

SUGGESTIONS FOR FIRST DAY OF CLASS ACTIVITIES

Claire Ashley & Mark Jeffrey, Departments of Contemporary Practices/Performance

Day One Intro Exercises (mostly notations for faculty rather than something to hand to students – all of these exercises are verbally given on the first day to keep them moving and on their toes) TA's video, tape, sound record, and photograph projects

Various Classes

Assignment: Creative first impressions - Students introduce themselves by writing 3 sentences and then verbally presenting them to the whole class

Assignment: What's in a name?

Over the course of twenty minutes write your name once, slowly, on the paper provided. Use the writing implements provided to slowly (excruciatingly) move the pen over the page without leaving the surface of the paper. This exercise must be done in silence. Find all possible interpretations, uses of the tools provided, and creative ways to use this intense period of concentration within such a limited framework/range of instructions – remember this is a 20-minute activity.

Assignment: Locate yourselves: Buckminster Fuller Dymaxion Body Mapping

Look at the projected image of Buckminster Fullers' Dymaxion Map.

Imagine the classroom floor with this map spread out across it entirely.

Position your body in the approximate location of the country you come from on the classroom floor. Talk to your classmates to make sure you are comparing your locations in relationship to one another, to the scale of the classroom, and to the map.

Now consider the elevation of the state/country/province/city/town or village you are from in relationship to other parts of your country. Move your body up or down (stand on a chair or sit or lay on the floor) depending on the elevation.

Bodies may need to lean against one another/lay over one another depending on the number of students from particular locations.

Finally think of your body as the state/county/province itself and pin the name drawing you just completed in the previous exercise to your clothes where your home city/town/village would be in relationship to your state/county/province etc.

Faculty and TAs participate too.

Document results.

Assignment: Speed Dating Drawing

TAs line up all tables down center of room in one long line.

Chairs at each side all the way down (15 per side).

Divide class in half – assign each half to one side of long table.

Every student gets a stack of paper (15 sheets) and a pen.

Each student draws the other for 2 minutes.

Conversations can be had while drawing.

After two minutes students move one space to left on each side of the table

The process begins again with a new prompt and a new partner

Drawing prompts will change for each 2-minute period.

The list could be as follows or something else if preferred:

1. Keeping your pen on the paper select a notable feature of your partner (could be a notable facial feature or personality trait) and focus on drawing that for two minutes – how can you embed personality into your use of line?
2. Have a conversation – how can you notate it?
3. Use dots, points, short burst of lines to create an observational portrait of your partner
4. Does your partner's personality demand a delicate line or a heavy line, a fast or slow line? Create a response drawing
5. Consider abstraction
6. Blind contour – talk to and draw your partner without looking at the paper
7. Discuss your favorite things. Draw pictograms/hieroglyphs for them
8. Use text to create a portrait of your partner
9. If your partner were a building what would they look like?
10. Play Pictionary/Charades
11. Draw your own reflection in your partners eyes
12. Use only shading to create a portrait
13. Draw the negative space
14. Use the edge of the paper
15. Write your partners name in silence

Excerpt from signage used to display version of this project on 3rd floor:

The class was divided in half and paired up across a table. Students had three to five minutes to speed date with one partner. They were asked to reveal some piece of dirty laundry about themselves in preparation for our first rotation topic "Dirty Laundry". Each student speed dated with 15 of their peers. Students drew their partners according to the following criteria: blind contour, line drawings according to first impressions, word association drawings, negative space, sound association drawings, etc. Each student here has a flip-book of 15 drawings of their classmates. Please flip through each set. Students considered the line used to make the drawings in terms of weight, speed, contrast, and expression (i.e. heavy slow lines to represent someone who is deliberate and careful in their response, or delicate staccato lines because the person responding talks fast, has a high pitched voice, or is timid, and nervous. etc)

Assignment: Century / Movement / Performing the Museum Assignment

Divide class via names pulled out of a hat – TA to call names into groups of 5 people. Assignment is for the students each to collect two artworks that they will then teach to the entire group to re-perform in Grant Park.

Schedule

1.20 – walk across to the museum.

