

Documenting Literate Activity: A Stop-Motion Journal Tour

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The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* presents a new genre: Documenting Literate Activity. Here, using P-CHAT and other writing concepts, Sofia Link shares the journey of making a stop-motion journal tour, exploring what it takes to create something new and finding joy in the process.

The Beginning

My story of uncertainty, progress, joy, and eventual triumph came from an ENG 101 assignment. However, the personal journey that I will share is a universal issue we all deal with at some point in our lives: finding our voice.

My professor, Heidi Bowman, presented an assignment where the main prompt was to create a project based on something that we were passionate about. The only requirements were that (1) research must be conducted and (2) we had to compose a reflection that “described our creation and creative process, while connecting our work to class concepts” (Bowman, 2022). The professor explained that their goal was for us to have complete creative freedom to make something fun and special to us. And there was a lot of variety in the topics, genres, and modalities that people chose. Some of the projects my classmates created were a TED talk on pediatric cancer, a playlist of the year, and a semester long course on Taylor Swift. Other projects included a script for a TV show and a pair of shorts. As you can tell, we were quite a creative bunch.

In my case, I was considering a stop-motion video with a twist, but it took me a while to develop the idea. We were told we could create “anything we wanted,” but my mind was blank. I talked about my struggles making choices with my writing professor, and she asked me about things that I loved. But honestly, I wasn’t able to answer at that moment. All I knew was that, throughout this year in multiple writing prompts, I have discussed how important writing and journaling is to me. I thought about that question over the next few days and slowly started producing quite a few things: music, poetry, art, and film. So, what I ended up creating really involves all those and embodies what I love and am passionate about. And I think this is something everyone can relate to. When we interact with our passions, it can make parts of our lives easier.

What Is This Thing Gonna Look Like: Production and Representation

My journey into this project began with my first idea: a stop-motion video. I began thinking about what I would make it of. Maybe I could do clay animation or get my friends to act in it? Well, I did not have any clay in my dorm room and did not want to bother my friends with hours of trial and error during finals week. So, I kept thinking. I was sitting at my desk staring at the rubric for this assignment on my computer. Ironically right next to me was my journal, so I ran with it. I liked the idea of flipping pages in my journal for the film but needed more substance.

In that moment, I had a vision of what I wanted my film to be, but it wasn’t completely clear yet. My first idea did not give the audience a

P-CHAT and Production

P-CHAT is a framework used by the ISU Writing Program that is designed to “help us think about and study the complex genres we encounter in the world” (Key terms & concepts, n.d.).

The ISU Writing Program describes this part of my story as **representation** (more on that next), and I see it as intertwined with another important term: **production**. Production deals with the means through which a text is produced, including tools, practices, genres, and structures that can contribute to and even pre-shape our ability to produce text (Key terms & concepts, n.d.).

In my case, the decisions to (1) share some of my journals and creative writing and (2) produce a multimodal text both shaped how to begin to learn what I needed to learn to produce the project.

chance to see anything that I had written. Therefore, I was sparked with the idea of doing what some might call a “read-aloud” of some of my poetry. I would slowly move closer to my desk, my journal would come into frame, I would open it, flip through the pages until I got to my most recent ones: the poems. I would read each poem aloud with light instrumental music in the background, use stop-motion editing to turn the page, and then once my six poems were read, the journal would be closed and exit my desk, and I would slowly move out of frame. (If you would like to see this in action, see Figure 5 toward the end of this article. There is a QR code you can scan to view the finished project!)

The process of planning my text (**representation**) did not happen all at one moment. I had the general idea and returned to my trusty Notes app on my phone every time I thought of something to add, like “put music behind voice,” or “start video by turning light on and end it by turning it off.” When it came to the way I chose to present it, I split up the video into multiple chunks, dividing the mini “tour” of the journal and each individual poem onto pages that combined to make a cumulative slideshow. (I will talk more about this later!) The foundation I already had laid the framework for me to be able to think of these little quirks.

I had a vision of what I wanted to create but was unsure if I was going to be able to make that vision a successful reality. I was nervous, but most importantly, I was also incredibly excited to get started. Once I began, I didn’t doubt that whatever I ended up with would be meaningful to me, and that’s what kept me going. As it evolved over time and began to take shape, I grew to love and love it even more. This project is so special to me because I have always viewed my journal as personal and private, but I wanted to be able to share and highlight some of my writing in a unique way.

