

File That Under “Part of the Process”

Kayla Scott

Kayla Scott takes readers through her first few weeks of English 101: Composition as Critical Inquiry and Art 109: Visual Thinking: 3-D Fundamentals. Scott introduces readers to the different genres encountered in an art class and how she deals with and organizes the different texts she finds. With her transfer of knowledge from English 101 and the use of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), Scott is able to demonstrate the different components of these genres and provide some insight into connections between art and English concepts.

English 101 Revelations: Genre Studies, CHAT, and Transfer

The first thing I learned in English 101 is that every type of writing is a genre, including texts, e-mails, critiques, and assignment sheets. This realization changed my life. Dramatic, I know, but really, it kind of did. How is it that texting is a genre? Once I started thinking about a text message as a genre, I began noticing and thinking about texts more and in new ways. That poster? That’s a genre. Who made that poster? How did they learn to write in that style?

A whole new way of thinking about texts was introduced in that same English 101 class that taught me texting was a genre; this way of thinking is thanks to **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT). It turns out that CHAT is a theory that helps us look at the how, why, and when of writing practices. According to my English 101 instructor, Deborah Riggert-Kieffer, CHAT helps you break down a genre into its component parts to discover its features and boundaries. CHAT is comprised of several essential parts: production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, and ecology. **Production** and **representation** deal with the process of writing,

specifically what tools were used and what the person was doing while planning and writing. **Distribution** includes how a text goes out into the world, whether on paper or online. **Reception** involves who reads the text and how it is used, whether the audience was intended or not. **Socialization** describes the interactions people have due to the use of text. And, finally, **ecology** deals with physical and biological forces that exist beyond the text.

After learning about CHAT, my mind was blown. Well, not really. But sort of. Sometimes I am a bit of a nerd, and learning a whole new way of thinking was somewhat of a revelation for my freshman year of college.

As of this point, I understood the basics of CHAT (though not nearly everything there was to know about all of the concepts). I knew texting was a genre and that, well, everything can be a genre. *Ta-da*. Newfound genius just waiting to make my mark on the world.

With my new way of thinking and genre knowledge, I began to make connections. Someone once told me that making connections is essential to truly understanding. Well, I now make connections in my everyday life. Connections from math to chemistry: using if A then B logic and that sort of thing. From art to communications: talking about symbolism, with certain words showing up in both classes. And even connection between my Art 109: Visual Thinking: 3-D Fundamentals class to English 101: Composition as Critical Inquiry.

It turns out that there are many different genres in an art class, specifically, 3-D Fundamentals with Tyler Lotz, a professor in the School of Art at Illinois State University. In this article, I will illustrate how I transferred¹ knowledge I learned in English 101 to my art class—in particular, how I applied what I learned about genre and CHAT in English to my art coursework.

Assignment Sheets and Professors

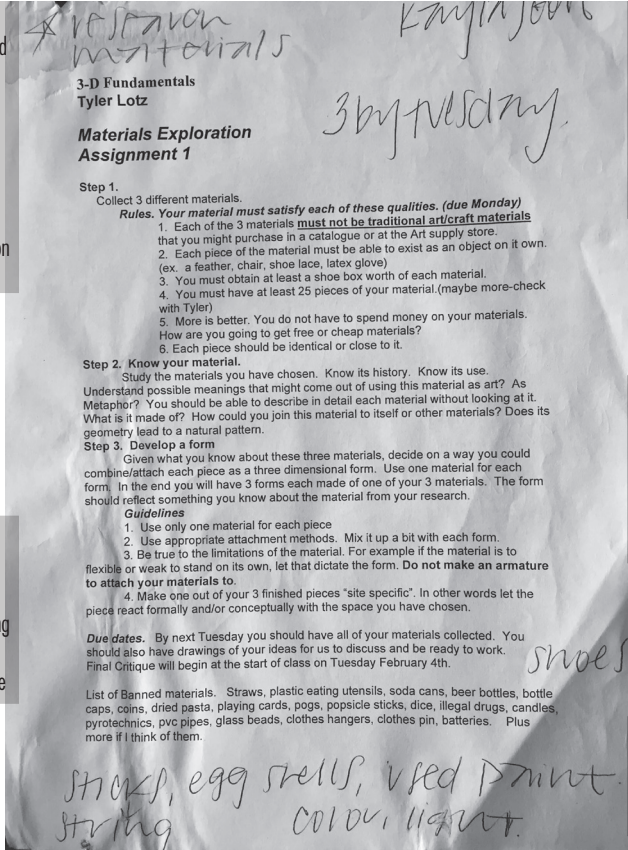
When I received my first assignment sheet, “Brochures,” in English 101, I did not recognize it as a genre. I started thinking about the finished product (the brochure I was assigned to create) as being the genre. Yet after all the genre talk we did early on in English 101, when I received my first assignment sheet, “Materials Exploration,” in 3-D Fundamentals (Figure 1), I immediately recognized it as a genre.

