



Faculty and Curriculum Development Centre

2017

Piece by piece: OCAD University teaching assistant resource guide

Bassidji, Ali, Brandhagen, Kris, Roberta, McNaughton, Robinson, Martha, Sky, Melissa, Toliadis, Ilias, Unruh, Leanne, Walker, Ellyn and Wheatcroft, Holly

Suggested citation:

Bassidji, Ali, Brandhagen, Kris, Roberta, McNaughton, Robinson, Martha, Sky, Melissa, Toliadis, Ilias, Unruh, Leanne, Walker, Ellyn and Wheatcroft, Holly (2017) Piece by piece: OCAD University teaching assistant resource guide. OCAD University, Toronto. Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1493/>

Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.

The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at repository@ocadu.ca.



PIECE BY PIECE

OCAD UNIVERSITY
TEACHING ASSISTANT
RESOURCE GUIDE





TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	04
<u>2013-2014 ACADEMIC YEAR CONTRIBUTIONS</u>	
TEACHING THE FINE LINES OF TONE	07
PLANTING SEEDS FOR DECOLONIZATION	11
ARTIST PROFILE: GHOSTS INTERPRETERS OF MEMORIES	14

**EFFECTIVE ONLINE COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR
SUPPORTING STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE TUTORIAL** **19**

A TUTORIAL OF RENAISSANCE HUMANISM **23**

TIPS FOR TEACHING ESL IN TUTORIALS **26**

2014-2015 ACADEMIC YEAR CONTRIBUTIONS

**STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING THROUGH GROUP
WORK: ENGAGING DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES AND
BUILDING CAMARADERIE AMONGST PEERS** **31**

**POINT, PROOF, COMMENT: A STRATEGY FOR HELPING
STUDENTS WRITE CLEAR PARAGRAPHS** **34**

2015-2016 ACADEMIC YEAR CONTRIBUTIONS

STRESSING THE RELEVANCE OF COURSE MATERIAL **38**

CONTRIBUTORS **41**



INTRODUCTION

This teaching assistant resource guide showcases the flavours of teaching and learning within the OCAD University art and design context, where creativity and imagination are cultivated and valued as critical elements of undergraduate education. The practices presented reflect the longstanding principles of good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). The contributions to this guide were prepared by teaching assistants for teaching assistants, as a way to build knowledge, share their experience and expertise, and celebrate the excellent work that teaching assistants do at OCAD U.

This guide begins with Melissa Sky's article, *Teaching the Fine Lines of Tone*, which demonstrates how scaffolding students' learning experiences through the use of an 'Enter / Explore / Extend' model helps students to take on increasingly more complex tasks as they develop their knowledge and confidence. This article also highlights the importance of active learning, cooperation among students, and grounding course concepts in students' every day lives.

Ellyn Walker, in her article *Planting Seeds for Decolonization*, shows how she actively has students question their assumptions and critically engage with visual culture and the politics of representation, in courses such as *Global Visual and Material Culture* (a course required of all first year students), and the *History of Photography*. She helps students to see the complex-

ity of cultural histories and their representation both within art as well as in daily life. Ellyn is not afraid to become a co-learner with her students and to question the course materials as a way of both modeling critical thinking and approaching the learning process.

The title of Martha Robinson's article, *Effective Online Communication as a Tool for Supporting Students Outside of the Tutorial*, speaks for itself. The approach that Robinson presents embodies the principle that frequent and substantive student-faculty or student-TA interaction is an important factor in student motivation and engagement. By encouraging peer-to-peer interaction on the Canvas learning management system, she establishes a sense of reciprocity and cooperation among students in her tutorials. Furthermore, she employs online discussion as a vehicle to encourage English language learners to practice their skills and to seek timely and relevant support to help them succeed in their studies.

Holly Wheatcroft's contribution, *A Tutorial on Renaissance Humanism*, provides concrete examples, tips, and suggestions that teaching assistants can integrate into their own teaching practices in order to lead successful tutorials and be effective in their teaching assistant roles at OCAD University.

Teaching assistants at OCAD U hold multiple roles – they are teachers, they are often graduate students, and they frequently have their own art or design practice. This first resource guide profiles the work of teaching assistant, graduate student, and artist Ilias Toliadis, and his three pieces from *Ghosts, Interpreters of Memories*.

This version of the Teaching Assistant Resource Guide is the beginning of a work in progress that started in the 2013-14 academic year. Each year, the Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre will solicit additional contributions from teaching assistants to build an increasingly comprehensive tool and resource for future teaching assistants. The development of this guide was spearheaded by Stephanie Dayes, Educational Developer, FCDC, was compiled and edited by OCAD U teaching assistant Meghan Bissonnette, and was designed by Carson Campbell, OCAD U graduate and staff member within FCDC. It is through their efforts and time that this guide has been realized.

Much thanks to faculty reviewers Catherine Black, Lori Riva, and Dr. Heather Coffey for contributing their time to review and give feedback on the submissions. Finally, acknowledgement is also due to the many faculty and administrators who have recognized the need for training to support our teaching assistants for their important roles in the learning journey of our students.

Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Reprinted from the AAHE Bulletin.

—Dr. Carol Roderick, Director, Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre (FCDC) June 2014

We are pleased to add contributions from Kris Brandhagen and Roberta McNaughton to this resource guide for the 2014-2015 academic year, and to congratulate them on being the first to complete the TA Certificate in Teaching & Learning. In order to be eligible for this certificate, teaching assistants must participate in 6 hours of our Fall training sessions, complete and write about 3 additional teaching-related workshops from across OCAD U, and contribute to this resource guide.

In her article, *Point, Proof, Comment*, Kris Brandhagen shares a three-step strategy she has used to help students write clear, well-structured paragraphs for academic essays. Teaching assistants leading tutorials for OCAD U's *The Essay* and the *Argument* course will find this article to be particularly helpful, as Kris has used examples from that course's textbook to illustrate her points.

Roberta McNaughton emphasizes the benefits of using group work techniques in tutorial, and speaks to the effectiveness of these techniques in the context of a first year art history course. In her article, *Student Centred Learning Through Group Work*, Roberta argues that group work helps to build a richer, more inclusive learning experience for students.

Thank you to the 2014-15 faculty reviewers, Lynne Heller and Sarah McLean-Knapp, for their thoughtful feedback and suggestions on the submissions.

This year also saw the introduction of the Inspired Teaching Award for Teaching Assistant of the Year. Congratulations to Holly Wheatcroft, who is the 2015 award recipient. Holly was nominated by Assistant Professor Richard Hunt. We published Holly's article, *A Tutorial of Renaissance Humanism*, in this guide.

The Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre at OCAD U has made great progress in Teaching Assistant professional development in 2014-2015, and we wish to once again thank all of the faculty and administrators who support these initiatives. We look forward to continuing to build a community for TAs in 2015-2016.

