

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 22 Issue 16 2014-04-18

Meeting the Minds!

Dr. Vive S. Kumar

Mind Mapping

Better Grades through Colour

From Where I Sit

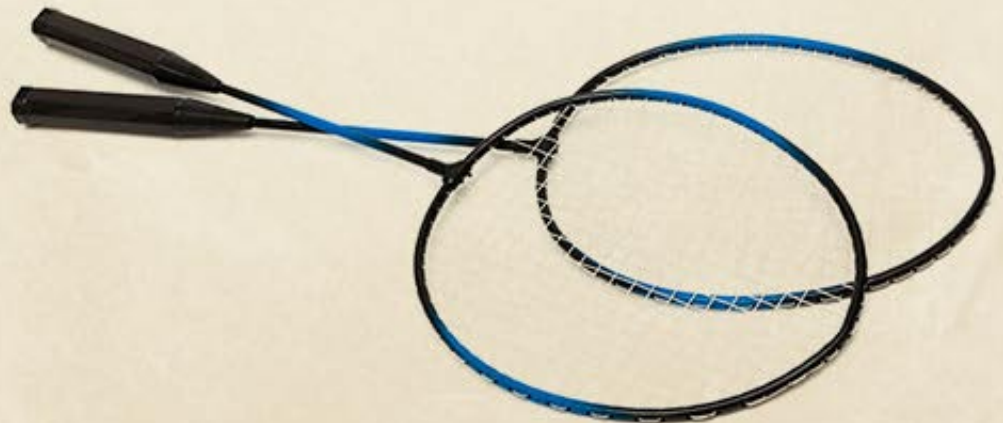
Ukraine Reaction

Plus:

Did You Know?

Primal Numbers

and much more!



CONTENTS

The Voice's interactive Table of Contents allows you to click a story title to jump to an article. Clicking the bottom right corner of any page returns you here. Some ads and graphics are also links.

Feature

Meeting the Minds: <i>Dr. Vive S. Kumar</i>	7
Mind Mapping your way to Better Grades	11

Articles

Editorial: <i>Too Many Eggs in One Basket</i>	3
---	---

Columns

Writer's Toolbox: <i>Shakespeare in the Park</i>	14
Primal Numbers: <i>Mind Control</i>	4
From Where I Sit: <i>I'm Sick</i>	13
Dear Barb.....	18
Mindful Bard: <i>The Great Beauty</i>	5
In Conversation: <i>With Patrick Woodcock, Part II</i>	16

News and Events

International News Desk	15
Did You Know?.....	17
Click of the Wrist	6
AUSU Update.....	20

Comics

Kids in Poetry.....	19
---------------------	----

***The Voice
Magazine***

www.voicemagazine.org

500 Energy Square
10109 – 106 ST NW
Edmonton AB
T5J 3L7

800.788.9041 ext. 2905

Email
voice@voicemagazine.org

Publisher

AU Students' Union

Editor-In-Chief

Tamra Ross

Managing Editor

Karl Low

Regular Contributors

Hazel Anaka
Barbara Lehtiniemi
S.D. Livingston
Wanda Waterman

The Voice is published
every Friday in HTML and
PDF format.

For weekly email
reminders as each issue is
posted, fill out the
subscription form [here](#).

The Voice does not share
its subscriber list with
anyone.

© 2014 by *The Voice*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to voice@voicemagazine.org, and please indicate if we may publish your letter.

EDITORIAL

Karl Low

**Too Many Eggs in One Basket**

Easter is upon us. When I was young, I used to enjoy the holiday, and we'd make a ritual out of boiling the eggs, and finding new and interesting ways to apply the dye to make them so brightly colored. My favorite was wrapping the egg up in a paper towel, twisting it tight, and then applying dye with an eyedropper to the paper towel. They'd come out looking tie-dyed, and, if you were careful with the colors you picked, quite beautiful.

I never managed to get into the art or skill of creating the traditional Ukrainian type of Easter egg. My patience only ran so far, and certainly not far enough for the type of intricacy involved in that work. But seeing Hazel's article in "From Where I Sit" this week reminded me of those eggs in more ways than just the name.

The situation down in the Ukraine is somewhat like the eggs of the same name. It's intricate, detailed, and terribly fragile. Often forgotten is that the President who started the egg rolling, so to speak, on this whole situation was democratically elected. That in no way excuses Russia or Mr. Putin for their use of force in the matter, but it is those kind of small details which make the situation so much more complex than most media have the inclination to inform us about.

Similarly, small details in how *The Voice Magazine's* articles are stored online made our situation with the Heartbleed bug extremely complex, and as late as yesterday, AUSU staff were still helping us fix up the problems that turned up as systems were updated and old code was discovered to be sorely lacking. If you happen to be going through the website and you find any article that seems to be missing all the text, please contact me as soon as you can. I think we've managed to find all the issues, but with the style and amount of programming that puts the Voice out to you every week, there may still be one or two hidden in unknown niches of the site.

Small but important details are kind of the watchword for this issue of *The Voice Magazine*. For instance, any students in or around Edmonton, I strongly encourage you to read the "Did You Know?" entry, as AU is looking for participants in a focus group to evaluate their student orientation program.

Meanwhile, in "Primal Numbers", S.D. Livingston looks at our capability to focus in detail, and how this skill may be becoming more important just as we're losing it to the variety of technological devices we have running. Also this week, Meeting the Minds brings us Dr. Vive S. Kumar of the Computing Science Department, and as you'll see by the interview, it is very much the specific details of tutoring and how students learn that he thinks deserves the most focus.

