



INCLUDING WRITING IN YOUR COURSE

A Toolkit for OCAD University Faculty

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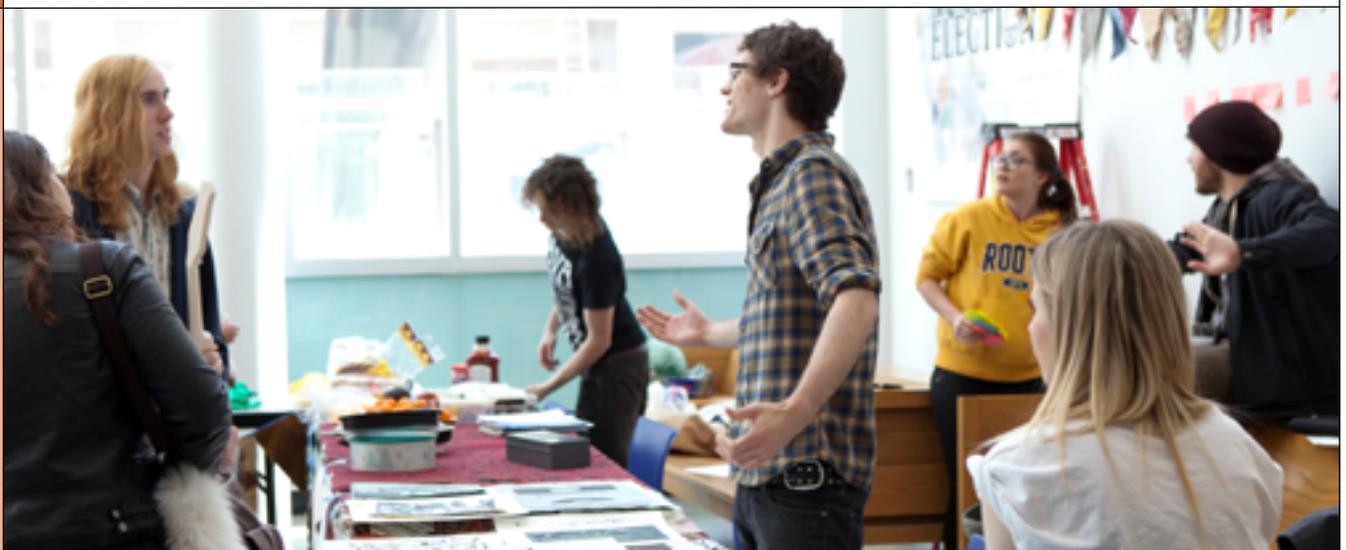
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Cover image: David Griffin. Sketchbook page (mixed media). OCAD University, 2008.

Below: Christina Gopic. Campus Life series, untitled photo. OCAD University, 2012.





Griffith, Angie. WLC Workshop, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

INCLUDING WRITING IN YOUR COURSE: A TOOLKIT FOR FACULTY

“Artists and art students write about art in order to clarify experiences and to account for responses to things that excite or frustrate them. The written response, as does the visual response, demands that we more carefully examine what is before us or within so that we may translate it to a word, image or symbol.” (Haust, 1998, p.29)

When students are provided with frequent opportunities to write, they become better writers. But such opportunities to develop their critical writing skills have additional benefits beyond making them better, more confident, writers.

Writing in art and design education underscores the link between critical thinking, critical viewing and writing skills. Students make connections between art and design theory and their studio work; they become critically-minded thinkers able to articulate their ideas and make these ideas accessible to their peers and instructors; and they develop more self-assured and fluid written expression.

Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty is a resource for instructors at OCAD U who want to integrate more writing into their courses. Those who currently require their students to write will find new ideas and resources to help them further develop their writing pedagogy. Instructors who wish to begin including writing, or more varied types of writing, will find resources to help them get started.

Individual sections of the toolkit may be read in any order. Each section contains extractable resources that can be used as a springboard for instructors to design and evaluate writing assignments.

In context

Writing Across the Curriculum

Current research on writing pedagogy argues that when students engage in writing, they become better at processing knowledge, especially when writing is integrated with other learning activities such as reading and speaking in an active learning environment. Writing is also a contextually-specific activity. Students' written literacy improves when writing takes place in discipline-specific learning situations.

The implications of the research suggest that, while there are basic skills and strategies to be learned in a first-year writing or composition course, students are better served by a writing curriculum that is embedded throughout their undergraduate studies in order to reinforce other kinds of learning, and is integrated with the learning they do in discipline-specific contexts.

This approach is known as "Writing Across the Curriculum." In art and design education, a well-expressed writing curriculum will also emphasize the relationship between writing as a process (requiring reflection, making in stages, critical feedback, etc.) and creative practice, with specific emphasis given to the ways that low-stakes and unassessed writing activities can enrich studio learning.

Writing to Learn

One approach to Writing Across the Curriculum is known as "Writing to Learn." The Writing to Learn school of argument values writing as a method that helps students to work through concepts and apply what they learn. Moreover, when students are given opportunities to write on a regular basis, ease with writing as a means of expression increases.

Given its emphasis on process and regularity, Writing to Learn activities usually take the form of low-stakes or unassessed writing incorporated into day-to-day teaching. Low-stakes activities typically involve writing assignments that are assessed, often just for completion, but that are not evaluated according to explicit disciplinary criteria. Such assignments include, for example, journals, reading-response exercises, take-home class preparation assignments and learning logs.

“Integrating writing into the Art and Design curriculum allows instructors to play a vital role in nurturing students’ ability to articulate their artistic processes and outcomes, their knowledge of art and design history and theory, and their own contributions as art and design practitioners.”

Unassessed activities are typically informal and exploratory, encouraging students to write as part of their analytical or creative thought process. They are often built into an instructional strategy in an active learning environment, for example, a free-writing exercise that asks students to brainstorm ideas or concepts in writing before sharing them in a group discussion. These activities are effective because students respond well to writing activities when they are not concerned about written fluency or grammatical correctness.

Writing in the Disciplines

"Writing in the Disciplines" is another approach to Writing Across the Curriculum in which, as with Writing to Learn, the emphasis is on giving students more opportunities to write, not only because students improve through repeated practice, but also because they improve as a result of formative instructor feedback that identifies writing strengths and weaknesses early on and adjusts teaching strategies and learning activities to address them.

A writing assignment that includes formative assessment might, for example, be broken down into a multi-stage process of drafting and revising with instruction and feedback offered at different stages (staged writing), or one that breaks complicated tasks and content into manageable parts of gradually increasing complexity, building a scaffold from one component to the next (scaffolded writing).

What does writing do in an art and design context?

Haust (1998) argues that visual art and design on the one hand, and writing on the other, should not be treated as separate endeavours, but rather as intersecting modes of self-expression. A sculpture, a wallpaper design, and a piece of writing may all stage an argument, provide citation, channel critical theory, respond to other artworks or scholarship, and so on. As Haust proposes, “As each form of expression complements and enriches the other, students develop a richer and more extensive vocabulary to learn, know, and express themselves as artists and scholars” (1998, p. 35).

Integrating writing into the Art and Design curriculum allows instructors to play a vital role in nurturing students’ ability to articulate their artistic processes and outcomes, their knowledge of art and design history and theory, and their own contributions as art and design practitioners.

Thinking ahead to students’ lives and careers after graduation, instructors may readily agree that graduates will need to be able to articulate themselves in writing as part of their future careers. Therefore, writing must be a key part of their undergraduate educati

Further reading and resources

Bean, J. C. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor’s guide to integrating writing, critical thinking and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Haust, B. (1998). Writing experiences across the Art Department curriculum. *Writing Across the Curriculum* 9, 29-35.

McLeod, S. (2000). Writing Across the Curriculum: An introduction. In McLeod, S., & Soven, M. (Eds.), *Writing Across the Curriculum: A guide to developing programs* (1-8). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Zissner, W. (1988). *Writing to learn*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Using this Guide

The toolkit is meant to be a resource guide for your use. Read it from beginning to end, skim, use only the sections you need, or just pick and choose the sample materials you need—there are no rules for how you choose to use the guide.

Each chapter of the toolkit is intended to guide course instructors practically in different aspects of the design of a writing curriculum, from writing learning outcomes to designing effective writing assignments, developing rubrics and providing students with feedback on their writing.

Each chapter also contains an “In context” section for those who would like a synopsis of the theory and research on the topic of the section, as well as references for further reading. Text boxes provide bullet-point summaries of key concepts and strategies.

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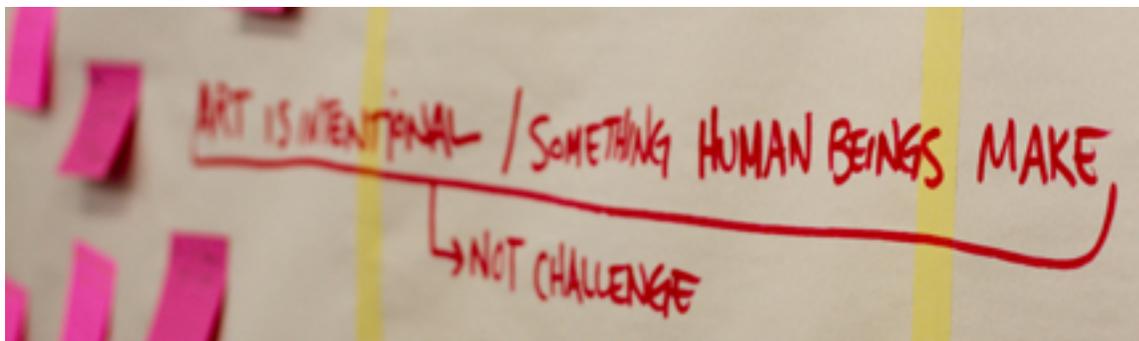
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Griffith, Angie. WLC Workshop, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

SETTING WRITING GOALS FOR YOUR STUDENTS

“The creation of a writing environment throughout campus [...] means campus-wide recognition that writing is central to students’ intellectual development and to their success in the wider world. It also means that writing is visible, understood, and accepted as a valuable tool for teaching and learning across the disciplines.” (Barnet & Rosen, 1999, p. 1)

Research in writing studies demonstrates that, for undergraduate students to become proficient writers for university, they require a writing curriculum that is both sustained throughout their undergraduate careers and integrated into their discipline-specific learning. To put it another way, learning how to write becomes more meaningful for them and they are able to invest more in it when it’s part of the learning they do in their programs. Moreover, it takes time for students to master ways of writing in very specific disciplinary or professional situations.

A sustained writing curriculum integrated into their program of study requires having program-level learning outcomes for developing students’ writing abilities, such that students are guided through the knowledge, skills and values they need to master, building from one course to another, as they progress through their undergraduate degrees.

So how, as a course instructor, do you set appropriate goals for students in your course? How will you know what’s appropriate to your context or to the year level of your course? What knowledge and skills can you assume students have learned in earlier courses and how can you prepare them for courses that follow?

In this section, we will consider how to set goals for students that are writing-specific and benchmarked to the level of complexity you should be expecting them to achieve, as well as how to express these goals as learning outcomes. We will also consider how to align your learning outcomes with teaching and learning activities and assignments in your course.

In context

When art and design undergraduate students have well-developed writing and oral communication skills, they are enabled to accomplish a variety of professional and disciplinary goals: applying to and entering graduate programs, applying for grants and arts funding opportunities, marketing their knowledge and skills, applying for jobs, and communicating professionally with colleagues.

“when students engage in writing, they become better at cognitively complex processes such as critical, abstract thinking, especially when writing is integrated with other learning activities such as reading and speaking in an active learning environment.”

They also become engaged and articulate global citizens. Earning a university degree means, in addition to acquiring very specific skill sets and knowledge, developing abstract conceptual, critical and theoretical abilities that inform their practice.

The evidence in current research on writing pedagogy demonstrates that writing supports and enriches the development of abstract conceptual, critical and theoretical abilities; when students engage in writing, they become better at cognitively complex processes such as critical, abstract thinking, especially when writing is integrated with other learning activities such as reading and speaking in an active learning environment.

Research also suggests that it takes time for students to acquire professional and disciplinary written and oral communication skills and that written literacy improves when writing takes place in discipline-specific learning situations. Thus, while there are basic skills and strategies to be learned in a first-year writing or composition course, students are better served by a writing curriculum that is embedded throughout their undergraduate studies and integrated with

the learning they do in discipline-specific contexts.

OCAD University’s *Framework for undergraduate writing competency* (2014) is a set of institutional standards that make explicit what students need to achieve to produce university-level writing. They articulate in clear and comprehensive language the goals that students need to be able to meet in order to become proficient writers. In the *Framework*, these goals are expressed as learning outcomes; that is, what students should be able to do vis-à-vis writing knowledge and skills by the end of their undergraduate program.

OCAD University has defined Undergraduate Degree-level Expectations (UDLEs) universal to all programs in the curriculum. The UDLEs are modeled on a provincial standard set by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), and they articulate broadly defined expectations for all three undergraduate degrees at OCAD University (BA, BFA and BDes).

The UDLEs are designed to help faculty engaged in program development to write program outcomes, that is, the attributes that graduates in the program will have achieved by the end of their degree. Program outcomes are used in turn to help faculty in the development of course-level outcomes, such that the specific content taught within the course can be understood in relation to an entire program of study. The learning outcomes of each course build on each other and work together to help students achieve program-level learning outcomes.

Well-written course-level learning outcomes will, in turn, help instructors to align their expectations for students with instructional strategies and learning activities. Outcomes must also be measurable in student assessments.

The learning outcomes in the *Framework for undergraduate writing competency* provide more specificity and context for the UDLEs, with particular emphasis on the methodologies and application of knowledge, and communication skills. They are intended to supplement the interpretation of the UDLEs in the development of program outcomes and particularly in the development of writing-specific curricula.

References and further reading

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Final report of the taskforce on writing across the curriculum. (2014). Toronto, ON: OCAD University.

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*Note that several sections below have been revised and reproduced from the OCAD U *Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency*.

What are learning outcomes?

Learning outcomes are statements that describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students will develop as a result of a learning experience. The learning experience or process can be anything, from a single assignment to an entire degree. Most commonly, however, learning outcomes are used in a course outline to communicate to students what they will be expected to be able to do by the end of the course.

In general, learning outcomes encourage course instructors to take a long view of their courses. Learning outcomes are a good way to begin thinking about your goals for a course: they make your goals more specific and concrete, focusing on actions and skills, and articulating what students will be able to do with the knowledge, skills and values they learn rather than what the course instructor intends to do or cover.

There are three key parts of a well-designed learning outcome (Mager, 1984):

- the statement uses a measurable verb;
- indications are provided of the conditions under which the outcome will be achieved;
- criteria for assessment and evaluation are identified.

At the course level, learning outcomes begin with a statement that identifies what students will be able to do with the knowledge and skills they will have acquired by the end of the course: e.g., “By the end of this course, students will be able to...” Similarly, at the assignment level, learning outcomes indicate what students will learn through the completion of the assignment, or what aspects of learning are being measured: e.g., “By completing this assignment, you will be able to...” or “When completing this assignment, you must demonstrate the following...” A bullet list of verb-driven statements will then help students to understand clearly what they need to accomplish.

Constructive course alignment

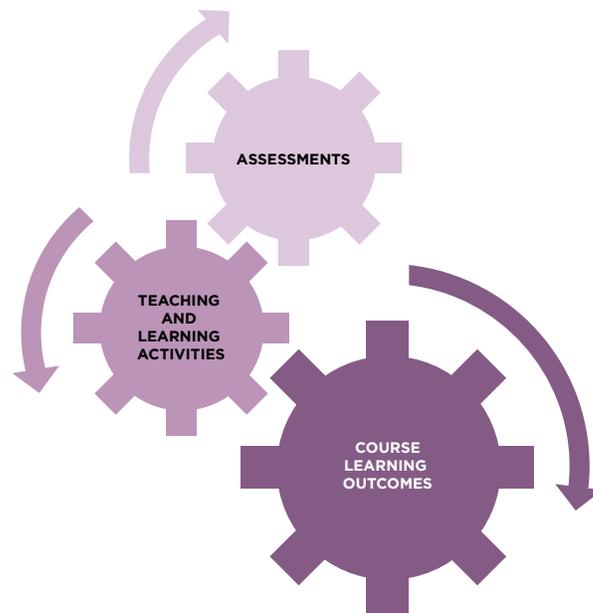
When building your course, it's important to align your learning outcomes with teaching and learning activities and assignments. You can set goals for your students by including learning outcomes in your course syllabus and assignments, but you also need to think about what you're going to do with your students to help them get there (teaching activities), what opportunities you're going to give them to help them practice their learning (learning activities) and how you'll be able to tell when they've met the goals (assignments).

Benefits to writing learning outcomes

Setting learning outcomes for a course helps:

- instructors align instructional strategies, learning activities and assessment measures to help students achieve the intended outcomes;
- students understand what is expected of them and the purpose of the course in their degree program;
- colleagues understand how their course might fit into the fabric of the curriculum;
- employers and other stakeholders understand how our students are being educated.

The dynamic relationship between learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assignments is known in teaching scholarship as constructive course alignment (Blumber 2009). In this model, learning is focused not on the course content but on what students will be able to do with their acquired knowledge by the end of the course. As such, it is a “learner-centred” approach.



