Defining New Media: Making Arguments about Literacy Events and Sponsors

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Abstract

Multi- and new literacies characterize many contemporary approaches to writing and literacy

studies, but the ways scholars define new literacies, particularly digital literacies, contribute to

how the field at large understands these literacies. New media is one element of digital literacy

that has often been used as a catch-all for various literacies, particularly multimodal and

digital literacies. However, scholars' definitions of new media demonstrate what roles digital

literacy plays within rhetoric and composition. Scholars define new media in such a way as to

emphasize digital literacy events that already take place in the field or argue how the field has

or should function as a digital literacy sponsor.

Keywords: new media, digital literacy, multiliteracies, definitions

Alexander Reid (2007) argues there are two virtuals associated with theories of knowledge composition: the virtual-technological and the virtual-actual (p. 4). He says, "if we ascribe to the belief that writing is not simply the recording of preexisting ideas, but instead participates in the composition of knowledge, then we are committing ourselves to exploring these intersections between technology and the embodied mind" (p. 5). Reid articulates an awareness of the virtual-actual as a nuanced theory about technology impacting our ideologies and knowledge construction, taking ideas about multiliteracies and digital rhetoric further than many scholars. Frequently, as I argue throughout this piece, scholars use key terms in new and digital literacies without attention to the conceptual impetus behind the use of those terms, but the arguments they put forward define digital literacies along the lines of literacy events and literacy sponsorship. Multiliteracies have been used to discuss everything from visual literacy (New London Group, 1996; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) to numeracy (Johanek, 2004) to digital literacies, including those associated with game play (Gee, 2003) and identity building (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Selber, 2004). I look at the use of *new media* as a catch all for digital literacies within rhetoric and composition's published scholarship. Scholars present different definitions of *new media* from one article to the next—sometimes even within one article. Although such issues may appear to be specific to certain subfields—such as computers and writing—they impact the broader fields of literacy, rhetoric and composition, and English studies as a whole. For example, as Claire Lauer (2014) points out, from 1990-2010, the MLA *JIL* had a 20% increase in job postings for positions related to the use of digital technology in expertise, and positions related to digital technology expertise "increased 410%" between 2008 and 2009 across the overarching field (p. 66). Because these terms have become so prevalent in our fields and our academic careers, knowing what we're arguing for when we discuss and draw on digital multiliteracies is imperative for scholars and hiring committees. New media is a particularly interesting term because it has such a diverse array of uses, as Lauer (2012) shows.

Although definitional precision is a concern, Lauer (2014) and others argue our *justifications* of certain terms' definitions are more important than such precision in the use of those definitions (p.

61). Scholars in the field employ specific—if diverse—definitions when discussing new media as a

digital literacy, and these definitions carry with them arguments about composing and rhetoric.

Digital literacy events arguments are often enthymematic, suggesting rhetoric and composition

scholars apparently, presumably, obviously, or naturally are concerned with new media (the implied

premise being that new media is an artifact appropriate for rhetoric and composition to study and

produce), and that scholars and students in the field routinely have digital literacy events via new

media. *Digital literacy sponsors arguments*, on the other hand, suggest how the field challenges new

media's fit in the discipline while arguing for new media as a legitimate object of study and

production for the discipline. Scholars who argue for the presence of new media in the classroom, the

university, and the discipline's professional development make a case that extends beyond the

computers and writing subfield: new media deserves robust inclusion in rhetoric and composition

studies. Such scholars clear a path for digital literacy and digital literate practices.

From 2000-2018, scholars have defined the present shape of digital literacy as integrally

related to the term new media, even demonstrating that the field now recognizes go-to scholars when

considering new media and related ideas (Lauer, 2012). While scholars tend to argue that new media

is a type of digital literacy event (that is, they write most about how both scholars and students use

digital literacy to read, create, or interact—in short, what digital literacy means from a practical

application standpoint), the field has less digital literacy sponsors arguments that epitomize new

media and digital literacies as the next stage in a continuum of rhetorical shifts and literacy

frameworks fit for the overarching discipline: though the subdiscipline has taken up digital literacies,

the larger field still needs digital literacy sponsorship. Joshua Daniel-Wariya (2016) and others argue

that

> competing definitions […] may not require absolute resolution, and it may not be
>
> necessary for the field to agree on a single definition. Instead, what is needed is an
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> awareness of the functions various definitions serve, what kinds of composing practices
>
> they enable and constrain, and well-reasoned justifications for adopting particular

definitions in specific contexts. (p. 37)

The field, then, needs to pay more attention to explaining ideological and epistemological

underpinnings for using *new media* in particular contexts (at the very least). I argue the field can

achieve such precision in situ by crafting and grounding digital literacy sponsors arguments about

digital literacies, demonstrating a robust fit within literacy studies and rhetorical practice.

In this essay, I briefly explain the rhetorical nature of definitions before articulating the

relevance of a new media case study and my methods of analysis in this case study. The results of the

study suggest two distinct definitional arguments, both of which demonstrate a lack of clarity about

digital literacies and new media as a digital literacy in particular. The lack of clarity but clear

association of a literacy continuum demonstrates the evolution of literacy studies in a technology-

saturated society.

