

# Writing differently in Art and Design: Innovative approaches to writing tasks

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# Writing differently in Art and Design

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Writing in art<sup>1</sup> and design education is different from writing in most other areas of university education. Art and design have their own forms of meaning-making, expressed through their creations. Writing is usually subsidiary to the creative output, supporting it but frequently to its side rather than central to the process. There are historical reasons for a role of writing in art and design education, and writing in art and design can contribute significantly to learning in these fields. However, writing differently draws on the strengths of art and design. The methods that teachers and students have developed to encourage writing when students have chosen to express themselves in other ways—and often have chosen against writing—may offer suggestions for writing in other areas.

## *Introduction*

Paraphrasing Brian Eno, art and artists operate as a cultural observatory, projecting future developments and enacting them within society (Graham-Dixon, 2005). Their sensitivity to cultural changes allows them to intuit shifts that later are embraced by the wider society, and to critique current practices. One result of this is that writing in art and design education is frequently more innovative than writing in other disciplines. For example, the advent of writing on computers and the easy ability to integrate graphic elements with text has changed the nature of writing in almost every area. Images, graphic representations of data, and new forms of page design are now part of “written texts” in most disciplines, and writing is widely understood to be a multimodal activity (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Kress, 2003). Nevertheless, writing in art and design has moved forward faster than writing in other areas in integrating multimodal content into written texts, as well as developing innovative approaches to writing for assessment purposes. Another area of innovation is intertextuality, in which art and design have developed approaches that allow for new configurations of meaning-making while respecting intellectual property rights as these are understood at universities.

Art and design are practical fields that produce artefacts or outcomes that are based on practice. They can be compared with other practical disciplines that are now taught at university such as nursing. As in art and design and many other new or emergent areas, conflicts arise because of the demands of academic study that are quite different from those of traditional experiential learning, conflicts that must be mediated in the written texts submitted for university assessment (Baynham, 2000). In nursing, the critical output is appropriate nursing care, which writing underpins and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, *art* refers to an area of study sometimes called Fine Art Practice, which involves the creation of artefacts or experiences set in the context of art, rather than, for example, the study of the history of art.

structures with evidence. Nurses must read and interpret evidence (as well as use writing for records and instruction), but unless nurses move into education, writing itself is secondary. However, because the evidence for best practice is communicated through writing, writing has an important role in nursing education. In contrast, the best evidence for a successful creative work or design is the work itself, not its interpretation through words. Nevertheless, writing has an important role in art and design education: it facilitates reflection and it can provide a context or, in the case of a design brief, the starting point for creative work. However, writing is substantially more ancillary to the process of art and design education than in most other fields of study.

This chapter will discuss the historical development of the role of writing in art and design education. It will then discuss some of the ways that writing is used for learning and for assessment in these fields, and some of the innovative practices that are used in art and design education.

### *Theory and writing in art and design education*

As described in Borg (2007), art education and design education followed very different trajectories, but in neither field was writing a crucial element. Before the Renaissance (and, in most cases, long after), learning how to make art required an apprenticeship to an artist, during which the apprentice learned the materials and practices of art making. Beginning in the seventeenth century, art education might also include studying in a school, but the focus of this education was drawing, perspective, and the absorption of the vision of masters. Only in the twentieth century did the pattern of art education begin to change, and only late in the century did writing become a significant component of this education. On the other hand, design as a separate practice is largely an outgrowth of eighteenth and nineteenth century industrialisation. With the recognition that there was a need to improve the quality of industrial design, an institution for design education was established as the first form of publicly supported education in Britain. Initially patterned on art education, it too did not include writing until late in the twentieth century.

Formal education in art and design had dual goals: it was intended to improve practice, but also it was intended to raise the status of artists and designers from the level of craftworkers to that of those in society who worked with theories and ideas, particularly natural science which had gradually separated itself from alchemy (Gieryn, 1983). The inclusion of writing in the twentieth century as part artists' education continued this process.

