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## Special Feature: The Future of Reading Assignments

One professor recently told me that he was asked by a friend, "Are you more afraid of AI undermining students' ability to write, or to read?" His answer was "to read". This question lies at the heart of this issue of the FD Newsletter. According to the recent CTL faculty survey on reading assignments, 88% of respondents indicated that the importance of acquiring reading skills for ICU students will either remain unchanged or increase in the future. With this in mind, I invited Prof. McGlothlin, Prof. Kibe, and Prof. Simons to discuss their creative approaches to designing reading assignments, including in-class group reading and device-free environments.

### 1. The Beginning of Reading?

Kei Nasu, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning / FD Director

February 2026

"Is this the end of reading?" This provocatively titled article by Beth McMurtrie in the May 2024 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* sparked much debate.[1] McMurtrie reported the serious concerns of university faculty in the US, who found that increasing numbers of their students, both in the humanities and sciences, were struggling with their reading assignments. A few months later, in an [podcast interview](#), she painted an alarming picture of young people who lack the endurance to read long passages, who are unable to understand the gist of an argument, and who do not know the joy of reading.[2]

"College students don't read books." We probably heard this back when we were students ourselves, but it seems clear that a significant shift is occurring in how students engage with books today. According to data presented by ICU library staff Hiroko Kihira in the journal *Daigaku jihō*,[3] the number of undergraduates who did not borrow a single book from the ICU library in AY2013 was 79 (3% of all ICU students), compared to 996 (33.5%) in AY2023. (Note that these figures exclude ebook views and online database access.) As there has been no change in the average number of books borrowed by the top 100 students who borrow the most books annually (298.7 books in 2023), we cannot simply conclude from this data that ICU students no longer read books. Nevertheless, given that the ICU library has long been known for the high number of books borrowed per student,[4] I was surprised to learn that one in three students did not borrow a single book in 2023. What is happening here?

The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably had a massive impact on learning. For three years, students were able to earn credits without having to pick up a book, as they attended lectures, received lesson materials, and submitted assignments online. Having become accustomed to the convenience of accessing the pages of a book we need in front of us on a screen, it is difficult even for researchers such as ourselves to go back to the way things were. Conversely, we now find it a hassle to make the effort to access texts that cannot immediately be read

online. Last year, for a group assignment in my General Education course, I allotted time for the students to go to the library and look for reference materials. Inexplicably, however, I found them repeating OPAC and Google searches on their laptops. “It looks like you have a few promising books there— why don’t you start by borrowing those?”, I prompted. Yet, the students would not move from their seats, and I realized that they wanted to minimize the risk of wasting time if they picked up a book that turned out to be useless.

The pandemic experience has highlighted our reliance on smartphones and social media for information acquisition, as well as our tendency to prioritize efficiency and seek maximum results with minimal time and effort. The 2022 revision of Japan’s curriculum guidelines for high schools (*Gakushū shidō yōryō*) for *kokugo* (Japanese language) created a subject dedicated to the study of “practical writing,” such as business proposals and instruction manuals, while reducing the time allocated toward studying novels, essays, and the classics. Moreover, as generative AI can now summarize even the longest documents for us in a matter of seconds, more and more people will find it bothersome to read complex texts.

Nevertheless, the ability to read texts independently and critically, whether in our primary or additional languages, remains essential for formulating our own ideas and expressing them in writing or orally. It is therefore a core skill to be fostered by a liberal arts education. Rather than simply lamenting the decline in our students’ reading skills, I think it is imperative that we continue to explore ways to position reading more effectively in our classes.

Let us return to the ICU library data: Kihira revealed that Stream 4 students in the ELA program began borrowing more library books because they are required to take an Extensive Reading component that involves reading [graded readers](#) every week. The average number of books borrowed in the year *after* completion of ELA was 22.1 books for Stream 2 students, who were *not* required to take Extensive Reading, and 34.8 books (1.6 times more) for Stream 4 students. As this suggests that curriculum design has a significant impact on students’ reading habits, I decided to stop distributing reading materials as PDFs or links and instead began encouraging students to visit the library more often.

I believe we can work toward ensuring that university marks the beginning, not the end, of reading for our students. Having reflected on my own teaching experiences and learnings over the years, I will share a few tips on how to effectively assign reading tasks in our courses.

### **1. Explain your choice of the reading material**

Students know they can easily access a fair amount of information on just about anything online or with the help of generative AI. Therefore, I always explain to my students why I think it is crucial for them to read the books and articles I have selected, and I make sure that they understand how the reading assignments relate specifically to the lectures and other parts of the course. Moreover, it is important to familiarize students with the specific writing styles of the field, especially since ICU courses are often attended by students from diverse majors.

## **2. Clarify your expectations**

In recent years, I have come to prioritize the time and effort that students take to engage with the assigned reading, more than their accurate comprehension of the content. I remind students that relying on AI to “understand” the content will undermine their learning, not only because doing so deprives them of the opportunity to grapple with documents themselves, but also because there is no single correct interpretation of a text in the field of history.

## **3. Take time to consider how you distribute the texts**

For my courses, I personally prefer to distribute the reading material in hard copy. PDFs might be all right for short texts, but for longer texts I believe there is a significant difference in the way we process and interpret information digitally and on paper. When I provide printouts, I use the booklet function on the printer, rather than simply stapling the pages in the top left-hand corner. I add paperbacks to the course-reading list in the library or encourage students to buy them in hard copy.