Definitions as Arguments

According to Edward Schiappa (2003), definitions are always rhetorical, always

contextualized. He argues scholars should approach definitions "as constituting rhetorically induced

social knowledge [… or] shared understanding among people about themselves, the objects of their

world, and how they ought to use language" (p. 3). Schiappa further explains different definitions

might be evoked depending on audience (p. 3). Authors construct their definitions as they would any

argument: with a particular audience in mind. For example, scholars writing for a *Research in the

Teaching of English* audience define new media differently than those writing for a *Computers and

Composition* audience; the definitions reflect an understanding of each journal's readership and

values. Definitions, then, have disciplinary purposes: scholars' definitions carry arguments about the

discipline to the discipline's different audiences. By putting forth definitions, scholars present

arguments that shape the discipline's development.

Definitions are not simply foundational, declarative statements: the foundation portrayed by

definitions is carefully chosen and developed. Still, definitions are often presented as objective

constructions: they are meant to appear translucent. According to David Zarefsky (2006), a definition

is: "an implicit argument that one should view the thing in a particular way. But the argument is never actually advanced" (p. 404). This is where the danger lies, particularly where digital rhetoric is concerned. The terms we use—multiliteracy, digital literacy, multimedia, multimodal, new media, digital media, digital composition, social media—are frequently used with implicit arguments based on a "definition [that] is put forward as if it was uncontroversial" (p. 404). Therefore, as Zarefsky shows, definitions are "a kind of strategic maneuvering" used by authors to advance certain arguments over others (p. 403).

In rhetoric and composition studies, scholars such as Susan Peck MacDonald (2007) and Abby Knoblauch (2012) have argued for definitions of integral key terms throughout the field's history. In the 21st Century, key terms in the field have not changed, but the list has grown to include various terms within the realm of digital literacy. Lauer (2014) underscores the proliferation of such terms within the field and highlights the ultimate problem behind the array of terms: what do they *mean* for the field? Lauer ultimately argues:

> by becoming aware of the terms we have been using and by taking ownership over the
> way we name and define the new composing practices and technologies we have come to
> value, we will be better positioned to […] articulate the importance of our work in a way that
> ensures its continuation. (p. 61)

While Lauer is writing for a computers and writing subfield audience, she suggests the larger field may find wider support in higher education with better articulated definitions of/for digital literacy that, as I have claimed elsewhere, engage in "conversations about what it means to write in the world at large" (Werner, 2015, p. 66); these arguments, then, are about "contemporary types of written products and the composing technologies used to craft such products" (p. 61). Terms central to digital literacy are, therefore, central to the field as the field evolves alongside a digital writing public.

Lauer (2009) also argued for distinct definitions of multimodal and multimedia. She claims multimodal is preferred within the discipline to "[describe] pedagogies that emphasize the process and design of a text" and that multimedia is "the term of choice in non-academic or industry spheres" (p.

231). Although Lauer shows both terms are used interchangeably, she explains concrete differences

between production and design (discipline/pedagogy) versus end products (industry). Lauer highlights

how scholars have begun to define these contested terms, but she maintains definitions "should be

driven […] by the audience who will encounter and use it" (p. 237). Her argument seems at odds with

that of Schiappa and Zarefsky (that definitions rhetorically influence audience understanding and

action). Instead, she argues the definitions of multimodal and multimedia depend on an audience's

familiarity with such terms, as if the terms are jargon.

Further, Lauer (2012) examines the field's definition of words related to—and including—

new media. Lauer investigates the definitions of new/multi/modal/digital/media texts, and to do so,

she examines the anatomy of their definitions. She goes directly to established scholars in the field

who study the concept and related concepts. Rather than discursively analyzing definitional

conversations, she asks scholars for their definitions (Lauer, 2012). Lauer argues such "[d]efinitions

are important because they help us determine our collective interests and values" (np.). She claims

scholars' definitions are the basis of shared ground, showing her inclination toward definitions as

guidelines for the discipline rather than arguments advanced within and for the discipline. She argues

the definitions are audience-oriented, contextual, limited, multiple, precise, and relative (Lauer,

2012). By interviewing notable scholars in the field who use these key terms, Lauer seeks definitions

that have shaped the field: her analysis demonstrates how one cohort of scholars has used and

influenced other scholars' terminology. Lauer, then, looks at a few definitions in order to:

> [help] us figure out what we think, not just the right words for what we already know […]
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> The chosen definition] positions us in the conversation, exposes our assumptions, announces
>
> our intentions, and helps us explain to ourselves and others who we are and what we believe
>
> in. (np.)

Examining our new media definitions is a part of seeking out positions within our discipline.

Scholars' definitions of new media at the start of the 21st Century are arguments about what

the field values—those values are reflected by the terminology used and the definitions bound to

those terms. New media is just one term used in discussions of digital literacies, but, although it is

used less frequently now than at the start of the millennium, it has cultural capital in the digital

humanities. Throughout this article, I review published research in the discipline, uncovering rhetoric

and composition's specific new media definitions, revealing the importance of paying attention to the

terms we use, the definitions we rely on, and the concepts we advance to articulate the purview of the

field and the impact it has on a digitally-saturated society.

