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Writing as Making: Positioning a WAC Initiative to Bridge Academic Discourse and Studio Learning

Cary DiPietro, Susan Ferguson, and Roderick Grant

The shift from college to university curriculum at OCAD University in Toronto, an art and design school, has produced tensions between cultures of making and their perceived incompatibility with academic discourse. These tensions, however, afford opportunities to reflect upon the place of academic writing in relation to diverse forms of knowledge production within the university. Writing in the studio, which emphasizes creativity, process and peer critique, productively destabilizes conceptions of academic writing as a generalizable academic skill while fostering the codification of disciplinary knowledge in emergent academic discourses in art and design. These issues are discussed within the context of a university-wide Writing Across the Curriculum initiative.

OCAD University (OCAD U) in Toronto is the largest art and design university in Canada and the third largest in North America. The shift from college to university curriculum in 2002 has produced tensions between cultures of making in the studio and academic discourse. While these tensions resonate differently within each program and disciplinary context, writing has occupied a central position within pedagogical debates, ranging from concern about the quality of student writing to fears about the encroachment of academic writing upon studio-based education. This dissonance, however, affords opportunities to reflect upon what and how we learn in different pedagogical and disciplinary contexts and to recognize diverse forms of knowledge production within the academy. Studio education—which emphasizes embodied and emplaced knowledge, materiality, creativity, process, and peer critique—productively destabilizes conceptions of academic writing as a generalizable skill and isolated academic discourse. Likewise, a writing pedagogy mobilized for art and design education enables pragmatic interconnections between—and, in so doing, also reveals the false dichotomy of—academic and art and design practices, while, at the same time, fostering the codification of disciplinary knowledge in emergent academic discourses in art and design.

In this chapter, we will explore these issues within the context of a university-wide Task Force on Undergraduate Writing Across the Curriculum established in 2013 to address concerns about student writing. We will begin with a brief overview of the institutional context of art and design education at OCAD U that gave rise to the task force, highlighting some of the key pedagogical tensions that arose during

task force discussions. We will then describe the resulting Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative, focusing on two key pieces that were developed to answer the need for a contextually appropriate and flexible approach: the development of degree-level learning outcomes for writing and the implementation process for a stream of WAC-designated courses. Finally, we will showcase its implementation in first-year in the Graphic Design program where writing is treated as a material practice through an emphasis on the acquisition and application of an intersubjective design vocabulary to support and enliven studio process, while also staking the grounds of Graphic Design as an evolving academic discourse and discipline.

The Institutional Context of OCAD University

OCAD U offers 16 undergraduate programs in fine art, design, digital media, and liberal arts across three undergraduate Faculties: the Faculty of Art (FoA), Faculty of Design (FoD), and Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences and School of Interdisciplinary Studies (FoLASSIS). Although FoLASSIS now offers its own programs, it was initially established to support OCAD U's transition to a degree-granting university in 2002 by offering liberal studies courses to satisfy the breadth requirements of each undergraduate program. In this manner, FoLASSIS has been historically responsible for most formal, for-credit academic writing instruction at OCAD U through both the disciplinary writing assignments found within liberal arts courses and a required, first-year writing course (Essay and Argument), housed within FoLASSIS.

The limitations of the first-year composition course model are well-established within the WAC literature (Petraglia, 1995; Hall, 2006) and it is now commonly recognized that becoming a good writer takes time and that writing is best learned when grounded in the context of a particular discipline rather than treated as a generalizable skill (Carter, 2007). By writing within their disciplines, students engage in the legitimizing and regulatory activities of their professions (Haswell, 2006), “inventing the university” (Bartholomae, 1986) each time they attempt to write. 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; see also Jones & Comprone, 1993; McLeod, 1989).

