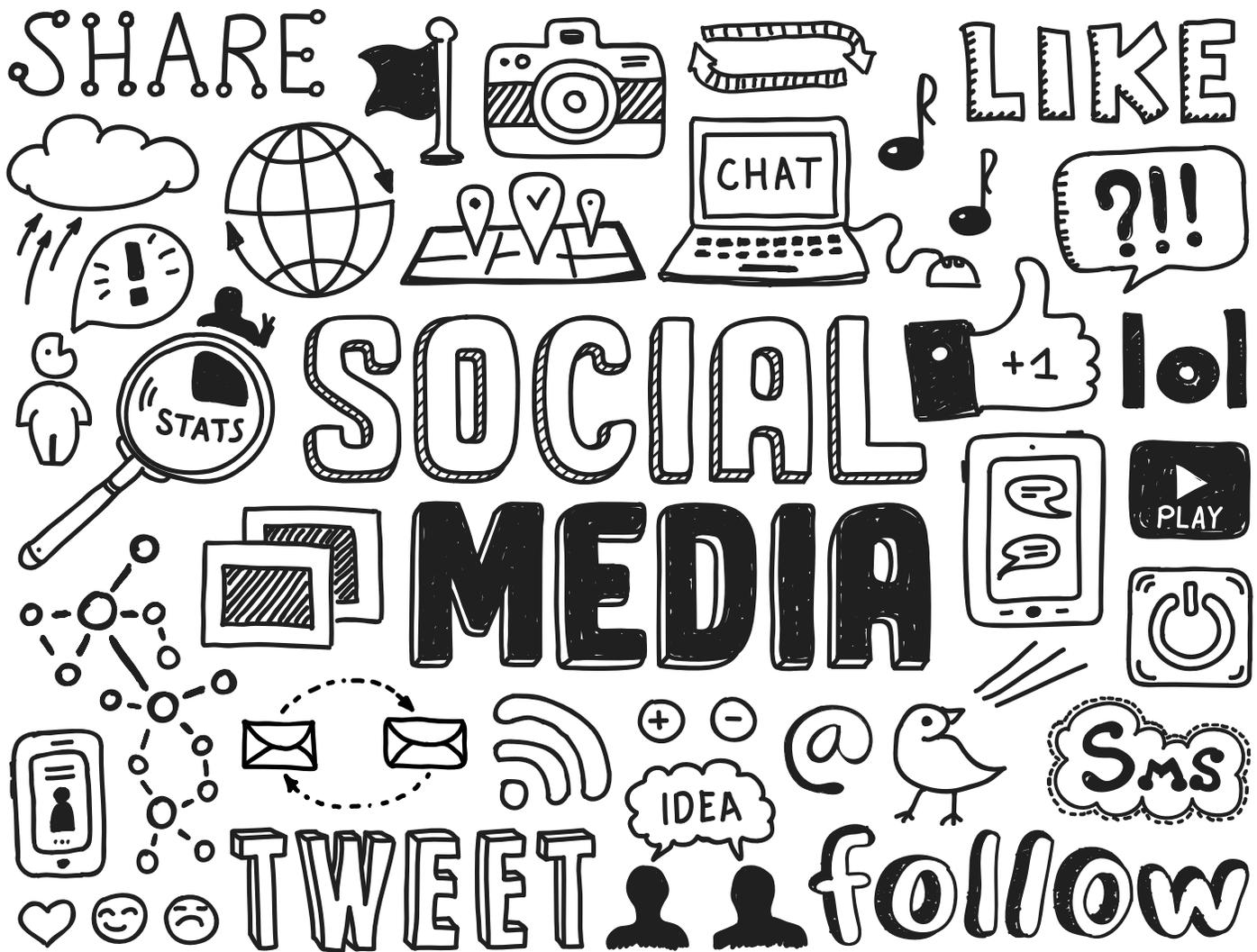


#criticalthinking: Using Social Media and Pecha Kucha in the Community College Classroom

By Laura Ann Metzger



Abstract

With technology on the rise not only within society but also within higher education, it is essential for community college students to become fluent in digital literacy as well as social media. This project supported community college students' use of social media and Pecha Kucha to develop their critical thinking skills and improve their writing.

