Chapter 10. Sampling Sound, Text, and Praxis: Student and Teacher as Producer in a (Somewhat) Open-Source Course

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This chapter describes the assignment sequence for a soundwriting course focused on remix, framing the role of the composition student and instructor as that of the hip-hop producer and breaking down its praxis into the components of theory, pedagogy, and curricula. Remix is a natural fit with soundwriting because at its start, remix was all about sound. Jamaican dance hall and hip-hop DJs from the 1970s were the first remixers, although the term remix is now used to denote everything from the interactive nature of digital cultural production to the process of writing in the field of composition. In the soundwriting course described in this chapter, students learned how to sample and remix in order to design and produce both new soundwriting texts, as well as with more traditional academic texts. Likewise, the teacher produced the course by sampling open educational resources (OER) in order to design and implement the course's pedagogy, syllabus, readings, and soundwriting assignments.

Remix culture has already been the focus of much theoretical scholarship in composition and rhetoric, as well as more generally in fields like design and cultural studies. However, as I began designing this course, I learned that there is little available on the processes and practices of remix and how these might be applied to pedagogy generally and composition and soundwriting specifically. This fact became clear to me as I prepared to teach this course: Plenty was available if I wanted to teach a graduate level cultural studies course on remix theory; very little was available on how one might go about actually teaching first-year college students to use remix practices as means of multimodal text production.

This chapter aims to help address this gap by providing a sequence of assignments that enable students to apply the strategies of remix to a range of composing tasks, including, of course, soundwriting assignments. For the purposes of this chapter, the term soundwriting refers to writing for sound and about sound. I will detail how Kirby Ferguson's (2016) formula for the practice of remix—copy, transform, and combine—can be used as the basis for student production of audio and alphabetic texts, and how the concept of remix can help students reflect upon and refine their own soundwriting processes.

Remix isn't new to composition scholarship and pedagogy. The concept of remix, most generally, has been examined as a framework for understanding the process of composing in digital environments (Davis et al., 2010; Walker & Cox, 2013;

Williams, 2012). Further, scholars like Mickey Hess (2006) and Martin Courant Rife and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss (2013) have examined how remix complicates traditional notions of plagiarism. Recent research has focused on more practical applications of remix to the classroom. For example, Dustin W. Edwards (2016) worked to "map the many ways that remix writers accomplish their rhetorical goals" (p. 41) by developing a four-part typology of remix. And Abby M. Dubisar et al. (2017) demonstrated how to use remix for the production of feminist rhetorical criticism in a multimodal writing classroom. Despite this work, there still exists a research gap in the field of composition: scholarship focused on remix pedagogy. To help fill this gap, this chapter provides an assignment sequence that exemplifies teaching the remix process in the writing classroom, and specifically, how it can be applied to soundwriting. Below is a description of this assignment sequence.

> **Assignment One: Responding to Sound and Soundwriting.** For this online gateway assignment, students read Greg Tate's (2016) "Why Jazz Will Always Be Relevant" (on music and remix) and listen to a related playlist. They then respond to a writing prompt that includes "embodied" questions that focus on students' feeling about what they listened to, in order to enhance engagement and investment.

> **Assignment Two: Team Presentation of Remix Analysis.** For this collaborative assignment, introducing analytic, remix, and soundwriting strategies, teams write and record a sound presentation or multimodal (sound + video) presentation that provides an analysis of a text that has been remixed. This presentation should identify the texts that were "sampled, transformed and combined," and analyze how remix methods were used to create a new text; it should also examine the purpose and audience of the remix.

> **Assignment Three: Analysis Essay.** Next, students write about a remixed text, relating it to a topic of debate in remix studies. Students produce an academically appropriate essay that "samples, transforms, and combines," primary and secondary sources with their own writing, using remix theory as their analytic framework.

> **Assignment Four: Audio/Video Remix.** Finally, students work in teams to collaboratively produce a remixed sound text, which can include a range of multimodal elements (e.g., sound, video, alphabetic text). For another soundwriting component of the assignment, students will record an audio presentation on the processes they used to plan and produce the remixed text, reflecting on the team's approach to remixing and soundwriting.

