

“ It’s just a drawing. Nobody dies. ”



That’s the advice that I still remember from the professor of my undergraduate drawing class. We were making **gesture drawings**—thirty-second sketches of the human figure. In thirty seconds, you can only make a messy drawing. The idea was to develop intuition, to loosen up, to avoid seeing our drawings as too precious. But perfectionism is a hard thing to let go of; it’s hard to be okay with making bad drawings. But making bad drawings is important to making good drawings.

“ Making bad drawings is important to making good drawings. ”

In my classroom, I want students to feel comfortable making **bad writing**. I want them to loosen up, embrace failure. I want them to play. To take risks.

I ask students to compose with modes, tools, and genres they’re not used to. When students try out things they haven’t done before, it destabilizes them. But that’s where the learning happens.

Pushing the boundaries of composition shows where the boundaries are, where there’s room to grow. It makes composition more intentional, less rehearsed.



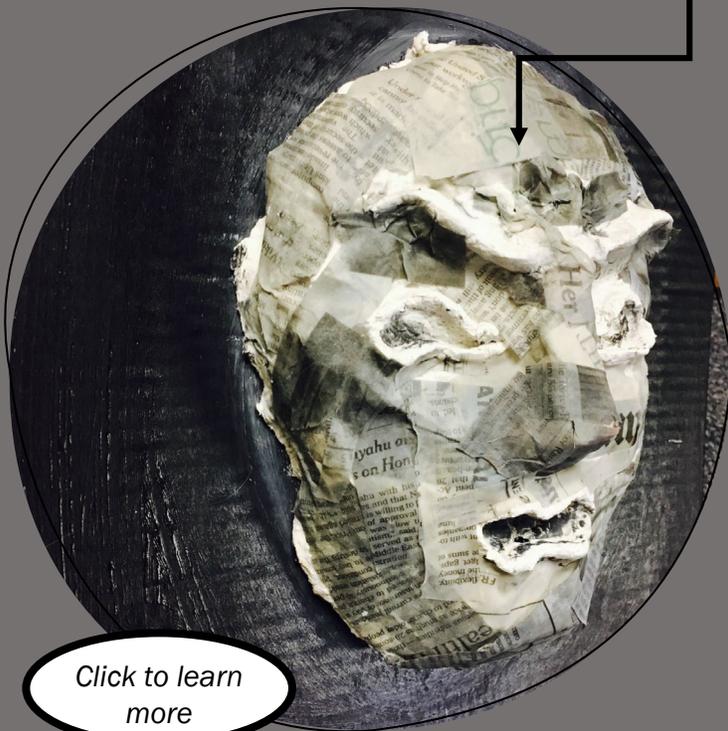
Your body has to be loose, relaxed, to make a gesture drawing. Even then, you’ll get one “good” one for every 10 bad ones.

Students in my classes have made comics, videos, websites, podcasts, scrapbooks, and papier-mâché sculptural essays.



