

# GASP! Get a Student Pondering

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## Increasing Student Motivation on Tedious, Routine and Boring Assignments

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By Mindy Yale

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I require students to complete workbook pages that correspond to the chapter under consideration. The workbook contains fill-in, labeling and multiple choice reviews of the material covered in class. Over the years I had noticed that there were some students who liked the workbook and some students who hated it. Those who hated the workbook fell into two categories: students who failed to turn the assignment in and students who copied the answers from those who like doing the work. I tried a variety of methods and finally landed on a formula that increased motivation in students who resist the workbook. The formula is simply to ERR: Explain, Relate and Revise.

The patterns of resistant students caused me to reflect on the importance and value of the workbook assignment in learning the material. Many of my students have jobs or children and the workbook might just fall to the bottom of the priority list. I wanted to be sure that the assignment was genuinely purposeful if I was going to continue to add to their workload outside of school. The repetitive exercises in the workbook supported the memorization required to learn anatomical terminology and to succeed on the multiple

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# Whose Learning Outcomes are These Anyway???

By Jacques De Beaufort

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When I was thinking about how to begin this short article, it occurred to me that I might have named it something like “A Funny Thing Happened to Me on the Way to the Forum,” because that’s honestly how I felt the day the Humanities “super-cluster” met on Development Day, Spring 2013, to discuss developing new general education learning outcomes. During the time the clusters normally meet, all the faculty who teach in the Humanities were gathered together to recommend wording for a learning outcome appropriate for the Humanities. As part of this process, we were given the course learning outcomes for each of the Humanities courses within the general education program. I looked at the outcomes for one of the Art History courses and the first thing that came to my mind was “What are these?” In fact, what I think I actually said was “This isn’t what I teach!”

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that this was the first time I had ever seen these learning outcomes, but it was the first time I had really SEEN them, if you know what I mean. Suddenly, I was looking at this list of outcomes with a new set of eyes. I realized that they didn’t accurately describe what I expected my students to learn and I knew then and there that something had to change. During the next Cluster meeting I brought the issue to my colleagues and found that I was not alone in my concerns. We all began to develop a new set of outcomes, and over the course of a few meetings they were carefully studied and crafted into something that everyone felt good about. In the end, new learning outcomes for each of the general education Art History courses were developed: outcomes that are clearly stated, well-organized and directly related to the material that we all teach.

So, here’s my advice to my colleagues outside of the Art Department. Don’t be afraid to take a second look at things. It’s possible that the outcomes you have now were written several years ago perhaps with less than clear direction and have remained dormant as a “first draft” for a very long time. With all the attention given to this process, this is the perfect time to take a new look and to examine your outcomes with fresh eyes. I’m proud to work here, as I know all of you are, and I wouldn’t want anything “on the books” that does not reflect the excellence that we all aspire towards. No one told us to make these changes; we entered into this process voluntarily because we wanted to showcase what we do

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in the best possible way. So take another look at your own outcomes and decide for yourself if they could use a little fine tuning. At the very least, it will open the door for a great discussion within your departments, further clarify the mission and goal of each course, and develop a collective understanding of how this can best be accomplished.

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## Meet Jacques De Beaufort

Professor de Beaufort joined the Palm Beach State community in 2010 after relocating from Los Angeles where he had been working as a professional artist and teaching as an adjunct faculty at several colleges. He recently collaborated with the Environmental Science Department and the Art Alliance to create a mural for a rooftop garden nestled away in an atrium on the North Campus. Additionally he has taken part in curating shows for the campus gallery and works with the Cultural Affairs Committee to develop an exciting program of visiting artists, speakers, and performers. He loves teaching and is known by his students for his glittering wit and colorful lectures.

When not working at the College, de Beaufort is busy painting, directing music videos, short documentaries, and the occasional short feature or running the art gallery/project space he recently founded in Lake Worth's new Urban Artist Lofts. He enjoys art-house movies and red meat.



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## Really? Assessment in the Fine Arts? Of Course!

It is often assumed that it is difficult, maybe even impossible, to assess the appreciation of art or music. After all, how does one judge whether or not a piece of art or music is good? Isn't that a matter of individual taste? If the point of art education is simply to teach students to "enjoy" art, then the simple answer might be "Yes." However, in order to experience art or music on anything more than a superficial level, students must possess knowledge of concepts, vocabulary and techniques—all of which are part of the creation of great art and music. While assessing appreciation is more of a challenge than assessing concrete skills, it is no more of a challenge than is faced in other areas of learning that teach aspects of cultural literacy such as literature. It is particularly appropriate in this instance to remember that assessment is not a science—it is an art!

