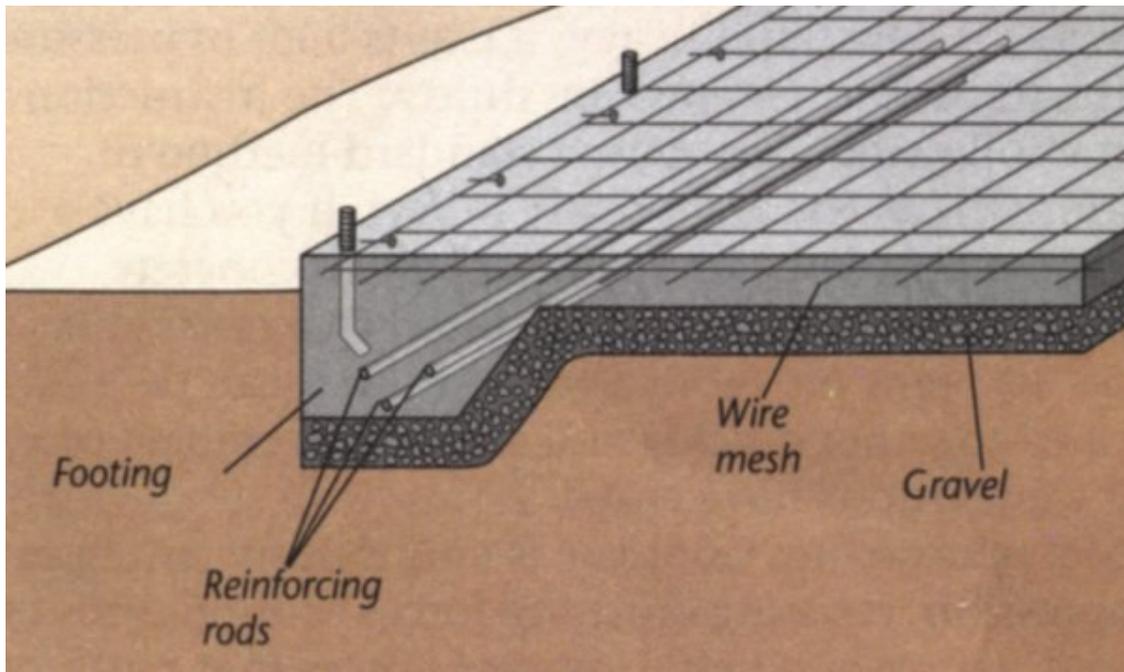


# THE VISUAL CLASSROOM

## A WORK UNDER CONSTRUCTION

### LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS – CONSTRUCTING YOUR THESIS



(Taken from [www.concretenetwork.com/images/slab-on-grade.jpg](http://www.concretenetwork.com/images/slab-on-grade.jpg))

### BUILDING THE STRUCTURE – ADDING YOUR BODY PARAGRAPHS



(Taken from <http://metcn8.com/008-construction/index.html>,  
[www.images.uk.ask.com](http://www.images.uk.ask.com) & [www.constructionphotography.com](http://www.constructionphotography.com))

## THE FINISHED PRODUCT – THE COMPLETED ESSAY



(Taken from <http://architecture.about.com>)

### THE VISUAL CLASSROOM

Students nowadays are living in an increasingly visual world, being exposed on a regular basis, for example, to the Internet, and a myriad of images within, such as pop-up ads, various websites and pictures on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), not to mention their proficiency with the use of text message icons. Therefore, if the visual world can be brought into the academic world of the classroom, then perhaps learning can be facilitated by making it more accessible to the students. Moreover, there is a great deal of research (see Avgerinou and Ericson, 1997), which strongly supports a visual approach within teaching and this presentation seeks to discuss how such an approach within the classroom can help to facilitate learning for students from a variety of academic departments. The presentation will discuss the ‘the visual classroom’ based on the following areas:

- Presenting a theoretical background on the benefits for students of a visual approach within academic pedagogy;

- Explaining what is meant by ‘visuals’, in terms of the different ways that this admittedly broad term can be interpreted and used within the classroom;
- Giving examples of how I have used visuals within my own teaching of academic writing and students’ responses to such;
- Discussing how visuals might be used within the teaching of other academic disciplines, to include the perceived advantages and disadvantages.

