, and poor word choices?

The first thing I noticed when reviewing Sarah’s portfolio assessment guide, of course, is how the guide relates to Sarah’s course objectives. The guide is drawn directly from it. Still, I think the two student-subjects who reported they did not find the portfolio construction process meaningful may have had more success if this portfolio assessment guide was given to them in advance. Sarah mentioned how some of her students may have approached their own portfolios differently if she would have had her guide ready the first day of the semester. Students would have likely organized their portfolios in terms of points in the assessment guide specifically. Ultimately, this would have lessened the time Sarah had to spend on assessing students’ final work. In the least, the assessment process, when tied in with the portfolio construction process more directly, is clearly a better teaching and learning support model.

I discuss the value of Sarah’s portfolio assessment guide in greater detail with each student-subject’s work later in this chapter. However, it should be noted that the instructor’s guide did not include the report of two skills that Sarah thought would be the most important for the digital portfolio in the very first interview I had with her: visual thinking and reflection. In other words, the guide is
based on the objectives of the course. And the objectives of the course are based on ways in which she traditionally taught first-year composition. The potential for digital portfolios to engage students in technological literacy, holistic metareflection, and visual thinking was not generally supported by the requirements of the portfolio, its presentation, or its assessment.

6. Writing or brainstorming ideas

Category six involves both technology and non-technology related teaching and learning heuristics. Data in this category are characterized by ways in which the teacher and her students brainstormed how writing instruction using digital portfolios fit into what the teacher and her students already knew; that is, pre-writing strategies which engage subjects to consider both writing and digital portfolio construction.

There were few instances of technology-related heuristics. Simply put, the teacher used relatively few computer tools. One software program commonly used at our school in other disciplines such as Music and Education to cluster or storyboard digital portfolios is a program called Inspiration (“The Power of Visual Learning”). Through the program users can design specific nodes and threads and combine and connect each in different ways. Inspiration enables users to visualize the connective properties of portfolios while seeing the entire picture, which is particularly valuable for constructing digital portfolios. The instructor researched the software prior to the beginning of the semester and chose not to include it for sake of time. She adopted a few of the company’s marketing ideas,
however, to teach brainstorming and critiquing strategies. Sarah showed the Web page I list as Figure 4.1 below to her students, in fact, during Week 10, in an attempt to teach students the “power of visual learning”:

Figure 4.1. Inspiration: The Power of Visual Learning

Sarah highlighted that first-year composition is as much a thinking class as it is a writing class, and that good writing is good thinking. She pointed out that writing is the process of getting an image from the writer’s head into the readers’ heads.

Sarah used Inspiration’s notes about visual thinking to discuss Donald Murray’s “Outline After Writing” strategy (The Craft of Revision 146-48). Specifically, she suggested to students during class during Week 10 that “If you create an outline after writing, you can see the structure of the draft, as Murray suggests. Murray says on page 147, “[Sarah, reading from the text] It may be
easy to then adapt your draft to the needs of the reader by moving sections around, perhaps creating new ones and eliminating old ones. Such moves may be suggested by test readers—classmates, workshop members, instructors, editors, friends, family—who, because of their need to understand and their distance from the writing of the draft, see a potential new structure clearly.”

Although very briefly, Sarah later made the statement during the same class session:

And like an essay, a portfolio can be clustered or storyboarded, outlined if you will. [. . .] You can “expose the structure of your essay,” as Murray suggests for drafts, but for your portfolio. Let’s read from page 146. “Here are some of the ways the writer can strip away the language from the draft and reveal the structure underneath.”

The teacher then asked students to read the points Murray lists on page 146 of *The Craft of Revision*, that in order to expose the structure of a draft, like a portfolio or the development of a portfolio, writers can:

- ask themselves readers’ general questions
- make formal outlines
- use a movie writer’s storyboard
- create a computer tree to show sequence and/or navigation
- draw a graph to show relationships
- write a shopping-list sketch
- make a computer print-out. (146-47)
In other words, Sarah used visual literacy technology to explain writing and brainstorming textual literacy processes. I later asked my student-subjects, informally, what they found useful in visual literacy as presented by their instructor. The students generally thought writing an outline after writing an essay draft could be very valuable. The students did not understand how this related to constructing digital portfolios, however. Again, the teacher did not dedicate enough time to this lesson plan. She could have integrated this with the importance of developing audience-aware navigational schemes.

I asked Sarah informally after class about her lesson. She pointed out to me that during class she began to say ways in which the essay is like a portfolio. To me she said that “portfolios have a thesis, really, and everything included is to prove that thesis.” In other words, the lesson was a brainstorming time for the instructor as well as the students. The instructor learned a new way to consider the nature of a digital portfolio. Sarah was not able to capitalize on using this information until she designed her portfolio assignment handout, later during the semester. When she administered the handout during the last week of class, however, the point that a portfolio can be one well-constructed and integrated essay was largely lost on the students.

Category six has its roots in both reflective immediacy and active remediation, using technology specifically and reshaping technology in other formats or other ways of seeing. Throughout the semester Sarah referred to and used two fixed-media tools to represent digital media types: the students’ portfolio folders and the teacher’s portfolio shoebox. Conceptually, both tools can
be likened to some of the work Apple is currently doing as part of their iTools and iDisk system (“iTools”). The purpose of both Apple’s system and Sarah’s fixed-media tools is to be a warehouse for interactive and ongoing artifact building.

That is, in addition to the course books and a dictionary, Sarah’s syllabus required students to bring to class two PC-formatted disks, a disk case, and at least two two-pocket folders for submitting assignments. Like the more technologically flexible “e-locker” model, the disk case and the folders represented binding nodes for students. That is, one disk was for work, and one disk was for the digital portfolio. The teacher presented this on the first day of class; the first disk being process and the second disk being product. Similarly, the two-pocket folders were to contain the drafting and peer and teacher response folder on the left, and the most current draft on the right. The teacher intended for students’ to move from the folders to the disks in quick transition. I asked her about the transition during the first week of the semester and Sarah said, “The idea is that students might brainstorm how they want ‘the look’ and order of their digital portfolio based on how they arrange it for me to review in their paper versions.” In other words, in the teacher’s view, students should have been able to reshape their backpacks (the media used most frequently in the course) quickly to their electronic counterparts (digital media for final presentation and assessment).

The move wasn’t so easy, as it turned out. Using digital media takes much time, especially if you don’t use the tools in hypertextual ways throughout the course for practice. Conceptually, however, the teacher used another metaphor
to help students “see” or conceive the digital portfolio constructing process. For many students, in my experience, when first learning a digital portfolio is required, visions of Web pages and animated gifs run through their heads. Common tool portfolios generally emphasize content over form, however, and writing over technology. Sarah took every opportunity to assuage the fear of building a “complex” digital portfolio. She did this in two distinct ways, and I’ve discussed advantages and pitfalls of the first, already.

The first strategy is to spend little time teaching the required technology, so as to mitigate its assume difficulty and suggest to students that the technology is easy to learn. I call this the “sink or swim” method. Of course, like the research paper in first-year composition, time to let ideas melt into one another is needed in digital portfolio construction.

The second strategy, however, one that I hadn’t previously seen, is that the teacher regularly carried a suitcase full of her supplies and notes for each day. Literally, she carried—more accurately, wheeled around—a suitcase. The students began to recognize throughout the course their teacher’s own system and organization process in the suitcase. And each class period Sarah would take out a small shoe box and would set it on the table in front of her. “This is the portfolio shoe box,” she would say. “This is where you’ll turn in your portfolios at the end of the semester during your final exam. The shoebox.” It is my view that the students latched onto the idea that they would somehow need to rethink all of their writing on paper into some sort of more organized and tightly arranged container, a disk. Sarah was prompting her students with this box on the table to
in some way “see” or brainstorm ways in which their fixed-media artifacts could be shaped into a digital portfolio format. And in some way she was making digital portfolio pedagogy her own, converting the digital system into her own shoebox/suitcase system as a metaphor.

7. Recognizing scalability

Category seven involves many processes, including reflection, reflexivity, and action. Data that fits in this category for each subject is data that involves subjects reflecting on who they are and what tools they’re using. The data also includes subjects considering how who they are or how the tools they’re exposed to has reshaped their identities. Furthermore, this data category also includes data that suggests subjects are recognizing ways in which media can re-tool or reshape itself. This is different than category three, applying knowledge rhetorically, in that category seven involves reflective and reflexive attributes (see Figure 3.2).

Scalability in terms of popular culture content is readily apparent in my data. The teacher framed the course in a highly structured way, sequencing the readings and formal writings from analyzing advertising to analyzing popular movies to analyzing film genres. Themes from each essay were carried from one project to the next. And each essay underwent a recursive, scalable process, moving from personal reflection on drafts to reflexive peer response to very active teacher response to final portfolio. As discussed earlier, the essay scoring guides were scalable in the sense that the portfolio assessment guide built on the
same concepts. Good teaching is a cyclical process that builds on what students know with new information through such schemata networking.

Even more developed pedagogy, however, recognizes advanced levels of scalability. The content for any course can be made scalable in terms of its assessment, for instance. That is, students can take an active role in creating assessment heuristics, and these heuristics can tap into if not teach content. As the content-base expands, so too should the depth of the assessment heuristics, etc. Scalability can refer to content being re-used or adapted across disciplines or in successive coursework or even outside academe, as well. It is for this reason that many teachers use Webfolios or ask students to include résumés with digital portfolios. And it is important to note that not only can digital portfolios because of their flexible and malleable format be more readily scalable than fixed-media portfolios, students can be taught to see this extended purpose more readily with digital portfolios. I discuss this point further in Chapter Five.

The teacher-subject in my study did not point out to students how artifacts and their final digital portfolio itself might be used in future courses or outside academe. The point is significant because two of the four student-subjects I observed indicated to me that they did not find the experience meaningful because they had to use computers to do something that was challenging. The students did not find it meaningful because they had to spend a good deal of time putting together something at the end of the semester that could have been submitted in hardcopy form without much difference. The teacher did not value metareflection and purposeful hyperlinking. As such, the students did not explore
more contextualized and reflective writing, or metaphorical or holistic ways of conceiving their work through navigational schemes.

In my post-course interview Sarah suggested that scalability was something she wanted to explore in future course offerings. She mentioned that because the portfolio is currently optional for English 103 and 104, the likelihood that students will be able to adapt their digital portfolios in other courses is relatively slim. She did not realize, however, the extent to which digital portfolio pedagogy is being embraced by a number of disciplines in our university. Sarah also said that using digital portfolios for English 101, a course which carries over into English 102 and then English 104, makes good sense. Our basic writing program is designed to encourage students who take 101 to take 102 with the same instructor. Students could then easily bring their digital portfolios from one course to the next. Another idea that Sarah had is that students could then bring portfolios constructed throughout 102 and 103—compilations of no less than eight month’s work—to their English 104 sections. 104 teachers would find this useful to gauge the level of student work coming out of the basic writing program in general, and each student specifically.

**The Student-Subjects**

Each student began the course with different levels of literacy, technology, and portfolio experience. I learned about each student’s background through the revised Writing, Computers, and Literacy Initiative survey (Appendix E), through the student portfolio writing questionnaires (Appendix F), and through impromptu
and scheduled interview sessions. Each student was a true freshman (having passed thirty semester credits) at the time of the study. Relative to the other students in class, Danielle and Kaliah were the least experienced using computers for educational purposes, and Jaclyn and Vickie were the most experienced using computers for educational purposes.

Because the teacher did not integrate the digital portfolio very closely within the framework of the course material, and only dedicated a short amount of time to focusing specifically on digital portfolios, the data I collected from the students was largely about what they were thinking along the lines of popular culture rather than digital portfolios specifically. The data I collected from the survey I administered toward the beginning and then again toward the end of class, however, provided some useful information; as did the student/teacher interview session for each student, the work completed by the students during the semester, and the final portfolios themselves. During the semester when I interviewed each student-subject the general discussion largely revolved around whether or not students were worried about constructing their final digital portfolios. Because of the way in which the teacher taught the course, I was not able to collect much data about the students’ construction process (students created their portfolios outside class and during finals week); about the students’ presentation of their digital portfolios (the teacher did not require a presentation to the class or to other peers—in other words, there was no “drafting” process for the portfolio); and about what the students felt about the way in which the teacher assessed each portfolio (the teacher’s assessment was distributed to each
student by placing it outside her door after finals week). That is, much of the student-subject data I collected includes students’ views about how the teacher specifically *did not* teach using digital portfolios in one way or another.

As such, I present the data more holistically rather than by specific categories from my resultant coding guide here in this section. In so doing I am able to give you a more accurate picture of who each student was, how each student approached learning first-year composition with digital portfolios in the context of Sarah’s course, and how each student might have had an even more successful experience—in her own words—if elements of the course had been taught differently. It is useful, still, to pay attention to reflective immediacy, reflexive hypermediacy, and active remediation and the attributes which signify their cases.

**Danielle**

Danielle was 19 years old at the time of the study, and was born in the Philippines on an air-force base. Danielle’s extensive traveling experience gave her *some* insight into the popular culture content of the course that the other student subjects did not have. At the time of my study, Danielle had been married for nearly two years with a child eighteen months old. Her home life is also significant because Danielle was planning to leave Ball State at the end of the semester to attend a college closer to her extended family in order to help support her family. She found it “very hard to balance school, a child, a husband, and work.” As a result, even though the instructor used the notion of a portfolio
being a scalable product as an incentive throughout the course, Danielle felt the possibility of using her digital portfolio after English 103 was very slim. It is also important to know that Danielle was previously a member of her high school’s orchestra and still enjoys playing the violin in her spare time. She was thinking about becoming a music major. She used a musical metaphor to help her present the content in her digital portfolio. In this way, Danielle conceptualized a larger significance for her work.

Still, in answering “What is a digital portfolio?” in my survey (Appendix F) at the beginning of the semester, Danielle reported that “I honestly don’t know what [a] digital portfolio is but I would imagine it is like powerpoint. It would be useful because all of your work is in one place and everything is easier to look at. I’ve had to use powerpoint but I have never done a digital portfolio.” Danielle’s sense of the nature of a digital portfolio was more like a “product-oriented collection” at the beginning of the study. And even though she demonstrated a lot of reflection, her final portfolio was still product-centered. For Danielle, page length was often the “end-all” goal. Here is a paragraph from her portfolio writer’s statement which was supposed to point out what was most important to her in her writing process:

My third essay assignment was not very hard; it was just very time consuming. I have done research papers in the past, but I have never had to research a movie. After turning in my first draft to have my thesis checked, I realized I did the whole paper wrong. The next day I had to rewrite the whole paper. During our peer group
session, my peers brought some things to my attention. When I rewrote my paper I went from five pages to three, this was a problem that I struggled with to fix. I fixed this problem by finding books about race and criminal justice. When I found the facts that I needed and added them, I got the length that I needed. When I did the final revision for this paper I was pleased with the outcome.

In my experience, working in a paperless environment changes students’ focus on page length a little. The focus of my study is not on paper vs. paperless classes; however, it is possible that digital portfolios as “flexible-text” collections encourage students to focus on something other than page length.

I asked my “What is a digital portfolio?” question again at the end of the semester, and Danielle answered very differently: “To me a digital portfolio is a ‘web site’ based collection of work to help you reflect on your work and make it easier to revise your work it didnt [sic] really help me because i did most of my revising on paper and when i put my work in the portfolio it was already finished but it did help me see how i progressed from draft to draft.” While Danielle was able to see the potential for the digital portfolio to involve a process and be a tool for reflection, in general, she did not present that process as part of her final portfolio. The instructor did not privilege reflection or allow enough time in the course to enable Danielle to maximize the possibilities she saw for a digital portfolio. In other words, the way in which the instructor presented the portfolio construction process, as well as Danielle’s lack of experience using technology for school, generally contributed to her limited view of the value of portfolios.
The student questionnaire also included ten statements that I asked students to rate using a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The purpose of these statements was not intended to gather quantitative data so that I could analyze, specifically, how students rated the value of using computers and digital portfolios in composition. The purpose was more or less to see if any significant changes occurred between the first time I administered the questionnaire and the second time. Here are the questions with Danielle’s response:

<table>
<thead>
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<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Digital portfolios are useful in composition.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
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Table 4.1: Danielle’s Questionnaire Statement Answers

The first two statements are about using computers in composition in general.

The second two statements are about using digital portfolios for drafts.

Statements five through eight relate to collaboration. And the last two statements are more holistic. As you can see from Table 4.1, Danielle found that using digital portfolios encourages students to reflect more about their writing. But she went from “undecided” to “strongly disagree” in her position on the statement “Digital portfolios are useful in composition.” In general, Danielle did not find using digital portfolios worthwhile.

In the survey I also asked Danielle another question which revealed a general but incomplete progression of understanding of what constitutes a digital
portfolio and how it might be used to learn writing. I asked Danielle “How can or does using a digital portfolio impact what and how you learn?” She replied, “I have no clue but like I said it would be useful for all my work to be in one place so it’s easier to work on and look at for revision.” And when I asked her this question at the end of the semester she wrote that “To be honest, it didn’t make much difference. We didn’t use it much. But, I think it could be useful to make some links between things I did outside class, if I had more time and if the teacher would let me.”

On a number of occasions Danielle pointed out to me, informally, either during or after class, that she did see a connection between the content material of the course and its possible representation in the digital portfolio format. That is, according to Danielle just after she submitted her first draft and peer response report for the first essay on advertising in American popular culture:

You know, this stuff we’re looking at now, like Barbie, is all about how people see things, really. And the stuff we’re reading in the other book, you know, that stuff about reading your own writing closely, is sort of the same. Is that the kind of thing we’re supposed to do in the portfolio? To show how we are writing, er, reading closely? Um, so maybe [. . .] the portfolio thing is like, um, the stuff we’re reading? Hmm, I like that. Yeah, I think I can see where the group stuff fits in, maybe like in between drafts. Maybe I can show close reading, uh, writing [. . .] by using the peer thing in between my drafts [in the portfolio].
And when the class was watching *The Nightmare on Elm Street*, a film the instructor showed during class in order to analyze popular culture genre-specific conventions in horror films, Danielle mentioned to me after class that she had the idea of putting a clip from the film into her portfolio. As she explained it, each of Freddy's fingers (Freddy is the nightmarish villain) could be a section of her portfolio. Not more than a week later, however, Danielle switched her theme from something the students were discussing in class to something she was involved in outside of class: music.