I also consider the benefits and challenges of teaching soundwriting as a form of participation in student-relevant, but legally fraught, remix culture. In my audio reflection, I will argue that connecting the practice of soundwriting to remix is ideal for fostering a classroom culture of engagement: Students are affectively invested in the work of the classroom when they write about and produce new sound texts by remixing the cultural texts they are personally invested in outside of the classroom. Essentially, soundwriting, at its best, is a process of remix, per Ferguson's (2016) formula: The soundwriter samples or "copies" a variety of recorded (often copyrighted) sounds and recontextualizes or "transforms" them by combining the sounds with original written then recorded content, which results in an audio remix. But while the process of soundwriting through copying, transforming, and combining found and original content may be technically easier than ever given our rapidly advancing digital ecosystem, teaching and learning it in the classroom is complicated by copyright laws that have not evolved at the same pace.

Assignments & Assignment Sequences

A note about this sequence: Assignments were designed to follow the template developed by the Transparency in Teaching and Learning institute (TILT). This approach to assignment design has been demonstrated to impact student learning and retention via the clear articulation of assignment purpose, task, and evaluative criteria (Winkelmes, 2013).

Assignment One: Responding to Sound & Soundwriting (A Gateway Activity)

You've now read the article "Why Jazz Will Always Be Relevant" by Greg Tate and listened to/viewed the playlist based on some of the artists/songs noted in the article. Now it's time to compose your response!

Your task is to produce an (approximately) 200-word written online response to what you read/heard/watched. Remember, remix is about selections and connections: Your job as the producer of this post is to select a piece (or pieces) of the article and connect them to selections from the related playlist, along with the concept of remix. (You can select keywords or ideas from our remix glossary or any of the other readings we've done to help you make the connection to remix theory.)

You have a choice: You can accomplish this in two different ways:

1. Focus on the article by writing about a story or idea in the reading that really stuck with you—discuss something you found cool or interesting, moving, or even difficult. Why did you connect with this particular part of what the author had to say?

   ◦ You should directly quote (in remix terms, copy & paste) from the article a sentence or two related to the story/idea you select.

   ◦ Try to relate this piece (sample) of the article to at least one of the

    songs or videos in the playlist and to the concept of remix in any way you like.

2. Focus on a song/video by writing about a part (lyric, beat, melody, image, sample) in the playlist that really stuck with you—something you found cool or interesting, moving, or even strange. Why did you "feel" this song or video? What kind of impact did it have on you and why?

    ◦ You should describe (with a sentence or two) sound or image you select.

    ◦ Select and quote a line or two from the article that relates to the song or video and connect all of this to the concept of remix in any way you like.

Playlist (all selections available on YouTube)

- "Jazz (We've Got)" (1991) – A Tribe Called Quest
- "Passing Me By" (1992) – The Pharcyde
- "Bitches Brew (Live)" (1970) – Miles Davis
- "Manage Bitches Brew–Remix" (2007) – Yesterdays New Quintet/Madlib
- "Alright" (2015) – Kendrick Lamar, featuring Terrace Martin
- "Never Catch Me" (2014) – Flying Lotus, featuring Kendrick Lamar (vocals) & Thundercat (bass)

Assignment Two: Remix Analysis: Team Presentation

Task

Production teams will create an audio presentation (i.e., a podcast) or multimodal (video + audio) presentation that provides an analysis of a remixed audio text. This presentation should identify the texts that were "sampled, transformed and combined" and analyze how remix methods were used to create a new text; it should also examine the purpose and audience of the remix.

Group members must individually produce a short, written text that contextualizes and/or analyzes a specific "sample" in the remix.

For this assignment you can:

- Create a brief podcast-like recording in which you describe and analyze the text. Tip: for example, if you are analyzing a song, you can model your recording off of an NPR music review, as long as part of your review includes discussion of how the artist uses remix.