Artists in western societies were educated through apprenticeships until the later part of the Renaissance, and the art historian, Ernst Gombrich compares the status of artists before Giotto with that of "a good cabinet-maker or tailor" (Gombrich, 1995, p. 202), as being a person of purely local renown. Artists were craftworkers, respected in their society for their skill but not honoured. They trained and worked through guilds, which also qualified them as masters in their field, capable of teaching apprentices as well as fulfilling the expectations of an artist. During the Renaissance, however, this began to change. According to Nikolaus Pevsner, in his ground-breaking social history of art education (Pevsner, 1940/1967),

humanists...began to praise individual works of art and individual artists to an extent incompatible with the medieval tradition of paint and sculpture as crafts in no way above

others... Thus, already during the Quattrocento, *the bonds which held the artist in his class were loosened here and there.* (emphasis added; Pevsner, 1940/1967, p. 32)

As artists studied classical sources, they recognised that they provided a theoretical grounding, and that these theories could enhance their social status. Both Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 – 1564), like other artists of their time, were apprenticed and trained in artists' workshops, where they received training in the crafts and skills of an artist, which Gombrich summarised as foundry-work for sculpture, life drawing and perspective, and the use of colours. However, as artists studied classical texts and theories, and their status increased in the artistic ferment of Renaissance Florence and Rome, some began to call for artists to receive education in theory as well as craft skills. Gombrich and Pevsner argue that both Leonardo and Michelangelo were committed to the creation of schools for artists in which students would learn theory as well as the practical skills of an artist.

The first of these schools, the *Accademia del Disegno*, was founded in 1562 by Georgio Vasari under the sponsorship of Cosimo di Medici. Vasari's plan was

to do away entirely with the medieval system of guilds for artists. An artist, [Vasari] felt, should not be in a dependent position, in the same way as a common craftsman. To make him a member of an academy instead would demonstrate that his social rank was just as high as that of a scientist or another scholar. (Pevsner, 1940/1967, p. 54)

The Accademia was followed by academies in France and Britain, sponsored by the monarch and serving to enhance the prestige of the nations by contributing to the development of great artists. In these academies, young artists learned how to draw, first by copying drawings, then by sketching plaster copies of classical sculpture and finally drawing from life models (In France, the academy had a monopoly on life drawing). Students also learned geometry, perspective and anatomy. The programme of study taught the artist not simply how to accurately represent the world, but how to create an ideal, a vision of "nature corrected" (Goldstein, 1996), essentially an idealisation of nature. The education of artists in this manner continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was a major component of art schools into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, industrialisation and the mass manufacture of goods led to decreased opportunities for skilled craftworkers and a perceived lowering of standards of design. In Britain, the first publicly funded educational institution (Bird, 2000), the Normal School of Design, was established in 1837 to improve the quality of design. This school, and others founded subsequently followed the pattern of art education, with a focus on conveying the vision of nature improved through training in drawing, perspective, geometry, and anatomy. Students were not trained in industrial processes, and as a result, manufacturers tended not to hire them, limiting the success of design education. The Arts and Crafts movement in the latter part of the century, led by William Morris, reinvigorated design through a rediscovery of "the organic inter-relation between material, working process, purpose and aesthetic form" (Pevsner, 1940/1967, p. 259).

The Arts and Crafts movement in turn inspired the founders of the Bauhaus in the period after the First World War. They established a school to educate artists that approached art analytically. Students learned the elements that comprised a work of art: point, line, geometric shape, and the spectrum. In addition, they received practical training in handling materials (e.g., stone, wood,

metal, glass, and pigment), as well as classes in geometry, art history, science, and design. This programme of art education was widely influential, teaching as it did a modernist approach to art creation that replaced the goal of teaching artists how to idealise nature.