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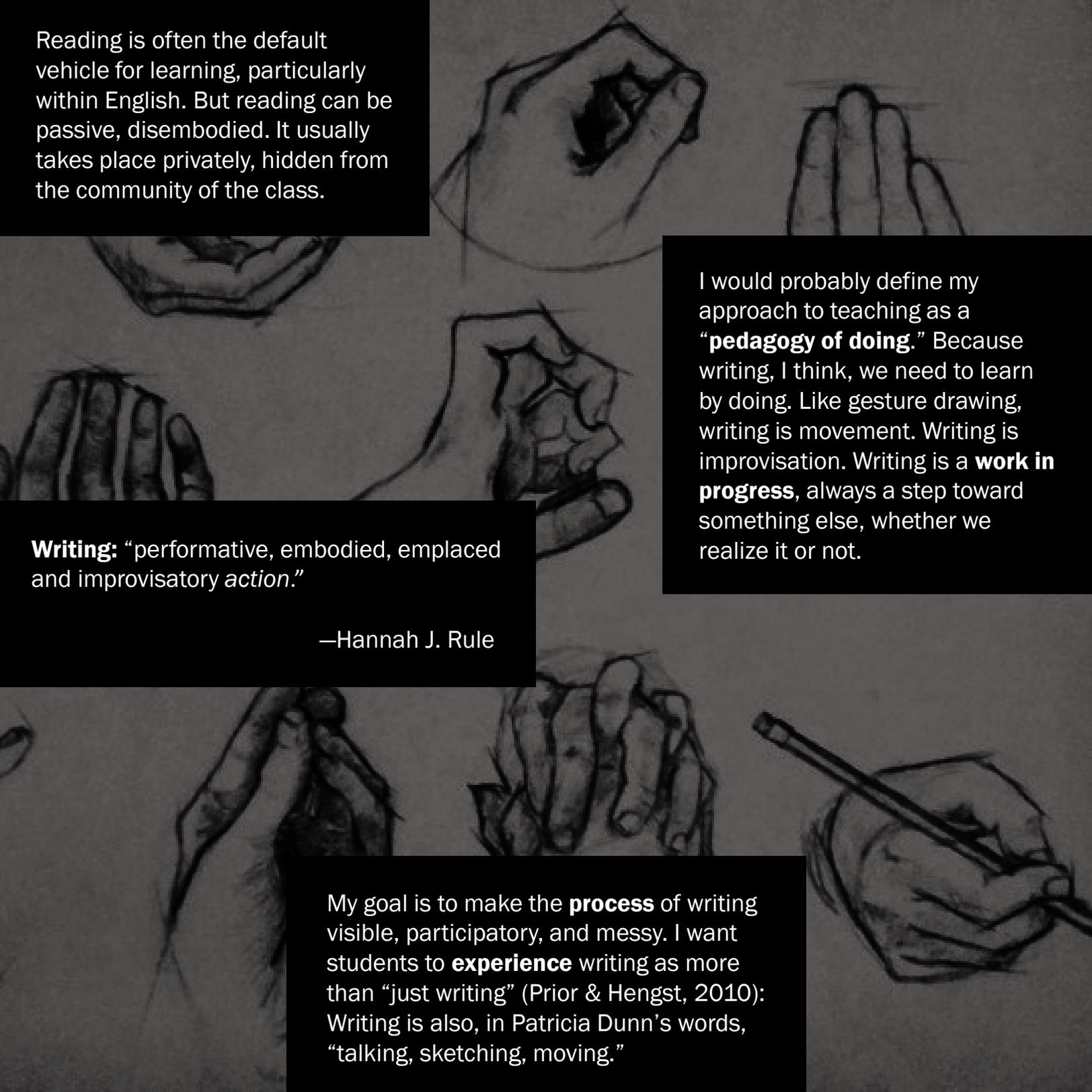
Student projects