The **reception** of the piece was also important to me. I wasn’t sure who I might ultimately show my stop-motion

Representation & Choices

The ISU Writing Program uses the P-CHAT term **representation** to highlight how the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it, how we think and talk about it, and the activities and materials that help to shape how we do so (Key terms & concepts, n.d.). In my situation, the assignment itself is a genre (we could call it, very broadly, “assignments given in writing classes”), and when I got the assignment, I had to make a lot of choices to plan my text, including what would be in the frame of the video, what I would say and do, how I would move my body, what people would hear, and so on.

Reception deals with how a text is taken up and used by others. Reception is not just who will read a text but considers how people might use or repurpose a text (sometimes in ways the author may not have anticipated or intended) (Key terms & concepts, n.d.).

video to, but the thought that other humans would interact with my texts was exciting. I am proud of how it turned out. It feels extremely rewarding to get to share something that means so much to me. I finally had a clear vision by the end of the creation process, and I was eager for viewers to interpret that vision in whatever ways come honestly to them.

More Production: Researching Genre, Tools, and Modalities

The genre of my project, I would say, is a mixture between creative film (specifically stop-motion), poetry, music, and digital collage art. If I had to classify it into its own singular genre, I think I would keep it simple and just call it a Journal Tour. Which is what it is, right?! I knew I wanted to include different creative methods because it gives the project layers and depth, which in my opinion is what makes it so neat. This was the first time I had ever made any type of film in a more sophisticated manner. I love watching movies, shows, and creative videos, but have never created something like this myself and had no clue how to do so. Enter: some **genre research**.

Stop-motion is a subgenre of filmmaking and is a type of “animation that captures one frame at a time, with physical objects that are moved between frames” (DragonFrame, 2023). The type of stop-motion I did is called object-motion. The **genre conventions**, or specific characteristics,

for object-motion animation set it apart from clay animation, pixelization, puppet animation, silhouette animation, or cutout motion. Specifically, my film involved moving and animating objects by photographing them, moving them slightly, and then taking another photograph. When the images are played back consecutively at a quick speed, the objects appear to move on their own.

The first place I went to learn about how to make a stop-motion film was the internet. I think I probably searched something like, “best and easiest app to create a stop-motion video.” I downloaded a few and did some trial and error to see which one I liked best.

Genre Research in Practice

The ISU Writing Program loves genre research! It’s the practice of investigating “specific genres in use in the world, including the people, tools, and recurring situations that influence how texts get produced in a genre . . . so that we can create recognizable, effective texts in genres that are familiar and new-to-us in current and future writing situations” (Genre research terms, n.d.).

As you can see below, when I was doing genre research, I researched the definition of stop motion and its genre conventions, and I used online resources to find and learn how to use the digital tools I needed to produce my videos.

I ended up settling on one called Any Motion because it was the most user friendly and free. After that, I practiced. A lot. I quickly realized that stop-motion is very time consuming! If I messed up one shot, I had to completely restart because it was almost impossible to replicate the angle my phone was at in the previous photo. It was frustrating at times, to say the least, and the most challenging part of this project. I did it over and over, attempting to make it perfect. I would shoot, sit down and evaluate, and then try again to get it just how I wanted it. Luckily the app was of great assistance, and I began to get the hang of things. It took me a full night to practice, and the next day I restarted and completed the animation. The hard part was over!

When it came to recording my voice reading the poems, I had previously worked with an app called Splice that would allow me to do that. See Figure 1 for an example of what this app interface looked like while I was working on this project. The recording part was easy, but the reading was tricky. It was out of my comfort zone for sure. I did multiple takes for each poem to ensure that I achieved the right tone, the recording sounded clear(ish), and my volume was sufficient.

I wanted some soft instrumental music in the background as well, and I debated looking for different songs for each poem but ended up settling on just one. It is one of my favorite pieces of music, and I thought it would be perfect. It is called “Juno” by Harold Budd. It is soft and bold at the same time, and its mood fluctuates in a similar way to the mood of my poetry.