## **4. Encourage all students to share their reading outcomes**

Instructing the class to “discuss what you have read” is too open-ended and may result in the discussion being dominated by a handful of enthusiastic students who have only read the first few pages. I try to encourage all my students to share their opinions by getting them to complete a one-page worksheet or, for small classes, to share a Google Doc with their questions, notes, and findings from other sources. These worksheets and shared documents can then be used for revision or writing essays.

## **5. Make space for students to say they don't understand**

I have found that students who lack confidence tend to make very general comments or simply agree with their classmates’ opinions because they are afraid to look like the only ones who haven’t grasped the reading material. I give such students an opportunity to contribute to the class by encouraging them to articulate what it is that they don’t understand, which then stimulates discussion as other students share their ideas.

[1] Beth McMurtrie, “Is This the End of Reading?”, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 9, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/is-this-the-end-of-reading>. ICU members can read the article via [ProQuest](#).

[2] Jack Stripling, host, *College Matters from The Chronicle*, podcast, season 1, episode 1, “Is Reading Over for Gen Z Students?”, *The Chronicle*, September 10, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/podcast/college-matters-from-the-chronicle/is-reading-over-for-gen-z-students>.

[3] Hiroko Kihira, “‘Daigakusei wa hon o yomanai’ wa hontōka?: Chōsa kara kangaeru dokusho suishin no hinto” [Is it true that university students don’t read? Tips gleaned from

a survey on reading promotion], *Daigaku jihō*, 422 (May 2025), 54–59, <https://daigakujihou.shidaren.or.jp/list/contents/?jihou=422>.

[4] *AERA MOOK daigaku rankingu 2023 nenban* [2023 AERA MOOK university rankings] (Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2022), 216–21.

## 2. Experiments in Strengthening Students' Reading Skills

Thomas McGlothlin, Department of Humanities

February 2026

Helping students become stronger readers has long been at the core of my pedagogy. Several observations have convinced me that this focus is a worthwhile investment of time and effort, including class time. First, in watching groups of students read and discuss texts, I have noticed that many – regardless of native language – struggle to grasp the meaning of each sentence and how individual sentences and paragraphs relate to each other. Instead, they guess at a text's meaning by recombining any familiar-sounding words and phrases that jump off the page. Second, many students seem unaware of the wealth of resources available through the library. Their go-to, even for complex questions, is whatever comes up at the top of a quick Internet search. Third, the skills necessary for good reading – the patient, careful attention to what another is actually saying, and the use of one's own experiences and expectations as a starting point for understanding but not ending point – are the same skills necessary for respectful, meaningful dialogue.

When designing learning experiences for reading, I try to be clear about what aspect of reading I want to strengthen. For example, do I want to broaden students' exposure to what is "out there"? Do I want to strengthen their close reading skills?

### **Building close reading skills**

I focused on close reading skills in a recent foundation course. For each super-4 session, I assigned about 10 pages of reading. I also wrote 5 to 8 multiple-choice reading comprehension questions. During the final 30 minutes of each class, students – sitting in assigned groups of 4 – would start the reading assignment for the next class. I gave them the reading comprehension questions (but not answer options!), which they worked together to answer. Whatever was not completed during class was homework. Students then spent the first 20 minutes of the next class – in different assigned groups – reviewing and discussing the text before taking the multiple-choice quiz.

Throughout in-class reading and review time, I circulated among groups, listening to their discussions, asking questions about the text, and sometimes giving mini-lessons on reading comprehension strategies. We spent the rest of class time discussing the ideas in the text.

In course feedback, many highlighted the confidence they gained from completing difficult reading assignments. Several also appreciated the focus made possible by the device-free classroom policy (about which none complained). I provided printouts of all readings and encouraged students to annotate them as they read. In fact, the only materials students could consult during the final exam were their annotated readings!

### **Engaging primary and secondary sources**

In my area major courses, I adopt a different approach. For each daily reading assignment,

I develop a one-page “pre-discussion sheet” with questions designed to guide students’ analysis and evaluation of the text. Students are required to come to class with this completed. These sheets are the foundation of our in-class discussions, and I collect them after class (giving feedback on ideas but grading only for completion, not correctness).

In several area major classes, I also seek to increase students’ exposure to literature in the field. At the beginning of the course, each student selects a work from a list I have developed of important primary and secondary sources related to the course. Each day of class begins with a period of 15 minutes when students are reading their selected work on their own, with me available as a resource. Students then spend 5 minutes paired up with a partner (randomly assigned each day) talking about what they are reading. By immediately explaining their reading to someone, students are able to solidify their understanding of the text.

Few finish the selected work during the term, but that is not the goal. The idea is to get them used to reading that kind of text, with me available to help them understand difficult passages. Near the end of the term, each student gives a short presentation on what they have read. Although the daily reading takes up the first 20 minutes of each super-4 class block, I have found the reinforcement and enrichment of class content to be worth the time.

### **Engagement and accountability for digital readings**

Finally, I adopt yet another approach in my general education course, Introduction to Christianity. My goal there is for students to read and engage together key excerpts from the Bible, but the excerpts are too long to be completed in class. So, I use an online tool called Perusall. I upload the excerpts into Perusall, and students begin reading and discussing the text together in class, in assigned groups. They then complete the unfinished portion as homework, making 2+ thoughtful comments in Perusall on the text. Those comments then form the basis of an in-class discussion of the text during the following class.

