

**Visualizing Objects, Places, and Spaces: A Digital Project Handbook**

# **Multimodal Composition to Explore the Self**

**Kelsey Dufresne**

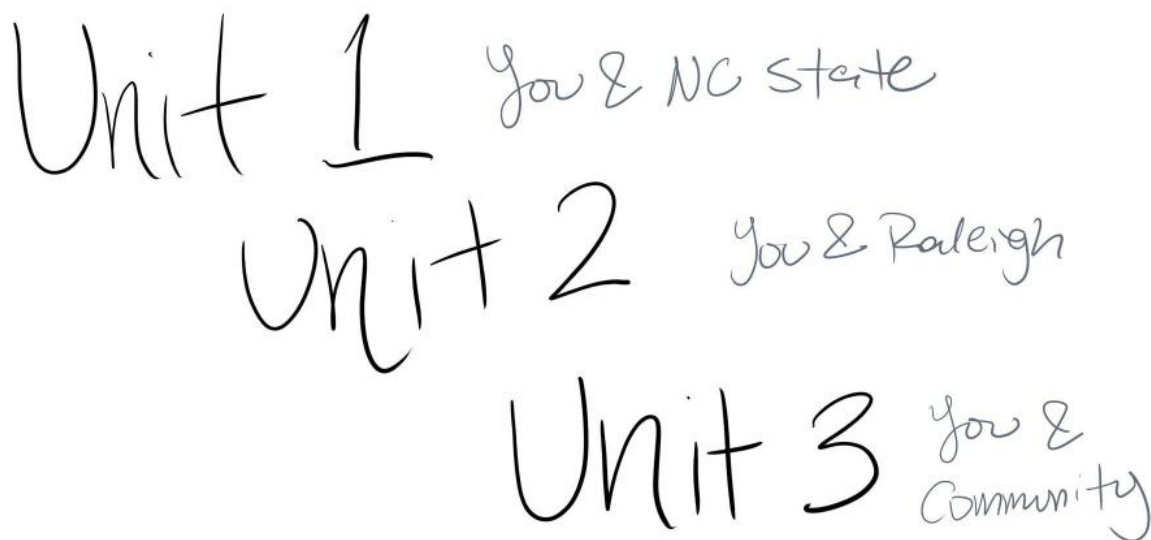
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## Constructing an Autoethnography and an Archive of the Self in the Composition Classroom with First Year College Students

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A visual from teaching ENG 101 (First Year Writing Program, Academic Writing and Research) and this corresponding assignment. This visual demonstrates the overall aims of the core units from our semester, and how each unit encouraged the students to expand their audience and focus. The final unit, Unit 3: You & Community, is where this assignment was introduced.

### Author(s) & Project Role(s)

#### Author:

Kelsey Virginia Dufresne, Doctoral Student and Instructor at North Carolina State University,

#### Role:

As the creator of the assignment as well as the instructor of record for ENG 101 (Academic Writing and Research), I encouraged students to explore their own positionalities within the contexts of writing, reading, and researching. In doing so, I designed the course to be exploratory — enabling students to conduct research that interrogated our local communities, produce multimodal projects, and practice critical

reflectivity. With this role, I developed the assignment expectations and rubric, facilitated peer and group review, and provided technical assistance. Furthermore, I also recruited our university librarians to give a presentation on critical archives and librarianship.

## **Assignment URLs and/or Files**

### **Guiding materials:**

- [Guiding Questions for Digital Archive](#)
- [Guiding Questions for Autoethnography](#)

### **Description:**

- [Assignment Description and Overview](#)

### **Overarching Course Calendar:**

- [ENG 101 \(072\) Course Calendar & Schedule of Activities, Spring 2021](#)

## **Learning Objectives**

*What did you want students to be able to do by completing this assignment?*

The purpose of this project is to practice placing oneself within scholarly discourse communities, while evaluating one's own positionality within personal communities and/or social justice issues. In doing so, students will:

- grow into their confidence as a researcher
- critically analyze and engage with their own identities through the process of writing an autoethnography and publishing a digital archive of the self
- create an archive of self as researcher, writer, and student - curating a place where digital materiality can be showcased and explore their multifaceted identities
- further develop rhetoric skills that best meet their desired audience through the specific forms they write in
- holistically assess and review their progress, growth, and development over the course of our semester as writers, readers, researchers, community members, and more

## Technology-Dependent Learning Outcomes

*Was there anything this assignment taught students that you felt they wouldn't have been able to learn through other types of class assignments?*

The digital archive of self provides students the opportunity to practice digital storytelling, multimodal composition, and technical editing — all of which would not be as easily compiled, if at all, through traditional essay-based composition. Moreover, this format and mode of knowledge production encourages and enables students to further consider choices regarding organization and the interconnection of their work. This is seen in the creative affordances of hyperlinks, various pages and subpages, and greater media incorporation support.

