

Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 11 Issue 1

June 2017

Book review

Friggens, G. 2017. Book review of Gröppel-Wegener, A. 2016. *Writing essays by pictures: a workbook*. Huddersfield: Innovative Libraries. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 11(1), pp.240-241.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/11.1.2204>



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Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

Gröppel-Wegener, A. 2016. *Writing essays by pictures: a workbook*. Huddersfield: Innovative Libraries. 59pp. 978-0957665224. £15.00. Pbk.

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I was first introduced to Alke Gröppel-Wegener's practice at the launch of the [East Midlands Writing PAD Centre: Journeys in Visual Learning](#) in 2014 and was captivated by the kinaesthetic approach. The challenge of teaching academic skills to students more at home in the design studio is a shared concern. Alke was awarded a teaching excellence fellowship by Staffordshire University in 2011 and developed an innovative approach called Tactile Academia, based on an exploration of the link between academic and creative practice. What I found most interesting at the Writing PAD Event was that the methods employed engaged students from all subject areas. So, whatever your subject interest, read on.

Writing essays by pictures: a workbook intends to demystify the practice of writing essays, explaining that the work students may have written up until now are not likely to be the 'sort of essays that university lecturers are looking for'. This workbook takes you through the process of writing academic essays, using research evidence to back up ideas. Designed to be used by students as a personal workbook, this reasonably priced publication succeeds in getting across a complex process in a simple, digestible way. Designed by the author and Richard Mellor, the inventive use of colours, fonts, images and creative page layout were engaging and attractive. The mind does not drift as the inventive use of these attributes, for example, a change of theme, a highlight, a diversion, something tactile to do makes it easy to focus on what's being written.

Students in creative subjects are likely to enjoy the format, but not exclusively. The use of analogy is sufficiently diverse that the majority of students will engage; the iceberg metaphor for research and writing, the 'ocean of literature' to explain sources, 'spilling the beans' for drafting content, all make for a memorable journey to producing a better essay. Today academic skills tutors and librarians are meeting many more students disclosing learning challenges such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and there are benefits of this approach for them too. Above all, it is simply making learning fun.

The content takes the reader through 23 small steps towards better academic writing, beginning just before the essay writing process, encouraging reading for fun. Here Alke is mindful of diversity, encouraging dyslexic students to engage with audiobooks while acknowledging the positives and negatives of the format. She does not pretend that essay writing is an easy process and is realistic, for example, about the self-discipline required to read academic texts. It is clearly a developmental process and it feels right that the book concludes with a section titled 'Turn feedback forward'.

The process helps the reader 'connect the dots' from researching and referencing sources within the 'ocean of literature', including strategies for notetaking in a way that is effective to the reader. She encourages a combination of image based and written approaches with ideas such as collage and documentary drawing' and 'poetic inquiry'. Methods intended to stimulate creativity and a deeper understanding of the reading are ultimately to encourage the reader to put things in their own words and interpret ideas for themselves. In my experience, students seem to lack the confidence to do this. She suggests techniques for organising the information, again, combining visual and tactile techniques with more formal methods such as creating an annotated bibliography. There is an underlying sense of confidence building as the reader is encouraged to

be free of the author's order of events in producing a literature review. Moving from the 'patchwork pinboard' of essay content to the linear storyboard, Alke helps the reader to 'spill the beans' in their first draft. Alluding to the fact that there will be further reorganisation before submission she uses a fun analogy, the 'dress-up doll of formality', to help the reader get to grips with the intended essay genre. A useful section, 'the icing on the cake', addressing the formalities of writing conventions, such as discussion of the use of personal pronouns and technical terms, has the potential to transform the reader's essay in to an altogether more academic piece of work.

I cannot help feeling that the students who engage with this workbook, whatever their subject area, will find it hugely transformative. As with all workbooks and skills learning, it requires time set aside for focus and commitment, but if any book can encourage that, this one surely can.

For me, a librarian working in an organisation with academic skills tutors to hand, I am often reluctant to 'join the dots' for the students, focusing on finding and referencing information and passing the student on to colleagues to complete the picture. However, as the workbook is written in such a succinct and accessible way, I feel I could use it in a library tutorial without detracting from my main concern. The exercises have given me some fresh ideas for use in the classroom too. I am tired of climbing the information landscape; I am off to dive into the 'ocean of literature' instead!