Perusall attempts to measure how much of the text students read by tracking how much active time they spend on each page (not just how much time the Perusall tab was open). For each student, I receive a report of how much of the text they “read” and how long they spent actively engaging the reading as a whole. I tell the students I use this report as part of my assessment, but I give them the opportunity to challenge my grade if they believe Perusall gave me an inaccurate picture of how much they read; last year, none did. Perusall also flags comments that were copied and pasted in, which often sound suspiciously like AI-generated text. (It also offers to use AI to grade the students’ comments, but I refuse to use this service!)

The plus of Perusall is that it allows students to engage the text and their classmates’ comments on it using any digital device (including smartphones). It also provides an accountability mechanism – no doubt imperfect, but better than nothing – for students reading the whole assigned text. The minus, though, is that students must use digital devices during class if we are to engage the text in class. The amount of distraction digital devices introduce into the classroom is tremendous. (Have you observed what students are doing?) Some students also tell me they dislike reading long texts on screens. I wish I could use a

device-free classroom policy in my GE course, as I do in my foundation course, but the reading requirements do not seem to allow it.

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of AI summaries has only strengthened my conviction that reading comprehension skills are worth the investment. As Prof. Marszalec argued during the faculty retreat, AI can increase the cost of information by flooding the world with good-sounding but unreliable “information” that requires verification. At the same time, using AI without having the skills to check its output is really just a form of “mindless magic.”

Many are worried that students will graduate without knowing how to get AI to produce results. I do not share that worry. AI aims to please and will be easier and easier to use. My worry is that students will graduate without the fundamental skills needed to check AI's output. The ability to ask AI to do things, such as summarize texts, will be universal and therefore effectively worthless on the job market. The ability to check and critically engage its output, by contrast, will require strong foundational skills, including reading comprehension skills. Those skills, I predict, will be what really matters for our graduates' careers.

### 3. Empowering Readers: Strategies to Improve Students' Reading Skills

Takashi Kibe, Department of Politics and International Studies

February 2026

Even at ICU, there are quite a few students who face reading difficulties. Based on course comment sheets, the percentage of students who face reading difficulties appears to have increased compared to 20 years ago. In the age of generative AI, it is even more imperative for educators to consciously work toward improving reading skills.

Ever since I joined the faculty in 2000, I have sought to improve students' reading skills along with expository skills (writing, presentations, Q&A). In fact, my efforts in this regard have involved improving my own reading skills and adapting my teaching methods to help students develop their reading skills. Here, I will share the helpful strategies I've developed from a quarter century of experience.

In my courses, I set a reading assignment (RA) task in every class, with the exception of the first introductory class and the final summary class. Based on my students' comment sheets, my courses are known for their large number of RAs, which likely affects the number of enrolments but also seems to attract students who want to improve their reading skills or prepare for the large volume of reading they will be required to do when studying abroad. Short RA tasks include book chapters, excerpts, and articles/essays (sometimes more than one per class), and longer tasks include entire paperbacks or pocket books. For example, for my foundation course (3 credits) in the previous spring term, I set five pocket books (including 2 novels), 4 paperbacks, and 8 book chapters or excerpts (including one in English).

Simply setting a large number of RAs, however, would not improve my students' reading skills. Rather, my courses would only be known for being very difficult. In my experience, the following points need to be considered for effective reading development:

#### 1. Student mindset

The development of students' reading skills is greatly influenced by their mindset. In my classes, therefore, I discuss two common psychological barriers that can hinder reading skill improvement: (1) the idea that reading difficulties stems from a lack of one's innate ability, and (2) the idealized model of the "genius" student, often from junior and senior high school, who seems to be able to grasp reading material instantly (e.g., scoring top marks in an exam by simply skimming a textbook just before it). I suspect that many students grapple with these barriers at the same time. Students who see their own reading difficulties as a question of ability or talent are likely to find each RA a painful reminder of their own incompetence. Approaching each RA as an opportunity to prove their ability will rarely be fruitful—students may refuse to skip parts they don't understand, seeing it as a personal failure. Often, this means that they will end up running out of time and are unable to finish reading the

entire text. While it would be better for them to skip any difficult parts and get an overview of the whole text first, before deciding which parts are worthwhile revisiting, their mindset limits their flexibility, rendering them unable to develop effective reading strategies (indeed, it is natural for humans to prefer to minimize one's exposure to unpleasantness). For such students, it is important for us to emphasize that reading, like any skill, will only improve through practice, and that skill is not a matter of one's innate ability or talent.

## **2. Guidance**

I usually guide my students' reading three to four times in each course, for about 10 to 20 minutes each time. It is important to show them how to read effectively. Briefly, effective reading is achieved through active reading. I discourage my students from adopting a passive approach (i.e., the idea that one is "given" an RA will tend to make one passive from the outset). Rather, our main focus is on active reading, identifying the steps necessary to make the RA easier to understand and then putting those steps into practice. At this stage, I explain why it is effective to aim to read each RA three times. For English-language texts, I also provide guidance on how to read academic articles, which also helps to improve the students' academic writing skills. I cannot overemphasize the importance of learning and exploring effective reading strategies, especially considering the busy lives of students.

## **3. Output**

Output is an important factor to consider for active reading. While students are reading, they also produce output (e.g., noting questions and opinions in the margins, underlining, folding the edges of the pages), and the comment sheets also provide an opportunity for output. In their comment sheets, I always ask them to write about the RAs, not only comments on the content but also reflections on their own reading. I also ask them to write about how many times they were able to read the texts, how long it took for them to read each text, and which parts they found challenging and why. It is vital for students to know that the number of times they read a text will not be reflected in their grade. I ask them to honestly write if they were unable to read a text, and reflect on the reasons for this and the strategies they have developed to improve their reading comprehension.