1.30 – (at Museum) students conduct research / find specific collection / era of time etc. *NOTE: Students need to meet us at 2.15 at the entrance to the MODERN WING*

2.15 – Walk to Grant Park, assign students in groups space to work in the park

2.25 – worktime at Park – each person directs / composes, the 4 or 5 people in the group to present the artworks they researched. Consider the entire presentation as each individual directs and then directs the other group.

3.15 – Presentations of the groups

3.45 – walk back to classroom

Assignment: Baldessari – Sing a Line

Groups of two, sitting opposite one another – one student sings a line to tell the other something about themselves. While one sings the other makes a line drawing (portrait?) of the person (blind contour?) Students then switch.

Note: Do we then have them move one seat down and do the whole process again?

Assignment: Color wheel bodies – performance in GRANT PARK

Using the previously sung line, students play a game of telephone. Student A sings to B, B repeats and sings to C, etc all the way to Z. The songs get layered on top of one another as student A then begins another line.

Note: We should start with Student Z and work our way backwards that means that the student who authored the line is always the first to sing it and pass it. We could wait until each person's song gets to students number 3 or 4 and then have the next person begin.

Judith Brotman, Department of Contemporary Practices

These are typically first day activities, but I do also thread them through the entire semester. At the risk of them sounding like "touchy-feely" discussions, I do ask students to dig pretty deep! And they are usually happy to do so. There are sometimes questions that students believe are not welcome in the classroom...and I think those are the very questions that are make-or-break in terms of a life-long career.

Freshman Orientation

Assignment: For my freshman orientation (which is quite different than any other population) I have students divide into groups of 5 or 6. I ask them to compile very long lists (sublime to ridiculous) of everything they are incredibly excited about AND everything they are incredibly nervous about. Then each group reads list out loud. The lists are often quite similar, and I think that's rather reassuring to the students. It also gives me an opportunity to address those things that they are especially nervous about. Typically I address the concerns (sometimes about navigating the city, sometimes about time management) to the whole group. Occasionally I'll need to speak to an individual student.

Arts Administration Professional Practices

Assignment: I give them about 30 minutes to write & answer the following questions, which we then discuss as a group:

1) What are your biggest fears about life after SAIC? What excites you most about it? *Quite similar to freshman orientation, and gives me some sense of what this group understands/expects from life after school.*

2) Discuss and describe the best decision you ever made and all that went into this decision. Was this decision a logical or emotional one ... or a combination? Was it based on information you had? Were other people influential in this decision?

3) Discuss and describe the worst decision you ever made and all that went into this decision. Was this decision a logical or an emotional one....or a combination? Was it based on information you had? Were other people influential in this decision? *(Both 2 & 3 a quick intro into meta-cognition!) Many students have never considered that there might be ways of making decisions that are more helpful....and less helpful. And that patterns of decision making might be there to consider for everything from when/if to go attend grad school, to job search, to a wide range of life/art decisions.*

4) Describe some of your best and worst critiques. Try not to pick solely based on whether or not the

feedback was positive or negative. Instead, try to respond to best and worst based on how the critique helped you proceed with OR hindered your work. Was it 1 on 1? Were there many people giving feedback? How was the information presented? What ultimately shifted in your work? *Question 4 is a bit tricky as I don't want the discussion to be focused on "s/he's a great teacher or s/he's a terrible teacher." Rather, the question is meant to provoke ownership in one's own critiques-----how to best use them, how to continue with them after school/outside of school. I think it helps them understand what facilitates the richest learning for each of them.*

I have also touched on above in Sophomore Seminar....and it was quite helpful.

Robin Deacon, Department of Performance

A few thoughts to add here – a simple process I have found very valuable is to ask students to look beyond themselves and to think about people who they have known or been influenced by, and how we may be the sum total of all such interactions.