Studying Scholars' Definitions

Because definitions are argumentative in nature, analyzing how scholars define new media

within rhetoric and composition's printed scholarship helps the field understand scholars' strategic

maneuvers and how such maneuvers influence disciplinary evolution. In order to analyze definitions,

maneuvers, and disciplinary development, I looked to published conversations in the field: journal

articles, which serve as an important locus of disciplinary power, shaping the discipline even as they

are shaped by it. According to Maureen Daly Goggin (2009), "journals have played one of the most

important roles in fostering the field of rhetoric and composition" (p. 225). Further, MacDonald

(2007) claims, "one way to probe assumptions and values in a profession is to examine the discourse

of its […] publication" (p. 588), and I use journals to probe the field's assumptions with regards to

new media: specifically, I review new media definitions from *College Composition and*

Communication, Research in the Teaching of English, Kairos, Computers and Composition, and

monographs.

As I have argued elsewhere (Werner, 2015; 2017), these four journals have been foundational

to the current disciplinary paradigm and further represent the scholarship of the overarching discipline

(*CCC, RTE*) and the subdiscipline (*Kairos, C&C*). For the purposes of this study, I have expanded a

previous data set and analyzed the data specifically for definitions of new media within publications

dealing with multiliteracies, both digital and otherwise.[1] I reviewed the monographs and journal

articles published from 2000-2018 for key terms regarding new media. Though monographs are more

situated on the fringes of a field's development, take longer to publish, and may have less of an

impact on the field depending on members' discretionary and/or budgeted funding for such materials,

they play a vital role in the advancement of the discipline and afford important lenses through which

scholars understand key concepts. As the 21st Century loomed, public discussions of the need for

technology, technological literacy, and the marriage of technology and teaching were widely

discussed, even by the Clinton Administrations' *Getting America's Students Ready for the 21st*

Century: Meeting the Technology Literacy Challenge: A Report to the Nation on Technology and

Education. An examination of these early definitions also allows for a foundation with which to

understand contemporary and future uses of related terms.

The scholarship at the start of the century sets the tone of the field regarding new media, and

arguments made about new media during this time period influence future definitions, discussions,

and research. We see the results of that influence in Lauer's (2012; 2014) work, for instance. Of the

articles published from 2000-2018, 132 were relevant to this study because they can be described with

the key term new media. Of the scholarly monographs published in the field, eleven were relevant

(described using new media as a key term). Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* was also

included because the text, published in 2001, is cited parenthetically throughout the data set and

mentioned in twelve definitions.

In this article, I rely on Thomas Huckin's (2004) notion of content analysis and the rhetorical

nature of definitions (Schiappa, 2003; Zarefsky 2006) to understand the discipline's new media

definitions. In the context of this study, a definition of new media consists of a statement in which an

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[1] In this piece, I have expanded an earlier data set to include artifacts from an additional eight years, and I've reviewed both journal articles and scholarly monographs. Finally, the current study only analyzes definitions, putting aside other related concerns of the previous study, for a more robust discussion of arguments.

author defines the phrase through explicit use of the term *new media* or reference to it (referent

pronouns) coupled with a definitional verb (especially "defines"), to be verb (is, are), or an active,

argumentative verb (explain, suggest, attribute):

Definition = New Media/New Media Referent + Definition Verb/ To Be Verb/ Argument Verb.

Further, definitions are not limited to sentence boundaries. Instead, statements consist of one

complete discussion of new media. Sometimes, such a statement was only one sentence long. Far

more common were definitions developed over a series of sentences (two or more). Statements

composed of several sentences did not take up different aspects of new media, but further explained

one particular aspect. Authors might also define new media in several places throughout their texts,

which I counted as discrete definitions.

Using these definition formula and criteria, only 62 (47%) of the articles and books contained

new media definitions. However, throughout these 62 texts, scholars articulated 137 distinct

definitions for an average of 2.1 definitions per text. In the 70 texts (53%) without definitions, authors

assumed readers shared an understanding of the term.

After reviewing articles for new media definitions, I inductively arrived at a coding scheme to

explain the definitions' content. This initial coding scheme consisted of twelve separate adjective-

based codes emerging over a series of critical examinations; I refined these codes by combining

closely related codes. After narrowing and refining to seven codes, I solicited the help of an inter-rater

and worked with her on 20% of my data. Ultimately, after narrowing and re-labeling argument

categories for more precision, six argument types emerged, and the inter-rater and I had a simple

reliability of 87% with a kappa of 0.8, which is categorized as very strong. Satisfied, I critically

reviewed the codes and definitions with an eye toward overarching trends to understand what

disciplinary, rhetorical work these definitions accomplish. I identified two emergent trends:

definitions allowed for arguments that contribute to how we understand *digital literacy events* or

arguments highlight *digital literacy sponsors and sponsorship*. I returned to the definitions once more,

coding for these two types of arguments.

Definitional Arguments:

Articulating Two Overarching Arguments via Six Categories of Minor Arguments

Comparing the different definitions showcases how scholars craft arguments about new media. The majority of definitions are concerned with practical uses of new media (digital literacy events arguments); definitions might explain new media's aspects or attributes or how to use new media (professionally or pedagogically): such definitions are about the application and practice of digital literacy and focus on digital literacy events. Fewer definitions make digital literacy sponsors arguments. According to Deborah Brandt (1998), literacy sponsors "are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). Definitions about digital literacy sponsors are concerned with the theoretical position of new media and digital literacies within rhetoric and composition; they are concerned with who has been a digital literacy sponsor in the field and how the field might function as a digital literacy sponsor in the future to its own benefit via cultural capital both in and outside of the academy.

