Chapter 5

Incorporating Academic Strategy Instruction in Assignment Design to Remove Barriers to Writing Assignments in Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

In early 2020, there was a faculty development workshop at MacEwan University on how to design philosophy writing assignments with fewer barriers commonly experienced by students with disabilities. This chapter streamlines the workshop and surveys barriers common to philosophy assignment guidelines: length, jargon, single-format, and a "don'ts" section. The authors contextualize these characteristics within the values, norms, and practices of academic philosophy. They present a case study of transforming Rodier's introductory philosophy guidelines before and after a UDL consult with Fidelak. They demonstrate the reasoning behind the transformation, including specific UDL applications and incorporating techniques from academic strategy instruction that address the hidden curriculum. In addition, they outline changes to in-class teaching that support students in completing assignments.

CONTEXT

In early 2020, Rodier, an Instructor of Philosophy at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and Fidelak, a Professional Resource Faculty member with MacEwan's Access and Disability Resource Department (ADR) teamed up to facilitate a faculty development workshop at MacEwan University's

day of Celebration of Teaching and Learning. Many Faculty members at MacEwan University have been prioritizing accessibility for students, specifically, through service changes, policy initiatives, internal research, and teaching and learning workshops. Our case study specifically addresses both assignment design and in-class teaching as sites of implementation for Universal Design Principles. We applied these principles specifically to writing assignments in the discipline of philosophy. We focused on designing learning and assessment activities that provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression for students studying philosophy.

The purpose of the workshop was to improve the accessibility of philosophy writing assignments through the sharing of professional practice with colleagues. We lead participants through the Rodier's journey to increase the use of UDL principles in both her teaching practice and assignment design. MacEwan University is a mid-sized undergraduate university located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada with a population of around 18,000 full and part-time students. MacEwan University has smaller class sizes, a focus on teaching and learning, and offers opportunities for faculty to increase their awareness and knowledge on topics related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and accessibility. Once a year, MacEwan's Office of Teaching and Learning Services hosts a day of Celebration of Teaching and Learning for faculty to learn, share, and grow together by participating in a variety of workshops and sessions on pedagogy. This paper is a reflection on the workshop and the consultation process that led to it. We believe it is valuable for readers to understand this journey and to reflect on our process. While we reflect on our consultation, we offer our own background and insights into the process, and thus the voice in this chapter will be shifting between us, both individually and together. This chapter uses both the first person singular (I) and first-person plural (we) at different points of describing our work. The language we use to describe our collaboration matches the duality of our individual and collaborative work—Fidelak from her work as an inclusive educator, and Rodier as a philosopher, and our collaboration together. We write in the first person to preserve each of our experiential expertise, and explain our experiences as directly as possible using our own words (Noon 2018).

The workshop focused on how to design philosophy writing assignments with fewer of the barriers commonly experienced by students with disabilities. With an interdisciplinary audience, we distributed Rodier's introductory philosophy essay guidelines - a before and after version showing the impact of a UDL consultation with Fidelak. We also presented research on the kinds of writing challenges all students face, and how adhering to principles of UDL when designing writing assignments is beneficial for all. Following consultation, the key shift was to incorporate strategies from, and student experiences in, academic strategy instruction into assignment design. While these are not the only kinds of UDL changes that could be made, we chose to emphasize how information is presented, the amount of choice, and supportive in-class instruction. These must be considered when supporting all students, but especially when removing barriers for students with disabilities.

During the session, we had participants comment on Rodier's before and after guidelines. These changes were well-received, and participants were riffing on how they could make similar changes in their own writing assignments. After the presentation, a philosophy colleague pulled Rodier aside to half-jokingly confess to preferring Rodier's non-UDL "before" guidelines. A colleague from Classics then joined the conversation to admit the same thing. While the before and after was well received by the interdisciplinary audience (primarily sociology, biology, nursing), this side conversation tipped us off to a potential distinct resistance from at least these two Humanities instructors in the audience. What might underlie these confessions? Is there something about writing in the Humanities, particularly philosophy,

that might make instructors reticent to UDL changes? This chapter unpacks not only our collaboration, but that side conversation after our workshop.

This chapter streamlines our workshop and presents an approach to increase the accessibility of assignment guidelines for introductory philosophy courses. We outline challenges to communicating assignment expectations clearly in the discipline of philosophy, and explain the rationale for incorporating student-led questions arising from academic strategy instruction in the revision of assignment design. This chapter has a broader reach, which is that even experienced writers face barriers to success on writing assignments, and this chapter will model how to make small changes to improve student writing. Our chapter begins with Rodier's reflection on her experiences as a philosophy student facing barriers to writing assignments and how that experience led into her andragogy. In section two, Fidelak outlines the importance of academic strategy instruction and how to implement it. In section three, Rodier surveys philosophy writing guidelines found online. In section four we come together to discuss implementation, and in section five, Rodier explains her redesign. In our conclusion, we discuss limitations and implications for others who might want to make similar changes.

