

Navigating Digital Technology: *Generative AI Reshaping Intertextuality and Multimodality in Writing and Composition*

Milina Tamrakar Tuladhar

PhD Candidate, English Department, Florida State University
milinatamrakar@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 15 Dec. 2025

Revised: 21 Dec. 2025

Accepted: 26 Dec. 2025

Abstract

This essay examines how new learning platforms, such as social media, AI, and digital learning tools, have shaped contemporary rhetoric and composition pedagogies. With the arrival of these digital tools, the meaning of knowledge production has shifted from alphabetic texts to multimodalities. The singular way of learning or sharing information has been replaced. This essay demonstrates how digital learning has promoted remix culture, hypertextual connectivity, and new multimodal forms like memes, mashups, and AI-generated images, drawing on theorists such as Kristeva, Kress, Selfe, Yancey, and Allen. The essay not only views these platforms as useful but also highlights the ethical considerations of them. The paper's conclusion makes the case that digital technologies both enhance and complicate composition pedagogy, necessitating authors and educators to strike a balance between critical awareness, creativity, authenticity, and the responsible integration of new tools.

Cite as:

Tuladhar, M.
T. (2025).
Navigating digital
technology:
Generative
AI reshaping
intertextuality and
multimodality
in writing and
composition.
*NOU
Multidisciplinary
Journal*, 1(1)
25-32.

Keywords: AI, composition, digital tools, intertextuality, multimodalities

INTRODUCTION

The digital technological breakthroughs in communication have impacted much of the world, intersecting digital tools with most of the human socio-cultural practices. The use of online resources: archives, videos, images, social media, websites, blogs, and podcasts conjoin to establish an integral relationship between human and machines, human and non-human entities, while influencing each other. MacKenzie and Wajcman (2012) state in their book, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, that “Technological change is

not only change in itself, but it impacts our minds not on how to shape it but adapt with it”(p.5). Either perish and be outdated, or adapt and steer unfathomable new identities along the conventional changes digitally. In this context of emerging digital technology, the field of Rhetoric and Composition (RC) finds *kairos* to stride over alphabetical writings incorporating new media skills and practices. Integration of writings along with these new media skills and practices often exhibits an overlap of texts, images, and videos, condensing an intersection of these artifacts, connectivity, intertextuality and

multimodally. Moreover, the scope of RC has been further enhanced and diversified by Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) in writing practices converging the phenomena of intertextuality and multimodality in its domain.

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how digital technologies change intertextuality and multimodality in modern composition; this study employs a qualitative research methodology. Examining theoretical scholarship in addition to digital artifacts like memes AI-generated images, remix videos, and hyperlinked multimedia texts allowed for a qualitative textual and media analysis. These artifacts were specifically chosen because as Eyman (2015) points out digital rhetoric must be examined through the media forms it creates, which represent new rhetorical functions. To understand how digital compositions remix, repurpose, and circulate meaning across platforms the analysis makes use of intertextual and multimodal theories. This is consistent with Selfe's (2009) claim that digital tools increase communicative possibilities and necessitate attention to multiple expressive modes. Recently, most scholars asserted that everything is technological. This study supports the viewpoint that modern ways of learning are compatible with multimodalities, which is echoed in Kress's (2000) notion that interpretive approaches are more effective than quantitative analyses. To beat copying algorithms of AI, teachers should create innovative assignments and provide different rubrics and increase students' awareness about AI's ethical limitations (Dobrin, 2023).