Scholars use new media definitions in two ways. They define new media from a practical standpoint, enthymematically demonstrating a shared assumption that new media is part of the discipline's purview (74% or 101 definitions). New media, then, is clearly a literate practice, and as the field is concerned with digital literacy events, new media should be robustly studied and used. Otherwise, scholars define new media from a conceptual standpoint, describing why or how new media functions within digital literacy sponsors: it is a component of digital literacies, subsumed under multiliteracies, of which the field should be concerned. Such definitional arguments attempt to convince others that new media is fitting content for the discipline, thus arguing for the discipline's role as a digital literacy sponsor (26% or 36 definitions). See Table 1 (below) for the overarching arguments broken down by minor arguments about new media, the arguments' descriptions, and the

percentages of arguments within the data set.

Throughout the six minor arguments, I use several terms that may be variously understood by other scholars. Therefore, articulating my own definitions of these multiliteracies sets a foundation for the categories I identify, allowing readers to understand what I mean when I invoke the terms *multimodal* and *digital*. When I use *multimodal*, I invoke Lauer's literature review and synthesis of *multimodal* in rhetoric and composition's published scholarship. Lauer (2009) says multimodal "[describes] our pedagogies that emphasize the process and design of a text," including the specific use of more than one mode of communication or argument (p. 231). Her argument differentiates this from *multimedia* because media implies the integration of all modes into one digitized means of dissemination. Therefore, I use multimodal to refer to a text that uses more than one mode of communication, whether physical or digital. Digital, on the other hand, I use to refer to those texts that are **strictly produced** using digital technologies (software and hardware) **and disseminated** via these same digital technologies. These terms are integral to many digital literacy events definitions of new media: as noted below, scholars emphasize one over another in their new media definitions. A definition might imply multimodality but emphasize digitality; another might highlight the composing process of choosing modes (even if those modes happen to be digitally mediated).

Table 1: Literacy Events and Literacy Sponsors via New Media Definitions				
Over-arching Argument	New media…	Description	Percent of Data Set	Total Percent
Digital literacy	is digital	Emphasizes digital composition and digital environments over other	26%	74%

events		attributes		
	is part of a literacy continuum	Emphasizes remediation and the re-working of previous, traditional, and linear literate practices	17%	
	is multimodal	Emphasizes multimodal and material components as well as composing activities	10%	
	is interactive, emphasizing conscious audience participation	Emphasizes audience participation or purposeful, conscious interaction	21%	
Digital literacy sponsors	has been defined by other scholars, and drawing on these definitions allows for continuity and understanding	Emphasizes preexisting definitions in the literature	16%	26%
	reflects a particular moment in rhetoric and composition's 21st Century history	Emphasizes new media as a fitting topic for scholarship, classrooms, and professional development of	10%	

		faculty and students; emphasizes particular "moments" of the field		

Digital Literacy Events Arguments

Scholarship in the field includes more definitions about how scholars *use* new media as a literate practice. This spectrum of definitions does not provide a cohesive understanding of what new media actually is, though. Rather, scholars suggest new media needs no further explanation for scholars in the field: the discipline already knows about new media. Digital literacy events arguments offer a shared assumption that new media is already part of the discipline: scholars using these definitions argue instead for new or more effective ways to *implement* these disciplinary constructs.

New media is digital is the most frequent type of argument scholars put forth, occurring 26% of the time (35 definitions). Definitions arguing *new media is digital* emphasize texts created in digital environments, using digital technologies, and intended for digital distribution. Arguments that *new media is digital* equate new media with digital composition and digital environments, either by specifically linking the word "digital" with "new media" or by linking "new media" with digital writing technologies including: software, hypertext, and on- and off-line programs. Madeline Sorapure (2006) describes software like Adobe Flash as shaping the creation of new media and argues Flash is the ultimate new media design program and "has come to represent new media in general" (p. 413). The argument that *new media is digital* is so frequent that scholars often conflate the term digital composing with new media, even to the point of using the phrases synonymously. Kevin Brooks and Andrew Mara (2007) group the phrases "digital communication" and "new media" 7 out of 22 times—32% of the time—on the first page of their article alone, demonstrating the conflation of these two terms. David Gillette (2005) says, "When the web first became popular, I taught my new

media courses (then called hypertext courses) through the lens of classical rhetoric" (np.). Gillette

identifies and conflates new media with other digital literate practices (hypertext).

Other scholars who argue *new media is digital* suggest new media is tied to computer

systems, languages, and networks. Mark Amerika and Jenny Weight (Miles, et al., 2003) equate new

media with computerized information systems. Amerika writes that we "(cyborgs all) have been

writing code into interactive states of being, which allows us to behave in a society of networked

consciousness" when he defines new media (Miles, et al., 2003, np.). Amerika argues new media has

to do with how digital writing technologies have become part of Western society (Miles, et al., 2003).

Weight likens the "epistemological, structural, and ontological parameters" of new media with that of

hypertext (Miles, et al., 2003, np.). She argues new media and the digital nature of hypertexting are

related, and she identifies a digital consciousness as an underlying element of new media,

strategically placing new media within conversations of both contemporary and future writing

technologies.

When authors argue *new media is multimodal*, they emphasize the use of multiple modes over

any digital activity that *may* be suggested. These definitions occur in 17% of definitions (23

definitions). Scholars whose definitions draw on multimodality may consider new media digital, or

they may consider new media non-digital: the emphasis does not rest on digitality but on the

combination of modes. In other words, scholars might describe new media as being both multimodal

and digital; however, they emphasize having multiple modes as the defining characteristic (rather than

the digital nature of the text). Arguments that *new media is multimodal* focus on incorporating

mulitliteracies and modes of writing, including sound, visual, video, color, and layout/design. The use

of such modes might happen in a digital environment, but scholars still place the importance on the

modes themselves rather than the composition's digital nature.