## **4. Relevant Exams**

If completing the RAs leads to good grades, students will have a greater incentive to read. Therefore, I make sure to quote from the RAs in the first part of both the mid-term and end-of-term exams, testing the students' reading comprehension. Rereading the RAs is the most effective way for my students to prepare for these exams.

Limitations of space prevent me from delving more deeply into other topics here, such as how setting appropriate RAs can determine half of the success of a class, the significance of diverse reading material for RAs, the importance of the classics, the lack of a bridge that connects what students learn in ELA and their Japanese skills, the need for close reading of texts, the benefits of reading groups, and keeping up our own reading as researchers. For

now, however, I hope you will find some of the above strategies a useful reference for your own classes and students.

## 4. Reading Together in the Analogue Classroom

Christopher Simons, Department of Humanities

February 2026

During lunch at the Faculty Retreat in February 2025, Professor Joo-Young Jung recommended several academic articles on the detrimental effects of student laptop computer use in the classrooms. One study concluded that taking notes on a laptop made student learning less effective than note-taking on paper due to differences between simply transcribing the lecturer's words (touch-typing on a laptop) versus processing and reframing arguments and key information (on paper) (Mueller & Oppenheimer 2013). Another determined that student laptop use not only hindered students' own learning, but negatively affected the concentration of nearby peers (Sana et al. 2013). Following up on this research, I encountered other studies with results showing the negative effects of classroom computer and mobile phone use. I had noticed anecdotally, due to laptop use in my classrooms, some responsible students seemed not to have learned key information that had been repeated in lectures several times during the course.

Therefore, from spring term 2025, I changed all my classes to analogue or digital-free teaching environments. Now, students put away their phones, computers, iPads etc. when a class starts. Computers are allowed for some group work activities; but after observing that many students immediately begin using messaging apps and social media when they are allowed to open their laptops, I may limit this use in the future. Currently, the instructor uses a computer to show slides, but the classes are gradually becoming completely 'flipped', with the goal of not using the projector during class time.

When I first added the 'analogue classroom' policy to my syllabi, I expected a lot of student push-back; however, there was none. Students with LAS accommodations sometimes request to use computers, but I ask these students to sit at the front of the classroom so I can help keep them focused during lectures. Overall, students seem to recognise the benefits offered by the analogue classroom, including: improved listening to the instructors and to each other; more effective note-taking on paper (including annotating photocopies of course texts directly); and improved results on quizzes and exams.

Reading, as always, remains a challenge for students, especially in pre-1900 English literature courses where the weekly reading can take on average 4–6 hours, compared to 2–3 hours for a class in modern literature. All my undergraduate courses now include a short weekly quiz to encourage students to complete the reading and check that they have learned the basic facts about a text (author, title, date, and key terms). The length of the quiz (usually 1–2 pages) and the balance of short- and long-answer questions depends on the number of students in the course and whether they are also completing a weekly writing assignment. After discussing strategies for the analogue classroom with Professor McGlothlin, I introduced to my classes his method of giving students group work time before the quiz to discuss the materials and share information about anticipated questions. This gives students

who have done the reading an opportunity to teach what they know to their classmates, which reinforces their own learning. In contrast, students who have not completed the reading can learn something from their classmates and have a chance of performing better on the quiz.

One benefit of the analogue classroom in which students and instructors read together for 45 minutes to one hour of class time is that the instructor feels confident that, through group reading, every student is getting *some* experience of reading key course texts, with the support of their classmates. The instructor can confidently make exam questions based on the sections of the reading done in class, knowing that every student should be able to answer those questions correctly. Other questions can check that the students are reading the remainder of the reading assignment as homework.

This last area remains a challenge. Although overall student confidence has increased with the knowledge that they can read complex texts and answer questions about them in quizzes and exams, some students have become overly reliant on the in-class group reading to pass a course. At first, I was making 70-80% of the exam questions answerable based on in-class reading (at least for GE and foundation classes); it's probably necessary to reduce this to 50-60%. If a student attends all classes, pays attention, and retains what they learn during class through good note-taking, they might be able to receive a 'D' in the course, even if they never open their textbook at home. However, this may be (as Ministry of Education guidelines suggest) too low a standard for a passing grade.

The other challenge that has arisen this year from in-class reading is that it prioritises the learning needs of lower-achieving students in the class, rather than top students. The few students who spend hours conscientiously completing all the required reading for every class have stated that they sometimes feel bored, or that they find themselves working as unpaid TAs, explaining key vocabulary to their groups and helping them interpret the texts. The methodology of in-class reading and quizzes may thus encourage more diligent students to read less. One solution suggested by a TA is to stream the reading groups every class by asking students to confirm if they have done the weekly reading. Students who have done the reading can be put together in a separate group and given more challenging discussion questions.

Finally, the analogue classroom has raised some administrative challenges. Photocopying the required course readings every week takes extra instructor or TA/CS time and photocopier resources. Paper quizzes need to be scanned after each quiz is complete, to provide a backup for grading records. Finally, grading handwritten quizzes and essays takes more time due to reading student handwriting. However, overall, the experience of the analogue classroom has been positive so far, and I plan to continue all my courses as analogue courses.