AN INTRODUCTION TO WRITING IN PHILOSOPHY

In my (Rodier) experience as a philosophy student and teacher, being able to write precise argumentative essays with high standards of clarity and logic are the contemporary acid test for good writing in philosophy. These essays are of high importance for undergraduate teaching and play a crucial role in coming to be a part of the discipline. Kristie Dotson, in her landmark "How is this paper philosophy?" (2012), argues that norms like those of writing philosophy papers are part of a larger "culture of justification" which enforces ahistorical universal standards of legitimization for vetting philosophical projects that keeps diverse practitioners out of our discipline (p. 5). An example of this false ahistorical universal is the idea of philosophical genius as pure mind communicated through precise argumentative language. This is highly unfortunate, since by contrast, so much of our training even in the Western philosophical tradition is centered on reading historical figures who practice philosophy in diverse formats: public conversations, protests, chatting during walks in gardens or up mountains, fiction and non-fiction dialogues, aphorisms, novels, meditations, treatises, public letters, and other variations. This is why it matters so much what philosophers teach and how they teach it. It is not until the rise of analytic philosophy, paired with the professional norms of academic ("publish or perish") journal publishing, that philosophy narrows itself to the precise form of argumentative essay writing seen in the highly polished journal article form today. Against the backdrop of this diverse writing tradition in historical philosophy, it is surprising that undergraduate teaching remains focused on highly specific and historically contingent norms of philosophical writing.

Philosophy teachers might do well to make two distinctions: first, between the kind of writing expected in the first year introductory level and in more senior courses; second, between content and form. If philosophers shake their fists when first-year students "can't write philosophy essays," then they ought to consider abandoning the expectations that the genre be respected by introductory students. In fact, they might do better to privilege content over form, and look for what is of value in introductory courses: argumentative techniques, logic, conceptual analysis, and interpretation of texts, all of which are possible outside of the stringent expository and argumentative essays assigned. These are not unrelated, of course. I can hear my objector assert that certain content requires a specific form to be relayed.

I am not pushing a sharp distinction between form and content, but rather asking whether the ways in which students are able to express arguments can be reimagined without tripping genre-specific wires along the way. In other words, what if there is less pedagogical value in philosophy's specific writing genre? Can philosophers look beyond their rigorous decades of training in philosophy and think like a first year student again? What if, at the least, some of our most stringent writing norms were tabled until the second year?

In my own undergraduate experience at a large Canadian prairies university in the early 2000s, papers were assigned at two points in the term, and rarely were we given topics or guidelines at all. My peers and I just guessed what we were supposed to write on. My suspicion is that there was an undercurrent of Darwinism here (Simpson, 2012, p. 86). One guess of mine was that this was a complacent "let's see what they come up with" pedagogical move; my most cynical guess was that my professors were weeding out students who did not possess latent philosophical genius. To add to my suspicions, many professors who went weeks without returning an essay would return my paper with no feedback whatsoever. I remember routinely flipping to the last page to see the grade and then throwing the paper out since there was no feedback to learn from anyway. Without topics, guidelines, rubrics, or feedback, I had two methods of trying to understand how to write in philosophy: first, through reading the works of great philosophers and "aping" their style, and that didn't go well; second, through exchanging drafts with fellow misguided peers, and this was met with a similar fate. Very few of us possessed adequate genre knowledge, so we received puzzling grades and had no sense of how to fix our mistakes. The exception to getting no feedback on my papers were the few instructors who provided brutalizing sentence-level editing and adversarial questions in the margins. Again, neither of these options helped me become a more confident writer.

After several unsuccessful papers, I started to make the genre work for me, near the middle of my third year. I got straight to the argument, avoided jargon, and began incorporating the philosophical turns of phrase that I was hearing in class. When I became a philosophy instructor, I decided to do better for my students. I wanted to spare my students from groping along with no instruction. I thought I would give them everything they might need including process instruction, guidelines, resources, and rubrics. I kept the same norms for philosophical writing that I had learned and expected perhaps the same or even more stringent writing from my students. I started researching the writing of texts in philosophy, and coming up with handouts. As I began teaching, I went the other way, hoping to correct the wrongs of my undergraduate instructors. I would provide detailed instructions with clearly laid out expectations. What happened next happens to many novice instructors. I ended up with enormous guidelines that were confusing my students. It was not until I started working as a writing specialist supporting students one-on-one to improve their writing skills that I realized that their questions were not being answered in my instructions and the instructions of many of my colleagues. This was my own pedagogical Copernican revolution, and I started to design assignments from the perspective of the student attempting a writing task, rather than expecting the students to intuitively navigate my complex and lengthy guidelines. In fact, in a philosophy Facebook group I am a member of, I asked faculty for common questions from undergraduates about how to write in philosophy. One by one they posted their handout sheets of norms for writing in philosophy that looked just like mine. I asked again whether these lists are what you want students to do or if these are questions students actually ask. After a lot of back and forth, faculty admitted that what students actually asked about were the same questions I got in the writing centre. These questions arose from students' confusion about genre. Questions like "do I need outside research?", "can

I use 'I'?", and "what citation style should I use?" are what students ask repeatedly, and yet the answers to these questions are not front and centre on handouts for writing in philosophy.