Keywords: community college, composition, social media, Pecha Kucha, critical thinking

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More students are entering college directly from high school and being placed in developmental English courses (Bailey, 2009); many other students manage to bypass development English courses yet still struggle in college-level English courses. These students are unable to formulate their thoughts into clear, coherent writing. At the high school level, students encounter locating theses in a text, but they seem to have less practice creating a well-rounded thesis. High school students are immersed in writing with models where they notice, interact, emulate, and apply. Although this method prepares students for high school exit exams, it does not fully prepare them for college writing. Due to these conflicting foci, a large percentage of entering, first-time college students are placed in developmental English courses. Further, in my experience, students who score just above the minimum and are placed in college-level writing courses, which include composition and other humanities-based writing courses, still struggle to write effectively.

Teaching in the college composition classroom and having to re-teach simple skills such as constructing a thesis statement, transitioning from paragraph to paragraph, and making well-thought-out connections between the subject and textual evidence, I had little time left to meet college-required student learning outcomes without having to completely water down the course content. I knew there had to be another way to re-emphasize these essential writing skills to students without having to take time away from other student learning outcomes. My work has found that through research, imagination, and creativity, students in the college classroom can use technology and reflective practices to build critical thinking and increase writing skills in congruence with expected student learning outcomes in the course.

Engagement and Social Media

According to Carducci and Rhoads (2005), college students today are learning in a media-driven society and are in need of instructors who can “design innovative learning opportunities to cultivate the principles and competencies essential to the betterment of an increasingly cultural and global society” (p. 9); furthermore, students should demonstrate understanding of material through creation of alternative media that are intended to increase critical thinking through counter narratives and differing perspectives. Based on the current student culture at my community college, it was evident that students would need creativity in the classroom not only to spark their interest in the classroom but also to help develop their critical thinking and writing skills.

It is sometimes difficult to capture the attention of students and keep them engaged in the college classroom, traditionally focused on lecture with minimal classroom discussion. Students often turn to their laptops to take notes during lecture, but are they really paying attention and actively taking notes? More than likely, students are using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to stay up-to-date with their friends. The question remains: How can these instant gratification media be used in the college classroom to grasp and maintain the attention of students?

Carducci and Rhoads (2005) argue that college educators should design innovative learning opportunities to cultivate the principles and competencies essential to the betterment of an increasingly cultural and global society; learning experiences should allow students to develop the media literacy skills essential for decision making in the media-saturated social environment in which they live. Furthermore, students should be given the opportunity to “create alternative media that are intended to produce counter narratives and express perspectives not frequently incorporated into mainstream media” (p. 9). Looking at the social media practices of college students today, it was apparent that the key to increase student engagement participation would be the incorporation of such instant gratification tools in the classroom. In this respect, students would receive instant feedback from not only their instructor and peers but also a wider population: others interested in the topic and from varying generations and cultures.

Critical Thinking and Social Media

Based on my accumulative observations, I have found that across the community college level, not just in composition courses, students are not able to articulate information and synthesize it into sound reasoning in a well-developed and formulated college-level essay. According to Lazere (1987), critical thinking instruction should be designed to achieve an understanding of the relationship of language and logic leading towards the ability to analyze, criticize, and advocate ideas; to reason inductively and deductively; and to reach conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief. McCrae (2011) argues that critical thinking is a student’s ability to scrutinize ideas and assumptions through reasoned argument, whereas Choy and Cheah (2009) claim “it is a process that needs to be constantly practiced and incorporated into daily lessons” (p. 205). Based on these claims, it is important for instructors not only to reflect on their own teaching style but also to reflect and become aware of the ever-changing student entering their classroom. As time progresses, so do students, and with the emergence of digital media’s prevalence in today’s world, it is important to incorporate social media literacies into instruction.