Although the content differs from art to English, both assignment sheets are in fact a genre, and a complicated one at that.

¹The term transfer refers to the idea that we approach writing situations with prior knowledge of other writing situations, and this knowledge impacts our choices. Ultimately, we might use the knowledge learned in a writing-intensive course in other writing activities outside of that course.

Reception: How a text is used

- Intended audience is supposed to read sheet and use as reference
- Unintended audience is those who are reading the sheet in *GWRJ*
- Author did not intend for me to spill coffee or write notes on the sheet



Socialization: Interactions between people instigated by text

- Instructor discussed assignment, expectations, and due date
- Students asked questions about assignment

Distribution: How the text goes out into the world

- The instructor distributed paper copies during class
- The paper copy was scanned to be printed in *GWRJ*

Representation: The activities that help plan and produce a text

- Years of experience in teaching
- Trial and error
- Revising assignment over time

Production: Tools used to create text

- Computer
- Printer

Figure 1: Assignment sheet from 3-D Fundamentals, with an example of a basic CHAT analysis for the assignment sheet genre.

In its simplest form, the assignment we were given on this assignment sheet was to create three different sculptures from three different nontraditional materials. This specific assignment is meant to merge technical skill and conceptual thinking. Using nontraditional materials is a large part of the assignment. One must figure out how to construct and fit together different objects that you would not typically use in an art classroom. Not only did we have to figure out the technical stuff, but Lotz wanted his students to understand what using these materials meant to the artwork itself and the effect it had on the concept as well.

Lotz has been teaching art at Illinois State University since 2002 and has taught 3-D Fundamentals almost every year since then. This most likely explains the in-depth and specific assignment sheet. Twelve years of trial and error went into this specific sheet. It undoubtedly changed from year to year as Lotz decided to try new things. But how did this assignment sheet start? With an idea, a concept that this teacher felt every new artist should know and understand. That’s what the assignment was built off of.

Every student that receives a degree from the School of Art at Illinois State University is required to take 3-D Fundamentals, whether they are a

graphic design major or an art teacher education major. This class is designed for beginners and meant to teach the fundamentals and building blocks of three-dimensional art. One such building block is that 3-D art can be made of just about anything; clay, leaves, eggshells, bottles, and even paper. Hence the assignment focused on materials exploration.

Conceptualizing and Creating

With Lotz's original concept in mind, the next step he undertook was to design the project. How will students understand the concept? What will the process be? What rules will be put in place?

As I started thinking about the assignment sheet for 3-D Fundamentals, I also began wondering about the assignment sheet I had previously overlooked in English 101. How did my English teacher make her assignment sheet? How did she select what genre the students would study? Did she have to determine a page limit? Would she allow them to pick the topic? How did she decide what restrictions to put in place?