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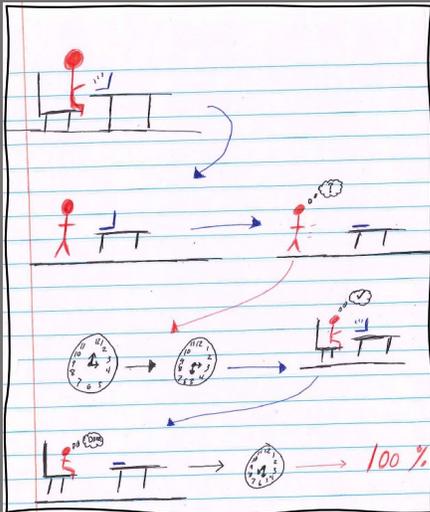
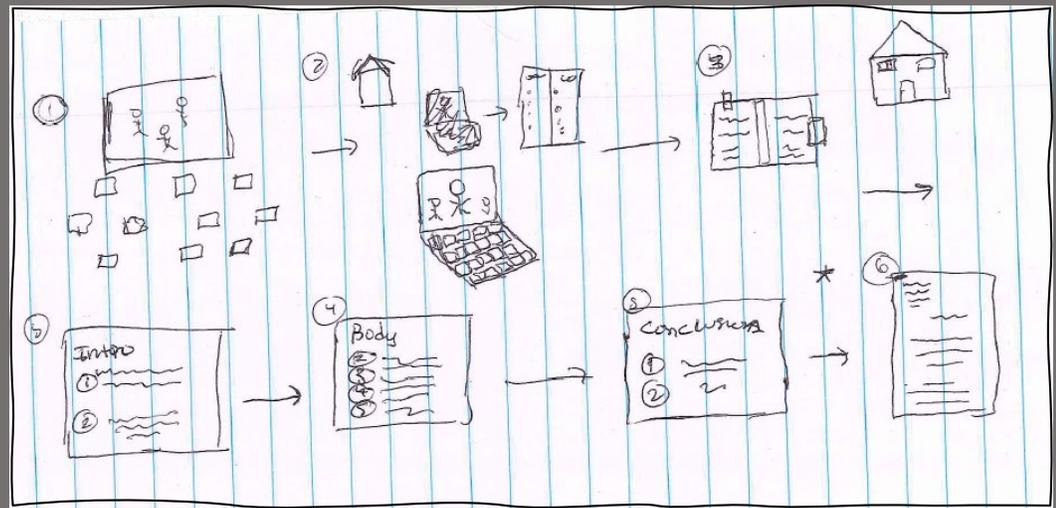
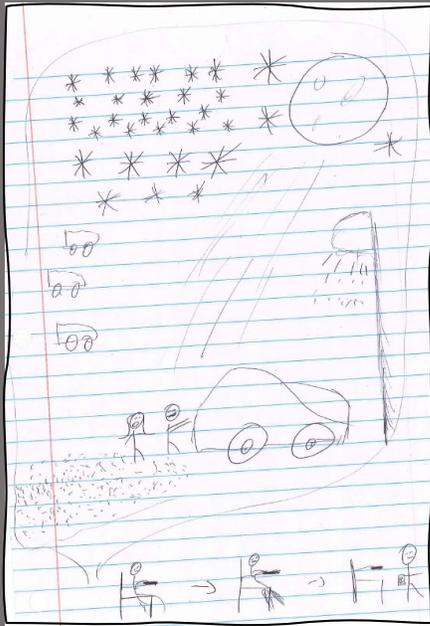
Reading is often the default vehicle for learning, particularly within English. But reading can be passive, disembodied. It usually takes place privately, hidden from the community of the class.

Writing: “performative, embodied, emplaced and improvisatory *action*.”

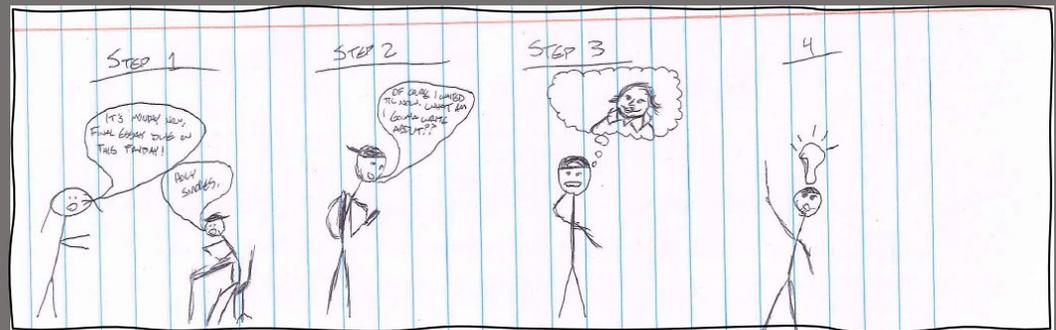
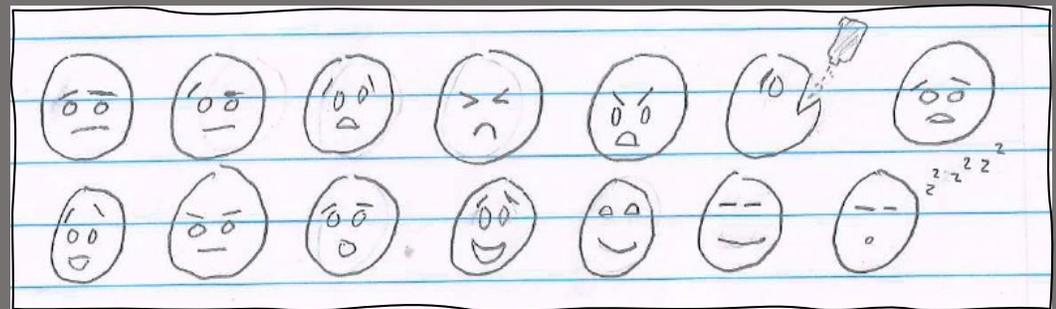
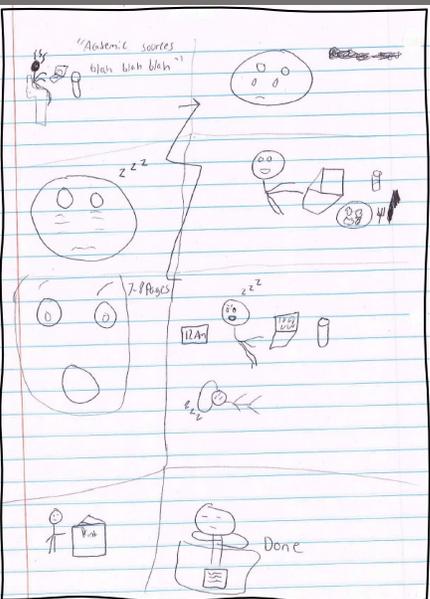
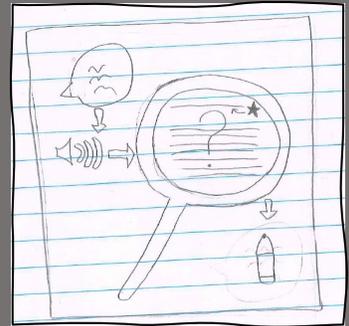
—Hannah J. Rule