While the value to art and design education of first-year composition and the academic writing instruction characteristic of a liberal studies curriculum are not in dispute, the inherent shortcomings of the first-year composition model of writing instruction seem also to be applicable at OCAD U where faculty from across the university have become increasingly concerned about students' writing

competency and ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing, especially within the context of studio-based programs. Although students struggle with writing requirements across their years of study, concerns about undergraduate writing competency have been especially pronounced in relation to capstone studio courses required in most programs, in which students combine studio making with sizeable writing components. Faculty expressed concerns that students were unprepared to write in ways specific to their professions and practices and that students seemed to have difficulty translating what they learned through writing instruction in liberal arts courses into the writing components of their final year.

The Task Force on Undergraduate Writing Across the Curriculum

In the Spring of 2013, in response to these concerns, a university-wide task force with membership from all three Faculties, as well as academic support staff, was established to develop a comprehensive strategy to embed writing instruction across the undergraduate curriculum and improve student writing outcomes. The Task Force on Undergraduate Writing Across the Curriculum conducted a comprehensive needs assessment, investigated the types of writing assignments currently being used within programs at OCAD U, and researched models of writing instruction in higher education generally, and art and design education specifically. Importantly, it was recognized from the outset of the process that any model of writing instruction at OCAD U would need to be grounded in OCAD U's unique institutional context, the curricular needs of OCAD U programs and the pedagogical approaches of studio-based art and design education.

A key theme emerging from the task force discussions—and one that we will return to throughout this chapter—was a tension between studio making and academic writing. This was expressed as the sense that students tend not to perceive writing as directly relevant to their studies at OCAD U, believing instead that their sole focus ought to be on making in the studio. This (mis)perception is both a reflection of, and reinforced by, the positioning of the Essay and Argument course—and liberal arts courses in general—as the main locus of academic writing instruction at the university, allowing students and faculty alike to treat writing as a discrete skill that can be learned independently of making in the studio. Positioned in this way, writing is sequestered from student learning in their programs of study, existing “over there” in liberal arts courses. Writing viewed in this manner thus becomes an instrumentalist problem of grammar and mechanics that is the responsibility of a small group of academic writing instructors. Furthermore, many studio faculty members describe an ambivalent relationship to the inclusion of writing in their courses, on the one hand recognizing strongly the value of written

communication to their fields of art and design practice and, on the other hand, expressing reluctance about both their ability to support and assess student writing and the pragmatics of including writing in studio courses with already very full curriculum. Some faculty have gone further, questioning the very presence of writing in studio courses, some suggesting that writing ought properly to remain the responsibility of a liberal arts curriculum and others questioning whether the presence of writing is counterproductive to studio pedagogies that exemplify often unarticulated but demonstrably embodied ways of knowing and doing.

Writing has thus come to occupy an uneasy space at OCAD U, particularly against the backdrop of the transition to a university and the perceived encroachment of liberal arts content on studio curricula—within this context of educational change, the problem of student writing became, at times, a flashpoint for larger pedagogical debates about the very nature of teaching and learning at OCAD U. And yet, the needs assessment also clearly revealed that writing is already very present throughout the OCAD U curriculum, in many different courses, across all programs and all faculties (DiPietro, 2014). Similarly, it was also found that writing is already used to support student learning in a wide variety of ways—visual analysis, idea generation, critical reflection, researching materials, and concept development, among others—and across all course types (DiPietro, 2014). And so, while writing and its purpose and place within the curriculum are highly contested, it is also widely accepted that OCAD U students must be able to write well in the context of their programs and future professions.

Writing in the Disciplines of Art and Design

It is in this last statement—“in the context of their programs and future professions”—that we might find a sense of the problem. Many programs at OCAD U do not identify as an academic discipline—indeed, they may actively resist identifying as an academic discipline—or are emerging disciplines where the academic discourse has not yet been well-established or well-documented in scholarly literature. And yet a key assumption of writing pedagogy, and indeed our approach from the outset of the task force discussions, is that writing instruction needs to support student learning in the context of academic programs which are themselves grounded in their respective disciplines. At the same time, “academic writing” is typically conceived of narrowly, as the conventional essay writing commonly found in the liberal arts, and there was understandable apprehension about the place of this type of academic writing in diverse disciplinary contexts, particularly art and design studio-based ones. And so it was that a kind of dissonance emerged around writing at OCAD U, with very different stakes involved for differently positioned faculty, students and staff.