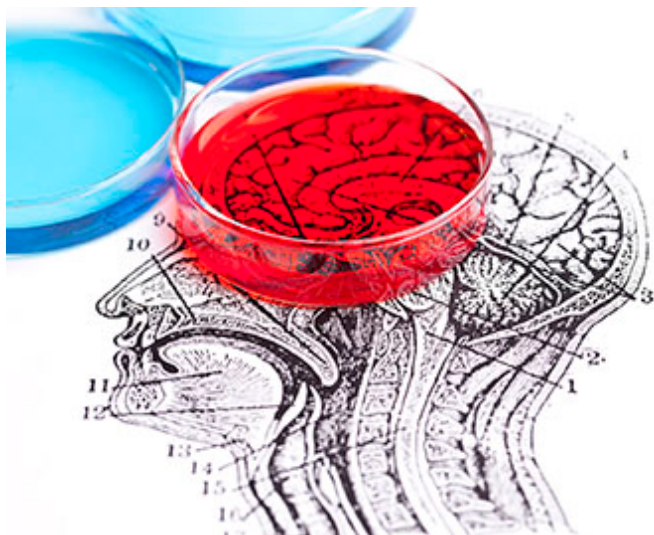
Barbara Lehtineimi has a plan to help us remember all those details, it's called MindMapping, and you can read about it in her latest article.

One detail you **all** should remember, however, is that the AUSU Awards Deadline is rapidly approaching. If you think you qualify for an AUSU award, you need to have your application in by May 1. Thousands of dollars are there for those who qualify or need them, so don't let a lack of focus on details keep it from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl', with a stylized, flowing script.

Primal Numbers Mind Control

S.D. Livingston



We know it's a trick, but we can't help being fascinated as an illusionist bends a spoon with his mind. There's something intriguing about the idea of moving objects with our brains. Now, from exoskeletons to ball games, science is bringing that vision closer to reality. The only trouble is that our fractured attention spans might not be up to the task.

There's nothing new about the potential of the human brain. Researchers have known for decades that our squiggly lumps of gray matter are one of the most complex, powerful structures on the planet—far faster than the fastest computer. As this *Live Science* [article](#) explains, researchers

have found that the world's fourth-largest supercomputer (with a whopping 1.4 million gigs of RAM) still takes "40 minutes to replicate a single second of brain activity."

Harnessing that power has led to some amazing breakthroughs, like the MindWalker. According to this *New Scientist* [article](#), the MindWalker is an exoskeleton, a mechanical frame that "aims to enable paralysed and locked-in people to walk using only their mind." Its developers plan to refine it, making it smaller and more lightweight, but not even its current clunkiness can detract from the spectacular possibilities.

This type of brain-computer interface (BCI) can power exoskeletons or smaller gadgets, but the common thread is focus. The user has to envision an action, and then EEG sensors (usually in a cap) translate that neural activity and send it to a device. And that's where BCI's wonderful potential might run into problems. Because to an alarming degree, we humans are losing our ability to focus.

It seems that just as we're reaching a point where our minds can control our external devices, those external devices have already altered the way our minds work. Smart phones, tablets, the Internet, television: we're immersed in a world of competing signals, all of them designed to feed us short, fragmented bits of information at high speed. With every click, every shift in attention, we're conditioning our attention spans to become shorter and more shallow. No wonder it's getting harder to focus.

On top of that, the natural decline in our attention span starts a lot sooner than we think. As *Slate* [reports](#), the "decline in our ability to filter out distraction and focus attention, unfortunately, begins not in middle age but rather in our 20s." That's worrisome news for basic tasks like studying, never mind using laser-like focus to change the TV channel or set our home alarm system with the power of thought.

So how will we do it? How will we manage to exist in a world where our attention spans can barely compete with that of a goldfish, yet science can better our lives by harnessing our focus?

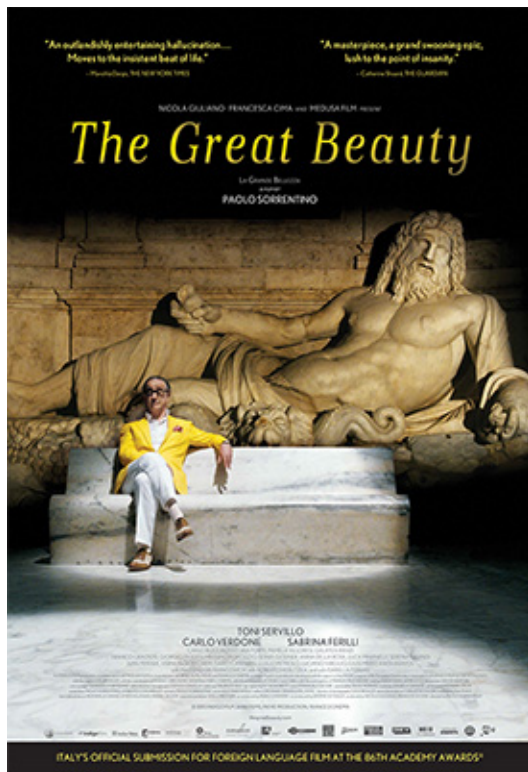
If we want to see the benefits of this research, it's not too soon to get ready. Turn off the TV, put down your smartphone, and try some of the tips in this *Lifehacker* [article](#). Because if the future holds the promise of using our minds to control our devices, we'd better get a whole lot better at controlling our minds.

S.D. Livingston is the author and creator of the Madeline M. Mystery Series for kids, as well as several books for older readers. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing.

Mindful Bard

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

Wanda Waterman



Film: *The Great Beauty*

Author: Paolo Sorrentino

Writer: Paolo Sorrentino & Umberto Contarello

The Visual Feast at the Wedding of the Sacred and the Profane

"Rome is a place where, more than any other city, the sacred and the profane go together."

-Paolo Sorrentino in an interview with Larry Rother for *The New York Times*

Have you ever experienced that peculiar astonishment that follows profound loss, that sense of surprise at the fact that the people around you are carrying on as usual? If so, you may have asked yourself, "How can they continue like this? Don't they know the world has ended?"

What if you were to experience this astonishment in one of the most inspiring cities in the world, a city almost numinous with history, art, wealth, and religious devotion?

For Jep, a famous journalist and the darling of Rome's high society, this kind of astonishment is the prevailing mood of his (superficially) charmed life. The exquisite splendor of his days and nights, coupled with a growing number of encounters with death, often leave him frozen with despair in the midst of the most fabulous spectacles. Though much of the art and many of the people he encounters fill him with mild contempt, he experiences one instance after another of profound aesthetic gratification. These latter scenes comprise a visual feast whose surpassing beauty renders the film's message all the more poignant.