I would probably define my approach to teaching as a “**pedagogy of doing**.” Because writing, I think, we need to learn by doing. Like gesture drawing, writing is movement. Writing is improvisation. Writing is a **work in progress**, always a step toward something else, whether we realize it or not.

My goal is to make the **process** of writing visible, participatory, and messy. I want students to **experience** writing as more than “just writing” (Prior & Hengst, 2010): Writing is also, in Patricia Dunn’s words, “talking, sketching, moving.”



In my classrooms, we practice **doing writing** in a variety of ways. In one of my favorite activities, I ask students to draw their writing processes. I then project their drawings on the wall, and we spend significant time learning strategies from one another at the same time as we consider the drawings themselves as compositions worth analyzing.



"[F]ocus on doing begins to mitigate fear, overthinking, uncertainty, and discomfort" (Rule, 2019).

Activity

Use PowerPoint to make a media artifact (a poster? a video? a diagram?) that defines the rhetorical term you have been assigned and provides an example of this term in use, *but you can't use words*.

In the notes on your "slide," make a case for why your term is the most essential concept in rhetoric and be prepared to argue your case with the others at your table.

I want to make writing—which in formal education is so often reduced to scripted transactions of papers and corrections—more flexible and more *human*.

In drawing studios, after composing gesture drawings, everyone puts their drawings up on the walls to discuss. Although it's called a "critique," the objective is not to point out flaws. The goal is to observe what happened—not only the drawings that were created, but also what people did to make them.

As a writing teacher, I want to create a space where writing is a **multimodal experiment**, and we **work together** to make sense of what each experiment means. And then we do it again.