Meyers and Nulty (2009) identify five characteristics of well-written learning outcomes for instructors. They argue course instructors need to provide learning experiences that:

1. are authentic, real-world and relevant;
2. are constructive, sequential and interlinked;
3. require students to use and engage with progressively higher order cognitive processes;
4. are all aligned with each other and the desired learning outcomes; and
5. provide challenge, interest and motivation to learn.

Characteristics of well-written learning outcomes

Good learning outcomes:

- use verbs to define what a student should *know* and realistically *be able to do* following engagement over time with a specific set of structured learning experiences;
- outline the *standards, conditions* and *terms* which must be met by students and specify the *degree of sophistication* in learning intended for students;
- focus on *observable, measurable* behaviours (what a student writes, does, or says) that can be used to gauge students’ successful achievement of learning objectives;
- address students’ prior or future knowledge.

Writing effective learning outcomes

As noted earlier, good learning outcomes will use active verbs to indicate what students will have achieved as a result of the learning process, and will indicate very specifically how such achievement will be met.

The following is a useful formula for creating learning outcomes for your course or assignment.

How to write a learning outcome

SWiBAT (Student Will Be Able To) + Active Verb (shows continued or progressive action) + Condition (as a result of) + Measurement (as measured by or as demonstrated by...) + When (at what timeline).

Example 1: By the end of this course, students will be able to explain and apply the principles of colour psychology to the process of picture building in the completion of a studio project.

Example 2: By completing this assignment, you will be able to identify and categorize the elements and principles of design in both vernacular and graphic design in a process journal and in oral critique.

Identifying learning outcomes for writing

The writing that students produce is not, by itself, a learning outcome. It is the result of a process that takes place in very particular learning contexts.

When we say that we want our students to become proficient writers for university, what we mean is that we want them to have mastered a range of knowledge and skills, some of which we associate conventionally with the writing process itself, such as good grammar and effective style, but some of which are connected to their ability to engage critically with discipline-specific subject matter and to communicate using very specific conventions of written communication.



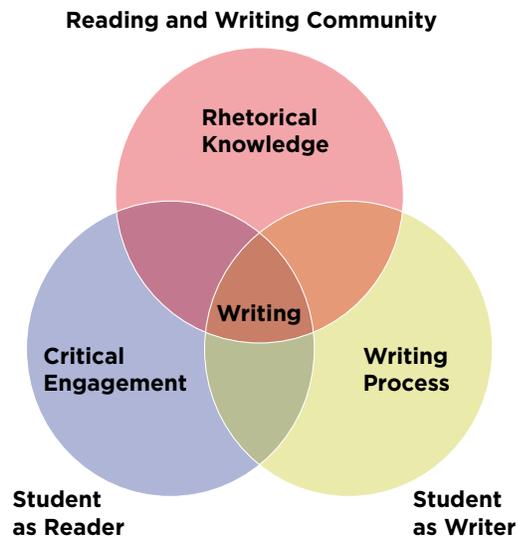
Griffith, Angie. FCDC TA Training Workshop, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

Effective writing therefore requires the integration of several learning outcomes, some of which may not, on their own, lead to writing—such as developing research skills or thinking critically—but which are nevertheless integral to university writing.

In OCAD University's *Framework for undergraduate writing competency*, these outcomes have been narrowed into three categories:

1. Rhetorical Knowledge
2. Critical Engagement
3. Writing Process

Students need to develop proficiency in all of these categories in order to become effective writers.



Rhetorical knowledge

“Rhetorical knowledge” refers to the student’s awareness of the reading and writing community within which their own activity is situated.

A rhetorically aware student considers:

- Why am I writing? For myself or for others?
- Who am I trying to reach? Peers? Employers? Potential patrons?
- How casual or formal should I be?
- What have others said? How have they approached it?
- Is this the best structure or style to use for my purpose?

Critical engagement

“Critical engagement” refers to the student’s ability to initiate and self-direct inquiry in the process of engaging with and producing new knowledge, and to use a range of analytical strategies that are sometimes encapsulated by the related terms “critical reading” and “critical thinking.” The critically engaged student does not assume that knowledge acquisition is unidirectional and automatic, flowing from the source to the student, but rather understands that knowledge is a discourse or interaction. When engaging with a text, object or idea, a critically engaged student considers:

- How does this text, object or idea do what it does?
- What are its individual parts?
- How do the parts work together to accomplish its purpose?
- Why does this text, object or idea use the materials, styles or media it does?
- How do those affect my understanding or reading?

Writing process

“Writing process” refers to the student’s awareness that writing is a process rather than a product (the act of writing an essay versus the essay itself), that the process requires the use of a variety of tools and strategies to produce the result, and that the student is the agent of this process. A writer does not simply set words down on paper; a writer generates ideas, maps concepts, plans, drafts, revises and edits. A student with an awareness of writing process might:

- use free-writing (i.e., short brainstorming or free association writing exercises) as a tool to discover potential research directions or ideas for their creative process;
- draft a paper several times before it begins to take shape;
- use a whiteboard and post-it notes to help them organize their work.

Benchmarking your learning outcomes

The learning outcomes for writing set out in *The Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency* describe what students must achieve to become proficient writers for university. They are also organized into three levels of proficiency or benchmarks that reflect the level of mastery a student has achieved of any specific competency.

The levels have been developed according to two criteria:

1. complexity of cognitive process; and
2. degree of independence demonstrated by the student.

The learning outcomes are benchmarked from lower-order learning activities (recalling, identifying, describing) to more sophisticated activities (analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, creating).

Beginner

At a beginner level, students are expected to *learn, recognize, identify and define* information with frequent and explicit guidance from the instructor.

Intermediate

At an intermediate level, students are expected to *analyze, evaluate, apply and synthesize* information with some guidance from the instructor. Instructional scaffolding provides students with a framework within which they feel comfortable working independently.

Advanced

At an advanced level, students are expected to *understand, analyze, evaluate and synthesize* information independently. The instructor provides occasional guidance and advice.

The levels will not necessarily correspond to year levels in the curriculum since students are typically expected to engage with a range of learning activities at all year levels requiring both lower and higher order skills.

Proficiency is therefore also determined by the degree to which the student is able to achieve the outcome independently, or, conversely, the degree of guidance the instructor is required to provide. The degree of guidance might include, for example, how a learning activity is introduced and explained, how students are guided through the process and how much formative assessment they receive.

You can use the learning outcomes of the *Framework* when developing your own learning outcomes for your course or for an assignment. No single course or assignment will address all of the learning outcomes in the *Framework*; quite the opposite, only a few will be relevant or possible to address. You will have to decide what's most appropriate for your students and what level of complexity should they be attaining.

The following sections of *Including writing in your course* will focus on the variety of in-class activities and assignments you can use in your classes to help students achieve the learning goals to become competent writers.

In appendix

Standards for Undergraduate Writing Competency

STANDARDS FOR UNDERGRADUATE WRITING

Rhetorical Knowledge The ability to analyze and act on an understanding of the audience, purpose and context of writing.	rhetorical situation
	conventions of writing
	modes of writing
Critical Engagement The ability to gather information about and analyze a situation, text or object, and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.	critical inquiry
	information needs
	analysis
Writing Process The ability to identify, select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for writing.	research
	use of sources
	writing and editing



RHETORICAL KNOWLEDGE:

The ability to analyze and act on an understanding of the audience, purpose and context of writing.



By the end of an undergraduate degree, students should be able to:

	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
<p style="text-align: center;">rhetorical situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain who is writing, to what audience and for what purpose, and be able to attend to broader contexts such as the historical or social; • analyze and evaluate contextual information, and reflect that understanding in their own writing; • situate their own production of knowledge in relation to received information by the appropriate use and citation of primary and secondary sources; 	recall and describe aspects of rhetorical situation, and respond with guidance to audience, purpose and context using conventions of language and style appropriate to the situation;	explain and evaluate rhetorical situation, and engage with audience, purpose and context appropriate to the situation with some guidance;	act independently to evaluate rhetorical situation and apply an understanding of audience, purpose and context;
<p style="text-align: center;">conventions of writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe and analyze conventions of writing such as language and style, and apply their understanding in a manner appropriate to the rhetorical situation (audience and purpose); • recognize, analyze and apply discipline-specific conventions of writing such as terminology, structure, use of sources and citation style; 	recall and describe discipline-specific conventions of writing such as terminology, structure and appropriate use of sources and begin to apply their understanding with guidance;	apply discipline-specific conventions of writing with some guidance;	evaluate discipline-specific terminology, and act independently to select and apply elements of structure, source use and citation style;
<p style="text-align: center;">modes of writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe and analyze different modes of writing (creative, narrative, descriptive, expository and persuasive), and synthesize and apply knowledge of different modes in their own writing. 	recall and describe the difference between modes of writing, and demonstrate proficiency in at least one mode such as description or exposition.	analyze and evaluate strategies of different modes and conventions of writing, and demonstrate proficiency in more than one mode.	synthesize the strategies of different modes and conventions of writing independently and fluidly in the creation of original written work.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT:

The ability to gather information about and analyze a situation, text or object, and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.



By the end of an undergraduate degree, students should be able to:

	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
critical inquiry	begin to self-direct inquiry into, and recall and describe discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study;	begin to initiate and self-direct inquiry into, and begin to evaluate discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study;	work independently to identify, evaluate and synthesize discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiate and self-direct inquiry in discipline-specific contexts; • demonstrate a comprehension of written and non-written texts, especially those specific to their discipline; 			
information needs	identify their information needs for a particular purpose and act on those needs with guidance;	identify their information needs for a particular purpose, act on those needs and begin to evaluate with some guidance the information gathered;	work independently to gather and evaluate information appropriate to their needs, and describe criteria used to make information decisions and choices;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify their information needs for a specific purpose, whether written or non-written, and combine existing information with original thought, experimentation and analysis to produce new information; 			
analysis	identify and describe formal features in the analysis of a situation, text or object, and begin to apply that knowledge in oral, visual and written expression with guidance.	analyze and evaluate formal features in the analysis of a situation, text or object, and apply that knowledge with some guidance.	work independently to analyze a situation, text or object, and synthesize their results in the creation of new knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe and evaluate formal features in the analysis of situations, texts or objects in a variety of written and non-written media; • analyze and synthesize their observations in oral, visual and written expression. 			

WRITING PROCESS:

The ability to identify, select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for writing.



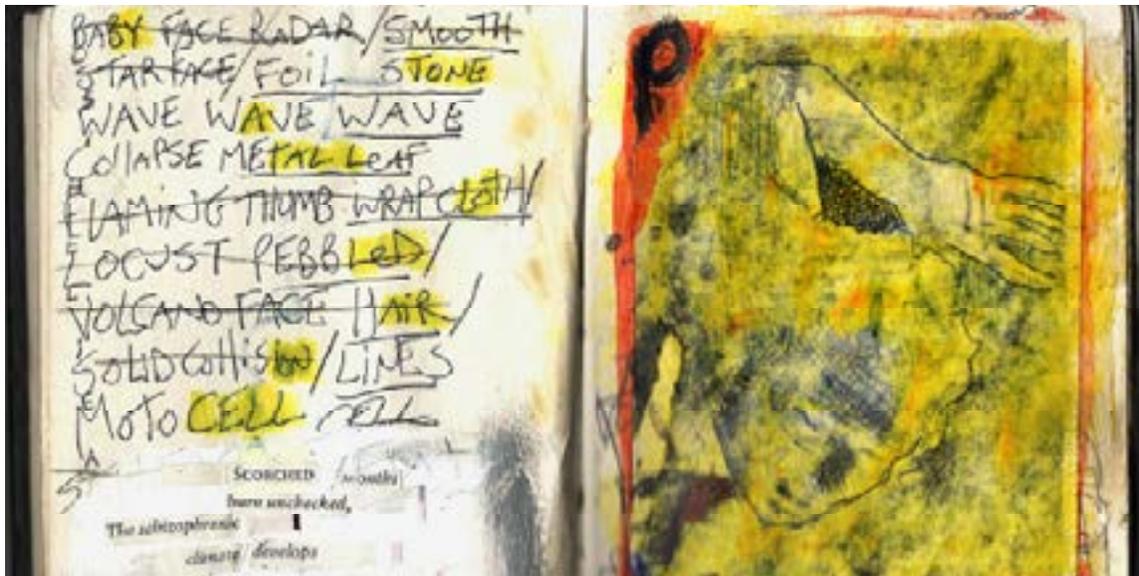
By the end of an undergraduate degree, students should be able to:

	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
research	select a research topic from among a range of choices and, with guidance, use selected information-gathering tools to conduct research;	identify a research topic and select from a range of information-gathering tools to conduct research with limited guidance;	identify and research a topic independently, and explain the criteria used to select from a range of information-gathering tools;
use of sources	quote, paraphrase, summarize and cite primary and secondary sources with guidance;	quote, paraphrase, summarize and cite primary and secondary sources with some guidance;	demonstrate competence in the abstraction and use of information from primary and secondary sources;
writing and editing	recall and describe tools and strategies for the process of writing, from generating ideas to drafting, revising and editing, and begin to select and apply those strategies with guidance.	select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for the process of writing with some guidance.	select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for the process of writing independently.

- use a variety of information-gathering tools, including library databases, to identify and research topics;
- select and evaluate primary and secondary sources, including textual and non-textual sources in a variety of media, as appropriate to the purpose of writing;

- incorporate and respond to ideas in other texts using quotation, paraphrase and summary;

- identify and apply appropriate tools and strategies for generating ideas, planning and organizing writing;
- select and synthesize conventions of different writing modes in their own writing;
- complete writing assignments through a process of drafting and revision;
- edit their own writing for correctness of grammar and style.



David Griffin. Sketchbook page (mixed media). OCAD University, 2008.

LOW-STAKES WRITING

“The evidence from research and instructor testimony seems irrefutable: exploratory writing, focusing on the process rather than the product of thinking, deepens most students’ engagement with course material while enhancing learning and developing critical thinking.” (Bean, 2004, p. 144)

Low-stakes writing assignments are routine writing activities integrated into day-to-day teaching or used as take-home preparation or review exercises. They provide opportunities for students to generate and develop their own concepts and to work through concepts and theories they have learned.

In contrast to high-stakes writing assignments, which are formal writing exercises completed outside of class time, low-stakes writing may consist of assignments worth small parts of the final grade. In fact, low-stakes writing does not have to be assessed at all. These assignments may be completed during class time or outside class time.

In this section, we will examine the benefits of low-stakes writing for students. We will also consider some strategies for assigning and assessing low-stakes writing activities in and outside of class.

In context

Low-stakes writing activities typically involve writing assignments that are assessed, often just for completion, but that are usually not evaluated according to explicit disciplinary criteria. Such assignments include, for example, journals, reading responses, free writing, brainstorming exercises, think pieces, take-home class preparation assignments and learning logs.

Low-stakes exercises allow course instructors to embed writing assignments into their courses without greatly increasing workload by adding labour-intensive grading. While students benefit from feedback that engages with their writing, such feedback can be given flexibly, even informally through dialogue or class discussion. In fact, research in writing pedagogy has demonstrated that informal and multidimensional responses to student writing often provide richer contexts for improving literacy than more formal letter and number grading systems (Tschudi, 1997).

The lowest-stakes assignments are not assessed at all. Unassessed activities are typically informal and exploratory, encouraging students to write as part of their analytical or creative thought process and are often built into an instructional strategy in the active learning environment, for example, a free-writing exercise that asks students to brainstorm ideas or concepts in writing before sharing them in a group discussion.

These activities are effective because students respond well to writing activities when they are not concerned about written fluency or grammatical correctness. This is especially true of second-language writers, who benefit most when low-stakes writing activities are integrated with other skills such as reading and speaking (Hall & Navarro, 2011).

Elbow (1997) notes that frequent in-class writing exercises encourage students to keep up with their readings and be more active and engaged learners. Once the expectation is established that writing will be a key part of students' work within a course, they are more likely to ready themselves for this writing by preparing carefully for class and finishing all assigned readings. Elbow notes that predictability is a key component in the success of integrating low-stakes writing. Students should arrive in class with the ex-

pectation that they will write (although they may not necessarily know the kind of writing they will do on any given day).

If writing is produced during class time (even if evaluated on a complete/incomplete basis), there may be a corresponding improvement in class attendance since in-class writing by definition cannot be completed outside of class time. Low-stakes writing assignments can also be designed so that the

“Low-stakes writing can also improve students’ sense of investment in their learning and can foster greater collegiality in the classroom environment. Rather than feeling that what they take away from the course has been predetermined by the instructor, students may have a greater sense that they are participating in a shared production of knowledge.”

writing takes place outside of class time (for example, students may produce an answer to a set question to be discussed at a follow-up class, or post their answer to a course blog or discussion board).

Even if students complete low-stakes writing on their own time, such writing serves a similar function to writing completed in class: it increases student engagement with course material and concepts; in studio education, it emphasizes the intersections between making, critical thinking and linguistic self-expression; it creates opportunities for students to gain confidence in their ability to articulate their ideas in advance of any major projects involving writing that may be a component of the course. Students may be willing to take greater critical risks in low-stakes writing, allowing them to explore ideas, concepts and approaches that might be outside of their usual comfort zone.

Low-stakes writing can also improve students' sense of investment in their learning and can foster greater collegiality in the classroom environment. Rather than feeling that what they take away from the course has been predetermined by the instructor, students may have a greater sense that they are participating in a shared production of knowledge. When students are given the chance to share their insights after their writing exercises are completed, they develop an even greater sense of the plural and participatory nature of knowledge creation.

