

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

*Volume 15 Issue 44
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The Right Time and Place

The rules, as they say, are made to be broken. But it's also worth remembering that there's an intelligent, effective way to do so, and then there's the way that a girls' judo coach tried to go about it.

Understandably, 11-year-old Hagar Outbih was upset when Judo Manitoba officials prevented her from competing in a judo tournament while wearing her hijab, a traditional Muslim headscarf.

The youngster reportedly burst into tears and vowed to start a petition to change the rules. From a child's point of view, it just wasn't fair. She had (one can assume) trained hard and been looking forward to participating alongside her friends. Any kid would have been disappointed.

The problem isn't with Hagar. She'd been allowed to prepare for and enter the tournament under the misconception that she'd be allowed to wear the head covering.

And the problem isn't with the rules. There's a strict (and clearly laid out) uniform for the sport: jacket, pants, belt, and a plain white T-shirt for women. No exceptions.

Why so stringent? Because any deviations are potentially dangerous, and even deadly, for competitors, and I take that from someone who knows: a man with 54 years' experience on the judo mat; seven years spent on the Canadian Judo Team; two Pan-American games; several years training in Japan; and more broken bones and shattered teeth than he'd care to count. In short, someone who knows exactly what can go wrong on the mat.

When I asked his opinion on competitors wearing a hijab, or any other departure from the official *judogi*, his answer was blunt: "Brain damage happens fast. And when I'm reaching behind me to throw a competitor, I'm not looking to see what's wrapped around his neck."

In our hyper-sanitized world, it often seems that nanny states go overboard in dictating caution, but in this case the rules are there for a good reason: a cloth wrapped around someone's head in a sport that involves throwing, grappling, and choke holds is a potentially deadly accident waiting to happen.

No, in this case the fault lies squarely with Hagar's coach, on two counts. First, if she's responsible for coaching children (or anyone), she ought to know the rules. The International Judo Federation's website lays the guidelines out plainly, right down to the acceptable measurements for virtually every centimetre of the uniform. The same rules are available on the Judo Manitoba website. Waiting until tournament time to challenge those rules is naturally going to lead to frustration for her team.

Second, supposing that her aim was to change the existing rules, she would have done well to pick a better time and place. According to a CBC article, the female coach has worn a hijab in judo competitions for 10 years without incident. "I don't think that accidents happen from wearing hijab," she says. She suggested that "maybe they need to try it and put it through an experiment with players and see if it is safe or not safe."

She may be right. Thorough and careful experiments just might prove that the head covering doesn't present any extra danger to judo participants.

But using the very public disappointment and tears of an 11-year-old isn't the right way to do it.



The phrase “my brain hurts” originated with the Monty Python comedy team and featured a fictional Mr. Gumby looking for a brain specialist. Those of you not familiar with the sketch are obviously not over 50. But for me, although a confirmed Python fan from the days of watching them on television in the 60s long after Mum was safely tucked up in bed (Monty Python was considered risqué at the time), the phrase took on special meaning when I decided to enrol in Athabasca courses.

A lifelong accountant and finance person, madness took hold of me and I was convinced that salvation lay in a university degree with a double major in English and French.

Quoi?, you ask. Exactly, I say. The blurb on the university website sounded innocuous enough; I just needed to apply and send money. What could be easier? Within two weeks the books arrived. Lots of books. My brain hurt just looking at them.

Going back to university as an old fogey is exciting but daunting. We have the benefit of not being under the stress that youngsters are under. Failed the French exam? Er, how does that affect the pension? Didn’t get the English essay in on time? So fire me!

However, we have decades of built-in pride and self-esteem that extract their toll. I find myself up at four a.m. to revise for the French exam because my old brain can’t retain those bloody tenses. I’m terrified that I’ll be the last person in the room to finish the exam at the invigilation centre. Never mind that the rest of them are high school dropouts doing multiple choice assessment tests. That’s not the point; who wants to look slow? My brain hurts just anticipating it.

I religiously log onto the student peer websites as instructed in the course material. In French, I find there’s no one else there. Does no one care that poor Audrey spends her time recording questions to stimulate discussion, but no one bothers to discuss?