## Skill Level

*What is the course title and level?*

ENG 101: Academic Writing and Research

As [North Carolina State University](#) expresses:

“As part of the General Education Program (GEP) in Writing and Speaking, most NC State students will take either one (ENG 101) or two (ENG 100 and ENG 101) writing courses in their first year. Although only ENG 101 fulfills the university’s graduation requirement in first-year writing, ENG 100 is offered for students who feel they would benefit from additional preparation and experience with college-level writing before enrolling in ENG 101. Students who successfully complete ENG 100 earn 4 hours of elective credit for the course. These courses should be completed during the first year of enrollment at NC State.”

The following slide, with text provided below, describes this course’s objectives:

## ENG 101 expectations/goals/course mission

### First Year Writing Program Course Objectives

The required course in this category will provide instruction and guidance that help students to:

1. Write effectively in specific situations, which may include various academic, professional, or civic situations, and
2. Understand and respond appropriately to the critical elements that shape written communication situations, such as audience, purpose, and genre, and
3. Demonstrate critical and evaluative thinking skills in locating, analyzing, synthesizing, and using information in written communication.

This course is designed to introduce you to writing and researching (and reading!) at the college level - but this class will also introduce you to critically consider what your role as a writer and researcher will be.

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This course is designed to introduce you [the student] to writing and researching (and reading!) at the college level - but this class will also introduce you to critically consider what your role as a writer and researcher will be.

*What kind of prior knowledge is necessary to complete this assignment? How do students gain this knowledge?*

As this course is designed predominantly for first year students, this assignment is designed to be exploratory while simultaneously providing students the opportunity to learn and practice new skills. This assignment requires students to compose and

support an argument-based thesis as well as execute the creation of a digital archive. Students gain the ability to do so through in-class discussions and instructions, as well as homework that offers scaffolded practice.

## Assignment Description

On the first day of class, I ask students to compose a positionality statement — which serves as the first assignment for the semester. This encourages students to critically consider who they are and how this influences how they engage in the world around them. The following slide and accompanying text below provide the prompt on positionality that I give to students:

### Positionality

1. Who are you?
2. How does that impact what you do?
3. Why does that matter?

As writers and researchers - it is vital to be critically conscious of our positionality and its impact on what we do.

Think of how you introduced yourself at the start of class, and then think more in-depth of who you are.

### Positionality

#### **Positionality**

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Think of how you introduced yourself at the start of class, and then think more in-depth of who you are.

In the final unit, students will revisit their initial positionality statements and further critically consider their roles and positions in our university and community, as well as their positions in, and relationship to, a self-selected in-group and/or social justice issue. Likewise, students will create an archive of self as researcher, writer, and student - curating a place where digital materiality can be showcased and can be used to explore their multifaceted identities. In doing so, students will further their digital literacy and data presentation and preservation skills as they construct their own digital archive. By the end of the unit, students will grow into their confidence as researchers while critically analyzing their identities.

## **Time Needed**

*How much time did you allot to this project?*

We spend 7 total weeks on this assignment. As this serves as the culminating project for the semester, we spend the most amount of time on this unit. This 7 weeks includes the time from which the assignment and broader unit is introduced to the time in which the assignment is submitted.