Research from recent peer-reviewed and pre-publication or conference papers suggests that workers whose productivity and achievements benefit most from AI are those who are already experts in their fields, i.e. people who have strong domain knowledge and critical thinking skills (Dinkman et al., Ikpen et al., Vaccaro et al.). The near future is uncertain, but

sending students out into the world who can work with, or compete with, current AI models—or at least accurately evaluate the quality of their output—is essential. The skills required for effective working with AI often seem to align with traditional liberal arts educational outcomes for students, including: the acquisition of a wide base of interdisciplinary knowledge and vocabularies, with narrow and deep domain expertise in one or two fields; the ability to formulate research questions and hypotheses based on expert knowledge; and the ability to search for new information and judge its value and its relevance. Counter-intuitively, by encouraging students to develop their reading and listening skills in a technology-free classroom environment, the analogue classroom may be a useful, even necessary, tool for preparing them to flourish in an AI-dominated world.

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## Fostering Inclusion and Connection: CTL's Language Program for Faculty

Mari Tsujita, Department of Education and Language Education

June 2025

Language Program for Faculty (LPF) is a unique CTL initiative in which ICU's teacher training students teach Japanese to faculty members and their families. A pilot program was conducted in AY 2024, thanks to funding from the Japan ICU Foundation (JICUF). In this report, I will summarize the development of LPF from its inception in April 2024 to its implementation in January and February 2025.

The LPF was instigated by CTL director Kei Nasu's proposal for a faculty-oriented language program last April. I immediately expressed my support, as I was conscious of the need for Japanese language classes for faculty. After consulting Professor Sunyoung Chun, who organizes tutor training sessions at CTL's Writing Support Desk, we decided to ask students enrolled in ICU's Japanese Language Teacher Training Program to devise an appropriate language curriculum for faculty. The students, supervised by Professor Chun, planned to apply for a JICUF faculty grant in order to present the results of this project at a teacher training conference. With Professor Chun on board, and supported by CTL staff members Keiko Nagase and Ryohei Nagahama, the program finally began to take shape.

The program was taught by five students (4 undergraduate and 1 graduate student) in the Japanese Language Teacher Training Program, called student instructors (SIs). First, in October 2024, we conducted a needs survey to ascertain the proficiency level and learning objectives of faculty members who had expressed interest in participating in our pilot program. We found that potential participants were most interested in improving their listening and speaking skills. The survey respondents felt that they were unable to communicate effectively in Japanese, as they were teaching classes, advising, and/or supervising theses in English.

Drawing on the results of this survey, we worked with the SIs to devise the following topics for the five 2.5-hour-long lessons to be held on Friday afternoons in January and February 2025.

- Lesson 1: First day of class (e.g., course description, syllabus, study advice)
- Lesson 2: Daily life in ICU and beyond
- Lesson 3: Conversing with coworkers
- Lesson 4: Conversing with coworkers and students
- Lesson 5: Reflections for further learning and presentations

The first lesson was held at CTL on January 10, 2025, with 13 faculty members as students, and subsequent lessons were attended by about 10 faculty members. Each lesson was taught by two SIs, who prepared content and materials on the above-listed topics. Every class was

very lively. In the first half of the lesson, the SIs presented the topic for the day and then the students formed groups to work on practice exercises together. In the second half of the lesson, the students presented a roleplay to the class or read out an email they had composed, and the SIs provided feedback, writing and explaining helpful expressions on the whiteboard. The SIs then reflected on the main study points and summarized the lesson. In the final lesson, the students consolidated all that was learned in the first four lessons to present a roleplay on a topic of their choice, such as a dialogue with a colleague, a visit to the city office, or a slideshow presentation on their field of specialization. One student roleplayed a message in Japanese to students enrolled in their course, and we heard later that they successfully replicated this in their actual course.

We were pleased that the pilot program achieved LPF's primary objective, which is to connect ICU students who are studying to become Japanese language teachers with faculty members and their families who want to improve their Japanese-language skills. In their feedback, the SIs mentioned the benefits of hands-on teaching experience and the opportunity to interact with faculty: "I learned how difficult it can be to design lessons from the learners' perspective, but I really enjoyed my discussions with the participants"; "It was a valuable opportunity to design and teach a Japanese-language curriculum under the guidance of professors in the field." Positive feedback we received from satisfied participants included: "I felt the best part of the LPF was the obvious enthusiasm of the student instructors, and also the faculty that helped them set up this programme"; "I feel like the LPF met two needs at once: providing community for faculty, and helping faculty improve their Japanese." Moreover, the participation of family members of faculty also seems to have fostered a more relaxing atmosphere. One participant remarked, "I do believe it is worth continuing this program and also to stress that it is open for family members too. It is a wonderful chance for us to interact with our spouse's colleagues on top of gaining some knowledge and daily life skills necessary for getting by in Japan."

Aspects that could be improved upon included more consideration for the different levels of Japanese-language skills among the participants. Those at beginner and intermediate levels found the lessons too advanced. In future, we may need to offer separate classes for different levels or to consider these differences when separating the students into groups or pairs. We should also allocate more time for lesson preparation, as each pair of SIs did not have time to discuss the different lessons they were teaching with each other, resulting in quite a lot of work for the support faculty as well. In order to continue the LPF, we will need to find ways to improve the program to make it more sustainable. We aim to establish LPF as a vibrant space for ICU students to gain practical teaching experience and for ICU faculty and their family members to enhance their Japanese language skills.

Finally, we wish to thank all the faculty members and their families who participated in the LPF, CTL staff, and the professors who guided the SIs: Sunyoung Chun, Atsuko Handa, and Yutaka Sato.



