

Infographics as Presentations of Literate Identity  
By Erin McLaughlin, Ph.D., University Writing Program

Each semester, as an early homework assignment, I ask students in my first-year Multimedia Writing & Rhetoric courses to respond to a series of questions about their writing and reading history. These profiles help me get a sense for the complex interests, anxieties, strengths, perceived weaknesses, and expectations each student brings to my classroom. In the Fall Semester of 2014, I altered the assignment slightly by asking students to respond to the same set of questions, but through a less conventional writing genre: an infographic. Though they were given no formal instruction on infographic software, visual rhetoric, or design principles at this early point in the term, the infographics these students produced provided a glimpse into each student's perception of their literate identity and the students' underlying awareness of symbolic representation. Further, the activity prompted rich in-class discussion about the functional, rhetorical, and critical literacies at work in any communicative context. Taken together, these artifacts offer a fascinating portrait of the digital landscape against which our students develop as writers, readers, and thinkers, as well as the literacies students bring to their first year of study at Notre Dame.

**First Writing Task: Introduce Yourself With an Infographic**

To help me get to know you as a student, please introduce yourself as a writer—with an *infographic*. Designed to communicate complex information clearly and quickly, infographics are, on their most fundamental level, visual representations of knowledge. Your task, then, is to introduce yourself to me (and your peers) through a blend of graphics and text that capture the complexity of your identity as a writer and reader. The design, organization, length, and flavor of your infographic is up to you, so long as your infographic somehow speaks to the following questions:

- What do you see as your strengths as a writer coming into the course, and what are some areas where you would like to improve? What tends to come easily to you as you writer in an academic setting, and what tends to be challenging? What do you hope to gain from taking this course?
- What experiences as a reader and writer stand out in your memory? For example, you might describe the kinds of writing you've done, and explain the process you tend to follow when writing an essay. Alternatively, you might discuss a person, course, assignment, experience, or text that has been important in your development as a writer and/or thinker.
- How do you see technology impacting your writing and reading practices in the past, present, or future? You might, for example, think about the

specific technologies you use to read and write and the extent to which you rely on these technologies in your academic life.

Many sites, such as [Piktochart](#), allow you to make infographics for free—you may use any application you like to design your image. You may also find inspiration and resources in the “Infographic” section of Notre Dame’s [ReMix website](#). Feel free to include personal photographs, icons, and other relevant media that best helps to give the class a sense for who you are.

Your infographic is due by Thursday’s class time and should be posted to your blog (simply download the .jpg image and insert into your blog entry—let me know if you need guidance with this process).

Best,

Dr. E