—Stephanie Dayes, Educational Developer, Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre (FCDC), June 2015



TEACHING THE FINE LINES OF TONE

**MELISSA
SKY**

01



Teaching the Fine Lines of Tone

Melissa Sky

This article shares my tips for teaching tone using a gradual release model of pedagogy, a structured teaching style wherein the learner steadily takes on increasing responsibility in the learning process. In this lesson, students learn to identify, evaluate and produce different kinds of tone in oral and written communications. Moreover, they learn to explain why tone matters in personal, academic and workplace communication. In keeping with the conventional “Enter/Explore/Extend” teaching template, I start the lesson with a hook (the entry point), displaying a funny text message screenshot of a couple breaking up via texts that start out rather ambiguous then become all too clear. I ask students to raise their hands if they have ever received a text that confused them because they couldn’t figure out the sender’s intention. This leads into a discussion of the challenges of expressing tone in electronic communication and the subsequent invention of emoticons. We discuss the nature of tone and how it is expressed differently in oral and written communication.

Besides body language, inflection is the main way in which tone is expressed in oral communication, and we engage in a fun, whole-class drama exercise to demonstrate how meaning can change depending upon inflection. This is the body of the lesson where we explore key concepts. I typically start by saying, “Wow, Angelina, I really love your outfit” in a genuinely complimentary tone and then in a sarcastic tone, so that inflection is modeled for them. We then move onto Activity 1 in the Appendix, collectively voicing the same word (“Oh!”) with varying inflections that shift the word’s meaning. This leads to a discussion of subtext and I project a short drama script (Activity 2) that is written ambiguously. The students get into pairs and act it out twice, changing the meaning of the scene by changing their tone. In one performance, they might be spies exchanging information. In the next performance, they might be a couple getting engaged. In another performance, they might be siblings starting a fistfight. Students are often fascinated that the same dialogue can inspire different interpretations of the scene.

From here, we move onto a consideration of tone in written work and how it is expressed through diction. I use real exemplars of student emails I’ve received to make the learning more authentic and relevant. I show them three emails, provide their context, and then ask students if they are at the right level of formality. After some discussion, I follow this up by

reading aloud the most outrageously informal essay I have ever received in my teaching career. I do this because it's memorably humorous, but also because the student does make several fine points, points that are missed because the tone overshadows the content. I ask students to work in pairs to re-write one of these points with appropriate tone. We then look at an assigned reading, Garrett Hardin's "Lifeboat Ethics," and I tell them how I would assess the writer's tone and ask them to find proof to support my claims. Specifically, I argue that Hardin's tone is elitist. Students have to find a word choice or phrasing to support this assessment, then give a synonym or rephrasing that would express the same general meaning, but convey a different tone.

To end and extend the lesson, I ask students to write two versions of the first few sentences of an artist statement. One version should have an arrogant tone and one should have a confident tone. We take this up the next class, comparing our creations. This often leads into discussions of appropriate levels of playfulness in professional writing. Throughout these hands-on exercises, we are engaging in ongoing conversations about why tone matters in our personal and professional lives. We also discuss the importance of knowing any communications' purpose and audience. I hope this article gives TAs what they would need to replicate and expand upon this lesson, which initiates thinking about the nuances of tone, a tricky topic for many students.

Appendix

Activity 1:

- Oh—(how lovely)
- Oh—(so what)
- Oh—(well, perhaps)
- Oh—(look out)
- Oh—(don't be so rude)
- Oh—(do you expect me to believe that)
- Oh—(that hurts)

Activity 2:

A. You're late.
B. I know. I couldn't help it.
A. I understand.
B. I thought you would.
A. I have something to give you.
B. Really?
A. Yes, this.

Activity 3:

Exemplar 1

Context: Undergraduate student to professor

Hello Ms. Sky, I was wondering if we will ever need our laptops for class. I take notes on paper and was wondering if I should bring my laptop to your class or leave it at home. I will ask my

TA the same. Thanks,
Anonymous

Exemplar 2

Context: Undergraduate student to professor

Hey Mel, I know it is mandatory to attend tutorials, but is it mandatory to attend the lectures?

Anonymous

Exemplar 3

Context: High school student to teacher

Hello professor. I have been sick for about 1 week with what my doctor think may be mono-nucleosis. I would appreciate it a great deal if you could send me a list of things I could work on...I am very grateful for your assistance in this matter...I am in your debt,

Anonymous

Activity 4:

Context: Grade 9 University Level English class

Romeo and juliet is, in my opinion isn't romance tragedy or comedy. Here is why i believe this. First off its defiantly not romance ok a 14 year old guy just breaks up with his girlfriend because she wont "lie" with him, so he and his friend are like hey man lets go try and get you some action, but he's all like oh Rosalyn blah blah blah. Then its like there in a toy store and he's pretty much like oh oh i want uhhh that one ! But when he meets Juliet he's kinda like yeah she alight tehn yeah she hot , so he pretty much stalks her and then listens in to her and decides he loves her. Keep in mind he got dumped a few hours ago. So then they figure out who they are blah blah blah than boom he's banished , and she is being forced to mary Paris , partly because her family wants a higher status. So a little later Romeo and juliet come up with a brilliant plan , fake her death ! Hey that a great idea honey ! So in the end romeo thinks juliet is dead so he drinks some poison and dies and Juliet wakes up and she is dead so she stabs her self with his dagger. The end. Its not a tragedy , some teens are in puppy love and they die for each other after knowing each other for like 3 days , aww pumpkin. Yeah its sad but not a tragedy. tragedies are when something like hurricane Katrina happens. Defiantly not a comedy not enough people know what their saying , and yeah sure cucumbers in her dress are funny but not enough to call the whole play a comedy. I dont know what to call this play other than boring , and as much as I respect Shakespeare , and the name romeo and Juliet has made for its self i think it is over exposed.



**PLANTING
SEEDS FOR
DECOLONIZATION**

**ELLYN
WALKER**

02

Planting Seeds for Decolonization

Ellyn Walker

Teaching Canadian art history needs to be viewed as a political act, as it necessitates critical engagement with visual culture and the politics of representation. This is what cultural theorist Stuart Hall has described as the ways in which inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender and class shape the production of images and, in turn, the way images are understood. Historically in Canada, French and English European settler culture produced images reflective of colonial and nationalist histories that excluded, misrepresented and codified Indigenous and non-white bodies. Such cultural elisions bring to mind a number of questions that relate to how one views and makes sense of national images with particular regard to teaching. For instance, who is represented in images of Canada? Who is left out? Why are these kinds of presences and absences important in teaching and engaging with art history?

Critical Canadian art history borrows lenses from multiple areas of study, which can include sociology, cultural theory, anthropology and geography, amongst others. This enables interdisciplinary and politicized readings of Canadian visual culture, such as how national identity is shaped through images of settler-colonialism. The relationship between the ways in which Canada has been visually represented and the ways in which settlement and colonization have occurred over time requires careful attention, as such linkages have been commonly overlooked in teaching art history and can reinforce dominant settler ideologies. Artworks and artists commonly associated with Canada have inevitably contributed to representations of the Canadian nation and its national imaginary, as well as to the recognition of who is part of the nation, and who is not. This article offers an example of how I engage critical Canadian art history in my teaching practice in an effort to question and push against Western canons of art and to consider alternative modes of representation.