The "what" and "why" of writing assignments should be central not only in guidelines, but in self-exploration as teachers and philosophers. This is why this narrative about my efforts to change my writing assignments is at the intersection of my personal story of going from philosophy student to teacher, my philosophical orientations, and my pedagogical research. The philosophy I came to know and love privileged the writer in isolation who produces pure philosophical argumentation without relational supports. This attitude trickled down to how I treated students. In discussing with colleagues why he includes a workshop on rough drafts, philosopher Stanley Werne (1993) was asked whether getting better-able students to comment on lesser-able students' work is unfair to the better students. This is a common concern in philosophy's false meritocratic ethos—the individualist cream rises to the top if left alone. Werne's response to this objection is telling. He writes, "It is not the main point of the assignment to see who can do better than whom without help from anyone else" (Werne, 1993, p. 47). This reveals an important assumption that undergirds chains of philosophical mentorship and assessment. I have had colleagues tell me the best student is the one you never have to talk to—the lone wolf at the back of the class. This student effortlessly hands in perfect papers on the last day of class, deadlines being pesky contingencies. I have also had colleagues go the other way and say they do not want students to inject themselves in their writing whatsoever, going so far as to say "I don't care what my students think, I care if they understand the text." It is no wonder our students have whiplash going from course to course trying to parse their professors' expectations for philosophical writing.

I knew after working with students across all disciplines on their writing that the majority of them had writing skills and experience from other disciplines that they could transfer to philosophy, if only it was properly coaxed out. Students were being taught summary skills, thesis and paragraph development, and argumentation in other disciplines. These skills were going by different names in different departments, and I was not facilitating my students' confidence in transferring that knowledge because I was overwhelming them with guidelines that made philosophical writing look as being beyond their reach. After cultivating a working friendship with Fidelak, I realized I was not only frustrating my own desires for my students to produce a certain kind of writing, but I was not giving the kinds of instructions that would help most students. Indeed, I was increasing barriers for students with disabilities. At the introductory level, I was providing instructions that only a small number of students could succeed at following, namely philosophy students who already knew how to navigate the genre. I was giving too many instructions and not helping students see which were the most important. Once I started thinking about what students need in the context of academic strategy sessions – specifically, thinking about how even experienced writers with disabilities need additional support through the production of a writing assignment – I started thinking about how to design to support a larger number of students. If I stopped reifying a certain kind of writing, was I able to allow some students to think more deeply?

ENSURING ACCESS FOR ALL LEARNERS

I (Fidelak) support students who experience barriers to learning as a result of diagnosed disabilities and/or medical conditions. MacEwan University's Access and Disability Resources (ADR) department consists of a diverse team of professionals who work closely with students and faculty to mitigate barriers resulting from learning environments that are not designed in a manner that supports students to access their full

education. To remove barriers for students, Professional Resource Faculty not only approve and facilitate accommodations and support services for students, but are key advisors at all levels of the university in promoting an educational environment with full access for students. In order to increase access for all learners, it is important to understand the work that occurs outside the classroom for some students.

In the course of my work with students, I often find that the barriers to student success may not be directly related to their disability, but are rather caused by elements of course design, including unclear expectations for coursework. This is why ADR also advises faculty, as was the case with my consultation with Rodier. To combat such barriers, ADR staff connect with students and provide them with accommodations and/or academic strategy instruction. In order for instructors to alleviate - and not exacerbate - barriers for students during course design, it is important to understand the steps often involved in accommodating students.

Accommodations in post-secondary education consist of supports that remove barriers to student learning by "levelling the playing field" (Smith et. al 2015). Typical accommodations provided to students in post-secondary include additional time on assignments and assessments, and use of high and low assistive technology tools. Higher-tech assistive technology tools utilized by students include the use of essay scaffolding software (e.g. Essay Jack), mind-mapping software (e.g. Inspiration), speech to text software (e.g. Dragon Naturally Speaking), word prediction software (e.g. Read & Write Google), spellcheck, and Screen-reading software (e.g. JAWS). Lower-tech assistive technology tools include drawing up outlines and using concept maps and graphic organizers to organize information. Along with recommending and approving accommodations for learners, students registered with ADR who are experiencing barriers in the writing process may receive additional service support in the form of one-on-one academic strategy instruction.

Many post-secondary institutions offer academic strategy instructional support for students with various disabilities. Such support is often required when elements of a course are not accessible or cannot be sufficiently accommodated for, such as additional time or technology, in a way that will allow full, equitable access for the learner. Effective academic strategy instruction draws on the Learning Triangle Model (Beringer et al., 2006 as cited in Richards, 2015). In the Learning Triangle Model, the individual differences of the learner, curriculum, instruction, and content, and instructional tools and materials, which include low and high level assistive technology, are all necessarily connected aspects of instruction. It is important for the individual differences of the learner to be considered because of varying levels of academic readiness for discipline-specific university writing. Early on in such strategy sessions, the student's previous experience with writing and functional skills required to complete the assignment are surveyed. For example, a student's understanding of organization, structure and required elements, citations, and other skills are crucial for this aspect of the Learning Triangle Model. Because the skills necessary to work with the instructional tools and materials of a specific discipline are beneficial to all students, it makes sense for instructors to include instruction that boosts students' abilities to problem solve while writing their assignments. In other words, teaching the skills required to complete assignments makes a course more universally designed.

When approaching guidelines without support, students often struggle with knowing how to begin, and as such, they report feeling overwhelmed as they spend countless hours attempting the assignment using ineffective strategies. This results in students becoming side-tracked and can lead to frustration and procrastination. Academic strategy instruction involves individualized teaching to develop skills necessary for completing assignments in an academic setting. Sessions specific to writing typically focus on

two main areas of support: decoding the assignment, task, and/or question, and planning the structure and organization of writing (Richards, 2015).

