

Iterative Practice. Iterative Pedagogy.

Integrating writing and studio education to foster reflective teaching and transformative learning in the first year graphic design classroom.

Question 1

Using WAC-informed activities, how can writing best be integrated in a meaningful way into a first-year design studio classroom (Communication Design 2)?

Question 2

Once writing activities are integrated meaningfully into a studio classroom, what effect do they have on students?

Context

While there are many well-established Writing Across the Curriculum programs in American universities [1], Canadian universities have been slower to embrace WAC-informed writing pedagogy [2] and there are even fewer examples of WAC approaches being adopted at post-secondary art and design institutions. The creative-discipline-specific examples of WAC programs that do exist—some art and design schools in Britain; some architecture schools in North America [3]—have been designed for and implemented in institutional contexts that differ from those of OCAD University. Thus, this pilot project sought to provide some data on how a WAC approach might best be implemented in a first-year studio classroom.

What is Iteration?

Within the discipline of design, iteration describes a three stage cycle of research (purposeful information gathering from texts, close observation, and material exploration), (re)drafting and revising (making and remaking based on evaluation and feedback from yourself and others) and reflection (on research and making). These stages may happen in any order: each stage informs the others and the cycle is often undertaken multiple times in order to arrive at a final design. Iteration is fundamentally critically reflective and communicative.

Critical Engagement Benchmarks Used in Project Assignment Design [4]

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

	BENCHMARKS		
	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
1 Critical Inquiry Initiate and self-direct inquiry in discipline-specific contexts Demonstrate a comprehension of written and non-written texts, especially those specific to their discipline.	begin to self-direct inquiry into, and recall and describe discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study.	begin to initiate and self-direct inquiry into, and begin to evaluate discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study.	work independently to identify, evaluate and synthesize discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study.
2 Information Needs Identify their information needs for a specific purpose, whether written or non-written, and combine existing information with original thought, experimentation and analysis to produce new information.	identify their information needs for a particular purpose and act on those needs with guidance.	identify their information needs for a particular purpose, act on those needs and begin to evaluate the information gathered.	work independently to gather and evaluate information appropriate to their needs, and describe criteria used to make information decisions and choices.
3 Analysis Describe and evaluate formal features in the analysis of situations, texts or objects in a variety of written and non-written media. Analyze and synthesize their observations in oral, visual and written expression.	identify & describe formal features in the analysis of a situation, text or object, and begin to apply that knowledge in oral, visual and written expression with guidance.	analyze and evaluate formal features in the analysis of a situation, text or object, and apply that knowledge with some guidance.	work independently to analyze a situation, text or object, and synthesize their results in the creation of new knowledge.

Iterative Stages	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3
Research	textual (week 1) material (weeks 1,2,3)	visual (week 1) layout (weeks 3,4)	observational (week 1) material (weeks 2)
(Re)drafting and Revising	making (weeks 2,3,4)	making (weeks 2,3,4)	making (week 2)
Reflection	critique (weeks 1-5)	critique (weeks 3,4)	critique (weeks 2,3)

Iterativity in Communication Design 2 Assignments

Iteration is built into studio pedagogy, and studio assignment design aims to foster iteration in students' making process.

Assignment Descriptions

Project 1:
Concept and the Senses | 5 weeks

Framework Learning Objectives:
Critical Inquiry **1** and Information Needs **2**

Communication Design Learning Objective:
Demonstrate how basic concepts can inform and guide the development of a project.

Project 2:
Typology of a Street | 4 weeks

Framework Learning Objectives:
Information Needs **2** and Analysis **3**

Communication Design Learning Objective:
Define and employ a basic design vocabulary to speak and write clearly.

Project 3:
Visceral | 3 weeks

Framework Learning Objectives:
Critical Inquiry **1** and Analysis **3**

Communication Design Learning Objectives:
Demonstrate how basic concepts can inform and guide the development of a project. Define and employ a basic design vocabulary to speak and write clearly.