# *Don't be Hatin', Start Thinkin'*

## (Or how to get students to love group work!)

By Thomas Capers

Oftentimes here at PBSC when being assigned to group projects students experience apprehension that they will be assigned to a dysfunctional group. It is not uncommon to hear comments from students that they fear group assignments because occasionally some group members are loafers and do not participate in group activities or they question why they need to participate in group projects.

When facing a group project, it is suggested that instead of reluctance, students should take a breath and GASP. Why GASP? GASP is an acronym to represent *Get a Student Pondering* and is a way for students to think critically about a topic. PBSC defines critical thinking as using skills to explore, evaluate, express, and engage in purposeful reasoning in order to reach sound conclusions, decisions, positions, and/or solutions.

GASP! Suggest to students they use the combined power of the group to analyze, evaluate, and make decisions based on group consensus because it is a well-known fact that groups reached more productive decisions than individuals. Critical thinking skills are essential for effective participation in a democratic society. So when assigning group projects, get students to think critically about what they are being asked to do and why. Get them to think about ways to make the group assignment more enjoyable and encourage participation from every member of the team. Get members of the team together and brainstorm ways to make the assignment less of a chore and a more memorable learning experience.

## Meet Thomas Capers

Professor Tom Capers has been a member of Palm Beach State College faculty since August 2010. He currently serves as the Department Chair for the Information Technology Bachelor Degree Program. Additionally, he is currently a member of the QEP implementation team, a member of the BSN eLearning committees, previously served as Secretary for NCBA, and President of the PBSC chapter of Sigma Beta Delta.

Professor Capers has a passion for golf and when time allows, you can find him on a golf course. His other interests include listening to classic and contemporary jazz, collecting baseball caps, and writing poetry. To date, one of the poems has been published.





## **Coming spring 2014...**

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[www.PalmBeachState.edu/QEP](http://www.PalmBeachState.edu/QEP)



# Using Music to Teach Tone\*

By Elizabeth Wilber

An essential reading skill is the ability to determine the author's tone. Students quickly master the difference between positive, negative, and neutral, but they have difficulty differentiating between more advanced tone words like nostalgic, apathetic, and ambivalent. One way I teach tone is by using music.

Students are asked to bring at least 30 predetermined tone words to class on index cards; they write the word on the front, the definition on the back, and indicate if the word is positive, negative, or neutral. (Students may opt to bring in all 90 words that will be quizzed.) First, I play "Peter and the Wolf Introduction" by Sergei Prokofiev and narrated by Dame Edna Everage. This track provides an excellent introduction to tone and music; we discuss how each instrument is indicative of the "tone" of the character it represents. Then, I play a song (I usually begin with music from movies, such as "Elysium" from *Gladiator* and "Flying Theme" from *E.T.*), and students hold up the index card with the tone of the piece. I circulate the room, indicating which students are correct or not.

I then move on to "my music." Students continue to determine the tone of the piece, but they get candy or extra credit if they know who the artist is. (Sadly, I give out very little of each!) A bonus lesson is that we all have different background knowledge; my musical favorites are definitely not theirs! (But who doesn't know who the Indigo Girls are?!?)

If I have time, I have two additional songs I like to use. The first is "Nine Crimes" by Damien Rice. I play a YouTube clip of the song from *Shrek the Third* and then the official video (links below), and we discuss how the context of the song gives it a different tone. I also use "Same Mistake" by James Blunt. First, I show the official video, and the song seems to be about a relationship gone sour. Then, I play it again while students read the



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lyrics. After seven lines, they realize the radio version of the song differs greatly from the album original. Many lines about Blunt's experience in the Kosovo War have been removed. The original is not about a relationship but war! We usually have quite an animated discussion about why these lines were removed.

This lesson on tone is a fun, energetic way to help students differentiate between tone words and move beyond thinking in terms of positive/negative/neutral. **It will be available in POLO this spring along with an accompanying video.**

Links:

"Same Mistake" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3c32wBYdU0>

"Same Mistake" Lyrics - <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jamesblunt/samemistake.html>

Blunt and war - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11753050>

"Nine Crimes" official - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgqOSCgc8xc>

"Nine Crimes" *Shrek* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXhg9Pzlw3A>

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## Meet Elizabeth Wilber

Though she secretly yearns to be a used car saleswoman living in Oregon, Elizabeth Wilber has found herself affiliated on-and-off with PBSC for 13 years. She currently teaches any and all non-math developmental courses. She is also a member of the QEP Implementation Committee and is cluster chair.

If asked, she would say she has many hobbies including dollhouse miniatures, reading, cycling, collecting art, and playing Words with Friends, but in reality, she's so busy explaining to students that Lincoln's first name wasn't "April Ham" (true story!), taking care of her three dogs and four cats, and spending time with her husband Michael (whom she met at a poetry reading) that she has no time for hobbies.