In the general course discussion forum I find people with questions like “What’s the easiest course?”; “Who’s the easiest tutor?”; “How do you switch to an easier tutor?”

I find myself ready to rip lips (Hello? Easy doesn’t cut it in the real world, you know!) until I remember that these folks are probably too young to know what the real world is like. They need the degree to get a job, make money, and have a life. The real learning comes later. When you no longer need it. And it becomes fun. And your brain hurts just because, not because it has to.

My father always thought that life happened the wrong way round. We should be born at 80, he asserted, and we’d know everything. Then we should go backward and die in the womb, all warm and cozy like. Given his logic, we’d do the university thing in our 60s. And die knowing nothing. Works for me. And the brain might not hurt anymore.



ENGL 189 - English for Business

Athabasca University's Centre for Language and Literature recently launched a new course to complement their ESL program: English for Business (ENGL 189). This course, which is a major revision of the former ENGL 187, is destined to give students insight into the language styles and writing common to the commerce world.

Although ENGL 189 might seem mainly useful for ESL students wishing to pursue a business education, course coordinator Veronica Baig indicates that this is not necessarily the case.

"The course attracts and is designed for both native and non-native English speakers," she commented, emphasizing that AU's one-on-one tutoring in courses "allows instructors to respond to both sets of students."

She continued that, although it might seem that native English speakers might have "an edge over non-native speakers, unfortunately many native English speakers have [a] poor grasp of English grammar—they make different mistakes from the ESL students, but they all make mistakes!" Again emphasizing AU's individual student tutoring, she recommends ENGL 189 for anyone, either native or non-native English speaking, to improve their business writing and communications.

ENGL 189 has eight modules, which target basic economics and accounting; labour relations and personnel management; marketing skills in English; ethics and related concerns; government and political issues; and, finally, international trade language.

Ms. Baig feels that a major "plus" in ENGL 189 is its "flexibility which it offers students to either concentrate on formal business writing, or to respond to general business/economics topics." Although the assignments reflect learning in both these areas to promote a well-rounded business English learning experience, the course "caters to both these needs."

ENGL 189's compulsory texts, *English for Business Studies* (MacKenzie) and *Business English* (Geffner), have been carefully selected for the course's "European/global audience," indicated Ms. Baig.

She explained that "there is a glossary in the textbook that provides translations of content-related vocabulary and idioms into French, German, Italian, and Spanish. There is also a CD with mini-lectures that are offered in several different English accents."

Ms. Baig also mentioned that the course texts are "supplemented with a wide variety of high-interest, business-related readings from Canadian sources: newspapers, magazines, and periodicals."

AU has effectively targeted the "loneliness factor" that many AU students experience, in that ENGL 189 students "have the opportunity to participate in online peer-editing activities." Although students are not obliged to take part in this, Ms. Baig is confident that this will help ensure that students stay connected.

Course evaluation consists of several components, the first being six business paragraph assignments, totalling 48% of students' ENGL 189 course mark. Ms. Baig indicated that the paragraph assignments are

designed to “offer students the opportunity to respond to business/economic readings using a variety of rhetorical methods: process, cause-effect, comparison-contrast, [and] argumentative-persuasive.” Additionally, a summary paragraph is part of the assignment.

Another 12% of the course mark is for one case analysis. This assignment is designed in such a manner that students can choose one of five presentation scenarios that they would like to research. The last two components of the ENGL 189 evaluation are one business report, worth 15%, and one final exam, totalling 25%.

Veronica Baig is the academic coordinator for ESL, and has been passionate about teaching English to foreign students ever since spending time in Austria and Kenya years ago. She shares that “her ESL experience has been a very positive one . . . I enjoy helping newcomers to Canada achieve their potential and their goals by helping them improve their language and writing skills. Along the way, I have taught all levels of ESL and to students from nine to 90 years of age.” Currently at Athabasca University she coordinates the English skills courses, including ENGL 140, 143, 146, and 149; she also is responsible for AU's ENGL 177, 187, and 155.