The message? We're all going to die in the end, and there's nothing we can do about it. It's a fact that somehow renders the beauty of life poignant and frustratingly empty at the same time, like a fading rose or a disappearing act.

Rome grapples with the fact of death with both arms—the sacred and the secular. The Roman Catholic Church embraces death through submission to a murdered master and a renunciation of pleasure (a renunciation seen as a bit of a put-on) and a pursuit of poverty, silence, and service. (There's an excruciating scene in which a 104-year-old nun climbs a long marble stairway to visit a statue of the Crucifixion.) The secular world, on the other hand, responds to the fact of death either by pursuing artistic achievements on a heroic scale or by wallowing shamelessly in endless debauched amusements.

Jep has chosen the secular route (while revealing a covert attraction to the sacred road), but his life is a flight from the artistic achievements expected of him; his first and only novel was a highly lauded flash-in-the-pan that left his readers begging for more. People keep asking Jep why he hasn't written another novel, and his replies are key to the meaning of the film. At first his excuse is that he's too busy partying to get any serious writing done. But later he admits that his mind has been occupied with a search for "the great beauty."

The film owes much to Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, right down to the journalist protagonist with the wild social life and jaded cynicism, disappointed and disillusioned with Rome while remaining utterly smitten with her.

Why should an artist watch this film? For one thing, it's incredibly inspiring, sparking the imagination to a degree that's almost explosive. For another, it provides a kind of roadmap of the creative life— its delights, its pitfalls, and its underlying web of conflicts.

The Great Beauty manifests eight of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful.
- It poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence.
- It provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavor.
- It inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation.
- It displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering.
- It gives me artistic tools; it makes me want to be a better artist.
- It makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomena, making living a unique opportunity.

Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book [They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good](#), a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.

Click of the Wrist

Video games—and their benefits and drawbacks—are constantly in and out of the news. They teach role-playing. They teach violence. They're interactive. They discourage interaction. They're contributing to a nation of couch potatoes. They're harmless entertainment. Instead of reading yet another opinion on the merits or lack thereof, enjoy these descriptions and depictions of video games come to life—some clever, some cool, and some downright disturbing.

Tetris

Recently Philadelphia gamers made the news when they organized and played the world's largest Tetris game—on the windowed side of a skyscraper. The link has a video that you're sure to be cheering along to!

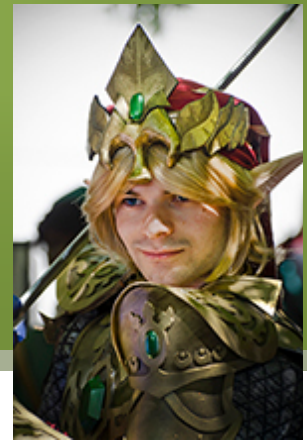
Angry Birds

If you haven't seen T-Mobile's live-action Angry Birds game, played in Barcelona in 2011, you're in for a treat. Curious about how it worked? [This article](#) explains more; and if you'd like to try it in your own backyard, be sure to read this step-by-step [guide](#).

Best of the Best

Or worst of the worst, that is. With its trademark sarcasm and humour, Cracked.com takes on six "insane real-life versions" of popular video games. From controls that deliver real-life electric shocks to your opponent to special headsets that turn the streets of your town into a Pac-Man maze to a Dance Dance Revolution variant that shoots bad dancers with a flamethrower, these games will make you thankful for the simplicity of a safe couch, screen, and joystick.

In The Game



MEETING THE MINDS

A **NEW** VOICE COLUMN



Dr. Vive S. Kumar has been tutoring Computing Science courses at AU since July of 2008. Tutoring Comp 268, 272, 347, and 494 at the undergraduate level, he's responsible for the education of approximately 270 students.

Dr. Kumar kindly consented to be interviewed by The Voice Magazine, and here is the gist of that interview.

What brought you to start in your field and tutoring for AU?

My research has always been in online learning. In-class instruction is insufficient in that it does not cater to the individualized needs of students. Student grades tend to fall into a statistical bell-curve regardless of the subject domain, the instructional model, or study resources, and we take the curve for granted. There are always some students who succeed, some who fail, and most end up somewhere in the middle.

What we want to do, and believe we can do with online instruction, is to shift that bell curve further to the right, toward better grades, toward higher competency.

I want to find out why the curve stays the way it does even in online instruction. Students have specific needs in their instruction, and in-class instruction simply is not designed for personalized instruction. Online instruction, on the other hand, can offer instruction that adapts to the continually changing needs of students throughout their study. In fact, online-instruction could treat in-class activities as supplementary.

In the 90's, we saw a new movement, tutoring systems where online instruction enabled individualized tutoring. Students with varying study requirements could actually receive different types of study plans, study resources, and study partners. It is unreasonable to expect human tutors to be able to cater to such study requirements, particularly from a distance. Tutors need support information from the learning system itself. We now have the technology to allow students to track their own learning habits, track their own skill development, and most importantly track their own learning capabilities. With students' consent, tutors could access these valuable information and offer appropriate tutorial guidance. As part of an umbrella Learning Analytics project, AU is currently piloting this technology in Comp 268. It allows students to track their own study data, and share this data with their tutors or friends or in the social media or with their loved ones. With students' permission, tutors can monitor where students falter, succeed, and need support. Tutors can follow students' study habits, if they have the time, even on a minute by minute basis and offer highly-informed instructional guidance.

So instead of waiting for students to contact me, I can proactively look at the data, if students opt to share it with me, and see right from that when a student is having a problem with a problem solving process, perhaps having to return to a specific chapter repeatedly, or taking a long time to complete an assignment, or receiving incorrect information from the discussion forum.

Our goal is to move all students on the bell-curve two standard deviations to the right. This learning analytics study is being repeated in India, Chile, and Taiwan and the results so far have been highly positive in favour of proactive support. Students receiving proactive support tend to score significantly better in assessments.