OR

- Create a digital visual/audio text using software tools (such as Keynote or iMovie).

Purpose

For many courses in college, as well as in most professional jobs, you will need to be able to work in teams to conduct analyses and present information clearly and creatively. For this project you will practice analyzing a text and presenting the results of that analysis in an aural or visual presentation.

Criteria for Success

This presentation should

- identify the texts that were sampled and combined in order to create the remix you are analyzing

- analyze how remix methods were used to create a transformed text

- examine the purpose of the remixed text; for example, did the text work to entertain, inform, or subvert norms?

1-Pager Criteria for Success

Each group member must also produce a written 1-pager (at least 250 words) about the remix. This written page can

- contextualize and/or analyze a specific "sample" or textual element used in the remix, OR

- discuss how remix techniques were used to create a new text, OR

- make an argument about the quality of the remix, OR

- describe how the remix challenges artistic or political norms.

Assignment Three: Analysis Essay

Purpose

The study of the humanities often involves producing written analyses of primary texts in a given area of study, using specific analytic frameworks or lenses, in order to make broader arguments about the cultural practices under investigation. In this case, you will be using the remix theories, big ideas, and keywords we've collaboratively compiled and developed to analyze a specific textual example of remix culture and make a claim about the importance of remix.

Skills

Throughout the academic and professional environment, you will need to be able to produce written analyses of many different kinds of texts and present your results in a way that engages your audience. In our network culture, you will often write in a digital environment, which requires that you incorporate multimedia elements into written products. For this project you will practice finding, analyzing, and synthesizing evidence and making a creative argument on the basis of that evidence.

Knowledge

This project will give you the opportunity to put what we've learned about remix terminology (keywords) and theories into practice within the context of a written "academic conversation."

Task

For this assignment you will sample, combine, and remix primary and scholarly sources to explore an example of remix culture. Your remixed

research text should be produced using the analysis of textual examples of remix (known as primary sources) and the synthesis of writing about remix (aka, secondary sources). Your job is to investigate and produce a written analysis of a product that you believe exemplifies remix culture. The purpose of your essay is to explain why this product specifically, or remix culture generally, *matters*.

- First, you will choose a specific *primary* text—a song, video, image. You will then produce a written critical analysis of it, using remix theory as your analytic framework.

- To help you analyze your *primary* source you can reference (sample) as *secondary* sources any of the texts that we've read, viewed, or heard in this course, along with two to three additional texts you find through your own research.

NOTE: Students can work in **teams of two if the final product is digital** and includes embedded images and/or audio/video. *For examples of a model text see "Why Jazz Will Always Be Relevant" (Tate, 2016) and "Remixing Culture and Why the Art of the Mash Up Matters" (Murray, 2015).* (A brief report detailing the roles and work of both producers will also be required for this option.)

Criteria for Success

For this project you should:

- Provide an analysis of a specific remix text, or set of texts.

- Sample and remix primary and secondary sources to inform your analysis.

- Use the remix keywords and theories to establish an analytic lens or framework for your analysis.

- **Use your analysis of the remixed text to answer the question: Why does remix matter?**

- Begin with an introduction that contextualizes and introduces your purpose.

- Provide a central claim about the significance of remix in general, and/or about the text you've analyzed, specifically.

- Use logical organization and structure to paper.

- **Include at least two secondary sources from class readings and two to three appropriate outside sources**.

- Include proper documentation of all outside sources. Follow **MLA or APA citation guidelines for works cited page and in-text citations**.

- Incorporate peer and instructor feedback in the final version.

- Use effective grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax, and other sentence level strategies.

- Include a logical conclusion that raises questions for further study on this topic.

- Write an essay that's at least five to seven pages long, double-spaced (not including works cited page).

If you work with partners, you must:

- Submit a final version in some kind of interactive digital format.
- Include images, video, and or sound.
- Incorporate elements of effective visual design.
- Submit a report detailing the primary roles of each team member, and the work you each completed.

