

## **A MULTI-GENRE EXTENDED DEFINITION WRITING ASSIGNMENT WITH A “TECHIE TWIST”: TEACHING TIPS**

### **ASSIGNMENT PREPARATION**

1. Allow enough time to complete the assignment.
2. Go over the prompt with the students, for it is in itself an intricate document that could cause confusion if not read carefully. Students must closely focus on the Essay Prompt especially noting that the purpose of the essay is to present a robust definition of a technological term or concept. This text is an argument that purposes that the denotative definition is not enough to understand the full ramifications of the term or concept – more depth and breadth is needed. Consequently, if the students do not address these ideas in the introduction and the thesis of the text, the essays seem to go out of focus. Also, the XtraNormal video is not clearly connected to the text as a conclusion of the matter.
3. Bring some completed models of the assignment to class and use class time to examine the models and answer questions that were posed when the students completed the Essay 2 Proposal (found in the appended Writing Resources). At first, the students are still reluctant to jump out of the formal-5-paragraph essay box, but as they see how the assignment is constructed, they become more willing to take a learning risk.
4. There are many ways of presenting the finished project: posters, booklets, standard and Prezi Power Points. However, insist that all of the requisite parts, including using XtraNormal to construct the essay’s conclusion, are present as indicated in the prompt.

### **ESSAY PREWRITING:**

1. Brainstorm appropriate topics to be sure the essay concepts are not too broad or too narrow.
2. Model in class how to craft some of the elements of the essay’s body section such as the six-room poem or the three formal definitions.
3. Some students may want to team up to complete the assignment. I have found this to be advantageous, but all those in the group receive the same grade. I usually limit the groups to two or at the most three students.

**THE “TECHI-TWIST”:**

1. Be sure to have plenty of time to play with XtraNormal.
2. Be equipped with an XtraNormal example. Walk the students through the program and registration.
3. Be prepared for connectivity problems as well as the time it takes for the program to present a working model of the students’ projects. Another time issue is the time it takes for the XtraNormal video to load, sometimes up to 2-3 minutes depending on the bandwidth speed.
4. Sometimes “techie” students want to use other tools to construct the essay’s conclusion. However, stick to your guns and insist on XtraNormal. One student commented that XtraNormal was “amusing.” Comments like these can be disappointing to an instructor who believes that the “techie-twist” is innovative; however, isn’t it the case that instructors are learners as much as the students are?
5. Prezi is a good platform for the students to present their information, for it lends itself well to the format of the multi genre nature of the assignment. The only glitch is that sometimes the site will not load the students’ presentations. This can present assessment issues, but the time is worth the wait, for the projects that presented themselves are of high quality and illustrative of the depth New Media tools can add to the writing classroom.
6. Again, some over-the-top -techie students may venture into presentations that are more complicated. This can complicate the submission and assessment of the essays, for your computer may not open the documents. Also, a lot of smoke and mirrors may obscure the fact that the student may have gotten caught up in the technology of the assignment and neglected the assignment requirements for what the student assumed the assignment required.
7. Be sure the students include the right links for the XtraNormal video and the other links say for example, if they use Prezi. A typo in the hyperlink can cause frustration and time lost emailing back and forth to get the right connection. If the students use Prezi or MS Power Point, show them how to use the “Insert hyperlink” function” so the XtraNormal connection will show up as a hyperlink.