It was by taking seriously WAC's emphasis on using writing to support student learning (Writing to Learn) and the rhetorical approach to writing as a social practice that takes place within particular discourse communities (Writing in the Disciplines) that we were able to mobilize these tensions within pedagogical debates about writing and develop a comprehensive model of writing instruction at OCAD U. As McLeod (2000) argues, WAC programs are most effective when they are transformative rather than additive; that is, when they engage faculty in deep collaborative work to enrich the curriculum through the renewal of disciplinary writing activities rather than simply adding writing to existing curriculum. In an art and design educational environment, this means beginning with an understanding of the specific curricular needs of different programs, and the writing genres and conventions of those same programs. In the context of studio education, it also means proceeding from an appreciation for the distinct value, aims and culture of studio pedagogy.

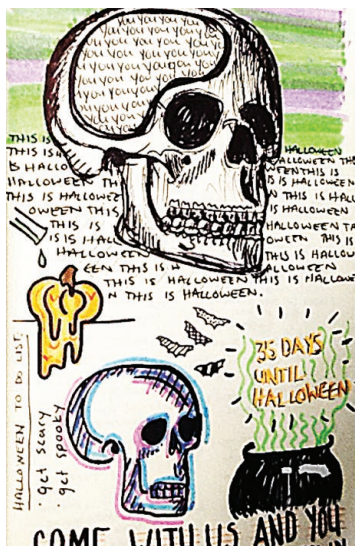
It follows, then, that typical understandings of academic writing must also be reconceived to include the rich, diverse forms of written knowledge production found throughout the studio curriculum. By drawing upon foundational pedagogical principles of studio education—including embodied and emplaced knowledge, materiality, creativity, process, and peer critique—and treating writing as a creative and material practice in its own right, the key assumptions of writing pedagogy can be extended, and perhaps even reimaged, to allow for an inclusive and relevant writing pedagogy for art and design education. In this sense, WAC in an art and design educational context is highly reciprocal, as writing pedagogy and studio pedagogy inform one another across different and shared pedagogical commitments.

The Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency

The mandate of the Task Force included the development of degree-level learning outcomes for writing and benchmarks for achieving them. The resulting document, OCAD U's Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency, set an institutional standard by making explicit what students need to achieve to produce university-level writing. The Framework was developed with reference to standards for writing and communication, including the Canadian Language Benchmarks, the Writing Program Administrators' Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, and the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards

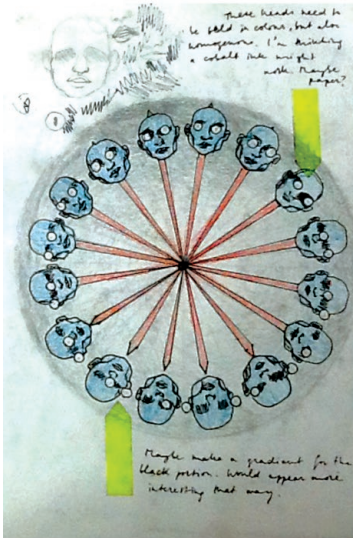
A learning-outcomes-based approach was chosen in part to shift the perception by some faculty that writing refers to the eloquent and grammatically proficient finished product, with the attendant concerns noted above about faculty not seeing themselves as competent language and writing teachers, to emphasize instead the variety of skills, knowledge and attitudes that students require in the *process* of writing—skills that are also essential to their processes of making. The learning outcomes include

