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Note: The following is the text of a presentation created using Prezi.

Visual Rhetoric for the Writing 100 ePortfolio

Using: page layout, text, white spaces, images, colors, fonts to present yourself as a writer online

What is visual rhetoric?
Visual rhetoric is how images communicate.

Why does it matter for my ePortfolio?
Unlike a sheaf of paper you might turn into your instructor at the end of the semester, the online portfolio is a dynamic web page. It requires you to think through how text, white space, layout, images, colors, and fonts work together to create an online identity for yourself as a writer.

Let's take a look at how one writer does it.

(image) Thomas Yeh's ePortfolio
Winner of the Sweetland Writing Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio
Main Page

Page Layout
Consistent page layout will give the portfolio a unified feel and make it easier to read. Web readers expect the most important idea and/or navigation on the upper-left. The second mostimportant idea can appear at the top center. Consider creating additional pages, rather than requiring a lot of scrolling to get through the text.

The title of the page is the writer's name, making it clear what this page is about.

A brief tagline clarifies the purpose of the page further and begins to introduce to how Thomas wants to present himself as a writer.

Page navigation is straightforward: he uses tabs to designate an introductory page and a secondary page with examples of his work.

Fonts
Fonts, like color, can help to set a tone on a website, so they should be chosen carefully. And, like color, they should probably not be used in too much variety. A simple, sans serif font can be used for most web-based text.
Text size should be large enough to allow easy reading.
This writer uses two fonts:

a serif font for his name

and a sans serif font for his other text

What tone do you think it creates? For some readers, the serif font suggests a more formal self-presentation, such as that on a resume, while the sans serif font creates a more personal tone and also makes it easier to read large chunks of text.

White Space
Web-based writing requires a lot of unused, or "negative" space on the page to make it readable. Leave plenty of space between paragraphs and space around paragraphs.

(new image: Work Showcase Page)

Text
Writing for the web is more effective when it is brief and highly structured. Identify and lead with your main ideas/reflections on the piece of writing you showcase, leaving other, less important points to be developed by the piece of writing itself.

Thomas uses an engaging, personal tone to draw the reader into his presentation of this essay. By the third sentence of the first paragraph, the content and purpose of the writing he is showcasing is clear.
He uses one more brief paragraph to say something more specific about the essay itself.

Images
Images have a range of functions. They can represent an item exactly—in its primary function, the picture of a shirt on the J. Crew website represents the shirt. On the other hand, pictures can be used to create a mood or to evoke an emotion. Think about what your images "say" and how they relate to the text they accompany.

Thomas doesn't use a picture of a Harry Potter book cover. Instead, he uses an image that suggests a book cover but substitutes a title that is linked to his essay. He incorporates images (the lightning bolt, the glasses) that evoke the idea of the Harry Potter books that further link his own thoughts to the books.

The image is also used to help structure the page. It creates a break between the two text paragraphs, and it serves as a visual transition between the descriptions of the essay found in those paragraphs.

Color
Color is extremely powerful in creating moods; it also affects readability. High contrast—darker text on lighter background—generally works best for readability. Keeping to a relatively narrow color palette—often provided by the ePortfolio platform—will help a site from becoming too busy.

Thomas uses several colors, but they work together to keep the page readable and not busy.
The yellow on the book cover works with the light yellow edging he uses on the border of the page.
For text blocks, Thomas sticks to black text on a white background. This doesn't seem harsh or boring because he also uses a muted gray as background for the text blocks.
Links are blue, which clearly identifies them for the reader. There aren't too many of them, so this blue doesn't seem to be competing with the other colors.

Next steps
Put these concepts into practice as you complete the visual rhetoric analysis of another writer's ePortfolio on Ctools.

Quiz text (implemented as a Hot Potatoes quiz)
--using a different visual portfolio as an image

Writing 100 Visual Rhetoric Analysis/Quiz text
-- = feedback text

Intro:
This multiple-choice quiz is designed to walk you through an analysis of the visual rhetorical choices one writer makes her in ePortfolio. You'll be looking at "Choreography of Words" by Kathy Pham, the winner of the 2011 Sweetland Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio.