It is fitting to close this course introduction with a final thought from Professor Baig: “...working with the wide variety of students who register for this course, and the other courses that I coordinate and tutor, is challenging, but very rewarding. In no other learning context would one encounter students from such amazing and varied backgrounds . . . I am often in awe of what some of my students have already done, and what they are trying to accomplish.”

More information on ENGL 189 can be found at the [course syllabus](#) webpage.

FROM THE GALLERY

Sandra Livingston



The November 19 session was a busy one for AUSU councillors. One major item was to set the date for the 2008 AUSU elections. Voting must be held within two years of the previous elections, and the 2008 elections will be held over four days, from Sunday, March 9 through Wednesday, March 12 (a call for nominations will go out 60 days prior).

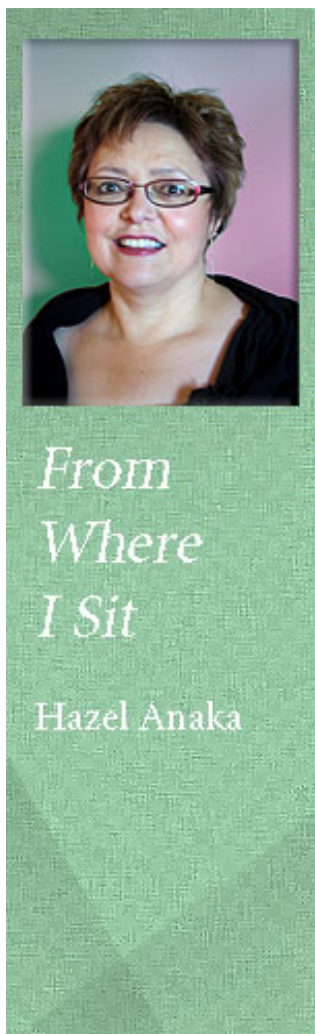
Council also approved funding of up to \$6,000 to purchase a bulk licence for SmartDraw. The program simplifies the creation of graphics often used in assignments, such as graphs, flowcharts, and maps, and will be available for AUSU members to download free of charge.

There was a change to AUSU's undergraduate rep on the AU Academic Appeals Committee. Because of scheduling constraints, AUSU President Lisa Priebe is stepping down from the committee and Tamra Ross, AUSU Executive Director, will take on the post.

Several votes were ratified, among them the decision to donate \$5,000 to the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness in support of their efforts to effect improvements to Canada's student loan system. As part of the Executive Meeting report, Lisa Priebe noted that council has also been working with AU on the issue of tutor standards, and AUSU council is creating a database for independent tracking of student calls.

A final item of note is that substantial security updates have recently been completed on the AUSU site, and a security contractor is doing a review to ensure the security of the election website.

Council's next formal meeting will be on January 21, 2008, and, as always, all AUSU members are welcome to listen in. Just call (1.800.788.9041 ext 3413) or [email](#) AUSU for the toll-free number.



Play This Game

George Boelcke is a financial expert and author of *It's Your Money!* He does radio spots, writes about money online, and speaks across North America to people in the financial services business. Recently I attended his credit and debt seminar.

One of the best parts of the evening was hearing about George's December game. Each year, when speaking engagements disappear in the holiday frenzy, George sets himself a challenge: keep more money in his pocket for the coming year by finding ways to cut expenses by \$300 per month.

He rattled off a list of the changes he made for 2007. It included things like bundling his cable and cell phone, increasing the deductible on his car insurance, and cancelling subscriptions for magazines he didn't have time to read. And this isn't the first time he's played the game.

Each year he thinks he can't possibly find anything else to cut, but he does. I'd say the gauntlet has been dropped for each of us to do at least as well for ourselves. The need has never been greater. The stakes have never been higher.

The average Canadian's debt load is now 125% of income. There are multiple credit cards in most wallets. Mail offering more pre-approved cards and low introductory rates for balance transfers arrives weekly.

Research tells us the average Canadian reads at a grade eight level. In order to read and understand the typical credit card agreement, a person needs the equivalent of 15 years of university. Is it any wonder no one reads the damn things? Forty-one per cent of consumers don't even know the rate of interest charged on their credit cards. It's a war out there, people, and many of us aren't even armed.

