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"Google has been my best friend lately." - Anonymous student commenting on research-in-progress

googol n. - A fanciful name (not in formal use) for ten raised to the hundredth power (10^{100}). -*Oxford English Dictionary*



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195.1 Multiliteracy Memoir

"Literacy is best understood as a myriad of." Googlism.com

"Despite so much scholarship to the contrary and many compelling personal accounts, there remains a seemingly indestructible belief, so commonly expressed in our public discussions about literacy reform and literacy crises, that literacy is a relatively straightforward matter of learning a set of rules by which to communicate through written language" (29). Bob Yagelski, *Literacy Matters*

The Assignment

Literacy: what a deceptively simple designation for an elaborate, sprawling concept. With so much discussion and debate about literacy, given the accelerating rise of digital communication technologies in recent years, one would expect that many of us have experienced an unmistakable shift in what we personally identify as "literate practices." Literacies have certainly expanded, and with this expansion, we have witnessed a growing set of terms for describing these changes: multiliteracies, multimodal literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy, electracy, and so on. With varying degrees of theoretical sophistication, these new literacy designations complicate conventional understandings of literacy, whether by introducing new concepts and practices (e.g., layering, aggregating, juxtaposition, remixing, among others) or by inventing new languages, from PHP to Leetspeak and 'IMglisH.' Many would agree that 'basic literacies' have, in the digital age, grown to involve *something* more than reading, writing, and arithmetic--the traditional three R's now almost cliched in their simplification of alphabetic and numeric literacies.

Our first assignment begins with some consideration of the range of habits and practices that have been formative for in your 'becoming literate.' We will explore this premise by examining the shifting ground of literacy wrought by new and emerging technologies. Meanwhile you will write your own "multiliteracy memoir", reflecting on a select few formative moments in your life that have shaped your views, attitudes, and habits with respect to literate practices. Remember the moments you choose to recount and analyze in the written account *will be contingent upon your own definitional groundwork with the concept of literacy*. In other words, you should think first about how you will focus and narrow the term 'literacy' so that the moments you illustrate give depth and insight into your sense of what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century.

Consider some of the following questions as heuristics, or generative guides:

- What is one of your earliest memories reading or writing? What is one of your earliest memories reading or writing on or with a computer?
- Was there a computer with internet access where you grew up? Who used it the most? For what?
- Identify and describe one or two of the greatest "wow" moments in your experience with a technology, new or old.
- When did you first access the internet? Who taught you how to do this? What were the basic sites, applications, and skills you found most helpful as you explored the web?
- At what moment did you find that you were more technologically savvy than someone older than you?
- Do you identify yourself as a 'digital native'--as one who has grown up using electronic devices so habitually that you take that skillset for granted?
- How do your reading and writing habits currently reflect lessons you remember learning when you were younger? Who taught those lessons to you? When? Why?
- How many text messages do you send in a week? To whom? What is the substance of these messages? How would you characterize the literacies they encourage or demand?
- How do you use Web 2.0 platforms (e.g., Flickr, Delicious, Twitter, Facebook)? And when did you begin using these sites? Why?

As you may notice, these questions are deliberately set up to blur the lines between traditional alphabetic literacy and digital literacies more typical to reading and writing with computers and mobile devices. This opening assignment in WRT195 invites you to account for any 'literacy' you decide to

focus upon, provided you introduce explicitly how you are narrowing the term and grappling with what it means to identify as literate as pertains to a given domain.

Your multiliteracy memoir will account for your own memory work where you identify a couple of key moments and present them as detailed vignettes. It will also establish connections between those personal moments and a definition of literacies that you determine to be relevant given the scenes, moments, and artifacts focal in your memoir. Your essay will offer an analytical claim, meaning that it will alert the reader to insights and understandings gained from having examined something (a set of literacy memories, encounters, or practices) more carefully and deeply.

Assignment Details

The essay should be a minimum of 1000 words, 12 point font, double spaced. The essay and project 1 portfolio are due on **Thursday, September 11**. Please use MLA citation within the body of your essay and on a Works Cited page, and please include an appropriate title for your essay (see below).

WC Incentive

Include evidence of an hour-long consulting session at the **Writing Center** in your Invention Portfolio to earn extra credit valued at one grading increment (i.e., a 'B' becomes a 'B+', a 'C-' becomes a 'C', and so on).

Title

Use a title from **Googlism.com**. Enter a keyword or phrase from your essay, and adopt as a title one of the results returned at Googlism.

Evaluation Criteria

- [1] Did the writer focus the essay effectively, with a clear, thoughtful claim addressing the issue of "literacy"? Did the writer organize the essay effectively, developing logical transitions between ideas and sections?
- [2] Did the writer work closely with the articles by Nicholas Carr or Motoko Rich, quoting and summarizing where appropriate and necessary, interpreting material and/or offering it up as evidence?
- [3] Did the writer compose beginning and ending paragraphs that work as a frame for the rest of the essay?
- [4] Did the writer provide details, not generalizations, and new ideas, not clichés?
- [5] Did the writer provide a title that provocatively and productively focused the reader's attention?
- [6] Did the writer edit for grammar, style, and usage effectively?
- [7] Did the writer cite texts appropriately and properly using MLA citation format?

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