I collected copies of all student work throughout the semester, including all drafts, peer group responses, and teacher response. It's difficult—if not impossible—to make any valid connection between most of this data and digital portfolios, especially since students submitted all work *during* the semester in hardcopy form. In fact, Danielle’s first drafts were handwritten. Because the teacher did not bring in a scanner or encourage students to include some of their work in their final portfolios as scanned images, much of this was left unconnected. Because Danielle repeatedly mentioned the value of reflection (strongly agree) in the student survey, both in terms of reflective immediacy and reflexive hypermediacy, in my sorting of the data I paid close attention to whether she improved her writing through reflection and whether any connections could be made between that work and her digital portfolio work.

In the peer group report and revision plan for the first essay, Danielle wrote:
The thing I struggled with the most was my thesis statement and how to get that organized and narrowed down. After I got that accomplished it was pretty easy to start writing. [...] During my peer response group I received both good and bad criticism about my essay. Shauna stated that I needed to use a thesaurus to make my paper sound more professional and also that I needed more detail in my paper. Shauna also asked a question that I never thought of to make the paper long “What can advertisers do to avoid the problem at hand?” Anthony stated that I had a good thesis but I still needed to expand on it to answer the question of why I thought advertisers were not setting a good example by using sex and affiliation to sell products. Eric said that he was “very interested” in my paper but that I need to describe a few more ads to make it longer and better developed. Finally you [the teacher] also commented on my thesis telling me to answer the question why.

Each student completed a three page reflective report after reviewing the completed reader response sheets from three other students. By comparing what Danielle wrote in her report and the changes between her second and third drafts, it is clear that she indeed benefited from reflection. I found this to be the case with her two other papers as well. Danielle made considerable progress by personally reflecting on her work between drafts two and three of all of her formal
writing. There is no evidence to suggest, however, that constructing the digital portfolio had anything to do with her writing progress.

I did find a possible connection between Danielle’s growth in the area of beginning her essays with “catchy phrases” and her portfolio letter of reflection. In comments from her peer response group and the teacher on the first essay, it became clear that in addition to the thesis Danielle needed to work on catching the attention of her readers. Beginning with the second essay, on all drafts, Danielle started using questions as the first sentence in her title. For instance, in the second essay she begins her final draft with “Are you ready to understand what Korn is all about?” In the writer’s portfolio statement Danielle wrote about the importance of catching the attention of her readers, and how this concept is important with new media as well:

One thing that this class has taught me is that I really am not a good writer. I accept that I’m not a good writer, but this class has taught me ways to make my writing a little better. In this class I have also learned as stated in the syllabus “how to take criticism for my writing and use it effectively” to make a better paper. I think I have done a good job in learning how to “establish a personal voice” in my writing. I have learned how to catch the attention of my readers better. Like advertising does, the hyperlinks in my portfolio are meant to catch your attention.

The connection here is one that embraces reflexive hypermediacy. Danielle considers how the medium impacts both who she is and how others perceive
who she is through her writing. Danielle links course content matter (advertising) to how she wrote what she wrote in her portfolio.

I was not able to collect the peer response my student-subjects offered other students because students did not save this information. However, I observed each group session. During one session with Danielle I noticed a particularly interesting peer-response exchange between her and one of her peer group members. The group, on their own accord, were discussing the portfolio project. The other student attempted to coach Danielle through the value of hyperlinking, as he saw it, and how the peer response guides might be sequenced or connected to her writing. At this time Danielle said, “I know this is bad, but if she [the teacher] isn’t going to spend class time on this, why the hell should I worry about it? I’m learning a lot with these guides and it seems like that whole portfolio thing, when we get to it, won’t do anything different.” It is clear from her portfolio that she changed her mind. Teachers must recognize, of course, that they cannot assess their students on skills or knowledge acquisition that they themselves have not demonstrated valuable.

More significantly, Danielle began her portfolio writer’s statement with a music-related simile. The instructor ended up asking students to use Microsoft Word® only rather than PowerPoint®. Danielle created her comparison in text rather than with graphic. She wrote that writing is like an orchestra; that there are many components and many different people have to work together in order to produce something. She referred to the “triangle” and how if one sound is out of place—just like the triangle of reader, writer, and text—“the entire composition
can fall flat on its face.” In her portfolio writer’s statement Danielle referred to the rhetorical triangle as “a sort of popular culture technology, one that shifts all the time and changes writing and messages all the time.”

In an interview just before Danielle submitted her final portfolio, I asked her “How do you think you can present what you’re learning in a portfolio?” Danielle thought about my question for a few minutes and then brought up the metaphor of music. She mentioned that when she writes she listens to music, and that certain music reminds her of certain things. “In a sense,” she said during the interview, “if you stretch it maybe this portfolio thing is supposed to be something that jogs my memory, like my music. Maybe it’s supposed to help me reflect more on my writing.”

Kaliah

Kaliah is the second student-subject who indicated on the WCLI survey—relative to the other students in the class—that she had little experience using computers. At the time of the study, Kaliah was 17 years old. She mentioned she had three older sisters and an older brother who were all either in or had graduated from Ball State. At least four times during the semester Kaliah pointed out to me that none of her siblings had ever produced a digital portfolio. Still, because she was a math education major, and had heard that K-12 teachers are increasingly asked or even required to use digital portfolios, Kaliah reported informally that she had some interest.
She answered the “What is a digital portfolio?” on my survey question pretty well the same toward the end of the semester as she did at the start of the study. Toward the beginning of the semester she wrote that “I guess a digital portfolio is one that has been created through the computer. All of the files are saved on a computer or disk.” And toward the end of the semester Kaliah simply wrote that “It is a portfolio that has all of your work kept on disk.” I suspected from the start that Kaliah would have more experience thinking about popular culture; she grew up in Indianapolis, attended inner-city public schools, and reported that “I also enjoy reading, braiding, walking, and clowning around. I like to stay up on all of the latest movies and fashion as well. I like to consider [sic] myself an all around good person.” (And Kaliah is African-American.) But the teacher later told me that out of the four student subjects she felt Kaliah was the least reflective, struggled the most with her writing, and had trouble conceptualizing applications for digital portfolios.

Kaliah’s response to the statements on the student questionnaire ranged widely:

Table 4.2: Kaliah’s Questionnaire Statement Answers

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From the way she responded to the statements, generally, it can be said that she came to see how computers could be more useful in taking a composition.
course. But she went from “undecided” on the drafting with portfolios statements to “disagree” and from “undecided” to “agree” with the statement “Digital portfolios are useful in composition.” Generally, it can also be said that Kaliah did not recognize working with digital portfolios as an interactive or process-oriented experience, but that building one was helpful in some way.

I asked Kaliah, specifically, on the survey, “How can or does using a digital portfolio impact what and how you learn?” The first time she completed the survey she hypothesized that “Using a digital portfolio could help me learn how to type better. I also will learn how [. . .] to format papers. I will learn by keep re-doing various essays and drafts over the computer.” From her answer it is clear that at the beginning of the semester Kaliah did not know the difference between working with computers and how you learn with a digital portfolio. The second time she answered the question, toward the end of the semester, Kaliah wrote, “A digital portfolio makes the revision process easier because you can delete and add words a lot easier than you can on paper.” Again, she is referring to working with computers in general rather than working with a digital portfolio specifically.

During my first interview with Kaliah I asked her what the difference between computers and digital portfolios were. I thought, perhaps, she did not understand the question on my survey the first time. She indicated that, indeed, there was little difference between computers and digital portfolios. She said that saving things to a disk made that disk the portfolio. Unlike Danielle, Kaliah did not see reflection as a major component to the digital portfolio. Kaliah recognized portfolios even more than Danielle as as collections of artifacts.
The data for Kaliah was difficult to categorize, as such, because she did not understand much of the course material or the objectives of the course syllabus. In general, she was not a reflective, reflexive, or active thinker, nor did she understand, fully, what technology or even “media” was. For instance, in a session during the seventh week of course, the instructor asked students to read Simon Frith’s “Rock and Sexuality” and David Samuels’ “The Rap on Rap” from Common Culture. In the first reading Frith’s thesis is that “even though music and musicians are becoming more and more liberated, other critics argue that contemporary popular music may in fact be expressing conservative ideologies in a new, different—and frequently disguised—form” (258). Samuels’ main claim in the second reading is that in the early 1990s the influence of rap and hip hop became widespread, and industry observers discovered that rap’s largest audience appeared to be white, suburban males. For Samuels, “Rap music offers middle-class white listeners their exotic ‘other’ in a prepackaged, easily consumable form, providing the vicarious thrills of transgression (drugs, guns, and sex) without the risk. [And] in order to appeal to these white fans, rap musicians and producers have created an increasingly violent and antisocial image of black males” (270).

The instructor and I expected Kaliah to take a stand during the discussion, because she was the only black student in the class. In the least, we both expected she would have an opinion about these two readings. Sarah had to prompt Kaliah and put her on the spot. Sarah asked Kaliah, “You’re the only person of color here in this room, Kaliah. What are your thoughts? I’m not saying
you have to ‘represent’ or anything like that. It’s just clear to me that we might need your perspective and experience. What defines the genre of rap in your opinion?” Kaliah reluctantly responded that she did not understand Frith and Samuels, and that she felt rap music wasn’t about racism or sex in the least.

Earlier that class period, however, the instructor had projected a Ja Rule video called “Living it up.” During the video Sarah pointed out key genre elements, such as monogamy, wealth, carefree, “homies,” sex, and racism; and specific material artifacts such as big houses, clothes, expensive cars, and jewelry. Kaliah was clearly not paying attention or thinking about how the medium of rap video in some ways attempts to define who she is (or in the least who other people think she is). Even if in her opinion the genre of rap music videos aren’t about racism and sex, it can’t be denied that racism and sex are blatantly portrayed.

I am suggesting that there is connection between Kaliah’s not understanding what the difference between a digital portfolio and computer is and what “genre” or “medium” is in general. In an interview with the instructor I asked Sarah about this point. Sarah said she did not know, but that what she did know was that Kaliah’s work was not very reflective and did not follow her assignment prompts.

In examining Kaliah’s work this is clearly the case. In the second draft of her essay analyzing advertisements, Kaliah wrote:

Jet is a magazine that has a predominately African American reader population. All of the advertisements main model that are
pictured are black. This magazine focuses more on the famous African Americans rather than superstars as a while. I chose this magazine because it is different. There is an array of black magazines, such as Ebony and Black Enterprise, but I seem to be more interested in Jet. Jet has more topics that attract my attention. I feel that the majority of Jet Magazine’s advertisements are geared to attract the attention of African American adults. All of the ads pictured black people. None of the ads were for toys or candy. In my opinion, more of the advertisements were geared toward women, but there were others that seemed to be specifically geared towards the males as well.

Kaliah pointed out to her peer group response team members that this is the paragraph that included her thesis statement. Clearly, Kaliah’s work is not very critical. She made a few editing changes between this draft and her final draft, but still did not provide any more specificity than what she had in the above paragraph. In a nutshell, in the above paragraph she wrote that ads in a magazine targeted at black people included pictures that have black people in them, both of men and women. And she mentioned that Jet Magazine catches her attention the most, but does not analyze why, which was the purpose of the assignment. Kaliah is not embracing reflexive hypermediacy, critiquing the medium (advertisement) to see the self and influences on the self more objectively.
In reader response sheets for Kaliah’s work, her peers alluded to how Kaliah did not take a stand as well. One student wrote with regard to what Kaliah’s thesis is for the advertisement essay: “Advertisements range under many different appeals. Many of these Jet Magazine ads seem to be geared toward adults because of the products and messages utilized.” In other words, advertisements include a variety of appeals, and magazines that deal with adult themes are geared toward adults. These points are not very critical, nor do they require a lot of thought. I found the same lack of critical engagement in most of Kaliah’s work. Her instructor pointed this same thing out to her in the student/teacher conference. During the conference there was no mention of digital portfolios. (The student/teacher conferences for the next two student-subjects are more illuminating.)

In her own peer group report and revision plan for the second draft of her second essay, Kaliah began to recognize—with the teacher’s help—that the thesis she included in this paper (as well as her previous paper) was still way too vague. She began her report this way:

I struggled the most with my thesis. This is the same problem that I encountered when I wrote my first draft for the first essay that we were assigned. When I received my paper from the teacher, she noted that my paper was too broad. Before I turned in my paper, I felt that I had a great paper that accurately backed up my thesis. I really haven’t found any method that would help me come up with a better and narrower thesis. My thesis is in the first paragraph. I
have to try to actually prove my thesis to be correct. I thought that was a persuasion paper and I don’t understand why I should have to prove my opinion to be true.

Kaliah had not used the computer much for educational purposes. She told me that she had a lot of trouble revising. She lost her disk four times during the semester, and had to re-type her essays. If there is a connection to be made here between writing concepts and digital portfolio construction, it is related to Sarah’s statement that I mentioned earlier in this chapter: “portfolios have a thesis, really, and everything included is to prove that thesis.” As was the case for Danielle, if Kaliah could have made a stronger link between how a portfolio is constructed and how an essay is organized, it is possible she could have learned more about how to write more effective thesis statements. Of course, because Kaliah was not comfortable with computers, and because the teacher did not rely on computers during class or even introduce the portfolio assignment until very late in the semester, there was no way for Kaliah to even begin to make this connection. She reflected about her work in the course dejectedly in her portfolio writer’s statement, the file that serves as the index page to the digital portfolios in this class:

My main problem is still the same. It is very hard for me to come up with my thesis statement. No matter what the paper is on or how hard I think, I have to struggle to come up with a half way decent thesis. I also seem to have a hard time backing up my thesis. This has been my main problem since the beginning of this class. This is
the one thing, in my opinion, that I feel has not improved at all. My thesis does get better with each revised paper, but, initially, my thesis’ don’t seem to be worth anything. My thesis,’ so far, have been too broad or didn’t have a claim. Once I really know want I am trying to get at in my paper, it is easier for me to create an accurate thesis.

She concludes her portfolio writer’s statement by suggesting that she ultimately did not have the skills she needed to write effective papers at the beginning of class. She did not suggest her writing improved. Further, because she was not able to include hyperlinks that worked in her digital portfolio, it’s clear to me that she never became an effective digital portfolio writer, either. In the conclusion to her portfolio writer’s statement Kaliah wrote:

In conclusion, I feel that when I started this class, I did not have the skills or experience to accurately complete these assignments. Revising my papers helped me realize what my main problems were. That helped me out a lot. I know now that, I need to check over my papers at least three times to make sure that my work is up to standards.

Jaclyn

Jaclyn mentioned she planned to major in business. Unlike the dissatisfying experience Kaliah reported both with the course and with the digital portfolio, Jaclyn’s writing and work during class demonstrated much reflection and she
was much more successful in achieving Sarah’s objectives. Jaclyn indicated on
the revised WCLI survey that she had a lot of experience using computers for
school. And she pointed out in interviews that she had attended a high school in
northern Indiana, one that is well known for its portfolio writing curriculum.

In fact, when asked “What is a digital portfolio?” at the beginning of the
study Jaclyn answered fairly articulately: “A digital portfolio is a portfolio done on
a computer or done w/ a digital device. A portfolio is a collection of work done by
an individual. So a digital portfolio is an individual’s work done on a computer, or
with the use of a computer.” While her initial definition is a little incomplete, it
shows considerable depth and understanding, indicating that Jaclyn saw the
connection between technology and writing process portfolio pedagogy from the
beginning of the semester. Toward the end of the semester Jaclyn answered this
question even more clearly: “To me a digital portfolio is a collection of work put
into one piece as a whole. The work is composed on a computer but that has no
conflict with the writing [sic] itself.”

Jaclyn’s second definition is particularly informing because she uses the
terms “one piece as a whole” and “has no conflict.” The first concept is something
the instructor attempted to get across on a few different occasions. The teacher
presented the portfolio constructing process similar to the general scope of an
essay: the portfolio has an introduction and thesis, points that prove the thesis,
and a conclusion. As such, it is an integrated presentation tool. Still, the depth of
this point was lost on most—if not every—student in the class, as the data
indicated with Danielle and Kaliah, in that the students often did not see the portfolio construction process as a reflective writing experience.

When I asked what Jaclyn meant by “conflict” in an interview session she said, “Well, it’s like . . . I can use the computers to make my portfolio, but I really don’t have to. The portfolio is something bigger. It exists outside the computer. It’s like the computer just lets you present it to my reader. There’s no conflict.” I take this to mean that because Sarah did not more fully explain the “obvious” advantages to using digital media to construct and present portfolios, students who even had some experience creating portfolios already did not see the process as something different than creating fixed-media portfolios.

On the student questionnaire Jaclyn responded to the ten statements I offered her much differently than Danielle or Kaliah. Jaclyn “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statements both the first and the second time I administered the questionnaire:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>First Administration</th>
<th>Second Administration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Using computers to write first drafts of essays is useful.</td>
<td>SA A U D SD</td>
<td>SA A U D SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Using computers to revise drafts of essays is useful.</td>
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<td>SA A U D SD</td>
<td>SA A U D SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Jaclyn’s Questionnaire Statement Answers

There is most likely no real significance between ways in which Jaclyn’s responses differed. It might be noted, however, that Table 4.3 might indicate that Jaclyn’s general expectations for what the digital portfolio was going to be were
higher than how Sarah implemented digital portfolio pedagogy throughout the semester.