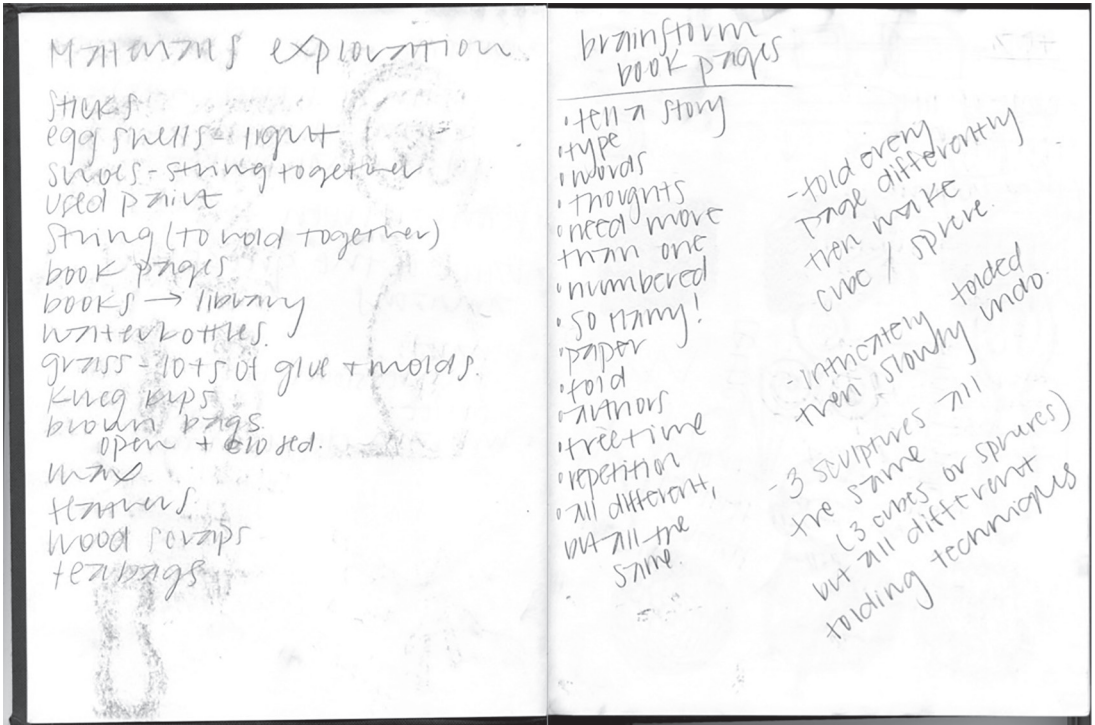
While Lotz continued to talk for three hours, I began to scribble project ideas on the assignment sheet, which he probably did not intend for students to do. Lotz probably expected us to take the assignment sheet, read it, and begin thinking about the assignment—in other words, that was what he intended our reception of the assignment sheet to be. But reception also takes into account how people use or reuse a text, and in this case I chose to use it as a place to jot down my ideas about what I could do for the assignment. Sticks? Egg shells? Books?

This later turned into a long list of materials in my sketchbook (Figure 2). Another genre? I think yes.

Part of the Process: Sketchbook

Maybe I am getting ahead of myself. Perhaps writing in a sketchbook is not a genre, but merely a step in the writing process.

Not everything is black and white, and not everything is a genre or not a genre. The realization that texting was a genre and posters are a genre thrilled me and, in response, had me assuming that every bit of text and writing was a genre. To me, those sketchbook pages looked like a genre. Writing, text, that's enough, right? Not exactly. What I was slow to realize is that those pages were not the final product; they were simply a step in the process, a means to an end.



Reception: How a text is used

- No audience besides myself, because I had no intention of people seeing my sketchbook

Production: Tools and structures used to produce a text

- Lack of format suggests there is no predetermined structure to how the pages are to be used
- Pencil was used to write on the paper

Figure 2: My sketchbook pages with ideas for the Materials Exploration project, with an example of part of a CHAT analysis for the sketchbook genre.

Writing in a sketchbook is a form of brainstorming. I create something like mental maps, but with less structure. This is where sketchbook writing becomes less of a genre, because there are no set rules within the sketchbook. This has to go there, that needs standard grammar, etc. Nope, none of that. The pictures show messy handwriting, lists, and writing on weird angles. There is no way to determine how this would be a specific genre, therefore we shall file sketchbook writing under “part of the process.”²

²I realize some people will disagree with this statement. In fact, some of my editors for this article tried to convince me the sketchbook was, in fact, a genre. But after talking with my English 101 teacher and working on this article, I decided that not every type of writing is necessarily a genre. I’m not suggesting that fewer rules make something less of a genre. My suggestion is, rather, that because there are *no* rules or expectations for what a personal sketchbook will look like, it cannot be a genre. There is no way to define it! Instead, the sketchbook is part of the work that leads to the final product.