## Case Studies on Using Mentimeter & Notion to Support Course Design and Research -CTL EdTech Forum Report- Yu-Kei Tse, Department of Society, Culture and Media

November 2025

I had the opportunity to share my experiences with colleagues at the second EdTech Forum on 8 September 2025, where I presented on the integration of two digital tools—**Mentimeter** and **Notion**—in my teaching and research practices. This session aimed to invite colleagues to discuss how we can more effectively enhance interactivity, organization, and collaboration in both classroom and research settings through diverse methods and tools.

As faculty members, we have been facing the growing challenge of navigating teaching and research environments that are rapidly evolving with the rise of diverse digital tools and generative AI technologies. At times, we may also feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of new tools available and uncertain about whether—and how— they can be effectively used in our teaching and research. While I think that many tools can enhance our work, I also believe that they should be regarded as supportive means rather than ends in themselves. To adopt any tool effectively, the primary task is to identify what we need and what we aim to achieve in our teaching and research. With this perspective in mind, I shared with colleagues the challenges and needs I have noticed in both teaching and research, and how adopting Mentimeter and Notion has helped me address these challenges.

In the first half of my talk, I discussed how I have integrated **Mentimeter**—an interactive presentation tool that allows real-time engagement with audiences—to enhance classroom interaction and participation. One of the key characteristics of ICU education is its emphasis on interactive teaching and learning in small, discussion-oriented classes. However, in practice, my colleagues and I often encounter the challenge that students are not always as active in participating in class activities for various reasons. This tendency becomes more noticeable in larger classes—many students who are confident and vocal in small-group settings may find it difficult to speak up in larger classrooms, particularly when communicating in a language that is not their first.

To cope with this challenge, I have incorporated Mentimeter in my classes, especially in large ones with over 100 students. I have found that it helps create a more inclusive and interactive atmosphere for students who might hesitate to speak in class. By asking students to respond to different questions using Mentimeter’s functions such as live polls, word clouds, and multiple-choice questions, I can collect, display, and discuss their responses in real time in an easy-to-understand, visual format. These visualizations then serve as prompts for deeper discussion or as effective transitions into the core themes of the topic.

As an example, I shared during the talk that in one of my classes on the changing role of television in contemporary society, I often use Mentimeter to ask students questions such as “Do you have easy access to a television set?” or “How do you watch television?” as

icebreakers and as a way for me to learn more about their television-viewing experiences. I also respond to some of the students' answers by briefly sharing my own experiences or thoughts, so that students feel more comfortable raising their hands to elaborate further on their own experiences. The fact that Mentimeter also enables students to learn more about their peers' perspectives further contributes to creating a more engaging and interactive classroom atmosphere.

The second half of my talk focused on **Notion**, a digital note-taking and platform designed for organizing materials, notes, and collaborative projects. I shared how I have gradually incorporated Notion into both my course management and research workflows. Working in the field of media and cultural studies, I need to continuously monitor new developments surrounding media industries and technologies. My primary need, therefore, has been to find a tool that allows me to systematically collect, organize, store, and analyze a wide range of online materials—including news articles, videos, and other resources—that can be used for both teaching and research. In this regard, Notion's database functions have become central hubs in my workflow, enabling me to maintain easily accessible collections of resources that I can revisit, update, and share when necessary.

During the Q&A session, several colleagues expressed interest in exploring how these tools could be adapted to their own disciplines, and we also discussed possible institutional support for expanding the use of educational tools across departments. Overall, presenting at the EdTech Forum provided an opportunity to reflect on my own teaching and research practices and to exchange ideas about the evolving role of digital technologies in higher education. Moving forward, I look forward to having more opportunities for faculty members to exchange ideas and share our pedagogical goals, teaching strategies, and research experiences. Such exchanges, I believe, can foster stronger collaboration, mutual learning, and continuous improvement in how we teach and conduct research at ICU.

## Reflections on the Oxford EMI Training Course

Kairi Shimabukuro, Department of Society, Culture and Media

November 2025

I decided to attend the Oxford EMI online training course in August 2025 because I'd been feeling anxious about whether I had the necessary language skills to teach in English for the first time at ICU. The week-long course was taught by a British instructor. Our Zoom sessions were scheduled to accommodate the different time zones of the participants, including Japan, Turkey, and Taiwan, which meant that it was 7pm for me in Japan. As I'm used to switching off from work mode in the evenings, I found it especially challenging to participate in discussions that were entirely in English. Nevertheless, the week went really quickly, and I learned a great deal. I'd like to share two of my biggest takeaways from the course here.

First, it is important to be creative and flexible when teaching in English to students with diverse backgrounds. I realized how much we can help students' comprehension if we keep our vocabulary as simple as possible, repeat or rephrase key expressions, and use contrasts, synonyms, and concrete examples. I especially appreciated the technique of "chunking," that is, grouping words into meaningful units and pausing between them as we speak. It was an important discovery for me because I had always believed that all I needed to do to be understood in English was to speak slowly. After the course, I confirmed the importance of chunking in an English-language announcement on the subway: "The local train / bound for Ogikubo / is arriving at / track one."

Second, there are many different ways to teach. It is particularly important to ask questions in class that requiring critical thinking rather than simple answers, in order to stimulate students to think and participate more actively in class. Making effective use of both types of questions reduces the amount of time the teacher speaks and gives students more opportunities to think and speak independently. Reducing the teacher's speaking time is not only beneficial for students, but also takes the pressure off teachers like myself who are anxious about their own English-language proficiency. It was reassuring to realize that teaching does not necessarily mean that I have to give long lectures in English.

Overall, the Oxford EMI online training course was a valuable learning experience, which has given me a firm foundation for tackling this new challenge of teaching in English.