### **A Background of Visual Pedagogy**

The benefits of a visual approach within teaching were agreed upon as part of the Delphi Study, in which 88 participants were selected based on their contributions to the International Visual Literacy Association’s Conferences and Journal (JVVL) between 1984 and 1988. The benefits included the following, and are taken from the work of Avgerinou and Ericson (1997):

- Visual images develop learning that uses the right hemisphere of the brain which deals with spatial processes and intuition, and this kind of development is somewhat ignored by the present education system, which focuses more on logic and analytical skills (i.e. involving the use of the left hemisphere of the brain).
- Visual imagery can greatly lead to development of cognitive styles, in particular field dependence/independence; impulsivity/reflectivity; and haptic/visual; students who are strong in these cognitive styles seem to do better in school.
- Developing VL (via the use of visuals in the classroom) increases competence in many verbal skills.
- Visual imagery leads to improved self-expression.
- Visual imagery can increase students’ motivation in all kinds of subjects and at all levels.
- Visual imagery can help to reach students for whom more ‘traditional’ methods aren’t as effective. Bilingual students, those with emotional problems, the socially underprivileged and ethnic students *have* been helped and responded well to the use of visuals, going on to improved academic achievement.
- Visual imagery can lead to improved confidence and self-reliance.

Avgerinou and Ericson (1997: 287) justify the use of visuals thus: ‘the way we learn, and subsequently remember, bears a strong relationship to the way our senses operate. This means that we, as educators, cannot afford to ignore the fact that a very high proportion of all sensory learning is visual.’ Below is a partial list of examples of the visual medium.

- Film clips
- Photographs
- Body language, such as hand gestures
- Describing concepts in a visual manner, such as the use of metaphors or analogies (such as that described with the work of Elbow)
- Magazine advertisements
- Television commercials
- Analysis of completed essays
- Recipes

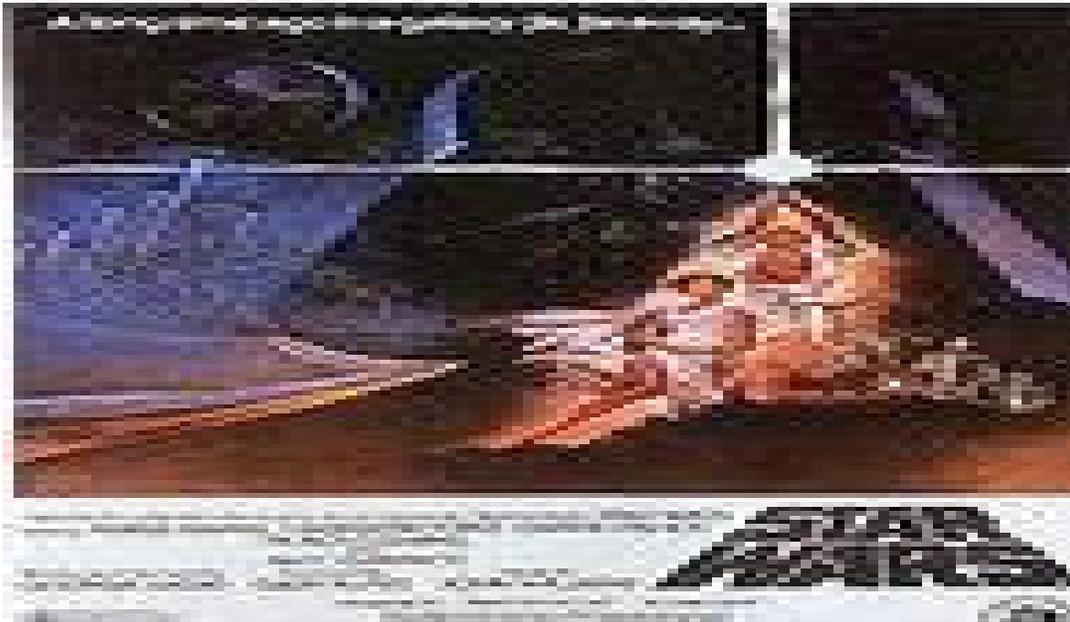
### **Application of the Visual Medium within an Academic Writing Class**

