

HOW YOU LEARN

A WORKBOOK FOR EXPLORING LEARNING STYLES

Writing & Learning Centre

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For more information and to access online resources, visit our website:
<http://www.ocadu.ca/students/wlc.htm>

INTRO

As artists, designers, and researchers at OCAD University, we look, we listen, we think, and we make. We use doodles, sketches, diagrams, and maps; numbers, sums, equations, and formulae. We build things, break things, and transform one thing into another. And, of course, we work with words. We read, write, translate, claim, question, converse and debate.

These activities are not as simple as they seem. Reading, for example, involves scheduling time to read, focusing and concentrating, encountering new words (and new uses of old ones), taking notes, developing a sense of the “discourse” the text is part of, making sense of the argument it makes, and of course figuring out how it relates to one’s own research and studio work.

As we negotiate the complexity of so many learning modes, we each develop our own approaches to interacting with the world. These approaches often become so habitual that we don’t even notice them. You could go years making notes one way (from the top of the page to the bottom, for example) without realizing the person next to you has a totally different note-taking style (right-to-left, perhaps, or with intricate drawings and charts).

The idea is this: you have particular strengths that not all your peers have, and these strengths can be maximized and developed in imaginative ways. Alternatively, you may have a “weakness” that, in another context, becomes a strength. For example, someone who likes to build things injures herself and begins to draw instead. All of a sudden she’s imagining structures she’s never been able to build. Or, if you think you can’t write but you love to talk, you speak your ideas aloud and have a tutor or a friend write them down. All of a sudden your prose has a sense of “voice” like you never thought it could.

That’s what this book is about. It’s a tool to help you examine the learning styles and strategies you bring to various situations and to imagine new approaches you may not have tried. Use it as a way to think creatively, as a record of your insights and as a way to tell us at the Writing & Learning Centre (WLC) how we can help you at each stage of your process as you invent, plan, discuss, develop and polish your work here at OCAD U.

READ

There are all kinds of readers: slow, fast, those who mark up their texts in colour, those who whisper under their breath, those who stop and reflect often, those who re-read several times...

How we read depends on our reading style but also on what we're reading and why. We might be reading to understand how an author thinks, we might be reading for specific details or we might be reading simply for inspiration.

At university, you often have a lot of pages to get through in limited time. You want to be able to relate these texts to your course, your other readings, your own writing and your studio practice.

How do you find reading challenging?



What helps you read?

- Reading in a quiet place? In a noisy one? In different places?
- Scanning a text before reading for detail?
- Underlining text or scribbling thoughts in the margins?
- Using diagrams in your notes?
- Reading aloud? Using text-to-speech software?



WRITE

There's no single, correct way to write. In fact, every writer has different methods and every text comes together in its own fashion. For example, where does one begin? At the WLC we have students who prefer to start with lots of reading and research, others who do quick sketches and outlines first, and still others who like to just dump ideas on the page and sort it out later.

And in each text we write we use language differently – do we ask questions and attempt answers, make claims and support them, use images to help persuade, use personal experience to establish authority?

Every text has its own purpose and audience, each can be made a number of ways, and each way of writing may suit one writer more than another.

How do you find writing challenging?



What helps you write?

- Dictating to a friend, tutor, or computer transcription program?
- Revising with a partner or tutor?
- Generating lists of words related to your topic?
- Writing from several different perspectives?
- Imitating the style of your favourite author?



LISTEN

From lectures, seminars, group work and critiques to collaborative projects, meetings and casual conversations, we listen all day.

And of course, we don't just have to take in the information; we have to decode, evaluate, agree, disagree, prioritize and finally relate it to our discipline and our course goals.

There are a lot of different strategies we can use to become more engaged, active listeners. Some people need quiet, others prefer a lively environment; some profit from repetition, others from conversation.

How do you find listening challenging?



What helps you listen?

- Asking questions? Asking others to repeat, speak up, speak slower?
 - Drawing, diagramming, and note-taking while listening?
 - Using podcasts and recordings to listen during off hours?
 - Using closed-captioning technology or a signing translator?
 - Chatting informally after lecture? Writing up formal notes after informal discussions?
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SPEAK

As you may have noticed, at OCAD U we are asked to speak a great deal. We ask questions, make requests, offer opinions, argue, concede, nod our heads and roll our eyes.

We've all had those times when we wish we'd had the right argument, the right word or the right manner of speaking, but didn't. And we've all had those little successes when that one question led to a revelation, or that one point changed someone's mind.

