A REVISIONS ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE

What can you do when it doesn’t have to be on 8 1/2 x 11 white paper?

In this assignment sequence, students consider what new kinds of arguments are possible when the “traditional” form of the essay is called into question.

ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE GOALS
This assignment encourages students to focus on the following goals for Revisions:
• practicing a rhetorical process for analyzing and producing written and visual texts.
• understanding how the audience and purpose in any communication situation shape effective communication.
• revising written and visual communication.
• discussing and analyzing the ethical implications of a communicator’s choices in a text.

WHEN TO USE THIS ASSIGNMENT
This sequence is good at the end of the semester, after students have developed a solid sense of purpose, context, and audience, and are ready to take on some more subtle work of considering the overall form of a text as a rhetorical strategy.

This assignment sequence requires at least 3 weeks and can spread over 5.

WHAT STUDENTS MAKE
Students produce both informal and formal written rhetorical analyses, and they produce their own experimental text.

THE ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE
1 Introduce students to the overall assignment sequence.
2 Students read and analyze several of the essays in chapter 14 of cda, Analyzing Essays. Students should read and analyze three or four of the essays in the chapter (any of the essays in the chapter except “Red Shoes”). Their analyses should be a mix of in-class discussion and informal, 3-4 page written analyses following up on class discussion.
3 Following class discussion that considers what all the essays read in step 2 have in common, students write a rhetorical analysis of the traditional essay form itself: what kinds of arguments and what kinds of reading does it encourage? This analysis should go through the steps of design plan, drafting, and revisions.
4 Students read and discuss “Red Shoes.” (You could also have them look at other “non-traditional” essays, such as Julia Kristeva’s “Tabat Mater” or at online arguments such as in the journal Vectors. You might also look at films with “non-traditional” structures such Trinh Minh-ha’s Surname: Viet Given name: Nam.)
5 Students write a formal, with drafts, rhetorical analysis of “Red Shoes”: Why do they think the author broke with the “traditional” form of the essay? What arguments is she working to construct that the “traditional” form doesn’t allow or encourage (or that she argues the form doesn’t allow or encourage)?
6 Using their analyses of the various essays in the chapter, students speculate about what kinds of arguments they can make if they themselves break the “traditional” form.
7 Through developing a design plan and testing it, students plan, produce, and revise a non-traditional essay using any medium available to them.