Lazere (1987) argues that fundamental cognitive abilities are needed in order to think critically: the ability to concentrate, to retain material studied, to sustain an extended line of reasoning in reading and writing, and to reason back and forth among the past, present, and future. In congruence with this, Vaske (2001) indicates critical thinking moves beyond fundamental cognitive abilities, but it also needs a social environment where individuals can share and interact with one another through means of communication. Small and Vorgan (2008) imply students of the 21st century are only social beings—digital natives who have never experienced a world without computers, twenty-four-hour news, Internet, and cellphones. They are individuals constantly using social media, text messaging, and watching or listening to music and videos. Social interactions are no longer just happening face-to-face but are now happening digitally through means of text messaging, email, and social media. However, with the rise of

Media tools such as social media integrated into the classroom can further benefit student learning. According to Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and Canché (2015), social interactions are a crucial component of the educational experience of college students” (p. 418). It is now necessary for instructors to create assignments that utilize students’ digital and information literacy in order to socialize and discuss information outside of the classroom to further enhance critical thinking abilities.

technology, more and more students are relying on the Internet for factual information, which increases the necessity for students to decipher the credibility of the source and the information. In order to support this, it is important for students to work closely with media technology to see firsthand how important it is to be both knowledgeable and successful. According to Anderson and Horn (2012), “technology is becoming an increasingly integrated part of pedagogy and success in higher education” (p. 4). This is, in part, due to the fact that Small and Vorgan (2008) suggest digital natives are using the newest and most up-to-date technologies and applications not only at home but also in the workplace. It is important to note that this can be seen not only on the college campus where it is difficult at times to get students off their electronic device to listen and participate in class discussion but also at lower grades levels. Students of today have been ingrained with the idea of instant gratification as a result of technology’s capacities (Small & Vorgan, 2008), so why not provide students with an outlet to communicate with their peers in a familiar way (the use of technology) which will also result in instant gratification?

Since college-level writing often poses a question or a writing prompt to students, it is essential for students to have the skills to develop their thoughts on their own and formulate their essay—students are required to do their own research and essay formulation outside of the classroom unlike the high school classroom environment which they have become accustomed. In order to build critical thinking, it is essential for instructors to use methods that have worked in the past but also incorporate media tools that students of today can utilize to strengthen and develop their thoughts to build critical thinking. Media tools such as social media integrated into the classroom can further benefit

student learning. According to Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and Canché (2015), social interactions are a crucial component of the educational experience of college students” (p. 418). It is now necessary for instructors to create assignments that utilize students’ digital and information literacy in order to socialize and discuss information outside of the classroom to further enhance critical thinking abilities.

Social Media in Action

My college classroom is moving away from lecture and placing a stronger focus on cooperative learning. I found it important not only to have students discuss information with each other but also to take discussion one step further and incorporate media technology to develop thought. For many students, blogs are the norm in Internet reading and writing. According to Mandernach (2006), “Blogs encourage critical thinking through the encouragement of self-reflection, sharing of the learning process and peer-review” (p. 50). Mandernach also argues that blogs allow for students to develop their critical thinking skills through writing, especially writing for a specific audience. Furthermore, Small and Vorgan (2008) argue that digital natives recognize classroom learning is boring; most individuals now entering college no longer write personal journals but rather share their innermost thoughts with friends, and oftentimes strangers, on websites and blogs. This is evident by the increase of social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Based on this information, I found it necessary to incorporate blogs into my classroom as well as other social media tools such as Instagram and Twitter.

Digital literacy work is complex and through the use of reflective practices, students are able to reflect on not only the writing process but also the deeper meaning of the work also enhancing critical thinking skills. Critical thinking, as we know it, is “self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It requires rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcoming our native egocentrism and sociocentrism” (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 2). Combining such practices with new digital literacy education will further increase the core skill sets and ideas that are centrally relevant to the objectives of academia in the 21st century (Roeser, 2009). The presence and emergence of technology within society also needs to take place with the higher education classroom. As Garrison and Akyol (2009) suggest, Web 2.0 technologies (blogs and social media) provide students the opportunity to increase interactivity and participation by developing collaborative communication and creation which provide students the means to become creative, critical, constructive, and producers of their own critical thinking and learning. Furthermore, Perkins (1985) states that educators need to give students the opportunity to use technology to further increase critical thinking skills, but in order for technology to be utilized sufficiently (a) the opportunity needs to become available to students, (b) should be recognized by students, and (c) students should be motivated to use it. In addition to this, faculty need to create authentic and thought-

provoking tasks which reflect the culture and the complexity of the environment students not only currently face but also will face and support and challenge students thinking while encouraging them to test their ideas against alternative views and contexts (Mandernach, 2006). Garrison and Akyol (2009) further state the implementation of Web 2.0 technology in higher education is a necessary means for academic success, and such technologies can provide the means to significantly engage students and sustain that engagement over time.