In the period after the Second World War, art education in Britain moved from independent art schools supported by local councils into the polytechnics, which in 1992 were granted university status. The change in the site of art education was accompanied by two changes that transformed the nature of this education. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a shift toward art practices being increasingly driven by explicit theory, rather than the implicit theory of representation and improvement of nature. While at the beginning of the century, artists issued explicit theoretical manifestos (e.g., Futurism), later critics and philosophers filled this role. Arthur Danto described the new role for theory in art: “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld” (Danto, 1964, p. 580). This shift toward theory-laden artwork meant that literacy was increasingly central to art education and artists. The art critic, Harold Rosenberg, pointed out that “only one of ten leading artists of the generation of Pollock [1912 – 1956] and de Kooning [1904 – 1997] had a degree” while the majority of artists shown in the exhibition “Young America 1965” had undergraduate degrees (Rosenberg, 1972, p. 39, artists' dates added).

The other change was the creation of a qualification for art and design students, the Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD), that would be equivalent to a BA degree and would be awarded by art schools. Evans and Le Grice (2001) describe the implications of the previous practical training in fine arts or design:

In Britain, an education as an engineer and in other fields of practical or applied knowledge had a lower status than an education in the theoretical, historical and philosophical subjects of the university. This powerful and class-based division in education only reflected the lower status of these professions in Britain. (p. 106)

A committee under the Ministry of Education, the National Advisory Committee on Art Education (NACAE), was formed to look at the state of art education. Known as the Coldstream committee after its chairman, it recommended the creation of the DipAD. Pevsner had a prominent role on the committee, and used his study of art education to argue for changes that would improve the status of artists and designers. As set out in the Committee’s report, “the aim [of the Diploma in Art and Design] should be to produce courses conceived as a liberal education in art” (Ministry of Education, 1960, p. 4). In order to do this, the committee included as one of their recommendations that students study both art history and contextual studies, and that these should be assessed and comprise about fifteen percent of the total course. In a subsequent report by the NACAE, Pevsner argued that the reservation of fifteen per cent in the art and design curriculum for contextual studies was “a dire necessity. It is clarity of thought and expression, it is unbiased recognition of problems, it is the capacity for discussion and it is ultimately understanding they must achieve” (Department of Education and Science, 1970).

This recommendation was accepted and contextual studies became a required component of the DipAD. The DipAD did not continue but was transformed into an honours degree in 1974, but, as art schools were assimilated into polytechnics, this element, which required a grounding in theory and written texts, continued. In 1992, the polytechnics became universities, and today most post-

secondary art education is carried on in universities, rather than in specialist art schools. The shift in the site of art education inevitably changed the nature of art education. Describing the changes brought on by formalising art education within a structure equivalent to a first degree, Firth and Horn wrote (1987, p. 42), “Coldstream [the NACAE] represented an academic takeover of an education previously based on more intangible qualities. Romantic ideology came up against a new bureaucratic barrier”. Art education took on many of the characteristics of university education in other areas—universities favour commensurability across the qualifications that they issue—and, in a survey of art education universities in Britain, written communication skills were required by the overwhelming majority of universities that taught art (Brind, 2004).

Christopher Frayling, the Rector of the Royal College of Art, used a distinction first proposed by Herbert Read between teaching *to* art and teaching *through* art. Teaching to art meant teaching the skills and attitudes of how to become an artist, while teaching through art meant teaching an adaptive frame of mind through the practice of art: skills such as “problem-solving, resourcefulness, independence of mind, flexible thinking, preparation for an unpredictable world” (Frayling, 2004, p. 39). Read, Frayling wrote, felt both were necessary, but that achieving the balance was difficult. Pevsner, for example, believed in what might now be called transferable skills, that “the purpose [of writing] is to make the student think and argue on a subject in which his interest has been roused and which is not art...” (Harries, 2011, p. 618). Finding the appropriate balance between art and design practice on the one hand and the ability to articulate and argue ideas orally and in writing on the other is a continuing issue in art education, one which Frayling said “makes the subject-area almost uniquely divided against itself” (Frayling, 2004, p. 40).

