



## Multigenre: An Introduction

by Lisa Langstraat



"A multigenre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination. It is not an uninterrupted, expository monolog nor a seamless narrative nor a collection of poems. A multigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images, and content. In addition to many genres, a multigenre paper may also contain many voices, not just the author's. The trick is to make such a paper hang together."

~~ (Romano, *Blending Genre, Altering Style* i-xi)

Multigenre writing projects respond to contemporary conceptions of genre, audience, voice, arrangement and style by enabling students to tap into their knowledge about new media literacies, rich rhetorical situations, and the multiple perspectives that are inherent in any writing activity.

In short, multigenre projects entail a series of generic documents that are linked by a central premise, theme, or goal. They may forward an argument, trace a history, or offer multiple interpretations of a text or event. They are rigorous forms of writing, involving all of the elements of a traditional research paper: research and citation, coherence and organization, purpose and aim of discourse, audience awareness, and conventional appropriateness. Thus, while multigenre projects certainly teach students valuable, transferable strategies and expectations for writing, they go further. As [Nancy Mack](#) explains, multigenre writing:

- Presents multiple, even conflicting perspectives of one event or topic.
- Provides a rich context for an event or topic.
- Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of audience needs and interests.
- Permits meaning to dictate form, rather than vice versa.
- Demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of various genres and uses of language.
- Integrates factual information into a meaningful text, verses copying or simply recall.
- Permits the author to highlight personal interests and special expertise.
- Stimulates critical analysis and higher-level thinking skills.
- Makes coherence and unity a genuine rhetorical problem to be solved.
- Requires research skills and knowledge of source documentation.
- Can make full use of new media literacies.
- Is almost impossible to plagiarize.
- Results in an interesting, engaging product.
- Demands careful reading and response.

Multigenre writing is thus informed by a multitude of rhetorical considerations including a complex understanding of genre theory. Teachers who engage in multigenre assignments must be prepared to sequence assignments/project pieces carefully, to engage in new kinds of response and evaluation strategies, and to learn to trust their students' abilities and creativity. The results of this preparation, engagement, and trust are consistently surprising, heartening, and rhetorically sophisticated.

### Additional materials:

- [List of Genres](#)
- [Sample Assignment Description](#)
- [Reader Response Criteria for Workshopping MGPs](#)
- [Sample Assignment Description for a Generic Research Project](#)
- [Sample Student Response to the Generic Research Project](#)

### For additional information, see the following links:

- Planning and Assessment Handout (by Nancy Mack):  
<http://www.wright.edu/%7Enancy.mack/handouts/mgplanning.pdf>
- Sample MGs: <http://clem.mscd.edu/~kuhnc/portfolio.htm>
- Bibliography:  
[http://fp.okstate.edu/efolio/johnson/johnson\\_pathfinder\\_multigenre.htm](http://fp.okstate.edu/efolio/johnson/johnson_pathfinder_multigenre.htm)
- Assessment:  
<http://www.americandreamer.net/bushwb/honorweb/multigen/mgrubric.html>