# From the Front Lines of the Writing Support Desk (WSD): An Administrator's Perspective on WSD's Appeal

Ryo Tamura, Center for Teaching and Learning

November 2025

[The Writing Support Desk \(WSD\)](#) is a service where student tutors support ICU students with their academic writing through one-on-one tutorial sessions. This year marks the 15th anniversary of the service, which began in 2010. We provide comprehensive support for writing various types of academic documents, both in Japanese and English, from the stage of brainstorming through to finalization. In recent years, the number of users has been increasing.

Since joining the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) as a general staff member in December 2023, I have been in charge of WSD operations for about two years. Although it has been a short period, taking on the role of supporting WSD's efforts from the inside has given me many opportunities to learn about the values it has upheld and the expertise it has cultivated over its 15-year history.

In this article, I would like to introduce the various appeals of the WSD that I have discovered through my experience as the staff member in charge.

## 1. WSD Tutors as Facilitators Who "Elicit" the Writer's Ideas

Before I was assigned to the WSD, I had assumed that the purpose of the WSD was "to help students write high-quality academic papers," and the role of WSD tutors was "to teach students how to write."

However, I soon realized this idea was mistaken. The Tutor Manual, a document distributed to all tutors, outlines the WSD tutor's role as follows:

...WSD tutors encourage students to "identify" and "resolve" issues in their papers on their own. Tutors ask writers appropriate questions about their papers and offer hints, serving as good listeners while students do the talking. By repeating this process, writers are able on their own to deepen their understanding of their topics, structure, research methods, and the direction they want to go in their papers. If students are able to learn the foundation of writing techniques through this process, then they will be able to write high quality papers even without the help of a tutor.

What is emphasized here is the tutor's role as someone who "elicits" the writer's ideas. The goal is not for the tutor to "give" the writer answers, but for the writer to "identify" the answers that should already exist within them. To achieve this, tutors are required to ask questions from various perspectives to stimulate the writer's thinking, while they are prohibited from "editing" or "correcting" the writer's papers. This philosophy — that the WSD

must commit to the "writer's growth" rather than merely the paper as an output—has been consistently valued since the establishment of the WSD.

Observing actual tutorial sessions, I can see that this WSD philosophy has deeply permeated the tutors. In most sessions, the majority of the voices heard belong to the tutee (writer), not the tutor. The tutee is prompted to express, in their own words, the problems they are facing and what they intend to write, in response to the tutor's questions. This process of articulation allows the writer's thoughts to be objectively organized, clarifying what they want and need to write. While it is clear that leading this entire process is a highly demanding task, I feel that our tutors are fulfilling this role very well.

## **2. A Rich Environment Supporting Tutor Development**

As mentioned, a very high level of skill is required of WSD tutors, and what makes this possible is the existence of a rich environment, including the training program, that supports their growth. Below, I will introduce the collaborative efforts between faculty/staff and tutors to enhance the quality of tutorials.

Students hired as WSD tutors are generally required to undergo approximately six hours of new tutor training. This training, supervised by the WSD Advisors (\*), includes a lecture on the aforementioned WSD philosophy and multiple practical tutorial session exercises. The exercise component is broadly divided into the following three stages:

*(\*) Faculty members who collaborate with administrative staff on WSD operations, tutor recruitment, and training. Currently, Professor Sunyoung Chun handles Japanese tutor recruitment/training, while ELA lecturer/instructors Susan Edwards, Emily Cousins, and Joe Garner handle English tutor recruitment/training.*

**Stage 1:** New tutors attend a tutorial session with a senior tutor as the tutee. They then write a report summarizing their analysis of the session content and insights they believe will be useful when they conduct sessions themselves.

**Stage 2:** Senior tutors act as tutees, and new tutors conduct multiple short role-play sessions (approx. 5–10 minutes). After the role-play, senior tutors provide feedback to the new tutors.

**Stage 3:** New tutors conduct a 40-minute demo session with a senior tutor, simulating a real tutorial session. Following feedback from the senior tutor, the WSD Advisors also review the demo session recording and provide comments and feedback.

By completing this thorough training process, new tutors are equipped with the necessary skills and mindset from the perspectives of both the tutee and the tutor before they participate in actual tutorial sessions.

Even after completing the new tutor training, tutors are obligated to attend workshops and meetings held each term. This ensures the continuous enhancement of practical tutorial skills and the sharing of know-how through communication among tutors. Whenever I witness the active communication among tutors during these training sessions, workshops, and

meetings, I realize that they understand these opportunities not merely as an obligation, but as a critical effort for their skill development and strengthening collaboration.

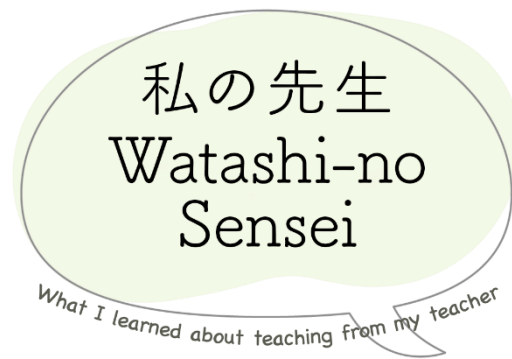
Furthermore, even outside of formal training and workshops, tutors routinely provide feedback to faculty and staff regarding their experiences and challenges in sessions, and it is common for this information to be integrated into the themes of subsequent training sessions or workshops. I am confident that these concerted efforts by faculty, staff, and tutors foster tutor growth and lead to the provision of high-quality tutorial sessions.