In Jaclyn’s student/teacher conference it was Jaclyn who initiated discussion about the final digital portfolio project. After discussing the thesis and body of Jaclyn’s second paper, Jaclyn asked Sarah “How does this fit in with the last assignment, the portfolio? I’m trying to make a list with different elements of my writing. What I mean is that I want to put some of this stuff, maybe the things you just said, in my final portfolio. Is that the kind of thing you want?” The tape indicates, though, that Sarah first moved the conversation back to her comments on Jaclyn’s first paper, and then toward the end of the conference she replied more directly:

Jaclyn, what you have in mind is great. I think you’re much further ahead in your thinking about your final portfolio, seeing it all put together like that. That’s not so important just now, though. Thinking about how to revise your first and second papers first, at this point, is probably what you need to be doing. Don’t get me wrong, jotting down ideas about [. . .] about your portfolio ideas, like connections between things, like you said, is a good thing. And you’re writing is great. You’re getting an A. This is a good thing. A good thing. But, need to think about style. Your style is pretty informal, and you need to change it for more academic-like purposes. The thesis and development of ideas is more important, but some of your professors will be more picky about style and
those kinds of issues. And it’s never a bad idea to ask teachers first if they allow first-person. Some of them are more old-fashioned, and they won’t. Sometimes professors will tell you up front, and some will assume one or the other. But as far as the portfolio, I’m going to make a handout about that. Basically it’s like a history of everything you’ve done this semester. And that you have an opportunity to kind of look at it as a history. Okay you know, here’s kind of what you’ve done, it’s an experiment.

Jaclyn then asked Sarah if there were going to be a set number of required links.

Sarah replied:

Well, I don’t want too many [laugh], because you know, none of us really has time to look at everything. But basically, you know you’ll be able to talk about your three papers in there and make references to drafts and revisions. You know so that you might say in this first paper you struggled with block or particular kind of issue and if I look at this—the sort of revision that you—I would see that that’s where you really made the break through, or whatever. Um, and, you’d have a link that would link me to that draft, so I could go look at it. And then you’d have a link that show me your final version in your portfolio. So, you’re going to write a cover or essay or letter, like you’ve been doing these revision plans for me. You’re going to do one of those for your whole portfolio. It will make sense. I’ll have a handout for you. [...] It’s just a way of archiving it all and
talking about it all in one body of work. And that’s the main thing when you’re talking about portfolios is that you’re talking about the body of accomplishment and instead each paper as a separate thing that no longer exists any more and no longer has a separate application to anything else. [. . .] But it’s hard to make digital comments, still. You know, I can’t just write in the margins. There’s still limitations.

For Sarah, the digital portfolio was to be a collection of new work with an added reflective piece that would enable the student to clearly state what she struggled with and learned through drafting. She chose not to comment electronically, but to use her own paper portfolio assessment guide. The links in students’ portfolios would simply link from the reflective cover to the individual drafts, rather than including “internal” linking between drafts and between essays and between other types of artifacts. Because much of the process-work—such as the informal writes, the peer response, and the self progress analysis for each paper—were handwritten, Sarah did not intend for it to be included even though at least one student, Jaclyn, did.

Jaclyn used Microsoft Word®’s Insert > Comment feature (the shaded phrases below) in her portfolio more reflectively than any of the other student-subjects. Also, similar to Danielle’s music simile but more well developed and sustained throughout the portfolio, Jaclyn used a metaphor to begin her portfolio writer’s statement, a boating metaphor:
Load up the boat, set the sails, and out to sea you go. Well I am sure you know boating is not that easy and neither has this class been. It is as if I was a first-timer setting sail, but as how many things in life go, I had my problems. This paper is meant to show you my journey in “the ocean.”

The semester started out with informal writes. They were meant to get us started with writing in college. Through the informal writes we were able to play with different styles of writing. This would in turn help us with our essays. I really enjoyed doing the informal writes because we got to express our opinions about an article/piece that we read.

By employing the use of “boating as a journey,” Jaclyn was able to reflect on a specific technology, a boat, and how it works in order to see her experience in English 103 more objectively. In other words, Jaclyn was engaging in reflexive hypermediacy. By using the metareflective comment feature, she was able to tell much more about the journey of the story even more objectively. That is, oftentimes Jaclyn would use comments to point out what the syllabus said. With informal writes she quoted the goals listed on the informal writes handout. She included all the page numbers of all the readings and hyperlinks to all the ads she investigated through the Insert > Comment feature.

Relative to the other student-subject’s portfolios, Jaclyn integrated hyperlinks more effectively as well. She engaged in active remediation, playing
with how the hyperlink or technology impacts the message (hyperlinks are underlined):

When the assignment came for the first essay I was really confident in what I was going to write about. I had chosen an advertisement that would be easy for me to analyze. If you look at my first draft you will see that I had used freestyle as my form of writing. I eventually made my way to a point that I was satisfied with and this essay is what I turned in to my peer group. The only changes suggested were punctuation and grammatical errors. I made those changes and then I came up with my final essay.

Other students’ portfolio writer’s statements lead into hyperlinks by separating, contextually, the link from the flow of the sentence. For instance, Danielle introduced her first essay’s drafts like this: “I learned a lot about writing by the assignment on advertising through my first draft. Click to see draft-1, draft-2, or draft-3.”

At the beginning of the semester I asked Jaclyn “How can or does using a digital portfolio impact what and how you learn?” She felt that “It will help you learn by letting you know what you do or don’t know on a computer and it can help you to become better with a computer. It will help you in the future especially because we are using more technology everyday. You become both familiar with a computer and writing.” Category seven in my resultant guide involves recognizing scalability. With portfolio pedagogy in general, and digital portfolio pedagogy specifically, recognizing how these collections can change over a
period of time for a variety of contexts is very important. Recognizing scalability is, perhaps, even more significant than being technologically literate. Jaclyn entered the course with both, as well as with previous experience using portfolios.

Jaclyn’s answer to my survey question toward the end of the semester was even more developed, suggesting that in addition to computer skills, creating a portfolio teaches writing skills in specific ways. Jaclyn wrote: “With the digital portfolio you have to tie all the pieces together so this helps you to see what you used in all the work that is the same or different. You can see what worked for one thing and maybe or didn’t work for another. It helps you see and relate everything together.” In addition to recognizing the scalable potential of digital media, Jaclyn is seeing her work holistically, considering how the portfolio can help her demonstrate she met her teacher’s expectations for the course, and she is applying knowledge rhetorically.

In an interview shortly after her student/teacher conference I asked Jaclyn if she felt constructing a digital portfolio would be worthwhile and if so, why. She said “Yes, most definitely,” and proceeded to talk about the importance of making the portfolio her own:

I’ve done a few portfolios now. I remember the first one. Mrs. Handy gave us a list of things to include, and we had to pick maybe 10 out of 15 things, and arrange them in some order. And that was it. It wasn’t until my second portfolio that I really got to write a reflection essay at the start or beginning. At the front. Um, and that
was, like, the best thing. Then with my next few portfolios, which were really just reshaping what I, er, did in previous classes, to be honest, I used something that I really liked to catch the attention of whoever might read my portfolio. I spoke about my mom in one, for instance, and how she’s my best friend and helps me with my schoolwork. Well, she did in high school.

Using a metaphor or a personal approach or individual navigational scheme to frame the artifacts of a portfolio is very important in first-year composition portfolios (see Katherine Fischer’s “Down the Yellow Chip Road: Hypertext Portfolios in Oz”). For Jaclyn, using a metaphor was the way she could make the portfolio construction process personally meaningful.

Vickie

In her own way, Vickie had a better understanding than my other student subjects of what a digital portfolio is and how technology might be useful in first-year composition. When asked for the first time to characterize digital portfolios, Vickie shared a definition that extended beyond “common tool” portfolios and hypothesized about the value of making portfolios public. In fact, her definition demonstrates her foresight into the potential interactive and collaborative nature of Webfolios and the value of a well-considered network infrastructure, two points I raise in the next chapter. Vickie initially defined digital portfolios in this way:

My guess is that a digital portfolio is a collection of written works kept on the computer through, say, a network and therefore it may
be easily accessible from any computer terminal within the network, making peer revaluations simpler as well. If a digital portfolio is a space on a network that houses compositions, technically it could be made so that anyone can access the papers and reply/leave a message on what he or she thought about it—What needs to be fixed & what the writer might want to change—and all with a sense of anonymity so the person evaluating and giving constructive criticism won’t worry about sounding so harsh & will give his or opinion more freely, helping the writer more. Then again I may be completely wrong. I am reminded of monster.com where one can put his resumee [sic] online and potential employers can search through and read them, and contact the person, and vice-versa.

In other words, Vickie recognized that the purpose of building a digital portfolio could include presenting one’s skills and notion of “self” outside the venue of the classroom. Vickie had never produced a portfolio, but mentioned that after signing the consent forms to my study she looked up “digital portfolios” in a Google search. Unfortunately, because she turned in some of her work early and left for home the day before I administered the survey the second time, I was not able to collect a second survey from her.

It is significant, however, that Vickie would often stay after class to clarify popular culture ideas with the instructor. In fact, it became a regular routine for Vickie to stay afterward to try to repeat the major threads of the day’s lesson by sharing relatable personal experiences. Vickie also asked the instructor on four
occasions how the content of the course could be related in some way in a digital portfolio; that is, how the medium could be the message. And as reported by the instructor, Vickie gave Sarah some portfolio “presentation” ideas. For instance, after a conversation with Vickie in a class session that followed a week later, Sarah related an example of how MTV videos use medium to present message just as “hyperlinking to something in a portfolio is kind of like the same thing.” It should be noted that like Kaliah, Vickie indicated she wanted to become a teacher. Whereas Kaliah was interested in secondary education, Vickie was interested in primary education.

I was surprised to find with the energy and general positive attitude that Vickie offered her teacher and peers that she was “undecided” on so many statements in the survey at the beginning of the semester. Where she was not undecided, however, with the statements that corresponded to the writing process in particular, Vickie “strongly agreed”:

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Table 4.4: Vickie’s Questionnaire Statement Answers

But then again she answered the “How can or does using a digital portfolio impact what and how you learn?” question by pointing out she had never used a digital portfolio before. I picked up on something here that the other student-subjects really weren’t describing. Vickie initially equated digital portfolio
pedagogy to computer-mediated teaching and distance education strategies. She wrote:

Hey I still don’t know for sure what this thing is and I’ve never used one in class before much less at all. I would imagine, if my network & reader response via the computer theory is correct, that the atmosphere would be far more relaxed and receiving and giving good criticism would be promoted. Without face-to-face explorations it may take a little longer to describe certain things; talking and body language are fast and efficient while the written (in this case “typed”) word takes more time and without body language and vocal tone and being able to see by facial expressions if the other person is grasping what is said it may lead to confusion or mistake ideas/meanings. On a computer one can look up words’ meanings if unsure, and synonyms [sic], and research his topic within seconds, making the writing of the essay faster and easier without as much hassle.

The way Vickie suggests that a digital portfolio involves a network and involves composing using the computer is different than what Kaliah suggested, that “I guess a digital portfolio is one that has been created through the computer. All of the files are saved on a computer or disk.” For Vickie, the interaction via the computer is part of the digital portfolio. Here is the root of Vickie’s many conversations and brainstorming sessions with her instructor.
I have recently begun to use interaction as part of digital portfolio construction with common tool portfolios in my own teaching. Technically, to setup a synchronous or asynchronous space that can be connected to students’ portfolios through the Internet can be difficult with common tool portfolios. It may, in fact, without technology support, be too difficult for most teachers in our program. Furthermore, one of the primary goals in using common tool pedagogy is to enable students to concentrate on writing or “writing as a technology” as opposed to just technology. Many first-year students are not terribly computer savvy. Also, it is helpful to assess portfolios in the same environment or with the same tools with which individual artifacts are constructed. I discuss the importance of common tool portfolios in our program in the next chapter. But, it is significant that even though Sarah did not indicate she had initially considered such a well integrated approach, one of her students initially conceptualized the digital portfolio in this way.

Of course, I asked Vickie in an interview about what she thought the nature of a digital portfolio was. And in our conversation she indicated that—unlike how she answered my question on the survey—the digital portfolio can be something just used in the classroom. While she was comfortable and very experienced using computers at home and at school, she had never taken an English, Composition, or Literature course in a computer classroom. As a result, Vickie reported that she may have mistaken what the survey meant by digital portfolios:
You know, like now that I see how an English class could work here in one of these labs, like, even though [the teacher] doesn’t use ever seem to use them, and I’m okay with that, because sometimes computers frustrate me, I, like, see now that an electronic portfolio or whatever you call it can be more like a web site, with links and stuff. I don’t know how to do that, but it’s like I’m not worried or anything. I do think it would be cool to do an AOL chat as a class or in our peer groups and include that sort of thing. Hell, like I could hyperlink to a chat that I saved in Word with some friends from outside this class. I was talking about how we were watching MTV videos in class and they thought that was pretty cool. I told them it was, but, like, that we had to analyze everything, like, in the videos. Rochelle asked me why, or what I meant by analyze, and I got to tell her about what I was learning in class, like from that Salamon [sic] guy and stuff. Like I felt smart. It was cool. I could see something like that, in my final project. I’m sure in the next month or so some other stuff like that will, you know, be there for me.

The first significant thing I noticed when reviewing Vickie’s portfolio was the way in which she managed her files (see Figure 4.2). Sarah mentioned in her portfolio assignment handout that students should “Make sure that you name and label each piece carefully as you save them on the disk.” My other student-subjects took this to mean they were supposed to put all of their files in the same
directory. Vickie, however, felt that by more efficiently managing her files she could conceptualize her portfolio more succinctly:

![Vickie’s File Management](image)

Figure 4.2. Vickie’s File Management

In our final interview she told me that “I already have my files in folders for each paper. I’m usually not organized like that, but it’s helping me see each section. Like, do you know what I mean? What did you call those things?” I had mentioned the term “nodes” during our interview.

In addition to creating a specific folder for each collection of artifacts for each paper, Vickie created an “Essay Index.doc” file which listed each of her essays, page length, thesis statements and other artifacts for quick review by her instructor:

**Essay 1: Analyzing Advertising – “Bare Facts”**

**Thesis Statement:** “It is the products and places advertised that have no real or apparent connection to sex or nudity, yet use one or the other in an ad to get attention, that are tasteless and vulgar and obviously not worth the time of a knowledgeable consumer.”
5 pages (You can find the specific ad written about here. See Group Report and Revision Plan for details on paper’s construction.)

----------

Essay 2: Analyzing Popular Music – Hanson: “We Won’t Go Down”

Thesis Statement: “Despite its reputation as a fluffy, childish one-hit wonder, this Oklahoman band of three brothers positively influenced adults and kids alike as well as helped start a revolution of feel-good pop in the late nineties.”

6 pages (Bibliography sources from internet linked for convenience.
See Group Report and Revision Plan for details on paper’s construction.)

----------

Essay 3: Analyzing Film – ‘Kong’ Fu: Modern Man Against Primitive Primate

Thesis Statement: “‘King Kong’ is not the classic ‘good against evil’ fable in which the hero is rewarded and the villain punished
and in which the two are easily distinguished; rather, ‘King Kong’ is
the age-old tale of man against the very nature that spawned him –
neither being the epitome of good or evil and both capable of
cruelty and destruction as well as protection and creation.”

5 pages (See Portfolio Writer’s Statement for details on paper’s
construction.)

The instructor mentioned the convenience of this index page in our final
interview, and pointed out that she plans to make it a requirement for future
student digital portfolios. In other words, Vickie reshaped the way she
conceptualized her work into a more linear form than her portfolio writer’s
statement, because she thought her primary reader might benefit from the
second form even though the assignment didn’t call for it. Vickie was engaging in
active remediation, viewing one medium better than another given a specific
rhetorical situation. Through file management Vickie explored ways in which the
medium or method of presentation impacted her content and reception of that
content.

Similarly, with regard to combining medium and message, Vickie
integrated her portfolio construction process with her writing process in her
portfolio writer’s statement. She demonstrates critical thinking which I did not see
in any other student-subject’s work. She also separates each node more
effectively in terms of page layout and content than her peers, perhaps because of her file management skills.

Vickie’s portfolio writer’s statement (Appendix P) was particularly astute and passages from her statement fall under each core category. She begins her statement with:

> When I began to put this portfolio together, I realized the advantages of my usual and stubborn method of writing without planning or creating subsequent drafts through countless revisions. In addition to being efficient time-wise, writing only one paper as the completed product would make the task of organizing that much easier. Instead of investing my time in the frantic search and retyping of numerous missing drafts and critical responses or in the planning and organizing of all the copies into a portfolio, I could focus more intently on an individual paper’s revision. Although I will admit that in times such functions as creating a free-write or answering a proof-reading/thesis questionnaire have contributed somewhat to my final writing. With one single piece of writing not only would arranging the portfolio be considerably painless but, most notably, I would already be finished.

In the introductory paragraph here it is clear that Vickie is reflecting on her personal expectations as a writer, as well as her teacher’s expectations. She considers what her portfolio would be like if it were only a collection of final drafts. Vickie is also relaying her brainstorming process, rethinking the way she feels
she learns, and is beginning to relate how her work can grow or be scalable. For Vickie, the process of including “missing drafts” and “critical responses” was a time-consuming yet helpful experience which contributed “somewhat [positively] to my final writing.” She goes on to suggest that “through this course I have learned the importance of rewriting not for the sake of repairing technical mistakes such as grammar but for the purpose of communicating clearly to an audience.” It is significant that Vickie does not focus here on the technology involved in constructing a digital portfolio or even creating multiple drafts (reflective immediacy). Instead, she focuses on her writing process.

When Vickie presents specific portfolio artifacts, however, she slips into reflexive hypermediacy. She concentrates directly on the technology she used and how that technology use enabled her to see her growth as a writer more objectively. The underlined text indicates a hyperlink that connects Vickie’s reader to specific examples of her own perceived “strengths” and “weaknesses.” In other words, she uses hyperlinking to be reflexive. Vickie writes:

On the subject of methods, I strictly followed the guidelines for the “Analyzing Film” essay assignment by choosing a specific film (“King Kong”) and by restricting my thematic focus to the structuralist [sic] approach of mythology. Strengths and weaknesses of this final draft are mostly the same as for every paper I write: My use of language and grammar as well as detail and description is particularly noteworthy while the lack of clarity, organization, and a sound thesis leave something to be desired.
Despite those faults, I believe I have improved my writing considerably in the course of the semester, most specifically in organization and in the research aspect of tracking down and citing sources.