I also knew that I wanted to present my videos in a slideshow. I searched different websites that had premade slideshow templates and came across Canva. I had used it before to create

Genre conventions refer to the characteristics of any kind of text that make it recognizable as participating in a particular genre: features that might be visible (length, structure, modes, tone, content) and social goals that we usually have to infer (why these elements, valued by whom, toward what goals)

(Genre research terms, n.d.).

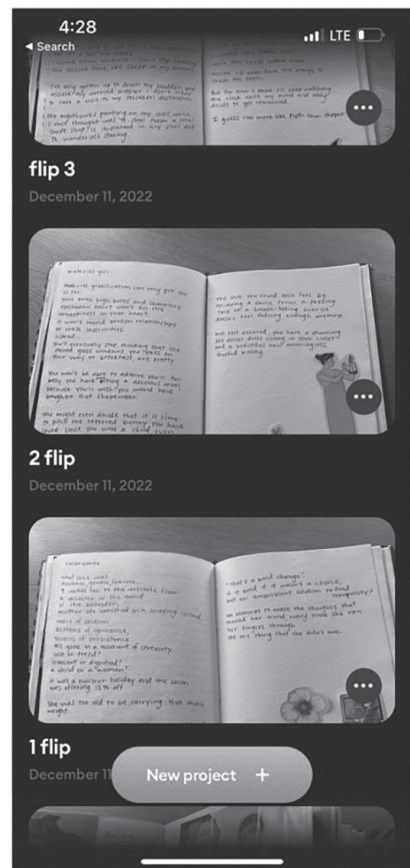


Figure 1: Splice project.

Multimodal composing refers to all of the modes that we can use to communicate that would include verbal (words), visual (images), aural (sound), oral (spoken), and spatial (arrangement of elements in a space).

Practicing multimodal composing means being aware that a lot of our work as writers includes much more than just a single mode (Key terms & concepts, n.d.).

infographics and posters but was not aware that they had slideshows. I then spent a little time browsing around and toying with different templates to find the best match for what I was looking for. Once I found the perfect one, I assembled the graphics in the way I wanted them, made a cover page, tweaked the formatting, and included a tree diagram (an informal diagram that displays the main concept in the middle,

with lines extending to topics and subtopics—looks like a tree!) about what I write in my journal.

Assembling was one of the most fun parts. I split my film into pieces, so there was an opening (minitour), individual poems, and a closing. The different parts of the video each went on their own slides. Learning definitely played a big part in the completion of this project! My result is not perfect or professional by any means, but I would not have been able to even do what I did without researching and lots of practice and experimentation.

Because I wanted to incorporate multiple things I loved into a singular project, that meant doing **multimodal composing**. I relied on multiple visual elements: short videos, photos, graphics, a chart, and animation. Figure 2 is an example of the graphics I chose to use on one of my slides



Figure 2: Slide graphic design.

in Canva. I also used the aural elements of music. Then, the reading of the poems was both oral (speaking) and verbal (making meaning through words). These multiple modes helped me produce a creative project that meant something to me, and hopefully to my audience. Originally, this project was only going to be shared with my writing professor, but as I produced the texts, I ended up thinking very differently about reception. As I considered who might interact with my work, I ended up making a lot of specific decisions with an imagined viewer in mind. I wanted the tone to be soft but powerful, so I chose an aesthetically pleasing slide template and a few sweet poems, but also countered that with some poetry that discussed more serious and grim topics. The music was neutral and could be interpreted in multiple ways. I did not want the tone to be too depressing or too happy because I wanted each individual that read, watched, and listened to create their own opinion and feelings toward this project.

New Learning and Antecedent Knowledge

I've talked about the genre research I completed, but I also had some **antecedent knowledge** regarding the genre I was creating texts in. First, I knew what stop-motion animation was. I had watched “Fantastic Mr. Fox,” a stop-motion film, the night I got the idea to make my own miniature film. I am also a part of Euphemism (which is a creative arts journal here at Illinois State University that you can look into online at <https://english.illinoisstate.edu/euphemism/>) and am on their poetry committee this year. So, I spent a lot of time reading poetry, which gave me great insight and inspiration on how to write some of my own. Poetry is an incredibly expressive form of writing, and I think it is special that I was able to write something that might not be conventionally good but means something to me. The production process for the poems I wrote consisted of going to my Notes app and seeing what random spurts of information I had spewed out throughout my day. Sometimes it was a string of words that sounded good together or other times a topic or feeling that I did not want to forget. I then started writing things down on paper (Figure 3).