Assignment Four: Audio/Video Remix

Work in teams to collaboratively produce a remix that includes a range of multimodal elements (e.g., sound, images, alphabetic text). Your remix should have some kind of purpose: to entertain, express, subvert, satirize, etc. Tip: Your remixed text can relate in some way to your team's Analysis of Remix.

A one to two-page "producers' statement" should accompany the final cut of each team's remix.

Producers' Statement and Presentation for Multimodal Remix

A 250–500-word "Producers' Statement" should accompany the final cut of each team's remix. This one- to two-page document should:

- Identify the major sources you sampled and remixed (be prepared to discuss and play excerpts from at least **two sources** (songs, movies, visuals, etc.)) that you sampled and remixed.
- Use Ferguson's copy/transform/combine framework to describe how you transformed and combined original texts to create a new remixed product.
- Explain the purpose of your remix, describing its central point and/or intended impact on its audience.

Presenting Your Remix

- Play excerpts of at least two sources that you sampled.
- Play your remix.
- Discuss your process and purpose.

Table 10.1. Remix forms, remix tools, and hardware

Remix Forms	Remix Tools	Hardware
Song	GarageBand	Laptop
Podcast	Fruity Loops	Smartphone
Video	Photoshop	Digital camera
Mixtape	Premiere Pro	Drum machine
Website	iMovie	Sampler
???	InDesign	Turntables
	???	???

Sample Student Projects

1. Sample Assignment One: Responding to Sound & Soundwriting (A Gateway Activity) by Anonymous. A response to "Never Catch Me" by Flying Lotus.[1]
2. Sample Assignment Three: Analysis Essay by Anonymous. A feminist analysis of a YouTube video that remixes Selena Gomez's "Me & My Girls" with scenes from movies.

Reflection

[Hip-hop beat fades into background.]

Justin Young: Hello, and welcome to "Sampling Sound, Text, and Praxis: Student and Teacher as Producer in a (Somewhat) Open-Source Course."[2] I'm Justin Young, Director of English Composition [*music fades out*] and the Writers' Center at Eastern Washington University. During this audio reflection, I'll give listeners a glimpse into my experience teaching a soundwriting course for first-year college students about and designed according to the concept of remix.

[Author-created hip-hop remix of John Coltrane's (1961) "My Favorite Things" fades into background.]

I'll talk about the cultural and pedagogical theories that inform my design and implementation of the class, as well as the specific assignment sequence that serves as the core of the curriculum for the course, how all of this relates to student engagement and integrative learning, as well as the challenges that arose in relation to my effort to promote open-source approaches, which ended up running counter to the culture of sampling that was fostered within the course itself. Finally, I'll be touching on samples of student work from the class, along with my own reflection on the learning experience I shared with my students while teaching the course.

So, you might guess that one of my favorite things is hip-hop. *[Music fades out.]* Ever since middle school, I've loved rap especially the kind with a lot of samples—*[hip-hop song "Plug Tunin' (last Chance to Comprehend)" by De La Soul fades into background]* my favorite album of eighth grade (and one of my favorites to this day) was De La Soul's (1989) *3 Feet High and Rising*, produced by the incomparable Prince Paul, which is universally recognized as a masterpiece of the art of sampling.

[Music plays without voiceover for 30 seconds then fades out.] (Of course, now, as Questlove pointed out, the only rappers that can afford to make hip-hop with

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1. Two student examples (text-based) can be found on the book's companion website.
2. The audio version of Justin Young's reflection can be found on the book's companion website.

samples are Kanye and Jay-Z [Ketchum, 2016], but I digress, though we will have more on that later.)

["My Favorite Things" remix fades in.]