Definitions suggesting *new media is multimodal* describe new media texts as potentially

physical or digital combinations of modes. Jody Shipka (2005) states that a new media text "attends to

a much broader range of texts, technologies, and rhetorical activities—those informing the production

and reception of print-based, linear essays, objects-texts, live performances, as well as digital texts"

(p. 347), and Cheryl Ball claims, "for students who don't have access to technology, that they can

produce [new media] multimodal texts that are scrapbooks or collages […] that don't have to be

digital" (qtd. in Lauer, 2012, np.). In Anne Frances Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia L.

Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc's (2007) text, Wysocki defines new media, stating: "**new media do not have**

to be digital" (p. 15, emphasis in original). Whether new media is physical or digital, the

combination and variety of modes used makes new media texts *multimodal*.

Arguments that *new media is multimodal* emphasize the process of composition *and* the final

product. Sorapure (2003) suggests that teachers focus "on the effectiveness with which modes such as

image, text, and sound are brought together" (np.). Often, definitions use terms such as combine, mix

and match (Alexander, 2008, p. 2), or integrate (Halbritter, 2006, p. 318). For both Bump Halbritter

and Jonathan Alexander, multimodality comes to fruition in new media where end products use

rhetorical contributions of each mode. The strategic maneuvering in these definitions resides on

understanding different modes' holistic rhetorical import for texts.

The arguments that *new media is digital* (26% or 35 definitions) and *new media is multimodal*

(17% or 23 definitions) together account for 43% of definitions (58). These two categories are

exclusive, as scholars emphasize one characteristic over another when defining new media. Although

they are exclusive, they are also closely related. Emphasizing the digital nature of new media, Dene

Grigar (2005) writes about the use of "new media technologies like 'websites, virtual worlds, virtual

reality, multimedia, computer games, computer animations, digital video, and human-computer

interfaces' [Manovich, 2001, pp. 8-9]" (p. 376). Although many of these technologies use

multimodality, Grigar emphasizes the *digital* aspects. Because scholars make these two arguments

about new media more frequently than other arguments, these scholars are most interested in situating

their work in terms of the digital literacy events associated with new media. Scholars make strategic

maneuvers to demonstrate how new media is already a part of the multiliteracies framework: one that

relies on print-linguistics *plus*. Scholars' interests coalesce around discussions about writing

technologies and new understandings of what it means to write and compose: in short, what does it

mean to be literate in the 21st Century. These arguments are strategic maneuvers demonstrating a

shared assumption that new media is an accepted digital literacy: they point to a commonly held

belief about new media's fit in the discipline, at least for one portion of these scholars' peers.

New media is part of a literacy continuum is a minor argument occurring in 21% of

definitions (29 definitions). This percentage—nearly one-quarter—suggests scholars are interested in

implications of what literacy looks like in our contemporary society. In these definitions, new media

is not just the next step in composing; it is instead a remediation of text and text-based literacies. As

Jason Palmeri says, "new media is […] a way of pushing us to try to do new things and to attempt to

connect the creative and scholarly traditions" (qtd. in Lauer, 2012, np.). Such definitions are strategic

arguments that scholars should include more diverse arrays of digital literacy events beyond a primary

adherence to print-linguistic texts. This continuum aligns with Brian Street's (1984) foundational

theory of ideological literacy and suggests rhetoric and composition scholars who adhere to primarily

print-linguistic literacies align more, perhaps, with autonomous models of literacy than scholars might

be comfortable admitting.

Rhetoric and composition scholars are almost as interested in arguing *new media is part of a

literacy continuum* (21%) as they are in arguing *new media is digital* (26%) and even more than

arguing that *new media is multimodal* (17%), suggesting *new media is part of a literacy continuum* is

a significant scholarly maneuver. A movement that embraces earlier modes of writing and

conceptions of literacy and allows for new literacies to be incorporated signifies shifts for the field

overall. Scholars who argue *new media is part of a literacy continuum* move the field toward new

literacy frameworks—and new understandings of multiliteracies—as they argue for paying more

attention to digital literacy events and potentially digital literacy sponsors: they attempt to convince

the discipline that new media is entwined with literacy.

Scholars also argue *new media is interactive, emphasizing conscious audience participation*

(10% of the data set or 14 definitions), a rhetorical move denoting new media as a process or product

with emphasized audience participation and interactivity—readers are asked to be conscious of their

experience of the text much more so than, for example, the interactivity required of reading or

annotating a single-mode essay. Here, the literate practice becomes especially salient. We might even

think of *new media is interactive* as denoting new media as a specific type of literacy event, given a

literacy event as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants'

interactions and their interpretative processes" (Heath, 1983, p. 93). *New media is interactive* is a

demonstration of digital literacy events in that it allows for the digital writing to be bound to

interactions and personal and interpersonal knowledge-making. When scholars argue through

definitions that *new media is interactive,* they suggest audiences play an integral, embodied role in the

development of a text, as do Thomas Rickert and Michael Salvo (2006) when they write, "new media

[resonates] with engagement" (p. 296). Scholars contributing to this definitional category argue that

audience is the central component of a new media text's rhetorical situation. Such a definition aligns

effectively with traditional rhetorical emphases on audience, allowing scholars to craft strong

arguments that new media already belongs to rhetoric and composition, as does the further alignment

of *new media is interactive* with Heath's articulation of literacy events.