Question 1: How would you describe the writer based on your overall impression of the page?
A: creative
--The juxtaposition of an image of a dancer along with the image of a writing notebook suggests that the writer does see herself as someone who creates in multiple modes. As well, the title "Choreography of Words" also highlights the blend of more than one way of being creative.
B: disorganized
--Although the writer uses images and words that suggest motion, the overall layout of the page is quite clear and well-organized.
C: a dancer
--Dance is highlighted in two ways on this opening page: through the image of a dancer and the word "choreopgraphy" in the title. The writer, however, seems to be suggesting something about her writing rather than just presenting herself as a dancer, because the image and word are part of a larger context that focuses on writing. The allusions to dance work well because they ask us to see her writing in an unusual way.

Question 2: Page layout: The writer uses both a navigation bar (the top line listing the names of the pages inside her site) and a series of links in the body of her main page (the titles above the images). Do you think this double titling helps or impedes the reader in understanding how to navigate the page?
A: It helps the reader.
-- It could help the reader, because it makes it less likely that he or she will miss important information.
B: It is confusing.
--It could be confusing to the reader, because he or she might wonder if there are different contents for each link or if there is a better one to click on. Still, the writer minimizes this potential confusion by keeping the titles the same for each form of navigation.

Question 3: Text/page layout: The writer uses a tagline/subtitle: "Choreography of Words: the choice and arrangement of words according to one's style and purpose in order to create a message." Is this tagline effective?

A: Yes, because it clarifies what the writer means.

--The tagline offers a definition of what might not be a familiar term to readers. In this way, it helps the reader understand who the writer is and how she thinks.

B: No, it is too abstract.

--Some readers may not find this tagline effective because it uses too many abstract words to describe the writer's meaning, such as "style" and "purpose." But, the writer has made a clear choice to try to harness these abstractions to get part of her writing philosophy apart. There isn't any perfect way of presenting yourself--you have to make choices about what you think is meaningful for the reader to know about you.

C: Yes, it is visually effective because it is right under the title.

--The placement of this sentence makes its purpose clear, but its subdued font might make it hard to see.

D: No, it is visually ineffective because the font is too small and not differentiated enough.

--These are good critiques. The words you use in your portfolio may be overlooked if they are not presented in a way that draws the reader's eyes to them.

Question 4: White space: For this question, look at the "About Me" page. Do you think the writer has enough white space to make her text readable?

A: Yes, the page's wide margins make the text readable.

--This page is a good example of using white space well. The margins, the space between paragraphs, and the padding space around the images make the page look uncluttered and bring attention to the text.

B: No, the paragraphs seem too close together.

--There are some slight inconsistencies in paragraph spacing, such as between the second and third paragraphs. The writer might also have considered making the paragraphs more uniform blocks, so that the edges aligned rather than wrapping around the images.

Question 5: Colors: Page: "About Me": While you are at the "About Me" page, consider the background the writer has chosen for the site. What stands out to you about it?

A: The background colors: the grey background makes the white center stand out more and makes it easier to read.

--Yes, there is a nice contrast between the grey and the white, which both softens the harshness of plain white on a computer screen and makes it stand out.

B: The white center text space is framed on the image of a piece of notebook paper.

--The notebook paper image links online writing to writing by hand. It suggests bridging the two media.

C: The background colors: grey and white are visually boring.

--You are certainly welcome to think so--keep in mind what you find appealing when you design your ePortfolio, but also think about readability. These background colors do help make the page readable, even if they do seem boring.

Question 6: Images: Page: For this question, look at the "Work Showcase" page: What tone do the images on this page create?

A: The vibrant colors create an energetic feel.

--These are sharp and colorful images, that grab the reader's attention. These photos show that using a lot of different colors in images can work if there are other elements that work to tie them together. For example, most of these images are photos, which creates a more unified look for the page. And while there are also lots of colors, there are many similar colors in each of the images.

B: There are too many colors and the page feels hectic.

--There are a lot of bright colors and some readers may find it jarring to look at a series of colorful photos. Overall, though, it does seem that despite the numerous colors there is a visual flow to the pages. There are hues that are shared from picture to picture that allow the eye to move through them. For example, the brick red of the buildings in the first photograph flows into the red mud of the second. The green salad of the food tray flows into the green accents of the cover image from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

C: The images are mostly photos and create a kind of journalistic feel.