When picturing popular images of Canada, one often thinks of the Group of Seven—a group of Canadian landscape painters working between 1920 and 1933 whose iconic artworks have represented nationalistic ideologies for almost a century. Their picturesque landscapes of locations such as Banff and Algonquin National Parks have become emblematic of Canada as a vast, sprawling wilderness uninhabited and awaiting conquer. These representations of the Canadian landscape have been popularized on national postcards, disseminating images of Canada on a global scale that depict notions of terra nullius, which literally means “land belonging to no one.” This kind of ideology attached to a land that has long been inhabited by Indigenous cultures is not only highly problematic, but also incredibly oppressive, as it perpetuates innocent notions of occupation and colonization. However, serious considerations apply to The Group of Seven’s picturesque landscapes, as they elide important cultural histories of Indigeneity on the land.

The landscape, particularly within the genre of painting, harbours secrets, selective memories, and self-serving myths that one must continuously consider when looking at representations of the Canadian nation. In the colonial Canadian context, this convention has given strategy to those whose imaginary is based on the evacuation of entire peoples from the landscape. These elisions of memory draw attention to the question of how different identities are represented within the nation space.

My teaching experience in courses such as *Global Visual and Material Culture* and *History of*

Photography has given me the opportunity to engage students in a deeper deconstruction of these images. While the students in my classes widely recognize the Group of Seven images I present to them, very few of them know the history of the sites depicted, specifically, the images' relationship to Indigenous history. For instance, in Lawren Harris's work *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1926, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), I ask how many students know that this work marks an important Indigenous site, where the Ojibway people have lived for thousands of years. No one raises their hand. Relating this tension to a more local context, I ask how many students in the class know that Toronto is also an Indigenous site, the original meeting place of the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and Wyandot people. Again, the same response.

By illuminating some of the histories we have not been taught in school, I try to show students that the process of learning history—be it art, cultural, political, etc.—is an ongoing process of engagement. It involves questioning what one has learned, and sometimes unlearning those teachings. For example, when showing my students artworks by Indigenous artists such as Carl Beam and Annie Pootoogook, one of my students continuously referred to them as 'Native American' artists. This was a unique learning opportunity for our class as well as for myself, as sensitive negotiation was required to communicate some of the complex history of naming and mis-identification. The next class, I brought in a stack of library books for the students to parse through, considering each of the titles and its context. The majority of the books used derogatory identifiers such as "Indian," "Native American" and "Eskimo." I explained that, in the past, these terms have been commonplace, though, are no longer so. I instructed students to always look at the publication date of a book before reading it, which can shed light on the linguistic conventions and social understandings from which it emerges. This kind of consideration means not denouncing racist and derogatory texts outright; instead, it posits critical reflection and contextualization. This practice follows the belief that history should not be censored or erased, rather, it should be critically considered.

I use these examples to illustrate to students how the presence and absence of specific cultural histories is a complex issue both in art and in life. I relate to students that I, myself, wasn't aware of Canada's Indigenous histories until more recently, which motivates me to look outside of the Western lens of art history I've been trained with my whole life. The ongoing movement for decolonization is an important approach through which to critically engage with representations of Canada. This process is achieved through continual practices of resistance that challenge the lasting effects of colonization, such as through the re-evaluation of Canadian art history and its canons—an act that includes students and teachers alike.



**ARTIST PROFILE:
GHOSTS,
INTERPRETERS OF
MEMORIES**

**ILIAS
TOLIADAS**

03

Artist Profile: Ghosts, Interpreters of Memories

Ilias Toliadas

The links between identity and memory are intimately connected to our cultural, geographical and familial history. IAMD grad student Ilias Toliadis explores the space created between all of these through his own Balkan heritage and the folk art of the region. Toliadis believes that ghosts inhabit the space between our histories and the objects with which we surround ourselves in the present. In his installations he aims to invoke these ghosts through the display of light fabrics and paper constructions supported by wood, ropes and other natural materials. He also invites the viewer to engage with the ambiguous ephemeral side of memory and its effect on identity, by simultaneously installing paintings made during the exploration of abandon or repurposed spaces.

More specifically in the three artworks shown here:

Bridge Ghost is an effort to bridge the idea of home with the idea of ceremonial space through the common use of the building's structure, commenting at the same time on the necessity of ritual.

Lake Ghost is inspired by the ancient concept of how the souls of the dead were escorted to the other world across the waters of a lake. The wooden raft signifies the ritual of this action and the light of the candle symbolizes a new spark, and new life. Through this fluid journey, death could be the beginning of something, rather than the end.

Stoa Ghost is a comment on the market ghosts, inspired initially after a visit to Kapali Carsi, the old covered market in Istanbul, which is designed in curved shapes. The ghosts inhabit the market, living with people during the day and remain after the lights are turned off to guard the market, solving out the problems with long nocturnal dialogues.



Lake Ghost







**EFFECTIVE ONLINE
COMMUNICATION
AS A TOOL FOR
SUPPORTING
STUDENTS OUTSIDE
THE TUTORIAL**

**MARTHA
ROBINSON**

04

Effective Online Communication as a Tool for Supporting Students Outside the Tutorial

Martha Robinson

What student would not benefit from a strategy to deliver resource and writing support that also encourages time management? Effective online communication with students accessed through learning management systems and email can improve the learning experience for students in both online and in-class tutorials. Directing students to resources for essay writing and suggesting study strategies for midterms and exams is beneficial across the board for students in both tutorial formats, enhancing the learning experience for students and easing information delivery for Teaching Assistants.

Improving student outcomes necessitates developing a willingness or habit in the student of communicating online with you as a Teaching Assistant (TA). The biggest hurdle can be lack of regular attention to the learning management system or student email on the part of the individual—encourage students to link these to a personal email for notification purposes.¹ Not every student will benefit from increased online communication but in two tutorial groups it did seem to help both average to above average students motivated to improve their outcomes and English language learners who needed extended discussion and support for their ideas. For the latter group, communication with a TA supported increased participation in discussions in the online tutorial as students could run ideas by the TA before writing a post that would fall under the scrutiny (real or imagined) of the group. Established patterns of communication made laying out materials, links, and tips that supported coursework manageable for me as a TA, and allowed an ongoing communication over the course of the academic week. A combination of announcements through Canvas and group email allowed information to be distributed incrementally in short messages—which are more likely to be read—and suggested a timeline for completing work linked to the timing of messages. For example, inserting a message about citations and bibliographies a few weeks before an essay deadline encourages students to consider citations at the beginning of the writing process and start working on the bibliography, an important time management strategy. Facility with online communication may also benefit students less comfortable with speaking in front of classmates in-class and reluctant to approach a TA in person.

Communication through the learning management system can support the student in multiple ways for writing assignments, exam preparation, and reinforcing in-class tutorials or online discussions by providing links to resources, individual feedback, and suggestions for time management. Small timely interventions in the writing process via a brief single-subject announcement or email will enhance each student's engagement with the assignment, save time for the student and TA, and positively contribute to student outcomes. It should not necessarily take up excess time for the TA: there may be students requiring more time from the TA and extended email dialogue, but there will be others that require little communication, balancing the time commitment. An environment where students freely communicate with the TA online offsets students' reluctance to attend office hours or briefly meet in person.

¹ At OCAD University the learning management system is called Canvas but universities use various programmes, including the proprietary 'Blackboard.'