Most retailers make financing available for in-store purchases ranging from computers to dishwashers. Lines of credit, once just a tool for businesses, are now available to anyone with some home equity. The scary part is for those people just paying the interest on their line of credit. It amounts to treading water.

The financial pitfalls are many. Indiscriminate use of bank cards can result in service fees at "foreign" ATMs. Not maximizing RRSP contributions is preventing many of us from recouping some of our tax dollars. Accepting your bank's account package without question may be costing you. Making only minimum payments on credit cards is bad for your financial health. Leasing a vehicle is not recommended for most people.

Buying a house with a tiny down payment and a long-term mortgage will cost you thousands of dollars extra in interest. And the list goes on. Buyer beware. Arm yourself with information and play George's game.

I'd like to try it myself this year. I'm sure it's doable. I'm convinced that mindset makes all the difference—if it's a game, it's not deprivation. If it's a challenge, it's not punishment. I'm sure we can do it. I wonder just how creative we can get. By the way, the idea isn't to spend the extra \$300 a month you find. That would just be wrong, from where I sit.

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis



Seether - Finding Beauty in Negative Spaces

Release date: October 2007

Label: Wind-up Records

Tracks: 12

Rating: 9

I must admit that when Seether first came onto my radar, I was not inclined to buy the album or even to pay much attention when my friends put it in the stereo. The first impression that this band made on me was that of an average, dime-a-dozen hard rock band that was virtually indistinguishable from Nickelback, Hinder, or myriad other sound-alikes currently enjoying constant radio play.

In truth, I'd still easily relate Seether to Nickelback, in terms of Shaun Morgan's vocals specifically, but also because of the almost laid-back and smooth approach to hard rock music. But this is not a bad thing.

The first single from this record is "Fake It," a track that the band's front man admits was almost one of the other 48 songs he wrote that just didn't make the cut. Morgan remarked that the song is a bit lighter and perhaps poppier than the rest of the album, something he doesn't mind in theory but that he thinks might be misleading to audiences.

I don't actually agree with him on this point. Although "Fake It" does have a slightly different musical focus than most of the other tracks on the record, the single isn't exactly what "Swing Life Away" was to *Siren Song of the Counter Culture* (2004 Rise Against album). In fact, the song really just helps to add character that I had not been expecting to the record.

What sets Seether apart from other similar bands is the fact that instead of being a carbon copied hard rock band with that omnipresent generic sound, Seether actually *is* a hard rock band formed independently of the contemporary record company pull for that specific sound.

"FMLYHM" (an acronym that might amuse you; I won't give away the surprise, so go download the song and figure it out!) and "6 Gun Quota" are the two songs on the record that appealed most to me, mostly because they were incredibly intense and essentially raw in terms of lyrical content and musical composition.

I expected bland and uninteresting music from this band simply because I'd heard a Seether song or two in the background once or twice and had lumped it in with other generic hard rock groups. As it turns out, Seether is actually one of the bands that those generic masses have been trying to emulate; *Finding Beauty in Negative Spaces* is emotional, gripping, and altogether surprising in its technical execution and distinct, commendable hard rock sound. I have been reformed and am happy to say it.



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Book: Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*

Publication date: 2006

Publisher: HarperCollins, New York, NY

Wait! I should have said to the class. Come back! I've made a mistake. Forget observation, consciousness, clear-sightedness. Forget about life. Read Chekhov, read the stories straight through. Admit that you understand nothing of life, nothing of what you see. Then go out and look at the world.

The fact that Francine Prose is an English graduate school dropout is comforting to those of us who love literature and yet managed to be utterly miserable while studying it in university. What she has achieved in this book is the delivery of what all we wide-eyed young wannabes were dumb enough to expect from a university English program, i.e., the vital groundwork for a successful literary career.

Writing Like a Reader would have been just as apt a title. Good reading of good literature can produce good writing. To write good literature one must read good literature with an eye to every element that carries the message.

The goal of this mode of study is not necessarily the act of writing; a careful reading of Tolstoy, for example, should lead to a grateful acceptance of Tolstoy's vision of the world, a vision that transforms our own experience whether or not we choose to write about it. *Reading Like a Writer* is Prose's journey into a concept of reality that has been honed, refined, and progressively made whole by some of the best minds in history.

