

Using Visual Notebooks in Courses

CCT DocuGuide

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Visual Notebooks (VN) are a pedagogical approach that decolonizes traditional methods of education by providing students and teachers with a notebook and materials to respond through visual mark-making to a series of prompts at the start of each class. In the fall of 2022, students were surveyed about their experience with VN. A majority of those students (85%) agreed that the method contributed to their learning process and recommended VN be used in other courses. Materials and support are provided by Creativity and Innovation.

VN starts with:

- simple strategies to access and practice visual ways of processing and knowing
 - explicit reminders that mark-making doesn't have to be realistic images
- initial skill building to create brave spaces, specifically for many students who equate visual communication with sketching or art practices
- reflection questions and exercises that connect to course content
 - often repeated more than once to enhance learning by supporting metacognitive processes.

The Visual Notebook (VN) Project serves **outcomes** related to:

- Institutional Antiracism Commitment: by introducing modes of learning that have been excluded from traditional, colonial-based academic inquiry, and providing space that centers various identity perspectives as assets.
- Course content: by providing space to process ideas and/or reflect on questions, students can become reflexive learners iterating their understandings by connecting the content to themselves, prior knowledge, and nuanced discernment of concepts. (ie: for CC100 classes, VN supports thinking about the nature of academic disciplines and the liberal arts).
- Creativity & Innovation: by exploring diverse ways of thinking and knowing, and by practicing divergent thinking and vulnerability.

In most higher education classrooms, certain ways of learning are privileged, including use of the English language, text-based reading and writing, logic (as opposed to intuition), and understanding with the mind more than the body. Visual notetaking creates an inclusive space where students feel comfortable using their own languages (linguistic, metaphorical, and symbolic), backgrounds, and modes of learning. Using visual notebooks also supports the increasing neurodiversity and mental health needs of our students. Visual notetaking privileges non-traditional systems of learning alongside more traditional academic methods.

These outcomes cannot come from process alone (Hyland-Russell, 2014). First time users of VN may be inclined to think that having 10 minutes at the start of class meetings each morning to respond to prompts visually is enough to foster diverse ways of knowing. The more an educator allows time for ongoing reflection through sharing, the more students become aware of “how

their ways of knowing and being are implicated in a range of social, political, and cultural constructs and systems” (p.1056). Encouraging students to try new approaches, to sit in discomfort, and to stay open to many perspectives and methods for knowing contributes to equitable educational experiences.

Format

10-15 minute daily morning prompts

- first activity of the class; PowerPoint can be put up before students enter. Often this leads to students coming on time to get started on the prompt.
- at the start time of class, *ask students to focus on the exercise.*
 - *Working in silence* allows them to be more in tune with visceral ways of knowing.
- incorporate visual notetaking during other times of class as well, encouraging class note taking in VN and/or doodling to process as they listen, prepare for an assignment, etc.
- emphasize that visual mark-making does not need to contain realistic images or look pleasing, might not feel comfortable, and can seem simplistic or disconnected. It takes time/effort to learn and this non-graded teaching tool supports many approaches to do that.

Evaluation

Visual Notebooks should not be graded or assessed. They are process-oriented, providing a space for students to think in non-traditional ways to better prepare them for class, explore possible ways of knowing, and bring their whole selves to the academic space.

If you would like to view students’ notebooks, *please let them know in advance*, then give them paper clips so they can clip together pages they want to keep private **or** ask them to upload a photo of the page they created for that designated prompt to canvas.

How to use begin using Visual Notebooks:

1. Email Kris Stanec & Jane Hilberry with the course title, block #, and # of students. They will then give you access to the VN Microsoft Teams site.
 - a. This provides Creativity and Innovation with time to purchase and deliver the materials to your office or classroom.
2. In VN Teams site:
 - Select either a “VN complete 18-day PowerPoint” or a “choose your own VN slides”
 - Copy & edit slides into your daily PowerPoint
 - Teams site also includes rationale/research, annotated bibliography, risk/mitigation strategies, and suggestions for additional uses of Visual Notebooks.

For support using Visual Notebooks to scaffold assignments and integrate course content more specifically, contact Kris Stanec or Jane Hilberry.