Two assignments in OCAD University's first year survey course, Global Visual and Material Culture, illustrate some of the strategies that can be employed to support essay and assignment writing and development:

Example # 1: A Visual Analysis Essay

Students were given as subject for a formal analysis the image of Bison (c. 12,000 BCE) from the ceiling of the caves at Altamira, Spain.² Assignment instructions embedded in the course content directed students to resource material for understanding what comprises a visual analysis, which I reiterated in an announcement. A specific question was assigned to my tutorial connecting the formal properties with an aspect of the image's meaning, in this case related to the topography of the cave. I found a narrated video on the UNESCO website that walked the viewer through the caves and with the permission of the professor sent the link to students.³ The ultimate goal was to increase understanding on the part of the student—some students had completely misinterpreted the image due to the distortion caused by the camera's vantage point, or thought the visual analysis was meant to be of the photo rather than the bison painting—and the quick posting of the UNESCO link was a not to be missed opportunity to enhance students' comprehension.

Example # 2: A Critical Analysis Essay

This assignment asked students to analyze a work of art or design currently on view in the city, crafting an argument that defined how the work responded to one of several text excerpts previously discussed in class. The essay, which also included a peer-reviewed proposal, allowed for multiple engagements using the learning management system. Three weeks before the due date for the proposal, I began encouraging students to choose their work and download and read the assignment instructions. This direct reminder was not unwarranted even though the assignment guidelines were accessed as part of ongoing weekly participation. In a subsequent announcement I highlighted the proposal due date and advised conducting a preliminary scan for source material before committing to a subject that would offer few opportunities for research for the final essay. I continued to provide links for the assignment instructions in the due date reminders, to provide even more access points to these instructions.

After proposals were submitted I created a group email that linked MLA guidelines with examples of how to do a simple in-text citation. Online correspondence enabled me to redirect suggestions from the peer reviews if necessary, and provide individualized feedback addressing issues before students began to write the full essay. Some students were asked to meet in person, but many issues were worked out through email exchange in which students were occasionally sparked by a single question, allowing for the percolating of ideas through messages exchanged over the course of several days. This gave the student an important opportunity—albeit with prompting—to work through the problems with their essay on their own through a conversational email exchange facilitated by a well established ease with online communi-

² Marilyn Stokstad and Michael W. Cothren, *Art: A Brief History* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd./Pearson, 2012), 25.

³ "Cave of Altamira and Paleolithic Cave Art of Northern Spain," UNESCO: World Heritage List, accessed June 16, 2014 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/310>

cation. This might not have happened in the course of a student/TA meeting when the student is more nervous, there are time constraints or an audience, and as a TA I have found myself anxious for the student to leave the meeting on the right track.

Student access to online learning resources provided through their university has become quotidian as PowerPoints and podcasts become important tools for learning. For the TA there is an opportunity to take advantage of the student's facility with these systems through timed delivery of links to resources and increased dialogue with students, which offer the chance to enhance the learning experience. Improved assignment outcomes may also result from the individualized response possible via the window on student progress offered through learning management systems. These systems allow the TA to craft targeted responses to students' works-in-progress, and communicate during the course of the academic week rather than limiting discussion to a weekly tutorial. Regular online communication and strategies of brief and timely announcements and emails will suggest time management, and allow the TA to direct students to resources, building a relationship with individuals that can directly impact the quality of student work.



A TUTORIAL OF RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

**HOLLY
WHEATCROFT**

05

A Tutorial on Renaissance Humanism

Holly Wheatcroft

This tutorial serves to analyze the complex topic of Humanism and its impact on the art and architecture of the Renaissance through a close look at one seminal work by Masaccio. By the end of this tutorial, students will acquire key tools with which to unpack the term **Humanism**.

HUMANISM: A cultural movement in Renaissance Europe characterized by a revival of Classical letters, an individualistic and critical spirit, and a shift of emphasis from religious to secular concerns.

The success of this tutorial rests in distilling the influence of Humanism on Masaccio's *Holy Trinity* (1427-28) into three easy-to-understand themes. The goal is to lead the students through a dynamic discussion of the painting in a very particular way: to focus on how a fascination with the Classical past (and particularly with the city of Rome and the achievements of the Roman Empire) during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries percolated into the art and architecture of the Renaissance, especially that of Italy.

The three themes are as follows:

1. A revival of antiquity (primarily through the collection and translation of Graeco-Roman texts and the study of Roman architecture), which I call **Classicism** for easy memorization.
2. **The rise of the individual** (reflected in such things as an increase in secular patrons and the inclusion of the signature of the artist).
3. **Naturalism** (a noticeable shift in the depiction of the environment from other-worldly to “this-worldly” through an awareness of the human body and the convincing depiction of three-dimensional space with the use of linear perspective).

As in all of my teaching, before I explore the theme of the tutorial, I always try to warm up / relax the students with some quick questions. For this tutorial on Humanism, I like to refresh their memory on when and why a Renaissance occurs in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Two quick questions to stimulate conversation:

Why does a Renaissance happen in Europe at this time, anyways? What developments in medieval society can we identify that preceded / laid the foundation for the Renaissance?

In the ensuing discussion, I am looking for the students to mention any of the key words highlighted below, which I then write on the blackboard and elaborate upon briefly with them:

- a) The **feudal system** and its collapse due to extensive travel (**pilgrimages** and the Crusades in particular) and the resulting new systems of trade; introduction of novel ideas, media, iconography and engineering, especially **optics** in the exploration of non-Western cultures.
- b) Shifts in education (and access to texts) from highly prosperous **monastic scriptoria** to the first universities and thus ultimately to the private / secular community. (Gothic cathe-

drals assumed the role of universities in the late eleventh century, which signaled a shift of focus from the traditional rural schools present in monasteries, to the up-and-coming urban centres) The rise of the **merchant classes** = new wealth, new institutions (i.e. guilds), and new systems of organization (especially banking and lending).

c) The Church and the rise of Marian cults = a shift in focus and presentation from the fear-inducing **Christ in Judgment** to the loving, approachable intermediary figure of **Mary**.

Analysis and discussion of Masaccio's *Holy Trinity*:

With the image of the fresco on the screen in front of the class, I begin with the easiest theme for the students to recognize: classical architectural elements in the painting.

Part One: Revival of Antiquity in Art and Architecture

Ask the class: what is influenced by antique architecture in this fresco? If the students are struggling, refresh their memories by referencing the Parthenon (Greek temple) and the Pantheon (Roman temple). Key terms the students should offer: coffered ceiling, barrel vault, engaged pilasters, Corinthian capitals, fluting, and the triumphal arch. I always write down what the students say on the blackboard to reinforce the use of proper vocabulary in any discussion.

The **triumphal arch** is key: use this as an opportunity to point out that although there is a visual shift and new awareness [again, of what?] in the perception of the mundane world, Christianity and the role of the Church is still very important. **Ask the class:** what was the function or symbolic meaning of a triumphal arch in the Roman world, and how does this relate to Masaccio's depiction of holy figures? You are hoping they make the link between the Roman symbol for victory and its appropriation by Western Christian society as a symbol for victory over death through faith.