Various Classes

Assignment: I ask students to write down the full names of very single person who has in some way influenced them artistically. So, this could be any artist, painter, sculptor, author, filmmaker, writer, musician, journalist or architect, etc. Names need not necessarily be artists – maybe its other students (past or present), friends, family, teachers, partners, a viewer/audience member who gave you useful feedback, or a teacher in first grade who encouraged you with your drawing in school. Also, this could be a NEGATIVE influence – someone you have strived NOT to be like. Students write this list in silence, and what initially seems like a potentially absurd task quickly becomes very absorbing. After ten to fifteen minutes of this (I find the longer the better), students are then asked to take turns in calling out the names in order akin to calling a register. After this warm up, I call out a series of questions to which the students take turns to respond with one of the names on their list. Some of the questions are as follows:

Who have you shamelessly copied? Who have you unconsciously copied? Who do you feel jealous of? Who is a bad influence? Who do you feel in the shadow of? Who haunts your work? Who do you wish to replicate? Whose influence do you want to shake? Whose work do you wish you'd never seen? Who have you thanked personally for their influence? Who are you ashamed to have been influenced by? Who is your guilty pleasure? Who do you think might have copied you? Who helped you stop making an artistic decision you may have regretted? Who have you exploited? Who helped you define or categorize what you do? Whose work do you wish you had found sooner? Who beat you to the place you were struggling find?

After each student has responded to a given question, we open up the discussion for students to give more information regarding why they have called out this name in response. Responses are autobiographical, anecdotal and often fascinating in terms of getting a broader sense of where the students are coming from and their existing knowledge and points of reference.

Werner Herterich, Department of Performance

Because performance often involves the live body in presence, I am interested in having people quickly become aware of active presence and the integrated nature of mind and body.

Various classes

Assignment: This exercise requires the student to focus on a task through a relaxed but ready body. The class creates a large circle about 20 feet in diameter. I insist that the circle be as geometrically accurate as possible with equivalent body spacings. We go around the circle saying the name by which we wish to be called for the semester in a clear voice that can be heard by all. We do this three times. Then I invite anyone who wishes to follow up on any names they have forgotten. I then give someone a small soft ball and the following instructions. That person is to throw the ball underhand and accurately to another person in the circle and, after the ball has left the hand and while it is on the way to that person, to call out that person's name.

The exercise counters the instinct to call the name first and then throw the ball - inevitably it takes some time for members of the circle to reverse the instinct, think first, act decisively. Eventually, when all are able to accomplish the task, I challenge the group to successfully complete as many exchanges as possible in one minute. This requires clarity of mind, a relaxed body, and a collaborative group effort. No one ever forgets anyone's name.

Tiffany Holmes, Department of Art and Technology Studies

This assignment was helpful in my art and technology classes because I could also make sure students knew how to download images from the internet, quickly exchange images/files, and also utilize presentation software like Keynote or PowerPoint. Additionally, the short presentations were fun because it gave everyone an opportunity to speak meaningfully about another student in the class.

Various classes

ASSIGNMENT: FACT OR FICTION?

Find another student in the class to partner with, ideally someone you do not know. Spend 5-8 minutes each getting to know the other person. Take notes on your conversation. You might ask questions about birth place, previous schooling, siblings, parents, guardians, likes, dislikes, artistic ambitions, etc. Ask about whatever interests you. Before you end, ask your partner if there is any significant piece of information he or she personally would like conveyed that you may have left out of your chat. Then, each individual will create a slideshow (maximum nine slides) about their conversational counterpart to verbally introduce this person to the class. Images may be culled from the Internet or exchanged via mobile phone/email. The slideshow must contain mostly truthful information but at least one of your slides should be "fictitious." This provides an opportunity to inject some humor into the presentation. Your introduction of your partner should last no longer than about three minutes, or twenty seconds per slide.

Rebecca Keller, Department of Sculpture

I have a number of exercises but this one serves multiple purposes, and is especially useful for younger students and those students new to the city.

Various Classes

Assignment: I sketch out the grid of Chicago, explaining the eight blocks to a mile, that it is a true grid etc... Then I have them call out locations they've heard about, places they want to go, how the EL works and why bridges lift up and etc, good restaurants, coffee shops, their neighborhoods (and we try to locate on the grid) and a few nuggets of Chicago history (often pertinent to my classes). In the process ...they end up talking about their hometowns, discovering mutual interests and places they want to go, food, (different types and how to get it/cook it), their experiences of the city, hopes/anxieties, etc.

Frederic Moffet, Department of Film, Video, New Media, and Animation

Various Classes

With video it is very easy to set up an exercise that includes the whole class.