#### **Essay Genre**

The first week of class was centred on the concept of essay genre. The way ‘genre’ is being applied here corresponds to what Wyrick (2002) refers to as ‘modes.’ There are four specific genres/modes which are as follows:

- Argumentation – The writer seeks to persuade
- Exposition – The writer seeks to inform/explain
- Narration – The writer tells a story or event
- Description – The writer seeks to create a picture of an object in terms of the senses involved

However, Wyrick (2002: 187) states that ‘in reality it is difficult to find any one mode (i.e. genre) in a pure form; almost all essays are combinations of two or more modes.’ Further, Swales (1998: 168) mentions the notion of a ‘hybrid genre.’ The world of motion pictures is quite similar, in that a film may indeed exhibit aspects of several genres despite having one *main generic function*.

**Star Wars (1977)**

**Genre:** [Action](#) / [Adventure](#) / [Family](#) / [Fantasy](#) / [Sci-Fi](#) ([more](#))

([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com))

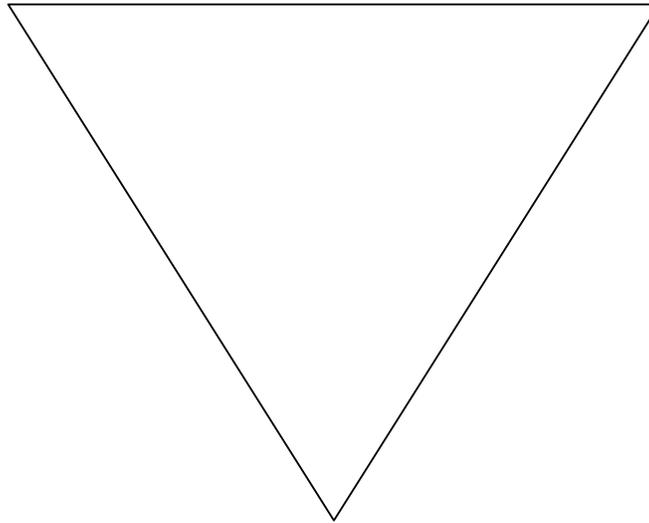
### **Discussion of How to Construct an Introduction Paragraph**

The introduction paragraph is often referred to in *Freshman Composition* circles as a ‘promise’ made by the writer to the reader. The promise revolves around telling the reader what the essay seeks to do (the ‘thesis’) and perhaps in what order topics of discussion will be presented.

The introduction paragraph should be constructed as follows:

- Your introduction **must** contain your *thesis*. This is the main point of your essay and should either be written as one complete sentence or implied within your introduction. You are telling the reader the purpose of your essay (a link to its main generic function)
- Your introduction **usually** contains *background information* about your subject
- Your introduction **sometimes** contains *a plan of your essay* (i.e. this essay will discuss Point A, then discuss Point B, before concluding with Point C)
- Your essay **may** contain *an opening ‘hook’* (i.e. something that gets the reader’s attention, such as a rhetorical question, quotation, statistic and so on)

### **The Inverted Triangle**



The purpose of the inverted triangle is to once again create a visual in students' minds as to how they might construct their introduction: presenting information which progresses from broad to narrow. For example, the initial sentences within an introduction can serve to offer broad background information on one's subject, leading into the more narrow area of the thesis.

### **Unity and Coherence**

Unity refers to maintaining a consistent focus within one's essay, the focus being contained within the thesis itself. Neman (1995: 148) states that 'if students have focused their entire paper upon supporting their central point, their papers will automatically be unified.' On the same page, Neman also offers advice to teachers, saying that 'we must urge our students to be brutal in eliminating any material they find not to the point.' Coherence involves organising one's essay in such a way that it is easy to follow the information within; 'reader-friendly' we might say. Wyrick (2002: 70) expands on this, stating that coherence 'means that all the sentences and ideas in your paragraph flow together to make a clear, logical point about your essay', which 'give the reader a sense of logical movement and order (page 71).' Within an average length essay of, say, 1000 – 2000 words, such 'logical order' is usually accomplished with maintaining one topic per body paragraph, with each topic of

course relating to, and illustrating, one's thesis, thus providing a link to unity. A visual used to illustrate coherence is shown below, and consists of a simple recipe:

### **How to Make Chocolate Pudding**

1 cup of sugar

5 tablespoons of cocoa

2 egg yolks

1 teaspoon of vanilla

3 tablespoons of flour

3 cups of milk

1. Beat yolks in pot.
2. Add milk and stir.
3. In a bowl thoroughly mix flour, sugar, and cocoa. Add to milk and eggs.
4. Cook and stir until thick.
5. Remove from heat and add vanilla.