A number of art theorists have spoken out against “linguistic imperialism,” the idea that “without a written commentary and analysis, the work that we do as artists cannot be accessed, given academic weight or properly evaluated” (Thompson, 2005, p. 224). Writers holding this position argue that art practice provides a meaningful, mature mode of expression that can be recognised by practitioners, and a text is not necessary to explain the work. Currently, arguments about the need for writing in art education centre on the practice-based PhD in art and design, in which a candidate submits both a body of work and a text that contextualises it. Discussing this, Candlin (2000) argues forcefully that the requirement for a written text privileges theory over the artwork, and that the requirement misunderstands writing. In a passage that most writing instructors would agree with, she argues that, like art, writing is a practice, one which is embedded in particular contexts. Those who require a text to explain art perceive writing “as so naturalised that it is not recognised as having a form. Nevertheless, there is a particular style to academic writing.... In a similar way to studying oil painting or drawing, academic writing has to be learnt and practised” (Candlin, 2000, p. 99). For reasons similar to those put forward by Candlin and Thompson, while undergraduate art education almost always includes a requirement for a written component, in some Master’s courses there may be no required written text (Hockey, 1999).

This survey of the inclusion of a written element in art and design education suggests that, from the time of the Renaissance to recent developments, theory and writing were included at least in part to elevate the status of artists, and that there are theoretically grounded arguments for not requiring writing as part of art education. Art and design students, while not necessarily having a developed critique of the requirement for writing, often resist it. Many identify themselves with their creative practice and see writing in opposition to that practice. They find it constraining and difficult; it is a

“secondary activity, which at best takes time away from making and at worst is painful in itself” (Hockey, 1999, p. 41). Interviewed about her writing, one PhD candidate in Fine Art Practice I spoke with said,

I’ve been thinking I’m not good at expressing myself in words, that’s why I chose art, and I wonder sometimes, “Why am I doing, doing this?” to write up, you know, a big chunk of essay to get the PhD. I like painting, I like painting, that’s what I’ve been trained for, I don’t know, it’s more natural doing my practice than reading and writing, umm...

Many students and art tutors resist writing and worry that it may displace their practice. One result of this conflict between writing and practice is the development of innovative approaches to writing tasks. The resistance to writing that art and design students often feel is replicated in other disciplines, and the innovations that lecturers in the subject area have developed may well be valuable to lecturers using writing in other areas.

### *Writing tasks in art and design*

#### *Writing different genres*

Though a recent study of writing at university (Nesi & Gardner, 2006) identified up to 22 different types of academic writing, coursework assignments tend to be dominated by “the essay.” However, in some disciplines, particularly emergent or practical disciplines, there is greater variation than in disciplines that have a longer history of university study. Art and design are among the disciplines in which students create a wide range of types of text or genres. *Genre* identifies the purposes (or ostensible purposes) of texts, and, from that, suggests their structure and goals. Although Nesi and Gardner identified a large number of genres, the number can be reduced to a set of “elemental” or basic genres (Coffin, Donohue, & North, 2009, p. 273):

- personal recount
- narrative
- taxonomic report (classifying and describing phenomena)
- procedure
- explanation
- discussion or argument.

As Coffin, Donohue and North note, precise classification of a text requires finer discrimination such as that done by Nesi and Gardner (2006). In contexts in which texts are important such as academia, genres are increasingly specialised and are frequently combined in more complex texts. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the broad categories can be informative. The essay falls in the category of discussion or argument and is characterised by a thesis or position and arguments for and against an issue. It depends on an array of evidence, and is usually supported by references and a bibliography. Art and design students frequently find essay writing challenging; Swift argues that

“the conventional, academic essay form, which appears to encourage simplification and authoritativeness can be seen as part of a hierarchical education system set up to disempower rather than empower students” (1999, p. 282).