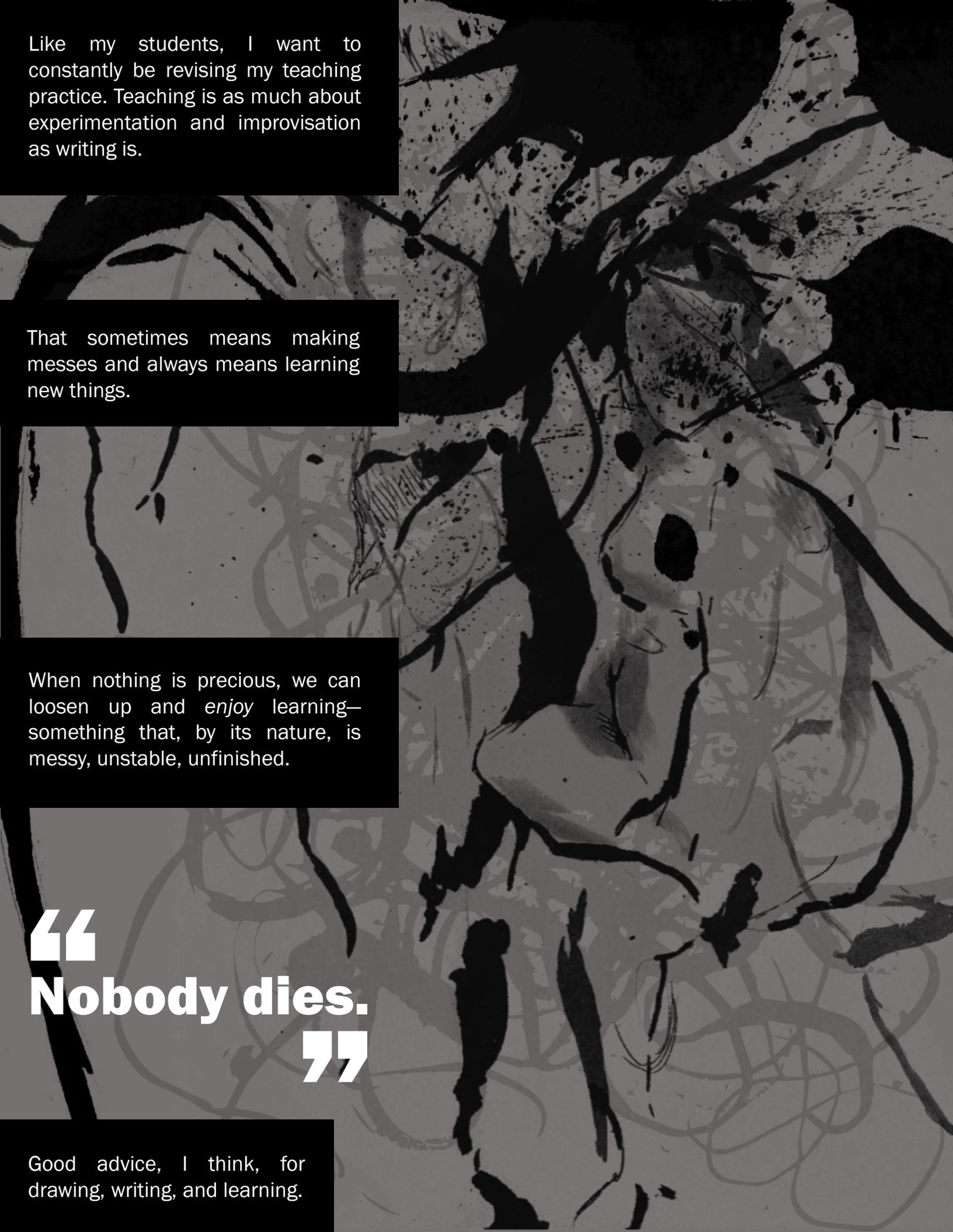
Collaborative Wireframing

- Each person adds *one* element to the wireframe sketch and then passes it on to the next person.
- When you're done, spread out all the pages where the whole group can see them.
- Discuss them as a group to decode what you think is the best design and write why you came to that decision.

"[W]e need to make a concerted effort to develop ways of examining final products... in relation to the processes composers employ. Additionally, we need to continue broadening our understanding of the multiplicity of modes, genres, moves, and strategies that might result in extremely compelling, purposeful work."

—Jody Shipka

Students whose literacies have often been marginalized—such as multilingual students or students with disabilities—are able to excel when the classroom ecology broadens what literacy means. In an environment where everyone is trying something new, difference isn't singled out.



Like my students, I want to constantly be revising my teaching practice. Teaching is as much about experimentation and improvisation as writing is.

That sometimes means making messes and always means learning new things.

When nothing is precious, we can loosen up and *enjoy* learning—something that, by its nature, is messy, unstable, unfinished.

“
Nobody dies.
”

Good advice, I think, for drawing, writing, and learning.