Decoding the Assignment, Task, and/or Question

Strategy sessions allow for modelling of effective strategies aimed to extract essential information from assignment guidelines. Essential information includes expected format, length, purpose, due date, and so on. Depending on the assignment guideline design, students are assumed to possess skills that allow them to "hunt" within lengthy paragraphs to find essential information and plot out first steps. For some students, extracting essential information can require specific close reading skills (scanning, highlighting) that may pose a barrier to the student. I provide instruction, and along with the student, extract, in bold or bullet form, crucial information needed to complete the assignment. I also teach students to use assessment criteria to guide their writing process, for example deciphering rubrics. The ability to use assessment criteria to map out steps is central to a students' navigation of postsecondary writing expectations. For example, students need to be able to prioritize tasks, and the assessment criteria gives them a way of ranking importance.

While working to support students with decoding the assignment, task, or question, I find that it is often the assignment guidelines themselves that lack clarity and consistency, and thus students often disclose that they do not know where to begin on an assignment. This is common, and naturally such strategy instruction focuses on modelling how to isolate key information from the assignment description, task, and/or question. In order to facilitate helpful interaction with unclear assignment guidelines, I often model appropriate problem-solving processes/strategies to make sense of the criteria. Even expert learners need to mobilize problem-solving skills when producing writing, often guessing and predicting what is being asked on the assignment. Through the decoding of the assignment process, the specific guideline layout is adapted to a format that is flexible to the learner's differences and skill levels.

Planning the Structure and Organization of Writing

Subsequent to extracting essential information, academic strategy instruction supports students in learning to develop an assignment outline. An assignment outline helps students visualize the breakdown of an assignment and substantially improves student success across all ages and abilities (Haydon, Mancil, Kroeger, McLeskey, & Lin, 2011). The outline highlights the necessary steps of the assignment in a linear fashion. Some students can generate an outline using graphic organizers or with various forms of assistive technology tools such as, a digital graphic organizer or essay scaffolding software.

After outlining the assignment, the next step is typically to support the student in breaking the assignment down into manageable chunks. This is often one of the most effective strategies for students in such sessions. These manageable chunks give the student smaller due dates, which helps to prevent the student from becoming overwhelmed with the big picture of the entire assignment. Students often require a demonstration on how to formulate a timeline for the manageable chunks. For example, students will agree to dates by which they should have completed steps such as brainstorming, creating an outline, collecting necessary research, formulating arguments/thesis, and producing first, second, and ultimately a final draft. The creation of a personalized timeline supports students with developing executive functioning skills required to complete academic tasks.

It is important to note that the skills taught during strategy sessions are not necessarily skills lagging only for students with disabilities, but skills that all learners would benefit from improving. Oftentimes, we refer to the above noted academic skills as the "hidden curriculum" referring to essential implicit and embedded skills required to fulfill expected academic tasks. One important aspect of the hidden curriculum is the unintended learning outcomes directly related to the tasks that students are required to complete in an academic setting (Victor Oron Semper et al, 2018). Such skills include the organization of time and space, structuring of genre specific assignments, and essential background knowledge/expected vocabulary. It has been suggested that the hidden curriculum is not intentionally hidden, but merely constituted by all those things that are taken for granted and are rarely given any attention (Victor Oron Semper et al., 2018, p. 484). The hidden curriculum itself contributes to barriers to student success. Such barriers are experienced differently by each student, and as such, barriers may change over time depending on the context (Martin, 1976, as cited in Victor Oron Semper et al., 2018).

Instructors can build in some of the above-mentioned strategy instruction to support students universally within the parameters of their specific course. Doing so is not overly difficult; however, it requires the instructor to design the course to consider the individual differences of the learners through the tailoring of course content and purposeful delivery of such content to the specific learners enrolled. Through the implementation of instructional tools and materials, including the use of low and high level assistive technology, instructors can teach students the skills necessary to develop as discipline-specific writers. For example, when presenting students with a writing assignment, instructors can show and offer some structured tools such as graphic organizers or outlines that can help students get started with writing, and explain how students could benefit from the use of such tools. Additionally, instructors can also offer insight into how they learned to write an undergraduate philosophy essay. The essay will be structured for the student to succeed if the opportunity for immediate failure is eliminated. Instructors can incorporate peer reviews, perhaps via structured writing workshops, or allow students to submit drafts of the assignment for feedback. Such feedback, whether offered by the instructor or by the peers, is more beneficial during the process of writing the paper than it is after it has been graded. In one of my educational psychology classes, I offer students the choice to receive structured, targeted feedback, in an individual area identified by the student, on an assignment before the date it is due for submission. If students choose to accept my offer, they will submit their assignment for grading a couple of weeks before the assignment is due. I provide feedback on that specific area because the assignment is not graded at that time, and students then have the opportunity to make changes and resubmit the assignment for marking, as per the stated submission date. Given the importance of feedback and earlier deadlines, it is clear that additional institutional supports, such as writing centres, provide critical services that remove barriers to the writing process for students. For example, some institutions have specific philosophy essay clinics where students can receive disciplinary specific feedback and guidance.

In the next section, Rodier goes into depth about how philosophical norms create commonalities in philosophy guidelines for writing assignments.