INTERTEXTUALITY AND MULTIMODALITY: INTERRELATED IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE

Before delving into the intersection of intertextual and multimodal relationships in digitally circulated multimedia content, I would glimpse on specific terms such as intersexual and multimodal. Intertextuality itself is intertextual. Someone created a piece of text and might have thought it to be an independent entity, being original and unmediated by any other work/s. Socrates' dialogism might have been thought of as an independent entity from what his disciple Plato added in his treatise *The Republic*. Aristotle's rhetorical appeals have nothing to do with his teacher Plato's ideological theories. For example, if we look at a classical literary text, *The Paradise Lost* by John Milton, Milton's use of 'Satan' in his canonical poem should not be mistaken as his creation without any mediation of his prior knowledge. His character 'Satan' in the masterpiece alluded to the biblical 'Satan' which Milton relied upon, and his text interacted with already familiar semiotic references to the Bible he must have known, and his readers sensed similar sense allusions. When Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality', she developed her theory relying on other preceding scholarly works. Primarily intrigued by linguists Saussure's semiotics, Bakhtin's dialogical interaction and heteroglossia, and Barthes' text as a "tissue of quotation," she synthesized and propounded these theorists' ideologies on language and its social and cultural representations that she terms 'intertextuality.' Thus, Kristeva's position of her "intertextuality" is itself intertextual.

Similarly, situations have differed with the inclusion of multimodal approach in writing technologies over printed text, unlike the example of Milton's use of Satan in his textual writing. It is crucial to be aware that texts referential to literary texts narrow down its connectedness in writing and composing. Since sign systems and language permeate into human life activities, any of their socio-cultural phenomena are linked within their language system. Thus, any text created can never be limited just to pre-existing literary texts, as it has its socio-cultural impacts in its formation. The text is referential not only to its preceding texts, but it is mediated with other forms of works embedded in its socio-cultural context. Any artistic and cultural activities beyond the literary domain, such as music, dance, cinema, painting, photography, architecture, sculpture, and popular culture, may heavily influence the given work and should be analyzed in relation to its context. Whenever a text is read in reference to other texts, it helps to trace its surrounding assumptions and implications for the readers to associate not only with its contextual network, which helps them to understand and interpret by those referred contexts. A piece of melody/sound, a dance step, a painting, a photograph, a part of a building, a design, can be a mode of expression. Every form of media is interlinked: Sound with visual, visual with text, text with movement mediated through interdisciplinary mediums. With the use of digital tools, intertextuality affordances have expanded and been further redefined. Texts no longer refer only to another text/s but become a part of an interplay of multitude platforms. Additionally, social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube homogenize texts and media products. Mode of Expression is no longer monolithic but explores an amalgamation of texts, images,

audio, video, oral, and possibly interactive associates. In this scenario, teaching and composition have faced a complete overturn now.

Multimodality refers to the use of multiple modes of communication or expression to convey information or meaning. These modes can include speech, writing, gestures, images, videos, and more. In various fields such as linguistics, communication studies, and education, multimodality is an important concept because it recognizes that communication often involves more than just words on a page or spoken language. It acknowledges that people often use a combination of different modes to communicate effectively, and understanding these different modes can lead to richer and more nuanced interpretations of messages. *Multimodality* is a term that refers to the use of multiple modes of communication or expression to convey information or meaning. These modes can include speech, writing, gestures, images, videos, and more. In various fields such as linguistics, communication studies, and education, multimodality is an important concept because it recognizes that communication often involves more than just words on a page or spoken language. It acknowledges that people often use a combination of different modes to communicate effectively, and understanding these different modes can lead to richer and more nuanced interpretations of messages.

Gunther Kress, in her article, "Multimodality," sees an object and its semiotic representation embedded in a web of cultural practices and values; and therefore, believes in multimodality of the textual objects, whether it is oral, signed, drawn, or written (200). Cynthia Self (2009)