Although composers of any text are (theoretically) sensitive to the needs and perceptions of

their audiences, composers who craft new media texts are hyper-aware of their audiences because

they rely on audience participation to complete the new media text. Grigar (2005) says, "the audience

must participate physically in the delivery of" new media (p. 105). Wysocki (2007) says:

> New media texts can be made of anything [...]; what is important is that whoever
>
> produces the text and whoever consumes it understand—because the text asks them to, in
>
> one way or another—that the various materialities of a text contribute to how it, like its
>
> producers and consumers, is read and understood. (Wysocki, et al., 2007, p. 15)

Jen Almjeld (2014) further argues, "a new media text […] foregrounds customization and

interactivity" (p. 76), while Aimee Knight (2013) argues, "Clearly, an important direction for

composition and new media studies is inquiry into the aesthetic as a mode of sensory experience—an act of sensory perception" (p. 153).

Audience participation might mean readers use provided software to digitally paint a picture or link two symbols on a screen in order to produce a new image or move the text in a new direction, even bringing new text or images onto the screen. Composers of print-linguistic texts, even simple webtexts, might ask readers to interact by thinking critically and taking notes, not by clicking hyperlinks or adding a new recording. Here, the audience must participate actively in the reading in order to have a literacy event: the digital literacy event is incomplete without added interplay.

Digital Literacy Sponsors Arguments

When scholars argue new media is related to digital literacy sponsors, they suggest digital literacy events within the field and the classroom rest on scholars' previous persuasions that new media belongs within the field's purview: they have persuaded the field to act as digital literacy sponsors. Digital literacy sponsors arguments about new media demonstrate knowledge that only parts of the discipline currently adhere to new media as content—as an appropriate literacy to integrate into the field via study and use; other members of the overarching discipline still need convincing. Digital literacy sponsors arguments aim to convince such members that new media—and, in many cases, digital literacy or multiliteracies in general—is both an appropriate and integral literate practice and artifact for the field, and that scholars and instructors in the field can and should act as digital literacy sponsors.

When authors define new media in terms of the work of rhetoric and composition scholars (teaching and scholarship) and new media's particular moment in history—its adherence to kairos— they argue *new media reflects a particular moment in rhetoric and composition's 21st Century history.* They suggest new media is a new, digital literacy, and as such, it is a fitting topic for both scholarship and a classroom curriculum because of its social timeliness and connection to multiliteracy, and they emphasize the practices of the rhetoric and composition community, suggesting opportunities for professional development and the realization that the use of "new media" as a term will ebb and

become mundane. Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, Ellen Cushman, and Jeff Grabill (2005) describe the heart

of this concept: "The types of issues commonplace to new media writing spaces […] are our

discipline's attempts to negotiate, adopt, and script writing with multiple media into its practices" (p.

28). For these scholars, new media changes the face of rhetoric and composition.

As students are asked to engage contemporary compositions, they are further asked to engage

in digital literacies. Scholars who write about new media's disciplinary importance emphasize the

necessity of speaking about new media as a constructive part of such students' literacy development.

Authors arguing new media is important to the field focus on implementation or assessment *rather*

than specific activities or events. Sorapure (2003) argues scholars explore why new media matters to

the field and to students by exploring "key continuities and differences between composing in print

and composing in new media" (np.) Only 10% of definitions (14 definitions) are arguments for more

fully incorporating new media into the scholarly and pedagogical work of the field; this low

percentage suggests few scholars are interested in *actively* convincing other scholars to incorporate

new media into the work of the discipline. However, that there is any discussion of new media's role

or timeliness in the discipline's development—and that such arguments have been published—marks

its importance. Scholars are interested in discussing opportunities to encourage digital literacy

practices for both their peers and students, with a clear outcome for the field regarding growth of

content, which leads to potential prestige and monetary benefit as course catalogs in English

departments are expanded to included digital literacies in general and new media composition in

particular.

Becoming more prevalent toward the end of the eighteen-year time period of this study is the

argument that *new media has already been defined by other scholars, and drawing on these*

definitions allows for continuity and understanding. From 2000-2010, this argument is presented by

just 5 definitions, but in the latter eight years, it is invoked 17 more times. Scholars making this

argument show new media has already been defined within the field (Daniel-Wariya, 2016, p. 37) or

that (re)defining new media is irrelevant in various ways (see Alvarez, et al., 2012). Such definitions

prove that rhetoric and composition has already acted as a digital literacy sponsor, in some capacity.

Lev Manovich's (2001) definition in *The Language of New Media* is the most commonly referenced.

Although his work is *cited* in numerous articles, scholars in the data set only *invoke* or *explain* his

definition eight times. From 2010-2018, other scholars more commonly cite definitions from within

the field: Ball's (2004) and Wysocki's (Wysocki, et al., 2007) definitions of new media are regularly

referenced, as are arguments by Lauer (2009; 2012) and Sorapure (2003).