Elbow argues that low-stakes writing “improves the quality of students’ high-stakes writing.” (1997, p. 7) One simple reason for such improvement is that students who write more frequently become more adept at expressing their ideas and interpretations with confidence and clarity. Finding language to express their ideas, insights and interpretations can empower students to become better writers for high-stakes assignments.

Instructors can help students understand the purpose of low-stakes writing by making explicit connections between critical thinking and writing skills and between low-stakes and high-stakes writing. When students understand the pedagogic reasons behind frequent low-stakes writing, they are likely to invest in the process and see it as something designed to benefit them as artists and designers in training, who will be called upon—both as students and as professionals in their fields—to communicate in multiple forms, and in both visual and written language.

Elbow suggests that short spurts of writing can be included at different points in class: 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class allows students to make connections to a preceding class or to any assigned reading that will be taken up that day; 5-10 minutes mid-class may break up a long or demanding class and give students an opportunity to wrestle with a critical or interpretive problem; finally, 5-10 minutes towards the end of class allows students to respond to the content or readings covered in class, and may also allow them to identify questions or problems to address in the next class meeting.

Haust argues that writing about art, whether about the process of creating art or about the finished piece of work, is another point of access to producing, understanding, analysing and engaging with artworks: “first, write about creation as a visual language

and the primary means of communication; second, write reflective sketchbook journals that combine words and images; third, write reflective free writing in preparation for thematic or critical discussion; and fourth, write responses to works of art” (1998, p.32). This combination of informal (“reflective,” “preparatory” work) and more formal (“responses to works of art”) modes of writing offers students opportunities to make explicit connections between writing as process (“writing to learn”) and writing as outcome (writing to demonstrate knowledge or mastery of a topic).

References and further reading

- Bean, J. C. (1996). *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- Hall, J., & Navarro, N. (2011). Lessons for WAC/WID from language learning research: Multicompetence, register acquisition, and the college writing student. *Across the Disciplines* 8, 4.
- Haust, B. (1998). Writing experiences across the Art Department curriculum. *Writing Across the Curriculum* 9, 29-35.
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Why assign low-stakes writing?

Students learn more and retain more when they move from being passive receivers to active producers of their own ideas, interpretations and analyses of course material. Writing their way through course concepts, readings and critical debates helps students develop and articulate their understanding of course material and their ability to apply and demonstrate their knowledge.

Low-stakes and unassessed writing assignments are highly effective in studio learning not only because they can help students to develop and work through their ideas, but also because studio learning, which emphasizes creativity, process, peer-to-peer dialogue and critique, is a great way for students to develop their understanding and practice of writing as process.

Key differences	
<p>High-stakes writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal assessment • Grade is often worth a large percentage of the final mark • Focuses on outcome rather than on process • Usually completed outside of class 	<p>Low-stakes writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal assessment • Often upgraded or evaluated on a complete/incomplete basis • Focuses on process rather than outcome • May be completed in class or outside of class

Evaluating low-stakes writing

Low-stakes writing may be evaluated on a complete/incomplete basis or on a simple scale that requires a minimal investment of grading time on the part of the instructor or TA (e.g., 1/5=incomplete; 2/5=unsatisfactory; 3/5=satisfactory; 4/5=very good; 5/5=excellent). Even such cursory grading if returned early in the term may give students an indication that they should seek additional guidance in order to better prepare for high-stakes writing later in the term or in other courses.

Low-stakes writing does not require that you provide detailed feedback. Instead, you may prefer to give holistic feedback to the entire class, responding to the broad trends in the class rather than to individual strengths and weaknesses. Even a cursory check mark on the page may be enough. It may be hard to not give in to the desire to identify errors and offer critical feedback on students' work, but remember that low-stakes writing activities are meant to be generative.

Another option for evaluating low-stakes writing completed during class is to devote a portion of the class time to a peer feedback exercise in which students respond to each other's writing. Here, the emphasis is not on assigning a grade but rather on opening up the ideas expressed in the writing to conversation in pairs or small groups. Again, the grade for the assignment may be in simple terms such as complete/incomplete.

Benefits of low-stakes writing activities for students

- Increase students' likeliness to prepare for class
- Increase students' investment in class (which may be manifested through improved attendance and course retention)
- Increase students' sense of interpretive and analytic independence
- Improve critical reading, viewing and thinking skills
- Clarify course concepts and help students identify their position on an issue or interpretation
- Provide opportunities to practice using course vocabularies and methodologies
- Encourage students to think "outside the box" by foregrounding process rather than outcome, leading to a greater willingness to take critical risks

Sample activities

There are many ways to integrate low-stakes writing into your class. A combination of low-stakes and high-stakes writing in a lecture or seminar is ideal, as this dual emphasis will make explicit to students the connection between writing as process work and other more formal types of writing that lead to the submission and grading of a written piece. For studio classes, low-stakes writing may help students to develop and articulate ideas for their projects. In either case, you need to consider whether low-stakes writing done inside or outside of class better suits your learning outcomes for your students. Many of the sample activities suggested below can be modified for completing inside or outside of class time.

Unassessed writing

Unassessed activities are typically informal and exploratory, encouraging students to write as part of their analytical or creative process. They are often built into day-to-day teaching as an active learning strategy. More informal, classroom-based exercises may include offering students an opportunity to reflect on their acquisition of course concepts or to brainstorm new ideas. For example, a free-writing exercise might ask students to brainstorm ideas or concepts in writing before sharing them in a group discussion.

The purpose is not to test students' knowledge or mastery of subject matter, but one side benefit may be an opportunity for the instructor to diagnose whether students have learned and are able to apply course concepts or whether additional discussion or explanation is warranted.



Griffith, Angie. FCDC TA training, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

The minute paper

The minute paper is a burst of short writing, usually conducted at the beginning of the class as a bridge linking back to the preceding class, or at the end of the class, offering students the opportunity to respond to concepts, readings or ideas presented that day. Minute papers may also break up a longer class session, offering a change of pace. The minute paper may involve students free-writing on a blank paper in response to a question or prompt posted on a PowerPoint presentation or jotted more spontaneously on the blackboard. On the other hand, the instructor may wish to prepare a handout for distribution where questions and spaces for answers appear on the same page.

The quickwrite

The “quickwrite” is another writing exercise that may help you to integrate informal writing into your course design. While the minute paper is predicated upon the direction or instructions offered by the instructor, the “quickwriting” or “free-writing” exercise may allow students to meditate more spontaneously and self-reflexively upon open-ended questions, issues or interpretation. When presented with an art object, theoretical approach or critical paradigm, the writing task may be more focused on providing students with the opportunity to generate an independent meditation or reflection on the object of study.

Reading responses

A somewhat more structured approach to low-stakes writing might require students to respond to class presentations, lectures or assigned readings in short (one or two-paragraph) take-home writing assignments. You might, for example, require students to complete ten over a twelve-week term and make these worth a total of 5% or 10% of the final grade, checking them each week for completion only. In a reading response exercise, a good strategy is to ask not for a general response or impression of their reading (though this can be valuable too), but for students to identify or explain something spe-

Pair and Share

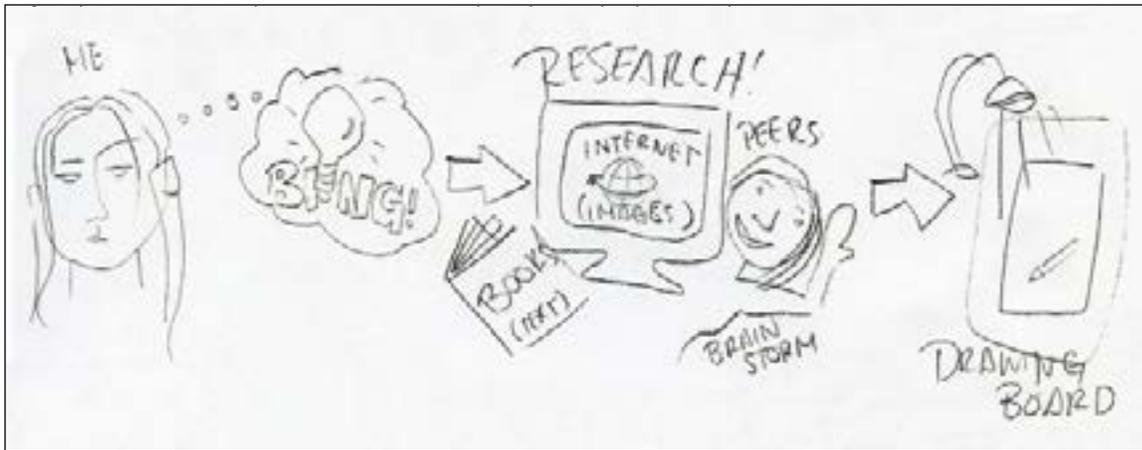
I utilize Pair and Share in most classes or what I call “Café Chat.” I vary it a little. Students in pairs tell each other their idea for the essay, artwork, or what they are working on and the other student writes it down and hands it over to the first student. This is the beginning of an assignment. Often students think that they can’t “begin” a written assignment. But they can verbalize whatever it is that they are thinking about, working on, etc.

After 10-15 minutes, students switch.

For each written assignment, we begin like this. While the exercise encourages the students to interact, it also helps them realize that they KNOW what it is they do or want to do, but they don’t know how to begin. When the student hands them their written thoughts, they have begun the assignment. It also instills in the student an understanding that you can (and should) do this all your life. Talking leads to writing.

This works too if the student is stuck and needs to verbalize to another person and get input from the class.

**Jennifer Rudder,
Criticism & Curatorial Practice**



Anonymous. Untitled sketch demonstrating a student's writing process. OCAD University, 2015.

Take-home low-stakes assignments

Each week, students are asked to find a reproduction of a drawing, in an art book or art journal, which they respond to in some way and which is related to an area being explored in class.

First, they emulate the drawing in their sketchbook ... Second, they copy a quote, an idea, or a thought from the book ... And, third they write a few lines in their own words explaining what they find relevant and significant about this drawing.

As with any research, they are asked to cite the source of the drawing. Although somewhat resistant at first, students eventually become enthusiastic about this assignment and begin to see the power of research and how writing reflective responses to masterworks can lead to the growth and progress of their work as well as their general understanding of art. (Haust, 1998, p. 31)

In appendix

Reading response to *Maus*, developed by David Griffin ([click here for editable Word file](#))

Critique worksheet, developed by Lisa Myers ([Word file](#))

Typology of a street design project: writing component ([Word file](#))

Practicing Descriptive Strategies in Pair Work ([Word file](#))

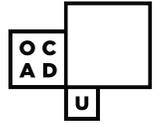
Scaffolding the Critique Process ([Word file](#))

Strategies for Modeling and Practicing Analysis ([Word file](#))

In appendix

Strategies for Researching and Documenting Visual Sources ([Word file](#))

Using Mind-Maps to Develop Visual Concepts ([Word file](#))



Title: Reading Responses to *Maus* **Developed by: David Griffin**

Assignment Context:

"I was simply bowled over by [students'] responses. My attention was drawn repeatedly by things even I had not picked up on in the text."

–David Griffin

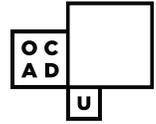
Reading assignments can afford opportunities for students to develop an awareness of seminal works and engage critically with the ways in which disciplinary professionals use materials, techniques and theories. This reading response activity was developed for Narrative Strategies: Drawing, a first-year studio class. The course explores storytelling and the ways in which narrative is conveyed through a diversity of tools and systems for representation (e.g. words, pictures, diagrams, music, etc.).

This particular assignment asks students to identify, describe and analyze the representative tools and systems at work in the visual narrative of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*.

The class was divided into groups of four and each group was responsible for a chapter. They were provided with a group space on Canvas, which they could use for scheduling and discussion. The students negotiated among themselves their approach to the questions; each group had a leader who was responsible for collecting the final answers. The questions were taken up in class and each group would report their responses.

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Assignment:

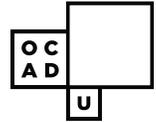
Chapter 1:

1. Identify and show us three panels that develop the relationship between Vladek and his son.
 - a. How do they feel about each other?
 - b. What visual and/or textual details are used to demonstrate this (e.g. shape of text bubbles, use of font, focus of image, etc.)?
2. *Maus* is a story constructed as much by pictures as by words. Identify a single frame, or a sequence, in which the story's narrative elements become clear to you. How do these particular frames serve to convey mood, atmosphere or thematic?
3. Some metaphors are obvious, some are less so; identify three examples of metaphor in the chapter, at least one of which is not obvious, perhaps lying in the blend of picture and writing.
 - a. What do these signify to you in the context of the whole narrative and what effect does it have on you as a reader?
4. How does Spiegelman make the transitions from "present" storytelling to past clear to the reader?
5. What does the chapter title mean?

Chapter 2:

1. The character named Art is drawn differently throughout chapter two. Describe the differences between two versions (e.g. when he's talking to his doctor and when he's at his drawing board).
 - a. What function might these visual progressions serve? (Why draw Art differently? How does it affect the reader's perceptions?)
2. Why does Spiegelman include masks in certain sections of the book, but not in others?
3. This is a story constructed as much by pictures as by words. Identify a single frame, or a sequence, in which the story's narrative elements become clear to you. How do these particular frames serve to convey mood, atmosphere or thematic?
4. Some metaphors are obvious, some are less so; identify three examples of metaphor in the chapter, at least one of which is not obvious, perhaps lying in the blend of picture and text.
 - a. What do these signify to you, in the context of the whole narrative, and what effect does it have on you as a reader?

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5. How does Spiegelman make the transitions from “present” storytelling to past clear to the reader? Is it difficult to follow the time transitions?
6. What does the chapter title mean?

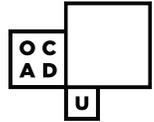
Chapter 3:

1. What is the significance of the masks that appear in the chapter?
 - a. Why are certain characters masked and what lies behind the mask?
 - b. Why does Spiegelman include masks in certain sections of the book, but not in others?
2. Vladek says, “Well at least I did something.” Can you identify specific images or text that show what Vladek means by this? If not, why not?
3. This is a story constructed as much by pictures as by words. Identify a single frame, or a sequence, in which the story’s narrative elements become clear to you. How do these particular frames serve to convey mood, atmosphere or thematics?
4. Some metaphors are obvious, some are less so; identify three examples of metaphor in the chapter, at least one of which is not obvious, perhaps lying in the blend of picture and text.
 - a. What do these signify to you in the context of the whole narrative and what effect does it have on you as a reader?
5. How does Spiegelman make the transitions from “present” storytelling to past clear to the reader? Is it difficult to follow the time transitions?
6. What does the chapter title mean?

Chapter 4:

1. Who are the Jewish police? How are they drawn differently than their fellow Jews or other major groups in the book?
2. When Vladek says, “Will I walk slowly, they will take me.... Will I run they can shoot me!”, how does Spiegelman frame this difficult bit of text with pictures. How does the artist use abstract linear elements or light/dark contrasts?
3. This is a story constructed as much by pictures as by words. Identify a single frame, or a sequence, in which the story’s narrative elements become clear to you. What about these particular frames serve to convey mood, atmosphere or thematics?

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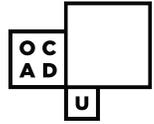


4. Some metaphors are obvious, some are less so; identify three examples of metaphor in the chapter, at least one of which is not obvious, perhaps lying in the blend of picture and text.
 - a. What do these signify to you in the context of the whole narrative and what effect does it have on you as a reader?
5. How does Spiegelman make the transitions from “present” storytelling to past clear to the reader? Is it difficult to follow the time transitions?
6. What does the chapter title mean?

Chapter 5:

1. How does the story within a story, “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” differ from the rest of the book? What stylistic changes, if any, can you see, and what do you, the reader, feel those signify?
2. Why does Spiegelman include it in *Maus*?
3. Identify three examples of visual metaphor in the chapter. What do these signify to you and what effect does it have on you as a reader?
4. This is a story constructed as much by pictures as by words. Identify a single frame, or a sequence, in which the story’s narrative elements become clear to you. How do these particular frames serve to convey mood, atmosphere or thematics?
5. Some metaphors are obvious, some are less so; identify three examples of metaphor in the chapter, at least one of which is not obvious, perhaps lying in the blend of picture and text.
 - a. What do these signify to you and what effect does it have on you as a reader?
7. How does Spiegelman make the transitions from “present” storytelling to past clear to the reader? Is it difficult to follow the time transitions?
8. What does the chapter title mean?

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Title: Critique Worksheet

Developed by: Lisa Myers

Assignment Context:

I use writing as a way to conduct studio critique in first-year classes. I find it helps students develop confidence in presenting their work and in responding to the work of others.

Before a class critique, students fill out the first side of the worksheet. Students then assemble into groups of four. Each student presents their artwork in this small group of peers. The rest of the students are invited to respond in writing with a comment or question about the work on the other side of the worksheet.

Then I bring the class back together and we have a full class critique. I encourage students to raise points that come to mind in the moment as well as the ideas that they have had time to prepare and think through in their groups.

Assignment:

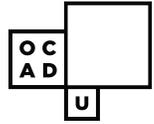
Questions for the artist:

List the materials you used.

1. How did you assemble this artwork?
2. How do the materials in your work relate to the concept?
3. What was most challenging about making this work?
4. What was most unexpected about the process of making this artwork?
5. What was the biggest risk about making this piece of art?