CHARACTERISTICS COMMON TO PHILOSOPHY GUIDELINES

Against the backdrop of the important work Fidelak does in supporting students to complete philosophy assignments, it should not be difficult to see why students who experience barriers to writing assignments might struggle more acutely in philosophy. Shelley Tremain (2013) has been documenting the exclusion

of philosophers with disabilities from the activities of the profession for some time, and has argued that these exclusions are tied to practices in the discipline. Students also find the discipline unwelcoming (Silvers, 2007, p. 341). Further, Silvers outlines how the content of philosophical sub-disciplines treats disability as an outlier from the normative questions that structure their inquiry (2007, p. 342). This exclusion of disability from the discipline enhances the gap in anticipating the needs of students with disabilities. As I have been trying to argue, teaching, both in content and delivery, mentoring, and constructing assignments are all part of who succeeds or not in philosophy. Tremain also argues that these areas are connected, and that how philosophy teaches about disability reveals how serious philosophy's problem is:

When...philosophers make the reductive assumption and assertion that any and all work that pertains to disability is in some sense biomedical or bioethical in nature...they variously sequester...philosophy of disability in the realm of "applied ethics," depoliticize and re-medicalize disability in ways that... collaborate with the institutionalized, discursive, and structural ableism of the discipline and profession of philosophy according to which philosophical analyses of disability are "not really" (i.e., not "hard," not "core," not "rigorous") philosophy. (2013, n.p.)

My research into how philosophers have dealt with students with disabilities in the classroom revealed a special edition of *Teaching Philosophy* (2007), which focused almost exclusively on physical and perceptual disabilities and deliberately bracketed the psychiatric as too difficult to deal with (Whitman, 2007). As Edyburn (2010) has argued, to move universal design forward, we have to stop analogizing all accessibility from changes in the built environment (e.g., curb cuts, etc.) (p. 36). Part of my argument, then, is that rethinking assignments and writing expectations is part of reckoning with this challenge – that is, whether the success of diverse practitioners, marginalized groups, and all students with disabilities matters to philosophers. Thus, the rest of this section will outline common features of writing assignments in philosophy that create barriers to student learning and success and will incorporate Fidelak's advice on how to make small but meaningful changes to live up to commitments to provide access to full education for students. This survey is non-representative and curated; however, I tried not to only pick extreme examples. I am reporting patterns that developed over time.

Length

The first feature of philosophy guidelines that needs to be revisited is their sheer length. Looking for student writing guidelines online revealed handouts of 2-8 pages of single-spaced information. Mine were upwards of 6 pages single-spaced at one time. I am not alone in my impulse to give students lengthy guidelines that I think will help them avoid errors in their writing (Horban, 1993; Rippon, 2008; Yablo, n.d.). These lengthy guidelines are often in paragraph form. For example, here is part of a paragraph on writing in philosophy that is embedded in a *30-page* instruction guide:

The assignment here: articulate the argument and how it hangs together (the inferences that make it up). As you do so, offer some intuitive motivation (defense or justification) for the premises and try to make the inferences intuitive for your reader. The goal here is to develop some *understanding* of how the argument hangs together and why the premises are compelling. This process is called "exposition." The goal is to exposit the argument for your reader. (Lavin, n.d.)

This is unclear in its expectations. It mentions a goal, but it does not outline the goal. It also employs a circular definition explaining "exposition" as expositing. This paragraph from Lavin is telling students what to do, but it does not show them what it will look like or how to do it. It is important for assignment expectations to articulate an expected structure for the assignment, if such a structure is expected, and to include examples of assignment structures. When students are introduced to essay writing in high school, they are typically taught to write using various graphic organizers or writing templates. Such scaffolding of the writing process is also important for teaching writing in the post-secondary sector. Given that this is a typical strategy used with students, instructors should consider providing visual and graphic organizers that demonstrate how a student might outline their assignment, rather than lengthy paragraphs that tell a complex story about the end product.

There is no steadfast rule for length of assignment guidelines; however, if the student is being asked to write a paper that is shorter than the guidelines, which was almost always the case for me, something has gone awry. According to Fidelak, the rule of thumb can be that the longer the guidelines, the more confusion and muddling through of information is required of a student. Lengthy guidelines not only add to their cognitive load, but they create frustration in the process of discerning the most important information for breaking down the assignment into manageable chunks. When designing clear assignment guidelines, Fidelak made it clear to me that I should make sure to isolate essential assignment information/criteria in a manner where it does not become lost in supplementary information. Normally, one-page guidelines, and one page for assessment information should suffice.

Jargon/ Insider Speak

The next feature that causes barriers for learners is the use of insider speak and dense jargon. As mentioned previously, simplified instructions are best. Be mindful of the level of academic language, paying specific attention to first year courses vs fourth year honours courses. Fidelak's analysis of the example above from Lavin was that instructions should not assume a high level of literacy and the ability to break down an assignment into a writing plan. In other words, philosophers should not be writing assignment instructions at the same language level with which they write journal articles. Portmore (2012) has guidelines that illustrate this use of jargon: "A good paper will have a logical and perspicuous structure. You need to organize your points and arguments in a logical fashion and at the same time make that organization apparent to your reader." Fidelak stressed to me that in cases like this students are then being asked to decode the vocabulary as well as perform the task being asked of them, thereby adding to their cognitive load and creating barriers to demonstrating course specific knowledge via the assignment. This diminishes the success and confidence of students who would otherwise be able to demonstrate their learning. Another example comes from Weinberg (2018):

The assignment asks you to answer a question (or questions). A necessary—but not sufficient—condition for a good grade is that you answer the question asked. To answer the question you must know what it is asking, so be sure that you know what the question is asking. Note that sometimes we can adequately answer a question only by asking and answering another question. As an example take the question, "Are Socrates' arguments in Crito against escaping from prison good arguments?" To answer, we need to ask and answer another question: "What are Socrates' arguments against escaping from prison?"