Opportunity for class discussion: Ask the students to brainstorm where we have seen this before. Answer: many places, Early Christian art is one example, but students usually remember the Romanesque portal. (This link helps students view Humanism as a "building-up" of ideas that had roots in the medieval period, instead of appearing out of nowhere).

Part Two: The Rise of the Individual

This is a very large theme for which there is not enough time to explore in any great depth. This section of the tutorial has one goal: to introduce the notion that Humanism was indebted to the increase of secular and private wealth during the Renaissance era. With increased wealth, the results are staggering: better health, access to learning, self-promotion, more time to create and invent, the confidence to question...the list goes on. **Have your students come up with a few.**

In Masaccio's *Trinity*, the most important element that reflects this theme is the inclusion of donor portraits in the composition. **Have the students point out** where they are located (outside of the sacred space of the arch) and why they are there (closer to holy figures = hopeful guarantee of everlasting life and salvation).

Part Three: Naturalism

By now the students are warmed up and very familiar with the painting. There are also probably about ten minutes left in the tutorial. Quickly reference some of the key elements that illustrate Masaccio's naturalistic style. For example, the artist attempts to give his figures mass (heavy drapery and solid, columnar bodies); volume (shading); and a realistic depiction of space (linear perspective, including haloes!).

What works best for me at this point in the tutorial is to focus on the figure of Christ. The students are by now losing interest and are in need of an easy, visual way to remember how naturalism as a pictorial strategy relates to the concept of Humanism. I move a lot at this point. Throughout the tutorial, I am always standing up at the front of the class, walking about, using the blackboard, and referencing the image—but near the end of the tutorial I use my body to make a direct reference to the way Christ is represented. **Ask the class:** how is Christ's body depicted and how does it show naturalism? Often the class is silent. I then ask a different question: how is Christ positioned in the Last Judgment scene on the tympanum of Autun? I mimic his posture in the Romanesque portal with my body; I am static, strict, tense, stern, contorted, and I gaze over their heads. Then I ask the question again of how Masaccio depicts Christ = he is heavy (the dead body is clearly being pulled down by gravity), has outstretched arms, a downcast face, and arranged in an S-curve. I show this position with my body and then recap this last section of the tutorial. I reinforce the difference between the two depictions of Christ's body: one is judgmental and of the spiritual realm, and the other is human-like, can suffer and feel pain, and therefore easier for the viewer to relate to.

If you have time, point out that naturalism is also present in the memento mori at the bottom of the composition—students really like this aspect of the work.

This tutorial involves students in breaking down a complex theme through an analysis of one particular art work, Masaccio's *Holy Trinity*. Once complete, students will have valuable tools, such as visual prompts and key terminology, with which to remember some of the concepts inherent to the theme of Renaissance Humanism.



TIPS FOR TEACHING ESL IN TUTORIALS

**LEANNE
UNRUH**

06

Tips for Teaching ESL in Tutorials

Leanne Unruh

While teaching English as a second language (ESL) is not the primary focus at OCAD University, it is important that we create a learning environment that is welcoming for students who are still learning English, and that we foster teaching practices that are accepting of varying skill levels. Based on over two years of teaching an art history tutorial for the English Pathways program at OCAD U, I have learned a variety of skills and tips that I hope will be useful to future Teaching Assistants.

Paraphrasing and Clarifying Instructions

There are four main skills in mastering a language: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. When teaching students who are still learning English, it should be recognized that a student's skill level in each area will vary. For example, a student who has strong reading comprehension may have difficulty understanding English orally. In tutorials, it is important to present information in several ways; for example, assignments and instructions should be explained both orally and visually. Being able to read instructions from a projected presentation or hand-out is extremely helpful to students, since they can go over instructions again at their own pace, and ask for clarity where needed. Posting tutorial PowerPoint presentations on Canvas (the online learning management system at OCAD U) also allows students to review instructions and information as needed.

It is also important to use clear and simple language when explaining assignments. Try giving instructions in several ways. For example, if students are asked to respond to a question, read it out loud and then paraphrase. (Ex. "How does this artwork illustrate the avant-garde? In other words, What characteristics of the avant-garde can be seen in this artwork?")

Adapting Tutorial Exercises

Depending on the professor you are working with, you may receive tutorial exercises that you are expected to do with your students each week. These exercises are primarily aimed at native English speakers, and may not take into account the skill levels of students still learning the language. Here are some common exercises that I have seen, and how I have modified them.

1. Discussion questions for the whole class. I prefer to break the class into smaller groups of four or five students and have them discuss questions among themselves, while floating around to make sure everyone is on the right track. This aids students who may be uncomfortable speaking in English in front of the whole class, or may have difficulty following a large group conversation.
2. When there are several discussion questions. I like to break the class into smaller groups and assign each group a question. After a few minutes we come back together and each group can present their ideas to the rest of the class.
3. "Game show" style review exercises. Some professors try to make review more fun by making it a game in the style of Jeopardy or Family Feud. These are often successful for encouraging active participation, but may be confusing to students who are not from North America.

Never assume that everyone knows how to play. Explain the rules thoroughly, and simplify them if you think it is necessary.

Knowledge Gaps

As teachers in Canada, we assume that there is a general body of cultural knowledge that students have from living in North America. Students who have recently come to Canada may have difficulty following lectures because their cultural knowledge is of another culture and region. Cultural decoding is a vital part of teaching students from various cultural backgrounds. Areas that I have noticed are particularly different are knowledge of geography, history, and timelines. For example, students coming from other parts of the world may not have the same understanding of the history of imperialism and colonialism, or Canadian and American independence from Britain. They might not know where the Mississippi River is, or be familiar with historical and contemporary indigenous issues. An example that I encountered last year was when the Harlem Renaissance was mentioned in lecture. It was assumed that 1) students know that Harlem is a neighbourhood in New York City; 2) they know that it has been a historically black neighbourhood; and 3) students have an understanding of the abolition of slavery, segregation, and the challenges facing African Americans both past and present. When I asked my English Pathways class if anyone knew where Harlem was, not one raised their hand. Instead of showing surprise at this, I took it in stride and did a short history lesson.

Argumentative Essay Styles

In North America, high school students are taught a basic essay style that begins with an introduction (including a thesis); makes three or more points in the body paragraphs; and has a conclusion that summarizes the main argument. In university we encourage students to write in a more complex style, but arguments are still built on evidence, that is, inductive reasoning. We accept this as the academic standard, but many parts of the world use different styles of making an argument.

The most common alternative is deductive reasoning. This type of logic is used commonly throughout Asia, as well as other parts of the world. Deductive reasoning begins with an assumed truth (rather than a thesis which much be proved), and relies on the reader's ability to deduce meaning from the author's examples, which are often theoretical and/or based on personal experiences. For more information on this style of writing, see Dr. Jane Mattisson's essay in the "Resources" section below.

Students who have learned to write essays using deductive reasoning often struggle with their first few essays in a North American academic context. They have good ideas, but have difficulty presenting them in a different format. Be sure to explain clearly to your students the expected essay format, outline what a thesis is, and offer extra help during your office hour for students who are unsure about their essay writing skills.