Based on student feedback on my integration of blogs and reflective practices, I made use of social media tools including Twitter and Instagram as part of the larger semester project: over the course of a sixteen-week semester, students are asked to read and respond to a minimum of six texts and develop their written responses first through blogs, Twitter, and Instagram. To end their semester project, students are asked to take information learned over the semester and create a Pecha Kucha assignment highlighting their newfound knowledge and skills. This project allows students to become social learners and teachers on a wider scope—their learning moves beyond the classroom—and, as Black (2005) suggests, it allows students to analyze their own work based on standards of clarity, accuracy, relevance, logic, and fairness.

Reflection, Social Media, and Pecha Kucha

In several different introductory courses that I teach, students are required to complete six response writings (blogs) on a particular topic, six tweets (140 characters each) summarizing their blog, and six original photographs with a short caption (maximum 5 words) with a hashtag (#) that further encompasses the theme of their blog posting. At the end of the semester, students gather all of their response writings and create and deliver a Pecha Kucha presentation to the class. Pecha Kucha, a presentation style created in 2003 by Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein, aims at telling a story in 6 minutes and 40 seconds; Pecha Kucha, Japanese for “chitchat,” was originally conceived for architects and other designers to share their work with others by using a PowerPoint presentation with 20 images which transition automatically every 20 seconds (Dytham & Klein, 2007, p. 6). This presentation platform thus challenges students to showcase their learning and development over the semester.

Still a relatively new form of presentation platform, Pecha Kucha has not been widely used in college courses, let alone composition or literature courses. Gries and Brooke (2010) have implemented a presentation model utilizing Pecha Kucha in the writing classroom in order to “illustrate how slideware can provide writers with meaningful acts of rhetorical transformation” (p. 21). In doing so, they argue that using a slideware platform such as Pecha Kucha for writing is effective in the development of rhetorical strategies, communication and collaboration with others, and synthesizing information in order to develop and present relevant ideas. As suggested by Gries and Brooke,

utilizing a presentation model for writing can be effective; however, the question still remains: Can Pecha Kucha be combined with social media to further develop critical thinking and collaboration with others? Through the development and implementation of social media in conjunction with Pecha Kucha in the college classroom, this question is answered.

Depending on the course, students are asked to complete the response writings in a different way: Students enrolled in ENGL 1301 complete their semester as a study of self. Over the course of the semester, they are asked to read, reflect, and respond to a specific text in order to help them find their identity within the college setting and within society. Students enrolled in ENGL 1302 study and research a selected social injustice affecting society today. Response writings 1 and 2 are dedicated to background information, response writings 3 and 4 provide opposing viewpoints on the selected topic, and response writings 5 and 6 present a solution to create change. Students enrolled in a literature course (ENGL 2323 or ENGL 2332) study and critically analyze six texts from a chosen time period. Each response writing needs to analyze the text using a different form of literary criticism.

Through the use of blogs, students are able to reflect on a text before creating a written response. By doing so, students are able to formulate their idea and narrow down their point of interest. Additionally, students move beyond just responding to a text by summarizing their written work into a “tweet” using Twitter. Asking students to summarize their own work into 140 characters or less tests their ability to think critically. Furthermore, through continued reflection, students synthesize their work by sharing an original photograph that emulates their voice through art and through an original hashtag (#) that represents the subject on Instagram. After completing such assignments weekly or biweekly, students are now able to develop a Pecha Kucha presentation to demonstrate knowledge learned over the semester because Pecha Kuchas allow students to fully synthesize and summarize large amounts of information succinctly to fully convey meaning and understanding through the use of images and concise information.

Over the course of the semester, students are assessed through the use of a rubric for each response writing (minimum of six total) and the Pecha Kucha presentation. Use of rubrics allows for limited, detailed feedback, but they are still useful in pinpointing where improvements are needed. Students of today do not look for long, detailed feedback that is time-consuming for instructors to write out; instead, they seek a simple answer (“What did I do wrong?” or “How can I do this better?”), and rubrics allow instructors to put a value on certain aspects such as thesis, organization, transitions, clarity, and so forth. (See Appendices A and B for Response Writing and Pecha Kucha rubrics.)