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Group Member's Response:

What questions or comments do you have for the artist?

1) NAME:

QUESTION or COMMENT:

2) NAME:

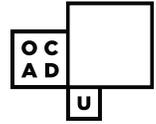
QUESTION or COMMENT:

3) NAME:

QUESTION or COMMENT:

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Typology of a Street Design Project: Writing Component

Assignment Context:

This assignment is taken from a three-week project that introduces first-year students in the Faculty of Design to the basics of information design and provides them with practice recognizing, defining and applying the principles and elements of design.

In the first part of the assignment, students are asked to take 100 photographs that document examples of graphic and vernacular design on a business-dominant city block. They submit these along with any process work and their answers to the questions posed below. They will then bring these photographs to the next class and begin sorting them according to the principles and elements of design.

The writing assignment prepares students for undertaking the in-class analysis and sorting. They practice in class the skills they will need to successfully accomplish the second stage of the assignment:

Recognizing and classifying elements and principles of design
Explaining how elements and principles interact with one another in a design

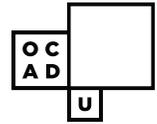
Assignment, Week 1:

From your photographs, choose one example of graphic design *and* one example of vernacular design. Answer the following questions *for each example*:

1. Identify an element that is being used;
2. Identify the dominant principle in the image;
3. What element is being used to manifest this principle?
4. Describe the type or kind of element.

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Title: Practicing Descriptive Strategies in Pair Work

Assignment Context:

This interactive activity, which is intended for a first-year class, gives students an opportunity to develop their ability to identify and describe the formal elements and principles of an image using disciplinary terminology. Students engage in low-stakes pair work to practice using and responding to descriptive language.

Students complete this assignment in class while the instructor gives oral and/or visual cues to guide students and makes notes of any terminology or concepts the class finds challenging.

At the first-year level, this activity can be used to develop the following skills:

1. Recognizing and identifying formal elements and principles;
2. Defining and using foundational, discipline-specific vocabulary;
3. (Re)producing foundational, discipline-specific visual elements;
4. Using verbal descriptive strategies to convey visual concepts.

Assignment:

Students are put in pairs. One partner is given or asked to choose an image (e.g., abstract painting, drawing, illustration). Depending on the classroom context, this can be either an image brought in by the instructor (abstract paintings work best for this activity) or a piece of work that the student has created but not yet shown in class. The student with the image does not show it to their partner. The latter prepares the materials needed for drawing.

The student with the image describes it to their partner using key terms that have been introduced in class, while their partner attempts to sketch it based on the description. Neither student is allowed to look at the other's image. A glossary of key terms (e.g., colour gradation, foreshortening, line weight) could be provided as an aid.

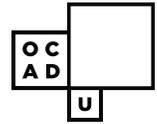
When the process is complete, the partners compare the original image with the reproduction and reflect on the process and/or the product. Instructors may choose to guide this reflection by providing a list of questions such as:

1. Are the qualities/characteristics of the original evident in the sketch/drawing?

SAMPLE

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2. Do any aspects of the image demonstrate a miscommunication between speaker and listener? If so, what caused it? Review the relevant key terms.
3. What knowledge/skills could each partner review in order to create a better result next time?

The students then switch roles and repeat the activity using a new image. This could be done immediately afterwards, or in the next class.

Assessment

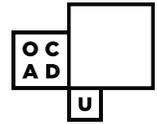
Upon completion of this activity, the instructor can offer some global feedback to the class and mark the assignment for completion.

If instructors prefer to give more weight to this assignment, they can run it several times throughout the term and have completion of the multiple activities be worth around 5% of the final grade.

SAMPLE

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Title: Scaffolding the Critique Process **Developed through discussions with Writing Across the Curriculum faculty teaching GART 1001, DRPT 1005 and GDES 1016**

Assignment Context:

Students enter their first year with little or no experience of critique and often find it challenging both to discuss their own work and provide effective feedback on their peers' work. This set of in-class and take-home activities is intended to break down the critique process into manageable steps and provide some guidance that will help students understand how to approach critiques.

This activity supports students with:

1. Identifying and explaining the context of work;
2. Analyzing an object/image and communicating that analysis;
3. Providing effective feedback during critique.

Assignment:

Prior to the Critique

The instructor provides students with resources they can use to prepare for the critique, such as a list of reflective questions and a list of discipline-specific terms (e.g. line, perspective, texture). The following are intended as examples only:

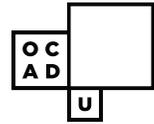
Questions for the student presenting their work:

- What is your intention with this piece? What are you trying to convey?
- How do the elements/principles of the piece help to convey your intention? (consider formal elements such as balance, colour, line, scale, perspective, etc.)
- Starting with your conception of the idea for this piece, describe the process you went through to reach this stage of its development. (Consider influences, material exploration, etc.)
- What aspects of the piece would you like to discuss during the critique? Why?

Questions for students responding to the work:

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- Focus on a formal element (or a use of material) in this piece. What effect does it have? How is it being used? (Consider formal elements such as balance, colour, line, etc.)
- What questions or suggestions do you have that would help the artist achieve their goal?
- Did your initial impression/understanding of the work shift once the artist discussed their intention? Refer to specific formal features, material choices or references to explain why or why not.

During the Critique

Students take notes on the feedback they receive. Alternatively, having a fellow student note-take for the artist/designer presenting their work provides the latter with the opportunity to meaningfully process the discussion at a later time. Alternatively, the artist/designer could ask permission to make an audio recording of the critique using their cell phone.

The instructor can circulate and monitor the discussions, and then offer some global feedback to the class.

After the Critique

Students can then use their peers' feedback as the basis for a piece of reflective writing in which they consider their peers' comments. To encourage purposeful writing, a prompt could be provided (e.g. "Discuss one comment or question from the critique that you want to consider as you continue to develop your work and explain why.").

It may be helpful for students to complete this reflective writing at home and submit it the following week so that they have time to give some in-depth thought to the feedback they received and move past their initial reaction.

Assessment:

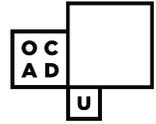
This in-class activity can be un-assessed or marked for completion, with the intention of giving students the opportunity to practice the critique process.

If instructors prefer to give more weight to the take-home reflection, perhaps 5% of the final grade, they could assess the students' final written reflections with an emphasis on clarity of meaning, and/or demonstrated comprehension of key concepts/terms and/or their ability to critically reflect on their work.

If students will continue to work on the piece/project throughout the semester, a third option would be for students to include images of the development of their work along with their written reflection in a portfolio which would be marked holistically at the end of the course.

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Title: Strategies for Researching and Documenting Visual Sources

Assignment Context:

This activity is intended as part of a scaffolded studio project (i.e., a project broken down into clear stages with feedback given at each stage) in which students are asked to develop an original visual concept. The purpose of this activity is to introduce first-year students to effective methods of finding and documenting visual sources.

This activity requires students to search for sources that could serve as catalysts for their visual concept. It acknowledges the variety of information-gathering tools (e.g., OCAD U library image databases, Google image search, local museum collections, personal observation of real-world objects/images) that students use and provides them with simple strategies and tools for documenting and annotating their sources. These sources are then included in a proposal, statement, brief or rationale that documents the development of students' original visual concepts in relation to their research.

Some of the skills targeted by this activity include:

1. Evaluating information needs;
2. Using a variety of tools to find information necessary for documentation;
3. Documenting visual research.

Assignment:

1. Begin by asking students what it means to do visual research. Some questions for students to consider:

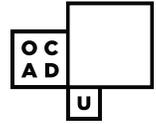
Think of the last studio project you completed. Did you use a Google Image search at any time during your process? Where else did you look for ideas? Did you document your visual research? When you submitted the project or presented for critique, did you discuss the different kinds of research you did? What does it mean to create "original" work in our field?

2. Next, explain why it is important, as both a student and a professional, to document visual sources. As part of the assignment introduction, you might want to introduce students to such issues as fair dealing, copyright and visual plagiarism as they relate to academic or visual practice in their field (the Writing & Learning Centre provides instructional resources for using visual sources).

3. Create a controlled-practice situation by providing students with examples of art or design from the Internet and ask them to find the original sources of those examples and relevant identifying information for documentation. Professors could introduce them to a

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reverse image search tool such as TinEye (a free Internet-based reverse image search engine that allows users to upload an image search for its sources). The fun of “detective work” such as this will help reinforce the importance of going to the original source.

4. Once they’ve found the information, ask them what pieces of information they think are necessary for effective documentation. Demonstrate how incomplete documentation (e.g. only the URL) is ineffective should they wish to revisit the development process of their concept later on. Provide students (in a handout, for example, or in bullet points in a slide presentation) with the information they should look for when documenting sources, such as:

- Artist/creator’s name
- Title of the work
- Date of creation
- Where the work is held (if possible)
- Date that you found/saw it
- URL (site that the image is on, not the image URL)
- Website name, if you found it online
- The book, catalog, or other hard copy source, if you found it in print.

5. Next, show an example of a student’s or even your own visual research in which visual images have been collected and the relevant information documented. This could include demonstrating use of online tools such as Zotero or Evernote to track and document visual sources.

6. In the final stage of this activity, which is initial research for a studio project, ask students to find at least three sources that they think might serve as a catalyst for their original visual concept and document them. You could also ask them to write two or three sentences for each source in which they explain what is interesting or valuable to them.

Assessment

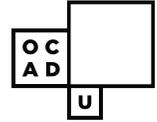
For the larger studio project, if you are asking them to produce original visual work, you will need to be very clear in your instructions about what “originality” means. This will be different in the different contexts of art and design.

You could mark this stage of the assignment for completion or on a simple three-point scale (e.g. excellent, satisfactory, unsatisfactory). If you want to give more weight to this assignment—perhaps 5% of the final grade—you could assess it in terms of the organization and completeness of their visual research document.

Alternatively, you could give a mark for completion as well as some feedback, then have students submit a revised version upon completion of the studio project, along with any other materials they have created, and assess the project holistically. This would give students an opportunity to apply your feedback.

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Title: Strategies for Modeling and Practicing Analysis

Assignment Context:

The following step-by-step process is intended to help first-year students develop the disciplinary language and techniques required to conduct a formal analysis of an image, object or site. Instructors begin by modeling the process of analysis so that students can observe and develop a conceptual framework before undertaking their analysis. Additionally, instructors provide a glossary of terms or toolbox that can benefit first-year students when developing their own oral or written analysis.

Most of this assignment could be completed in class or through an online discussion board, though students would likely benefit from completing a written formal analysis outside of class due to the extra time it would allow.

Some of the skills targeted by this activity include:

1. Recognizing and identifying formal elements and principles and/or contextual considerations;
2. Evaluating the effects of these principles and/or contextual considerations;
3. Using disciplinary terminology to communicate an analysis.

Assignment:

Begin by providing students with a glossary of terms that have been, or will be, discussed in class and can be used in a formal analysis.

Next, model the process of analysis. Show students a particular image, object or site and provide a variety of examples of oral or written formal analysis that employ terms from the glossary. To help scaffold the process of analysis, instructors could:

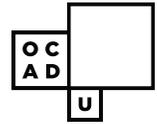
- Identify particular elements or principles (e.g., colour, line, balance, contrast, etc.) and/or contextual details (e.g., if the site is public/private, accessible, etc.);
- Communicate clear “cause and effect” relationships (e.g., “The artist/designer has employed a cool colour palette and the effect is...”).

The examples provided could include differing or opposing interpretations to demonstrate to students that there are often a variety of ways to interpret a work.

For first-year students with little experience in formal analysis, some controlled practice of recognition of elements and principles/contextual considerations would be initially helpful. This could be as simple as providing the class with 1-2 images of works and

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having them identify the work's characteristics in a pair/share activity prior to unpacking the effects as a class.

Having students analyze the same piece will create opportunities to explore and share varying interpretations while maintaining a focus on disciplinary terms and analytic language.

Otherwise, have students select a work that they find themselves or choose from a list provided to them. The latter has the advantage of enabling instructors to have a clear sense of the framework of the discussion in advance. Then have students work individually or in pairs using the resources they obtained in class to prepare an oral or written formal analysis that they present or submit. A written analysis could be a one-page take-home assignment.

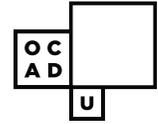
Assessment:

Having students work in pairs creates an opportunity for them to negotiate meaning while reducing the amount of marking required of instructors; on the other hand, if students work individually, instructors can provide specific and personalized feedback.

Instructors assess students based on their ability to apply these concepts and techniques in the final oral or written formal analysis they produce and assign a grade worth perhaps 5-10% of their final mark.

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Title: Using Mind-Maps to Develop Visual Concepts Developed in a Writing Across the Curriculum workshop with faculty teaching ILLU 1002 Illustrative Concepts 1

Assignment Context:

This highly adaptable activity, which is intended for a first-year class, supports students with exploring, developing and refining the initial stage of a visual concept for an art or design studio project. Alternatively, they could use it to develop a visual representation of their response to a prompt or piece of art. Depending on how the instructor chooses to implement this assignment, it could be completed in class, at home or through an online discussion board.

With that in mind, this handout includes different strategies for encouraging students to reflect on the visual concept developed in their mind-map and how they can articulate their concept to others.

Some of the skills targeted by this activity include:

- Drafting, clarifying and expanding concepts;
- Brainstorming and developing relevant language;
- Reflecting on visual concepts.

Assignment:

To complete the core element of this assignment, students are presented with a question, concept or object that will be used as the focus of their mind-map. This could be a piece of the student's work that has been completed or is still in progress, a work selected by the instructor or the student, or a question or topic provided by the instructor (i.e., a prompt).

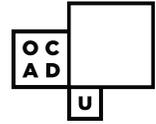
Students then work individually to create a mind-map in response to the chosen work.

The following strategies for approaching mind-maps will encourage students to focus on the message they are creating and can be adapted, refined or combined easily:

- Students can be encouraged to explore methods of including verbal language (e.g., relevant disciplinary terms, key names/dates) in their mind-map as a way of identifying and explaining the context of their work, anchoring meaning and promoting knowledge recall. The instructor could provide, for example, five key terms as written prompts.

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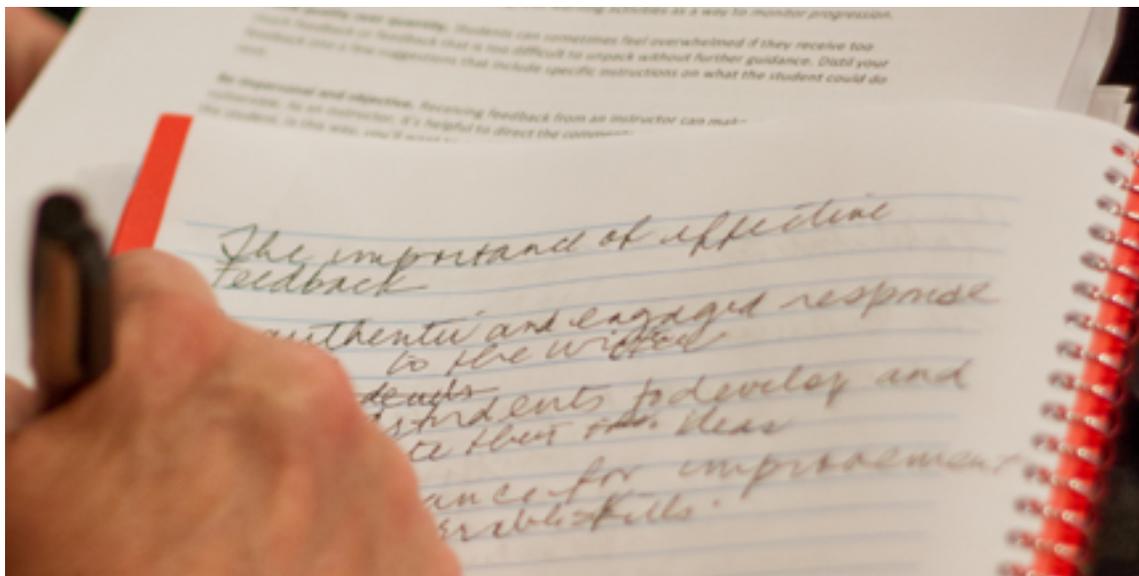
Another strategy for encouraging students to include verbal language in their mind-map is to have them begin by responding to a prompt with an image-only mind-map in order to develop a concept. They then choose an image from the map that they wish to continue exploring and (either on the same or a separate piece of paper) develop a verbal mind-map responding to the image. For example, if in response to the prompt “Wake-up call,” the student has sketched a disposable coffee cup, a branch of their verbal mind-map might include words like, “fair-trade coffee, latte, pumpkin spice, race, feminism,” while another branch might have “cardboard, green, script, full capitals, sans serif, beige plastic.”

If instructors prefer to focus students’ attention on thinking critically about mind-maps, they could ask students to complete a mind-map, then write a brief description of the process reflecting on the image/words they began with vs. where they finished.

Mind-maps could also be employed as a means of scaffolding the shift from brainstorming to the next stage of concept development. For example, students could be asked to write a list of two or three questions or statements planning their next steps in concept development. (e.g., Will they be undertaking material exploration? If so, what materials and why? What else might they need to know about their concept and where might they look for this information?).

