

## THE THREE PILLARS: FINAL FOUNDATIONS

OCTOBER 10, 2013

You now have the three pillars of our course:

**The Flipped Classroom** | This happens primarily through our website, which facilitates and emphasizes autodidactic, collaborative, and inquiry-based learning.

**The DAMAGES+ Rubric** | This gives you the language to analyze and emulate effective writing in any mode of discourse and for any purpose, and it is the primary tool of the central skill of metacognition.

**Grade Abatement** | This process removes the stress and stigma of grades and gives you, the student, greater agency, honesty, and self-awareness within the learning environment.

The website is chock full of this sort of stuff, including the document you're reading right now and the DAMAGES lecture/quiz that you can take here. You have printed copies of most of this and enough iDevices amongst you to have filled all the interstitial moments of the past month with these foundational ideas.

Which is also to say that if you *haven't* kept up with all this reading, you are in for a very long and probably frustrating year, unless you quickly and vigorously correct your ignorance.

You will continue to build the sort of ramiform and responsive web this course requires through our current and upcoming texts, including Jerry Jesness and Dan Pink<sup>1</sup>. Dan Pink's book, *Drive*, is about motivation, which should remind you of the first day of school. If you can dredge that memory up from the cavernous abyss in your heads, you'll remember making your motivations transparent:

**Intrinsic Motivation** | This internalized desire to learn and improve requires a thorough understanding of grade abatement, the course rubric, and the flipped classroom; it also requires enough metacognitive skill and tenacity to avoid the Dunning-Kruger effect.

**Extrinsic Motivation** | This is the sort of operant conditioning that has been used in your education without pause since you were very, very little. Think of stickers and gold stars and Honor Rolls.

Because the second motivation is ingrained in you, you have to be weaned off of it. It's not that intrinsic motivation has to be *replace* the extrinsic (that may be impossible); it's that your motivational schema is really out of whack. It overwhelmingly tilts toward the carrot and the stick.

The last piece of our pedagogical puzzle is one way to balance the intrinsic and extrinsic. It is an attempt to create a transparent link between the two motivations and to give you control over the Pavlovian side:

**Gamification** | The process of earning points for completing learning-related tasks and miscellaneous activities. (You can [read more about the concept here.](#))

For us, every XP-earning task will be connected directly to intrinsic learning. Make no mistake, however: You are earning points that curve your GAP score. It is a game. The idea is this:

You cannot learn if you are afraid of accurate self-assessment.

Accurate self-assessment -- accurate GAP scores -- will be lower than you want, at least at first.

∴ Therefore, you will not accurately self-assess/learn without a way to boost that score.

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<sup>1</sup> After we look at Pink, we may abandon our educational unit for a bit to talk about obscenity, profanity, and the importance of language. Halloween is coming up, after all, and Francine Prose will wait for us to finish discussing zombies and torture porn.

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That's a sort of syllogism, and it raises the question: How do we get you learning authentically without worrying about that final GAP score? The answer: We give you the opportunity to spam that GAP score with XP. You started the year with two of these:

1. Find your writing portfolio from last year.
2. Make a hall pass.

Those were easy, and while the first one is related to our course, the second really isn't. You will rarely see such gimme gamification in the future. The idea, after all, is to trick your grade-obsessed brain into learning and collaborating by giving it the sweet, sweet points it craves<sup>2</sup>.

Here's one of the remaining XP-earning tasks for the quarter:

- At the end of Q1, you will be given a difficult test on all of the pillars of the course, from GAP scoring to the DAMAGES+ rubric. You will be allowed to "cheat" -- remember your summer reading -- and your performance will earn you XP.

Here's another XP-earning assignment that was shared with all of you:

- Once you've gotten through all of the writing-related reading and revision for this week, figure out how to submit your response to the school's online newspaper. In order:

1. Locate the editors of the paper.
2. Register as a contributor to the paper.
3. Format and submit your work.
4. Revise according to any feedback.
5. Get your work published online.

One wrinkle: Not every XP-earning task is advertised, and you have to figure out the rules and rhythms of the course as you go along. For instance, students who conferenced with me first earned XP; so did the students below, whose emails about course-related materials showed initiative, amenability, and intelligence. So the verb I used before, "spam," may not be entirely accurate; it's much more a nascent understanding and responsiveness that you'll need.

For instance, this doesn't mean that you can spam me with emails to boost your final grade. Those of you who are accustomed to gaming the system in this way -- to cutting corners, copying homework, perhaps even selling fabricated assignments to your peers -- are going to find yourselves in a decidedly uncomfortable sort of conference at the end of the quarter.

Starting now, the expectation is that you take the initiative -- no carrot, no stick. Look for deeper patterns and truer skills, and you'll recognize the next such clandestine opportunity for XP. You'll also get better at the core skills and knowledge of the course, which will make your GAP score higher; and then you'll be able to intuit the XP-earning actions more easily; etc., etc., and you see where the cycle is going.