In this paragraph it is clear that Vickie is using the technology of hyperlinking to meet the expectations of her instructor. When she points out how she “restricted” or narrowed her topic to a particular aspect of a particular film, she is indicating how she is rethinking learning. She indicates places where her writing still needs improvement. Elsewhere in the portfolio writer’s statement, with regard to a different essay, Vickie discusses how she “went so far as to post a message in the band’s official Yahoo message board explaining [her] predicament and asking if anyone could help out by e-mailing [her] a short account on why [other fans] liked the band, what the music meant to [them], etcetera.” She is highlighting the technology. She is engaging in reflexive hypermediacy.

The third core category, active remediation, can be identified in Vickie’s portfolio writer’s statement as well. Vickie demonstrates ways in which she applied knowledge rhetorically, “for the purpose of communicating clearly to an audience.” She includes three links to her Group Report and Revision Plan, where she traces examples of how she improved her writing based on specific peer response. Vickie explains, “As I explained more in depth in my Group Report and Revision Plan, I bent the rules in this fashion simply to reduce the number of quoted texts and long titles which deterred the reader from smoothly gliding from one sentence to the next and to prevent confusion. With all lyrics,
song names, and direct quotes in quotation marks, it became difficult to tell one from the other, jeopardizing the reader’s comprehension.”

More specifically, Vickie suggests that she learned how to “conceptualize” and get information for one form of “technology” or media assignment (film), by working with another form (advertising), early in the semester. She writes:

> My first and second-favorite piece of writing during this course, “Bare Facts” took me a long time to conceptualize.* I was at a loss for advertisements, unable to find one I thought I was capable of writing a sufficient amount on or one I wished to write about at all. Since I have no magazines myself, I used Bracken Library’s sources and finally came across a promising and controversial graphic for “Bowlmor Lanes” Bowling Alley within an issue of *Ms. Magazine*. I collected two other such ads that displayed women in a sexual way and began to write about the three and the vulgarity of such innuendos – especially when considering the places the ads promoted were prone to visits from children and adults of all ages. I soon discarded this rough draft through fellow peer editor Courtney’s suggestion however, since it had too much potential content and not enough room to develop it in, not to mention the fact that tying the three ads into one thesis was somewhat challenging. All three of my peers pointed out what areas needed more or less elaboration in the text and the useless repetition I could not steer clear from. With the finished product being more
simply and clearly written than any other in this digital portfolio, it is obvious why I tend to favor it so much. I cannot say exactly that since it is completely different from the rest of my later work that I have improved, for it is difficult to ascertain whether clear and concise is better than a long and involved not-so-quite understandable composition, like, for instance, this one.

That is, Vickie was able to recognize the process of working with advertising could apply or be scalable with regard to film. She relates and equates working with these specific technologies with her writing process, “for it is difficult to ascertain whether clear and concise is better than a long and involved not-so-quite understandable composition, like, for instance, this one.” Vickie is engaging in active remediation. Whereas Vickie’s portfolio writer’s statement demonstrates ways in which she was engaging in reflective immediacy, reflexive hypermediacy, and active remediation, the three other student subjects’ work does not.

In the next chapter I share implications of this fact and the data in Chapter Four by outlining some results, by presenting a conclusion of sorts, and by offering a general summary of my dissertation.
Chapter Five

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

Although we have not traditionally recognized it, literacy and technology are inextricably intertwined. Print technology has dominated language arts for the past few centuries, and our conceptions of literacy have been shaped by the features of that technology. The emergence of computer networks as venues for communication and community will affect the fundamental shapes of literacy. Writers and readers now must understand how communication and literary arts work in electronic environments that both resemble and differ from print. (5)

– Eric Crump and Nick Carbone, English Online

In a February, 2002 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education called “Creating Online Portfolios Can Help Students See ‘Big Picture,’ Colleges Say,” the vice-chancellor for information technologies at the Maricopa County Community College District, Ronald Bleed, points out that while digital portfolios are “on the horizon,” they are still being defined (Young). W. Webster Newbold, current Assistant Chair of the English Department at Ball State University, in an article entitled “The ‘Autobiography’ Model For Developmental Reflection” in Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy, points out that “To bring electronic portfolios into a position of significant instrumentality in teaching and
learning in our department, we would [. . .] need to carry out *summative evaluation* in addition to the mainly *formative evaluation*.” The purpose of my study was to begin to define and describe some of the complex intersections between teaching and learning first-year composition with digital portfolios, focusing on the construction, presentation, and assessment processes in one first-year composition course at Ball State University. In other words, the purpose of my study was to collect summative data.

**Results and Implications**

The significant data I collected for each subject presented specific, observable phenomena that is useful to the work currently being done in the English Department at Ball State University and in the field of composition in general. I break the results down in terms of what might be useful for teaching, for learning, and for researching. It should be noted, however, that my results are limited to the context in which I studied. The instructor’s teaching style, a unique combination of lecture and emphasis on popular culture and modeling and scaffolding and multimedia, made it difficult to study digital portfolios in course when the instructor asked students to turn off their computers for the first quarter or so of the semester. She did not use the teacher’s station until after midterms. In environments which rely on paper and more face-to-face interaction rather than computer-mediated interaction, it is difficult if not impossible to collect data and demonstrate results regarding topics like the impact of collaboration on constructing, presenting, or assessing digital portfolios. And because the teacher
did not introduce the portfolio assignment handout until the last week of the semester, I was not able to observe students actually construct their portfolios.

For Teaching

I teach first-year composition with digital portfolios, and during the course of my study I was a member of a portfolio taskforce team in the Teacher's College. The taskforce brainstormed ways in which teachers at Ball State University could be trained to sequence sound pedagogy and effective technology. My role as researcher-observer in this study was difficult for two reasons. First, given my background and the work I was doing concurrently, I often felt I knew ways of teaching first-year composition with digital portfolios that were more effective than those Sarah was using. Second, both the teacher and the students recognized me as someone who had created digital portfolios before and was fairly savvy with computer technology. On many occasions I had to decline teacher and student requests for help because the integrity of my study would have been compromised in significant ways. Still, I discovered five specific ways in which the instructor's model worked and didn’t work, however, which I relate here in this section.

1. As is the case with using any technology in first-year composition (if not in most fields), the tool must be integrated from the first day of class as a key component to the course, and it also must be sequenced if not as part of the content than as the content. Teachers must recognize the construction,
presentation, and assessment of digital portfolios as part of the content of the
course itself. The data from my study reveals numerous instances where the
teacher and the students pointed out they did not achieve the full learning
potential of the digital portfolio because of when and how it was presented. The
“sink or swim” method can work with technology to a certain degree. However, a
digital portfolio should be seen as something more than technology. Seeing
portfolios as more than receptors or dissemination tools—within the scope of
first-year composition—is simply good pedagogy. Further, like an extensive
research paper, a truly reflective portfolio requires ample time to produce.

2. The teacher should find a connection to the digital portfolio from within the
context of the teacher’s own pedagogy. The teacher-subject in my study did this
in at least three ways. First, the teacher related visual and “spatial” literacy in
terms of the portfolio to the contemporary American popular culture content of
the course. The teacher could have capitalized more on file management and
visual representations of the portfolio—as in Vickie’s case—to reach more
students. The teacher, as she reported at the end of the semester, could have
also emphasized concepts central to portfolio pedagogy in her course’s
objectives. Second, the teacher in my study regularly required paper folders and
disks for student work. Each folder became a “mini-portfolio” which was then
“scalable” in terms of reformatting the work conceptually and perceptually for a
final portfolio. Also, the portfolio assessment guide—although a scoring guide is
more effective if the student has some stake in producing it—was directly
generated from the course objectives and the self- and teacher-guides for individual essays. Third, the teacher used a shoe-box which served as a daily, symbolic reminder that students work had to be put into a format that she could accept at the end of the semester. One strategy the teacher did not use which was problematical for her students is important here too, however. The teacher required a different medium for final assessment than the students used to compose their work in. Simply put, the three stages of teacher presentation, student construction, and student and teacher assessment are balanced more effectively if the same technologies are used in each stage.

That is, the discontinuity between composing in one environment or with one specific set of tools and then assessing in another environment or with other sorts of tools can weaken the presumed value of either an environment or a teaching and learning process. For instance, two of my student-subjects reported that composing informal-writes by hand but then completing a digital portfolio seemed counter productive. For another example, if the digital portfolio is integrated into the routine and context of the course throughout the duration of the semester, students in my study said they would find the digital portfolio construction experience more meaningful and purposeful.

3. The importance of rhetorical hyperlinking and constructing navigational schemes for teaching audience-awareness, as well as the difference between writer-based writing and reader-based writing, cannot be emphasized enough. One reason the students in my study found the experience of producing a digital
portfolio in the context of Sarah’s curriculum meaningful, was because they generated their own “metaphorical glue” to connect personal and academic experience and demonstrate knowledge learned. The “holy grail” in large-scale or programmatic portfolio assessment is an infrastructure which supports and highlights both student creativity and teacher or academic standards. In other words, for composition instructors who have large numbers of students, some combination of personal creativity and ordered presentation—as in the case of Vickie’s index page—might be appropriate.

4. Most of the literature on portfolio pedagogy in general highlights purpose as the most important component. Purpose is perhaps the most important element of digital portfolios. It makes sense in first-year composition because of the importance the field gives audience. In terms of a digital portfolio, however, it is important to know that purpose for students can best be impacted in two ways, as seen from this study. First: scalability. One major difference between a fixed-media portfolio and a digital portfolio is the flexibility and malleability of the artifacts and the arrangement of those artifacts to reach specifically targeted audiences. In my study, students who did not find the experience meaningful did not see how their work could be conceptualized holistically or could be scalable and applicable to other contexts. Second, first-year composition digital portfolios can be explained and taught as if they were extended essays. The idea came to Sarah after having taught the course. In a sense, a portfolio is “a story” or “a history,” in Sarah’s words. It is an essay of essays. That is, if the introductory
reflection letter or essay is a thesis, filled with claims about what the student learned through the duration of the course, the artifacts can serve as “body paragraphs” which support that claim. As the instructor wrote in the portfolio assignment handout with regard to the portfolio writer’s statement:

This statement will be a self-assessment of the semester’s work.
Your Portfolio Writer’s Statement should be a thesis-based essay of at least two pages that discusses all three of the formal writing assignments, in detail. Your thesis should state what you have learned over the course of the semester, in effect making an argument for the quality of your work, after all the revisions, as represented in this portfolio. You may want to refer to the course goals, as listed on your syllabus, and the “Writing Skills Questionnaire.”

5. Seek or create training and/or an ongoing support system. Ultimately, we are teachers of writing. Still, as technological literacy in our curricula today becomes increasingly important, we are teachers of writing and we are teachers of technological literacy. It is important for the teacher to get the support she needs and provide the support the students need. It is imperative, however, that the teacher feel qualified and comfortable using the technology in order to not limit or restrict pedagogy.

Just as portfolios are by their very nature contextual, so too should portfolio curriculum and faculty development be contextual, rooted in the objectives of the classroom and specific policies and goals of the institution. In
conversation with many teacher trainers, with technology in general and digital portfolios specifically, teacher training is most effective “in the hallways.” That is, “just in time” training is more effective because it captures and builds on the immediate attention and need of faculty in specific circumstances. At recent conferences I have heard teacher-trainers refer to this as “smart training,” and “sustainable faculty development.” Capturing and building on the “teachable moment” is not limited to students. In the English Department at Ball State, some of the most effective training has been the result of the “infection” and “consulting” models, as well as best practice showcases (Siering; White).

For Learning

The results of the study suggest general factors why students found the experience of using digital portfolios either with or without much value. I have already highlighted a few, including the student’s relative technological literacy, the teacher’s integration of the course content with the digital portfolio, and the student’s general understanding of the relatively scalable and portable nature of digital portfolios. It is difficult to determine specific results and/or recommendations for learning with digital portfolios outside the context of my study because technology changes classrooms so widely and quickly. Still, here are three recommendations from my study:

1. The two students in my study who found the experience personally meaningful, generally, went back to the teacher’s objectives on the syllabus as
they were constructing their portfolios. Keeping the teacher’s objectives in mind as well as the portfolio assignment prompt is absolutely crucial to constructing a solid portfolio. The objectives, in fact, may in some way serve as a helpful heuristic or outline for the introductory letter of reflection.

2. Vickie’s portfolio writer’s statement is one of the best first-year composition reflection essays I’ve ever read. What makes Vickie’s statement and digital portfolio so good is that recognizes the value of synthesizing personal writing processes and course content within the framework of the portfolio construction process. Vickie reviewed her informal writes in order to capture the “story” of her growth through the course. Keeping a dialogue journal or some informal record of reflection while taking a course that requires a digital portfolio is particularly valuable. Furthermore, creating an environment to store and “see” artifacts—whether this be a well-considered file management system on a floppy disk or online, or a more advanced XML database infrastructure—enables students to better visualize connections between artifacts and course concepts.

3. The student-subjects in my study all either initially thought that a digital portfolio is defined by its ability to be more collaborative and interactive (students felt that the general value of using computers to learn how to write is for collaboration purposes). And at the end of the semester each student indicated they would have learned more if the portfolio assignment included some space for using collaboration and interaction itself as a purposeful artifact. Solid
process-writing digital portfolios in some way include each component of the writing process. An extension of this point, of course, is that although it requires a major pedagogical shift for teachers, students should keep or convert every artifact into a digital format.

For Researching

My resultant coding guide is a helpful model that can be adapted and refined for future digital portfolio research specifically and technological literacy research generally (Figure 3.2). It is a synthesis of conceptual writing process theory and perceptual new media theory, and works to address Eric Crump and Nick Carbone’s call with which I began this chapter: “The emergence of computer networks as venues for communication and community will affect the fundamental shapes of literacy. Writers and readers now must understand how communication and literary arts work in electronic environments that both resemble and differ from print.” The resultant coding guide includes seven attributes. In some ways each attribute can be associated with multiple core categories.

The core category “reflective immediacy” describes ways in which students, teachers, and course matter do not consider the impact of electronic media specifically. Instead, the categories concentrate on an increase in self-awareness. Duncan Carter and Sherrie Gradin define reflection as the “careful, ongoing consideration of a subject,” and emphasize that it is centered on the self or the individual (2-3). Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define transparent
immediacy as the “style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium [. . .] and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation” (272-73). Immediacy is the visual or perceptual embodiment of the concept of reflection; “the desire for immediacy is the desire to get beyond the medium to the objects of representation themselves” (83). The term “reflective immediacy,” therefore, is the careful, ongoing consideration of some subject whereby the technology is purposefully transparent.

Conversely, the core category “reflexive hypermediacy” is characterized by a specific focus on technology, and in so doing enables a student or teacher to see one’s self or actions more objectively. Reflexivity, according to Donna Qualley in *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry* (1997), is “a response triggered by dialectical engagement with the other—an idea, theory, person, culture, text, or even an other part of one’s self” (qtd. in Carter and Gradin 3-4). Reflexivity in the context of first-year composition instruction is considerably more complex than reflection because it involves “trying on” the position or perspective of some “other,” and then critically looking back at one’s own initial position in a new light (3-5). Hypermediacy forefronts the medium in an attempt to make readers hyper-conscious of the tools being used. Perceptually, the effect enables the reader and the writer to focus on the message the medium is presenting as well as the message the content is presenting. “Reflexive hypermediacy” therefore refers to phenomenon whereby the process of specifically acknowledging some specific medium or technology
directly impacts ways in which students and teachers look at themselves objectively, perhaps through others’ eyes.

And the third core category that the data revealed to me in my study is “active remediation,” which denotes the viewing of one medium as better than another for some specific, rhetorical reason. The technology is then seen as impacting or changing writing content. For Carter and Gradin, action refers to doing something with rhetorical and authentic zeal (5-6). And for Bolter and Grusin, remediation implies “restoration.” That is, invoking one form of media or technology to replace another presents more meaning more effectively. The data elicited observable phenomena which had elements of both “action” and “remediation.” The core category “active remediation,” thus, refers to choosing a specific technology for a rhetorical purpose. In so doing, oftentimes, teachers and students see work more holistically or sustainable and scalable.

Suggestions for Future Research

As I mentioned earlier, because of the my study’s setting, there were a number of inquiries left unexplored. In general, my study was a micro-level study which focused specifically on using digital portfolios in the process of writing for one first-year composition section. My study was designed to be summative; to describe ways in which the teaching and learning of the construction, presentation, and assessment processes of digital portfolios interact with writing instruction. There are many variables in my study, however, and each variable could make up its own study:
I used this table in Chapters One and Three in order to relate the many intersections of my research question. Further research is needed in each field of this table for both teaching and learning. For instance, a study focusing specifically on how students create each draft throughout a semester with the final digital portfolio in mind, as well as drafting strategies an instructor might use or teach in such a course, is a definite gap in the literature. How students collaborate in peer groups and then use the electronic interchanging in relation to their drafting processes in digital portfolios, as well as how teachers interact with students in online spaces and then use transcripts or email records as digital portfolio artifacts, is an important avenue for future research. Furthermore, student and teacher reflection over measurements of assessment for grading digital portfolios electronically—especially in first-year composition—has only recently become possible to examine.

In addition to highly focused studies on these fifteen components, another area of research that is still relatively unexplored includes investigating basic differences between fixed-media portfolios and digital portfolios. Emily Springfield has a chapter in Barbara Cambridge’s *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices for Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (2001) called “Comparing Electronic and Paper Portfolios.” In the article Springfield alludes to cognitive
differences between the two media types relating to reflection and the connective properties of artifacts. These differences need further exploration in order to better understand the impact of digital portfolio instruction in first-year composition.

Katherine Fischer’s article, “Down the Yellow Chip Road: Hypertext Portfolios in Oz,” which has been reprinted in at least three collections on portfolio pedagogy, is one that I relied on in my thinking about the value of metaphors in first-year composition digital portfolios. Fischer’s article basically says just that: metaphors are valuable. Further research on how students can build their own navigational schemes which rely on personal metaphors in order to envision the portfolio holistically and “interconnectedly,” is needed. The research should include the metaphor of the portfolio as essay.

