

Studio Thinking as a Resource for Teaching Writing

In their recent book, *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* (Teachers College Press, 2007), Harvard researchers Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly M. Sheridan (who is now an Assistant Professor in the College of Education and Human Development at Mason) outline what they call the “studio thinking framework”: the 8 “habits of mind” that are taught in studio classes (see [Studio Thinking Framework: Eight Habits of Mind](#)).

These habits of mind go beyond the mastery of craft. They include learning how to engage with the world as an artist does; how to keep focus and persevere through a protracted process of creation; how to train the senses and expand observational skills; how to express thoughts and feeling visually; how to think about oneself as part of various art worlds; and how to keep an open, improvisational state of mind while working.

An awareness of the studio thinking framework can help anyone who teaches writing to artists. The habits of mind for successful writing overlap in many respects with the studio habits of mind. By explicitly linking the two, writing instructors can help artists move more comfortably from the world of visual expression in which they are already comfortable to the world of verbal expression, which may seem less natively comfortable to them.

The studio thinking framework also provides insights for infusing writing into studio curricula. According to Sheridan and her colleagues, the studio environment is dominated by three teaching modes: the *demonstration-lecture*, in which a technique is modeled for the student, and examples of its use are given; *students-at-work*, in which students attempt to apply new techniques and build their skill base in class as the instructor circulates among them, commenting and assisting; and *critique*, in which works-in-progress are discussed and evaluated by the instructor, the student, and the entire class. To be most effective, writing instruction should fit seamlessly within the existing flow of the studio and should “feel like” the rest of the studio activities, not as an interruption to them.