Grading

When grading ESL papers, it is important to remember that students may have greater or lesser skills in the areas of reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Courses that have grades heavily based on essays and exams can be a challenge for students who are still struggling to master writing in English. Grading written work from English language learners should focus

heavily on content and ideas, rather than grammar and style. Ask your professor how much of each assignment's grade is allotted for writing skill, and try to give as many marks as possible for ideas, originality, and content. When writing comments on papers, make sure to tell your students that, though their writing could use improvement, their ideas are strong. Encourage them to make use of your office hours, and The Writing and Learning Centre. That said, you should not be line-editing your students' essays; make notes of major structural errors and phrasing that interrupts the clarity of the essay, but simply circle grammatical errors. If a student makes the same error consistently throughout their essay, correct it in one paragraph or one page and then stop. The student will understand how to correct the error in their next assignment.

Resources

Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* (Pearson, 2014, 11th ed.) is geared at students in art schools, and covers research, citations, essay style, grammar, and comparisons.

OCAD U has a useful page for finding essay formatting guides: http://www.ocadu.ca/library/how_do_i/find_style_guides.htm

Purdue University has a fantastic compilation of resources for both teachers and students: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/5/>

For more information on deductive vs. inductive writing, see Jane Mattisson, "Chinese essay writing: a special challenge for universities in the West," University of Kristianstad, Sweden. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:174515/FULLTEXT01.pdf>



**Student Centred
Learning Through
Group Work:
Engaging different
learning styles and
building camaraderie
amongst peers**

**ROBERTA
MCNAUGHTON**

07

Student Centred Learning Through Group Work: Engaging different learning styles and building camaraderie amongst peers

Roberta McNaughton

I believe that the current method of student-centered learning through group work can be very beneficial for quickly engaging students in course material, while providing an excellent tool for the teacher to continually assess each student's progress. I would also argue that group work helps to foster a richer, sociable learning experience that builds camaraderie and learning support among peers. My experience is with a relatively small group of 26 students, so I will speak to that size dynamic.

As the teaching assistant leading a tutorial of 26 students for a first year art history course at OCAD University, it was challenging to cover the intensive curriculum of memory work along side a very steep critical analysis learning curve. The course covered the beginning of art to the 1800's across several continents. The pace of study was rapid and the breadth of terms and concepts to be absorbed was extensive for these new students.

We started many classes with a chat about how they were doing with the course work and where any problems may have arisen for them in understanding the lecture or the assignment preparations. As early as the third class, we were able to split up into less intimidating groups of 6 and later 3 people so as to speak in a more conversational manner about the learning objectives of each tutorial. I, in turn, was able to walk around the room and listen in on each group's discussion and quickly assess how they were progressing with the concepts.

In the document *Cooperative Learning in Technical Courses: Procedures, Pitfalls, and Payoffs*, educators Dr. Richard M. Felder and Dr. Rebecca Brent (1994) outline a thorough review of the benefits of group projects and student centred learning. They spell out the practical outcomes of this kind of teaching as it impacts all the different learning styles.

Weak students working individually are likely to give up when they get stuck; working cooperatively, they keep going. Strong students faced with the task of explaining and clarifying material to weaker students often find gaps in their own understanding and fill them in. (...) Students working competitively have incentives not to help one another; working cooperatively, they are rewarded for helping. (Brent & Felder, 1994)

There are other benefits to group work within the class setting. The conversations are fluid and the entire class has a chance to speak in this student-centered model of teaching. Time is of the essence in a survey course and this model allowed me to see a problem early on in the direction of learning in the class. My students were having trouble filtering through the dearth of lecture and textbook material to find the pertinent facts needed to succeed in exams. Having learned of this problem, I focused much of the tutorial to teaching the students how to take good notes. This meant teaching them how to pinpoint and disseminate the pertinent material. From there we learned how to analyze the material for the many essays due. As the fall term progressed and the students got to know one another, we were able to split the groups into a one-on-one scenario. My goal in forming one-on-one groups was to aid any students that speak English as a second language or who may be too shy to speak to 26, or even three to six people. OCAD U has a large component of ESL students and it behooves us to learn more about teaching to these students' needs. Barry P. Taylor (1983) in the journal arti-

cle Teaching ESL: Incorporating a Student-Centered Component speaks of the importance of group work and the fostering of conversation that it encourages.

Current research in applied linguistics claims that most adult learners acquire a second language only to the extent that they are exposed to and actively involved in real, meaningful communication in that language. (Taylor, 1983)

If an individual's ideas in my class were valuable to the group, then the individual and I would share their concepts together with the larger class as a whole. With this method the more reluctant speaker is naturally more confident to speak up and share what they have to offer, because the teacher has already confirmed their voice as valuable. This also means that every student is active in the class. In this model "students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills". (Brent & Felder, 1994)

Studies have shown that active learning is best for keeping the students' attention engaged (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). If we are passive in a lecture, we tend to drift our attention away from the teacher, even with the best intentions.

By the end of a 50-minute period, you are likely to hear and remember less than 20% of the content. Short group exercises during a lecture cut down on boredom and increase the amount of the lecture that you'll actually hear. (Brent & Felder, 1994)

This active learning and group work also helped the class to build camaraderie with their fellow students, and it helped me to flesh out how the students were thinking about the material.

Many aspects of teaching using a student centred method were very satisfying and successful, but one incident in particular stands out. Several students were shy about speaking publicly to the full class, but one student hadn't talked yet and it was nearing the end of the semester. I thought it would be interesting and valuable for the rest of the class to hear her thesis idea. She was reluctant to speak but the class gently encouraged her. After she finished describing her thesis in a full voice and with a fair level of confidence, the class cheered. They were working together to succeed and that was beautiful to watch. This positive outcome of our group work confirms the surprisingly predictable results shown in Dr. Felder and Dr. Brent's report (1994) from their longitudinal study that devised procedures for implementing cooperative learning.

References

Bonwell, C.C. & Eison, J.A. (1991). *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, No. 1. George Washington University.

Brent, R.M. & Felder, R. (1994). *Cooperative Learning in Technical Courses: Procedures, pitfalls, and payoffs*. Retrieved from <http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Papers/Coopreport.html>.

Taylor, B.P. (1983, March). Teaching ESL: Incorporating a Communicative, Student-Centered Component. *TESOL Quarterly* 17, no. 1.



**POINT, PROOF,
COMMENT: A
STRATEGY FOR
HELPING STUDENTS
WRITE CLEAR
PARAGRAPHS**

**KRIS
BRANDHAGEN**

08

Point, Proof, Comment: A strategy for helping students write clear paragraphs

Kris Brandhagen

In my experience working as a teaching assistant for first year art history and English courses at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD U), I found that many students are not aware of proper writing structure. In my tutorials, I advise students to form body paragraphs using a top-heavy approach: state the point, outline evidence, and provide a comment. A few quick tips from a TA or instructor can go a long way in preparing students for writing essays, answering essay questions, and arranging reflections across disciplines. For this article, I consulted the instruction notes of two different teachers who use this strategy, Brophy (2014) and Sowerby (2015)

While many consider the sentence to be the primary unit of writing, for essays and reflections, in my opinion, it is actually the paragraph. In academic writing, a paragraph is “a group of sentences that support one main idea” (writingcenter.unc.edu, 2014). A paragraph should be no less than three sentences and not more than eight sentences. “The unity and coherence of ideas among sentences is what constitutes a paragraph” (writingcenter.unc.edu, 2014). Following this model, students are encouraged to use one or two sentences for each one of the recommended steps, beginning with the point, providing evidence, and concluding with a comment. If this structure is followed, paragraphs will be organized, offer one unified idea, and be three to six sentences in length.