But as proof she did once have time to read, her pets are named Queequeg, Melville, Roland, Susie, Tess, Walt, and Tux, all of whom but one are named after literature (though none after her current favorites – Erdrich and Atwood). Can you guess which ones?

Answers: *Moby Dick*, *The Gunslinger*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Walt Whitman



# Increasing Student Motivation on Tedious, Routine and Boring Assignments

Mindy Yale ([continued from cover](#))

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choice tests in my class as well as the State's licensing exam. A conversation with students helped them agree that the assignment is useful to reach the goal of licensure. It also seemed to satisfy their need to know why they should care. This little chat was effective in getting some of the resistant students to turn in a few assignments. But allow me to back up to explain the reflection that led to my willingness to even breach the topic with the students in the first place.

An understanding of the logic behind the assignment was an appeal to the rational mind but was not, in itself, enough to motivate students who saw the assignment as something they *had* to do rather than one they *wanted* to do. Quite frankly, I agree with them. Grading their workbook pages is boring and tedious, and I have things I'd rather do with my time, such as watching fresh paint dry. In fact, I felt it was so boring that I eventually stopped checking the work thoroughly. I glanced at it to see if there were erasure marks or scribbles which would indicate that they had done the assignment on their own. I also evaluated the handwriting to see if it was neat to show that some time went into it or if it was that of a student who rushed to do it on the morning it was due. Realizing that I was as bored with the assignment as they were, I decided that showing a little compassion might speak to their emotional resistance. When the next opportunity presented itself, I explained the logic behind the assignment and told them that I knew it was boring and repetitive but the ultimate goal was worth enduring a little tedium. Remarkably, this increased student motivation to do the workbook and my own motivation to go through their work more thoroughly. I would have underestimated the importance of them feeling like I could relate to them had I not seen consistent improvement in the work of the students.

There was one student in this class who did not respond at all to the intellectual appeal or the emotional appeal. I spent quite a bit of time wondering how to get this student to do his workbook. He was very bright and had high test scores but was often defiant and non-compliant. He wanted to do things his own way and not how he was told to do them. I can certainly understand that type of resistance. I decided to give him an option for a repetitive exercise to prepare for tests, and I asked *him* for input, explaining his alternative was

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to continue accumulating zeroes on the assignments. He talked for quite a while giving me all manner of examples of things he likes to do to prepare for tests including the use of flash cards, re-writing his notes over and over again and testing himself. For this student, the workbook really seemed to be a waste of his time as he was successful on tests without it. Our discussion, and my reflection on it, helped me understand his attitude when he received zeroes for not turning in the workbook. He was putting in the effort to study and I was punishing him. I decided to accept a copy of what he was doing in lieu of the workbook. If he made flash cards or wrote the definitions over and over again or drew pictures to label, he could show them to me and receive full credit. His entire attitude changed in class due to the provision of a little autonomy on HOW the assignment was done.

I gave the same opportunity to all of the students in the class. I explained why repetition was purposeful, related to them by acknowledging that it was boring and provided opportunity for them to fulfill the purpose in the way that works best for them. The entire class now consistently turns in their homework on time. There are no more excuses, no more last minute attempts to copy from another, and there is actual enthusiasm for the homework. Some students still prefer the structure that the workbook provides and some come up with creative ways to memorize the information including drawings, making puzzles, etc. To ERR is, in my experience, effective.

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## Meet Mindy Yale

Mindy Yale is a Stewart Award recipient and has been teaching anatomy, physiology and complementary and alternative medical modalities in the Massage Therapy Department since 2005. She has been actively involved in the QEP development, advisory and implementation teams and is passionate about critical thinking and assessment practices.

In her quest for success in teaching both critical thinking skills and dispositions, Yale studies and experiments with insights from behavioral economics, learning style inventories, motivational theories and argumentation. For fun, Yale plays with rubrics. Her students consistently score higher on the National Board Certification Exam than most students in the nation.



## *About **GASP!***

### *Palm Beach State College*

The idea behind *GASP!* is pretty simple. We all want students to think! As faculty and staff, we appreciate ideas that will make it easier for us get students thinking, and we want to better understand how assessment can help us know we're on the right track. *GASP!* may come in the form of a single fact sheet, a newsletter, or sometimes perhaps, something more journalistic.

**The QEP and General Education Committees want to use *GASP!* as a platform to**

- ✓ feature faculty and staff who have or are using strategies that help students demonstrate achievement of any of our general education and institutional learning outcomes, including critical thinking;
- ✓ update readers on important issues related to assessment, accreditation, or the QEP;
- ✓ promote College events related to critical thinking, assessment, or professional learning opportunities for faculty or staff that will lead to improved student learning.

**If you have any ideas you would like to have featured in *GASP!*, please contact us!**

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