Instead of setting tasks in the discussion genre, lecturers in art and design frequently choose other genres, such as the personal recount (reflective writing), taxonomic reports (classification and description), and procedures (the stages of a process). Reflective writing is extremely important and will be treated separately, but both the taxonomic report and the procedure offer significant advantages for students writing in art and design. Many students find them easier to write than discussion texts, as they can be based on students’ experience rather than on the synthesis of other’s research, and they allow students to create multimodal texts using images and drawings as well as words. Texts in these genres are often structured chronologically or by the steps of the procedure, so organising the paper is simpler than the discussion genre. They can also be directly related to students’ professional practice, leading to greater engagement with the writing task. For example, at one institution Year 2 students in Fashion Design were asked to choose a clothing store and document its layout and allocation of space in relation to stock and target customers. The essence of the task was a taxonomic report, in which students had to analyse customers, merchandise, store, and implicitly, its competition. This complex analytic task, though, was arranged so that students had to pay close attention to the design of the store in order to make sketches and layout plans, as well as to think through the marketing of the clothing that the store stocked. The combination of multimodal presentation and descriptive writing facilitated the development of the students’ analytic skills far better than essay assignments that try to instil analytic skills more directly. Writing in the genre of procedures can involve students explaining the steps of a craft or skill, or other staged process. In describing procedures, often procedures that they are quite familiar with, students have to analyse and make explicit tacit knowledge. Through tasks such as these, students’ writing ability is improved along with their transferable skills.

### *Reflective writing*

Reflective writing, which is part of the elemental genre of personal recount, is one of the most important types of writing that art and design students engage in. Many applied subjects such as nursing use reflective writing to encourage students to be self-critical and self-aware. It is a particularly well theorised area. Donald Schön, who wrote one of the seminal books in the area (Schön, 1983), identified the importance of reflection *in* and *on* action as a response to the positivist tradition that dominated universities from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He sought to revalue the ability of practitioners to act and to reflect on tacit knowledge, arguing that “practitioners may become reflective researchers in situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and conflict... Here the exchange between research and practice is immediate, and reflection-in-action is its own implementation” (Schön, 1983, pp. 308-9). This is strikingly similar to Frayling’s characterisation of the skills gained through the practice of art. Schön’s thinking underpins many of the writing assignments in art and design, as dealing with uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and conflict are both characteristic of artistic creation and are outcomes that modern art frequently tries to encompass.



In their approach to reflective writing, art and design differ from many other practical or applied disciplines, such as nursing. In other disciplines, reflective writing tasks are often highly structured, using frameworks such as Gibb's reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988). Because art and design often try to generate instability, they draw on more playful approaches to reflective writing. Reflective texts in art and design need to be open to the variety of experiences, visual and verbal, that may influence students, and this would not be enhanced by a highly structured form. One area that tutors and writing instructors in art and design draw on is writing development, adapting strategies that are used to overcome writer's block and other inhibitions to writing. As noted by Candlin (2000), writing is a practice, one that is different from artistic practices but which *as a process* shares similarities. Some of the methods used to engage students with writing tasks are derived from writing studies, while others advance from these ideas, often by using materials other than pen and paper or computer. All are intended to encourage reflection and writing in stages.

An art student spoke for many student writers when she realised "Oh I can do bits?! – Oh I can do that" (quoted in Francis, 2009, p. 29). In order to encourage students to write more fluently, writing instructors encourage students to write frequently, but in smaller amounts, and to keep a notebook in which to write ideas and insights. Notebooks and journals can be written in a more informal style than is normal in academic writing, which reduces students' apprehension and delay. Once ideas have been committed to paper, they can be polished to make them conform to a more formal academic style. In order to reduce the marking load and to improve the quality of the work, tutors can get students to summarise their thinking or to use the journal as a data source for a commentary on the process of creation.

Journals encourage reflection; in fact, in some cases students do not need to be required to keep a journal. Medway (2002) described how architecture students kept sketchbooks that were not read by lecturers or even by other students, except in glimpses over the shoulder. When Medway looked at some of these sketchbooks, he realised that they contributed not simply to the process of learning the knowledge of an architect, but to the process of self-identification as an architect. The development of a disciplinary identity is one of the goals of assignment writing in every discipline. Tutors in art and design often require students to keep sketchbooks, notebooks, or journals in order to foster their identification as artists and designers.