CHAT helps us to understand the different components that go into creation and use of a genre. One of these components is representation—the process the creator of a genre undergoes in working toward the final product. Brainstorming is one part of that process. Throughout my own brainstorming process and the multiple sketchbook lists I created, like the one shown in Figure 2, I finally came to a decision that I would use book pages as one of my materials for the Materials Exploration project. (I cheated a little, because a book page might be considered only one small component of an actual book, but Lotz worked with me on this one.)

Blurring the Line of Genre

I began this project for Art 109 at nearly the same time that I began to learn about CHAT in English 101. Whenever I made connections between CHAT and the real world, I always thought of my art class and *Fly Trap*. *Fly Trap* by Francis Hardinge is a book that I bought for ninety-nine cents and cut apart to create my sculpture for the Materials Exploration project. I'm almost positive the author of that book never intended for the book to be taken apart and viewed as a visual artifact rather than actually read. Soon after I started folding thousands of book pages (two copies of *Fly Trap*), I ran out of pages. I bought another book that was similar size and color from a girl on my floor for five dollars: *Liar* by Justine Larbalestier. Now the line of genre is blurred once again, and not even books are black and white.

The genre of books seems simple, right? What about now that this book is folded and rolled up into a cube? The whole book is still there. The viewer is still looking at the book. The viewer is responding to the artwork; which happens to be the book. Right?

The authors of those books probably did not intend their books to be used as art, but that does not change the fact that it happened. CHAT helps us to recognize what happens to a genre once it is out in the world. CHAT can help us see that we have no control over what happens to a genre once we have produced and distributed it. As I created this sculpture for my art class, I realized that my English class gave me words to describe the new **trajectory**³ these books were embarking on because of my art project.

³Looking at the trajectory of a genre allows you to examine its “life.” Even if the writers of the books I used for my art project didn’t intend for their books to become sculpture, the “life” of their books continued far past when they were printed and read, and their trajectory (or the path they took once they were out in the world) now includes the fact that I produced something new, a sculpture, from their pages.

Distribution: How a text goes out into the world

- Books typically are sold in stores or put in libraries; however, these books were in the University Galleries
- Artwork is not mass produced, there is only one

Reception: How a text is taken up and used by others

- Viewers express like/dislike of what they see visually, not what they actually read
- Authors' intended audience was teenage readers, not art gallery visitors
- Authors had no intention of having their books made into a sculpture



Socialization: Interactions between people instigated by text

- Looking at rather than actually reading the text
- Critiquing artwork
- Asking: What do viewers gain from this artwork?

Figure 3: Sculpture formed from book pages, with an example of some components of a CHAT analysis of the sculpture.

Once I finished my sculpture from the books, I started to realize that those book pages experienced an entirely new reception once I created something new from them. With books, I generally think that people would simply react with like, dislike, boredom, or something of that matter. Now that those book pages are part of a sculpture, people react to my artwork made from text, but viewers are now reacting and interpreting the book pages as part of a larger visual project, rather than reading the words.

Why are there three? What is the artist trying to express? How do the book pages relate to the form? These are similar questions to those that arose on the day this sculpture was due in class.

Style of Critique

The day of critiques arrived and I was faced with an entirely new genre. Our teacher asked the class to pick one of our peer's sculptures and write about it. I was supposed to describe the piece (easy) and then write about what we interpret the piece as (what?).

Although at first I was not sure about what to do with the critique assignment in my art class, as I thought back to my English 101, class I realized that maybe this genre wasn't completely new after all. All semester long in English 101 we were assigned articles to read out of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* and instructed to write about them. I wrote about whether I liked the article, how it applied to our class, what I took away from it, and sometimes, I criticized them. Maybe this kind of writing in art class was like that, in which case the reading responses I did in English 101 could serve as an **antecedent genre** I could use to help me figure out what to do with my critique in art class.