Assignment: After doing an initial workshop on the camera, I leave it plugged in the monitor/projector and then ask each student to come and perform a technical task as a form of review. While doing this, the student must interview a peer, asking them questions similar to the ones mentioned by Karyn Sandlos ("Where did you grow up? What are your hobbies? Favourite food? What is your best/worst memory of school?"). It is usually funny, people get to talk to each other even if briefly and realize that they know how the camera works as well as they thought.

Karyn Sandlos, Department of Art Education

Here are a few suggestions of collaborative exercises that students have done in class.

Various Classes

Assignment: We have done a version of the storytelling exercise, in which students pair up and briefly interview one another using a few basic questions such as "Where did you grow up? What are your hobbies? Favourite food? What is your best/worst memory of school?" Using the responses to the interview questions, each student writes a short story about their partner. The stories are read aloud in class and the group then tries to determine what is fictional and what is real.

Assignment: Students get in small groups (2-4). Each group is given a deck of cards, a marble and a roll of tape. The groups get 15 min to build a structure out of the cards/tape. They must use all of the cards and the marble. At the end of the 15 min, the groups take 2 min to talk with the larger group about their experience of collaboration. The large group then comes up with 'awards' for the structures, i.e., 'Most beautiful,' 'Tallest,' 'Most likely to fall over'... etc.

Roberto Sifuentes, Department of Performance

Usually the first day and indeed several of the first sessions address the question of building community. As a means of introduction, on the first day I usually ask the students to come up with a poetic "tweet" about themselves and what fires them up at this moment. It must not be an academic list of their accomplishments but a short poetic introduction.

example "I'm a linguistic tightrope walker and I want to learn how to fall"

Also useful on the first or second day in a Poetic jam in the form of a "poetic exquisite corpse." This exercise can be tailored to any class. I use the first prompt "performance is/is not" to get students to reveal their stereotypes of this form, but the identity and art themed prompts are particularly useful as a community building exercises so that the students can articulate a collective ethos for the class. I have included a pre-written description....

Various Classes

Assignment: Poetic Exquisite Corpse

When practiced with a new community, it also results in a laundry list of issues, which are important to that community. I do this exercise periodically during the semester, eventually asking the students to bring their own themes and take over leadership of the exercise.

Instructions:

- One of the instructors performs the role of "poetic DJ".

Your role as DJ is to make sure that 'the word' circulates constantly and evenly and that everyone participates in the making of a poly vocal chant poem, even those less talkative. If people choose to close their eyes and concentrate on the meaning, musicality and rhythm of the language, it can be an even more powerful experience.

- You start by posing a simple, open-ended rhetorical statement. One by one, in no particular order, people begin to complete the 'triggering' statement with brief poetic words or phrases. As people engage in this creative form of call and response, you may snap your fingers at the end of each phrase in order to add continuity and a dynamic rhythm to the poetic exercise.

Let's say that the triggering statement we use is: "I do what I do, because if I didn't..." Then someone answers, "...I would go mad." Then as the instructor, you repeat the triggering phrase and someone else yells out..."I couldn't face myself in the mirror" and so on and so forth. After a few rounds, people get increasingly freer and more creative, until the experience becomes a collective chant or spoken word 'exquisite corpse'.

- It is useful to set a few simple guidelines:
 - Participants should be clear and somewhat loud when speaking.
 - If two or three people speak at the same time, make sure they repeat their phrases at different times for clarity's sake.

In every poetic mapping session, one person can volunteer to record the session with an audio device or act as a scribe and write the collective poem as it happens. These performance poems are then transcribed and shared with the group, sometimes posted in the performance space or uploaded to a workshop blog. The transcripts of these poetic sessions read as amazing texts.

- Useful triggering phrases that have worked for us include:
 - "Performance (or live art) is.../performance is not..."
 - "My community is... /My community is not..."
 - "My identity is / is not..."
 - "I make art because / because if I didn't..."
 - "I draw my strength from.../I struggle against..."
 - "I am feminine when... / I am masculine when..."
 - "If I could transform the world I live in with my imagination; in my world there would be..."

You might want to move away from the individual and deal with collective prognosis:

- "In the future art will..."

If the triggering statements have both a positive and a negative open ending (samples 1 to 6)– begin with the positive phase for a few minutes and then switch to the negative when they least expect it.