points out the significance of visual and aural modality in communicative practices broadening the composition course and argues that in today's context, we might be "confiscating several intellectual and social opportunities and responsibilities and limiting student's rhetorical agency if we continue to rely on print version as the primary means of composition." (p. 618) She adds that the emergence of new software and hardware applications have increased people access to the "means of producing and distributing communications that take advantage of multiple expressive modalities" (2009, p. 637) Kathelene Yancey's digital portfolio as one of the significant compositions is intertextual, multimodal and is linked internally and externally. New composition includes rhetoric and the literacy of print to bring "the notions of practice and activity and circulation and media and screen and networking to our conceptions of process" (2004, p. 320). Thus, the composition overlaps with each other, and intertextuality intersects multimodality with available digital tools. The tale of Cinderella that chronicled the Greek version of a girl's story with a lost shoe to Grimm's fairy tales is no longer available only in the printed version stacked in libraries and bookstores. The story is transformed into different animated as well as human-starred versions from 1950 until 2023, some under the Walt Disney production and with Sony Pictures, now digitally available in Amazon Prime Video. Just a click in Google and social media and any other available digital browsers, Cinderella pops up on smartphones, laptops, and computers intertwined with texts and other forms of media. This accessibility redirected and encouraged students and researchers to experiment with multimodal composition.

Moreover, the convergence of intertextuality and multimodality engendered novel forms of composition. The hypertexting expands its field hyperlinking to various media including video, audio, animation and interactive process developing Gary Heba's (1997) "HyperRhetoric," a form of communication that (re)invents "itself negotiating among users, developers, electronic content and its presentation in a multimedia environment" (22) (cited by Eyman, 2015, p. 26). In this sense, hypertexting reflects intertextuality, connecting text and other texts materializing it into multiple forms as "direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism, and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected. By doing so, an intertext transforms or reproduces the texts preceding it" (Zengin, 2016 p. 300). For these forms of media, Graham Allen (2021) in his book *Intertextuality* emphasizes that "It does not seem strange, to most people on the verge of the second decade of the millennium, that most films they watch are remakes, that a good proportion of the music they listen to consists of cover versions or remastered tracks or is dependent upon sampling, and that the television shows they watch, the digital games they play, and event fashions they wear are frequently, even predominantly, allusively based on previous decades and previous styles" (p. 204)

Intertextuality, Multimodality, and Generative AI Intersection: A New Form of Composition

The data collected by Google, Facebook, and the World Wide Web, to name a few domains, for example, comprises not only different forms of media but also integrated images, memes, parodies, videos, movie clips, music, and hashtags. Contemporary classrooms are

now equipped with digital tools to observe classical literary as well as non-literary texts through frequent transmedia adaptations. Not only sections of canonical texts but also any forms, images, videos, and sounds are frequently analyzed. Google, Facebook, and YouTube changed the cultural environment, redefining intertextuality. The mashups and remix popularized, with Web 3.0, not only the texts but certain domains within any form of media, texts in the websites and blogs could be hyperlinked. In *Rhetoric Online*, Barbara Warnick discusses contemporary users of web-based discourse access to information just in a fingertip understanding and hyperlinking various resources such as articles, references, images, videos, and podcasts within it. “Within one resource, researchers can easily to any hyperlinked resources to reinforce their details” (cited as Eyman 2015, p. 34).

Kirby Ferguson, in his podcast *Everything is a Remix*, states that intertextuality is not a new phenomenon. The remix and mashups videos combine various songs with digital images, emojis, video songs, title captioned with corresponding videos, effects and sound. It conveys one familiar story with familiar characters and familiar situations. Even though the production might seem original, many glimpses of former artifacts are replicated not only in music videos but have extensively in movies and TV shows. Ferguson thinks that when movies and TV shows aren’t sequels or remakes or adaptations, they’re still designed to be like other movies. They stick to the rules of genre, a *tres bon* French word. Genre films give us familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.” For instance, the videos on one of the popular Grimm fairy tales, *Cinderella*, continue to be remediated,

repurposed with the common storyline of the Cinderella story in which her lost shoe leads to her conjugation with the prince. The first Disney’s animated Cinderella movie in 1950s is followed by *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* (2002); *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time* (2007) while later non-animated movies *Cinderella* in 2015 and other movies with the reflection of the name Cinderella, however with different situations and stories just to name a few.