**A copy of the first XP-earning email of the year:**

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[REDACTED],

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<sup>2</sup> [Watch this video](#), if you haven't already. Now [read this article](#). Your brain is, most of the time, actively sabotaging you. Learn to fight against it -- learn to be capable psychonauts, as that video terms it -- and you will immediately find yourself more successful.

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The fact that you took the initiative to write me, and the humility it takes to ask for help, means that you would never deserve such a poor evaluation. Two of the key skills in this sort of learning environment are self-awareness and amenability; you seem to have both, which makes me confident you will be okay. It may not feel like that right now, but you can trust me.

You can also trust that you are not alone in your confusion. This is a paradigm shift, and it is difficult for most people to do that. Making the effort you are making to understand it puts you in the minority, however, and that is a very good thing.

My advice:

1. Start by identifying the steps you need to take. You have an essay, and you've done the reflection on your process, right? Your next step is to try to identify your own thesis.
  2. Read the emulation-through-analysis guide that has another student's work scanned into it. If it seems overwhelming at first, slow down and read it again.
  3. If you still feel confused, meet with me, and we'll go through your thesis writing together.
- There is a lot to read and a lot to take in. Give it time. You have no tests or quizzes to worry about, and when you are given something I call a "test," you will be able to collaborate on it. Everything in here is about learning. Sometimes learning is chaotic and messy, and it always starts with something we're not used to: confusion and a lack of understanding. If we knew it all already, there would be no reason to be here, right?

Keep letting me know how you're doing,

Mr. Eure

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From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, September 30, 2013 9:42 AM

Subject: Concerned

Mr. Eure,

I am concerned about my own work right now. Honestly if we were to have a conference of what grade I would deserve at this point, I would say 0. I am just confused. I've been so used to the usual process of writing a paper, handing it in, then getting it back and revising it. I don't know why it's so difficult for me to adjust to this new learning style but it is. It's hard for me to constantly check my email, keep up with the comments on your webpage, and everything else that's going on (hall pass, analogy essay, etc). I was just wondering if you had any suggestions of how I could keep up with everything and get all that I can out of it. You offer so much, I just want to be able to keep up and learn as much as I can. SO please!!! If you have any advice, I'd really appreciate it.

~[REDACTED]

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**A copy of the second XP-earning email of the year:**

Mr. Eure,

...I have read your grade abatement and I have a couple of questions after my first read through:

1. What approach do you recommend for "internalization of key rhetorical figures and strategies" (in addition to emulation through analysis)?
2. How does XP fit into the grade abatement process?

Besides these two questions I would also like to share with you a brief response to the last sentence of 5. The Dunning-Kruger Effect, "You might consider yourself an apprentice thinker, reader, and writer, in which case your teacher is here to mentor you." I have particularly strong positive connotations with the word "mentor" and I was greatly appreciative to see it used. Establishing an apprentice-to-mentor relationship with my teachers instead of the typical student-to-teacher relationship is something that has become increasingly important to me.

Lastly, I think that it is important that students are made aware of the censorship done by the school. It came up in conversation with another student and she was disturbed by the whole thing. Her reaction made me think that it was worth mentioning, and perhaps having a discussion about.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

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#### **An example of XP-earning insight from Friday, October 4:**

At the very end of seventh period on Friday, a group of four approached me to say the following:

"Did you give us this [Mensa cryptic] to see who would look the answers up and who would try to figure it out on their own?"

I said yes, that's one reason.

"Is this to see who just wants to get the right answers and who wants to learn something?"

I said yes, that's one reason<sup>3</sup>.

This group gets XP points, because they are absolutely right: One reason to give you a cryptic is to see who reflexively Googled the answers, desperate to finish early and get the right answers, despite this not being a light diversion, not a graded assignment. I wanted to see which of you allowed yourselves to struggle.

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A few more XP-earning achievements from the last five weeks<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup> Their moment of clarity had everything to do with their peers utterly missing the point and Googling the answers inside of ten minutes. Only one class period did this, and except that there is a sort of mob mentality that takes root in some classrooms, I'm not sure why.

<sup>4</sup> And you must remember that these are not necessarily actions that will earn you points in the future. To use the verb "spam" properly: The best (and maybe only) way to spam this course is to embrace the core skills

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- Setting up Google Groups and sharing materials with peers in order to facilitate learning
  - Sharing related texts or links with peers, which illustrates that ramiform learning we've talked about
  - Particularly thoughtful emails in the same vein as the above ones
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At this point, a portion of you are still looking for the shortcut. You want the cheat codes. You would, I imagine, happily bang your head into the wall if you thought that would ring up points like some kind of carnival test-your-strength game.

There is no cheat guide here. This, however, will help: [Level Design: To the Right, Hold on Tight](#). You will learn to play this particular game by playing it; if you think yourself above that trial-and-error intuition, [this is the only sound you're going to hear all year](#).

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outlined in the grade abatement guide -- for example, amenability and collegiality -- and do it in a way that doesn't reek of a sort of self-centered attempt to earn points.