It is ground-breaking because we are not looking at individual technologies or learning capacities, as some older studies did, but now we are putting them all together in a big basket. It lets us see that each student is different because they need support at different degrees in different capacities, and lets us ask "how do we support students in a highly personalized manner?" This holistic approach is showing remarkable results and we hope to publish the results shortly.

Another key feature of the learning analytics system is its ability to explain students' grades. For example, when a student graduates from Comp 268, we will be able to associate the marks scored by a student in each assessment activity with specific skills and course learning outcomes. With this, we can see specific skills that may need improvement, the global context in which students need to place their skills, and predict successful curricular pathways and plans for students.

What are the common pitfalls you see students running into?

Students who do not need my tutoring are welcome to handle studies on their own. Students who need my support are welcome to approach me openly and I will be glad to pester them through their study. But, what about students who are neither here nor there? They are not sure about the level of support they need from tutors and they are not sure about their own study capacity. This is where I, as a tutor, need support from the learning analytics system. I need something to help me engage this bulk of middle-ground students. I want to know where exactly the student thinks I should or could provide help.

So it is not about the common pitfalls, but about specific ones. If a student is struggling, tutors want to know about the specific problem. Tutors would love to be in touch with students because students then are no longer black boxes.

The students' union may want to take it up onto itself to encourage students to openly approach tutors. If students are not using tutors, then the reason to have tutors decreases and the tutors' motivation plummets.

So it is not about the common pitfalls, but about specific ones. If a student is struggling, tutors want to know about the specific problem. Then they can send an email, or speak over the phone, or have a video conference to give hints or further readings to students. Tutors could also extend over-the-shoulder type of support in online instructional environments. Tutors would love to be in touch with students because students then are no longer black boxes. With our learning analytics approach, we can engage any individual in the class who's willing to share their learning habits data.

Online learning is like a big dragnet right now. Universities have traditional lecture based classes and lab based sessions. And, they use online instruction as a supplement—to motivate students by offering alternative

and additional resources. This just adds more load, as it does not replace any of the other study activities students already have to do.

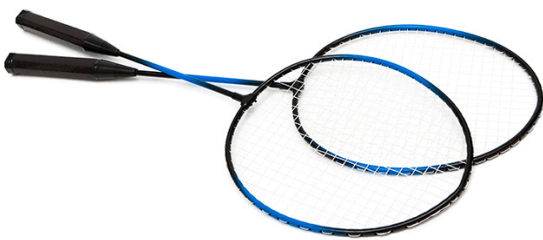
A new way of thinking about online instruction is on its way – big data learning analytics. We need to support students in all possible aspects towards skills acquisition. In addition to supporting students to do well in academically, we should nurture students to improve other associated skills. We need to inform students, on a timely basis as they study, about their level of competence in various skills. The grades should truly reflect competency of the student. More importantly, there should be a solid explanation as to why a student received a particular grade, not just an estimate based on a few assessments. Online instruction is much more suited for such competency-based instruction than lecture-based instruction.

What is interesting to you currently in your academic field?

We are finding ways to use ‘smart learning environments’ to supplement gaps in tutor’s understanding of student needs. Such environments use techniques from Artificial Intelligence and big data analytics, among others. Taking this further towards causally explaining students’ study habits, gaps in their skills, ways to address those gaps, and predict pathways for success is what keeps my research going.

Our research group has received provincial, federal, and international funding to create an adaptive content system, where the text material itself customizes to student needs, captures instructional issues, and can be “taken home” by students as evidence of skills progression.

Such a tactical portfolio allows our students to compete internationally. They can not only compare their skills with that of their classmates, but also with students from around the world who have taken similar courses. We are trying to change the traditional perception about instruction in a number of subject areas including computing sciences, mathematics, language learning, and other STEM areas.



And outside the field?

I very much enjoy badminton. I am a Canadian National official for badminton, aiming to be certified for Pan-American status this year. I am also the President of the Edmonton Badminton association, and the Secretary for Badminton, Alberta. Currently, we are trying to bring the 2015 Canadian Open Masters tournament to Edmonton.

You might not think it, but badminton is yet another domain where the type of tracking we are speaking about for online learning can be used to improve how we play. We can track how players play, strategise, develop skills, and analyze games using gps 3D tracker technology on their shoes, racquet grips and in the shuttle. The ideas we have generated in big data learning analytics will be applicable in a large number of areas such as complex training, soft skills development, and business intelligence.

What is your opinion on AU's move to e-texts so far?

It should have happened a long time ago, and I am glad that we are taking big strides toward e-texts now. E-texts are now used in many countries where students can print portions of their text even as a text book, use their mobile phones to annotate text, attach videos to their text, record their personal notes to text, associate notes from their classmates, share their study challenges with parents, upload learning experiences in their

portfolios, and so on. Technology allows us to advance study choices for students. We need to take a leadership position in e-texts not only because AU has the expertise to clearly articulate e-text needs for geographically distant students but also because we have the technological means and the subject matter to develop custom e-texts. Custom e-texts are the way to go. For example, e-texts for Mathematics will have special requirements for problem solving that will be substantially different from e-texts for learning French or Nursing courses.

How about the shift to a call-centre model?

The call-centre model is shown to be a success within the Faculty of Business. It is currently being piloted in the Faculty of Science and Technology. The model allows AU to collate all sorts of information regarding student needs into a single channel that enables us to track students' communication expectations. It is great if we get it right and ensure that the service standards are adhered to. It allows us to have a feel for students' expectations for now. It also gives AU a handle to compare such expectations in the past and plan for the future. As a tutor, I am fine with the model as long as it enhances the student-tutor communication.

It's not fully functional yet. It doesn't integrate multiple data sets, and some of the functionalities tutors enjoyed in the previous model are not available in the call-centre model. Hopefully, in the next few months it will be upgraded to the full version.

Once we have experienced the model to a certain extent, we should survey students, faculty and staff about its utility to determine its university-wide adaptation.

So what do you think of social media use in education?

We should leave it to the students to pick media of their choice. We cannot impose media on students. Students with different backgrounds and personalities, dealing with different domains of studies, would require different types of social media and controls on them. AU offers its own media and students are welcome to use it.

We should be bold enough to explore new learning-enhancing pathways, engage learners in innovative technologies, and support tutors towards goal-oriented guidance.