(Taken from [www.virtualcities.com/ons/0rec/03puddin.htm](http://www.virtualcities.com/ons/0rec/03puddin.htm))



- *What is the thesis?* 'How to Make Chocolate Pudding'
- *What is the background?* The ingredients
- *What is the essay map?* Beat eggs, add milk, mix, cook and so on.....

The bulleted information above relates to the construction of an introduction of course, but from the perspective of coherence, we can indeed see how each point in

the making of chocolate pudding offers a logical, clear flow of information. If we were to rearrange the order of preparation, then we would indeed be left with a recipe – and by extension an academic essay – which is *incoherent*.

### **Support**

#### ***Sample One***

Clay (p.44) also states that it is very rare for a child to learn to write another word before their name, as they are most motivated to write their name. Kress (1997, p.66) explains this motivation by saying that the name provides a challenge and mystique for the child, and the opportunities for writing it are endless. Clay explains that the child first recognises the initial letter. Nicholas showed that he recognised the letter ‘n’ when he called it ‘my letter’, the reason being ‘n for Nicholas’ (see diary, session 1). This observation was exactly what Clay would have expected, as she states (p.46): ‘A child who is beginning to discover print and who is shown an alphabet may correctly respond to certain letters with “that’s in my name”’.

#### ***Sample Two***

The issues involved with obesity are largely social, not just biological. If we live in a consumer culture, where bigger is better, is it really a surprise that this mantra also applies to the size of our food portions? Jackson (2005: 281) believes that ‘obesity is a major source of concern’. If we continue to believe that eating smaller portions is somehow an attack against our personal right to choose what we do or simply not as enjoyable as eating as much as we want, then the problem looks set to stay.

## Peer Review

### PEER EDITING SHEET

1. Which sentence appears to be the THESIS STATEMENT? Or, is the thesis implied? Either way, write down the thesis in your own words.
2. Write down the individual *topics*, not *topic sentences*, for each body paragraph. Alert the writer if there doesn't appear to be a specific topic for each paragraph or if there is more than one topic per paragraph.

**Paragraph 2 –**

**Paragraph 3 –**

**Paragraph 4 –**

3. In terms of UNITY, does each and every sentence relate back to the thesis? In particular, does the writer introduce any new topics and/or new aspects of the original thesis in the conclusion that were not previously mentioned?
4. In terms of COHERENCE, do you believe that the writer's sentences have a logical progression (A – B – C, etc.) AND does each paragraph have only one topic AND has the writer used connectors – words that join sentences/sections together (e.g., 'however', 'for example', 'in addition', and so on)?
5. Overall, what suggestions, if any, would you give to the writer for improvement?
6. What do you feel are the essay's strengths? Include here a mention of any stylistic devices that work well (e.g. figures of speech, effective word choice, etc.)

## Advertisements



(Taken from [www.tabasco.com/arts\\_pavilion/tv\\_ads/index.cfm](http://www.tabasco.com/arts_pavilion/tv_ads/index.cfm))

**SLOGAN:** *It's like love. No matter how badly you got burned last time you always want more.*

The slogan above is an example of an analogy, and students can discover the power of words by relating the shared properties of love and Tabasco sauce: they both ‘burn’ people, though in different ways. This can encourage students to use more effective rhetorical methods, such as figures of speech, with which to enliven their writing. Regarding figurative language used within academic writing, Kolln (1999: 184) states that it sends ‘a message to your reader: “Pay attention! Read this carefully. It’s important.”’ Furthermore, Wyrick (2002: 325) states that ‘figurative language produces images or pictures in the readers’ minds, helping them to understand unfamiliar or abstract subjects,’ with Elbow (1998: 18) believing that ‘metaphors make a big difference.....’ (page 18).

In closing, there are many ways that visuals can be used within a classroom, some traditional, some less so, but they can all serve to make learning arguably more enjoyable and in turn, help students to learn more.

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