# Map Composition Assignment

## Purpose

Maps combine the visual, spatial, and linguistic modes of communication. While they most visibly help us get from Point A to Point B, our readings have also shown that they can inform and persuade, enable better decision-making, and help people see complex information in new ways. But we've also seen that they can reinforce oppressive social structures and marginalize people and their perspectives. In other words, they are a powerful tool of communication that can be used for many purposes. Learning to make a map yourself will help you better understand the decisions made by map-makers so you can learn to read and use maps more critically, question their perspectives, see the values that inform their content, and learn to counteract their influences when they are used to silence or oppress certain viewpoints.

For this assignment, you will learn to make a map that is intended to help solve a problem you identify or improve the lives of people in a particular location. This semester, we're focused on multimodal writing that promotes action, advocacy, and social change. So through this assignment, you'll be creating a map that has action, advocacy, or social change as its goal. Now, just as no single piece of writing can solve a complex problem, neither can a single map. But just like a single piece of writing can *contribute* to solving a problem, so too can a map. So you should see your map as a step toward solving the problem you identify.

## Tasks

As with more traditional writing assignments, you'll complete a series of tasks that will help you move through the assignment. While these tasks are numbered, they are not necessarily linear. You may find yourself moving back and forth among the tasks as you work toward completing the assignment, and your exact process will look different than someone else's based on your own knowledge, strategies, and approaches to the assignment.

### 1. Identify the problem you want to address through creation of a map.

I recommend that you choose something localized or personal to you here so you can effectively compose the map yourself. Your personal observations, perspectives and lived experiences are valid forms of knowledge that can be mapped. Creating a map that draws on those observations will allow you to make that knowledge visible to others.

I also recommend that if an idea isn't immediately coming to mind, spend some time thinking spatially about things you're already interested in and care about. Or consider ways you could use prior research to create a map. See below for some ideas.

### 2. Brainstorm and research.

Before you select a specific mapping approach or technology, spend some time brainstorming what you could put on your map, what the map might look like, and in what context people might use your map.

Conduct preliminary research on the problem and location you've identified, and seek out maps on similar topics to use as inspiration and to help you see what's possible in map-making.

### 3. Determine the technology you'll use and begin creating a draft of your map.

You may choose to create a map using map-specific software or other tools.
Digital map: Lectures in this unit will introduce you to two digital mapping technologies: Google My Maps and ArcGIS StoryMaps. Each technology has different strengths and affordances, so spend some time exploring the examples and tutorials posted in Blackboard before making a decision about which map software to use.

Creative map (digital or analogue): You may choose to create a map using any creative skills and approaches at your disposal (painting, collage, etc.). See the links in Blackboard for examples and inspiration.

Determine the affordances and limitations of your chosen map technology and determine how to use the affordances to your advantage and address or work around the limitations. (I'll help you identify and investigate these in feedback sessions, too.)

### 4. Get feedback.

This unit includes both peer and instructor feedback on drafts.

### 5. Revise, answer the Reflection Questions below, and submit!

# Possible Topics

I list topics here to help you recognize the many ways that maps could be used to address problems. Use this list as inspiration for your own ideas. And if you're stuck, email me so we can brainstorm together!

| Problem | Possible ways to map that problem |
|---|---|
| Healthcare Inequities | • A map proposing locations for installation of outdoor exercise equipment in parks, walking paths, or other health-promoting features<br>• A map of trans-friendly health providers with contact information<br>• A map of free and income-based health services and nearby public transportation options for accessing those services |
| Disability Access | • A map showing accessible and inaccessible locations (entrances, restrooms, etc.) on campus or in another location to help visitors<br>• A map proposing changes to accessibility on campus or in another location to promote infrastructure changes |

| Mental Health | • A map that compares access to mental health resources in rural vs. urban areas or wealthy vs. poorer areas to promote more access in underserved areas |
|---|---|
| Racial Injustice | • A map that documents how systemic racial inequities have impacted Covid-19's spread (see https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/04/16/mapping-racial-inequity-amid-the-spread-of-covid-19/ )<br>• A map of Black-owned businesses in an area<br>• A map showing the history of racial discrimination in housing (see https://mappingprejudice.umn.edu/ ) |
| Student Life | • A map showing key services and transportation options near campus to help new international students transition to the university<br>• A map showing nearby outdoor recreation opportunities (camping, hiking, etc.) to promote physical and mental health |
| Science Education | • A map of birdwatching locations that provides descriptions of species that are likely to be seen at each location<br>• A map of the environmental impacts of a disaster on the people, plants, and animals impacted by the disaster<br>• A map of a local park to help children learn about plants, animals, and other natural features<br>• A map that shows inequitable exposure to environmental contaminants for communities of color (see https://blog.thegovlab.org/post/how-data-can-map-and-make-racial-inequality-more-visible-if-done-responsibly ) |

## Reflection Questions

After you complete your map, you'll answer several reflection questions to help make your process and decisions visible and to think about how you might apply what you've learned about maps beyond this class.

In your reflection, answer all of the following questions.

1. How do you see your map contributing to solving the problem you address in your map? Who might your map help, and what other types of documents and/or actions could accompany the map to help it contribute to solving the problem?
2. What does your map allow you to communicate that you might not be able to communicate as effectively using other modes of communication?
3. What key decisions did you make during the process of composing your map? How did those decisions impact your map?
4. What is the most important revision you made after receiving feedback? Why did you make the revision, and how did it improve your map?
5. Given additional time, knowledge, or technical resources, how would you improve your map?

6. In our daily lives, we most often use maps to get from Point A to Point B. However, now that you've made at least one map, how might you think about maps differently in the future?

7. What other kinds of problems within your major or intended profession might be addressed using maps? Identify at least two problems and explain how maps could be used to communicate about those problems. For ideas, consider what problems people in your major try to solve to improve people's lives and how those problems are tied to specific locations.