Over the course of these 7 weeks, we spend class time introducing and exploring relevant content, including:

- Autoethnographies: Genre and Impact
- Researching the Self
- Picking a topic
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Topic focus
- Thesis development
- Quotes, paraphrasing, and bringing in research
- Researcher Positionality
- Guest Lecturers Victor Betts and Virginia Ferris with NCSU Libraries: "Critical Perspectives with Archives: Colonial Project vs Critical Librarianship"
- Assignment workshop
- Partner conferences for assignment

The students also spend time outside of class working on this assignment for their homework. In doing so, they:

- Self select their topics and subjects of research
- Create an outline for their autoethnography

- Compile research for their autoethnography
- Read: [“What is a Community Archive?”](#)
- Read: [“Your Personal Archiving Project: Where Do You Start?”](#)
- Create their drafted autoethnography
- Modify/edit their original positionality statement
- Develop their personal archive

## Support & Training

*What kinds of support or training did you provide to help students learn to use new techniques or specialized tools?*

### **For content and composition support:**

- In-class instruction
- Group work + discussion
- Student samples
- Guided brainstorms and mindmapping
- Guiding questions
- Homework
- Peer Review
- Individual conferences

### **For technical support:**

- In-class instruction
- Recommended platforms for ease of use
- Student samples
- Guiding questions
- Homework
- Individual conferences

Students were able to work on their projects during class through workshop sessions, peer review, and group (as well as individual) conferences. This is broken down more in our [schedule](#).

## Resources

*Did you need any specialized equipment, tools, or human resources to make this assignment feasible? If so, please describe.*



**Slides for during-class instruction:**

[Google Slides](#), 1

[Google Slides](#), 2

[Google Slides](#), 3

**Bringing in the library:**

To support the critical inquiry I aim to foster in this class, I invite two university library archivists to give a guest lecture/guided talk on archives (what they are, who has access to them, what are they for) and critical librarianship. For my specific university and my students, I have invited [Virginia Ferris](#) and [Victor Betts](#).

**Examples of digital archives:**

[“North Carolina Maps” Archive](#)

[“From Plantation to Park: The Story of Dix Hill”](#)

The two above articles provide information about two different archiving projects and processes. I ask students to interrogate them through the following questions:

- What is helpful, applicable, and useful? What is not?
- What might be the limitations within these projects?
- What are the differences between these two projects?

**Recommended platforms:**

- [Wix](#)
- [WordPress](#)
- [Google Sites](#)

**Peer Review and Individual Conferences:**

Halfway through our unit, the class engages in a peer review process. For the last year, these occurred digitally and synchronously through Zoom. As such, we relied on sharing materials through the Google Suite and breakout rooms for the students to engage in the process — broken down in the slide and accompanying text below:

## The Peer Review Process:

1. Breakout room with Partner
2. Make sure you both have access to writing
3. 20 minutes - reading & re-reading (No editing, no writing, no commenting on their document - but do take separate notes)
4. 15 minutes - post-reading review
  - a. "Copy editing" vs "Grow and Glow"
5. 5 minute - write a paragraph synthesis of what you read
6. 5 minutes - talk, offer ideas, go over questions or suggestions

Slide from instruction materials that outline my peer review process.

### **The Peer Review Process:**

1. Breakout room with Partner
2. Make sure you both have access to writing
3. 20 minutes - reading & re-reading (No editing, no writing, no commenting on their document - but do take separate notes)
4. 25 minutes - post-reading review
  - a. "Copy editing" vs "Grow and Glow"
5. 5 minute - write a paragraph synthesis of what you read
6. 5 minutes - talk, offer ideas, go over questions or suggestions

After peer review, students sign up for individual conferences with me as their instructor. I utilize [these slides](#) to help remind the students of the goals and aims of the project.

## **Assessment**

*How did you assess or grade this project?*

Upon introducing the unit and corresponding assignment, I also provide students with [the rubric](#) that I will use to grade their work.

## Challenges & Opportunities

*If you assigned this project again, would you change anything? If so, what?*

In future iterations of this assignment, I would like to include time and space for my students to share their work with the entire class. As the instructor, I learned so much about my students through this assignment — and I think that my students would gain so much from the opportunity to learn from and with each other as the experts of their own lived experiences.

*Describe any trouble spots or complications someone else might want to be aware of before trying a similar assignment in a course of their own.*

I attend and teach at a university where I have much freedom and flexibility in regards to what I teach and how I teach. As such, bringing in digital projects and assignments, such as this, is well supported. At other institutions where this may not be as regularly seen and/or encouraged, I would encourage instructors to advocate for the advantages and benefits of multimodal learning — and perhaps use this assignment as a template where essay-based composition is completed alongside digital humanities work.



Photo of Thompkins Hall at North Carolina State University.

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