I observed art students at Master's level who were required to keep a journal, which formed the basis for discussions with their tutor (Borg, 2004). In the journal, students kept a record of literacy events (readings and thoughts on readings, seminar and tutorial discussions, as well as reactions to artworks). The goal laid out for the course and carried forward through the journal was "profound self-reflection [that] can be matched to the expanded field of methodological, critical and theoretical options" available in fine arts practice. The journal and discussions with the tutor surrounding the entries contributed to the student's final paper, required for the Contextual Practice element of the course. For the students I observed, the journal was maintained as a computer file that was printed out and kept in a loose-leaf notebook. In the journal, besides text there were sketches and doodles that were added to the printed page, as well as notes by the tutor and written comments by the student. On the pages of the journal, I could trace a multi-sided discussion between tutor, student, and her reading and observation. This on-going conversation, which she referred back to throughout the course, fed directly into her final paper, as well as facilitating a high level of self-reflection about her artistic practice.

Francis (2009) suggests an alternative way of organising the journal to foster a reflective dialogue. Because students value aesthetic qualities, the form of the journal is important, and students may prefer an attractive book that allows them to combine sketches and text immediately, rather than adding them to computer printouts. Medway (2002) noted that the sketchbooks kept by the architectural students were similar: black, with small neat writing. If students use a handwritten notebook to keep their journal, Francis suggests that they might write current reflections only on the left or right hand page, while saving the opposite page for later annotation and rethinking. Francis calls this a double entry journal and points out the opportunity provided by this arrangement for writers to reread and reflect on their earlier thoughts. She also suggests that, if the journal is to be assessed, it may be better (and more practical) for tutors to get students to summarise what they have written, which also encourages both analysis and reflection.

In the MA course mentioned above (Borg, 2004), students were required to submit a 5,000-word essay that complemented their final exhibition. The aim of the essay was

to transform [students'] intellectual deliberations (a set of ideas of unique personal interest) into a fully referenced and well-argued essay... [By writing this essay,] an opportunity is thus created for the articulation of ideas that do not easily find expression in the process of producing and exhibiting artworks.

In other words, students were being asked to shift genres, to move from the elemental genre of personal recount to that of discussion or argument. The criteria for the visual work that the students made were creativity, inventiveness, and originality. These ambitions influenced the choice of topics for the essay. Because the topic was to be “a set of ideas of unique personal interest,” the range of areas addressed varied widely, from an auto-ethnography of a personal journey from Japan to Britain that referenced Courbet and Hokusai and the ideas of Gaston Bachelard, to dream writing, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

For other courses and programmes, the approach to the final essay or dissertation may be quite different, but the issues that tutors try to address through the written texts are often similar: to establish through writing a relationship between students' practice and their values and interests. One example from the WritingPAD website (Lydiat, 2004) described the aims of the dissertation for students:

- write their own experiences
- to be personally reflexive, reflecting upon the ways in which their own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped their research
- to be aware of other knowledges and to understand and evaluate their own place within those knowledges both practically and theoretically.

The movement from the genre of personal recount to the genre of discussion is also a movement from reflective writing to the more academically familiar genre of the essay, even if, in this context, it includes distinctive features. In the programme that Lydiat describes, students begin writing about their personal experiences, reflecting on these, and move to the genre of discussion, in which ideas are evidenced, acknowledged, and evaluated. One element of the movement toward more the more conventional essay form is the use of evidence and the acknowledgment of that evidence (citation

and referencing), though this may take forms that are unfamiliar in other parts of the university. Turner and Hocking describe the use of collage in student writing, citing Lucy Lippard's view that "collage is the prevalent aesthetic of feminism" (2004, p. 155) They note that students are encouraged to draw on contemporary critical theory. Students in the programme they discuss build on their interests and subjectivities, which may result in writing that uses collage or sampling. This approach to intertextuality tries to build on students' independence and originality while encouraging them to explicitly acknowledge sources.