And perhaps the most important research in the near future—research that has been going on for the last five or more years in many institutions across the country, as I discussed in Chapter Two, like the PT3 research in the Teacher’s College at Ball State University—involves infrastructure. In order to sustain digital portfolio pedagogy on the departmental, college, institutional, and even on individual classroom levels, continued research on the support structure is needed. Support includes faculty development and technology resources in terms of computer storage, file transfer software architecture, and data/artifact acquisition tools.

It is clear that wedding process portfolios and technology impacts first-year composition immensely. It is clear that we must pay attention to the
construction, presentation, and assessment process as it interacts with the process of writing. And as Stephen Gilbert suggests, it is clear that our institution must develop its own “portfolio of strategies” or canon of methods in order to maximize the potential of these inhabitable spaces (21). Studies such as this one will continue to teach us methods for seeing the complex intersections between teaching and learning, and will continue to offer well considered strategies for sound instruction.
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Appendix A: Dissertation study invitation and informed consent of the selected teacher

Dear Composition Instructor:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study, titled “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios” is to collect information and document how instructors and students teach and learn the writing process by creating, presenting, and assessing digital portfolios. If you agree to participate as an instructor in the study, providing your informed consent by reviewing the attached materials and signing this form, here’s what you’d be committing to do:

- Teaching with the digital portfolio in one section. The investigator can provide general information, including models. Part of the study examines your creation of scoring guides and other necessary tools, however.
- At the beginning of your involvement in the study you will complete a questionnaire (approximately 20-minutes). You will be asked to complete the same questionnaire again toward the end of the semester.
- You will need to offer your students an informal questionnaire so that the investigator can learn who is more comfortable using computers for academic work and who has more limited experience. The investigator will ask two students who are more experienced, and two students who less experienced, to participate as case study subjects. The investigator will provide informed consent forms for all students in the class, regardless.
- The investigator will attend each class session and take notes.
- At least every other week (and possibly by special arrangement) you’ll need to meet with the investigator for approximately 30-minutes to discuss the progress of your course and specific observation queries.
- The investigator will work with you to request interviews with the four students sometime after midterms and before finals. The four students will be also asked to complete a questionnaire toward the beginning and again at the end of the semester.
- Lastly, the investigator will review student-participant’s digital portfolios and other assessed work. These collections will need to include all of the assessment feedback you offered the four students.

You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of me before signing the form and beginning the study, as well as at any time during the study. This study will be completed by Spring 2002. The foreseeable risks or ill effects from participating in this study are minimal to nonexistent. There are benefits to be expected from participating in this study, including creating a better awareness of how writing process learning takes place using the digital portfolio.

For more information on your rights as a research subject, the following persons may be contacted: Ms. Sandra Smith, Coordinator of Research Compliance, Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 285-5070; or Dr. Daniel Goffman, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board, Dept. of History, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 285-8700. The investigator and faculty supervisor can be reached through the English Department, 285-8580, and at the following addresses/phone numbers: Rich Rice, English Department, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 288-3638, riceman@bsu.edu; or Dr. Web Newbold, English Department, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 285-8377, wnewbold@bsu.edu (on leave Fall 2001).

I, _______________________________, agree to participate in this research project titled “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios.” I have had the study explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_____________________   ________   _____________________   ________   _____________________   ________
Participant’s Signature          Date            Principle Investigator            Date            Faculty Supervisor                Date
Appendix B: Questionnaire for the selected teacher

Teacher Questionnaire

Directions: Below are three questions about teaching with digital portfolios for “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios.” If you’re unfamiliar with anything, please hypothesize. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please complete these questions wholeheartedly and sincerely. Feel free to use additional paper. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. What is your understanding of the nature and function of digital portfolios?

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2. Do you believe digital portfolios impact the content of teaching in general? If so, how?

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3. How can or does a digital portfolio impact how you teach first-year composition?

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Appendix C: Introductory script to read to the students regarding their participation in being observed for the duration of the semester, for their work to possibly be examined by the researcher, and for their possible participation completing a questionnaire twice and being interviewed twice (approximately 25)

I am a student in the English Department working on my dissertation study about how digital portfolios impact teaching and learning in first-year composition. This research is called “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios.” I would like to observe your learning in this class this semester. I will try not to interact with the class. As part of the study, also, you may be asked to complete a 20-minute questionnaire and participate in a brief interview or two regarding your learning. I would also like to review a copy of your digital portfolio and other work for this class.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Also, even though it is important to provide your name on the questionnaires, that is only for the purpose of comparing your questionnaire to other work and observations, and your name will never be published alongside any of your material or observations that I collect.

Please take a few minutes to read the “informed consent” letter which further explains my study. If you agree to participate, sign the consent form. Also keep in mind that even if you do sign the consent form now, you are free to withdraw your consent from the study at any time without prejudice from the investigator or your instructor. I’ll re-read this information to you when it comes time for you to complete the questionnaire, at which time you may choose to withdraw your consent, of course.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Appendix D: Student informed consent form (approximately 25)

Dear Composition Student:

The purpose of the study, titled “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios,” is to collect information and document how instructors and students teach and learn the writing process by creating, presenting, and assessing digital portfolios. If you agree to participate, here’s what you’d be committing to do:

- giving your permission for the investigator to observe your learning;
- completing a questionnaire (approximately 20-minutes) twice during the semester;
- participating in an interview with the investigator twice during the semester;
- allowing the investigator to review your digital portfolio and other assessed work in this course.

Results of the study may be published, but names will never be given. Your identity will remain strictly confidential and participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice from the investigator or your teacher. Please feel free to ask any questions of me before signing the form and beginning the study, as well as at any time during the study. This study will be completed by Spring 2002. Your participation will require little additional effort and may contribute to your learning. The foreseeable risks or ill effects from participating in this study are minimal to nonexistent. There are benefits to be expected from participating in this study, including creating a better awareness of how writing process learning takes place using the digital portfolio.

For more information on your rights as a research subject, the following persons may be contacted: Ms. Sandra Smith, Coordinator of Research Compliance, Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 285-5070; or Dr. Daniel Goffman, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board, Dept. of History, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 285-8700. The investigator and faculty supervisor can be reached through the English Department, 285-8580, and at the following addresses/phone numbers: Rich Rice, English Department, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 288-3638, riceman@bsu.edu; or Dr. Web Newbold, English Department, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, (765) 285-8377, wnewbold@bsu.edu (on leave Fall 2001).

I, _______________________________, agree to participate in this research project titled “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios.” I have had the study explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_____________________   ________   _____________________   ________   _____________________   ________
Participant’s Signature          Date            Principle Investigator            Date            Faculty Supervisor                Date
Appendix E: Student questionnaire (approximately 25)

Writing, Computers, and Literacy Initiative
Computer Usage Survey

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Also, even though it is important to provide your name on the questionnaires, that is only for the purpose of comparing your questionnaire to other work and observations, and your name will never be published alongside any of your material or observations that I collect. Please answer all of the questions.

Thank you very much!

Name: Age: Course/Section:
Phone: Email:

Directions: For questions 1−4, please circle the number that corresponds to the most accurate description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. How often does your family use computers?</th>
<th>Every Day</th>
<th>Every Few Days</th>
<th>Once a Week</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Self</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Parent 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Parent 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Sibling 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Sibling 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Sibling 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Sibling 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. At home, how often does your family use the Internet?

3. At your high school (or previous training), how often did you use computers?

4. At your high school (or previous training), how often did you use the Internet?
Directions: For questions 5-9, check the boxes of all answers that apply. If the desired answer is not available, specify the answer in the “Other” option.

5. At home, for which purposes does your family use the Internet or World Wide Web?
   - None (we do not use/have the Internet)
   - Financial information (e.g., stock market)
   - Research (for classes, work, or curiosity)
   - Purchases (e.g., shopping)
   - Weather/news/sports
   - Communication (e.g., email, chats)
   - Design/maintain web pages
   - Recreation/entertainment
   - Travel information/planning
   - Other: ________________________________________________________________________

6. At your high school (or previous training), for which purposes did you use the Internet?
   - None (we do not use/have the Internet)
   - Financial information (e.g., stock market)
   - Research (for classes or curiosity)
   - Purchases (e.g., shopping)
   - Weather/news/sports
   - Communication (e.g., email, chats)
   - Design/maintain web pages
   - Recreation/entertainment
   - Travel information/planning
   - Supplement teacher lectures (pictures, etc.)
   - Other: ________________________________________________________________________

7. At your high school (or previous training), in which classes did you use computers?
   - None
   - Business
   - English
   - Sciences (chemistry, biology, physics)
   - Math (algebra, geometry, calculus)
   - Philosophy (including religion)
   - Computer sciences / keyboarding
   - History / economics / government
   - Journalism (desktop publishing)
   - Foreign languages
   - Other: ________________________________________________________________________

8. How do you like to use the Internet or the World Wide Web?
   - None (we do not use/have the Internet)
   - Financial information (e.g., stock market)
   - Research (for classes, work, or curiosity)
   - Purchases (e.g., shopping)
   - Weather/news/sports
   - Communication (e.g., email, chats)
   - Design/maintain web pages
   - Recreation/entertainment
   - Travel information/planning
   - Other: ________________________________________________________________________

9. What do you dislike about the Internet or the World Wide Web?
   - Nothing
   - Cost of service providers
   - Easy access to “indecent” material
   - Lack of privacy/security
   - Slow connections, traffic jams
   - Too impersonal
   - Too commercial, advertisements
   - Limited university-wide access
   - Hard to distinguish correct/incorrect material
   - Time-consuming searches
   - Other: ________________________________________________________________________
Appendix F: Questionnaire for the four selected students

Student Questionnaire

Directions: Below are ten statements about composing portfolios for “Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios.” There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. If you’re unfamiliar with anything, please hypothesize. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are uncertain, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with the statement. While some of these statements may seem repetitious, take your time and try to be as honest as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Using computers to write first drafts of essays is useful. SA A U D SD
2. Using computers to revise drafts of essays is useful. SA A U D SD
3. A digital portfolio helps writers think through drafts. SA A U D SD
4. A digital portfolio helps writers think through revision. SA A U D SD
5. Creating a digital portfolio encourages peer collaboration. SA A U D SD
6. Giving peer-critique on essay drafts is useful. SA A U D SD
7. Receiving peer-critique on essay drafts is useful. SA A U D SD
8. Creating a digital portfolio encourages useful peer-critique. SA A U D SD
9. Creating a digital portfolio helps writers think reflectively. SA A U D SD
10. Digital portfolios are useful in composition. SA A U D SD

Directions: Below are two questions about learning with digital portfolios. If you’re unfamiliar with anything, please hypothesize. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please complete these questions wholeheartedly and sincerely. Feel free to use additional paper. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. What is a digital portfolio?

__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________

2. How can or does using a digital portfolio impact what and how you learn?

__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
__________________________________________________________________________ ____________
Appendix G: Institutional Review Board accepted application

IRB #02-35

Section I – Title, Purpose of the Study, and Rationale

1. **Title**: Teaching and Learning First-Year Composition With Digital Portfolios

2. **Purpose of the study**: To document how the construction, presentation, and assessment of first-year composition student digital portfolios appear to impact teaching and learning drafting, revision, collaboration, peer-critique, and reflective writing.

3. **Rationale**: Portfolio pedagogy has been studied extensively since the mid-1970s. In the last five years digital portfolio research has become a primary focus. However, this research most often refers to entrance and exit portfolios, entire-curriculum “institutional” portfolios, and faculty teaching portfolios. The research that is available on student digital portfolios most often refers to online Webfolios (portfolios designed to be published on the Internet), and database template portfolios (portfolios which require students to populate a pre-formatted database template). There are only a few studies which refer to student digital portfolios that are constructed with “common” tools like Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint in first-year composition. No study has critically examined and documented the impact of these common tools on teaching and learning the writing process. Its findings will help provide evidence emphasizing the value of technological literacy in English; and will document and suggest effective digital portfolio construction, presentation, and assessment strategies for ongoing portfolio research at Ball State University.

Section II – Description of Subject Population

1. **Number of subjects**: Approximately 26.

2. **Describe the subject population**: The subject population includes twenty-five students and one teacher in one English 103 section.

Section III – Subject Recruitment

1. **Describe the method of subject recruitment**: The class will be selected based on when it is scheduled. The students will likely be between the ages of 18 and 20. The investigator will administer a computer usage questionnaire (Appendix E) that has often been used in the Writing Program, and will select four students for case study (two who have considerable computer experience, and two who have more limited computer experience).
Section IV – Methods and Procedures

1. **Describe the methods and procedures to be used:** All subjects will complete informed consent forms and will be provided their own copies. The study will use questionnaires, class observation, teacher and student informal interviews (the questions will be based on class observations), and assessed artifact analysis:

   **Appendix A:** Dissertation study invitation and informed consent of the selected teacher
   This form gives the principle investigator permission to observe the teacher during class, to interview the teacher every other week for one semester in the subject’s office, to administer and collect one questionnaire completed twice by the teacher, and to collect and review four selected students’ digital portfolios and course assessment.

   **Appendix B:** Questionnaire for the selected teacher
   After signing the informed consent form, the teacher will be asked to complete this questionnaire twice. Ideally, this will take place sometime toward the beginning and toward the end of the study for base-line information. The questionnaire will be administered at the end of interview sessions. Teachers will be asked to complete it on their own time and return it to the principle investigator’s university mailbox or in person. It should take approximately 30 minutes. This is not anonymous: this data must be correlated with other data. Names, however, will not be published.

   **Appendix C:** Introductory script to read to students regarding their participation in being observed for the duration of the semester, for their work to possibly be examined by the researcher, and for their possible participation completing a questionnaire twice and being interviewed twice (approximately 25)
   Informed consent for general observation is needed from every student, whether or not they are the four specifically selected subjects.

   **Appendix D:** Student informed consent form (approximately 25)
   After the introductory script is read, this form will be handed out. This form gives the principle investigator permission to observe the student learning process, to interview the student twice during semester, to administer and collect one questionnaire completed twice by the student, and to collect and critique the student’s digital portfolio and course assessment using the specific reader guide. All students will be asked to complete this form; however, only four students will be interviewed, surveyed, and asked to submit work.

   **Appendix F:** Questionnaire for the four selected students
   After signing the informed consent form, the four selected students will be asked to complete this questionnaire twice. Ideally, this will take place sometime
toward the beginning and the toward the end of the study for base-line information. This 20-minute questionnaire will be administered during class, but students may choose to complete it later if preferred. Students will return their completed questionnaires to the investigator during the following class session. This is not anonymous: this data must be correlated with other data. Names, however, will not be published and will be kept confidential.

**Section V – Anonymity/Confidentiality of Data**

1. **Describe how data will be collected and stored:** All data is kept confidential. Names on questionnaires must be recorded to correlate data with observation, interview, and artifact analysis; however, no subject will be identified when the study is written. Questionnaires, thus, will be returned to the investigator directly. Data will be stored in a database on the investigator’s secured computer. A search and replace after all data is collected will change all subject names. Data will not be shared during the study. Because the data is not anonymous, it will not be shared with the teacher-participant.

**Section VI – Subject Incentives/Inducements to Participate**

1. **Describe any incentives/inducements to participate that will be offered to the subject:** There are no incentives/inducements to participate. Participation is voluntary, can be reconsidered at any point during the study, and will not play a role in students’ grades.
ENGLISH 103: “COMMON CULTURE”
Fall 2001: Ball State Univ.

Instructor: Sarah  Office Phone: 285-XXXX  Office: RB XXX  E-Mail: XXX
Office Hours: 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays & Thursdays; other times by appointment
Course Websites: http://www.eboard.com; http://www.prenhall.com/petracca

Texts and Materials:
Common Culture: Reading and Writing About American Popular Culture by Petracca & Sorapure, 3rd ed.
The Craft of Revision by Murray, 4th ed.
A College Dictionary
2 IBM-format double-density floppy disks
1 diskette case
At least two two-pocket folders for turning in assignments

Course Description:
More than likely, when you’re hanging out with your friends, one of the things you enjoy discussing is popular culture—the great new CD you just got, last week’s South Park episode, or even what that girl in your biology class was wearing. Popular culture is all around us, bombarding us with thousands of messages a day about who we are, who we should try to be, who we should admire, what values we should have or reject, what to buy, how to live. Yet most of us are not actively engaged in questioning the messages we’re receiving. This class will try to change that. We will become conscious of what some of those messages are. We’ll question them. We’ll talk and write about them. Because analyzing popular culture with a critical eye allows us to begin to become our own person, one who can see beyond the manipulation of the advertisers and the producers of popular culture to live an examined life of conscious choices.

In considering these texts, we will learn techniques for critical inquiry at the undergraduate level and forms and processes for writing in college, including the use of computer technology. We will complete a number of in-class writing exercises; learn techniques for writing about both written and electronic texts; develop processes for drafting, editing, and revising written work; review grammar rules and style tips; and learn strategies for conducting research and properly documenting sources. Along the way, we will engage in a number of discussions that will help us to understand the goals and forms of undergraduate writing as well as understanding the choices that the authors of our texts have made in the writing process.

Course Objectives:
- Develop critical reading and thinking skills while considering the form and content of popular culture in a variety of texts and contexts
- Become active rather than passive learners and participants in classroom discussions and activities
- Understand college writing as a process of answering challenging and socially relevant questions for specific audiences, rather than as isolated acts of parroting generally-known information back to an instructor or filling pages with empty sentences and phrases
- Exhibit a basic understanding of the form and content of a thesis-based essay
• Practice and improve writing skills through the use of invention techniques, planning, multiple drafts, peer response, revision, and editing and mastering the use the computer-assisted techniques to accomplish those goals
• Learn to conduct basic research in a subject of interest and how to use a university library for locating and retrieving materials from a variety of sources
• Summarize, paraphrase, quote, and integrate source information, ideas, and opinions accurately and effectively into papers while citing sources appropriately with MLA style documentation
• Become effective, critical, and diplomatic readers of peers’ work
• Recognize and respond to basic demands of audience, including focus, organization, and development through examples, detail, and evidence
• Establish a personal voice in one’s writing
• Present finished texts conforming generally to American standard written English.