What do you think AU needs to do to improve?

When I joined in 2008, internationally, AU had a good name as a leader in online instruction, technology and learning. This has deteriorated somewhat, and the rest of the world had caught up with us and even have overtaken us in many aspects. This is something we need to overcome, because we have the potential to show the world that we have better instructional models and technologies that offer better learning opportunities for students. We must strive to reach that leadership role again in the world of online learning. We should be bold enough to explore new learning-enhancing pathways, engage learners in innovative technologies, and support tutors towards goal-oriented guidance. Cost, strategy, quality, and timeliness are some of the major factors to consider in this venture, but that is for another discussion. I do not want to see AU to become just a decent online learning institution but an institution that brings global perspectives in learning revolution, and I absolutely believe we can.

Mind Mapping Your Way to Better Grades

Barbara Lehtiniemi



If you're already using colour and shapes in your note-taking, you may be ready for the next level: mind mapping. Mind mapping is a highly visual method of keeping notes and thoughts organized. Particularly useful for students, mind mapping techniques brings your study notes to life. Mind maps are powerful memory aids incorporating the whole-brain use of colour, symbols, and radiant thinking.

The concept of mind mapping was developed by Tony Buzan, a British author of several popular psychology books. Buzan, who also hosted the BBC show "Use Your Head," has long been

fascinated by how the mind works. He believes that traditional note-taking, which is linear and wordy, does not help the mind retain and recall information. Instead, the mind needs ideas radiating out of a central concept. Mind maps mimic the brain's radiant thinking.

Mind mapping has many adherents today. There are several computer programs available for electronic mind mapping. Tony Buzan markets his own *iMindMap*, and there are a few, such as *Wisemapping* and *Freeplane*, available online for free. AUSU members can also create mind maps using *SmartDraw*, available through the AUSU [website](#) free for one year. But for the most flexibility, create your own mind maps by hand.

Begin with a large—at least 11" x 17"—piece of unlined paper; an artist's sketch pad works well. To create your mind map, you'll need lots of colour: fine- and medium-tip markers, pencil crayons, and a pen. You don't need any artistic talent but a little imagination helps. Now you're ready to begin.

Start with a central idea.

Depending on your mind map, your central idea could be the subject of a lecture, a chapter title from your textbook, or a major concept you're trying to grasp. With your paper in landscape mode (long sides on top and bottom) place your central idea in the middle of the page. If you can, make your central idea a picture or a symbol. Add words if you need to, but make sure to use at least three colours for your central idea.

Radiate out from the centre.

Break your central idea into themes (five is a good number to work with.) Beginning in the top right section of your page, draw a fluid branch out from the central idea. Make the branch thick at its base and tapered toward the end. Label the branch in big letters with its theme. Continue adding branches for each of your themes, radiating each from the central idea.

Build the themes.

From the end of each theme branch, break out increasingly smaller branches for concepts relating to the theme. Group the concepts together meaningfully, much as you would in traditional note-taking. Use different colours for each group.

Exercise your imagination.

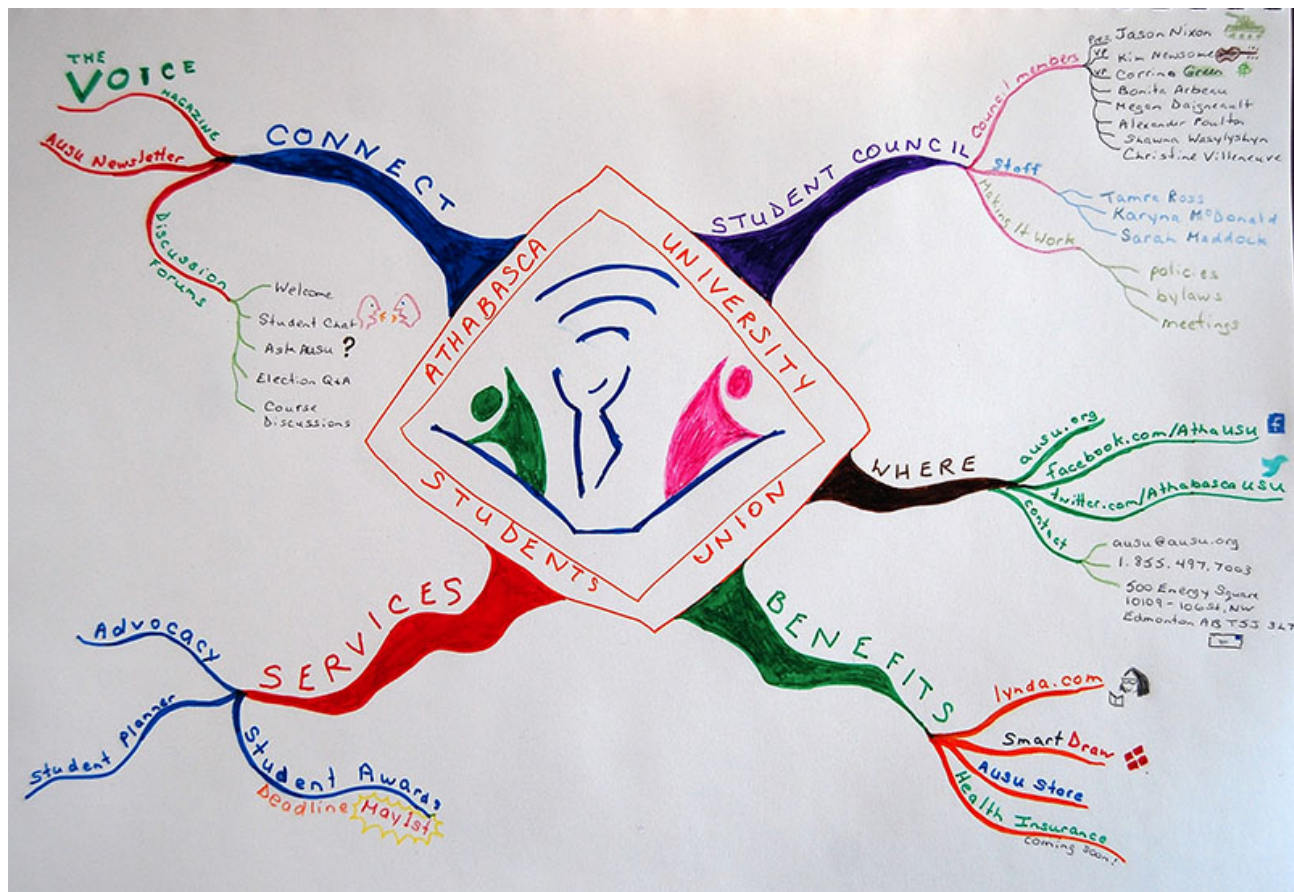
You can use words to label your concept branches (single words work best,) but if you can think of a symbol to use instead, you'll end up with a powerful memory aid. Not only does a symbol represent more than one word, but the visual aspect of it will aid in later recall. Do not worry about your artistic ability. The mind map is only for you so nobody but you will be interpreting your drawings. Your drawing ability will improve with practice.