In addition to the reflective journal, art and design students are frequently asked to write personal statements. Artist's statements are part of artists' practice, the text with which artists contextualise (or refuse to contextualise) an exhibition or presentation of their work. In exhibitions, these texts stand alongside the art creation, in some cases guiding the gallery goer to an understanding of the creation, in other cases perhaps misdirecting her, and in others refusing to say more than the artist's name and the date of the work. Writing a personal statement forces the art or design student to reflect on their work and consider how they wish to position it. Students often find this difficult, a moment in which they have to put themselves forward, rather than let their practice speak for them, and in student exhibitions it is common for the personal statement that accompanies the work to have only a minimum of information. As an assessed piece, though, students can be asked to locate their work, not historically, as though they were only the sum of previous artists' work that they had seen, but rather intellectually.

Artists' statements may also do more than guide viewers in understanding the artefact. Although less fashionable now, artists' statements have expressed political views or views about art. *The Futurist Manifesto* (Flint, 1972) from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is a particularly vivid example of this, while at other times artworks have required insight into the theoretical underpinnings of the creation in order to interpret them (Danto, 1964). Finally, some artists have subverted both the text and the viewing experience in museum practice, in which viewers experience of the explanatory texts recontextualise objects that are already included in museums, or they smuggle their own objects into the museum, along with texts that reframe the experience of museum going (Dorsett, 2007).

### *Expressive approaches to writing*

Art and design frequently use innovative ways to present texts, ways in which texts are combined with artefacts so that the unified creative object works synergistically. Many tutors encourage students to create visual essays that bring together in different ways texts and objects. Swift (1999) found herself teaching Fine Art in Context to a group of second year mature art students. She replaced the requirement for a conventional essay with a visual essay that would combine words and objects to illuminate their practices. Among the aims of the visual essay were:

- To integrate and relate the processes of making and writing
- To create an awareness of theoretical structures and their relevance to making/writing/thinking
- To become aware of personal working/thinking patterns (Swift, 1999, p. 283)

Swift encouraged students to find expressive forms for their writing. One student took a block of wood, roughly the shape of a railroad tie 80 cm long. She sawed the wood part way along its length and slipped the pages of her text in the slits. Initially the text on printed acetate could be moved within the slits, suggesting the freeing of words locked in. As the green wood dried and shrank, the text became trapped, a metaphor for writer's block.

The WritingPAD website (Writing Purposefully in Art and Design; <http://www.writing-pad.ac.uk>) has examples of delightful responses to writing tasks that call for an integration of words and artefacts. These responses are intended to be singular; they are individual answers to a common task, though one that may be expressed in different ways, a task that asks students "to integrate and relate the processes of making and writing." For a dissertation at York St. John's University, Alexandra Hutchinson wrote her paper, and, to relieve stress, as she wrote, she folded the printouts into the shape of small stars, which she used to fill a jar. A note she put on the jar asked, "I am worried the structure is too fragmentary. Do you think there's time to change it...?"

One approach to getting students to write, whatever their discipline, is to get them to put ideas down on paper and then to rearrange them into a structure that is communicative and appropriate for the audience. The cut and paste facility of word processors has made this easier for writers who write with some assurance and who recognise the problem in their text. Students, however, often "begin at the beginning, go on to the end," and hand in the assignment when they have reached the word limit. Francis (2009) reminds us that writing is a physical process, one that relatively recently migrated from materials such as baked clay, papyrus, bark and parchment to manufactured paper. She suggests a variety of techniques to encourage art and design students to write in small, manageable increments. Postcards, scraps of paper, fabric, and package labels can all be used as writing surfaces. A few words written with charcoal on a scrap from a drawing pad may have more meaning for a student than a neater note. These bits of writing have advantages over an outline on a full sheet of paper of being able to be moved around freely, so that thoughts can be put in new arrangements, and students can see the contingency of writing in the materiality of bits of text.

Another way to work with the strengths that students bring to writing is to get them to create visual representations of their texts. Mind maps and shapes that show the flow of ideas within the text can help students plan their assignments and also encourage them to step back and analyse the structure of an assignment in progress. Setting out the organisation of a text in visual form can make it easier for students to understand not only what they need to do, but also what they have done so far. Sharples (1999, p. 82-3) gives examples of a "notes network" for an essay and a template that can be used to understand the structure of an essay, while Francis (2009) provides examples of a variety of sketches, using blobs, silhouettes and clumps, that can be used to clarify the organisation of an assignment. Many students, not just art and design students, find visual forms more approachable for the inchoate ideas they have about a topic rather than outlines or lists, which seem to commit writers to a structure and hierarchy before their ideas have taken form.