Rachel Weiss, Department of Arts Administration

Here's the assignment I give for the 1st session of the MAAAP introductory seminar. It has worked pretty well because, while students often immediately jump to affiliate themselves with the terms 'community' and 'participation,' the discussion immediately raises questions about which 'community(ies)' they want to engage and which they may belong to, and what that belonging consists of. Similarly, talking about 'participation' immediately brings to the fore questions about their own positionality, identity, and agency vis-a-vis the cultural publics who they work with, and what it might mean to really share authority/voice/power over what happens.

MAAAP Introductory Seminar

ASSIGNMENT: Think through your own current professional interests, perspectives and practices in relation to one or more of the "Keywords." Also use the information and insight you've gained over the summer from reading the 3 blogs by Nina Simon, Diana Ragsdale and Createquity.

- a. Write a 250-500 word paper articulating your ideas. Submit as Word doc via email prior to class (faculty@saic.edu).
- b. Be prepared to present your thoughts in class, in a five minute presentation (visuals are always welcome).

Jessica Westbrook, Department of Contemporary Practices

In my experience all assignments are generating discussion/interruptions; I use these mostly in required, first year courses lately

Various Classes

Assignment: Give the class a set of things to review and select a category to align with (e.g. asked them all to look through <http://rhizome.org/artbase/>) then asked them to find other people in the room who agree/share interests and figure out common ground.

Assignment: Last year, and this was super fun, I had students give us a walking virtual tour of their neighborhood or a place where something significant happened/story, using google street view (now you can go inside buildings which is another level of interesting). for the most part everyone has something they want to show/tell about where they grew up, or worked

Assignment: 5-7 question handout; they fill them out so even the shy students have a point of ref and don't have to feel pressured to perform or interact. Really basic, but then we go around and share answers - questions from something easy like - cats or dogs, to biggest mistake, to sleeping in public

Assignment: A long time ago, with graphic design students, i'd give them something to read that they weren't used to considering, like a short article on cognitive dissonance, then ask them to present a few minutes, through any creative means, on contradictory ideas they struggle with - this would be upper div. undergrad. in photo areas i would have them bring in a printed photo from their life - something from home - a family album snapshot or something they found in a antique/thrift store (this is probably more difficult now) and we'd do an actual critique of the works with some prompts (beginning photo 1 level). that was super fun because sometimes there was speculative storytelling with the found photos

Beth Wright, Department of Liberal Arts (Science)

In my geology classes, I deal with another kind of diversity: religious diversity. Some of my content offends religiously conservative students (and yes, we do enroll some religiously conservative students), so I need to establish the boundaries of science, conveying its authority in my subject, but acknowledging its limitations as well. And I want ALL students to feel comfortable and safe within those boundaries.

Geoscience Classes

Assignment: I have conducted the following exercise on the first day of most of my geoscience classes. On that day I, like many of my colleagues, discuss the scientific method, the formulation and testing of hypotheses. I then present them with a hypothesis for the structure of the earth: a figure called The World of the Ancient Hebrews. Scholars tell us this represents the understanding, not only of the Israelites, but of most of their neighbors at the beginning of the Current Era (New American Bible, 1970).

I point out that, like all hypotheses, this one was based on observations: people knew that water falls from the sky, so they put a layer of water above the firmament, with a wall holding it back, and floodgates to let the rain through. They knew that, even in the Middle East, if you dig deep enough you generally hit water, so they put waters beneath the earth. At the top of the model is the Heavenly Seat of the Divinity, or God, and in the depths is a murky underworld known as Sheol. Next I ask students how they would test this hypothesis, and they come up with tests, most of which involve space flight. We agree that the hypothesis must be rejected, given contemporary experience in space exploration – no wall, no floodgates. This is no shame to a hypothesis, to be eliminated by data not available at the time it was formulated. But, I tell them, the ancients got something right – the earth is layered. If we eliminate the barriers, and allow the earth, air and water to settle out, what happens? The students come up with the layers of atmosphere, hydrosphere and solid earth, and deduce the principle of density layering. This leads into a discussion of the current model of the solid earth – crust, mantle and core – also layered by density.

I then return to the earlier hypothesis. What, I ask them, do we know about the density of God or Sheol? How do they fit in our current hypothesis? It becomes clear that some things fit into the scientific realm – things that can be measured – and others do not.