the development of rhetorical or contextual awareness of their practice through the use of disciplinary vocabulary or the mastery of professional genres of writing, the ability to engage critically and analytically with textual, visual and material sources, and the use of tools in the process of developing concepts and arguments (brainstorming, mind-mapping, drafting, and revision) in ways that integrate written and oral discourse with visual and material production and encourage students to reflect upon the interconnections of the writing process with studio making. By focusing on the learning outcomes, faculty are able to develop unique and creative approaches to writing that are contextually specific to their disciplines—for example (in Figures 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4), having students combine the use of disciplinary vocabulary and written reflection with their practice of drawing in sketchbooks and process work in first-year courses—while, at the same time, drawing connections via common learning outcomes to their learning in liberal studies courses. Note that the figures shown below were collected as part of a multi-year research study approved by OCAD University's Research Ethics Board (REB 100805). To participate in the study, students consent to the collection, analysis and dissemination of their visual course work for research purposes, indicating whether they prefer to remain anonymous or be credited for their work when reproduced in scholarly presentations and publications.



"I'm not sure why I love using highlighter so much but it's probably my favourite medium to use, however, I'm starting to explore using white out in unconventional ways. I like to use it as paint, making things white, obviously; to use it to create texture, layering it as it slowly dries; I use it to stop sharpie from leaking through the next page as a primer. I use it to not only fix mistakes but to create them instead."

Figure 8.1. Excerpt from a sketchbook by Siobhan Waldock, produced for a required first-year drawing course in the Drawing and Painting program taught by David Griffin, Faculty of Art, and excerpt from the same student's written reflection on the use of the sketchbook to develop a habitual drawing and writing practice where they reflect on their materials, how they experiment with materials, and where such experimentation leads to creativity.



"When it comes to highly conceptual projects, writing is my first touchpoint, often transcribing an inner voice as it tracks my train of thought (my ideas are generated almost completely internally, save for occasional visual prompts from Tumblr or random stumbled-upons). I find this approach helps when the time comes to verbalise the 'message' behind the final product, since there is this initial rough draft of ideas already in place."

Figure 8.2. Excerpt from a sketchbook (anonymous) for *Drawing and Painting* (as in Figure 8.1) with excerpt from a written reflection statement in which the student articulates why writing is valuable to their critical and creative practice.



"The original on the left looks less frightening and more protective, based on how its standing. Since I wanted the lion to initially appear aggressive, I thought changing his body position, as I did on the right, would look more frightening as if the lion could leap out at you ready to attack."



"I tested the colours I wanted to use, as well as the medium. I tried colouring the thumbnails with marker and pencil crayon (on the left) and then with water colour (on the right). I decided to go with the water colour because I liked the more organic look and the wash I could create of the sky with the watercolour."

Figure 8.3. Excerpts from a mind-mapping exercise by Brigitte Bernardo in a required first-year course in the *Illustration* program taught by Shea Chang, Faculty of Design. The assignment requires students to creatively reinterpret their zodiac sign to convey a unique visual message.

"This artwork conveys a message about homesickness of those students who are living abroad without their family. As an international student, I have been in Canada for more than two years. I always experience homesickness no matter how long I have been here. I believe that most of the international students usually experience the same emotion as mine because we left the place where we were familiar with and then moved to a part of the world that we knew nothing about, which was an adventure. To be honest, the emotion of missing home and family is uncontrollable."



Figure 8.4. Final illustration and artist statement for the zodiac assignment from Figure 8.3 by Cindy Zhao. The student reflects on their personal experience as an international student, demonstrating how students make meaning in language that emerges from their personal experience, the embodiedness of their creative practice, and their place in the world.

Negotiating the Tensions between “Academic” Discourse and Art and Design

As noted above, the Framework also enables a flexible and contextually-nuanced approach to the implementation of the WAC initiative in course and program development. Rather than prescribing a curriculum or a fixed approach to writing pedagogy, the Framework instead permits interpretation and translation of the learning outcomes into different disciplinary contexts. Through a course development process, faculty actively engage with the language of writing pedagogy in order to translate it into their unique curricular and disciplinary contexts. Given the tensions described above between academic discourse and studio pedagogy, such engagement requires a negotiation of sometimes fraught and often contested language and concepts.