One approach to writing that can take different forms is patchwork writing. This approach is not unique to art and design; a special issue of *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* (2003, issue 40[2]) had articles on the use of patchwork texts to teach social work, nursing and science among other areas. Patchwork writing in art and design could include an assignment to write in different styles on a single topic (Francis, 1999, p. 195). In response to an exhibition, students

might be asked to write from the point of view of a newspaper reviewer, the artist, and to create a description of the layout of the exhibition. They might also be asked to write an academic response to the exhibition, placing the artworks in historical context, as well as other possibilities. All of these different texts would then be submitted. Students would gain experience in writing for different audiences, and each text can be relatively short, with the whole accumulating to an assignment of appropriate size for the module or course.

As noted earlier, some writers feel that collage is a particularly apposite form of creation for the modern moment. Texts can be physically assembled into an overarching text. One student, Asuka Kawabata, at Central St Martin's was described on the WritingPAD site as having investigated the construct of "authorship." She created a 6,000 word assignment by cutting each individual letter of her text from a variety of printed documents. Without the tremendous labour of assembling a text by pasting each letter, students may be asked to create a text by bringing together sources that are photocopied or printed out from the internet. In the next stage of the task, students could be asked to make explicit the relationships between the sources, first by drawing these relationships and later by writing passages that clarify similarities and contradictions among them. By physically assembling the texts into a patchwork, students can be brought to see the ownership of the original texts and the links that can be drawn among them.

To close this section, it may be worthwhile to revisit the strengths of the traditional essay, with its references and bibliography. Assigned topics may ask students to write about techniques, artists, or designers who influenced them, set cultural phenomena in a context or, to give the task a clearer sense of audience and purpose, they may be asked to write an introduction to a catalogue to accompany an imaginary exhibition that they must plan. Traditional essays are familiar if perhaps unloved, and students, who for a variety of reasons might not feel confident about writing, can find comfort in the structure of tasks such as these. In interviews that I carried out with students on a PhD programme in fine arts, one student offered as a reason for following a traditional model, that writing in an innovative and creative manner might engage the practitioner in him, and he already had an art practice that he was following, while an international student said, "I have never thought about that, because, you know, writing in English is itself is really hard. I don't want to, dare to, do something very strange and creative. I think it will be a disaster." Both students, for different reasons, found the familiarity and constraints of traditional essays easier to work with than more innovative tasks. Another student reported that an essay that she had written in the past now looked much easier now that she understood how to write in an academic style: "what I have been learning is basically the obedience to a certain style and academic writing. You follow through that. That's a lot of it. In that sense it's quite liberating" (Hudson, 2009, p. 124).

### *Conclusion*

There is much that those who support writing in other disciplines can learn from art and design. Art and design approach writing from a different perspective than many other disciplines, though, like many other areas of the university, they have significant numbers of students who find writing challenging. Tutors in art and design have extended tasks and approaches that are used in many areas of writing support to encourage students to engage with writing, such as writing in genres other than the academic essay and connecting their writing closely with their professional goals.

These tasks help students understand how writing can support their art and design practice. Tutors in art and design frequently assign tasks that get students to write small amounts of text, but to write them more frequently. These tasks are often not directly assessed, but instead they contribute to assignments that gather up the small bits of writing into a larger, coherent whole. This reduces the marking load on the tutor, while making the writing task more manageable for students.

Multimodal texts are used in many disciplines, as images, graphs and charts provide clearer and more concise ways to present information than writing. Art and design tutors also ask their students to combine visual content with written, but they also prompt students to go beyond these forms of information design to investigate the support that texts are written on and the ways that texts might be presented. Drawing on the inherent strengths that students bring to the study of art and design, these tasks elicit in some instances strikingly innovative responses.

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