For the first step, “write a clearly-worded topic sentence making a point” (Sowerby, 2015). In the following example, political activist Barbara Ehrenreich uses a comparative approach to state her point at the beginning of her essay on the “The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream,” which is included in the textbook *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, which is currently in use for the first year English Essay and Argument course at OCAD U.

Stories of white-collar downward mobility cannot be brushed off as easily as accounts of blue-collar economic woes, which the hard-hearted traditionally blame on “bad choices”: failing to get a college degree, for example, failing to postpone child-bearing until acquiring a nest egg, or failing to choose affluent parents in the first place. But distressed white-collar people cannot be accused of fecklessness of any kind; they are the ones who “did everything right (Ehrenreich, 2014, p. 261).

These first two sentences are formed like a thesis statement, stating the point, that white-collar downward mobility is not an issue that can be easily dismissed, comparing it with the “economic woes” of blue-collar people, in terms of lack of education, conceiving children early, and a tongue-in-cheek point about the lack of ability to choose one’s own parents. It is easy to infer from her comparison that white-collar people are not downwardly mobile due to these reasons. In other words, the class she is discussing comprises educated people who commonly wait to have children and come from white-collar families.

Now, the second step is to provide proof that backs up the point that was just made. Depending on the details of the assignment, some acceptable types of evidence are: “reasons, examples, names, and/or numbers” (Brophy, 2014). Other kinds of evidence include quotations, testimonials, anecdotes, analogies, and personal experience (Seitan, 2009). The next part of Ehrenreich’s paragraph provides the proof corresponding to her point.

They earned higher degrees, often setting aside their youthful passion for philosophy or music to suffer through dull practical majors like management or finance. In some cases, they were high achievers who ran into trouble precisely because they had risen far enough in the company for their salaries to look like a tempting cost cut (Ehrenreich, 2014, p. 261).

Corresponding with what was extrapolated from her first sentence above, Ehrenreich asserts that white-collar individuals are generally educated in practical areas, and that the problems causing downward mobility might be precisely because they have become successful. Her evidence here comes in the form of a reason and an example.

Finally, it is necessary to connect the proof to the point by providing a comment. The commentary does two things: explains the validity of the evidence and links the proof back to the original point (Brophy, 2014). How does a student do this? “Explain the proof. How does it prove the point? Discuss what the proof shows” (Sowerby, 2015). As part of their commentary, students might do some or all of these: explain what the words in a quotation mean, why it is significant, and what it reveals (Sowerby, 2015). Provide context for the evidence, as well as reveal any subtext that may exist beneath the words, and consider what is not revealed by the evidence (Sowerby, 2015). Ehrenreich employs the use of subtext, using vivid language to outline the incongruence that exists when both blue-collar and white-collar people end up poverty stricken, and she contrasts that to the promise of the American Dream.

They were the losers, in other words, in a classic game of bait and switch. And while blue-collar poverty has become numbingly routine, white-collar unemployment—and the poverty that results—remains a rude finger in the face of the American dream (Ehrenreich, 2014, p. 261).

To finish her paragraph, Ehrenreich uses some rather strong language to catch the reader’s attention, referring back to her comparison of white-collar to blue-collar at the beginning, using similar words to unite the paragraph: “dull” and “numbingly.” She provides her opinion, which indicates that the American dream is white-collar and educated, to say the least, describing white-collar poverty as “a rude finger in the face.” This type of language offers a visceral viewpoint of how America treats its white-collar workers when it fails to deliver on its own promises.

The point, proof, comment approach can be used across the board to create cohesive, clear paragraphs that ascribe to the academic model of writing paragraphs, essay questions, and formal essays. In essay writing, once the body paragraphs are created in this way, students may condense the first sentence of each to form a clear thesis statement that maps out the argument. Likewise, the last sentence of each paragraph can be adjusted to form a summary of the points made in the essay. It is easy for any instructor to remember these three words, “point, proof, and comment,” using them to help guide the outcome and accuracy of a writing submission.

References

Brophy, P. (2014, March 29). *Essay Writing: Point, Proof, Comment*. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from Prezi: <https://prezi.com/ykjh9zaehybo/essay-writing-point-proof-comment/>

Ehrenreich, B. (2014). The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream. In G. Graff, & C. Birkenstein (Eds.), *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (pp. 260-71). New York City, New York, United States of America: W. W. Norton and Company.

Seitan, C. (2009, December 10). *Types of Evidence*. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from writingsimplified.com: <http://www.writingsimplified.com/2009/10/4-types-of-evidence.html>

Sowerby. (2015). *Paragraph Construction: Point - Proof - Explanation*. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from sowerbywrms: <https://sowerbywrms.wikispaces.com/file/view/Paragraph+Construction.pdf>

writingcenter.unc.edu. (2014). *Paragraphs*. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/paragraphs/>



STRESSING THE RELEVANCE OF COURSE MATERIAL

ALI BASSIDJI

09

Stressing the Relevance of Course Material

Ali Bassidji

Making the relevance of coursework clear to students is one of the most effective strategies to stimulate thinking, creativity, and imagination – and a potent remedy against apathy and the gradual withdrawal of student engagement in your course. It would be a significant oversight on the part of the teaching assistants to simply get on with teaching the course material, assuming that every learner under their care comes preprogrammed with determination and purpose, a solid educational (and psychological) foundation,¹ or understands why certain courses are mandatory. On the contrary, I argue that the onus of addressing the relevance of a course, its outcomes, as well contextualizing the material in a way that students could easily relate to – is entirely on the university and its educators. I advocate that teaching assistants help to connect the course material to individual learners' aspirations because it promotes student engagement and encourages students to invest more deeply in the course.²

What follows are three approaches that I have found to be especially effective in encouraging active participation of students, and fostering an attitude of creativity and imagination that goes beyond the requirements of course syllabus or gaining credentials. These activities could easily be modified – or expanded on – to fit whatever course material is being taught:

1. Addressing relevance on the first day of class/tutorial:

Ask the students to think about the relevance of the course material in the context of their individual goals, communities, and cultural background (above and beyond what the course description purports to be offering). Also, ask them to think of possible ways they could link the various courses they are currently taking. This will encourage the students to critically think about their courses and how knowledges are connected. This line of inquiry helps students develop the skill to reflect on and make sense of the course content, material and assignments in a specific way.

2. Make the students feel responsible for their own learning in tutorials:

One of the best (and easiest) ways of engaging students and deepening their investment in the course is to make them responsible for part of the learning. When you are facilitating a tutorial, look for opportunities to give the students the chance to contribute to, introduce or even lead a discussion or activity. A low risk way to do this is invite students to post questions and comments about the course material or any other relevant material they wish on Canvas prior to the tutorial (be sure to let your faculty member know you intend to do this; you may also require their help to set it up).