To give but one example of such a flashpoint, the development of research skills and information literacy are described in the Framework in the more neutral language of “information gathering.” In art and design education, “research” has the rhetorical force of conventional academic practice and, for many studio faculty, therefore potentially problematic connotations. An institutional emphasis

on research, an emphasis driven by funding and tenure processes, is sometimes interpreted as administrative pressure to force art and design education to conform to an academic norm. Where “academic” research is understood primarily to mean using library databases to find authoritative scholarly sources and documenting and citing textual sources using established disciplinary conventions, “studio-based research”—a coinage many faculty members are disinclined to use—involves a variety of embodied, haptic, and empirical explorations of processes and materials requiring, for example, sketching, feeling, observing, copying, experimenting, and prototyping. Although a common observation by faculty is that such studio-based research is embodied and does not require written language, in fact, the challenge—and often the point of meaningful connection as well as, occasionally, a difficult impasse—is to demonstrate how writing is also an embodied practice, and that no visual or material practice exists, as it were, outside of language and, therefore, that visual and material research can be enriched by a variety of written and oral interactions between faculty and students.

By unpacking the implications of information-gathering skills in studio situations, we can draw out parallels between textual, visual, and material practices, to show, for example, how students can use writing as a means of documenting visual sources in a sketchbook or journal (e.g., recording the act of walking down the street and observing graphic design) or by annotating photographs and images, or how they can describe their studio research orally in critique and cite their sources of information (see Figure 8.5). The need to teach students more intentionally how to document and cite visual and material sources has, in fact, taken on new urgency given the rising tide of instances of academic misconduct involving visual and material plagiarism. What we discover, then, by drawing out the parallel between “academic” or textual practices and studio-based visual and material practices is a pragmatic but increasingly false dichotomy, especially in light of OCAD U’s transition to university curriculum and the still emergent disciplinarity of art and design education. Working through the language of research thus becomes an institutional and educational imperative.

WAC Course Development

In addition to the Framework, another key piece of the WAC initiative is a stream of designated WAC courses, one stream in each undergraduate program at each year level such that all students take one required WAC course in each year of their program. These designated courses were identified from existing courses within the curriculum that already had a writing component or for which the inclusion of a writing component was well-aligned with the course. The implementation of the initiative involves working with faculty to align their course learning outcomes,

teaching and learning activities and assessments with the benchmarks identified in the Framework. As noted above, the course development process requires faculty to interpret the learning outcomes of the Framework according to the contextually specific needs of their students and practices of their programs, adapting or developing new writing strategies and assignments. As such, the process is dialogic, driven by faculty and requiring their expertise, and supported and facilitated by a WAC team comprised of faculty mentors, educational developers and language/writing specialists. The initiative is also tied to a complementary strategy to support the learning needs of second-language writers.



Figure 8.5. Excerpt from an assignment showing primary material research by Ruitong Zhu, a student in a first-year Materials and Methods course in the Material Art and Design program taught by Joni Moriyama, Faculty of Design.

There is no prescribed WAC curriculum and, to date, the emphasis has been on low-stakes in-class writing activities integrated into studio-based making activities. The course development process involves a variety of strategies, including an online survey or "reflection" tool to help faculty develop their courses, pre- and mid-term faculty

workshops, faculty and student-focused events such as lunchtime roundtables and exhibitions of student work, and the development of teaching resources in the form of a faculty toolkit. The Writing & Learning Centre also provides optional short workshops for students tied to learning outcomes in the Framework that can be embedded in classes.

The most effective implementation strategy has been the use of a model of collaborative course-based research. Using an iterative methodology informed by collaborative inquiry and participatory action research, disciplinary faculty team up with writing specialists and educational developers to develop and test writing activities and assignments designed to help students achieve the Framework's learning outcomes. The approach grounds theory in practice in the classroom, enabling the refinement of best practices in ways that are meaningful and authentic, as well as responsive to the needs of a particular discipline or context.