With their use of blogs, Twitter, Instagram, and Pecha Kucha, students have been able to increase their success in my writing classroom. Furthermore, students demonstrated more positive interaction with other students and increased their participation inside and outside the classroom. Students also continue to demonstrate increased participation and engagement in both student-teacher and student-student interactions.

Growth Through Social Media Implementation

In my classes, I have observed students' enhanced participation in in-class and online discussion. They have also demonstrated increased critical thinking skills through the use of social media tools (personal blogs, Twitter, and Instagram). From the start of the semester to the end of the semester project, students have shown growth in writing in the areas of organization, transitions, and the development of theses as well as the formulation of ideas. At the beginning of the semester, students expressed concerns about the assignment, but by the end of the semester, students' feelings about the assignment changed for the better. Additional responses from students have included, "At first, I thought blogging would be a waste of time, but I found myself putting more thought and detail into writing my blog than papers submitted in class."

As this student suggests, she spent more time working on her response writings than essays for the class. This suggests that not only were critical thinking skills being developed and challenged, but using technology to become more socially and culturally aware encouraged the students to put forth more effort in order to complete the assignment well. Another student reflected on the course assignments in this way: "At first, the Pecha Kucha presentation sounded easy, but I soon learned that it was the hardest presentation that I ever completed. The time and effort that it takes to complete one allowed me to further develop my knowledge in order to do well."

Due to the nature of Pecha Kucha presentations, large amounts of time are needed to complete them. However, since students have done all of the work needed for the presentation in the previous weeks, they need only to further summarize their work in order to create a concise and logical presentation within the allotted time frame. By doing so, students are being challenged to use their

critical thinking skills to find the exact information that is needed to share with others to ensure understanding. Having already practiced summarizing their own work by Tweeting information about their blog, students are now challenged by a time constraint. Keeping their audience in mind helped them focus on what was essential information. Another student remarked, "Writing a blog allowed me to be more aware of my audience rather than writing for my teacher. I found myself writing for not only my peers but also other generations."

Students can become focused on writing for only one audience, their instructor, rather than for multiple audiences. With this assignment, students became aware that there is more than one audience and are able to write to target multiple audiences. In addition to this, students become aware that writing through technology is an integral form of communication that can be shared instantly as well as discussed outside the arena of academia.

Conclusion

With their use of blogs, Twitter, Instagram, and Pecha Kucha, students have been able to increase their success in my writing classroom. Furthermore, students demonstrated more positive interaction with other students and increased their participation inside and outside the classroom. Students also continue to demonstrate increased participation and engagement in both student-teacher and student-student interactions.

The use of social media has provided students the opportunity to become more refined in their writing development, not only in the college classroom but also in an online environment. Furthermore, students learned to communicate both as an individual and as a member of an online community. It is important to remember that with the fast-paced, ever-changing technology that surrounds us, we, as educators, need to create new and exciting ways for students to build critical thinking skills necessary for the collegiate, cultural, and social environments in which they communicate.

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Appendix A

Rubric: Blog							
PROJECT ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION: (Total Points 100)							
Writing Process & Organization – 75 points	5 – Mastery	4 – Proficient	3 – Competent	2 – Ability	1 – Developing	0 – Not Clear	
	Introduction: Well-developed introduction engages the reader and creates interest. Contains detailed background information on selected text. (1x)						
	Thesis: Thesis clearly states a significant and compelling position on theme/genre of the text. (2x)						
	Subject: The writer clearly reflects on specific examples from the text and real-world examples. (2x)						
	Description/Examples: The writer clearly includes sensory details and concrete examples that help the reader understand the writer’s claim. The paper is descriptive and the environment is clearly described. (2x)						
	Organization: There is superior, logical, and cohesive organization of the document. The essay reveals a logical progression of ideas with a clear structure that enhances the thesis. (2x)						
	Transitions: There are superior transitions that lead the reader between paragraphs and thoughts. (2x)						
	Conclusion: The conclusion of the reflection significantly wraps up the author’s thoughts and moves beyond restating the thesis. The conclusion significantly synthesizes the writer’s reasoning. (2x)						
	Sentence Structure: The writing demonstrates superior, smooth, skillful, and coherent thought. Sentences are superior and expressive with varied structure; diction is consistent and words well chosen. (1x)						
Knowledge of Writing Conventions & Style – 25	5 – Mastery	4 – Proficient	3 – Competent	2 – Ability	1 – Developing	0 – Not Clear	
	Grammar/Usage: The writer clearly followed the conventions of usage, punctuation, and spelling in their writing according to the experiences for the chosen genre. Demonstrated mastery writing strategies for editing unintentional divergences in grammar, mechanics and sentence patterns so as to meet the expectations of academic discourse. (2x)						
	Flow: Demonstrated a superior, logical, and effective sequencing of ideas (flow) based on purpose and skillfully linked to theme. (2x)						
	Documentation: The writer practices appropriate means of documenting their work: Minimum 2 direct/indirect quotes properly integrated using MLA style. (1x)						
Total Points Earned							