New Media's Peak

Another way to view the impact of arguments about new media is by identifying their

frequency and timing. Asking when the arguments were made helps to identify other trends in the

field of digital literacy: when was new media meaningful, when did scholars use the term but opt not

to define it (signaling, perhaps, the belief that the definition was already solidified), and when was the

height of the term's use? Graph 1 (below) shows the frequency of the use of new media as a key term

in scholarship and the use of new media definitions throughout the journals and monographs in the

18-year time period.

Graph 1: 18 Years of New Media in Rhetoric and Composition
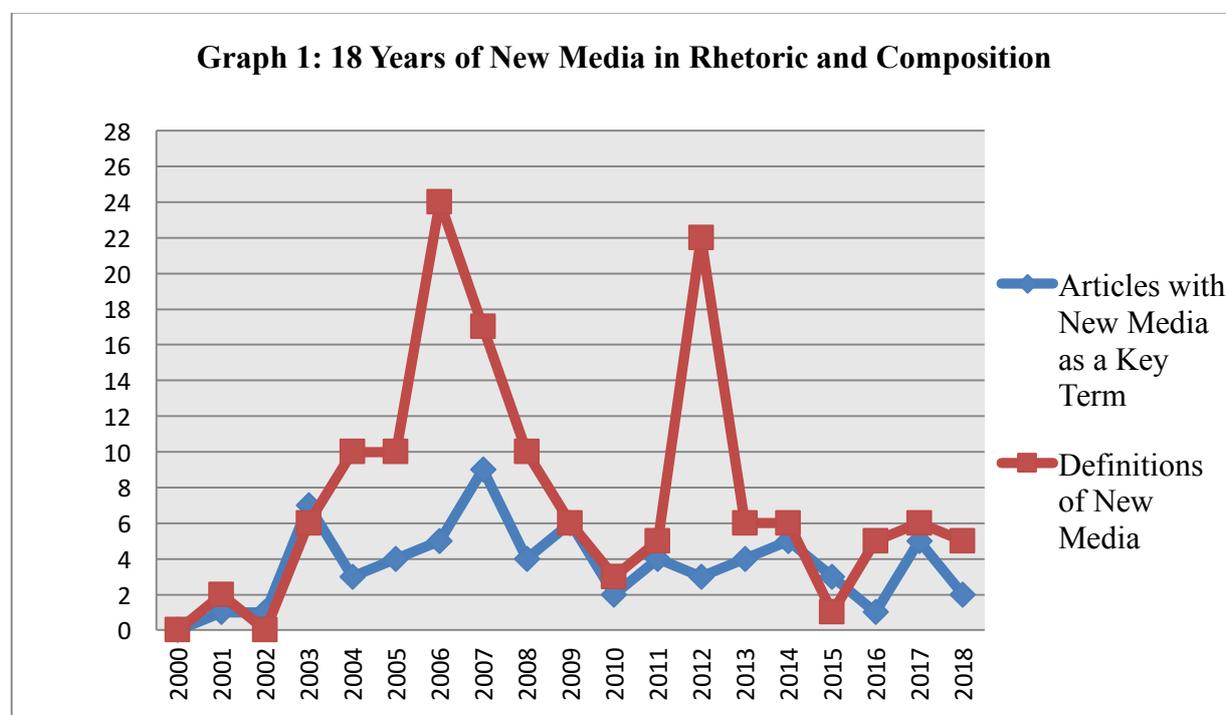
Graph 1 shows that the new media as a key term peaked in 2007. Accordingly, it rose steadily

from 2001 to 2007, and then began to drop off from 2009-2018 (perhaps in favor of other key terms

as new media was picked up by the digital humanities). It is also clear that the most new media

definitions (24) were crafted in 2006 with a resurgence in 2012 when Lauer asked scholars to

thoroughly articulate their definitions in her article "What's in a Name?". 2006-2007 was a significant

point in the timeline, as both using new media as a key term and the need to define new media peaked

and then fell away. In the second decade of the 21st Century, new media is simply referenced in

scholarship and is usually not accompanied by a definition, relying instead upon past arguments about

new media. In the early years of the 21st Century, scholars needed to articulate their positions more

precisely (and the lag in publication pipelines may account for more definitions surfacing in 2006).

Although definitions are still articulated and arguments still made about new media, the field does not

seem to need them as much as it did at the onset of the 21st Century. Now, new media is one digital

literacy term among many.

Conclusions and Implications

Many scholars use the term new media without describing or defining it. These authors use

new media "as if it was uncontroversial" (Zarefsky, 2006, p. 404). Such authors, perhaps unwittingly,

use a popular approach to arguing for new media's position in the field: they assume the argument has

already been made and adhered to within the discipline at large; theirs is a digital literacy events

argument, common in the data set. Still, both digital literacy events and digital literacy sponsors

arguments about new media are strategic maneuvers. The definitional trends show scholars in the

field are more likely to put forth digital literacy events arguments—examining the new media texts

people can produce and how—than they are to put forward digital literacy sponsors arguments—

examining what the value of new media is for a field largely dependent on print-linguistic practices.

While scholars who use digital literacy events arguments strive to move the field toward a more

enhanced understanding of contemporary literacies, they do so at the expense of arguments aimed at

theorizing literacy with the potential of alienating disciplinary members who are not yet convinced

multiliteracies (especially digital literacies) truly belong to the overarching discipline rather than

certain subfields.