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Griffith, Angie. FCDC TA training, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

“Developing high-quality writing assignments is one of the best ways to improve students’ writing. A good writing assignment also deepens students’ engagement with course material, promotes critical thinking, and helps students learn the discipline’s characteristic methods of inquiry, analysis and argument.” (Bean, 2011, p.119)

Thoughtfully designed assignments help students by offering them opportunities to develop skills, use vocabulary, familiarize themselves with conventions, and apply new knowledge in guided and structured ways. Well-developed assignments will also help students understand how their work fits within the bigger picture of their learning in the course and program of study.

Whether you’re designing a new assignment or reworking one you’ve tried before, you’ll want to approach the process by considering what students need to be able to accomplish by the end of the course (your course learning outcomes), the type and complexity of the skills required to achieve the learning outcomes and how you will use this particular assignment to measure how students are achieving those outcomes.

In the following section, we will consider some strategies for designing effective writing assignments and writing clear and effective assignment instructions. We will also consider the importance of modelling good writing practice and guiding students through in-class activities and scaffolding of assignments.

In context

As noted in earlier sections, research in the scholarship of teaching and learning has demonstrated that students learn best when teaching and learning activities are explicitly and directly connected to the learning outcomes of the course, and assessment methods clearly evaluate how students have achieved the goals articulated in the course learning outcomes.

As Blumberg notes, “instructors can maximize student learning by viewing objectives as the unifying and driving force for planning teaching and learning activities and assessment exercises. When these activities and exercises relate to and follow from the course goals and objectives, the course is aligned” (2009, pp. 102-3). This is called constructive course alignment, meaning that all the assignments students are required to do in a course relate clearly to the larger learning outcomes.

“Transparency and clarity are the first principles of good assignment design. A well-designed assignment will be clear and explicit about expectations and how those expectations relate to the learning outcomes of the course.”

One strategy for designing assignments that are well-aligned with course learning outcomes is “backwards design”: that is, instructors begin by considering what students need to be able to accomplish by the end of the course (learning outcomes), what teacher-led and student-centred activities through the course will help students get there, and how assignments will give students opportunities to practice what they’ve learned and measure their progress.

Transparency and clarity are the first principles of good assignment design. A well-designed assignment will be clear and explicit about expectations and how they relate to the learning outcomes of the course. Assignment instructions will explain why students

are being asked to write, how the writing relates to their learning and what they need to do to achieve it. Instructors will also use those expectations as the criteria against which student achievement will be measured (there is more on assessment strategies in the subsequent section). As students progress from beginner or “novice” to more advanced or “expert” writers in their disciplines, they will need less explicit guidance as they come to internalize the expectations or conventions of writing specific to their disciplines and professions.

Assignment instructions should thus indicate to students how they are to engage the course material. Assignment prompts like “analyze,” “describe,” “argue,” “imagine,” “compare,” “summarize,” “discuss” and “evaluate” introduce different writing tasks. Students should understand both the task and the standards by which the assignment will be evaluated. For this reason, instructors may wish to make a set of assessment criteria or a grading rubric available to students in advance, and should clearly discuss their expectations in the assignment handout. The narrative description of the assignment or the essay questions should make clear what the instructor wishes to see, without being unduly prescriptive.

The learning outcomes in the *Framework* are a good resource for instructors as they undertake “backwards design,” and clearly identify the various knowledge and skills required for writing proficiency and outline the pathway from beginner to advanced competency at these skills.

One way of supporting students in moving from novice to expert writers is to scaffold complex activities. At its most basic level, scaffolding refers to any kind of support in which an “expert” provides a framework that assimilates more difficult skills and concepts in order to allow the “novice” to focus on a specific skill or concept that might otherwise be difficult for them to access or understand.

Wood, Burner and Ross were the first to use the term scaffolding to describe the “means whereby an adult or ‘expert’ helps someone who is less adult or less expert” (p. 89) in a one-on-one interaction.

[This] involves a kind of “scaffolding”

process that enables a...novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult “controlling” those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. The task thus proceeds to a successful conclusion. We assume, however, that the process can potentially achieve much more for the learner than an assisted completion of the task. It may result, eventually, in development of task competence by the learner at a pace that would far outstrip his unassisted efforts (p. 90).

Scaffolding is rooted in an understanding of learning as an activity that occurs in a social context; that is, the learner does not acquire skills and knowledge by themselves, but through structured interactions with others.

In one-on-one contexts, the support and the guidance comes from verbal cues, body language (motivational scaffolding) and the ways in which the instructor frames questions (cognitive scaffolding).

In an assignment design context, the support and guidance is found in the way the assignment is structured. If an assignment requires the integration of multiple skills, those skills can be developed by breaking the assignment down into smaller tasks which focus on each skill individually.

One additional benefit of incorporating scaffolded writing assignments is that early writing and early feedback may act as a plagiarism deterrent. Students who are engaged in the creation of their own ideas and the development of their own arguments may be less inclined to expropriate the ideas of other scholars or to recruit someone else to produce course work for them.

Students will benefit from the coaching and support offered by instructor feedback and peer discussion, and instructors will be aware of which students are progressing through the writing steps of a given assignment and which students are failing to meet the targeted deadlines.

In summary, well-designed assignments will fit logically within a course by being aligned

with specific course learning outcomes; a corollary is that course learning outcomes should be clearly aligned with specific assignments or tasks within an assignment to give students opportunities to develop and practice their learning, and to measure and evaluate their progress.

Assignment instructions should also be clear and transparent about learning goals, while guiding students through completion of the assignment through the use of appropriate prompts and breaking specific tasks into stages. As students become more proficient writers, they will need less explicit guidance and instruction.

References and Further Reading

- Bean, J. C. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor’s guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Blumberg, P. (2009). Maximizing learning through course alignment and experience with different types of knowledge. *Innovative Higher Education* 34, 94-103.
- Haust, B. (1998). “Writing Experiences Across the Art Department Curriculum.” *Writing Across the Curriculum* 9, 29-35.
- Wood, D., J.S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*. 17(2), 89-100

Planning effective writing assignments

What is the context of your students' writing? That is, why are you asking them to write in particular ways and what are you hoping they'll get out of it? Although we often take such questions for granted, a well-designed assignment will address explicitly the context of the writing students are asked to do.

The primary context is always their learning experience. Writing assignments give them the opportunity to put their knowledge and skills into practice, and to receive guidance and get feedback from their instructors so they can get better at doing it. Assignments also give instructors the opportunity to measure what their students have achieved in the course.

But most writing that students do in university is practice for other disciplinary and professional types of writing. A secondary context for writing concerns the wider audience and purpose for writing. If you ask your students to develop written artist statements, who is the wider audience? What is the purpose for writing them? Are there conventions for writing in the genre?

Effective writing assignments will:

- Match or align with a learning goal in the course
- Be meaningful for students beyond simply getting a grade
- Guide and support students so that they can succeed

A well-designed assignment will fit logically in the course. Students will invest more in their writing if they understand how that writing fits within the course to support and develop their learning overall. However, writing assignments will also be more meaningful if the wider disciplinary and professional context is clear. That is, a writing assignment is not simply a hoop students must jump through to get a grade, but helps them develop as an artist or designer.

What you need to know before you plan your assignment

As you design your assignment, ask yourself the following questions:

What do students need to be able to do in this assignment?

Think carefully about how the assignment will help students develop very specific skills and knowledge that are part of their learning in the course. How does the assignment address one or more of the course learning outcomes? Thinking through this relationship will help you to develop and communicate clear expectations.

How can you help your students get there?

Are your students able to work independently or do they need some guidance or support? If they need guidance, you can provide "steps" or a process guide for doing the writing; you can show a model writing sample you've prepared yourself or drawn from published examples; you can ask them to prepare drafts in class and provide guidance as they write; you can also scaffold the assignment so that students are completing it in stages.

How should it be evaluated?

It may be that the assignment doesn't need to be evaluated at all. If students are writing in their own process books or journals, for example, the audience for their writing is themselves and the purpose is to support and develop ideas for their work. If the audience is a disciplinary or professional community of practice, a more structured evaluation process will help students develop and refine their ability to write in that context. If assessing the writing, make your expectations really clear: do they need to explain their intention for the work? How should they document their written or visual sources? Should the submitted work look a certain way or conform to a particular style guide?

What writing activities or assignments will work best in your course?

Un-assessed writing activities

- Free-writing and brainstorming activities: use short, informal activities in the classroom in order to stimulate class discussion about a reading for the day.
- Critique note-taking: have a student take notes for the presenter during critique. The latter can then focus on oral communication skills, while the former practices listening and note-taking skills.

Low-stakes writing assignments

- Q&A: have students answer a series of questions about their work (e.g. describe the materials they have used; articulate their reasons for doing so; identify challenges they encountered) prior to engaging in critique.
- Reading or visual work response: use habitual (e.g. weekly) take-home writing assignments in which students answer a structured series of questions to get them to think critically about a reading or a work. They can then use their answers to inform discussion in class.
- Journaling: have students keep a weekly journal in which they document their ideas or process for a work.

High-stakes writing assignments

- Analysis essay: have students produce a critical analysis essay that articulates and develops a focused claim using disciplinary vocabulary about an object and situates it within relevant research.
- Artist statement: have students explain or contextualize a visual concept, describe their intention, or situate their work in relation to theoretical perspectives and aesthetic influences.
- Grant proposal: ask students to describe a project and suggest the ways in which their work contributes to a themed exhibit in order to persuade readers to fund them.



Griffith, Angie. FCDC TA training, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

Scaffolding writing assignments

Scaffolding can serve different purposes, depending on the level of ability of your students.

For novice students, scaffolding an assignment allows them to practice and gain experience with new skills in a focused and controlled manner, increasing the chance that they will integrate them successfully in a complex assignment.

For more advanced students, scaffolding models writing processes, structuring their approach to a written assignment in a way that encourages them to begin planning and researching early, use the appropriate strategies to generate ideas, plan, organize and revise their writing, and receive formative feedback from their peers and instructors.

In short, scaffolding an assignment encourages students to approach writing in much the same way they approach making: as research, exploration and revision within a community of other writers.

What is a scaffolded assignment?

Scaffolding an assignment means breaking down the assignment so that students are able to develop it in clear, logical stages. A scaffolded writing assignment might ask students to propose a topic for a studio project, create a bibliography of visual research, prepare a draft written statement, and finally, revise their draft before submitting their work for grading.

How do I scaffold?

In the case of beginner-level or novice writers, focus on breaking the assignment down in a way that supports skill acquisition and development. Structure the smaller assignments in ways that build towards a complex task in a systematic manner and ensure students have opportunities to acquire new skills with guidance before being asked to integrate them more independently. Use scaffolding to enable students to develop skills and strategies gradually, and walk students through the process of building from tasks of lower cognitive complexity to tasks of higher cognitive complexity.

For example, you might ask students to begin a studio project by preparing a short written inventory of their materials and methods. A subsequent assignment might ask them to develop an explanatory rationale or intention statement for their project. A final written assignment might ask them to evaluate or critique another student's rationale in relation to their completed studio project.

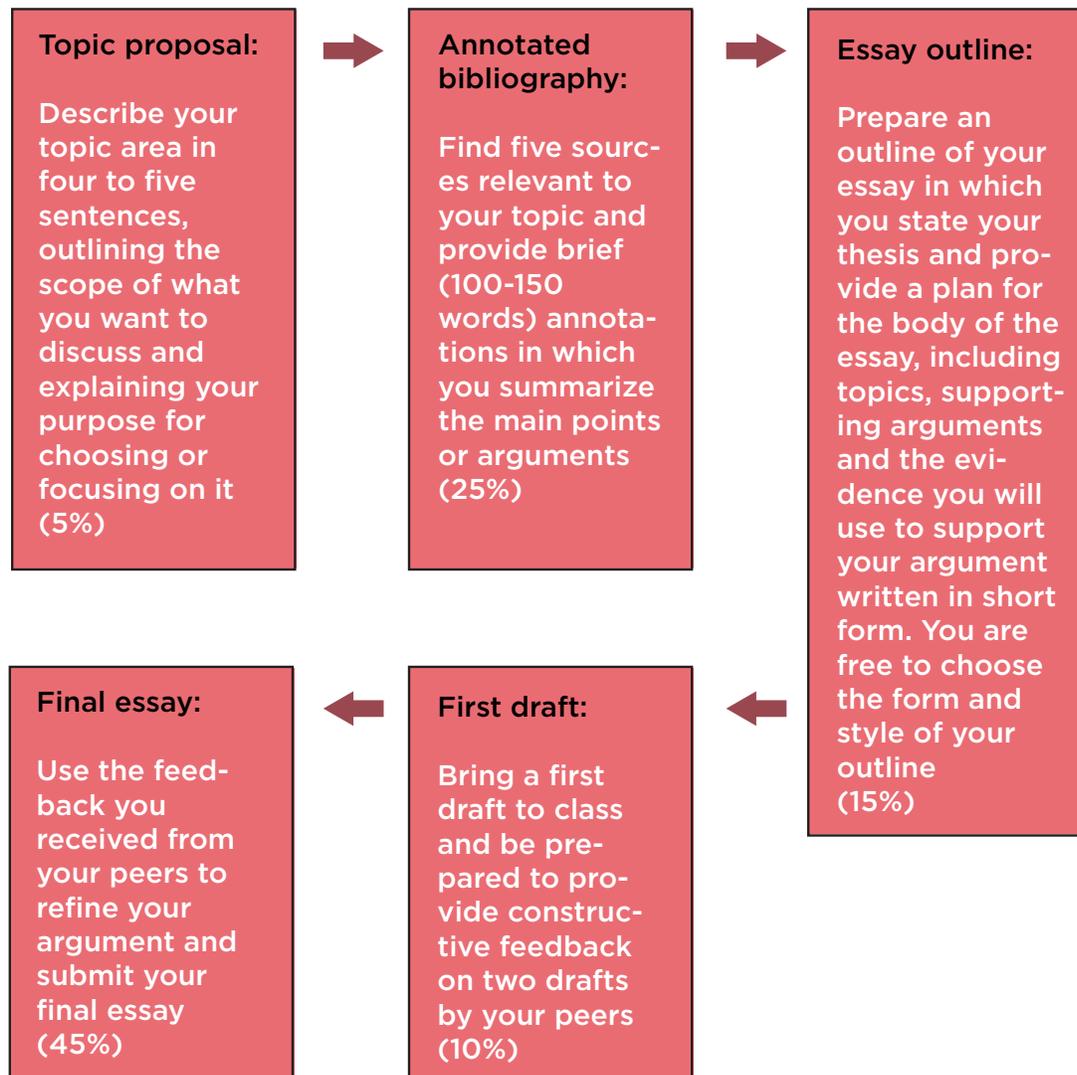
Flow chart to show progress in a scaffolded writing assignment: "Studio project A, writing components"



In the case of more advanced writers, focus on breaking down the assignment in a way that gives students the space and time to develop and edit their writing. Structure the smaller assignments in ways that provide students with access to multiple opportunities for feedback from both their instructor and peers, and sufficient time to undertake a revision process, enabling them to respond to and incorporate that feedback. Use scaffolding as a way of encouraging their understanding of writing as a process.

For example, an art history research essay in an advanced or upper-level course might begin with an exploratory analysis, followed by a topic proposal that frames a research question or questions. An annotated bibliography will then help students track and evaluate their research. Finally, an outline and one or two preliminary drafts combined with opportunities for instructor and peer feedback will give them opportunities to develop and refine their argument and approach.

Flow chart to show progress in scaffolded writing assignment: “Art History Research Essay”



Scaffolding works especially well when the stages of the assignment are aligned with the assessment criteria you use to evaluate them. For example, if you are proposing to evaluate the strength of the argument, an outline with a clear thesis statement will provide students with direct and focused feedback.

In subsequent sections, we will consider strategies for evaluating writing assignments as well as using grading rubrics to communicate assessment.

Assignment prompts (or what are you asking your students to do?)		
Less sophisticated define, describe, discuss, summarize, review, outline, show	More sophisticated demonstrate, explain, compare, contrast, comment, support, argue	Most sophisticated evaluate, analyze, criticize, synthesize, interpret, propose, justify, prove

04

Writing effective assignment instructions

Assignment instructions convey what the student is expected to accomplish, and how they should accomplish it; thus they should include clear information about the kind of writing the student is expected to produce and the criteria by which the students' work will be evaluated.

One of the best ways to do this is to identify learning outcomes for an assignment by **using an explicit signal phrase** such as, "By the end of this assignment, you will be able to..." A phrase such as this shifts the emphasis from what students have to produce (the "deliverable") to what students will gain as a result of engaging in the process.

When writing assignment instructions, try to **avoid normative or highly subjective language**, for example, "proper vocabulary" or "interesting research question." Remember that while you have a clear sense of what "proper" and "interesting" mean, these terms convey little to students who have no sense of the norms upon which "proper" and "interesting" are based. Instead, explicitly articulate and define what these norms are and how students can achieve them; so "proper vocabulary" might become "disciplinary vocabulary," while an "interesting research question" might be reframed as an explicit identification of the characteristics of a successful research question (for example, that it is appropriately broad or narrow, that reliable information is available to answer the question, etc.)

Finally, **aim for a clear, clean layout** that can accommodate the variety of needs and diversity of learners in the classroom. A page of dense prose is not the most inclusive approach; use headings and subheadings to signal where information may be found. If an assignment has multiple parts, provide an overview in the initial document, but convey the details of each assignment separately, especially if the assignment is scaffolded and each section has a different purpose or focus.