Appendix A

Rubric: Twitter Feeds and Instagram Post								
PROJECT ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION: (Total Points 50)								
Summary of Blog (Twitter) – 30 points	5 – Mastery	4 – Proficient	3 – Competent	2 – Ability	1 – Developing	0 – Not Clear		
	Summary: Summary of blog meets the minimum requirement of 130 characters or less. (4x)							
	Blog Link: Inclusion of blog link in Tweet. (1x)							
	Instagram Link: Inclusion of Instagram link in Tweet. (1x)							
Relevance of Summary and Original Image (Instagram) – 20 points	5 – Mastery	4 – Proficient	3 – Competent	2 – Ability	1 – Developing	0 – Not Clear		
	Summary: Summary of Tweet meets the minimum requirement of 15 words or less. (2x)							
	Image: Original image (created by student) applies and bears relevance to the blog subject. (1x)							
	Hashtag: Meets the minimum requirement of 5 words or less and directly connects the original image to the tweet and blog posting. (1x)							
Total Points Earned								

Appendix B

Rubric: Pecha Kucha						
PROJECT ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION: (Total Points -100)						
	5 – Mastery	4 – Proficient	3 – Competent	2 – Ability	1 – Developing	0 – Not Clear
Writing Process & Organization – 70 points	Introduction: Well-developed introduction engages the audience and creates interest. Contains detailed background information. (1x)					
	Thesis: Thesis clearly states a position. The speaker’s position is strongly supported with relevant reasons and ample evidence throughout the presentation. (2x)					
	Subject: The speaker clearly reflects and provides evidence to support their claim. (2x)					
	Description/Examples: The speaker clearly includes sensory details and concrete examples that help the audience understand the speaker’s claim. The presentation is descriptive and the environment is clearly described. (2x)					
	Organization: There is superior, logical, and cohesive organization of the presentation. The presentation reveals a logical progression of ideas with a clear structure that enhances the thesis. (2x)					
	Transitions: There are superior transitions that lead the audience between slides/photographs and thoughts. (2x)					
	Conclusion: The conclusion of the presentation significantly wraps up the presentation and moves beyond restating the thesis. The conclusion significantly synthesizes the speaker’s reasoning. (2x)					
	Sentence Structure: The prose demonstrate superior, smooth, skillful, and coherent thought. Sentences are superior and expressive with varied structure; diction is consistent and words well chosen. (1x)					
	Research Tools: Properly cited minimum of 3 sources. (15pts)					
Knowledge of Writing Conventions & Style –30 points	5 – Mastery 4 – Proficient 3 – Competent 2 – Ability 1 – Developing 0 – Not Clear					
	Pecha Kucha Style: The speaker accurately set-up their presentation using Pecha Kucha style (i.e., 20 slides/images at 20 seconds each, etc.). (1x)					
	Grammar/Usage: The speaker clearly followed the conventions of syntax and grammar in their speech according to the experiences for the chosen genre. Demonstrated mastery speaking strategies for editing unintentional divergences in grammar, mechanics and sentence patterns so as to meet the expectations of academic discourse. (2x)					
	Flow: Demonstrated a superior, logical, and effective sequencing of ideas (flow) based on purpose and skillfully linked to theme. (1x)					
Documentation: The speaker practices appropriate means of documenting their work: All photographs (original & borrowed)/minimum of 3 sources accurately cited (alphabetical order) in a Works Cited page. (2x)						
Total Points Earned						