Reading Like a Writer is what we should have read before perusing all of those excellent tomes reputed to give us a taste of how we should be writing. Prose looks at fine literature through a number of lenses, including character, detail, words, sentences, and paragraphs, asking us to read slowly and think carefully about the intended effect of this or that gesture, word choice, or line of dialogue, to take nothing for granted, and to be specific when we tell ourselves what it is about a particular book or passage that makes it engaging and memorable.

The passages quoted in this book are remarkable examples of the principles Prose is trying to teach. They also serve as part of a brilliant marketing campaign for good books in general. Some of these passages and the descriptions Prose gives of their contexts will send you scuttling to the library or bookstore to look up complete books. (I am now desperate, for example, to read Paul Bowles, of whom I'd known nothing before.)

Prose is far from snooty about her reading material, but this journey really is about the best literature, of which she provides a comprehensive beginner's canon at the end of the book. (Why else break out all these lenses?) Reading *True Romance* stories for escape and enjoyment is one thing, but carefully examining the writing for meaningful clues to a heroine's motives is a waste of mental energy. Read good books, and read the heck out of them.

The Bard could use some help scouting out new material. If you discover any books, compact disks, or movies which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the Bard's criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

AUSU THIS MONTH



Response to AUSU's open letter from Joy Romero, Chair, AU Governing Council

Athabasca University

Office of the Governing Council

October 31, 2007

Dear AU Students:

I am very pleased to learn, through your elected AUSU representatives, that you share our excitement and satisfaction at the recent Government of Alberta allocation of \$30 million in capital funding for the new Academic and Research Centre on our Athabasca campus. This level of government support does indeed, as your student leaders say, clearly demonstrate the province's strong commitment to post-secondary education and to AU students in particular.

In response to your question about how AU will use these funds to enhance student services, it is first important to emphasize that, as dedicated capital funding, this \$30 million grant is specifically earmarked to cover construction costs of the new building in Athabasca. None of the money may be diverted to operational uses. That said, however, acquisition of our new building will allow us to enhance student services in many ways.

As you may know, AU academic and support staff members have for some time now been suffering from a critical shortage of work space. Our main campus was designed to house a staff serving the academic and support needs of a 10,000 member student body. Last year, in contrast, 37,000 students enrolled at AU. In the past five years alone, our staff complement has grown by more than seven per cent annually, and finding adequate office space, meeting space, research space, etc. has grown increasingly difficult. Many staff members have been forced to work in environments that are not suited to their professional needs, and such compromises have impacts on operating efficiencies and, inevitably, if not addressed on the quality of service provided to students.

The new Academic and Research Centre will greatly strengthen Athabasca University's leadership role in addressing distance education challenges and opportunities. In addition to providing badly needed space and services for the academic and research centres of the university, including work space for 210 additional staff members, it will enhance and support increased collaboration between researchers and academics giving impetus to research into teaching practices, innovations and implementation strategies associated with e-learning. It will also house the university's new Technology Enhanced Learning Research Institute—an Institute dedicated to using technology in learning. All of these improvements are destined to have a direct positive impact on the quality and quantity of the university's academic and research programs.

In addition, in 2010, when academic and research staff move into the new building, the space they now occupy in the existing main Athabasca campus building will be renovated to house student support staff. The altered building will be transformed into the Athabasca University Learning Centre and, in addition to expanded student service facilities, will house a significant teaching laboratory.

These are indeed exciting times for AU and for current and prospective AU students. These and other proposed capital projects as well as the planned introduction, over the next several years, of a number of new academic programs, the creation of several new research institutes, including the Technology Enhanced

Learning Research Institute mentioned above, the adoption or creation of innovative educational technology in support of distance learners and the planned expansion of our student financial supports are positioning AU to both broaden its outreach and expand its services to students. Over the coming few years, AU students will benefit from a broader range of academic choices and enhanced opportunities to participate in research, and they will be supported by a broader (and deeper) range of non-academic services.