Teaching to your assignments

If your students are novice writers, one of the best ways to help them is to integrate teaching and learning activities into your class that will give them practice in writing for the assignment. Here are some strategies you might try:

Read rhetorically

Try reading samples of professional or published writing (e.g. exhibition catalogue statements) and ask your students to identify rhetorical strategies and language that make them especially effective. A more focused exercise might have them simply identify all the adjectives and compile a glossary for their own use.

Model writing for your students

Provide your own samples of the writing task you're asking students to complete. Better yet, write it there and then, on a chalk or whiteboard. Even if it's only a sentence or two, students will have a better understanding of what you mean by a "thesis statement" if you show them your own examples. They'll also see you work hard to come up with an idea and revise your work. After all, writing rarely emerges perfectly formed without effort.

Create a glossary of useful terms and phrases

If you're reading a statement describing a visual concept, for example, identify useful "signal" phrases and "transitional" words and phrases. A signal phrase is a phrase that signals to the reader what the writer is going to do ("In this essay I will argue" or "The purpose of this work is"). Most students assume they're not allowed to be so explicit in their writing, but why not? Signposts will only help the reader along the way. Transitional words and phrases (firstly, secondly, moreover, in addition, in conclusion) build connections between sentences and paragraphs. Read writing samples with your students and compile a list or glossary of such terms and phrases that are appropriate to the context.

Create opportunities to practice writing in class

As the adage goes, practice makes perfect. Giving students the chance to begin developing their ideas in class will mean they're not writing at the last minute. An effective strategy for in-class writing is to create small exercises keyed to your grading criteria. For example, if students are required to explain their visual sources for a design concept in a larger design pitch assignment, have them practice "paraphrasing" other designers' concepts—that is, putting other people's concepts into their own words. This would also be a good opportunity for them to practice citation of their visual sources.

Instructor's Checklist:

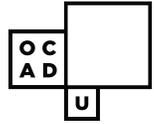
Do your assignment instructions:

- identify the task of the writing using appropriate prompts?
- identify the genre of the document and the conventions (tone, structure) of this genre?
- outline what the document needs to accomplish in order to be successful?
- use clear and objective language?
- identify the audience of the assignment?
- suggest how the student might approach the assignment?
- provide formatting guidelines?
- state the due date?
- describe the criteria you will use to evaluate the assignment?
- identify what percentage of the total grade the assignment is worth?

In appendix

Effective Assignment Instructions Checklist ([click here for an editable Word file](#))

Scaffolded Research Essay for VISD 2B36 ([Word file](#))



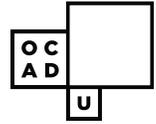
Effective Assignment Instructions Checklist

Do my instructions:

- Identify what a student will be able to do by the end of the assignment?
- Identify the type (genre, e.g. short answer, reflection, project proposal) of writing task being assigned?
- Identify the tone (e.g. formal/informal) and structure required for this task?
- Identify an audience and purpose for the writing task?
- Outline what the writing task needs to accomplish in order to be successful?
- Provide formatting guidelines?
- State the due date?
- Identify what percentage of the total grade the assignment is worth?
- Describe the criteria that I will use to evaluate the assignment?
- Suggest how the student might approach the assignment? (Optional, depending on context.)
- Use clear and objective language?

SAMPLE *Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty*

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Title: Scaffolded Research Essay for VISD 2B36 History and Evolution of Typography

Assignment Context:

For this assignment, students are asked to write a research essay of 1500 to 2000 words about an aspect of typographic history of their choosing. Most students are new to the history of typography and, in the past, have struggled to generate topics, undertake research and develop arguments. The assignment is therefore broken down into several smaller assignments that are intended to guide them through the successive stages of research and writing.

The diagram below provides an overview of the scaffolding of the assignment and provides basic information about each assignment. The rubric attached is used to evaluate the final research essay. Note that each of the criteria in the rubric is developed at one of the stages of the assignment.

Assignment:

The main assignment for this course is a research essay on typographic history due near the end of the term. Your essay:

- must be 1500 to 2000 words,
- include references to a minimum of 5 sources in support of your argument, and
- include images to support and develop your argument.
- Text and image citations should be formatted to MLA style.

Writing is an iterative process. An “iterative process” means that your ideas and arguments need to be developed through several stages of thinking and talking through them, over time. A good research essay is not written at the last minute before the end of the course, but is rather developed through stages in a process: thinking about a topic that interests you, doing some research on it, formulating your argument and ideas, drafting the essay and then revising it.

To guide you through this process, the essay in this course has been broken down into several stages. In each week's module, you will find information, activities and assignments that guide you through the stages of research and writing. These are located under the heading, "Research and Writing." In the first stage, for example, you'll begin to think about developing something that interests you about the history of writing and typography into a topic for your research and writing.

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The final research essay will be evaluated according to the following five criteria:

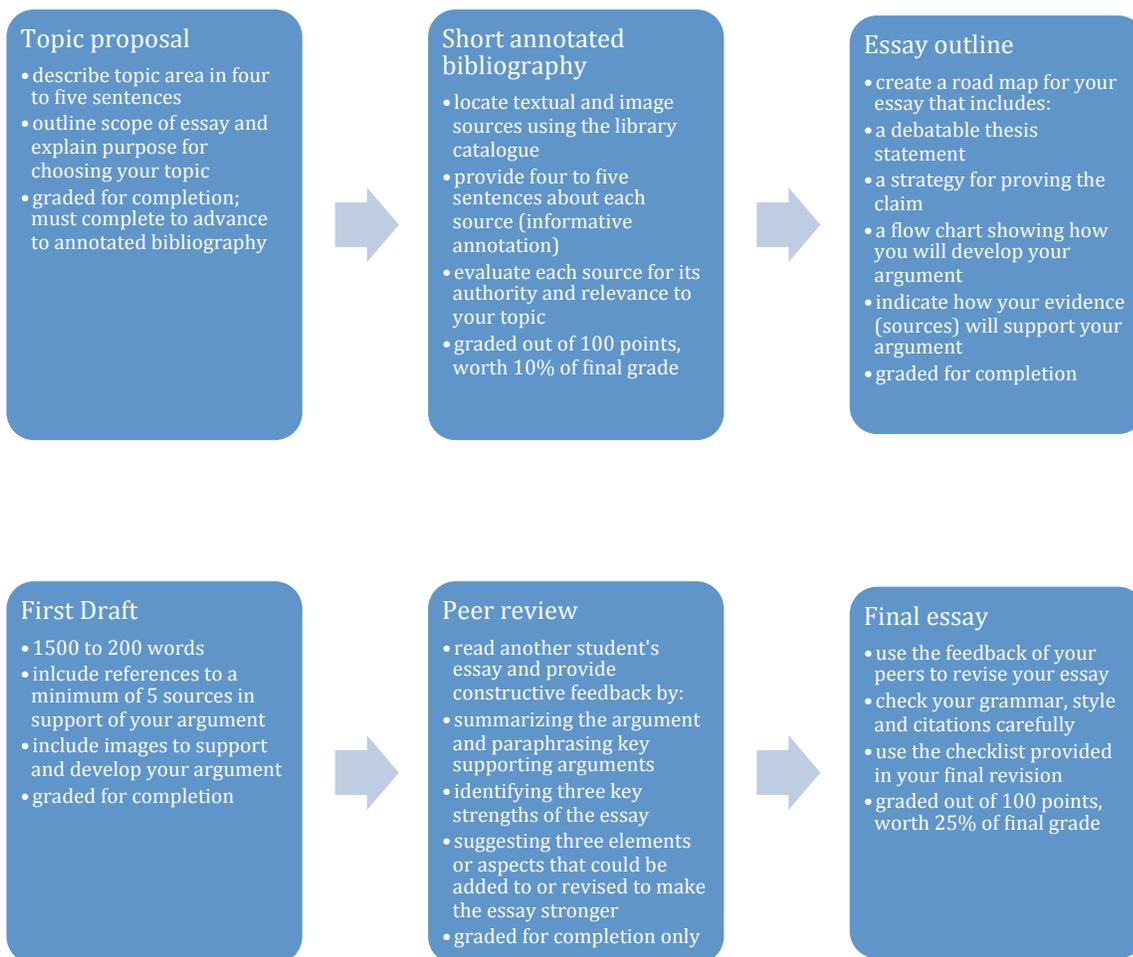
Argument clear, complex thesis with persuasive, supporting argument.

Structure logical, orderly development of the argument including an introduction and conclusion.

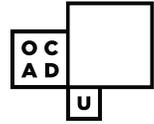
Evidence close attention to factual detail, including careful analysis of written and visual evidence

Research variety of peer-reviewed secondary sources and visual images

Writing clear, concise writing edited for grammar and citation style.



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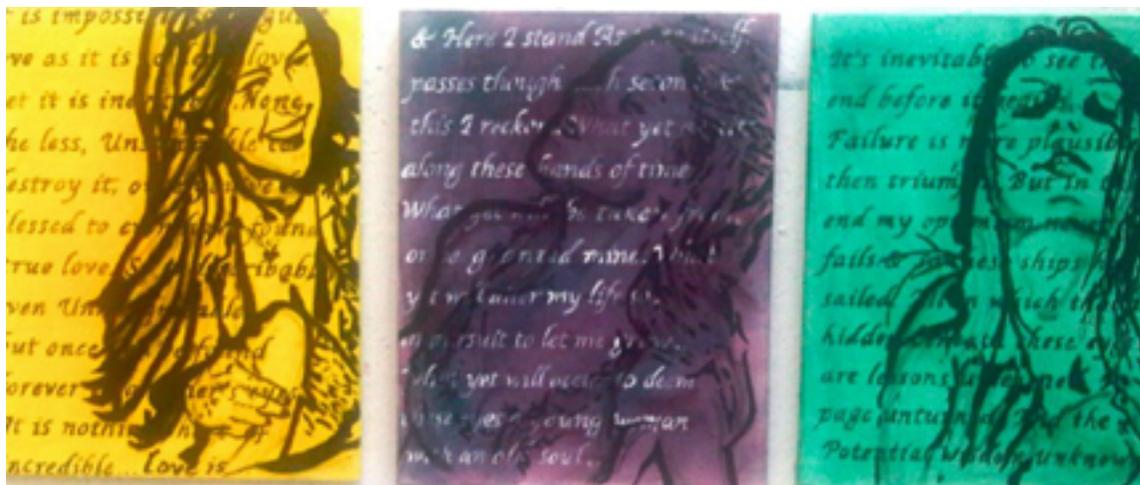


Grading Rubric for VISD 2B36 History and Evolution of Typography Final Research Essay

	A	B	C	D	F
argument	complex thesis; critical, abstract, original thought; strongly analytical and insightful; offers persuasive, coherent supporting arguments.	clear, cogent thesis; convincing; analytical; offers valid, logical supporting arguments.	thesis is clear but descriptive, summative, impressionistic; (somewhat) underdeveloped supporting arguments.	thesis is not debatable, unclear; rudimentary summary and/or description; illogical or invalid supporting arguments.	no argument.
structure	logical; organic; compelling; integrated with and supports thesis; essay structured by coherent argument.	logical; orderly; coherent; mostly integrated with thesis; essay structured as argument.	some parts of argument linked illogically, incoherently; not fully integrated with thesis; essay organized by text chronology or description.	paragraphs, sentences linked illogically, incoherently; not integrated with the thesis; some, little attempt at organization .	no order; incoherent; much irrelevance; no argument; very repetitive.
supporting evidence	careful, close attention to detail; excellent analysis of visual and written evidence; quotations and paraphrase of written evidence are integrated seamlessly; images are highly relevant to argument.	effective, apparent attention to detail; effective analysis of visual and written evidence; effective use of textual quotation and paraphrase; images are relevant to argument.	some attention to detail; inadequate analysis; written information needs fuller context; written and visual examples not fully integrated into argument; images are not entirely relevant or appropriate.	little attention to local textual detail; tends towards generalization, description; no analysis; little quotation; not integrated.	no attempt at close reading; little evidence of having read the text; no textual quotation.
research	Excellent variety of written and visual secondary sources; peer-reviewed.	Good variety of written and visual sources; peer-reviewed.	Some variety of written and visual sources; some may be inappropriate, not authoritative.	Too few sources; inappropriate or irrelevant to argument; not authoritative.	No or few written or visual secondary sources.
writing	concise, elegant; few errors; good vocabulary; very effective use of critical terms; citation style correct throughout.	clear, concise; minor errors; good vocabulary; good use of critical terms; minor errors and inconsistencies of citation style.	some errors of syntax; grammar; word choice; punctuation; colloquial language; some errors in citation style.	serious errors of grammar, syntax; errors mar understanding; little attempt to use citation style.	repetitive; writing is incomprehensible; no evidence of citation style.

SAMPLE *Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty*

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Mare, Megan. Perspective. OCAD University, 2013.

ASSESSING STUDENT WRITING

“Many conversations about assessment seem to assume formal, standardized activities... but it is important to remember that assessment is a critical component of writing: writers self-assess and frequently seek evaluative input from readers throughout their writing process.” (Huot and O’Neill, 2009 p.1)

Low-stakes and unassessed writing activities give students the opportunity to engage in writing activities without feeling pressure to write well. Rather, students write with the understanding that they’re using writing as a tool to accomplish something else.

There are many occasions, however, when it’s important to know how well students are writing. Students may be expected, for example, to develop their ability to communicate in a particular genre of writing—in which case, their writing will need to be evaluated. But even if the emphasis is on writing as a process or tool for accomplishing something else, students may still need opportunities to receive feedback on their writing to know whether they’re doing it well or how they might improve.

In many higher-level courses, the ability to communicate in writing is deeply integrated with other learning activities. Students may be required, for example, to experiment with a well-known process for creating or designing a three-dimensional object, but they may also be required to communicate their own process orally or in writing, or to document the results of their experimentation, such as why they made particular choices. So offering students more detailed feedback on their writing earlier on may help them to develop the skills they’ll use in higher-level courses.

In this section, we’ll consider some strategies for assessing or evaluating student writing and the advantages of communicating clear, explicit expectations to students. We will also consider some ways of identifying and generating grading criteria.

In context

The advantage of low-stakes and unassessed writing activities is that their emphasis is on writing as process. This is also their limitation. Writing may be useful as part of a generative or reflective learning activity, but the question of whether student literacy actually improves is difficult to gauge without clear criteria against which to measure improvement. In other words, in order for students to become better writers, they also need to engage in “high-stakes” writing that meets the standards or expectations specific to the context of their writing.

“If writing enhances student learning, it does so in very particular disciplinary contexts, and what students demonstrate by learning how to write is mastery of vocabulary, analytic methods and the genres of writing specific to their disciplines.”

But even if students are reasonably capable writers to the extent that they can put words together to form grammatically coherent sentences, such mastery of basic written language does not guarantee that students will write well in any given situation. Writing is always a highly contextual activity (Odell & Swersey, 2003). If writing enhances student learning, it does so in very particular disciplinary contexts, and what students demonstrate by learning how to write is mastery of vocabulary, analytic methods and the genres of writing specific to their disciplines.

Each time students attempt to write, they are “inventing the university” (Bartholomae, 1986, p.4). Inventing the university requires negotiating between the attributes we associate with self-expression—creativity, point of view, voice—and the “peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse” of a scholarly or professional community that they must appropriate or to which they must adapt their own voices (Bartholomae, 1986, p.

4). That is to say, they learn to write within a highly specialized context where their success as writers marks their entry into a professional community of practice.

The most common genre of assessed academic writing—or, what is sometimes called “formal” writing—has typically been the academic essay (especially in the humanities and social sciences), in which a student will present a debatable claim and support that claim with analytic evidence and, sometimes, secondary research. In many learning situations, the essay is a genre that helps students learn to accommodate their writing to the vocabulary and discursive conventions of specific academic disciplines, and it’s important to remember that expectations for essay writing vary widely from one discipline to the next.

But even though the essay is work that students are expected to produce—that is, it’s a product of their learning activity—the essay is also a tool used to develop process-based, higher-order critical-thinking skills such as analysis, reasoning, argumentation and communication.

In art and design education, students are required to produce art and design work, and though such work involves developing the same critical-thinking skills, the conventional academic essay, with its highly structured organization and very particular ways of writing, is not the most appropriate or relevant genre of writing to support or develop art and design work.

In art and design contexts, students may be required to communicate elements of their work through process books, rationales, statements of intention, and so on. Such assignments are no less “formal” than more conventional genres of academic writing such as the essay, but are ways of writing specific to art and design, genres that reflect the particular ways of communicating professionally and academically within art and design disciplines.

What do students need in order to be able to progress from novice to proficient writers who have mastered very specialized kinds of writing? Primarily, they need guidance and feedback, given in a variety of ways at a variety of times in their learning process. Opportunities for formative assessment in

a course are especially important. The goal of formative assessment is to provide early and ongoing feedback that allows students to learn from and improve upon their writing, perhaps by reworking and revising drafts of an essay assignment that build towards a final draft. Novice writers will also require more explicit instructor-led guidance as they develop their writing knowledge and skills. The degree of guidance provided might include, for example, how students are guided through a particular activity and whether writing is modelled for them.