Your finished mind map will make a visually appealing and useful aid for studying. First of all, just creating the mind map cements the information it contains in your mind. By using your imagination to come up with symbols, you bring the concepts vividly to life. Secondly, by reviewing your mind map periodically (and adding to it if need be,) the powerful visual combination of colour, words, and symbols are easier to recall than plain black text. You may find that you can actually "see" details of your mind map just by thinking about it.

Creating a mind map requires a small time investment but has a big payout on exam day. Depending on the level of detail, a mind map can take as little as 30 minutes to create. Once you've completed a mind map, post it nearby where you can glance at it often as you continue your studies. Add more symbols or other detail if they come to mind later. If you create mind maps throughout a course, you'll have a series of maps to aid in your exam preparation. Students who routinely use mind maps as a study tool often find they need no other notes.

For detailed instructions on how to mind map, see Tony Buzan's [website](#) or look for his books on mind mapping. While you're at www.thinkbuzan.com, check out the [gallery](#) of mind maps created by students from all over the world. Your mind is all ready to map. It's just waiting for you to find your way.

Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario



An example Mindmap of AUSU



I'm Sick

For Ukrainians the world over, the current crisis in Ukraine is tragic. It has captured the attention and concern of thinking people everywhere. It's been dubbed the greatest threat to world security in the 21st century. World leaders have been weighing in on the matter since late November 2013 when the first grass roots protests began in Euromaidan, Kyiv's central square.

The protests arose over exiled President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign an agreement with the European Union as he slithered ever closer to Putin's Russia. The number and frequency of outraged comments from world leaders, historians, and thinkers has increased in direct proportion to the irresponsible actions of Russia.

Canadians can be proud of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's loud and increasingly pointed, personal attacks on Putin and his actions. Cynics may say he's playing to the 1.2 million Canadians who claim Ukrainian heritage. Whether or not that is a factor is immaterial in my opinion. In this, he is taking a leadership role that overshadows the apparently weak Obama response. Of course it remains to be seen if all the rhetoric, sanctions and harsh threats of increasingly strong responses penetrate the blockhead Putin.

For a man who seems to care so much about what the world thinks of him: think spending \$50 billion on the Sochi Olympics, Vladimir Putin is surprisingly oblivious to what the entire globe is saying to him. Getting kicked out of the G8: big deal. Being sanctioned and denounced by the United Nations General Assembly: another day at the office. Joining the company of Kim Jung-Il, Chavez, Mugabe, al-Qaddafi, Berlusconi and other tyrants: you misunderstand.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel who has spoken on the telephone with Putin several times has told the media that he appears 'delusional.' The now G7 leaders have moved their June meeting from Sochi to Brussels. Putin has brushed off the freezing of assets and restricting travel by Russian politicians as meaningless.

I spent some time listening to a live stream of the UN debate about a resolution urging a peaceful resolution to disputes and conflicts. In virtually every case the individual speakers spoke of the rule of law and the sovereignty of a nation's borders and the unacceptable actions of Russia.

I don't want war. I don't want violence. I don't want anyone to be hurt. Well, except Putin and his ilk. Better men than him have been assassinated while monsters like this live on in affluence; terrorizing and killing hundreds or thousands of innocents. The corruption of these tyrants is legendary. I wonder if Yanukovych will ever finish building his 8000 square meter mansion on the Black Sea. After all a guy needs a break from his primary palace, doesn't he?

I'm sick of the corruption, the entitlement, the insanity, the big talk and the impotence of civilized society to fix things. God alone knows what will happen next, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is Lucky Dog. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

Writer's Toolbox

Shakespeare in the Park

Christina M. Frey



Shakespeare in the park ... or on the stage. In ruined buildings ... or across the grounds of Alcatraz. With a sci-fi twist ... or in the Wild West. In Elizabethan costume, modern dress, or just with plain cast t-shirts.

Feeling a little like Sam-I-Am? Much like green eggs and ham, Shakespeare's plays work anywhere and everywhere, with new twists and angles, with a lavish backdrop or minimalist staging. But why is that?

In this week's Toolbox we'll celebrate William Shakespeare's 450th birthday by looking at why his writing has endured so long—and how modern writers can apply his genius to their own work.

Sex, love, and lies

Part of the power of Shakespearean drama is its universality.

Ambition, sex, love, lust, lies, loneliness, envy, manipulation, power—these have motivated human relations for centuries and transcended class, race, gender, and wealth. That's why putting *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in a '70s/disco setting or transposing *Twelfth Night* to the world of the wealthy in Titanic-era England work; the peculiarities of the plot and setting are trumped by the timelessness of the themes.

It's also why there have been so many unique and successful screenplay adaptations of Shakespeare. You're probably aware that *West Side Story* (1961) is a musical based on *Romeo and Juliet*, but there are countless others. *She's the Man* (1999) brings *Twelfth Night* to the campus. *10 Things I Hate About You* is a teen coming-of-age drama based on *The Taming of the Shrew*. *Forbidden Planet* (1956) marries '50s-era sci-fi with *The Tempest*. Most recently, Joss Whedon's clever version of *Much Ado About Nothing* (2013) has Shakespeare's original verses spoken by modern-day characters, whose interactions with the themes of the story are as current as any modern reality TV.