Students will have to decode the sentences in this paragraph and may become frustrated trying to understand what is being asked of them. Significant background knowledge of how philosophers ask questions is being assumed of students when providing instructions at this level of language. Instead of dense instructions with jargon, it is recommended that instructions use student friendly, disciplinary neutral language. One way to make the language level even more student friendly is to break the assignment down into smaller tasks like a student would do when mapping out their own to do list. Chunking the assignment mitigates barriers for students who would otherwise require specific accommodations, such as assignment extensions, strategy instruction, assistive technology. To get started, many academic support centres have added assignment calculators to their websites to help students with time budgeting, and breaking down paper writing into smaller tasks.

Single Format

When students are given assignments which can only be submitted in a single format, there is only one means of expression through which to demonstrate their learning. Carefully laid out explanations and examples of other kinds of writing in philosophy have been published, such as Duhan Kaplan's (2006) work on how to teach autobiographical writing in philosophy, and Richmond's (1979) work which outlines teaching the process of writing itself as dialogic. These kinds of works are few and far between, and their main purpose is not to better include students experiencing barriers, but rather, to offer philosophically justified alternative formats for assessment. Most guides focus heavily on argument and thesis, and many suggest a student have these completely mapped out before they begin writing (Horban, 1993). Providing students with options to demonstrate their knowledge removes barriers specific to single forms of academic expression. For example, allowing students to choose the way in which they demonstrate their knowledge, for example, the form/structure of writing assignment, permits the student to select a format that will best allow them to represent their knowledge, thus eliminating some structural barriers.

Don'ts

Philosophers are not alone, among writing intensive disciplines, to regularly include the next feature: the lengthy "don'ts" sections. My own guidelines had a list of 18 don'ts, eight of which began with the word "avoid." This is no surprise as we often emphasize critical reasoning skills in terms of errors to be avoided (Faulconer et al., 1988, p. 230; Horban, 1993). I ask students to avoid lengthy introductions, grandiose claims, sexist language, subjective language, jokes, and arguing with questions. I know that the process of developing these lists represented an effort on my part to catalogue student errors observed over time, out of grading frustration. Fidelak has made the cumulative effect of these lists clear to me: they make it seem like there is no positive way through. Listing cautions shuts down problem solving and instructs students only on the final product, rather than on the draft that they will ultimately revise.

Within these lists of don'ts, there are repeated appeals cautioning against "cuteness," "vacuousness", "fluff", "slang", and "cliche", policing written norms that map masculine and elite forms. Issues with "cuteness" are also a reason for advising against writing in a dialogue form, and this recommendation circles back to our earlier discussion of single formats:

Many students find the dialogue form attractive. Done well, it can be very effective. But it's extremely difficult to do well. The form tempts the author to cuteness, needless metaphor, and imprecision. So you shouldn't try to write dialogues for this class, (Yablo n.d.).

My guidelines not only repeat the imperative to avoid fluffy language, but they also caution against using sexist or ableist language.

Another problem of these long lists is that they blend issues of different levels of importance. For example, here are a few extracts from my guidelines:

Avoid grandiose claims like "Since the beginning of time…" or "Since the dawn of mankind…" what you say will be unphilosophical and probably false." And, my don'ts section also includes: "Avoid lengthy and/or unnecessary quotations: the primary voice for explanation of all ideas (including someone else's ideas) should be your own words.

By far the overuse of quotations harms a student's assessment more than the use of a silly grandiose statement, but my guidelines equalize these by keeping them in a running list. The next section deals with how guidelines rely on a hidden curriculum.

TEACHING PROCESS, ASSIGNMENT DESIGN, AND ASSESSMENT

When designing inclusive learning environments, and thus, clear writing assignment guidelines, it is important for instructors to consider the barriers created for students as a result of hidden curriculum expectations that lay beyond the required writing assignment. As discussed earlier, such hidden curriculum expectations involve institutional etiquette, such as awareness of plagiarism and cheating and curricular implications that may relate directly to subject specific writing styles. There are also hidden expectations in relationships between faculty and students. For example, availability of instructors for support can vary, and resources within the institution are often not clear or accessible to all students (Victor Oron Semper et al., 2018). As such, removing barriers is not just in the assignment itself, but rather, the teaching process, assignment design, and the assessment. When designing clear assignment guidelines, it is important to consider the teaching process by asking: "what are the areas of the hidden curriculum which need to be taught to students in order for students to successfully complete a high-quality assignment?" It is also important to examine the assignment design itself by asking: "what skills are students expected to demonstrate in the assignment?" Lastly, the overall assignment assessment needs to be considered, and this can be done by asking: "how will students be graded in the assignment?" Through the above-mentioned self-questioning, instructors are prompted to examine all areas of their instructional practice more mindfully.