I had written about art before, but not about art created by someone I knew, and it wasn't something I would have to read directly to the artist. I was forced to think about what the audience, including the artist, would think before I even began to write. Encourage, but not glorify. Be honest, but not harsh. I decided to write a critique of a sculpture created by a girl I knew, and I gave her a list of about five interpretations and a few suggestions (Figure 4).

Now, this sheet of paper is not necessarily the formal genre of critique (at least not quite yet). This sheet of paper is messy. There is no structure, and it is hard to pinpoint exactly what my stance on the piece is from these little blurbs. Here, I am taking notes that will help me write my critique.

These reflection-critique hybrids led to ten-minute conversations about everyone's artwork. What we liked, what we disliked, why we liked it, why we disliked it, what was done well, what could be done better. Talk about socialization . . .

Rubrics: When Grading is Not Right or Wrong

After the critiques were finished, our Materials Exploration project wasn't quite over. First we had to wait to receive our graded rubric back from our instructor. Rubrics are a complicated genre that must be well thought out because they help determine students' grades. Although they differ from assignment to assignment and subject to subject, the general structure is the same. A rubric features different categories and the students receive a numerical score for the categories, which add up to the total grade for the assignment.

Production: Tools and structures used to produce a text

- Tools include pen and paper

Representation: The activities that shape how people produce a text

- Looked at artwork while describing what I see

Reception: How a text is taken up and used by others

- Will the artist of this piece be offended by what I say?

Ecology: Physical and biological forces that exist while producing a text

- Physical forces include only ten minutes to write in a loud classroom

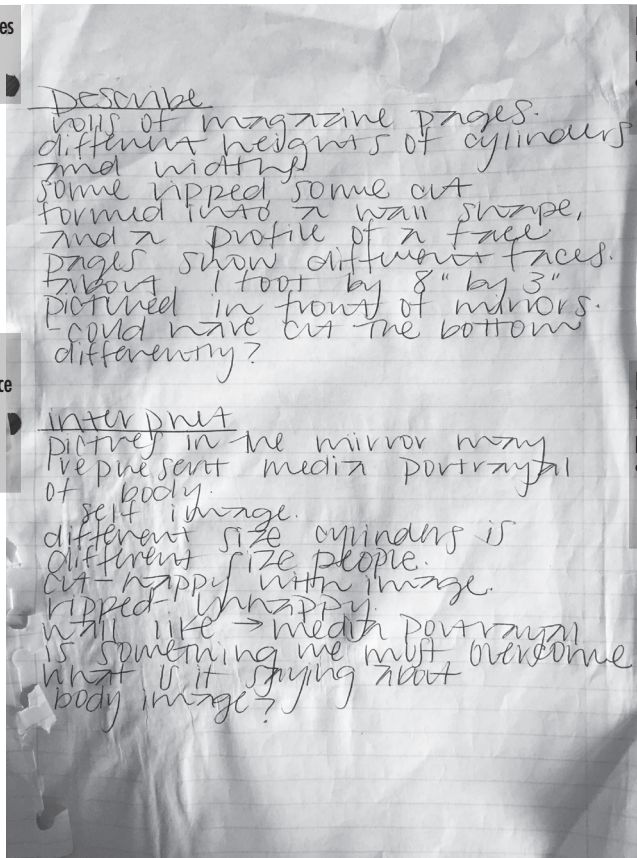


Figure 4: Handwritten critique for 3-D Fundamentals, with an example of a partial CHAT analysis of the critique genre.

Rubrics are sometimes used for grading projects that might not have a clear right or wrong answer, like English papers or art projects. Although rubrics are a common grading tool, they still pose problems or raise questions—for instance, what differentiates between a nine and a ten? What is good and what is very good? It is up to the teacher to determine what is good—or good enough.

This rubric not only grades the final product, but the entire process from start to finish. This means that coming to class, being prepared, and participating in critiques all factor into my grade. This seems fair considering all the time and effort it takes to create some of these projects. Lotz created this rubric to make it possible for students to receive a good grade even if the final product did not turn out as expected and to give credit to students who work hard the entire class and not just at the last minute. He wanted to take away the emphasis on the product and focus more on the process. This can seem unusual for those who feel the final product is all that matters. Lotz also added a category called “Project Ambition” in order to encourage people to create challenging art projects; even if a student does not finish the project, they can still get a ten in this section.