So why am I talking about my favorite things? I want to get this started by briefly discussing how important and effective it is to help students make connections between their favorite things, the things that they love and care about, and whatever is going on in the classroom. Researchers like Melissa Peet, Director of Integrative Learning and Knowledge Management at the University of Michigan, point out that Bloom's taxonomy only focuses on the rational, cognitive components of learning, leaving out entirely any role that affect or emotion, or the body itself, might have in learning something new (Peet et al., 2010). Proponents of integrative learning therefore advocate embodied pedagogies that focus on encouraging students to tell stories and reflect, *[music fades out]* in order to help them make connections between their own interests and passions and the classroom. In fact, additionally, as Christy Price (2010) points out, a teacher's own passion for a subject can have a positive impact on student learning.

So I'm here to tell you that, based on my experience teaching this course, the framework of remix in particular, and soundwriting in general are particularly useful for encouraging and facilitating the kind of embodied, integrative learning I've just described. But before I go any further, I want to take a moment to define and contextualize the term "remix" and how it relates to the soundwriting course I'm discussing.

Let's start with the original meaning of remix, which is all about sound: *["The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel" by Grandmaster Flash (1981) fades in.]* It's a type of music production that developed in a particular historical moment, namely in the Jamaican dance hall scene and then in the Bronx at the birth of hip-hop in the early 1970s as DJs like Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash pioneered the techniques of turntablism (pun intended) using record players to isolate and extend breaks, sampling and remixing the music of others to create new jams and, of course, to keep the party moving.

Remix can also be used to denote a new era of creative production, applicable to many disciplines and industries, marked by a shift from what Lawrence Lessig (2008) calls *[music fades out]* "Read/Only culture" to the current "Read/Write culture" in which previously passive viewers now create original content by sampling and remixing and distributing that content freely online (p. 28). And, of course, the concept of remix is used in comp-rhet to understand and describe the processes of writing and multimodal composing in the digital age.

So why is this framework and topic of remix so useful in promoting the kind of integrative embodied learning I talked about earlier? To put it simply, at its most elemental level, encouraging students to remix, to create texts like a hip-hop producer would, gives them license to start the creative process with material

they care about and build from there, creating new texts using pieces of things they already are invested in.

This seems like a good moment to shift gears and actually talk about the assignment sequence that I'm here to share. For each of these assignments, students are provided specific directions, requiring them to sample existing material in order to create a new text. In other words, students are encouraged to engage in the steps of the remix process, copy, transform, and combine, which Kirby Ferguson (2016) establishes in his video series *Everything Is a Remix*. Additionally, the assignments necessitate the use of this remix formula as a framework for the analysis of remixed texts.

The first assignment, a gateway activity that introduces students to the world of soundwriting, asks them to write about sound by responding to a playlist of songs produced via remix.

The next assignment, the Remix Analysis: Team Presentation, asks students to work in production teams to present in audio form, an analysis of some kind of primarily audio text.

The third project, The Analysis Essay, is a more traditional composition assignment, which frames research-based writing as a process of copying, transforming and combining.

For the final project, the Audio/Visual Remix, students work in teams in order to produce a primarily audio text by remixing other texts. All of these assignments enable the student producer to either write about or produce media based on the stuff they themselves care about.

I learned, however, that this fact, while a strength from the student engagement perspective, was a complicating factor in my effort to design and produce an open-source course. My original goal for the design of this course was that it would be entirely open source—that is, all of the materials used by and produced by students would be freely available and remixable. It quickly became clear that this aim was unrealistic; at least as far as student products were concerned. I was able to provide a course reading list and a music/video playlist out of material that students could access freely online. And I did begin designing the course with an open-source resource Copy This Syllabus (Russo, 2011) as a starting point for the course design, though the model I found was for a graduate course which needed to be adapted for first-year students. A list of readings, songs, and videos I used for the class can be found in the written portion of this chapter.

This commitment to open-source design and production couldn't be maintained, however, when students started producing their own remixes. For one thing, the culture of sampling which still permeates online DIY artistic production and which was fostered by the course itself was counter to an effort to ensure that everything students sampled and remixed came from something like Creative Commons. That is, my open-source ethic ran up against the realities of remix culture. This experience is consistent with how remix proponents like Lessig (2008) and Cory Doctorow (2014) describe the challenge of squaring the

ways in which digital art can be and is produced with our antiquated and corporate-leaning copyright laws. Such scholars argue that current intellectual property law unnecessarily limits creative production. A point that's confirmed by the Questlove comment I mentioned earlier—when only Jay-Z and Kanye can afford to sell albums with samples, there's a problem.