Teaching Process

The skills taught in the teaching process are imperative in ensuring students succeed in completing writing assignments. Within the teaching process, disciplinary specific writing styles must be introduced to students before they are expected to employ them independently. Ideally, this teaching should occur alongside course content, rather than via "one-off" workshops, and course material and should include

instructional scaffolds that allow for student mastery, for example, use of graphic organizers, templates, access to supplementary sources and discipline specific exemplars. There are many ways for such direct instruction to occur within the course. If requiring students to complete a traditional writing assignment, instructors should show students a variety of assignment outlines using a sample topic. Embedding a discussion of the outline, showing a visual of the outline, and providing students with access to resources on how to build an outline or mind map are beneficial to all learners. Also, providing students with examples for the expected form, structure, and content of a writing assignment helps students get started. Some instructors break larger assignments down into smaller mini-assignments. The mini-assignments focus on elements that are required for the final term project/assignment. For example, one can teach students how to conduct research within the field of study and then have students conduct a small assignment where they hand in their research. In philosophy, it might be best to have students submit an introductory/ signposting paragraph for feedback, or perhaps a traditional outline that employs superordination, which means putting related bullet points under more general headings. This is all highlighted to emphasize that assignment guidelines are not the place to teach the hidden curriculum. Skills expected to complete assignments should be taught prior to the students being expected to complete the assignment.

Assignment Design and Assessment

It is important for the assignment design to clearly consider and articulate the skills students are expected to demonstrate and the overall purpose of the assignment. If instructors want students to complete these assignments, they should be clear on the purpose. Is the assignment an essay because it has always been an essay, or is there something particular to the form that demonstrates the desired skills? Instructors should state clearly what they want students to do and how they would like them to do it. In addition, clear assessment guidelines are important for students to understand how to map the steps for completing their assignment. In fact, as mentioned previously in this chapter, teaching students to utilize those assessment guidelines is helpful in ensuring students complete assignments accurately. Thus, the incorporation of clear assessment criteria is an essential component to assignment design. We suggest a ranked, qualitative rubric. It should give students a sense of the importance of each element and what qualities they should demonstrate.

REDESIGN

Working with Fidelak made me realize that not only do I need to rethink the language, length, and purpose of the assignment design, but I also need to think about what skills I am preparing students for in my in-class teaching. Thus, what started as a consultation about redesigning the guidelines and rubric became a rethink of my whole approach to the course.

In my redesign, I omitted the list of dos and don'ts. I pulled out the most important information from that list, such as elements of structure, organization, and argument development, and framed them as positive guidelines. For example, instead of burying the fact that the paper should only have a very brief introduction and conclusion within the list of dos and don'ts, I now suggest that the focus of the paper is the arguments students develop in the body paragraphs, and that introductions and conclusions in philosophy are usually "bare bones" statements to begin and end the essay. Then, I suggest writing the introductions and conclusions last, so that the thesis matches what is actually written in the paper.

In addition to a formatting section that discusses how to format a document, I added a section for common FAQs that I actually get from students: Can one write in the first person? Does one need outside sources? What citation style does one use? What is the percentage of the paper which should be setting up philosophers' arguments and what is the percentage which should be one's own view? Answering each one of these FAQs removes a roadblock that can delay the writing process. Fewer roadblocks also helps students break the assignment into chunks and draw on skills they already have.

In addition to omitting the "dos and don'ts" section, the most overt change my assignment guidelines went through was to offer students three modes of writing about the same topic. I try to frame this positively and get straight to the heart of the assignment in the instructions. Table 1 is what Rodier's instructions now look like.

Table 1. Assignment options

For this assignment, choose one of the following three options	
1 Standard five paragraph essay	Develop and defend an interpretive thesis that identifies and rehearses one of two chains of argument (see below) from Plato's Euthyphro. The standard essay is structured in the following way; introduction, three (or more) paragraphs (main body), and a conclusion.
2 A letter	write a letter to a clever friend or family member who has never read the *Euthyphro*. The letter should explain the progression of one of two chains of argument from the text and should include a critical discussion where you build upon or critique the argument.
3 A dialogue	you will write a philosophical dialogue between yourself and a clever person who holds a different view than you (they must not be a straw-person!). Rehearse and explain one of the two chains of argument from the text and demonstrate critical engagement with the ideas.

Table 2.

The two chains of argument:	
1. What is Divine Command Theory? Discuss through the Euthyphro dilemma.	2. Is morality about serving God? Discuss in relation to how Socrates questions Euthyphro's definition of holiness/piety as "ministering to the gods."

Both of the chains of arguments were explicitly discussed during class time. These instructions, including the FAQ section, come in at about a page. The rubric is another page. Students who chose the essay usually have a basic or better understanding of how to write one (about 60%). Students who would rather be creative wrote a dialogue (about 15%), and students who have less familiarity with the conventions of philosophical writing chose the letter (about 25%) of students. Giving students choice reduces barriers and has ripple effects through the term. Drop-out rates tend to be highest after a first assignment, which was not my observation in this one class. This also had effects on the feedback and improvement process. Giving students choice and ownership of their first assignment, I believe, enabled them to better understand which areas needed improvement after the first assessment. If the whole term does not include multi-modal writing assignments, it is the instructor's responsibility in the feedback process to highlight for the student the parts of their writing that best demonstrate genre-appropriateness so they can transfer that to a later argumentative essay. Thus, instead of thinking of the assignments as completely separate, those who write the letter or the dialogue can be scaffolded towards an argumentative essay.