Requirements and Writing Assignments:
All reading and writing assignments are due on the dates listed on the schedule. Other assignments may be added later. To keep you on track, I may give pop quizzes and will ask for impromptu writing in class. If you do your work, neither of these will be a problem for you. To accomplish course goals, all students in English 103 will be required to complete:
assigned readings, exercises, and examinations;
• an introductory essay;
• three main essays, in multiple drafts;
• a self-assessment journal;
• course-related library instruction.

Papers:
You will write three formal papers in this class, ranging from four to six pages in length, with multiple revisions. Papers and drafts are due on the date specified in the syllabus unless otherwise instructed. In addition to these formal papers, you will be assigned short, informal response papers that are required and will figure into your total course grade if they are completed.

A large part of the writing process is understanding strategies for managing time and meeting deadlines. Falling behind on one assignment can create a domino effect for subsequent assignments. Though I can sometimes offer extensions to those students who approach me before an assignment is due, I cannot give full credit to any late work if you don’t let me know in advance. Some students have severe problems with procrastination, which is usually the result of fear, self-doubt, or poor work habits. One of my tasks in this class is to help you overcome this problem, but I cannot do so if you don’t tell me that this is a problem for you. If this is your circumstance, let me know as soon as possible so we can work through it.

Because I am trying to teach you good work habits, late papers will lose one-half a letter grade for every day they are late. Papers submitted after one week will receive an automatic F. This includes missing class on the day a draft is due (peer review day) or failure to have a reasonably complete draft on those due dates. Failure to turn in any assignment will result in a failing grade on that assignment, and failure to turn in any of the formal papers will result in a failing grade in the course. If you are ill (with doctor’s proof) or are covered under the university’s bereavement policy (once again proof on paper), REASONABLE allowances will be made for late work.

All pre-writing, drafts, and reader responses (including mine) are to be turned in with each paper, each time. Never throw anything away—I want to see it all! You are expected to keep all these material neatly labeled and organized. Therefore, I won’t accept papers without these materials.

Portfolios:
This course will be taught using a portfolio grading system. The three formal papers will be developed and revised throughout the semester to allow you to apply the best of your knowledge of the writing principles learned in class. They will then be submitted, along with accompanying materials, at the end of the
semester and graded as an overall body of accomplishment. This has the obvious advantage of enabling your four papers to represent your best possible work. This does not mean, however, that drafts will not have specific due dates during the semester, and the penalties for late work described in the section above will certainly apply. Furthermore, students will be required to submit regular progress reports.

While the advantages of the portfolio system are obvious, some students may feel insecure without the regular feedback of letter grades and points to track their grade point average. To offset this, students may submit drafts for my comment when such feedback seems appropriate to them and may request a midterm evaluation of their portfolios in progress. While I cannot give an accurate estimate of a final grade based on a draft, I can give feedback as to whether in general the drafts meet minimum standards and point to areas for further improvement. Details of these procedures will be provided in class.

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal Writes (11 total)</td>
<td>10 points each 100 (can skip one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Quiz &amp; Tour</td>
<td>25 points each 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Group Report &amp; Revision Plan (3 total)</td>
<td>50 points each 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Responses (3 sets)</td>
<td>33.3 points/set 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total 1000 points</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I use a standard grading scale, without any kind of curving.  

**Grading Criteria for Formal Papers:**

A "A" – The essay has an original, interesting topic or takes a unique/fresh angle on a familiar one. The organization is clear, utilizing a clear thesis--whether stated or implied--solid support, transitions, topic sentences, and a strong closing/conclusion. The essay shows evidence of critical thinking that is clear, logical (coherent and relevant), and probes well beyond the surface of the topic. The title captures the reader's interest and leads her or him right into the piece. The essay flows smoothly from title to conclusion, and the reader isn't distracted by unnecessary words or phrases, obscure or unnecessary references, unnecessary $10 words, or the use of clichés. Description is clear and lively, using vivid detail and sensory images expressed in fresh language. The writer invokes discerning sources when appropriate and correctly documents and cites sources. The essay is free of grammar and punctuation errors and appears polished, completed. Above all, the reader enjoys reading this piece.

A "B" – The essay is clear, uses language well, and has an effective structure. The title works to engage the reader, and progress toward the conclusion is smooth. The writer makes good use of descriptive detail and supporting evidence. Creativity and originality of thought are evident, but the essay lacks polish. There may be under-developed ideas or under-supported claims or the analysis may lack depth. The language may be erratic in its effectiveness. Overall, the reader may feel slightly unsatisfied, like the piece needs another draft.

A "C" – The essay is average, pedestrian, predictable. The structure lacks organization or may be fuzzy; the overall point may not be clear. Title may be less than effective. Language use is uninteresting, clichéd, lame; word choice shows no originality or creativity. There is a lack of detail and supporting evidence. Sources used are poorly presented or chosen, often both. The piece may seem bland or unfinished, needing more work to carry it to completion. Punctuation or grammatical errors distract the reader. There are minor problems with citation and documentation of sources.

A "D" – Below average, unfocused, confused. Language use ineffective. Title either doesn't reflect the content or demonstrates a lack of originality. Distracting punctuation and grammar mistakes interfere with the reader's progress. There may be serious problems with citation and documentation of sources and/or the choice of sources. Overall, an unsatisfactory reading experience, leaving the reader wondering at this waste of time. Reads like a first draft.

**Attendance:**
The university requires instructors to take attendance at every class meeting. According to English Department policy, missing more than 20% of class meetings will result in automatic failure for the course.

Rather than try to distinguish between legitimate excuses (for circumstances that are truly unavoidable and due to a serious illness or problem of some kind) and elaborate, fictitious stories (this isn’t, after all, a creative writing class), I will leave the responsibility for attendance up to you. That is, you are aware that it is your responsibility to be in class and to know the material discussed in class whether you are present or not, and to get any assigned work turned in by the deadline. You have four “free” absences, no questions asked (though you will lose points for any work not turned in and in-class activities and quizzes cannot be made up). So, if you are sick, if there is a genuine family emergency, if you must go out of town, there is, built into this class, room for you to do that. However, when you miss your fifth class, your final course grade will drop by half a letter grade, i.e. a B becomes a B-. When you miss your sixth class, your final course grade will drop by one full letter grade, i.e. a B becomes a C. When you miss your seventh class, I have no choice but to issue a failing grade for the semester.

While we all may run late on occasion due to some unforeseen circumstance, habitual lateness is not acceptable. Therefore if you are 15 minutes late or more for class, I will mark you absent.

Furthermore, you should know by now that sleeping in class, playing with the computer or reading your e-mail at your workstation, or not participating and actively contributing to group activities do not constitute “attendance” in class—your mind must be present as well as your body. I reserve the right to mark you absent if any of these becomes the case.

**Plagiarism:**
Students will be expected to adhere to academic standards in the use of source material in their papers, as described in Ball Point. As will be explained in class, sources must be integrated smoothly, introduced with the author’s name, and cited according to the MLA format. In general, a student must give credit to others’ work whenever he or she:

1. Quotes another person’s actual words
2. Paraphrases another person’s words or ideas
3. Uses another person’s words or ideas
4. Borrows facts, statistics or other illustrative material, unless the information is common knowledge.

See pages 8-9 of Ball Point for more information about avoiding plagiarism as well as a description of the penalties for violating plagiarism policies. Be advised that committing an act of plagiarism can result in failure in this course and even expulsion from the university. If you are confused about how to cite sources, please ask your instructor or seek help from a writing tutor.

**Conduct:**
Students are expected to adhere to the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities regarding classroom conduct. Any inappropriate behavior, disorderly conduct, or non-compliance with required coursework may result in a charge of academic and/or personal misconduct, which may result in a lowering of the student’s course grade, course failure, or a requirement to withdraw from the course.

- Because discussion and group work are important components of this course, the following principles will be used:
- Seek the best answer rather than try to convince other people.
- Learn the facts and ideas supporting all sides before making your own decisions.
- Try not to let your previous ideas or prejudices interfere with your freedom of thinking.
- Speak whenever you wish (while not interrupting anyone), even though your idea may seem incomplete.
- Do not interrupt either the instructor or other students while they are expressing a point of view, asking a question, or offering an explanation. Wait for them to finish and for the instructor to ask for questions.
• Practice good listening skills by trying to formulate in your own words the point that the previous speaker made before adding your own contribution.
• Avoid disrupting the flow of discussion by introducing a new topic. Wait until everyone has commented on the present topic.
• Give encouragement and approval to others.
• Seek out differences of opinion; they enrich the discussion.
• Be sympathetic and understanding of other people’s views.
• Be respectful and discreet about personal information revealed in the course of classroom discussion and peer reading.

A few other issues:
You are an adult. As such, you don’t need permission to leave the room to attend to personal matters nor do the rest of us wish for you to announce it. Simply try to do so as quietly as possible. Prop the door when you leave so you can return with minimal disruption (for locked computer classrooms).
• Workstations are for coursework. Do not use them for checking and answering your e-mail, even if you get to class early. If you are hypnotized by the shiny box, turn off the monitor to avoid the distraction.
• On due dates, bring your material already printed, organized, stapled, and ready to turn in. It is a great waste of time and money to use class time to prepare your assignment for turning in.
• You have been provided with this detailed syllabus on classroom policies and expectations. You have also been provided a course schedule listing all assignments, therefore there is no reason to waste classroom time by asking questions you could easily answer for yourself by reading these materials, such as, “How much does this assignment count in our grade?” or “What were we supposed to read for today?” It is your responsibility to consult the syllabus and course schedule regularly.

Tutoring:
While I will offer some assistance outside of class for students with questions and problems with their course work, I won’t always be available at the times when you need such assistance. You are encouraged to make use of the university’s resources for tutoring, which are free. For more information on making these arrangements call the Writing Center, RB 291 (285-8387) or the Learning Center, North Quad 323 (285-3778). Take both the assignment sheet and your notes and/or drafts with you to any tutoring session. Be advised that tutors will not proofread your papers for you. Instead, at any stage of your writing project they will help you develop good writing habits and spot error patterns so you can become a better writer. Walk-in tutoring is offered, but it is best if you call to make an appointment, especially during busy times such as midterm and end of term. If you wish, you can arrange weekly appointments with a tutor.

Students with Special Needs:
If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a physical or other disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your needs. All information will be kept confidential. For further information on accommodations, go to this link: http://www.bsu.edu/dsd.

Some Tips for Success:
Please ask questions. I want to make your experience as a new member of the academic writing community as painless as possible; that’s my job.

Furthermore, my office hours are available for you to use, even if you don’t have a problem with an assignment. You are welcome to just stop in for a chat about any subject you’d like. One key to academic success is to get to know your instructors, and to let them get to know you. Don’t be intimidated: I was a first-year student once too, and we might have more in common than you think!

This syllabus is based on the objectives of the Ball State English Department course curriculum.
The Reading Schedule

CC = Common Culture
Murray = The Craft of Revision
Ball = Ball Point

Assignments are due on the day listed on the schedule below. Expect to turn in all informal writes on the dates listed (they should be typed). Bring both of your floppy disks and both of your textbooks to each class meeting. This schedule is subject to change.

Week 1
M—Course introduction, overview, goals, and policies. High school versus college survival tips. Begin working on diagnostic essay (Informal Write #1).
W—Computer basics and etiquette.
Reading: Read ch. 1-3 of Ball; Read syllabus.
Writing: Diagnostic essay due, typed; fill out first column of the “Writing Skills Questionnaire.”
Quiz: Syllabus.

Week 2
M—Active Reading: Barbie Casebook.
Writing: Answer questions 1-4 on p. 21 about the Motz essay.
W—The Writing Process; S.O.A.P.
Reading: CC p. 22-35; Murray ch. 1.
Writing: Informal Write #2.

Week 3
M—No Class: Labor Day
Reading: CC p. 36-39, 46-60 (Solomon).
Writing: Informal Write #3.
First Essay Assignment Given.

Week 4
M—Advertising Appeals.
Reading: CC p. 60-78 (Fowles).
Writing: Informal Write #4.
W—Images of Men & Women in Advertising.
Reading: CC p. 106-125 (Moog and Barthel).
Writing: Informal Write #5.

Week 5
M—Images of Men & Women in Advertising Pt. 2.
Reading: CC p. 125-150 (Miller and Steinem).
Writing: Answer questions 1-5 on p. 132-3 about the Miller essay.
W—Library Instruction: Class meets at the foot of the spiral staircase in Bracken Library.
Reading: Ball ch. 9.
Assignments: You must have the first set of library tutorials and the self-guided tour completed before our library session.
TH—End of first withdrawal period.
Week 6
M—Peer Editing of Essay #1.
Reading: Murray ch. 9; “Response Groups” handout.
Writing: Essay #1 Draft Due; Informal Write #6.
W—Focus and Development Workshop.
Reading: Murray ch. 2 and 4; “Evaluating Response Groups” handout.

Week 7
M—Popular Music and Sexuality.
Reading: CC p. 257-270 (Frith).
Writing: Essay #1 Draft Due w/ Group Report & Revision Plan; Informal Write #7.
Screening: Music videos.
Second Essay Assignment Given.
W—Music Subcultures: Punk Casebook.
Reading: CC p. 310-322 (Lewis).
Writing: Informal Write #8.

Week 8
M—No Class: Fall Break.
W—Music Subcultures: Punk Casebook Pt. 2.
Reading: Jello Biafra Interview (http://eserver.org/bs/30/grad.html)
Screening: The Decline of Western Civilization: Punk (1981)

Week 9
M—Music Subcultures: Punk Casebook Pt. 3
W—Music and Race: Hip Hop.
Reading: CC p. 270-294 (Samuels, August et al).
Writing: Informal Write #9.

Week 10
M—Peer Editing of Essay #2.
Writing: Essay #2 Draft Due.
W—Form and Order Workshop.
Reading: Murray ch. 5 and 6.
Writing: Bring a draft of either Essay #1 or Essay #2 to work on.

Last day to withdraw from a course.

Week 11
M—Paragraphs and Transitions Workshop.
Reading: Ball ch. 5.
Writing: Essay #2 Draft Due w/ Group Report & Revision Plan; Bring a draft of either Essay #1 or Essay #2 to work on.
W—Film Criticism.
Reading: CC p. 504-515 (Schaefermeyer).
Writing: Informal Write #10.
Third Essay Assignment Given.
Week 12
M—Horror Films: Freddy Krueger Casebook.
Screening: A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 5: The Dream Child
W—Horror Films: Freddy Krueger Casebook.
Screening: A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 5: The Dream Child Pt. 2
Reading: CC p. 528-535 (Hunter and Heuck).

Week 13
M—Horror Films and Psychology.
Reading: CC p. 516-528 (King, Evans).
W—Portfolio Conferences (assigned appointments)

Week 14
M—Portfolio Conferences (assigned appointments)
W—No Class: Thanksgiving Break.

Week 15
M—Research and Citation Workshop: Film Criticism.
Reading: Ball ch. 9.
Writing: Working Bibliography for Essay #3.
W—Voice and Development Workshop.
Reading: Murray ch. 3 and 7; Ball ch. 5.
Writing: Bring a draft of Essay #1, #2, or #3 to work on.

Week 16
M—Peer Editing of Essay #3.
Writing: Essay #3 Draft Due.
W—Workshop on Grammar and Editing and Preparing the Portfolio.
Reading: Murray ch. 8, Ball ch. 6, 7, and 8.
Writing: Bring a draft of Essay #1, #2, or #3 to work on.

Week 17
M—Last Class Day.
Writing: Final Portfolio Due.
Course Evaluation.
Appendix I: Informal writes handout

Informal Writes

By the end of this course, you must turn in ten (10) informal writes, at least one (1) page in length, typed, double-spaced, and using a 12-point font. There are eleven topics listed below, so you may skip one during the semester (note that #11, the Midterm Self-Assessment, is required, and cannot be skipped). The purpose of these writes is to practice the skills we learn in class, including critical thinking and reading, without the high stakes of the formal essays. They will also serve as catalysts for classroom discussions, so you may be called upon to read portions of your informal writes in class.

Due dates are listed on the course syllabus and entries will be collected that day and then returned later. When they are returned to you, keep them together in one place; you will be asked to turn the entire set back in at the end of the course. Late work will not be accepted and will result in 0 points.

1. Diagnostic Essay: Reflect on the role writing has played in your education and personal life. Maybe you can recall a time—writing for yourself or for a school assignment—when writing enabled you to think in a way that surprised you. What kind of writing were you doing and what did you discover? Or think of an occasion when you experienced great success with a school assignment. How did this come about and what did you achieve? Write a thesis-based essay of 300-500 words that describes and analyzes specific examples of how writing has affected your life. The essay must be typed.

2. How would you describe your own writing process? Think of a simile (writing is like…) or a metaphor (writing is…) that best expresses your view of writing. Write it at the top of the page. Then describe how you normally write. How much time do you spend thinking and making notes before writing a draft? What kinds of things do you do to help with invention? How many drafts do you usually write? Do you share your drafts with friends or teachers to get their critical comments? What do you do when you revise a draft—change the wording, rearrange parts, cut or add whole sections? Do you proofread for clarity, grammar and spelling? If so, at what point in the process?

3. Solomon argues (after de Tocqueville) that the American dream is contradictory, that we are promised equal opportunity, but in actually, desire a life of privilege and distinction for ourselves, above the other supposedly equal citizens. How does advertising exploit this contradiction? Choose a particular ad you’ve seen (in any media) that you think is manipulative or exploitative in the way that Solomon describes, and explain why you think so. If possible, attach a copy of the ad to this entry, and be prepared to share it and this entry with your peer discussion group.

4. In his discussion of the way advertising uses “the need for sex” and “the need to aggress,” Fowles debunks the persistent complaints about the use of sex and violence in the mass media. Find a current example that you think supports Fowles’ point and explain why you think it does. If possible, attach a copy of the ad to this entry, and be prepared to share it and this entry with your peer discussion group.

5. Barthel’s essay was written in 1988. Find a more recent example of images of men in advertising. What new trends or strategies does your example indicate in advertising to male consumers? What do you think lies behind these trends? If possible, attach a copy of the ad to this entry, and be prepared to share it and this entry with your peer discussion group.

6. Tell me about doing the library exercises and the library instruction session. How familiar were you with the library and with doing research before these activities? What were the most puzzling or frustrating parts of doing the exercises? What did you do to try to solve these problems? Did it
work? What surprised you about the experience? What would you like to learn next about the library or about conducting a research project?