Thank you for your letter and your interest in the changes affecting your university. At AU, the focus is on you, the student, and all developments, whether they involve bricks and mortar, technological innovation or academic research, are calculated to enhance the opportunities that we can provide to you.

Sincerely,

Joy Romero, P.Eng., MBA PM

Chair

Athabasca University Governing Council

cc: Frits Pannekoek

An open letter to Joy Romero, Chair of AU Governing Council

Dear Ms. Romero:

On behalf of the students of Athabasca University, we are excited and encouraged by what Dr. Frits Pannekoek has called the “second greatest milestone” in the history of Athabasca University. The approval of \$30 million toward AU’s new administrative and research center, as announced today by Minister of Advanced Education and Technology Doug Horner, is a tremendous step toward ensuring that AU will remain one of Canada’s finest educational institutions.

This funding demonstrates Alberta’s strong commitment to Alberta’s students, and the students of Athabasca University. Athabasca University also demonstrates this commitment through its focus on increasing affordability, accessibility, and quality of education for our members. Recent limits imposed on annual tuition increases are an important first step toward ensuring affordability. Today’s funding announcement will further address accessibility issues for AU students.

In early 2007, AUSU presented the government and AUGC with a document detailing our Vision for a Skilled Alberta. It is clear that our concerns have been heard and that steps are being taken to ensure that students’ views are incorporated into revisions to our education system and university services. We are encouraged that we have reached this milestone to improve the main campus of our university and ensure that AU has sufficient staff to address growing student needs.

We now look forward to learning how AUGC and Athabasca University will use these funds to enhance the quality of AU’s offerings and we request a communication from AUGC to our members explaining how this new funding will enhance student services.

We continue to look forward to reaching future milestones that will ensure that AU can address the urgent need for enhanced learning and virtual communication technologies, more courses and programs, and research opportunities for students.

AUSU



At Home: Investigation continues into the Frank Paul case

Mandy Gardner

After nine years of lobbying by Aboriginals and concerned Vancouver action groups, the inquiry into Frank Paul's death has finally been opened. The homeless aboriginal man was found dead in an alley in Vancouver after being taken from the drunk tank and deposited in the alley by police.

His family was originally told that his death was caused by a hit and run; later, they were informed of the actual circumstances by a counsel to the B.C. Police Complaint Commission in a phone call that came a full two years after the incident.

Aboriginals in the area have been calling for a formal inquiry into Paul's death based on their belief that racism had a major role to play in the treatment of the deceased; apart from dealing with this allegation, the current inquiry will also question the ability of the police force to investigate itself following such an incident.

The treatment of people in police custody who are affected by drugs or alcohol will also be investigated since, according to many witnesses who knew Paul, the man was an alcoholic and was drunk at the time of his death.

A former driver for the organization Saferide has said that Paul was not a violent man, but that his health was failing him and he would often have trouble walking. Saferide organizes the pickup and drop-off of drunks to facilities where they can sober up, and former employee Brian Morgan says he would never have left any drunk alone in an alley regardless of his ability to walk.

When Paul was deposited in the alley in an area he is reported to have sporadically called home, his clothes were soaking wet, he was still drunk despite a stay in the drunk tank, and he was completely unable to walk. The cause of death was reported as hypothermia.

The police officer who left Paul in the alley was given a one-day suspension; the sergeant in charge was suspended for two days.

In Foreign News: Breakthrough research into phantom limb pain

Researchers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., have conducted a study into possible visualisation treatment for victims of phantom limb pain. Phantom limb pain is experienced by 90% of amputees and is thought to be related to the damaged nerve endings caused by the loss of the limb; amputees will often perceive pain in the place where their missing limb used to be.

The study group consisted of 18 volunteers, all of whom had lost a leg (most of these were victims of the Iraq War).

The volunteers were split into three groups and given four weeks of treatment: the first group was set up to look into a mirror that reflected their intact limb and visualize the missing limb in its place; the second group watched a covered mirror; and the final group was given mental visualization exercises.

The average pain rating of the volunteers before treatment was 30 out of a possible 100; after the program, the mirror group reported the best results, with the average pain rating dropping to seven out of 100.