The research is premised on the recognition that a contextually nuanced approach requires deep and meaningful investigation into the rich and diverse forms of written knowledge production in art and design, as well as the skills students need to progress in their disciplines. It also reflects our awareness of the need to test the assumptions of and generate validity evidence for the Framework. Faculty who participate in the research become, in turn, advocates for the initiative who are able to share the results of their research demonstrated through student samples of written and visual work. Collaborating staff from the writing and teaching centers translate their enhanced expertise to other WAC collaborations and use the results of the research to guide and inform the initiative while also contributing to educational research. One especially fruitful collaboration has been with Graphic Design faculty teaching the first-year WAC-designated course.

Learning Language, Learning Practice

An active student press as well as faculty output in research and scholarship indicate that an interest in and productive energy around writing and design as a discourse exists in and outside of existing Graphic Design curriculum. In place of introducing writing as a tangential and mechanical exercise exterior to design-as-a-practice, recent efforts in the first year of the program embed an approach to WAC that *a) builds facility with disciplinary language, b) initiates a contextual awareness of writing as a conceptual/rhetorical tactic of making, and c) commences a reflective relationship between visual and verbal form.* These three facets of learning serve as a foundation for the development of Graphic Design as critical visual rhetoric in the second, third and fourth years of the program. As the first year concentrates on the acquisition of formal skill and technique, writing is introduced as a low-stakes means to extend the activity of design as a process. The studio introduction of WAC begins with an intersubjective sense of design vocabulary in the first year of the program.

a) builds facility with disciplinary language

The acquisition of disciplinary language is a complex and long-term activity, but common ground can be found from the perspective that design will be a second language for all students regardless of linguistic proficiency in English. The mapping of a core design vocabulary in the Graphic Design program at OCAD U (Figure 8.6) allowed students across multiple sections of a core design studio to see the language of their discipline in a relational context—not all language functions in the same way—where some terms are descriptive, some are active, and some are shared by other disciplines. The map was given as a paper handout at the beginning of each project throughout the first year as a means for students to identify, track, and define where the given project existed in terms of language. As all projects were composed of multiple phases over four weeks, the maps served as a means for students to demonstrate their sense of where a project started, and where it went as the project evolved towards its conclusion.

BDes Graphic Design

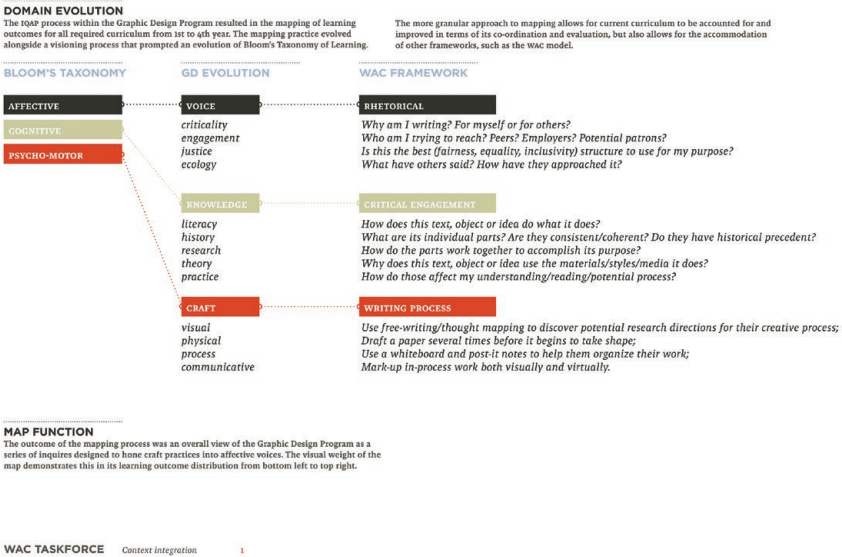


Figure 8.6. Excerpt from a curriculum map by Roderick Grant for the Graphic Design program at OCAD University showing the relationship of a modified Bloom's taxonomy, program learning outcomes and WAC learning outcomes identified in the Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency.