It's a lot to negotiate, but the complexity involved in all this informal exchange of knowledge is just as valuable as more formal written and studio assignments.

How do you find speaking challenging?



What helps you speak?

- Rehearsing with a friend or at the WLC?
- Chatting informally over coffee?
- Doing breathing exercises before a presentation?
- Recording yourself and listening back?
- Meeting with your instructor one-on-one to discuss course concepts?



ANALYZE

The word “analyze” comes from the Greek “to loosen” – so to analyze something is kind of like loosening its screws, figuring out how it’s put together and considering how it works and what it does. It means thinking seriously and curiously about an object or idea and asking questions like, What are the effects of this thing? What makes this thing happen? Who does it benefit and who does it harm? What would the world be like without it?

Analysis, then, is actually a type of creative thinking – you probably do it all the time in the studio.



How do you find analysis challenging?

What helps you think analytically?

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- Spending lots of time observing the object of your inquiry?
 - Describing, drawing, and visualizing the object or concept?
 - Answering difficult questions?
 - Looking at something from several perspectives?



FOCUS

A university campus is a hectic environment. We're all pretty busy making work, studying, writing, and just hurrying about trying to keep up. It can be difficult to concentrate on one thing at a time.

At the WLC we see a wide range of factors affecting students' ability to focus. Some need a quiet space, others an uncluttered work surface, and others just need help figuring out what order to do things in. Some students deliberately study in distracting environments in order to practice not getting distracted.

In any case, it's a matter of trying several approaches until you figure out a few tangible ways to help you get the work done.



How do you find focusing challenging?

What helps you focus?

- Breaking down tasks into manageable pieces?
 - Knowing when to take a break?
 - Doing certain kinds of work at certain times of the day?
 - Getting physical exercise?
 - Consulting with your instructor, tutors, or peers about your needs?
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INVENT

Good ideas don't always present themselves, but they're not as mysterious as we sometimes think. Ideas are right here in the world we live in, literally waiting to be found in our bodies, in our language and in the objects around us. It's a matter of travelling several paths and finding what works.

In other words, next time you think you don't have any ideas, consider this: ideas aren't something you have, they're something you do. They come from working, thinking, failing, questioning, processing, resting and trying again.



How do you find inventing challenging?

What helps you invent?

- Imitating others? Doing the opposite?
 - Allowing studio work to influence academics and vice versa?
 - Listing everything you don't know about a topic and using these as questions?
 - Setting random rules and constraints and seeing what happens?
 - Coming up with "bad" ideas just to get started?
 - Returning to a project after time away?
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ORGANIZE

Whether it's juggling five assignments at once, keeping track of your research, or maintaining a tidy enough workspace to stay on top of things, organization makes all the difference in your day to day experience of university.

Everybody's got different tricks for keeping it together, from to-do lists and notes on the backs of hands to elaborate colour-coding systems and smart phones.

Learning what works for you might not happen overnight, but there are lots of practical ways to get started. If you'd like, you can work with someone at the WLC to find new ways of organizing your time and space and to monitor what kinds of effects these strategies might have on your confidence and success.



How do you find organization challenging?

What helps you get organized?

- Using a day timer?
 - Using flowcharts to describe schedules, to-dos or essay structures?
 - Having your tutor e-mail you to-dos at the end of each session?
 - Switching from paper to screen or vice versa?
 - Tidying up your workspace?
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NEXT STEPS

Now that you've given some thought to your own personal learning habits and styles, you're ready to try a few new things. Use this document to keep track of what works and what doesn't. Whenever you need a little perspective on your study, writing, research, studio work, or life on campus, review the above for strategies on how to get things done in a way that works for you.

Again, please feel free to make an appointment with the Writing & Learning Centre or come by during drop-in hours. One of our tutors will be happy to work with you to help develop new learning skills.

COME VISIT US AT:

Room 1510, Level 5
113 McCaul Street
416-977-6000 Ext. 229
wlc@ocadu.ca

RECEPTION HOURS:

Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

DAILY DROP-IN (ROOM 1512):

Monday to Thursday, 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Friday, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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Credits: This book was made with contributions by: Leah Burns, Tina Giovinazzo, Josh Thorpe and Rebecca Smollett. **Designed by:** Marketing & Communications, 2012. **Thanks to:** the Writing & Learning Centre staff for all their help and feedback. **Copyright:** This book is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial No Derivatives License. You are free to share - to copy, distribute, excerpt, and transmit the work but you must attribute this work to the Ontario College of Art and Design Writing & Learning Centre and you may not use this work for commercial purposes.

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