References:

- [1] For an overview, see McLeod, S. (2000). *Writing Across the Curriculum: An Introduction*. In McLeod, S., & Soven, M. (Eds.), *Writing across the curriculum: A guide to developing programs* (1-8). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.
- [2] Graves, R., & Graves, H. (2012). Writing programs worldwide: One Canadian perspective. In C. Thaiss, G. Bräuer, P. Carino, L. Ganobcsik-Williams, & A. Sinha, *Writing programs worldwide: Profiles of academic writing in many places* (117-27). Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse.
- [3] Henry, J. (1990). *Writing Architecture*. *Journal of Architectural Education* 43.2, 3-6.
- [4] DiPietro, C., & Brancato, E. (2014). *Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency* (10). OCAD University.

Acknowledgments:

We would like to thank Michael Atlin for his support with the data analysis.

Iterativity in our Practice

This understanding of iteration was applied to learning and teaching contexts in our pilot project as a way of fostering responsive and reflective teaching practice and teaching support. The iterative collaborative process enabled the design instructors and the writing specialist to gather information about one another's contexts and needs as well as those of the students, and apply this knowledge to the assignment design process for projects 2 and 3.

Research:

- Project 1**
- instructors develop their teaching practice by experimenting with purposeful integration of writing throughout a studio project
 - specialist develops understanding of studio instructor goals, studio assignment design, and classroom pedagogy
 - specialist assesses student needs (by reading student writing) and instructor needs (through discussion of writing assessment)

Revising and Redrafting:

- specialist and instructors collaboratively develop writing assignments for projects 2 and 3

Reflection:

- instructors and specialist meet at the end of projects 1 and 2 to discuss observations and challenges
- weekly journaling throughout semester by instructors

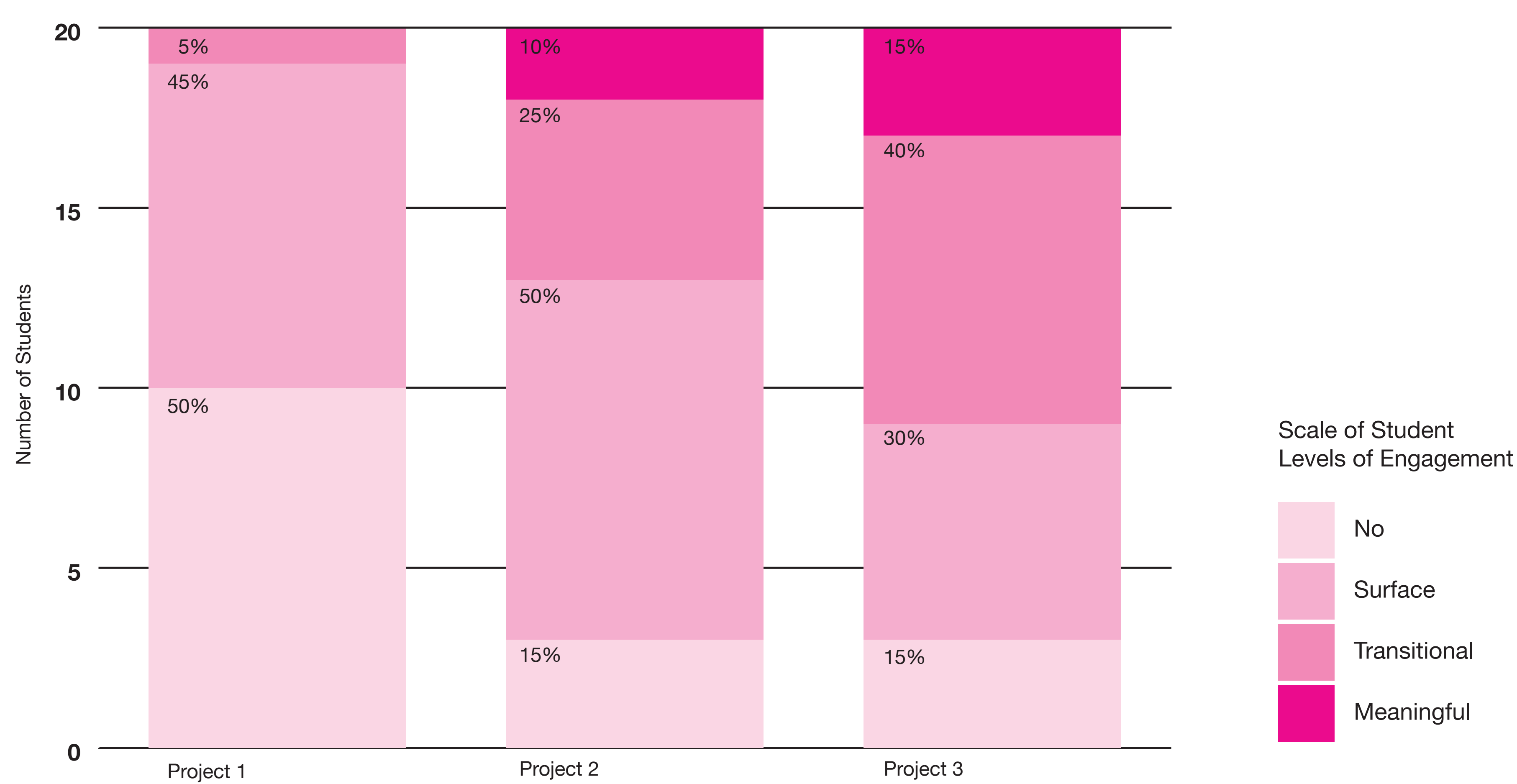
Preliminary Findings from Iterative Collaborative Assignment Design Process:

For first-year design students, writing activities that clearly and specifically support or are integrated into the making are more effective than those that ask students to describe their process or reflect generally on their making.

Even in second term, first-year design students do not have an understanding and knowledge of basic discipline-specific terminology. They also lack the analytical abilities required to write critically about their iterative process as a whole.

Instructors must explicitly communicate the purpose of the writing assignment and the value of writing as process rather than product. First-year design students willingly engage in writing activities, but some assume that all writing in a university context is essay writing and will respond in that format whether or not it is suitable for the assignment.

Student Levels of Engagement in Written Components



Preliminary Analysis

54 first-year students drawn from four sections of Communication Design 2 took part in the study. The data in this poster comes from analysis of the work of 20 students chosen at random, 5 per section with a final grade range of 60 to 85. Only one student had completed more than one semester at OCADU.

Of these 20 students, 7 identified that English was not their first language; 3 of those students had studied more than eight years in Canada, 1 student had studied for seven years in Canada,

2 students had studied between 3-4 years in Canada, and 1 student had less than one year of education in Canada

Three comparable writing components were analyzed, one from each project. Each of the components asked the students to use disciplinary vocabulary (elements and principles of design) to undertake some aspect of critical engagement. The components were analyzed according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Definition	Example
No engagement	Student does not use disciplinary terminology to identify, describe, and/or evaluate their work or that of others from a disciplinary perspective.	"The vernacular design consisted mostly of graffiti. Findings show many kinds of graffiti from intricate murals to careless vandalism." (1415)
Surface engagement	Student uses disciplinary terminology to identify, describe, and/or evaluate their/others' work in a way that reflects a definitional understanding of a concept and a descriptive level of engagement.	"The dominant principle in the group is composition. [The signs] all use various compositional techniques to include the image in the poster" (1413)
Transitional engagement	Student sometimes uses disciplinary terminology to identify, describe, and/or evaluate their/others' work in a way that reflects a deeper understanding of a concept and a somewhat analytical level of engagement.	"Colour is a powerful element that is being used in these signs...the dominant principle being used in these signs is dominance/emphasis. One of the primary uses for colour in advertorial signage (sic) is to gain attention. Red...is used strategically to gain attention." (1424)
Meaningful engagement	Student usually uses disciplinary terminology to identify, describe, and/or evaluate their/others' work in a way that reflects a deeper understanding of a concept and an analytical level of engagement.	"Colour: displayed a use of mostly vibrant, saturated colours on posters and mostly dull colours (probably dulled by the weather outdoors) in other forms such as graffiti." (1441)

Preliminary Findings from Data Analysis

Overall, students demonstrated progressive improvement in their acquisition of disciplinary terminology and their ability to critically engage.

Between projects 1 and 2, the number of students demonstrating no engagement decreases substantially while the number of students who demonstrate surface-level engagement remains steady; a significant number of students shift into transitional and meaningful levels of engagement.

Between projects 2 and 3, the number of students demonstrating no engagement remains steady, but the number of students demonstrating surface-level engagement decreases; the numbers of students demonstrating transitional and meaningful engagement increase.