These movies showcase parts of the Cinderella story reformed, repurposed, and reappropriated from the original version. Moreover, Cinderella’s memes bring another interplay of divergent media brought by the digital culture. The media relationship juxtaposed moving to and fro into its memes inducing text and extending and/or deviating the original storyline to satirize and mock the social situations. With a music video, “Cinderella vs Stepsisters Princess Rap Battle Music Video,” it seems just a clickable distance to merge a text with image, an image with video, hashtags with image and video, songs into parodies, hyperlinked e-zines, websites, blogposts, images and videos into memes, and games. Logan Middleton points out in his article “Mix It Up, Mash It Up: Arrangement, Audio Editing, and the Importance of Sonic Context” that whenever we edit, manipulate or distort files, “we’re also playing with or experimenting with the contexts of each of those files. When we mash them up to create new meaning or take them out of context to alter existing meaning, we’re doing quite a bit of work that goes unnoticed.” (2022, p. 34)

Such a similar interplay of intertextuality and multimodal phenomena is exhibited in the above examples of the photo



image of the original painting of “Mona Lisa” by Leonardo da Vinci. The digital picture of the painting is repurposed and reformed and used as a meme developed by web users digitally. The first painting by da Vinci has undergone considerable changes digitally however, preserving the essence of its original model. Mona Lisa memes with its new forms intertwine retextured digital content decontextualized into various forms depending upon the objectives of its remake. The third picture created by AI incorporates the original touch while hinting to repurposed texture. These reframed versions of Mona Lisa exhibit new forms of remix touch conjoining heuristically new possibilities and new opportunities. Richard Dawkins coined the word meme as “an imitated thing.” Intertextual and multimodality intersect to form a new form of literacy in the meme makings. Hence, with the use of digital tools, its techniques and reformations, Bogost (2007) delineates the emergence of new forms of literacy in today’s context as traditional rhetorical methods no longer suffice in new media forms. Eyman cites his perspectives on intertextuality of digital

tools that “Email, websites, message boards, blogs, and wikis ... forms can function rhetorically, and they are worthy of study; like visual rhetoricians, digital rhetoricians hope to revise and reinvent rhetorical theory for a new medium” (25) (cited by Eyman 2015, p. 34). Since, digital sphere inflates to infinite audience any given composition can be appealing to more targeted audiences to “an interested crowd of heterogeneous spectators.”

It seems now with ever-rising digital innovations: automatons, bots, algorithms, Human Computer Interface, Generative AI, linked the stored data from digitally published books and academic works, Wikipedia, and any available materials from the Internet and coopted contextual domains. This transposition from one media to another media not only makes intertextuality multimodal, but the use of Generative AI has revolutionized writing and composition. The grammar, spelling, style, and tone of texts are autocorrected with AI assistance. Moreover, chatbots like ChatGPT produce requested information in just a few seconds with guided prompts. Its users generate multiple outcomes on their research topics and content, citations, drafting, and even proofreading. Composition students and researchers can retrieve much information for their projects. The examples below are the multiple outcomes on “Multimodality” provided by ChatGPT in two different time periods.

It is not only ChatGPT manipulating any alphabetical composition, but art generators expand visual images, including photographs, videos, symbols, icons, tables, cartoon pictures and create their own images based on the provided prompts. Initiated by art generator DALL, E 2, Harry Guinness



(2023) in his blog states the popularity of various apps launching almost every week to experiment and produce various weird and wild-looking realistic results. The following images are examples from DALL.E 3 art generator.

The above images give an essence to Sherlock Holmes, a character in the detective series by Arthur Conan Doyle, who often smokes a pipe; however, the repurposed one exhibits a parrot. These AI-generated pictures assemble prior text knowledge of the nineteenth-twentieth-century popular detective stories of Sherlock Holmes and have undoubtedly developed into a new artwork in the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