In order to master highly specialized genres of writing, students also need expectations to be clearly and explicitly communicated. These expectations are also the criteria by which the writing is evaluated. When you evaluate a student's writing assignment, you ask such questions as: how well has the argument been developed? How is the whole work organized? What kinds of evidence have been used? Are sources cited correctly? Most course instructors have internalized these criteria. They are able to look at a student's writing assignment and evaluate it quite quickly based on an intuitive understanding of what makes for good writing in their field. Students, however, are more likely to succeed in their writing assignments when they are given explicit and detailed assessment criteria and are guided through the process of achieving them.

To summarize, students need structured learning activities and assessments—opportunities for “formal” writing—in order to be able to write and communicate within and for their disciplines and professions. While lower-stakes writing is useful for process-focused, generative and reflective learning, higher-stakes writing helps students accommodate their knowledge creation to communities of disciplinary and professional practice. Effectively-developed assessed writing assignments will guide students through their writing process, with multiple opportunities for constructive, formative feedback, and will provide explicit criteria against which they can measure their progress.

References and Further Reading

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- Popham, W.J. (1997). What's wrong—and what's right—with rubrics. *Educational Leadership*. 55(2), 72-75.
- Spandel, V. (2006). In defense of rubrics. *English Journal*, 96(1), 19-22.

Graded writing assignments:

- Create opportunities for giving students more structured feedback on writing
- Help students to master vocabulary, analytic methods and the genres of writing specific to their disciplines
- Empower students to communicate and act on their knowledge

Why do we grade student work?

Student work is graded for a variety of reasons, reasons that are largely determined by one's relationship to the grading process.

The student view: “getting a grade”

It's hardly surprising to learn that students are concerned primarily with their numerical grades. After all, scholarships, graduate programs and professional schools are all grade-based and highly competitive.

The institutional view: “quality assurance”

Universities must ensure that the degrees they issue have been earned and therefore that students have sufficiently met degree requirements.

The disciplinary view: “professional standards”

While instructors are responsible for determining grades and giving feedback, the standards they use are not arbitrary. The professional standards of different disciplines cross institutional boundaries and are often very formal—which is why meeting them can sometimes feel for students like “jumping through hoops.” Think of law students or students in accredited programs who go through very formal examinations to become qualified to practice in their fields.

The instructor's view: “giving feedback and creating learning opportunities”

The primary concern of course instructors is that feedback given to students creates opportunities for them to learn and do better.

Grading as a learning activity

In educational research, assessment is usually described as being either diagnostic, formative or summative.

A ***diagnostic assessment*** might be a brief writing assignment you give students before beginning a new unit that evaluates what they already know. A well-designed diagnostic assessment will not only help you plan your teaching so that it caters to very specific learning needs, it can also highlight for students gaps in their skills or knowledge

that need to be addressed. A summative assessment at the end of the unit that evaluates the same skills or knowledge will then show them what they've learned and how far they've come.

A **formative assessment** will give students the opportunity to use your feedback to improve their work. An example might be a writing assignment that allows students to submit a draft, get feedback from you or their peers, and then revise and resubmit. This strategy works well when built into scaffolded writing assignments.

While **summative assessment** is the most common type of assessment in postsecondary education, the final exam being the most superlative example, diagnostic and formative assessment are arguably more important from the perspective of teaching and learning. Assess early, assess often. This is a good mantra for effective course design.

Norms versus standards

There is a qualitative difference between norms and standards that impacts the way we think about marking. A comparable example can be drawn in how we approach the evaluation of art or design.

Imagine, for example, you overhear two people talking about a work of art in a gallery. One says, "This painting is obviously not very good." The other responds, "I like this work because the artist uses chiaroscuro to emphasize the shadow effect." What is the difference between these two responses?

The first is a normative claim, which means that the viewer is responding in a way that depends on their own point of view and the viewer expects that the same point of view will be shared by the other person because it's "obvious" or normal. The second is a descriptive claim because it describes the painting in relation to an element or criterion that can be objectively described.

We use normative claims all the time because we often share assumptions with the different communities of people around us. When assessing students, however, criterion-referenced descriptive claims are more useful. It's not helpful to tell a student that their writing is "obviously" not good, especially when compared to that of another student, if we want them to improve their ability.

Diagnostic, formative and summative assessment:

- Diagnostic assessment is used to determine the skills and knowledge a student brings to the course
- Formative assessment identifies what learning the student needs to do and is therefore part of the learning process; primary purpose is to improve student performance
- Summative assessment measures the learning the student has achieved

Norms versus criterion-referenced assessment:

In educational theory, assessment is usually described as being either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced.

- Normative or norm-referenced assessment: students are graded comparatively relative to one another
- Criterion-referenced assessment: students are graded according to pre-determined criteria or expectations, usually broken down into achievement levels

Using grading criteria to assess

In criterion-referenced assessment, the criteria are detailed and provide explicit assignment expectations, that is, what you expect students to have achieved by completing the assignment. Assessment is then usually measured on a scale or cut score of performance based on predetermined standards (e.g. disciplinary or professional standards, year-level benchmarks or expectations).

Students should know what the criteria are prior to completing the task and should understand how to achieve them.

Why use grading criteria?

- Grading criteria set clear expectations students can achieve
- They communicate disciplinary or professional standards, making them explicit
- They demystify grading, both the process and the result
- Students compete with themselves rather than each other to do better
- Criteria can be used as an instructional tool, especially in diagnostic and formative assessment, to help students meet expectations

Generating criteria for a writing assignment

Developing clear grading criteria for writing assignments can be challenging. For genres such as the academic essay, they are fairly conventional. Typically, we expect essays to have clearly stated arguments, evidence to support claims and sometimes secondary research. It can be more difficult, however, to identify what's required to produce a really effective artist statement, for example.

If you're developing assessment criteria for a writing assignment in your class, ask yourself the following questions:

What should students know and be able to demonstrate in writing in this assignment?

In a well-aligned course, your assignment will align with a course learning outcome. Your assessment or grading criteria might provide a more detailed breakdown of the learning students need to demonstrate in a given outcome. Perhaps these are more discrete competencies or skills they need to demonstrate.

What will indicate that students have demonstrated the required skills and knowledge in the assignment?

If, for example, students have to communicate in writing their intention or visual concept for a studio project, then the criterion in this case—that is, the thing you look for and evaluate—might be a statement of intention or purpose, or an explanation of their concept.

Aligning course and assignment learning outcomes

Learning outcome (course level)

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- use writing to explain and document your developing ideas for a visual concept in a studio project

More specific grading criteria (assignment level)

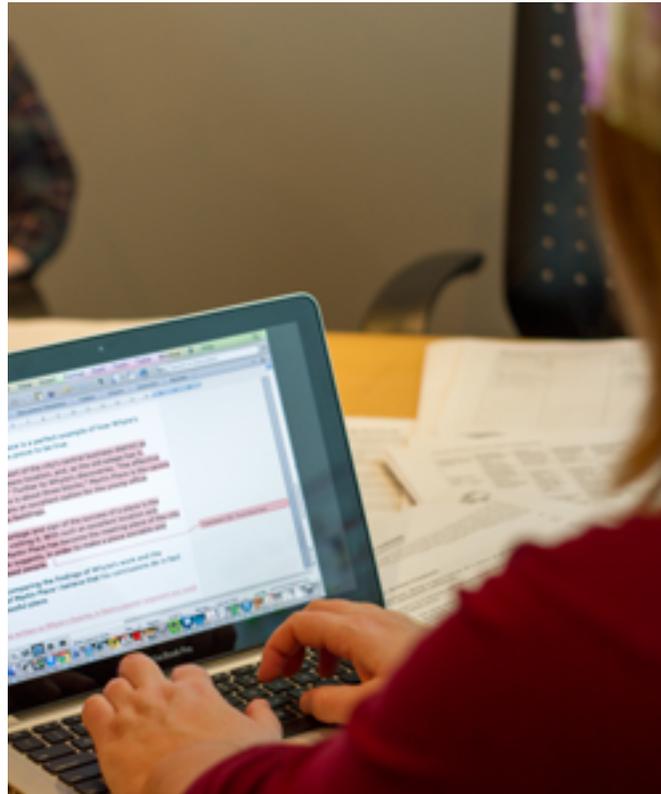
By completing this assignment, you will document the development of your work in order to:

- explain your intention for a visual concept
- show evidence of your visual research and document your sources
- use appropriate vocabulary to describe such elements as colour, line, shape and texture
- identify the tools, materials and processes you will use to complete your project

How should their performance be measured?

In your particular learning context, what indicates an exceptional versus an adequate versus a less than adequate performance of any of the criteria? To be exceptional, does a visual concept have to be original and inventive? Remember that you can help your students achieve the benchmarks you set by guiding them and being explicit about your expectations. You can also show them models or samples of good practice.

The university grading policy also provides descriptive benchmarks for performance at different grade levels. These descriptors might help you think through and provide model language for your own benchmarks.



Griffith, Angie. FCDC TA training, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

Grading rubric for a writing assignment to document project development					
	A	B	C	D	F
explanation of intention for visual concept	complex, persuasive explanation of intention	clear, effective explanation	mostly clear explanation, could be developed further	intention is not adequately clear	no explanation of intention
evidence of research	excellent variety of visual sources; clearly documented	good variety of visual sources; clearly documented	some evidence of visual research; citations incomplete	little evidence of visual research; no citations	no evidence of visual research
use of vocabulary	clear, precise use of vocabulary	mostly clear, effective use of vocabulary	mostly clear use, some vocabulary used imprecisely	little evidence of vocabulary appropriate to project	no evidence of vocabulary appropriate to project
identification of tools, materials and processes	comprehensive, effective range of tools, materials and processes	appropriate, mostly complete range	some identification of tools, materials and processes; could use further development	little evidence of tools, materials and processes	no evidence of tools, materials and processes

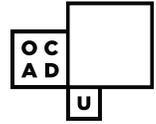
In the next section, we'll consider how you can communicate your assessment criteria and student assessments using grading rubrics.

In appendix

Writing Diagnostic for a First-year Art History Course ([click here for editable Word file](#))

Self-Assessment Checklist: Artist's Statement ([Word file](#))

Self-Assessment Checklist: Research Essay ([Word file](#))



Writing Diagnostic for a First-year Art History Course

Assignment Context:

A “diagnostic” assignment—which you might call simply a “preliminary” assignment—provides students with feedback early on in a course. The purpose is to give students a sense of what skills and knowledge they already have and what they need to develop. It also gives you, as course instructor, a preliminary sense of what your students are capable of achieving and how you might tailor your teaching and learning activities to address specific needs or concerns you identify.

Diagnostic assignments are usually not given a grade that counts towards the final grade because they take place before learning in a course has begun. You may find a holistic rubric, such as the one below, is a less intimidating way for you to provide substantive feedback. However, if you do give students a nominal letter or numerical grade (that is, assign a grade but don't include it in the final grade weighting), they can evaluate their progress by comparing it with grades received later in the term.

Below is a sample diagnostic essay for VISA 1B06 Critical Frameworks for Art History. The diagnostic was delivered in class prior to a workshop led by the Writing & Learning Centre. The writing was graded and returned to students and the needs of the students identified by the diagnostic were used to inform the development of the subsequent workshop.

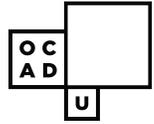
Assignment:

Name:

“Until one tries to write about it, the work of art remains a sort of aesthetic blur... After seeing the work, write about it. You cannot be satisfied for very long in simply putting down what you felt. You have to go further” (Arthur Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, 1994). What does “going further” mean when writing about art?

In the space below, write a brief essay that begins with a claim in answer to the question above. Provide at least TWO reasons that support your claim and provide evidence to support your reasons. Use concrete examples rather than abstract generalizations or impressions. You might begin by thinking about or considering some of the theoretical approaches or methodologies you've studied so far.

SAMPLE *Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty*



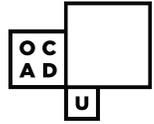
Grading Rubric

Quality of Argument		
Clarity of Structure		
Use of supporting evidence		
Quality of Writing		

Overall Evaluation:

SAMPLE *Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty*

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Self-Assessment Checklist: Artist Statement

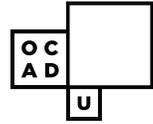
Context:

Along with assignment instructions and grading rubrics, self-assessment checklists can be another opportunity to communicate your expectations to students. The checklist format enables students to actively bring these expectations into conversation with the writing they have produced and also provides a clear framework that students can use to assess and edit their own work.

Encourage students to use such checklists near the end of their writing process, as they are preparing their final drafts.

SAMPLE *Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty*

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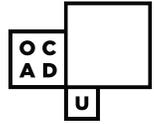


Artist's Statement Checklist

Checklist	✓
AUDIENCE & PURPOSE	
Is your use of vocabulary/terminology appropriate for your audience (e.g., general public, critics, artists)?	
Is your description of your work appropriate to your purpose for writing (e.g., for a gallery, website, exhibition)?	
Is your statement a suitable length for your purpose?	
Imagine you are a reader seeing your statement for the first time. Does it aid your understanding of the work?	
INTENTION & INTERPRETATION	
Do you describe the intention(s) of your work?	
Do you provide specific details as to how your work addresses this intention?	
Do you describe the potential relationship between your work and the audience? (optional)	
MATERIALS & PROCESS	
Do you describe the materials/media you work with?	
Do you provide specific details as to how those materials/media are used in your work?	
Do you highlight formal elements and/or aspects of process important to your work?	
Do you provide specific details as to how those formal elements and/or aspects of process are used in your work?	
INFLUENCES	
Do you mention any cultural influences that inform your work?	
Do you mention any theoretical influences that inform your work?	
Do you mention any methodological influences that inform your work?	
Do you provide names of any specific people, cultures and/or works that inform your work?	
Do you use quotation marks to distinguish other people's words from your own?	
PROOFING	
Is your statement formatted appropriately for its purpose?	
Are your sentences clear and simple?	
Is your language clear and precise?	
Is your statement grammatically consistent (verb/noun agreements, verb tenses)?	
Is your statement stylistically consistent (capitalization, spacing, indentation, fonts)?	

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Self-Assessment Checklist: Research Essay

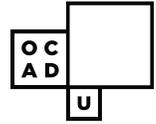
Context:

Along with assignment instructions and grading rubrics, self-assessment checklists can be another opportunity to communicate your expectations to students. The checklist format enables students to actively bring these expectations into conversation with the writing they have produced and also provides a clear framework that students can use to assess and edit their own work.

Encourage students to use such checklists near the end of their writing process, as they are preparing their final drafts.

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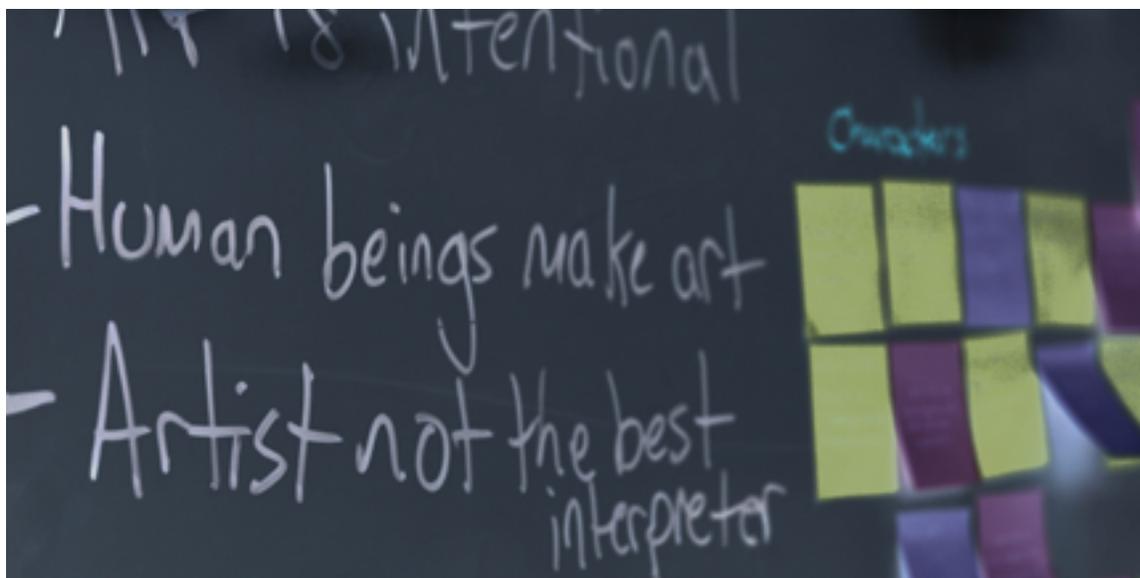


Essay Checklist

Essay Checklist	✓
THESIS	
Does your thesis make a claim?	
Does your thesis propose a strategy for supporting that claim?	
Does your thesis draw a comparison related to specific examples?	
BODY PARAGRAPHS	
Does every paragraph have a topic sentence?	
Do your topic sentences state the focus of each paragraph?	
Is the focus of each paragraph relevant to your thesis?	
Does each paragraph contain examples and evidence to support your claim?	
STRUCTURE	
Do your paragraphs progress logically to develop your argument?	
Do you use transitional expressions to link ideas from sentence to sentence?	
Do you use transitional expressions to introduce, summarize and conclude ideas?	
USE OF SOURCES	
Are all of your ideas and words your own?	
Have you checked your essay against your notes to make sure?	
Do you cite your sources where appropriate (i.e., for paraphrase or summary)?	
Do you use quotation marks to distinguish other people's words from your own?	
Are your citations complete and correct?	
FORMAT	
Is the font Times New Roman 12 point?	
Have you included B/W illustrations at the end of your essay?	
Have you included a Bibliography including cited works at the end of your essay?	
PROOFING	
Are your sentences clear and simple?	
Is your language clear and precise (pronouns, terminology)?	
Is your essay grammatically consistent (verb/noun agreements, verb tenses)?	
Is your essay stylistically consistent (capitalization, spacing, indentation, fonts)?	