Although scholars such as Reid (2007) demonstrate that digital literacy sponsors arguments

are integral to the overarching concerns of the field (what does it mean to compose knowledge? how

do technologies function as materialities in pursuing all available means of persuasion? what are the

"embodied, cognitive processes of composition" that new media affects? how does new media. as a

literate practice, shape our social and literate worlds?) (p. 6-9), other scholars still insist definitions

are not as important as they once were (especially devoid of particular contexts and audiences)

(Daniel-Wariya, 2016, p. 37). Questions concerning the value of new media for the discipline,

especially in terms of faculty relations, university politics, and classroom practices and management,

are crucial. Drawing on digital literacy sponsors definitions positions the field to answer critical

questions for maintaining a presence on campus and adding to the cohesion of the discipline via

member coherence. New media is a new literacy, but it is part of a continuum of digital literacy

events that rhetoric and composition is working to claim, as evidenced by the six new media

arguments scholars employ.

Scholars' definitions of new media make digital literacy events arguments 74% of the time

and digital literacy sponsors arguments 26% of the time. Because digital literacy events arguments are

those with underlying assumptions about new media's implicit position within rhetoric and

composition, scholars making these arguments assume their audiences acknowledge new media texts

as appropriate objects of study and production, and these scholars assume new media texts and

technologies are already part of the discipline. These scholars, though, forego the much-needed step

of explaining *how* new media fits into the research questions and objects of the discipline, assuming

rhetoric and composition's connection to such texts.

Fewer arguments about digital literacy sponsors suggests these arguments are not as integral

in the discipline's development. However, having fewer discussions of new media's position in

disciplinary formation and foundational knowledge—how the field understands and sponsors digital

literacy work—is problematic. Without digital literacy sponsors arguments, there is no common

language or common understanding regarding new media: the field's discussions remain imprecise,

leaving the field vulnerable from the inside. Without a common language and understanding of new

media's position—and, indeed, that of other multiliteracies—within rhetoric and composition and

with only assumptions about its positions and discussions of its textual properties, the field is open to

insider and outsider critique. Insiders claim digital literacies only concern the computers and writing

subfield while outsiders (those in fields with similar areas of study, more new media experience and

expertise, or administrative power over departments) can challenge rhetoric and composition across

campuses. These outsiders can potentially stifle the field's development by stopping rhetoric and

composition scholars from teaching digital literacy in their classrooms, both undergraduate and

graduate. Without digital literacy sponsors arguments, the future of digital literacies within the

discipline, and students' rhetorical use of new media, is on shaky ground.

On the other hand, scholars who present digital literacy sponsors arguments strategically

maneuver rhetoric and composition into the 21st Century by situating new media staunchly in the

discipline and by calling the discipline membership to function as digital literacy sponsors. Because

digital literacy events arguments only speak to those scholars who share the implied premise that new

media and related digital literacies belong to rhetoric and composition, using such arguments

predominantly contributes to a further defining of the computers and writing subfield rather than the

overarching discipline. Digital literacy sponsors arguments have the power to shift how scholars (both

insiders and outsiders) understand literacy as well as the purpose and products of rhetoric and

composition studies.

Although a fixed, stable definition for new media would grow stagnant quickly and limit the

discipline's development, rhetoric and compositions' teachers and scholars should think critically

about how and why they use specific terms, such as new media, because their uses of such terms

affect disciplinary development. The line between terms such as multimodality, digital composition,

and new media is blurred. The line between multiliteracies, new literacies, and digital literacies is

similarly blurred. In some cases, the blurring is beneficial, helping scholars explore closely related

areas in their scholarship and teaching, adding variety and nuance to exciting areas of study. As

composing technologies evolve, new media—and its definitions—will continue to evolve. Without

explicit, contextualized definitions of new media, rhetoric and composition scholars are frequently

discussing different things when they are under the impression they are discussing the same thing:

some scholars in the field may even adhere to multiliteracies (such as multimodality) being a part of

the discipline's purview without extending that same epistemology to new media. The discipline's

cohesion is distorted by these contradictory definitions, making it difficult to continue scholarly

momentum because there is a limited common foundation upon which to build. When some scholars

confuse new media with digital composing, others insist it is not digital in the least, and still more

insist new media must include a large degree of audience interaction and participation, discussions

about new media will continue to be broad and potentially confusing and frustrating: the potential to

dismiss new media's fit within the discipline grows stronger especially as the foundational arguments

in the new millennium cover a diverse spectrum.

New media definitions are strategic maneuvers about the field's position within larger

institutions, too. Relying on different arguments moves the field away from English departments and

toward communications or media studies departments, where print, speech, the visual, and the digital

merge. While building stronger relationships with closely related fields and departments would allow

for disciplinary evolution, it is not necessary for the field's growth. With so many definitions of new

media, rhetoric and composition could benefit from developing substantive, consistent definitions and

arguing more powerfully for new media's incorporation into the overarching field. Currently, the field

is still divided regarding whether or not discussions of digital literacies are even relevant for the entire

field or just relevant to the subfield: this is perhaps why so few articles about digital rhetoric and new

media find their way into journals such as *College Composition and Communication, Rhetoric*

Review, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. With digital literacy events arguments

overpowering digital literacy sponsors arguments, scholars do not make adequate arguments for the

role new media—as one element of a literacy continuum—can play in the construction, evolution, and

adaptation of the overarching field. Instead, by using more digital literacy sponsors arguments, new

media can be ideologically and epistemologically situated within rhetoric, composition, and literacy

studies.

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