7. In what ways, by Frith’s account, did rock music in the 1960s provide women a “useful step toward liberation” (paragraph 11)? What problems grew out of this “useful step?” Do you agree with Frith that there is no “natural” male or female sexuality?

8. What was Teodor Adorno’s primary objection to popular music (28)? How did punk rock support or refute Adorno’s ideas about pop music, according to Lewis? And having read Lewis’ essay, what would you say his definition of punk rock is?

9. Outline the historical roots of hip-hop, as laid out in the article “Hip-Hop Nation.” What social and/or personal concerns does this music reflect? What, according to this article, is the thematic function of “the violence and misogyny and lustful materialism that characterize some rap songs?” What do you think of the authors’ analysis?

10. Briefly summarize in your own words each of the three basic critical approaches Schaefermeyer describes. How do they differ from one another? Which would you find most interesting and illuminating? Why?

11. Midterm Self-Assessment

Part One: Assess how the various techniques of the writing process that you’ve been learning and practicing are working for you. Which invention techniques seemed to work best? How does it help you to think of a piece of writing as a task which has a specific audience, purpose, and form? How does the amount of material you have to work with at this point compare to previous writing experiences you’ve had? If you have used some of these steps before, explain how they might be different, or how they’ve worked or not worked for you in the past compared to how they’re working now. If you haven’t used these steps before, are they helping you come up with more ideas, keeping you from becoming as blocked or anxious?

Part Two: What are your primary concerns with the two drafts you have in progress? Which issues have your peers identified for you, and how have you addressed them? If you were to assign each draft a grade right now, what do you think they deserve? What are their respective strengths and weaknesses? What remains to be done?

Part Three: Make one suggestion for something you would like to be covered more in class, such as one thing that isn’t clear yet to you or one thing you would like more practice with.

Part Four: Mark the second column of boxes on the “Writing Skills Questionnaire.”

Bring all four parts of this self-assessment to your conference.
Appendix J: Portfolio assessment guide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>How well does the portfolio demonstrate your ability to:</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>Exhibit a basic understanding of the form and content of a thesis-based essay.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate that you can narrow a topic to develop an effective thesis statement?</td>
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<td>What you can choose an effective strategy for organizing and developing the body of an essay to support that thesis?</td>
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<td>Apply the principles of the writing process through invention, drafting, peer response, and multiple revisions.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate that you have drafted and revised your formal work effectively?</td>
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<td>Are topics and paragraphs developed fully and presented in a logical and strategic order?</td>
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<td>Have reader suggestions been considered and addressed?</td>
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<td>Have you mastered the use of computer-assisted techniques to accomplish these tasks?</td>
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<td>Make rhetorical decisions in order to produce an academic essay with effective strategies for a particular audience.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate your familiarity with the concepts of rhetorical context?</td>
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<td>That you understand college writing as a process of engaging in an intellectual dialogue with other students and scholars?</td>
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<td>That you have developed a personal voice appropriate to your audience?</td>
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<td>Conduct basic research in electronic and print resources.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate that you can recognize the kinds of sources you’ve looked at?</td>
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<td>Can you locate sources on your own that are tied to something you’ve read?</td>
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<td>Have you made appropriate decisions regarding the relative quality of materials?</td>
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<td>Read critically, identifying the rhetorical strategies &amp; evidence that other writers use.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate that you understand the parts of an essay, can understand what you read, that you can summarize texts fairly?</td>
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<td>Use and synthesize info from sources.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate your ability to synthesize and organize sources and your ability to analyze the differences between them?</td>
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<td>Does it show that you can use sources to provide both confirming and contrary views as you develop your own assertions?</td>
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<td>Use style and citation conventions appropriate for an academic audience.</td>
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<td>Is the style formal, as it should be?</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate that you know how to introduce sources smoothly and cite them according to MLA guidelines?</td>
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<td>Apply the rules of Standard Written American English.</td>
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<td>Does the portfolio demonstrate that you can edit your manuscripts effectively to eliminate spelling errors, grammatical errors, and poor word choices?</td>
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Name: ___________________________ classes missed: ________ pieces missed: ___________________________ portfolio grade: ________
Appendix K: Revision and self-assessment guide

PEER GROUP REPORT AND REVISION PLAN

The Peer Group Report and Revision Plan should be approximately 2 to 3 pages, typed, double-spaced. It should cover the following elements:

1. Number each paragraph in your draft, and refer to them specifically when answering the questions below.

2. As you were putting together this project (from the beginning stages), what did you struggle with the most? And what techniques did you use to help you resolve those problems? Try to include a history of your writing process so far on this project.

3. List all the comments and suggestions for improvement you got from your peer editors and from me, referring to specific comments from the response sheets and drafts.

4. Between the peer editing session and the day you are preparing this portfolio, what specific changes have you made to your drafts to address the advice given on peer day? Once again, refer to specific sections and paragraphs in your draft to describe the revisions you have made.

5. Do you understand what you need to do next to improve the paper? Explain what steps you are planning to take, and how you are planning to make them.

6. Evaluate your response group by answering the questions listed at the bottom of the “Evaluating Response Groups” handout.

Consider the questions asked in the “Evaluating Response Groups” handout (those in list at the bottom), and evaluate how well your group is working at this point. Give specific examples as much as you can. This should be at least one paragraph.
Appendix L: Essay evaluation form

Student Name ________________________________

ESSAY EVALUATION FORM

Focus/Argument/Strategy (S.O.A.P.)

4 Highly insightful point that moves beyond the obvious. I learned something—it made me think! S.O.A.P. is fully realized.

3 Very good point with evidence of critical thinking and application of S.O.A.P.

2 A clear point made, but not particularly original or insightful. The essay may display a shallow understanding of the text(s). There may also be a failure to fully apply the assignment. Some S.O.A.P. components are not evident.

1 Struggles to make a point, has more than one thesis, or thesis is too broad. There is little evidence that S.O.A.P. has been considered.

0 Confusing. Mostly unclear ideas and a lack of focus. A freewrite rather than an essay.

Development/Evidence/Organization

4 Well developed and supported with sound reasoning and persuasive evidence. Originality of examples and connections. Excellent transitions between ideas and well developed and coherent paragraphs.

3 Support is generally good and relevant but may occasionally be thin or not used to best advantage. Paragraphs are generally solid and unified, but may lack coherence in spots and/or transitions may be awkward or weak.

2 Support is minimal or unevenly applied. Text(s) used little if at all. Some support may be irrelevant or poorly explained. Paragraphs are shaky, with little coherence and problems with unity. Transitions are absent or poor.

1 Little support or poor development. Major ideas remain unexplored. Text is poorly understood with little evidence of critical reading on the part of the student or the student shows serious weaknesses in analytical thinking.

0 No significant development or organization strategy in place. Serious problems with paragraph structure or no paragraphs at all. Little or no use of the text or of other kinds of evidence. May veer entirely off assigned subject.

Style and Mechanics

4 Excellent writing—concise, smooth, and with a strong sense of the writer’s voice—enjoyable to read. No serious problems with mechanics or spelling.

3 Very good writing—concise, clear, but somewhat lacking in voice. Very few problems with mechanics or spelling.

2 Fairly good writing, but lacking in style or inappropriate in style. Poor editing or a number of problems with syntax, diction, grammar, or spelling.

1 Message is blurred by frequent errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Sloppy presentation and little evidence of editing or proofreading.

0 A train wreck—no effort has been made in this area.

Total Points_____ Letter Grade _____

Comments:
Appendix M: Formal writing assignments

ESSAY ASSIGNMENT #1: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF ONE WAY YOU ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR FAMILY

Type of Writing: informal and informative

Audience: your classmates

Purposes:
- To present yourself and your family to other readers so they might know you better
- To practice using personal insight as a way of approaching a subject
- To explore the ways the course theme applies to yourself and/or your family and friends, as well as connects you to people with physical or mental differences

Thesis: An assertion about how a particular kind of personal difference affects how you perceive your own identity or the identity of someone else.

Length: 4-5 pages, typed

Due:
- First Draft 1/16
- Second Draft 1/23
- Revised Draft w/ Report and Revision Plan 1/25
- Final Draft in Portfolio 4/26

Thinking about David Sedaris’ account of his unusual brother (and in fact how each member of his family is rather odd, including himself), consider one way you are different from your own family. Describe what this difference is, tell us a little about yourself and your family, and tie the difference to how you perceive your own identity. An alternate topic is to profile a “different” family member or friend.

Obviously the more interesting or unusual the difference is, the easier it will be to keep your audience’s interest. The fact that you’re two inches taller than anyone else, to use one example, will be hard to develop sufficiently to sustain a full essay. That said, a good writer could make such a trivial difference very amusing.

You need to go beyond simply telling us about a difference. You need to explain why or how this difference occurred, how it affects you, how it’s a part of who you are. A key term in the description of purpose above is “insight.”

You may present this in an analytical, detached fashion, get creative with details like Sedaris, tell a story, etc. The format is up to you. But you always want to use the principles learned in “Showing, not Telling.” Describe the “characters,” using dialogue as well as physical description to bring them alive, including yourself. Relate anecdotes which illustrate the way the difference is apparent. You could even interview some of the people involved.
ESSAY ASSIGNMENT #2: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF A TEXT FOR REPRESENTATION(S) OF GENDER OR SEXUAL IDENTITY

Subject: the representation(s) of gender or sexual identity

Type of Writing: high informal style, informative, and persuasive

Audience: your classmates, all of whom are familiar with your chosen text(s)

Purposes:
- To present your analysis and interpretation of a text to other readers and convince them that your reading is plausible
- To develop a deeper appreciation of a text through close reading and analysis
- To explore the ways gender roles and sexual identities affect our sense of difference

Thesis: An assertion about how a particular gender or genders or sexual identity is/are represented in your chosen text. Example: "While The Piano initially seems to be about a strong woman who fights for her independence and personal fulfillment, both spiritually and sexually, from an oppressive husband, closer consideration reveals that in fact this woman runs from one abusive man to another. Therefore, contrary to the critical praise the film received for being feminist because it portrayed a Victorian woman's sexual awakening and was written and directed by a woman, the film instead perpetuates the destructive 'romantic' myth of the woman as victim."

Length: 3-5 pages, typed

Due: Draft 2/20
Revised Draft w/ Report and Revision Plan 3/1
Final Draft in Portfolio 4/26

Texts to Choose From: David Sedaris "You Can't Kill the Rooster" or "I Like Guys"
Wendy Chapkiss “Dress As Success: Joolz”
Welcome to the Dollhouse
Katherine Anne Porter "The Grave"
Paul Theroux “Being A Man”
Antony Easthope "Masculine Style (2): Banter"
Stand By Me

The texts for this unit offer several possibilities for topics. The two Sedaris stories, the two films, Porter’s short story, and Joolz’s autobiography are all about gender in a number of ways. Each of these could be analyzed by itself. Both the Theroux and Easthope essays are critiques of the ways masculinity is constructed in our culture. They offer theories about how masculinity “works.” And Easthope directly demonstrates how such theories could be used to analyze a text about gender when he analyzes Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. To some extent the Chapkiss presentation of Joolz’s personal experiences could also be used as a critique of gender conventions for women. Therefore, any of these three could be used as a source to apply to one of the
other texts above (Sedaris, Dollhouse, Porter, or Stand By Me). Logical pairings are to use either Theroux or Easthope to analyze Paul “The Rooster” Sedaris, any of several characters in “I Like Guys,” the older brother in Dollhouse, Paul in “The Grave,” or any of several characters in Stand By Me, or to compare Joolz’s struggles with her own femininity and appearance to those of Dawn in Dollhouse or Miranda in “The Grave.”

I suggest that you choose the one that most intrigues, surprises, or impresses you (and that may be one of the theoretical/critique essays too). Read/watch your chosen text again, carefully, thinking about the way gender is presented or discussed in the selection. Think about how the text itself “defines” what it means to be a man or a woman, hetero or homosexual, or even outside of these binary oppositions. Or how it questions the standard definition(s).

Here are some questions that might help you get started picking a topic:

- How is the character presented by the narrator/filmmaker?
- Does the narrator's/filmmaker's gender or sexual identity seem to affect his/her presentation of the story or of particular characters? For example, if the writer is male and is trying to portray female experiences, does it seem authentic? How well does s/he do in imagining how a person of the opposite gender or a different sexual identity thinks, feels, and behaves?
- Is the way a particular character is treated by other characters affected by gender or sexual identity?
- Is the gender or sexual identity of a particular character important to what happens in the story--for example, if it were switched, would the story be different?
- Is the gender or sexual identity of a particular character important to what the main theme/point/purpose of the story seems to be?
- What kind of a man/woman/hetero/homosexual person is this character?
- What qualities or attributes does the text mark off or suggest as being specifically “feminine” or “masculine,” “straight” or “queer?” What emotions, values, or attitudes does it associate with being male or female, straight or queer?

Once you have found a focus, then you need to put together the evidence from the story/film to support it. Use the MLA citation form (as described in Ball Point and WWR, to quote from the story as needed. If you are working on a film, in-text citations aren’t needed, but you should set up the quote in the context of the scene and transcribe what is said accurately. You should assume that your readers are familiar with the story/film, and therefore you shouldn’t summarize the plot. But you do need to demonstrate your interpretation and make the connections you see clear to the readers. It’s not sufficient to merely point to the evidence; you must explain how you read/interpret that evidence in order to illustrate each of your points.

This essay should not be merely a personal response to the text nor should it be a report of what the text is about, like a book report. This is a critical, interpretive, and persuasive analysis of how gender or sexual identity is represented in the text, in your opinion, supported with textual evidence.
SYMBOL ASSIGNMENT: “The Grave”

1. Review the advice given about reading and writing about literature in chapter 12 of *Bedford*. Then read Katherine Anne Porter’s short story “The Grave” in the handout packet.

2. Then, using the good critical reading practices (marking favorite, important, and puzzling passages; making marginal notes and responses) described in the “Critical Reading” handout in your packet, read the story a second time.

3. Then, read the story a third time, this time making a list of symbols you spot in the text.

4. Take a sheet of paper, turn it sideways, and split it into two columns. In the left column, make a list of each symbol from step three. On the right list three possible meanings for each of the symbols in the left column. Think about the connotations of the word or object. Free associate to think of possible meanings. There probably is no single meaning for any of them. This exercise is not about right or wrong answers at this point, but about learning to read more closely and expanding your imagination.

**Due:** 9/21 (TTH)  
9/25 (MW)
LIBRARY EXERCISE

Working Bibliography for Language and Identity Unit

Beginning with the third essay assignment (which will ask you to analyze some aspect of identity in the set of essays on language (Tan “Mother Tongue,” Mellix “From Outside In,” and “Wright “The Power of Books”) you will have to begin using outside sources to support your own thesis and start learning how to cite them properly. There are a huge number of sources on the subjects of identity, literacy, and difference, even on a topic as seemingly specific as an individual author or essay. Therefore it would be best if you can begin this exercise having settled on one of the narrowed topics listed in the assignment.

With this narrowed focus from the broad topic of language and identity, research in the library to find secondary sources (this means that you cannot count the Mellix, Tan, or Wright essays themselves). Our learning session in the library will help you get started and give you some basic research tips. Using library resources, find five sources, at least three of which must be from scholarly/professional sources (generally books and journal articles). The definition of a scholarly source is as follows:

1. Published by an academic or professional press, institution, or organization, such as the Modern Language Association, the California University Press, or Routledge.
2. Edited by academics and professionals, not journalists.
3. Articles in journals or anthologies are selected for publication by juries, editorial boards, by invitation, or published as the proceedings of professional conferences. In general, writers are not paid for publication unless they’ve written or edited the book entirely by themselves.
4. The primary audience is academics and professionals in the field or in related fields. Some publications are also accessible to non-professionals, but make few concessions to a non-professional audience. They are still rather technical in language and adhere to stringent source documentation standards.
5. Advertising in scholarly journals is specific to the publication’s professional field, such as advertisements for books in the field or related fields and conference notices. They do not advertise cosmetics, tobacco, or alcohol.

Once again, let me emphasize that this means you cannot have more than one popular magazine or newspaper source (such as Newsweek, Time, or The New York Times). I’m looking for a range here.

A general guideline is to find at least twice as many sources as you will finally need because only a certain percentage of these will be good, up-to-date, pertinent sources which you might actually want to use in your essay. Therefore, you should begin by looking up and looking at approximately ten different selections.

After locating and reading the sources you’ve found, evaluate them and choose the best five. Using the relevant sections of your textbook (WWR) and Ball Point, construct a
proper MLA-style "Works Cited" entry for each source.

In addition to the basic MLA citation information I also want you to include some "tracking" information so I can see how well you're learning to use the library. Therefore, include in each entry 1) the call number, 2) the physical location in the library (stacks, microfilm room), and 3) the original source where you found this particular item (such as a listing in Reader's Guide, the librarian), exactly like in this example:

Working Bibliography

AP 2 .N624/Microfilm/Academic Index

HV 3004 .B63 1994/Stacks/Bib. of Bogdan’s Freak Show

IUPUI PN56 .M55 M55 1996/Stacks/MLA Bibliography

PQ 2613 .G325Aj/Stacks/Online Catalog

My own book.
PQ 2613 .G325Aj/Stacks/Online Catalog

DUE: 4/5. Please keep one copy for yourself.
ESSAY ASSIGNMENT #3: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF LANGUAGE’S ROLE IN IDENTITY

Subject: the role of language(s) in forming and/or changing identity

Type of Writing: high informal, informative, and persuasive

Audience: your classmates, all of whom are familiar with the essays

Purposes:
• To present your analysis and interpretation of an idea about language and identity to other readers and enable them to understand your point of view
• To develop a deeper appreciation of a text through close reading and analysis
• To explore the ways a sense of difference can be employed and represented by a writer of autobiography
• To practice using secondary sources

Length: 4-6 pages, typed

Due: Working Bibliography 4/5; Draft 4/12; Final Draft 4/26 (Portfolio)

Choose one of the topics listed below to develop an analytical, thesis-based essay on the broader topic of language and identity. In addition to one or more of the three essays we read in this unit (Mellix, Tan, and Wright) you may also draw upon your personal experiences in developing your essay. Furthermore, you must use at least two outside sources. The outside sources can be books, articles, films, television shows, and even interviews. Sources must be documented using MLA-style citations, as discussed in class.