--Good observation--there is a definite difference between photographs and other types of images that can be used on a web page. Using several photos on this page has multiple effects. To take just one, the writer seems to be engaged with a wide range of aspects of the real world, as the photos range from portraits of individuals to a snapshot of flood to a cafeteria tray. She eventually uses other types of images further down the page, but these opening photos set a strong tone.

Question 7: Do you think these images work well with the writing that is presented?

A: Yes, they illustrate and enliven the essays this writer is presenting.

--This writer has done a very good job of selecting images that are interesting in their own right but also connected to the essays they represent in some way. The second essay, for example, is an analysis of a photo essay, and the writer uses the web-based format of this portfolio to include the actual images she was analyzing. These photos draw the reader in to the writing rather than simply explaining the essays. This is another way that the writer has used the ePortfolio to communicate her own ideas about her writing.

B: No, the connection between the images and writing isn't always clear.

--While the wide range of images on this page might seem disconnected at first, a closer look at the essays to which they link shows that each of them has a compelling thematic connection. For example, the first images--two senior portraits of people who are not the writer and whose relationship to the writer isn't clear--might not seem connected to the paper at first glance, but the titles "No More Cardboard Backgrounds" makes it clear that the writer's use of typical, staged senior photos is intentional. This essay is also one that she connects to making the transition from high school to college writing, again making the senior portrait meaningful. These photos embody both what she is analyzing in the essay and what she is moving away from as a writer.

Keep in mind that sometimes a straightforward illustration is not the best way to use an image. Using something unexpected but appropriate at a deeper level can be very effective.

Question 8: Images & citations: What is the effect of including citations for the images this writer uses?
A: It's distracting information that I don't need.
--Having sources listed directly under the image might seem kind of clunky, but it's important to give others' credit for their work. It shows the writer isn't just copying and pasting; she's done some background research on these images. If you don't like having the citations right next to the picture, consider a photo credits section at the bottom of the page.
B: It makes me trust the writer because she is clearly acknowledging work that is not her own.
--Definitely--we grant more trust to writers who are clear about what they did and did not come up with on their own. Also, citing the photos allows her to get credit for the one that she did create on her own.
C: It's cool because now I know how to find that image if I wanted to know more about it.
--This is a key reason why citations are an important part of scholarly conversation. You might want to track down one of these images just like you might want to track down a source cited in an essay. Telling the reader where it came from is providing valuable information and contributing to future thought and conversation.
D: It's helpful, because I know that the writer took one of these photos herself and edited others, which gives me ideas about how I will come up with images for my own ePortfolio.
--It's great to think about the logistics of creating an ePortfolio ahead of time. As this example demonstrates, there are a lot of ways to come up with images that you think communicate well.

Question 9: Fonts: Page: Home page: What is the overall effect of the font(s) the writer has chosen?
A: The serif font gives the page a formal tone that is appropriate for academic writing.
--The serif font might very well remind the reader of Times New Roman font, which is required for many academic papers. That doesn't mean it is the only appropriate font choice for an ePortfolio, however. One aspect of the web-based format is a wider range of visual style. Consider experimenting with font to see if it changes the overall presentation.
B: The font looks stiff.
--The serif font might very well remind the reader of Times New Roman font, which is required for many academic papers and which for some readers might create as an overly formal, rigid look. The images on the page (such as the dancer in motion and the flowing script), however, clearly work against rigidity. The more formal font is nicely balanced by the more flowing images.
C: The main font contrasts with the cursive script and handwriting in the images, making the writing in the images look more "in motion," which complements the idea of a "choreography" of words.
--Not all fonts are in the text. As this page demonstrates, images of writing can introduce new fonts onto the page. This interpretation of the font choice is clearly driven by a level of attention

to the site that not all readers will employ, but the effects of font can be far-reaching and subtle. It can be an integral part of presenting yourself online.

Question 10: Text: For this question, click on one of the pieces of reflective writing posted on the "Reflections" page. Do you think the text layout is effective for web reading on this page?
A: Yes, there is plenty of white space along the edges.
--The notebook page background creates a clear space around the text and helps focus the reader's eye in the center. The text, though, does seem a bit hard to keep reading until the end, which might be helped by the use of a sans serif font or creating more space between paragraphs.
B: No, there is not enough space between the paragraphs.
--The paragraphs do seem a bit close together, and the large amount of text in a serif font is a bit harder to reader than a sans serif font would be in this context. You might want to consider double-spacing between paragraphs or switching to an easier to read font.