The intent of the map is to help students establish the linguistic territory of their discipline, and to identify inter-disciplinary potential when the vocabulary seems inadequate. The map is thus never thought of, nor presented as, a totality,

Students who can begin to see design language as a means to initiate visual making processes are well on their way to more advanced conceptual and theoretical investigation. We don't just see contrast between black and white, between blue and yellow, we make that contrast happen, we initiate that principle if we have a working definition of that principle. That principle then, can guide *how*, and therefore *what*, we make as designers—this is an active participation in the definition of language, and brings design and writing together as generative practices (see Figure 8.8). Though being able to write down what one is about to do doesn't necessarily mean one will be able to do it, we will be able to respond to whatever is made, and iterate the work both verbally and visually.

PRINCIPLES	ACTIONS	PRACTICES
Means of organizing elements and their relationships.	The manipulation, disruption, or qualification of principles.	To further build upon our core language we look to other practices and disciplines for their specialized lexicons.
<p>ASYMMETRY/SYMMETRY <i>> static/look</i></p> <p>ATTRACTION/REPULSION</p> <p>BACKGROUND/FOREGROUND</p> <p>BALANCE/ANBALANCE</p> <p>CLARITY/AMBIGUITY</p> <p>COMPOSITION/STRUCTURE</p> <p>CONTRAST/HARMONY</p> <p>DENSITY/SPARSITY</p> <p>DIRECTION</p> <p>DOMINANCE/RESERVATION</p> <p>GRADATION</p> <p>HIERARCHY <i>can be shown through colour & placement of elements</i></p> <p>MOVEMENT</p> <p>OPACITY/TRANSPARENCY</p> <p>POSITIVE/NEGATIVE SPACE</p> <p>PROPORTION <i>what even is my thing? get clarification</i></p> <p>RADIATION</p> <p>REPETITION</p> <p>RHYTHM</p> <p>SCALE</p> <p>STATIC/ACTIVE</p> <p>TENSION</p> <p>UNITY/FRAGMENT</p> <p>VARIATION</p>	<p>ACCELERATE</p> <p>ADD</p> <p>ALIGN</p> <p>CROP</p> <p>DISPLACE</p> <p>DISRUPT <i>disrupting images placement of elements of grid the rhythm</i></p> <p>DISTRIBUTE</p> <p>DIVIDE</p> <p>ENLARGE</p> <p>EXAGGERATE</p> <p>EXTRACT</p> <p>EXTRUDE</p> <p>FRACURE</p> <p>FRAME <i>craft is the quality of how smth is made</i></p> <p>INTERLOCK</p> <p>INTERSECT</p> <p>ISOLATE</p> <p>JUXTAPOSE</p> <p>LAYER</p> <p>MIRROR</p> <p>MODIFY</p> <p>MOVE</p> <p>MULTIPLY</p> <p>NEST</p> <p>OVERLAP</p> <p>PENETRATE</p> <p>REDUCE</p> <p>REFLECT</p> <p>SHEAR</p> <p>SHIFT</p> <p>SPLIT</p> <p>SUBTRACT</p> <p>TORQUE</p> <p>WAVE</p>	<p>ARCHITECTURE</p> <p>CINEMATOGRAPHY</p> <p>DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>COLOUR</p> <p>DRAWING</p> <p>INTERACTIVITY</p> <p>JOURNALISM</p> <p>MATERIALITY</p> <p>PHOTOGRAPHY</p> <p>TYPOGRAPHY</p>
<p>GESTALT PRINCIPLES</p> <p>CLOSURE</p> <p>CONTAINMENT</p> <p>CONTINUITY</p> <p>GROUPING</p> <p>PÄGNANZ <i>regarding certain values that might create emphasis</i></p> <p>PROXIMITY</p> <p>REPETITION</p> <p>SIMILARITY</p> <p>• contrast helps define the space</p> <p>• warm advances, cool recedes</p> <p>• modernism ought to distinguish itself from nature</p>		

