



## Resource Review

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<b>Name of reviewed item:</b>	Inspiring Writing in Art and Design: taking a line for a write
<b>Author:</b>	Pat Francis
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### Review:

A few years ago I signed up for a workshop with Pat Francis at the University of the Arts; the session offered strategies for tutors who were involved in encouraging art design and media students to write. When I strolled into the seminar room, I was met by a kindergarten table: piles of brightly coloured paper spread in luminous fan shapes, lolly sticks and fabric, paper plates, scissors, string and glue pots. A man in a suit asked worriedly if this was the right place for Contextual Studies. The workshop leader beamed and nodded. For a moment I thought she was going to hand him a smock.

Pat Francis is a sessional specialist writing and dyslexia tutor at the University of the Creative Arts. Her book *Inspiring Writing in Art and Design* is a collection of ideas she has developed, initially with individual dyslexic students, and then later in workshops like the one I attended. Most art, design and media degrees have an academic requirement which involves oral presentations, essays and a dissertation module. Most art, design and media students baulk at this – not only because many are dyslexic or spatially orientated, but because they feel that they came to college to work with materials, images and design processes, not words. Those of us who teach Cultural or Contextual Studies often have to overcome our students' strong resistance to writing. This book is intended for use by students as well as the support and academic tutors who teach them.

*Inspiring Writing in Art and Design* is comprehensive in its scope, using theory gained from the Writing PAD project (purposeful writing in art and design), as well as creative writing practice and insights from art and literature. The book's core

principle is that writing needs to be practised in the context of creativity, rather than as a set of academic rules and rigours. Francis proposes that when writing practice is fun and creative, the insight gained by students will allow them to develop the skills necessary for the written requirements of a degree course. But this is not an instrumental approach, working inexorably towards the conventions of academic form. Many of the methods Francis suggests, such as a range of ways of using reflective journals, produce outcomes which enhance students' understanding of both theory and practice. Francis talks about breaking down in order to build up; this methodology of analysis and synthesis always seems to result in a new whole.

The book is divided into a number of sections, although the material contained in each is not discrete and there is often an overlap of methods and themes. An introduction is followed by a section on 'Connecting Inspiration, Theory and Practice,' which cites influences ranging from Riding and Rayner's theory of learning preferences to a Guardian article by Jeanette Winterson. There is then a brief discussion on 'The Process Visual', a model for visualising the writing process.

The introductory chapters are followed by Section 1: Principles. This section is broken down into 'Methods', 'Reading', 'Practice and Process' and 'The Writer: Self and Others'. Section 2 is Practicals which, as Francis states in the book's Resume, is 'full of short and useful exercises.' Section 3 is 'full of Examples.' 'Full' is the correct description, because each page is bursting with ideas. For example, page 52, in the Methods section of Principles, is titled *Postcards*. On this single page there are paragraphs on the collection of postcards by Ringo Starr memorialising the Beatles era, Beth Nelson's use of postcards to aid the construction of an artist's journal and Tom Phillip's National Gallery exhibition of postcards as an archive of social history; these examples lead to a discussion of the ways in which a tutor could use postcards to encourage the telling of stories, generate research and reflect on personal histories and memories.

This sheer wealth of ideas, a strength of the resource, does run the risk of bewildering the reader. I have found the intersecting organisation of material difficult to negotiate, although as I continue to make use of the book, its logic may become more apparent. An example of this kind of overlap would be Francis's discussion of 'reflectionnaires'. The concept is explained in 'Methods' (Section 1), with the comment that 'a few samples are given in Section 2.' My personal preference would be for the theory and practice to be in the same place, particularly as 'theory' here is only a description of method. However, both the 'Contents' pages and 'Index' are comprehensive, so the determined reader is able to make connections across the various sections and subsections of the text.

Francis' methods range from the conceptual to the material; her gift is that she is able to make both accessible to the reader. Often the two are combined, as when she discusses the notion of Time from a philosophical standpoint by drawing on paper plates. Her acknowledgement of the common reaction 'Oh this is like Blue Peter' reminded me of that workshop and the horrified look on the be-suited gentleman's face. An hour later he was happily writing on fabric swatches and bus tickets. While this may not be the most obvious way to persuade undergraduate art, design and media students to write essays, it could work as the first stage of re-casting writing as a creative activity. The book also comprehensively covers the later steps of 'Working Towards Essays', including 'Reading and Noting Techniques', 'Structuring' ('Classifying and Clumping') and 'Viewpoints'.

*Inspiring Writing in Art and Design* is an excellent resource for all those who wish to engage art, design and media students in the practice of writing. It contains a comprehensive bibliography which testifies to the breadth and depth of the author's research. I intend to choose a few key methods to use with students over the course

of the next academic year, but there are probably enough suggestions here to last the rest of my professional life. I would highly recommend Pat Francis's generous and inspiring book.