Students did, however, produce remixed texts for my class out of copyrighted material. I would argue that this is fair use, since no one was looking to sell any of these products, and the only major audience for the creations was the class itself. It does pose a challenge for this chapter, though. Just to be safe, I will not be including as sample student texts any of the remixed texts my students created via sampling copyrighted texts. I will briefly describe a few, however.

Student 1 sampled and created a mash-up of "Heroin" by Badflower and "My Boy" by Billie Eilish. She had never done any music production before but managed to learn enough about how to use GarageBand (Apple's entry-level recording software) to combine two songs to create a single remixed song that was moving, as well as musically and thematically coherent.

Student 2 sampled and remixed (what he called) an "Old School" rap and beat by Biggie Smalls with "New Wave" (again, his term) raps and beats, including work by YG and Drake. His idea was to remix a Biggie rap from the song "Juicy" over a current New Wave beat and then transition to current artists like YG and Drake rapping over a beat from the original Biggie song. He wrote in his producer's statement that the remix "came out better than I expected." He continued, writing that "tons of people from the dorms" said that the remix "was really good and I should post it on YouTube," which made him feel like "I went from not knowing anything about how remix is used . . . to making a remix myself that people wanted me to publish."

Student 3 *[student remix described below fades in]* was a more experienced music producer, someone who had done a fair amount of hip-hop production and performance prior to the class. He created his own beats for two recent hip-hop songs, one from Future called "Covered in Money" and another by Young Thug, "NASA." His beats are in fact featured in this audio reflection, as I sampled and chopped parts of his remix that didn't include copyrighted vocals. *[student remix fades out]*

I should mention that for at least two of these students, this kind of audio production was a real stretch of their abilities. As I mentioned above, the student who mashed up the two songs "Heroin" and "My Boy" had never used any audio-production software and yet somehow, over the course of apparently five hours, learned enough about GarageBand to produce a seamless and affecting remix. Another student, as I noted earlier, was surprised by how good his final remix ended up and got peer feedback confirming his success.

For my part, I must note that producing this chapter was a learning experience for me, too. Like my students, in order to produce the very segment that you are listening to now, I had to push myself to try a new kind of composing and producing, learning to use audio software in ways that I never had before. While I've done a fair

amount of music production, along with a couple of local public radio appearances, I'd never produced anything podcast-like, so to speak. Writing and recording in this way was challenging but enjoyable, and it gave me a much better sense of how writing for sound is a unique rhetorical experience. Based on this experience, my plan for the future version of this course is to require students to produce their own audio podcast reflections on the class. While the course sequence, specifically the Remix Analysis Team Presentation assignment, allows for and encourages students to produce spoken audio segments, this is one of two options for the assignment, and most students take the other, which is why there aren't any student samples for that particular assignment in the chapter. In the future, I want to ensure that students gain experience in producing a spoken audio segment, so they will not only write about and produce sound, they will write for sound.

And, finally, *["My Favorite Things" remix fades in]* while I haven't included the audio remixes produced by students using copyrighted material, I have included such a text that I produced. The music that began this program and that you're hearing now includes samples from John Coltrane's (1961) cover of "My Favorite Things." It's my attempt to create a trap version of what Maria sang for the Von Trapp children in *The Sound of Music*. Get it?

Which brings me back to what I believe is a real strength of this class. My experience suggests that the design of the course encouraged embodied, affective learning as students were able to write about and produce new versions of artistic and cultural texts that they wanted to engage with, because those texts mattered to them outside of the classroom. This remixed course enabled them to design and produce new pieces of written and audio texts out by sampling and remixing their own favorite things.

[Music fades out.]

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