Landscaping is the latest technological development occurring in today's world, digital technology plays an influential role in shaping our teaching and learning practices. Any composition embeds an intertextual and multimodal approach along with available means of digital tools to produce novel compositions, such as remixing, hyperlinking, and developing memes from the available resources. The resource has become more profound, dynamic, ubiquitous, and accessible that in this context, it seems impossible to detach technological developments in today's writing and

composition class. However, thoughtful integration of these tools in writing and composition should be practiced, avoiding plagiarized and dealing with authorship and copyright issues. Some scholars like Emig (2001) question the impact of "technology's inevitable doom" and argue in his article "Embodied Learning" that "Cyberspace is awash with rumors, innumerable, pseudo-facts, and outright lies, all of which can be literally deadly to the user's mental as well as physical well-being. Without the means to weigh and to judge what is given equal space - an a-judgmental, a-responsible space - users stay mindless consumers and impaired citizens unable to make evaluations crucial to personal and civic survival" (278). Jeffrey T. Grabill and Troy Hicks also discuss the use of ICTs as simply not enough but "critically understanding how these writing technologies enable new literacies and meaningful communication should also be core curricula and pedagogical function of English education." (2005, p. 307). Dobrin (2023) too refers Generative AI's limitations on its possible biases and hallucinations due to assembling and sorting multiple generated patterns, it is definitely important to be cautious about these generated composition that "when considering the use of Gen AI in your own writing, you'll need to consider the context of the task, as well as the ethical and policy consideration involved" (p. 61). It is now urgent that "teachers should teach students how and when to use it, as ChatGPT, among other GenAI tools, has become exceedingly popular at all levels of education" (Sherma, 2025, p. 63). The colossal opportunities and threats are there in the digital realm with using Generative AI in today's writing technology to which students, researchers, and scholars need to balance their own authenticity.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, B. (2008). Web 2.0 and Emergent Multiliteracies. *Theory Into Practice*, 47(2), 150–160.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071535>
- Alexander, J., & Rhodes, J., (2014). Introduction. *On Multimodality: New Media in Composition Studies*. Urbana: IL: NCTE Press, 1-27
- Allen, G. (2021). *Intertextuality* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003223795>
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. (Ed.) Holoquist, M. (Translated) Emerson, C. & Holoquist, M. University of Texas Press.
- Baron, D. (2012). From Pencils to Pixels. *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution*. Oxford UP. (p. 227-246).
- Barthes, R. (2010) The Death of the Author. *Readings in the Theory of Religion*. Ed. Elliott, Scott S. & Waggoner, Matthew, 1st Edition, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315475615> (Original work published 1977)
- Dobrin, S. I. (2023). *AI and Writing*. Broadview Press.
- Emig, J. (2001). Embodied learning. *English Education*, 33(4), 271–280.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40173296>
- Eyman, D. (2015). Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric. *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Media, and Practice*, University of Michigan, (p. 12-60).
- Ferguson, K. (2023). *Everything is remix*.
<https://www.everythingisaremix.info/everything-is-a-remix-2023>
- Grabill, J. T., & Hicks, T. (2005). Multiliteracies Meet Methods: The Case for Digital Writing in English Education. *English Education*, 37(4), 301–311.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40173204>
- Gunness, H. (2023, July 9). The top AI art generators in 2024: Every AI art generator you should consider using. <https://zapier.com/blog/ai-art-generator>
- A parrot detective wearing a deerstalker hat and smoking a pipe.
<https://zapier.com/blog/ai-art-generator>
- Kress, G. (2009). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). The Bounded Text. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Ed. Roudiez, Leon S, et.al, New York, Columbia University Press, 36-63.
- MacKenzie, D., & Wajcman, J. (1999). Introduction. *The Social Shaping of Technology*. Oxford University Press, (pp. 1-49).
- Milton, J. (1905). *Paradise lost*. George Routledge and Sons.
- Mona Lisa. *Wikipedia*, April 25, 2024 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa
- Selfe, C. L. (2009). The movement of air, the breath of meaning: Aurality and multimodal composing. *College Composition and Communication*, 60(4), 616-663.
- Sherma, A. B. (2025). Review of literary theory for robots: How computers learned to write. *International Journal of Language Instruction*, 4(4), 61-65. <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.25444>
- Yancey, K. B. (2004). Made not only in words: Composition in a new key, *National Council of Teachers of English*, 56(2), 297-328.