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Griffith, Angie. WLC Workshop, untitled photograph. OCAD University, 2013.

USING GRADING RUBRICS

“Few things are more frustrating for students than unexplained grades (‘Why is mine a 73 and hers a 78?’), and it is one of the great powers of the rubric to bring us closer to explaining the inherently inexplicable notion of what makes a piece of writing work.” (Livingstone, 2012, p. 112).

In an earlier section, we considered the advantages of communicating clear, explicit expectations for student work. Having clear expectations and using assessment criteria serve to demystify the grading process and help students achieve goals.

In this section, we will consider how grading rubrics can help you communicate your expectations to students, both before and after the grading process. We will also consider some of the many different kinds of grading rubrics and ways to design and use them.

In short, a rubric is a tool for communicating how a student has met predetermined criteria for a course or assignment.

In Context

A rubric is an assessment tool that both instructors and students find useful. It offers a clear statement of assessment criteria for a given assignment, often expressed in the form of a table that measures achievement on a cut score or scale based on formal, often disciplinary or institutional standards. Rubrics can be used to evaluate a variety of assessed assignments, including essays, research or design projects, group work, critiques and presentations. Each type of assignment will require a different rubric that describes what students are required to achieve.

While creating different rubrics for every assignment you use involves considerable work, the advantage of designing original rubrics is that the thoughtfully designed rubric compels you to consider carefully why you're asking students to complete an assignment and what they need to be able to demonstrate by completing it.

“Both an end in itself and a stepping-stone to the next assignment, the rubric gives students an explicit indication of what elements they need to work on in the future. Evaluation, which might otherwise seem subjective, mysterious and opaque, is reshaped into something objective, public, and transparent.”

Instructors can design assignment-specific rubrics to offer students a sense of how well they have executed the task or applied the particular skill set the assignment evaluates. Rubrics can thus be particularly useful to students when distributed in advance, ideally with the assignment itself.

For the student who, for example, may not

have given much thought to “organization” or “use of evidence,” seeing such categories itemized (and described in terms of achievement in each of the grade ranges) provides the student with increased awareness of how important such components are to the success of the project or assignment. Having access to the rubric ahead of time may thus factor into the student’s work in the pre-writing, drafting and revising process.

While rubrics offer students the chance to measure their own achievement against clear expectations, the rubric should not be seen as prescriptive. A rubric does not tell a student what to do or how to approach an assignment. Instead, it offers the student insight into how an assignment will be (or has been) evaluated. Both an end in itself and a stepping-stone to the next assignment, the rubric gives students an explicit indication of what elements they need to work on in the future. Evaluation, which might otherwise seem subjective, mysterious and opaque, is reshaped into something objective, public and transparent.

Working with rubrics can be useful for instructors at both the assignment design stage and the evaluation stage. At the designing stage, the rubric and assignment can be shaped in tandem, giving the instructor opportunities to define and articulate learning outcomes, and to formalize strategies for evaluation. Some rubric formats will be easily transportable from assignment to assignment, and may be evaluated and slightly revised from year to year, while other types of assignments may require developing a new rubric that is oriented around a unique or unusual type of project.

At the evaluation stage, using rubrics will help instructors to achieve greater consistency in grading. This is especially true when some or all of the grading in a course is done by Teaching Assistants. Because the rubric serves to explicate and formalize expectations, it may also incidentally lead to faster or more efficient grading as the instructor or TA can rely on the rubric to explain the difference, for example, between A-level performance and B-level performance.

While rubrics have the potential to make grading more consistent and efficient, to be truly successful they still require the

thoughtful labour of an engaged reader and evaluator. The rubric should thus be considered a “flexible” and “individual” device that operates “within a system of grading” (Livingstone, 2012, p. 111). As Spandel observes, rubrics do not require that instructors “abandon individuality or cease responding on a personal level” (2006, p. 21). While the rubric schematizes expectations for the assignment, it does not require the instructor to evaluate each assignment as if it must fit into a single and narrow definition of the assignment. Recognizing that students approach assignments, arguments, critiques, etc. from their individual positions, a rubric should fundamentally acknowledge that there are multiple ways in which an assignment can be approached. The use of a rubric, like “any tool, is ultimately specific to the user” (Livingstone, 2012, p. 110).

Students respond positively to grading rubrics because they present reliable, consistent, accurate and clear feedback (Andrade and Du, 2005). The rubric provides objectivity “by insisting that the teacher have a basis for the final assessment” (Livingstone, 2012, p. 111).

Even before students begin work on an assignment, rubrics clearly communicate the instructor’s expectations. Thus, a thoughtfully designed rubric may “promote student learning, achievement, and self-regulation” (Andrade, 2006, p. 9).

In addition, if the same rubric is used for multiple assignments in the same course, it provides the student with the opportunity to implement feedback on future assignments and to measure their own progress. Livingstone notes, “Comparing paper to paper, [students] can even begin to self-identify trends in need of strong correction” (2012, p. 112).

By highlighting specific learning outcomes, rubrics may also help students better understand how an individual assignment fits within the larger learning goals of a course.

References and Further Reading

- Andrade, H. (2006). The trouble with a narrow view of rubrics. *English Journal*, 95(6), 9.
- Andrade, H. & Du Y. (2005). Student perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment.” *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation* 10(3), 1-11.
- Livingstone, M. (2012). The Infamy of grading rubrics. *English Journal* 102(2), 108-113.
- Popham, W.J. (1997). What’s wrong—and what’s right—with rubrics. *Educational Leadership*, 55(2), 72-75.
- Spandel, V. (2006). In defense of rubrics. *English Journal*, 96(1), 19–22.

Developing rubrics

A rubric is a tool that course instructors can use to communicate to students how an assignment has been graded by showing them how they have met expectations or criteria. Students appreciate the clarity and concision rubrics provide and, generally speaking, the use of rubrics leads to fewer grade complaints.

Rubrics all have three common features: evaluative criteria, quality definitions, and a scoring strategy” (Popham, 1997, p. 72). Apart from these key common features, a rubric can take different forms.

The two most common types of grading rubric are **holistic** and **analytic**.

Why use a rubric?

Rubrics help you to:

- Communicate clear expectations
- Grade objectively and consistently
- Reduce your grading time
- Provide high quality feedback to students
- Show students how they performed on specific parts of an assessment

A **holistic rubric** assesses multiple criteria at one time based on an overall or holistic evaluation. Holistic rubrics are useful for providing summative feedback, or when criteria are interrelated. For example, holistic rubrics are useful when grading short answers on a test or exam. You may find it useful to insert a short table such as the one below directly into the test or exam question sheet, so students can use it to inform how they complete the question.

As in the case of the sample holistic rubric below, the scoring doesn’t demonstrate how students have fared with respect to particular expectations but rather gives an overall measure of performance.

Example of a holistic rubric for a short reading-response writing exercise

	Assessment Criteria: Use of relevant examples; ability to describe and analyse; ability to apply discipline-specific concepts and terms
5/5:	Always uses relevant examples; identifies specific visual/textual elements; clear and specific analysis; uses disciplinary vocabulary correctly and effectively.
4/5:	Most examples are relevant; identifies specific visual/textual elements; clear and specific analysis; uses disciplinary vocabulary correctly and effectively.
3/5:	Some examples not relevant; general discussion of visual/textual elements; description more prominent than analysis; occasional misuse of disciplinary vocabulary.
2/5:	Few relevant examples; little discussion of visual/textual elements; description more prominent than analysis; frequent misuse of disciplinary vocabulary.
1/5:	Answer is incomplete; little or no use of examples; no analysis; frequent misuse or no use of disciplinary terminology.

An **analytic rubric**, by comparison, assesses each criterion of an assignment individually by level of performance. Analytic rubrics help identify strengths and weaknesses relative to particular criteria or expectations. For this reason, analytic rubrics are useful tools in diagnostic and formative feedback.

Example of an analytic rubric for an essay

	A	B	C	D	F
Strength of Thesis	complex thesis; critical, abstract, original thought; strongly analytical; offers persuasive, coherent argument.	clear, cogent thesis; convincing; analytical.	thesis is clear but descriptive, summative, impressionistic; (somewhat) underdeveloped.	thesis is not debatable, unclear; rudimentary summary, description.	no thesis.
Structure of Argument	logical; organic; compelling; integrated with and supports thesis; essay structured by coherent argument.	logical; orderly; coherent; mostly integrated with thesis; essay structured as argument.	some parts of argument linked illogically, incoherently; not fully integrated with thesis; essay organized by text chronology or description.	paragraphs, sentences linked illogically, incoherently; not integrated with the thesis; some, little attempt at organization.	no order; incoherent; much irrelevance; no argument; very repetitive.
Use of Evidence	careful close reading of text; excellent attention to local textual detail such as form and figures of speech; insightful, critical analysis; quotation with explanation.	effective, apparent close reading of text; good attention to local textual detail such as form and figures of speech; adequate analysis/quotation.	some evidence of close reading; some attention to local textual detail; inadequate analysis/quotation; textual detail needs context; examples not fully integrated into argument.	little evidence of close reading; inadequate attention to local textual detail; tends towards generalization, description; no analysis; little quotation; not integrated.	no attempt at close reading; little evidence of having read the text; no textual quotation.
Clarity of Writing	concise, elegant; few errors; good vocabulary; very effective use of critical terms.	clear, concise; good vocabulary; incorporation of, attempt to use critical terms.	mostly clear, some confusing or imprecise language; some difficulty using critical terms.	serious errors of grammar or sentence construction make understanding difficult.	repetitive; incomprehensible writing.

How you choose to lay out your rubric, whether holistic or analytic, is up to you. However, a table such as the example above is effective, combining, as it does, the appeal of a clear at-a-glance overview with more nuanced descriptive comments. The table format offers a series of criteria (for an essay these might include argument, organization, evidence, quality of writing) and a description of the achievement (Popham’s “quality definitions”) throughout the grade range. Generally speaking, the more detailed and specific the rubric is, the more useful it will be for students.

In using an analytic rubric such as this, the instructor could underline, circle or highlight the relevant items (and might include elements from more than one “quality” column). The instructor might also annotate the rubric further by writing in further descriptive comments into individual boxes.

One final consideration is how the rubrics are scored. Analytic rubrics can be *weighted*, such that each of the criteria is given a value worth so much of the total grade of the assignment. Weighting your rubric is useful when you want to assign a higher value

to a particular criterion. However, doing so gives you less flexibility in the assigning of grades. Unweighted analytic rubrics are more commonly used in evaluating writing and oral assignments.

Example of a weighted rubric for a studio project with a writing component

	A	B	C	D	F	POINTS
Quality of Design (60%)	Exceptional form and craft; composition effectively communicates data and analysis; strong and purposeful use of typography, hierarchy, contrast, alignment	Strong form and craft; composition effectively communicates data and analysis; purposeful use of typography, hierarchy, contrast, alignment	Composition sometimes communicates data and analysis effectively; somewhat effective use of typography, hierarchy, contrast, alignment	Composition rarely effectively communicates data and analysis; little to no effective use of typography, hierarchy, contrast, alignment	Composition hinders communication of data and analysis; ineffective and and/or haphazard use of typography, hierarchy, contrast, alignment, (etc.) or other elements	
	51 points	45 points	39 points	33 points	30 points	/60
Quality of Writing (30%)	Clear description and analysis of specific design features; accurate use of discipline-specific language	Mostly clear description and analysis of specific design features; mostly accurate use of discipline specific language	Occasionally clear description of design features with some analysis of specific design features; occasional misuse of discipline-specific terminology	Incomplete description of design features, little to no analysis; frequent misuse or no use of discipline-specific terminology; multiple spelling and/or grammatical errors	No description or analysis of design features; no use of discipline-specific terminology; spelling and/or grammatical errors impede communication	
	26 points	23 points	20 points	17 points	15 points	/30
Quality of Portfolio Presentation (10%)	Includes all process work; organization of materials coherent and effective	Includes some process work; some materials missing; organization is sometimes coherent and effective	Includes most process work; organization of materials mostly coherent and effective	Missing multiple components; organization of materials vague/difficult to follow	No evidence of process work; no clear organization of materials	
	8 points	7 points	6 points	5 points	4 points	/10

From the students’ perspective, the well-designed rubric offers a clear visual representation of what they have achieved in relation to the learning outcomes, and indicates what improvements need to be made in the next assignment in order to achieve greater success.

Setting your criteria

In terms of how many criteria you include in a rubric, Popham (1997) recommends against overly general and overly detailed rubrics, recommending no more than five criteria be evaluated on the rubric. In practice, it may be necessary to include more or

fewer criteria. Each criterion should be a significant component, attribute or skill related to the task of the assignment.

In addition to avoiding overly general or overly dense rubric design, instructors may wish to avoid unduly negative language that may be discouraging to the student reader. “Underdeveloped argument” or “argument needs further development” are more neutral than “weak argument” or “poor argument.” In the rubric, as in marginal notations and final comments, graders are encouraged to be constructive and supportive in their language choices.

The next section of *Including writing in your course: a toolkit for faculty* provides other strategies for giving feedback to students.

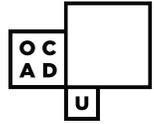
In appendix

Holistic Rubric for an Essay Assignment ([click here for an editable Word file](#))

Analytic Rubric for an Essay Assignment ([Word file](#))

Holistic Rubric for Exam or Test Short Answers ([Word file](#))

Weighted Rubric for a Design Studio Project with a Writing Component ([Word file](#))



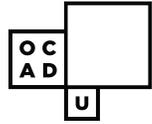
Holistic Rubric for an Essay Assignment

Quality of Argument		
Clarity of Structure		
Use of supporting evidence		
Quality of Writing		

Overall Evaluation:

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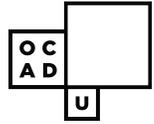
Analytic Rubric for an Essay Assignment

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structure of argument	logical; organic; compelling; integrated with and supports thesis; essay structured by coherent argument.	logical; orderly; coherent; mostly integrated with thesis; essay structured as argument.	some parts of argument linked illogically, incoherently; not fully integrated with thesis; essay organized by text chronology or description.	paragraphs, sentences linked illogically, incoherently; not integrated with the thesis; some, little attempt at organization.	no order; incoherent; much irrelevance; no argument; very repetitive.
use of evidence	careful close reading of text; excellent attention to local textual detail such as form and figures of speech; insightful, critical analysis; quotation with explanation.	effective, apparent close reading of text; good attention to local textual detail such as form and figures of speech; adequate analysis/quotation.	some evidence of close reading; some attention to local textual detail; inadequate analysis/quotation; textual detail needs context; examples not fully integrated into argument.	little evidence of close reading; inadequate attention to local textual detail; tends towards generalization, description; no analysis; little quotation; not integrated	no attempt at close reading; little evidence of having read the text; no textual quotation.
clarity of writing	concise, elegant; few errors; good vocabulary; very effective use of critical terms.	clear, concise; good vocabulary; incorporation of, attempt to use critical terms.	mostly clear, some confusing or imprecise language; some difficulty using critical terms.	serious errors of grammar or sentence construction make understanding difficult.	repetitive; incomprehensible writing.

Grade:

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Holistic Rubric for Exam or Test Short Answers

Assessment Criteria: Use of relevant examples; ability to describe and analyse; ability to apply discipline-specific concepts and terms (vocabulary)

5/5: Always uses relevant examples; identifies specific visual/textual elements; clear and specific analysis; uses disciplinary vocabulary correctly and effectively

4/5: Most examples are relevant; identifies specific visual/textual elements; clear and specific analysis; uses disciplinary vocabulary correctly and effectively.

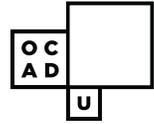
3/5: Some examples not relevant; general discussion of visual/textual elements; description more prominent than analysis; occasional misuse of disciplinary vocabulary

2/5: Few relevant examples; little discussion of visual/textual elements; description more prominent than analysis; frequent misuse of disciplinary vocabulary

1/5: Answer is incomplete; little or no use of examples; no analysis; frequent misuse or no use of disciplinary vocabulary

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Weighted Rubric for a Design Studio Project with a Writing Component

	A	B	C	D	F	Points
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Quality of Writing (30%)	Clear description and analysis of specific design features; accurate use of discipline specific language 26 points	Mostly clear description and analysis of specific design features; mostly accurate use of discipline specific language 23 points	Occasionally clear description of design features with some analysis specific design features; occasional misuse of discipline-specific terminology 20 points	Incomplete description of design features, little to no analysis; frequent misuse OR no use of discipline-specific terminology; multiple spelling and/or grammatical errors 17 points	No description or analysis of design features; no use of discipline-specific terminology; spelling and/or grammatical errors impede communication < 15 points	/30
Quality of Portfolio Presentation (10%)	Includes all process work; organization of materials coherent and effective 8 points	Includes all process work; organization of materials coherent and effective 7 points	Includes most process work; organization of materials mostly coherent and effective 6 points	Missing multiple components; organization of materials vague/difficult to follow 5 points	Missing multiple components; no clear organization of materials < 5 points	/10

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