Production: Tools and structures used to produce a text

- Tools include computer and printer for initial production, pen or pencil for filling in points
- Specific format—common for scoring rubrics
- Grading scale is predetermined

Representation: Activities that shape the text

- Added categories as the rubric was improved or edited
- In grading, looked at the whole process, not just the final work

Name	Grading Period	points
Each Category has a total of 10 possible points Poor (0-5 pts.) Below average(6 pts.) Average(7-8 pts.) Above Average(9 pts.) Exceptional(10)		
Classroom Productivity Student attends class and uses class time wisely to complete assignments.		10
Out of Class Productivity Progress is made on assignments between class periods.		10
Engagement in Classroom Activities Student is attentive during instruction and demonstrations. Actively participates in lab duties and cleanings.		10
Timeliness/ Completion Student completes assignments. Meets deadlines and due dates.		10
Preparedness Student comes to class with materials, ideas, plans etc.		10
Project Ambition Student proposes and completes a project that is ambitious and challenging.		10
Craftsmanship and Technique Student demonstrates a solid understanding and control of the materials and processes. Projects are completed with an aesthetic intention that is appropriately connected to the conceptual premise of the work.		10
Creativity and Originality Projects are rooted in original and innovative ideas. Student demonstrates an inventive exploration of materials and aesthetics.		9
Clarity and Quality of Concept Student's work has a strong conceptual basis. Ideas are derived from careful and extensive research. Artwork successfully communicates the intended concept.		10
Critique/Discussion Student regularly makes thoughtful and articulate comments about fellow classmates work during critique and idea discussions. Completes and contributes to discussion of assigned readings.		9
A (100 – 90%) B(89 – 80%) C(79 – 70%) D(69 - 60%) F(59 – 0%)		Total
		98

Distribution: How a text gets out into the world

- Used to give students their grades
- Handed out individually on paper

Reception: How the text is taken and used by others

- Students may think the teacher dislikes them because of a bad grade
- Students may wonder why they earned a 9 instead of a 10 in a particular category

Socialization: Interactions between people instigated by text

- Students ask others what their grades are
- Students talk to the teacher about why they got the grade they did

Figure 5: Rubric for 3-D Fundamentals, with an example of a CHAT analysis of the critique genre.

Since rubrics provide a grade, the reception of a rubric is especially important. Students may be happy with a grade, or they may be upset and feel they deserved a higher grade. This generally reflects on the teacher who created the rubric and whether they can justify their decision in giving a nine instead of a ten.

Developing My Own Definition

Grading is one of the aspects of teaching where I see connections between art and English. Unlike in math and science, there is no “right” or “wrong”

answer in art and English. Yes, there are skills to be taught in both subjects; like grammar and proportions. In college, grades are necessary to evaluate mastery of content, but ultimately, art and writing are a form of expression. They both create an outlet for one to express their thoughts or feelings. Art and writing may be used to inform, to persuade, or simply to enjoy. There is so much that can transfer from one subject to another.

In addition to expression, another similarity between art and English is the fact that I am not a professional in either. I cannot write the perfect critique or create the perfect sculpture. I am still learning and developing, just like my knowledge of genre is still developing. I am learning what a genre is and working toward creating my own definition. I am still not sure if I know exactly what “counts” as a genre. Not everything fits into a category easily. But maybe it’s not supposed to.

Works Cited

- Riggert-Kieffer, Deborah. “CHAT Lecture Notes.” Illinois State University. 5 Feb. 2014. English 101.
- Lotz, Tyler. Personal interview. 10 Apr. 2014.



Kayla Scott is a junior at Illinois State University studying art teacher education and ceramics. After discovering her love of writing research, Kayla became a 2014–2015 Grassroots Writing Research Fellow. When she isn't writing or working in the studio, Kayla spends time creating set pieces for the Metcalf School musical, working out, and meeting with the University Scholars and SILICA executive boards.