The take-home lesson for writers? The intricacies of plot, setting, and character are vital to a good story, but it's important not to lose sight of the bigger picture. When crafting your work, think thematically; consider the emotions that have motivated people for millennia, and how they might intersect with your own plot and characters.

All in character

Another reason for Shakespeare's literary staying power is the way he created memorable characters through almost entirely dialogue alone.

The plays' minimal stage directions have given artists and directors a lot of freedom of interpretation (for example, *Macbeth's* three witches have been portrayed as everything from shriveled old hags to seductive sirens). But Shakespeare's reliance on the characters' speech to tell the story also has made his work a stellar model for writers wanting to deepen their characters without resorting to an overabundance of narrative description.

When you're writing a novel it's hard to convey what's in your head, and there can be a temptation to tell more than show—to explain a character's emotions or motivations rather than letting them shine through in the way that character speaks and acts. Skim some of Shakespeare's plays and notice how he used monologue and dialogue to create character imagery that's still being dissected by English students over four hundred years later. And even if your writing project is one that requires lavish description, remember that, as Shakespeare himself wrote, "Brevity is the soul of wit." Sometimes a little can go very far.

Happy birthday!

This year, in honour of the Bard's 450th birthday, take some time to leaf through a play or two (or better yet, find time to take in a production—whether onstage or off). Think about how easily the themes and personalities are transposed to modern times. Observe the way the characters interact and how much story, mood, and characterization are conveyed through dialogue alone. Whether you're writing thrillers, romances, or genre-bending literary fiction, you're sure to find inspiration in the work of one of history's greatest writers.

Christina M. Frey is a book editor and a lover of great writing. Chat with her on Twitter about all things literary @turntopage2.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK

At Home and Abroad



At Home: Government Sued over Law School Approval

In British Columbia, a group of five lawyers is suing the BC government over advanced education ministers Amrik Virk's decision to approve the controversial Western Trinity University's school of law, according to a story in *The Globe and Mail*. Western Trinity University requires all students and staff to live up to its "community covenant" that requires they abstain from "sexual intimacy that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman."

The lawyers contend that the minister had a duty to consider how accrediting the school might violate our Charter guarantees of equality and freedom of discrimination on sexual preference.

Around the Globe: President of Yale becomes CEO of Coursera

Richard C. Levin was formerly the president of Yale University. Last month, however, he was named the head of Coursera, an online education company that primarily deals in massive open online courses (MOOCs). Coursera is a for profit company that relies on students taking its MOOCs to sign up for a "signature track" that provides students who've successfully completed a course a certificate indicating so, provided they've paid a fee of approximately \$50 in order to verify their identity.

Mr. Levin, interviewed in a *New York Times* article, predicts that Coursera will start being financially viable within five years, basing that on the idea that as online courses become more popular and certificates from them more well accepted, they will be able to capitalize on demand to increase fees as enrolments increase. Coursera currently partners with larger universities to deliver their content.

In Conversation

With Patrick Woodcock, Part II

Wanda Waterman



Patrick Woodcock uses poetry to document the suffering of humanity in war-torn countries— a kind of poetic nonfiction. (See Voice review of [Echo Gods and Silent Mountains: Poems](#), his book of poems based on his time in Iraqi Kurdistan.) Recently he took the time to answer Wanda Waterman’s questions about literary forms, his childhood, and the conditions that enabled him to embark on so many remarkable adventures. (You can read the first part of this article [here](#).)

The Surrealist Influence

Patrick doesn’t place himself within any specific school of poetry, which is not to say that he feels all poetry schools are one or that he remains uninfluenced by the styles of other poets. In his early youth he developed an attachment to surrealist, romantic, and metaphysical poetry, which resonated so much with the weirdness of his personal life as to eventually throw him a little off-balance.

“When I was in high school I loved surrealism—from ‘Where’s the fish?’ to Philippe Soupault. But as I began to travel and explore—*truly* explore—my daily life became far more odd and surreal than my dreams. I was living within a fog of surrealism during the day and then dreaming of nothing more than sitting in a chair beneath a tree at night (I still have this one a lot), so I had to abandon my initial fascination

with surrealism and look elsewhere.”

In keeping with the romantic direction in which he’s observed the arts heading these days, Woodcock has been delving into metaphysical and romantic poets, but he says he doesn’t see their influence in his latest book of poems. (Some of us would beg to differ).

“Remote” Poetry

“Overall the symbolists have influenced me the most—Mallarmé continues to astound me every time I read him. I have referred to my writing as ‘remote’ poetry, ‘remote’ because of my geographical locations, ‘remote’ because I have chosen to write the least-read form of literature, and lastly and most importantly, ‘remote’ as in the channel changer.

“The television remote had just come out when I was young, and so we no longer had to sit and watch unbearable television. It pains me to hear lazy journalists make sweeping generalizations about the vulgar hordes with short attention spans. Look at the television programmes we were given in the 70’s and 80’s; most of it was complete rubbish. We had every right to say ‘fuck you’ and change the channel.

“In a way, the television remote was my first artistic tool. If I only had 30 minutes to watch TV I would use it to create an enjoyable mosaic of sounds, colours, and visuals from the subpar programming we were given.

“This has carried over into my writing. If I begin a poem as a folk narrative or choose to write in iambic tetrameter only to find out that my subject requires another approach, I change it. I don’t feel obligated to adhere to one form throughout a piece. So I am quite comfortable in changing the channel midway through a poem or even a line. My subjects demand this flexibility from me.

Ascerbic Irish Wit

"I was born on July 12th, which is William of Orange Day in Ireland. It is a wonderful day when the Irish get together and kick the crap out of each other. So my first name is actually William. not Patrick. As a child named Willy Woodcock I had two choices: pursue comedy or develop a nifty little heroin addiction.

"From what I can remember I have always been a funny person and so is my father, but in that warped, acerbic Irish way. When most people were watching *The Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island*, my father and I were watching *Benny Hill*, *Dave Allen At Large*, *The Two Ronnies*, and *Monty Python*.