It is important to keep in mind that I want to hear your opinion, not one already published elsewhere, or a repeat of our classroom discussion. The thesis should be your own idea, though it may be informed by things you’ve learned through your research. Like before, this essay should not be merely a personal response to the text nor should it be a report of what the text is about. This is a critical/interpretive and persuasive analysis of how language and identity is represented in the text, in your opinion, supported with textual and secondary evidence.

1. Wright describes a moment when he understood that Mencken was “using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club” and wonders about using them in such a way himself (particularly against racism). But when he tries to write, though he’s filled with “desire and feeling,” he finds himself unable to produce anything that doesn’t sound “flat…” Using Mellix’s and/or Tan’s experiences and other supporting materials, analyze Wright’s writer’s block and the reasons why he might react this way.

2. Each of the three writers describes feeling split between types of “Englishes” that they have learned, either through their upbringings or through education. Define this
“doubleness” and analyze what effect it has on the three writers. Use outside sources to help support your analysis of the process of grappling with the expectations of assimilation while trying to maintain a sense of roots (one possibility is the debate over “black English” or “ebonics”). What kinds of choices have to be made? What are the costs of such choices? What are the benefits?

3. Each of these writers describes the experience of learning new ways of thinking and expressing themselves with language, including writing. Despite their common experiences, each has a distinctive writing style of her/his own. Analyze the style of two of the writers, and try to define the “voice” of each one. What, if any, remnants of their original “English,” their “Mother Tongue,” do they still retain in their writing? Outside sources that focus on prose style, syntax, and voice in English (such as your textbook or style manuals like Strunk & White’s classic) will help you develop this analysis.

4. As a variant on number three, compare the style of one of the writers to the style you’ve begun to develop at Ball State. Analyze one or more of your formal papers (it doesn’t even have to be one written in English 103) in the same way as described above—looking at prose style, syntax, and voice—and compare it to one of the three writers. Take into consideration how your own cultural, ethnic, and/or regional background is reflected in your style. As above, refer to style manuals and English textbooks to develop your analysis.

5. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.” Write an essay using one or more of the three essays, and supporting materials, to support or refute Wittgenstein’s assertion. Some fields to consider for supporting materials are research on literacy and economic mobility or on education and cognitive development.

6. Write an essay after the same fashion as one of the three authors. That is, analyze your own experiences with literacy. What kinds of “Englishes” do you use? Do you speak or read a language other than English? Is English your second language? How do you view your own education? Have you ever felt excluded in any way from school? Have you ever felt or been told that your “English” wasn’t appropriate or adequate? What kinds of “English” have you been taught in school? Like Wright, has anything you’ve read had a big influence on you? Have you experienced any of the things the three writers describe in their struggle to master standard English and become professional writers? What are your reasons for coming to college? Have you thought about the role of language in your college career? In the professional setting after college? Do you have a sense of what kind of literacy will be needed in your future profession? Support your analysis with your own personal experiences, those of any of the three writers we read, and outside sources.
FINAL PORTFOLIO

Your portfolio should contain the following items, arranged in six sections, in the order listed, with the newest item (final draft) on top and the older pieces in reverse order underneath. Please prepare your portfolio neatly and include all items requested. Failure to include required materials or organize the folder so that I can find the materials will result in a lowered grade. This is your opportunity to present your accomplishments of the semester, so take it seriously. Because of the issue of bulk, please use a 1” wide three-ring vinyl binder for your portfolio, nothing larger. Tabbed dividers would be nice to keep things orderly.

I. Portfolio Writer’s Statement

This statement will be a self-assessment of the semester’s work. When replying to the questions below, be sure to refer to specific pieces of writing included in this portfolio. This statement should be 2-3 pages, typed, double-space.

A. How have you approached the course's challenges, in terms of both time and effort? What can you say about your preparation for class (following guidelines, doing the reading, having work done on time)? Which part(s) of the process gave you the most challenges? Which one(s) did you find the easiest to do? It will probably be helpful to refer to the “Writing Skills Questionnaire” in Part II of this portfolio to remind you of your goals.

B. How would you evaluate your participation in class, including attendance, discussion, and peer group work? How many class sessions have you missed?

C. For each of the three final essay drafts included in this portfolio, explain the primary challenges you faced with each paper and how your revisions attempted to solve these challenges. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each final draft?

D. What grade do you think you have earned in the course, both in terms of effort and in terms of the quality of work you have produced? Explain and defend your self-evaluation, referring specifically to assignments. Take into consideration the degree to which you met the guidelines of the assignment, the amount of revising you may or may not have done, particular challenges you overcame, and the degree to which you demonstrated the necessary skills required.

II. Writing Skills Questionnaire

Complete the last column of the questionnaire and include it at this point in your portfolio.
III. ESSAY #1: Description and analysis of one way you are different from your family

Please include the following items in the order listed and described.

A. Final Draft
B. All drafts and revisions going back to invention and notes, in reverse order. Make sure to include feedback from instructor and peers as they occurred as well.

IV. ESSAY #2: Analysis and interpretation of a text for representation(s) of gender or sexual identity

Please include the following items in the order listed and described.

A. Final Draft
B. All drafts and revisions going back to invention and notes, in reverse order. Make sure to include feedback from instructor and peers as they occurred as well.

V. ESSAY #3: Analysis and interpretation of language’s role in identity

A. Please include the following items in the order listed and described.
B. Final Draft
C. Works Cited
D. Copies of all sources cited (except those provided in the class packet).
E. All drafts and revisions going back to invention and notes, in reverse order. Make sure to include feedback from instructor and peers as they occurred as well.

VI. Course Feedback

Please answer the following questions about this course: What suggestions do you have for me, your professor, to improve this class? Think about the various areas: presentation, assignments, reading selections, feedback on written work, classroom atmosphere, screenings, topics, whatever you think needs improving or what you think I did especially well. What did you love? What did you hate? If you hated something, do you think it was for your own good anyway, or that you learned something from it anyhow? I really appreciate your spending some time thinking carefully about these questions. I really do take them seriously in planning my courses.
FINAL PORTFOLIO

You are going to submit your final portfolio on computer disk this semester. The advantages are obvious, but it might take a little extra time to learn a few tricks in MS Word to meet all the requirements (you must use MS Word 2000 or 98). Please read this handout carefully, and make sure you have included ALL the requested material on the disk and have double-checked to make sure that all the links open and that the documents are correctly saved and labeled. Failure to include required materials or organize them according to these instructions will result in a lowered grade. This is your opportunity to present your accomplishments of the semester, so take it seriously. Remember, this portfolio is worth 65% of your course grade!

I. Portfolio Writer’s Statement

This statement will be a self-assessment of the semester’s work. Your Portfolio Writer’s Statement should be a thesis-based essay of at least two pages that discusses all three of the formal writing assignments, in detail. Your thesis should state what you have learned over the course of the semester, in effect making an argument for the quality of your work, after all the revisions, as represented in this portfolio. You may want to refer to the course goals, as listed on your syllabus, and the “Writing Skills Questionnaire.”

For each of the three final essay drafts included in your portfolio, explain the primary challenges you faced with each paper and how your revisions attempted to solve these challenges. Take into consideration the degree to which you met the guidelines of the assignment, the amount of revising you may or may not have done, the strengths and weaknesses of the final draft, and the degree to which you demonstrated the necessary skills required.

When composing this statement, be sure to refer to specific pieces of writing included on the disk, inserted in this document as hyperlinks (instructions to follow below), and labeled according to the following system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LastName1Final</td>
<td>the final draft of your first essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>LastName1A</td>
<td>the first draft of your first essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>LastName1A[Sarah]</td>
<td>first draft, first essay, Sarah’s comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LastName1B</td>
<td>second draft, first essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LastName1RP</td>
<td>first essay, revision plan and group report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make sure that you name and label each piece carefully as you save them on the disk. You should use a fresh disk and only include those materials that you directly refer to in your writer’s statement. To create the hyperlinks in the Portfolio Writer’s Statement, simply highlight a word or phrase, such as Essay One First Draft, and then select Insert > Hyperlink. When the box pops up, simply click on Browse, locate the file you want to
link to, and then double-click on the file name. It’s that easy! If you want to include peer comments in the files, use the Comments feature of MS Word (Insert > Comment).

II. Essay #1 Final Draft: Analyzing Advertising

Include your final draft (including a Works Cited page if you used sources other than those in your textbook) as well as any other drafts, peer comments, and your revision plan if you refer to them in your Portfolio Writer’s Statement. You don’t need to include all the materials, just those you discuss.

III. Essay #2 Final Draft: Analyzing Popular Movies

Include your final draft (including a Works Cited page if you used sources other than those in your textbook) as well as any other drafts, peer comments, and your revision plan if you refer to them in your Portfolio Writer’s Statement. You don’t need to include all the materials, just those you discuss.

IV. Essay #3 Final Draft: Analyzing Film

Include your final draft (including the required Works Cited page). Also include any other drafts, peer comments, or the working bibliography if you refer to them in your Portfolio Writer’s Statement. You don’t need to include all the materials, just those you discuss. Due to the logistical difficulties, I will not ask you to include copies of your sources, but you should be aware that if I suspect plagiarism, I will ask you to show them to me in order to prove that you’ve followed the proper documentation procedures; therefore you should keep these materials until midterm next semester.

Please use a label for your diskette, with your first and last name as well as your English 103 section number.
Appendix P: Vickie’s portfolio writer’s statement

When I began to put this portfolio together, I realized the advantages of my usual and stubborn method of writing without planning or creating subsequent drafts through countless revisions. In addition to being efficient time-wise, writing only one paper as the completed product would make the task of organizing that much easier. Instead of investing my time in the frantic search and retyping of numerous missing drafts and critical responses or in the planning and organizing of all the copies into a portfolio, I could focus more intently on an individual paper’s revision. Although I will admit that in times such functions as creating a free-write or answering a proof-reading/thesis questionnaire have contributed somewhat to my final writing. With one single piece of writing not only would arranging the portfolio be considerably painless but, most notably, I would already be finished.

In truth, without a plan of action or a revising step a paper would be disastrously unorganized, unclear, and, if not full of mistakes, most likely one-sided. Through this course I have learned the importance of rewriting not for the sake of repairing technical mistakes such as grammar but for the purpose of communicating clearly to an audience. This requires an open mind and the input of fellow readers, both of which are stressed in the class. Throughout this class I have attempted to “recognize and respond to basic demands of the audience” with a clear thesis and focus, an organized plan, and strongly developed examples and details, as my three papers demonstrate.
ESSAY 3: ANALYZING FILM

“Attempt” is the operative word in the case of my third and last essay. This paper was a challenge, not so much due to time constrictions than an excess of information. Finding a narrow enough subject within the movie itself became quite a task. I finally decided on approaching the film from a mythic standpoint of the cultural against the natural, which is such a psychologically engaging issue that I felt I could not write enough to support all the evidences I found through research. This clearly resulted in my writing a somewhat sketchy generalization of the evidences for fear of getting so involved that I would exceed the time limit as well as page length specified. I touched upon the points briefly, leaving a feeling of empty “filler” words in between, as my fellow peer editor Dustin Oberlin noted when he wrote that the original paper had “enough stuff.” Courtney Martin stated that the first page was too confusing, and both Michele Lorenz and Dustin Oberlin echoed that opinion. I inspected and revised the document in several places; the most prominent change being the rearrangement of and omittance [sic] of large sections of the first and second paragraphs. I prize myself on my spelling and grammar, and therefore nearly threw a “hissy-fit” when I couldn’t think of a grammatically correct smoother-sounding way to write “Man may have come a long way” near the beginning of the last paragraph. Yet another one of English’s great flaws, the term “man” in this context is the singular group of humankind, and a correct way to word this would be “Man has come.” Even if one has a singular subject, “may have” and “might have” are permanently maintained (there is no “may has” or might “has”). Though I may be a stickler for
grammar, I am even more infatuated with a harmonious voice to a reading, and therefore when in doubt, I choose the result more compositionally favorable. The requirement least challenging to me, as one can deduce from looking over this writer's statement, was to write with an academic audience in mind.

I didn’t engage into making many revisions for this literary undertaking. I changed a word here and there for better word flow and I also added the publishing information to a source in the bibliography. I left the rest alone however; perhaps since I have seen the movie and have written the paper myself I can follow the method of madness so well that I do not see what could be done to adjust the draft otherwise.

On the subject of methods, I strictly followed the guidelines for the “Analyzing Film” essay assignment by choosing a specific film (“King Kong”) and by restricting my thematic focus to the structuralist [sic] approach of mythology. Strengths and weaknesses of this final draft are mostly the same as for every paper I write: My use of language and grammar as well as detail and description is particularly noteworthy while the lack of clarity, organization, and a sound thesis leave something to be desired. Despite those faults, I believe I have improved my writing considerably in the course of the semester, most specifically in organization and in the research aspect of tracking down and citing sources.

ESSAY 2: ANALYZING POPULAR MUSIC

The essay on popular music took the most of my time and dedication, consequently being my personal favorite. Even though I am quite proud of my
take on and representation of a band that most love to hate, I am not blind to possible revision ideas. However, due to a lack of time I am unable to fully rework my drafts significantly. Even if I did have the time, I would most likely change very little if anything at all. I find all my documents to be satisfactorily completed with a show of significant skill acquired through the years – from speaking and reading as well as learning in multiple English classes.

The most recent changes made to this paper were the conversion of all incorrectly cited sources (referred to by a superscripted number much like a footnote instead of the parenthesized author name or title) and also the replacement of italicized song names for the “academically correct” version with quotation marks. As I explained more in depth in my Group Report and Revision Plan, I bent the rules in this fashion simply to reduce the number of quoted texts and long titles which deterred the reader from smoothly gliding from one sentence to the next and to prevent confusion. With all lyrics, song names, and direct quotes in quotation marks, it became difficult to tell one from the other, jeopardizing the reader’s comprehension.

Other past revisions include a reworking of the opening and an addition of writing about the most recent album by the band (for reasons of comparing the growth of its music), most easily seen as the differences between my rough draft and near-final draft. Sources were hard to come by, especially individual fans’ accounts on the band and how its music affected them. It seems that in 1997 and 1998 one could not visit a fan page without a section on “Why I like the Band Hanson,” complete with lists of how the band and music inspired one person or
how she related to it and felt that someone cared, and so on. Nowadays that is not so, and I even went so far as to post a message in the band’s official Yahoo message board explaining my predicament and asking if anyone could help out by e-mailing me a short account on why he or she liked the band, what the music meant to him or her, etcetera. I never got a reply.

With finding sources as the single most difficult challenge, the second and third would have to be finding an approach and the dealing with annoying grammar inconsistencies that I came up with. When I was trying to first write the paper, I was very unsure of how to approach the subject. I tried to be as informative and impersonal as possible (yet still showing that I am in favor of the band as opposed to not) so as not to frighten away people with yet another close-minded I-am-holier-than-thou juvenile account of “like, this band is cool, like, and ummmmm… they’re just awesome, like, because I said so! And if you don’t like, like them…then you’re STUPID!!!” ’ Again with the grammar obsession; I had quite a time of debating whether or not I could use the singular “band” with the plural possessive of “their” (such as in ‘the band played their music’). Peer reader response indicated that the second draft was confusing (I get that a lot), but otherwise hadn’t much to say on the subject. I followed the procedure outlined on the assignment sheet by constructing a “detailed description” of the band, analyzing the “themes and values” within the music, and by discussing (though rather shortly) the effects the band’s music has on its listeners and why or why is not the band popular in the mainstream society. I believe that the essay is one of my better ones through dedication alone, one that displays strong
grammar and literary background. A more complete description of the trials and tribulations of this work may be found in my Group Report and Revision Plan.

ESSAY 1: ANALYZING ADVERTISING

My first and second-favorite piece of writing during this course, “Bare Facts” took me a long time to conceptualize. I was at a loss for advertisements, unable to find one I thought I was capable of writing a sufficient amount on or one I wished to write about at all. Since I have no magazines myself, I used Bracken Library’s sources and finally came across a promising and controversial graphic for “Bowlmor Lanes” Bowling Alley within an issue of Ms. Magazine. I collected two other such ads that displayed women in a sexual way and began to write about the three and the vulgarity of such innuendos – especially when considering the places the ads promoted were prone to visits from children and adults of all ages. I soon discarded this rough draft through fellow peer editor Courtney’s suggestion however, since it had too much potential content and not enough room to develop it in, not to mention the fact that tying the three ads into one thesis was somewhat challenging. All three of my peers pointed out what areas needed more or less elaboration in the text and the useless repetition I could not steer clear from. With the finished product being more simply and clearly written than any other in this digital portfolio, it is obvious why I tend to favor it so much. I cannot say exactly that since it is completely different from the rest of my later work that I have improved, for it is difficult to ascertain whether clear and concise
is better than a long and involved not-so-quite understandable composition, like, for instance, this one.

With a more sufficiently narrowed topic (the one ad as opposed to the three), I was able to fully follow and explore the meanings and appeals of the ad, an act mentioned in the writing guidelines listed on the Essay Assignment sheet. The polished final, in my opinion, is one of the most successful pieces I’ve written. With a strong sense of lucidity and a more comprehensible language style, this kind of essay is a rare find among my works. In my Group Report and Revision Plan, one can see that I had had my doubts on the paper. Whereas then I was feeling negatively about the end product, I have now come to realize that it was rather well-written and the thesis strongly founded on many good examples. It seems I had gotten it in my head that the more a person writes, the more noteworthy and engaging his written dialogue is. In this context I viewed “Bare Facts” as empty and therefore worthless; the work of a fifth-grader. Looking back at it now, I see a charming paper with valid arguments and interesting views in abundance.

As can be gathered from my three drafts, I have the ability to write rather well (in my opinion); I just need to hone up my skills. Through successful learning programs such as this English course—which emphasizes the necessary skills to progress to higher learning—I will no doubtedly [sic] continue to improve.