I also had antecedent knowledge of other digital tools beyond my Notes app. I already knew how to work Splice, which made it easy to navigate. My antecedent knowledge helped me

Antecedent knowledge, or prior knowledge, can be both helpful and problematic. It can help us out as we try to figure out how to do a new thing. But sometimes, it can get in the way because it can cause us to engage in styles of writing or making that were useful in past tasks but don't work (or don't work well) in new situations.

So it's necessary to pay attention to how antecedent knowledge is shaping our current activity.

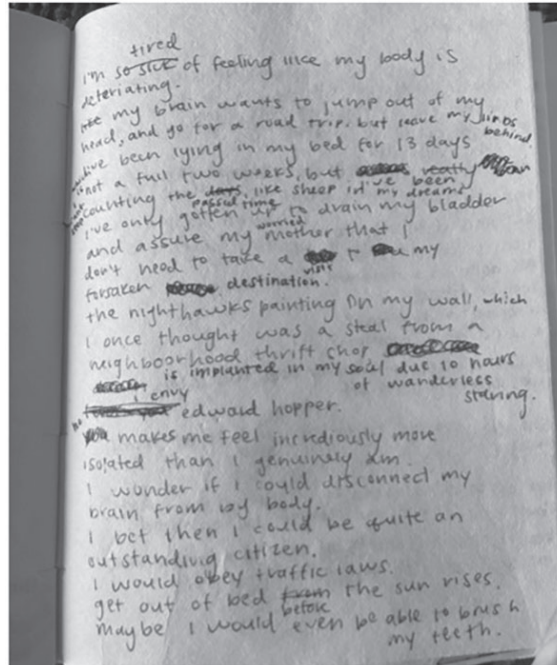


Figure 3: A rough draft of my first poem for this project.

use different modes within this particular genre to strengthen my writing identity and make me more confident in my multimodal composing skills.

Final Thoughts: Creativity, Making, and Living in the Now

I am most proud of the creativity in my Stop-Motion Journal Tour. I could have avoided doing so much work for this assignment and done something simpler, but I stuck with it and made something that I think is quite neat. I really like that I incorporated different modes and truly embodied the idea of multimodal composing. It was not the easiest thing to figure out how to make my vision into something that did not look like a child made it, but I did it and I'm proud of myself (see Figure 4, a screenshot of the final cover image for my project; and Figure 5, a QR code that will take you to the final videos I made!).

I think there are a few areas for improvement in my final-for-now draft. The first being the stop-motion video itself. I spent a lot of time and effort on it, but it still is not perfect, and I think I just unfortunately do not have the skill level to make that happen. The second being my poetry and reading skills. I have never written formal poetry in any manner before this year or ever read



Figure 4: A screenshot of the final cover image for my project.

my work to anyone. I know there is room for improvement in both of those areas, but I am still learning and growing and think I did the best I could do at this moment. This project made me step outside my comfort zone and try new things, and I am proud that I was able to do that successfully.

I can say with confidence that this project has captured and brought together my experiences in my ENG 101 course (what I learned as a writer and producer of texts), my personal interests, my antecedent knowledge, and a whole bunch of new learning. I was able to create a unique idea, rely on multimodal composing, produce the project while thinking about its reception, research a new genre and new tools, use them successfully, and share something I am proud of in a cumulative way.

At the beginning of the semester, I remember that I said I enjoy researching things that I am passionate about, which remains true. However, I might also say that research makes me even more passionate about a topic—and genre research makes me even more excited to compose in a new genre. The more I practiced and researched, the more excited I got. And I think that can be applied to nearly anything a person has to learn both in and outside of school.

I knew I had the potential to improve as a writer. I just lacked confidence, something many people can identify with. Confidence can be hard to gain and even harder to keep. But at this point, I'm finally feeling much more confident in



Figure 5: a QR code that you can scan to view my final project!

a lot of my skills. I enjoy writing more now, and I like to write in different contexts as I did for this project. Ultimately, I was able to challenge my beliefs about myself as a writer, and I hope I will continue to learn and grow in that aspect. I also hope that you reading this article know that you can learn and grow from engaging in new things, especially if you have a passion and vision for it!

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