From Comedy to Music

Music was right up there with comedy for Patrick. He and his brother both studied violin ("I was horrible at it while he was brilliant"). He eventually satisfied the musical urge by learning basic guitar chords and then joining a choir. Singing in the choir, he says, "... helped me cultivate my morbid fascination with funerals, cemeteries, and the pageantry of mourning."

From Music to Literature

"In my teens I began to listen to bands like The Smiths, The Church, The Cure, Momus, etc., who all had wonderful lyrics—I had rarely paid attention to a song's lyrics before— and this led me to a new respect for literature and inevitably poetry. Once I began to read and explore poetry I knew that this was the avenue I wanted to pursue.

"Comedy always came too easily to me. There was no challenge; I never had to force it. Writing poetry is so bloody difficult, such a daunting task and struggle – and that's why I'm so passionate about it. In the end *The Life of Brian* and Robert Lowell's "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" have moved me equally, and the only difference between them is that Lowell's lines are much harder to reinvent and re-create.

(Patrick Woodcock's Tumblr page: <http://patrickwoodcock.tumblr.com>. *Echo Gods and Silent Mountains* can also be found here on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Echo-Gods-and-Silent-Mountains/248778701905472>)

(to be continued)

DID YOU KNOW?

Edmonton Students!

Focus group needed: Newer students in Edmonton



A working group from the *Student SUCCESS* group is looking at the Undergraduate Student Orientation that was developed last year.

The first thing they are looking into is overall usability of the product itself. They need a group of 8 - 10 newer AU students in the Edmonton area who may be interested in participating in the usability testing. There will be a testing station set up at AU, Edmonton on April 29th & 30th, as well as AU staffers on hand to run the sessions.

For more information and to register for the sessions, contact Serita Smith at seritas@athabascau.ca



Dear Barb

Barbara Godin

Dear Barb:

I am in my early twenties and the youngest of three kids. My parents are great and have always been there for all of their kids. Recently I discovered that on Saturday nights they go to different friends' homes and they all smoke marijuana. I was shocked when my cousin told me about this. Maybe I'm a prude, but I can't believe my parents are doing this. Not only is it illegal, but not a healthy thing to do. My parents rarely even drink. I want to say something to them as I really don't think they should be doing this. Not sure how to approach them!

Emma

Hi Emma:

Your parents are adults and what they choose to do in their spare time is really not your concern. You said they are good parents and have always been there for you and your siblings, so obviously they are conducting their lives in an acceptable and productive way. You will find there are a lot of people around your parent's age that are smoking pot. Remember that this is the Woodstock generation who grew up smoking weed. I agree with your concern about the illegal aspect, but this also is their choice. You certainly have a right to discuss your feelings with your parents, but be prepared, as they most likely will not stop smoking pot just because you feel they should. You are fortunate to have had good parents who provided you and your siblings with a decent and happy life.

Thanks for your question, Emma.

Dear Barb:

My brother is driving my husband crazy! He comes over to our house while we are at work, eats all our food, and makes a mess of the house. My husband is furious and he wants me to do something about it. I love my brother and I know he's having a hard time right now and has no money. Once my brother finds a job I know things will improve for him and he will be have money to buy his own groceries, etc. I really don't want to kick a guy when he's down. Dazed and confused about what to do, Holly.

Hi Holly:

I can understand both sides of this tough situation. As you know your brother is in a difficult place right now, but he still has to have respect for other people's property. He should not be going into your home and making a mess. Perhaps you could invite him for dinner a couple of times a week and explain to him that you and your husband would prefer he come over when you are home, that way you could share a meal and have a visit. He may be very receptive to this arrangement as he probably also needs some emotional support. Hope this helps your confusion.

Thanks, Holly.

Email your questions to voice@voicemagazine.org. Some submissions may be edited for length or to protect confidentiality; your real name and location will never be printed. This column is for entertainment only. The author is not a professional counsellor and this column is not intended to take the place of professional advice.

Comic

Wanda Waterman

If Kids Were Allowed in Poetry Slams



THE WAYS THAT BE, THEY BE NOT FAIR,
OH SWEET MILK CHOCOLATE CHANTICLEER!
WHILE FOSSILS FEED ME CABBAGE ROLLS
MY EASTER CANDY'S GITTIN' OLD.



GOT ME A DIZZY CORN POPS HANGOVER,
RACCOON EYES AND MORNING
HORRORS,
LOOKIN' LIKE A ZOMBIE GHOUL—
IT'S 8:00 AM AND TIME FOR SCHOOL.



I RAGE AGAINST THE SETTING SUN,
OH YELLOW NEON SIGN THAT READS,
HEY DUDE, YOUR DAY IS DONE!
I FREAK, I GIVE MY PARENTS FITS,
I FIGHT THE POWER! I ZZZ ZZZZ . . .



I MAY LOOK LIKE A PRINCESS
FAIR,
WITH AZURE EYES AND GOLDEN HAIR.
BUT INSIDE I'M A WRECKING BALL
AND BORN TO BE THE BOSS O'
Y'ALL.

WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN

Your tutor is waiting.



lynda.com
Online Software Training

Training in:

3D

Animation

Audio

Business

Design

Developer

Home Computing

Photography

Video

Web + Interactive

plus

Creative Inspirations



Access training at <http://www.ausu.org>

CLASSIFIEDS

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@voicemagazine.org for more information.

THE VOICE

500 Energy Square - 10109 - 106 St NW - Edmonton AB - T5J 3L7
Ph: 855.497.7003 - Fax: 780.497.7003 attn: Voice Editor

Publisher Athabasca University Students' Union
Editor-In-Chief Tamra Ross
Managing Editor Karl Low

Regular Columnists Hazel Anaka, Barbara Lehtiniemi, S.D. Livingston, Wanda Waterman

www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in HTML and PDF format.

Contact *The Voice* at voice@voicemagazine.org.

To receive a weekly email announcing each issue, subscribe [here](#). *The Voice* does not share its subscriber list.

© 2014 by *The Voice Magazine*