I also began modelling certain skills I wanted students to perform on assignments. For example, I became more diligent in citing and referencing course materials in my slides and handouts, even where it is obvious where these where from. I started drawing attention to how I was citing during my teaching process. This allowed for smaller moments where I could teach things like paraphrasing, indirect citation, and how to cite web sources. I also used my class time and teaching materials to present different voices in philosophical argumentation. In the course of my Facebook discussions with other philosophers, Tanya Hall mentioned how students struggle to go from writing research papers in other disciplines to writing in philosophy classes, since we do not use philosophers as authorities that can be appealed to. Hall (2020) writes:

Many students treat the following as equivalent: As of 2018 # people live below the poverty line (reputable source…). It is wrong to spend our money on unnecessary stuff when we could do a lot more good by donating it to an effective charity (Singer). [Students] see sources as "backing up" what they are saying, and not as part of a background conversation they are joining.

Confusions like this arise when students navigate different contexts and genres across disciplines. My own observations, along with Hall's, have informed changes in my teaching as well. I ensure that I explain how philosophers approach an appeal for authority, since this is unique to our discipline. Further, I highlight when and why I am drawing on a secondary source, specifically explaining how this is appropriate in a context for understanding a text, but that it cannot do your work for you. I also draw attention to moments when the author is explaining a view they do not hold, such as when they are paraphrasing an objection. Paying attention to voice like this helps students position themselves in essays and helps to address their confusion when they ask if they are allowed to have an opinion in their essays or not.

The last major change in my assignment design was the inclusion of a weighted, qualitative rubric. As Fidelak has outlined, rubrics are crucial for students to understand how to start, and how to break the assignment down into manageable chunks. I have encountered resistance from some of my philosophy colleagues about the use of a rubric. The resistance centred on the objection that a rubric acts as a measurement template that outputs a grade. This has not been my intention or experience. Students are accustomed to rubrics in high school and other disciplines, which highlights the importance of this as minimally a good first-year transition strategy. Adding a rubric provides continuity and allows students to transfer skills to the new genre. The rubric has had the added benefit of reducing the number of student questions and complaints after the assignment has been graded.

In addition to revising my guidelines and modifying my in-class teaching, I now provide exemplars of student work, or a "worked sample". An exemplar, not necessarily an "A" paper, shows all of the main elements, with my margin comments pointing out what is successful and what could be improved. This way, students can see a model and visualize the expectations contained in the guidelines and rubric. Some of the best advice I was given as a graduate student was to go to the library and read a sample of previous students' theses. I have also started building timelines into my teaching that chunk out the assignment for them. I tell students when they should start their assignments, have discussions about theses and organization, and structure throughout class to get students started early. When I require secondary research, I have started bringing in library supports on how to research and cite. In addition, I have added the opportunity for students to exchange drafts in class.

IMPLICATIONS, OUTCOMES AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

An important consideration not addressed in this case study is the level of reflexivity and feedback built into this design. Ideally, there would be at least a mid-course review, if not continual loops of feedback allowing real-time adaptation to students' needs (Dolmage, 2005). Instructors need to be open to a broader range of learner needs, as well as building in loops of feedback for a co-intentional practice, which allows for continual improvement. Ideally, a measurement tool would be included in this redesign to attain a solid grasp of the student experience. Another area for consideration is the necessity of instructional technology for universal design (Edyburn, 2010). This redesign is inherently low-tech; however, the learner/user will be using technology to complete assignments. The integration of this technological use is not considered in the redesign. Furthermore, in terms of multiple means of representing learning, writing is the only format considered as an option here. We have interpreted this narrowly to mean options only within a writing framework. In this way, our redesign may still qualify as a retrofit and not a universal design (Capp, 2017). Moreover, the presentation of knowledge involved in writing presumes that significant hurdles have already been overcome – specifically, the advanced reading level required for success in philosophy. Access to the vocabulary of philosophy needs to be addressed, though access to knowledge is not the same as learning (Capp, 2017).

In the months since our workshop, we have reflected on the half-joking comment that a colleague preferred Rodier's "before" guidelines to her revised philosophy writing assignment guidelines that more closely align with all three principles of UDL. This comment draws out a problem in the wider implementation of UDL, which is that without large scale training and implementation, it will only find support among those of us with the time, energy, and institutional support to implement changes. Even then, it remains largely a voluntary individual instructor response. This raises bigger questions about how universal design principles can be reflexively integrated into post-secondary disciplines, or whether this is the job of instructional design specialists. Given the barriers that some philosophy writing guidelines pose to students, and the persistent achievement gap for students with disabilities (Edyburn, 2010), we no longer find this to be just a humorous quirk of philosophy but rather, a serious issue of access, justice, and responsibility to students. Along this vein, this chapter has considered disability in isolation to other key identity factors that impact achievement, such as language, race, class, and gender (Knoll, 2009). Along with ableism, such oppressions need to be addressed rather than papered over in the use of "universal" in universal design, and this must be addressed institutionally as well as in instructor practice.

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