The covered-mirror group experienced heightened pain during treatment, and the pain ratings of the visualization group were elevated during the first week and then alleviated over the course of the following three weeks.

The researchers are happy with the results; however, they regret that they do not fully understand why the mirror therapy, or any mental visualization, helps to treat phantom limb pain. For now, the best guess of doctors involved in the study is that "the mirror may have provided visual feedback that turned down the brain's pain pathways."

CLICK ON THIS - Bizzart

Lonita Fraser

Oh what a strange little web we weave, when first we practice . . . art with carrots, sculpture with cardboard, ephemera art, and making our very own photo books. That's one of the nicest things about the Internet, is how much it lets you play.

Bent Objects

Bent, but not just in oddness. A new take on everyday objects becoming characters before our eyes.

Bookr

For any of you with a Flickr account, this might be just the way to preserve some of your favourite photos. This site lets you create your very own photo books.

Liverpool University Centre for Poetry and Science

For too long have the arts and sciences walked opposing sides of the street. LUPAS "is a forum to facilitate discussion about the relationship between those two traditionally opposed subjects, poetry and science."

Woodpixel

A deliciously unique way to combine the technologies of today with traditional materials: create pixel art using wooden blocks. I want one of these myself!

typoGenerator

Using pre-installed backgrounds and typefaces, this web tool will take your inputted text and make some very nice typographical art out of it.

Mashed Potato Sculpture Contest

When they told you not to play with your food, maybe this is what they were afraid would happen.

Paper Boxes

Use this web tool to make foldable boxes out of your own chosen images and other artwork.

Blind Boxes

A surprise selection of various ephemera, available in a handsome cigar box. A nice gift for the artist, craftsperson, scrapbook maker, or design enthusiast in your life. I'd love to get my hands on a couple of these.



No payoff for cramming: York professor proves it's better to study over a period of time

TORONTO (CUP) -- A study at York University suggests that cramming right before an exam may not be the best way to learn and retain information.

The study, entitled "Spacing Effects in Learning: A Temporal Ridgeline of Optimal Retention," was concluded by psychology professor Nicholas Cepeda in Oct. 2007.

The study surveyed 1,350 individuals and showed that material needs to be relearned at least one month after initial learning in order to retain it for one year.

Cepeda used online flashcard-style testing at varying times to reveal that information is retained on a sliding scale.

"What we have conducted shows that using flashcards while studying can greatly increase how much you remember, compared to just reading the textbook. Write the question on one side of the card, and the answer on the back. Quiz yourself using the question, then wait a few seconds, and then look at the answer," Cepeda explained.

"Cramming for exams hurts short-term retention of facts a month after learning. Students remember about 10 per cent additional facts by not cramming. Cramming is even more detrimental to long-term retention a year after learning. By spacing study episodes across a month-long period, students remember twice as many facts as when they cram, a 100 per cent improvement in retention after a year."

While many students agree with Cepeda's study, they recognize that cramming is often necessary.

"If your schedule is very tight, then you don't have much time. You have no choice," said Levi Stutzman, a first-year psychology student. "When you cram, you pretty much are putting as much information as you can, and when you study longer you have time to digest."

Cepeda said that his studying time was usually under control. "I can quite confidently tell you that I have never pulled an all-nighter getting ready for a test. Personally, I find sleep is more important than spending half-asleep time studying," Cepeda said. He does understand, however, that some students need to cram before an exam. "It's natural for everybody. Cramming is more like absorbing information instead of learning it."

Despite the study results, some people argued that other people work better under tight deadlines. "Some people work better under pressure. You can produce good or bad quality of work." Cepeda suggested that spreading out study time would improve retention. "If you have three hours devoted to studying for an exam, spend an hour a day, over three days, instead of spending three hours in a single day."

He also recommended that students alternate their study times across different types of material. "Spending an hour on history, and then an hour on math will be more effective than spending two hours solid on history and then two solid hours on math."

But some students feel it is not necessarily important to remember everything after an exam has passed. "I work really well under pressure. When I know I have to get this done, it motivates me. You cram to pass an exam, not to get intellectually rich," said Janilee James-Coutou, a first-year science major.

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THE VOICE

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