¹ See Schaffhauser for more on the subject of students not being adequately prepared for the demands of higher education. For another view on the subject see the article by The Canadian Press. It is also illuminating to peruse a recent study under the direction of Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. The latter provides a sense of the complexity of the barriers to education at the post-secondary level that if not addressed will almost certainly prove to be debilitating to learners at the college level.

² See Jacobs, for an insightful discussion of credentialing versus educating.

At the tutorial you might use the student-generated questions or comments to start a debate. This is a crucial activity: it teaches students to listen, carefully consider, and respect other points of view, it teaches them how to agree or disagree intelligently and politely, and it encourages them to cultivate a mind of inquiry. A debate also serves as a valuable exercise in building students' confidence to question the course material and its relevancy in their practice / lives. Above all, debates provide a space in which the students can utilize their peers' world views as a sounding board to better develop their own.

3. Statement of relevance:

Following the submission of an assignment, I ask students to write a 150-200 word paragraph in tutorial that explains (in plain language) whether they found the assignment challenging and beneficial, what influenced their choices / approach, and how the topic could be relevant to their aspirations as an individual, an artist and/or a scholar. This can help students to understand the value of completing the course requirements and shift their perception of assignments away from a predominantly grade-oriented point of view. Although students will always care about their grades, helping them to understand why they are completing assignments and how - specifically - they develop valuable skills and knowledge in the process, encourages them to actively participate and engage in the course.

References

Canada. Parliament. Senate. Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. Report On: Opening the Door: Reducing Barriers to Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Issue 7, Third Report of the Committee. [Ottawa] Parliament, June 2011. Parliament of Canada. Web. PDF. 3 June 2016.

The Canadian Press. "Students not Prepared for University, Survey Say." CTVNEWS, 21 Sept. 2009. Web. 2 June 2016.

Jacobs, Jane. "Credentialing Versus Educating" Dark Age Ahead. Vintage Canada/Random House, 2005. 44-63. Print.

Schaffhauser, Dian. "Survey: Most Profs Find US Grads Unready for College or Work." *campustechnology.com*, July 2015. Web. May 2016.

An abstract geometric pattern composed of numerous triangles in various colors (blue, green, yellow, orange, red, purple, pink, grey, and brown) arranged in a complex, overlapping, and somewhat symmetrical fashion, creating a sense of depth and movement.

CONTRIBUTORS

ALI BASSIDJI

Ali Bassidji is an artist, and an art historian, residing and practicing in Ontario. He holds an MA from OCAD University in the field of Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media Art Histories (2014). His undergraduate studies were in the fields of Fine Arts at OCAD University, and earlier on, Computer Science, at the University of Kansas and Cornell University. Broadly stated, Bassidji's studio practice – though it is decidedly focused on figurative painting from firsthand observation in the medium of oil – investigates the psychological, cultural, and ethnical dimensions of colour associations and perception.

KRIS BRANDHAGEN

Kris Brandhagen is an interdisciplinary artist. She has performed, screened, published and exhibited her work in various venues over the past decade. Currently, Brandhagen is an MFA candidate in the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design program at OCADU. She has had the pleasure of employment as a teaching assistant at OCADU for the duration of her studies, and looks forward to continuing on with a teaching career as well as spending time on her art and writing practice.

ROBERTA McNAUGHTON

Roberta McNaughton was born in 1966 in Toronto, Ontario and has degrees from both the Ontario College of Art and Design and the University of Guelph. She is also presently an MFA candidate at OCAD University.

Her work has been exhibited in both public and commercial galleries in Toronto, and commercial galleries in Los Angeles, and London, England. McNaughton's paintings are in the collection of several corporations such as TD Bank; they are also in the collection of the National Archives in Ottawa. She has received several Ontario Arts Council grants and currently shows with Katharine Mulherin Gallery in Toronto.

MARTHA ROBINSON

Martha Robinson is currently completing a Master's degree in Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories (2014) at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada. Her thesis research is an examination of the incidence of ovine tropes in contemporary art through the work of contemporary artists, and the implications for posthumanist theory and its symbiotic relationship with animal art. Ongoing research explores questions of contemporary and historic animal representation, collections, posthumanist theory and non-anthropomorphic representation of the animal. She also holds a BDes (Illustration) from OCAD and maintains a practice in painting and illustration.

MELISSA SKY

Melissa Sky is the Creative Director of Femme Fatale Creations, a film production company specializing in LGBTQ films and social justice documentaries. She has a fancy-pants PhD in English literature, which she sometimes uses to teach at OCAD University and sometimes abuses to overanalyze trashy novels. Her most recent publications include "Feminist Art: A Body of One's Own" forthcoming in the peer-reviewed anthology *Feminism in the 21st Century: Art, Visibility, Diversity* and "Making History, Making Community" in the EGALE-sponsored anthology *Out Proud: Stories of Pride, Courage and Social Justice*. You can learn more about her films and writing at www.femmefilms.ca.

ILIAS TOLIADIS

Ilias Toliadis grew up in a border village in northwest Greece. He studied at the Fine Arts School of Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece and completed his MA in Visual Arts with distinction at the University of East London, UK. While living in Athens, Toliadis directed the Graduate Association of Athens Fine Art School and curated more than 25 exhibitions there, collaborating with groups and artists from around the world. Toliadis has shown his work in various galleries, art spaces, abandoned buildings and community centers in Greece, England, Scotland, United States, Canada, Egypt, Italy, and Spain. He just completed his first year of the IAMD program at OCAD University, where he is also working as a TA. He will complete the program in April of 2015.

LEANNE UNRUH

Leanne Unruh is a writer and artist based in Toronto. She holds an MA in Contemporary Art History from OCAD University (2013). She has taught as a Teaching Assistant for several years at both Brock University and OCAD University. While Leanne has a broad education in art history, contemporary art is her first love. Her more specific areas of interest include art and activism, the politics of place, and dialogical artwork. These are combined in her thesis project, *Borders in the City and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*.

ELLYN WALKER

Ellyn Walker is a curator, writer and art historian based in Toronto. Her work focuses on cross-cultural artistic production as a type of decolonizing practice. Her research asks questions of coalition and belonging in relation to representation of the nation. Born and raised in Toronto, Walker is a white settler of Scottish and Italian ancestry born on Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and Wyandot territory. Her projects have been presented by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Prefix Institute for Contemporary Art, Xpace Cultural Centre and Videofag. Her writing has been published in *C Magazine*, *The Journal for Curatorial Studies*, *Public*, *Magenta Magazine*, *Studio* and *Sketch*. Ellyn is a recent graduate of OCAD University's MFA program in the Criticism and Curatorial Practices program (2014).

HOLLY WHEATCROFT

Holly Wheatcroft has been with OCAD University since 2012. She has an MA in Art History from the University of Toronto and a publication on antique iconographical influences in medieval bestiaries. Previous teaching experience includes five years at Marianopolis College, Montreal, as a full-time instructor in art history and the humanities with active participation on Academic Council, curriculum committee and in the coordination of an annual Arts Trip. Concurrently Wheatcroft is a member of the Toronto Public Art Commission at City Hall, an educator at PAMA, and has a studio practice with gallery representation. Her work has been shown at Peak Gallery, the Design Annex in Hamilton, IDS Toronto, bookhou, and has been featured in Covet Garden.