Figure 8.8. Excerpt from an assignment by Vuoni Unigabe, in a first-year Design Process studio, required by the Graphic Design program, taught by Roderick Grant, Faculty of Design. The assignment combines visual and material exploration of design vocabulary with short, written reflections.

c) commences a reflective relationship between visual and verbal form

Graphic Design reserves a dedicated discourse for the study of language in the form of *typography*. Typography at OCAD U is a studio sequence of five courses. While students are exposed to a full range of digital approaches to given design projects, the final project of the year is a fully hand-assembled book of their reflective writing in relation to their studio work (Figure 8.9). The project gives students a chance to review their work, but most importantly, gives students the experience of building language from its constituent fragments and structures as an active visual practice.

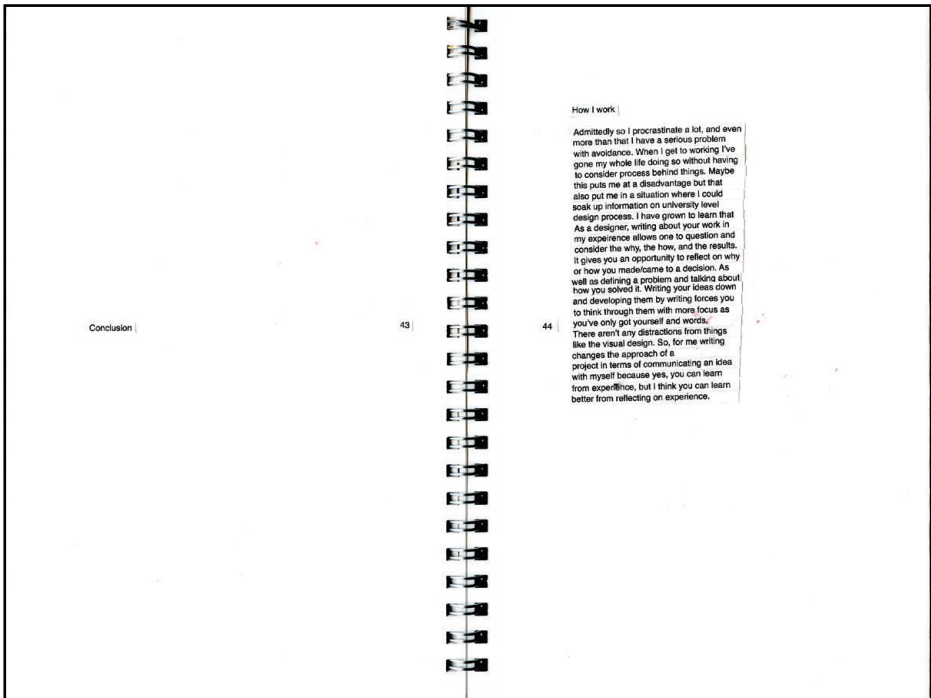


Figure 8.9. Excerpt from an assignment by Jason Aronsberg, in the first-year Design Process studio. The assignment asks students to assemble their own writing, typographically, by hand, word by word, line by line to gain experience with language as having physical/material properties.

In taking writing from a generic word processing document, printing it onto plain white paper, then cutting that paper apart to be re-composed within a specific page format, syntactic issues meet visual and rhetorical issues of spacing, structure, composition, and visual movement within a defined format—the page. The requirement of performing this process with paper, scissors, tape, etc., gives the work consequence and real, physical weight. Importantly, students become active

participants in constructing academic discourse in the discipline of Graphic Design through their engagement in this work—language as a way of “doing” the discipline (Carter, 2007, p. 385). As students engage with this practice, they come to see that language can be defined, applied, but also visually re-contextualized as it has a conceptual as well as a phenomenal life. An exposure to the life of language in vocabulary acquisition, generative potential and as a means to reflect on individual decisions and praxis, grounds first-year students in an experience of language as having unique potential across different contexts, practices, and disciplines.

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