### **3. Closing Remarks**

I hope this overview has successfully conveyed the appeal of the WSD, as I have experienced it from the perspective of the staff member in charge.

I believe our ongoing mission is to inherit and develop what has been cultivated throughout the WSD's history, while also discovering and creating new forms of appeal. To this end, we are actively working on strengthening our internal structure, as well as enhancing collaboration with writing centers at other universities and external organizations. As part of this effort, we are currently moving forward with a project to host a symposium at ICU in collaboration with the Writing Centers Association of Japan (WCAJ), scheduled for Saturday, March 7, 2026. The symposium will invite faculty and staff from writing centers at various universities for interactions through presentations and panel discussions. We will provide further updates once the details are finalized.

We are committed to various initiatives to ensure the WSD continues to develop. We hope that you encourage students to utilize the WSD. If more students use the service, tutors gain more experiences, leading to more opportunities for mutual growth. We sincerely ask for your continued cooperation in realizing a "WSD Community" where faculty, staff, tutors, and students are united.



## **Watashino Sensei**

### **- What I Learned about Teaching from My Teacher -**

#6 Rekishu Yamazaki, Department of Natural Sciences

November 2025

“How should I choose a graduate school?”

I remember asking my “goofy” academic advisor this question about three months before my graduation in the US, where I had thoroughly (perhaps too thoroughly) enjoyed my liberal arts education. Having immersed myself in music theory and pottery in my last two years at university, I had not given any thought whatsoever to job hunting or further studies. Clearly, it was I who was “goofy,” but my advisor responded to my question with a bunch of his own questions: “Where in the US do you want to live?,” “What kind of food do you like? Meat? Vegetables? Or do you miss fish, since you’re Japanese?,” “Hang on, if you’re Japanese, why are you a Mennonite?” ... This barrage of questions rapidly ventured into what is called “outside the light cone” in relativity theory—in other words, it had no causal connection to my original question. Of course, I didn’t get the kind of answer I was hoping for. Instead, as usual, I was grilled extensively about my hobbies, background, and countries I’d like to visit someday. The following year, I ended up training for a year at a sushi restaurant in Atlanta.

This “goofy” academic advisor of mine was John Ross Buschert, a physics professor at Goshen College. I hadn’t intended to major in physics initially, but he just happened to be my academic advisor when I started college. Up until I graduated, I’d frequently pop into his office, not just during course registration periods. Looking back, I have no recollection of ever speaking seriously with him about physics. He would always sign my course registrations immediately, and for the rest of our meeting he would chat about unrelated topics or ask me lots of questions. “Are you interested in volunteering in Africa?” (Err, didn’t you just sign my course registration....?), “Did you know that if you walk along the railway tracks from your dormitory, you’ll reach Florida?” (What nonsense!) “The Amish prohibit sport and are shunned if they play basketball” (That could be true....), “What do you think

about the war in Bosnia?" Scattered between the lines of these conversations were slivers of philosophy, religion, and questions about what I wanted to do with my life.

Now, at ICU, I too am an academic advisor, and I find myself recalling those simple questions of my advisor. While he only ever gave me the bare minimum advice on the immediate issues at hand, his kindness in getting to know me as a human, alone in a foreign land, gave me courage, and he presented me with vital questions that would help to shape my future.

It is both a challenge and a joy for me to get to know different students outside my field through ICU's famed "advising" process every term. I aspire to be that "goofy" advisor for each one of my brilliant students who are now shaping their own futures.

## #7 Suzanne Quay, Department of Education and Language Education

February 2026

When I think about the teachers who shaped me, I always return to one: Miss Lily Genis. In the classroom, she seemed larger than life, her voice warm and steady, punctuated by the unforgettable, "*Believe you me...*". She taught English, yes, but what she really taught was the joy of learning and respect for each student. My younger brother once confessed that he had dreaded always being compared to me in the high school we both attended—until he entered her class. She saw him not as someone's sibling but as himself, and he flourished. From her I learned that good teaching begins with recognition: the quiet, unwavering act of truly seeing the person in front of you.

After I graduated, "Miss Genis" became "Lily", and teacher became friend. By then I could no longer recall the specific content of English 12, yet the lessons she impressed upon me have guided my entire career. She showed me that encouragement can echo across years, that one kind word can redirect a life, and that every student—every person—deserves to feel valued. These were not theories she articulated; they were practices she lived. Her example taught me that teaching is not measured by curriculum delivered, but by confidence nurtured and human potential affirmed.

I often return to Christina Rossetti's poem, "*Remember*", which Lily loved, for its gentle reminder not to grieve but to carry forward what truly matters. Only much later did I realize why the poem felt like a message she had quietly been preparing us to hear. Lily Genis passed away on August 2, 2005. This essay is for her—and for those she continues to inspire to "remember and not be sad."



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| <p>9. 2025/11/11</p> | <p>Part 5: Your Community<br/>           9. Christianity and the ICU Community by Prof. Alberg, Director of Religious Center, Rev. Kitanaka, Prof. Yakiyama, and Rev. Johnson</p> <p><u>Online Contents</u><br/>           Administrative Affairs Group<br/>           IT Center<br/>           Library<br/>           College of Liberal Arts Group<br/>           Graduate School Group<br/>           Educational Affairs Group<br/>           Personnel Group<br/>           Center for Teaching and Learning and Special Needs Support Services<br/>           Center for Research Planning and Support<br/>           Counselling Center<br/>           Human Rights Consultation</p> |           |
| <p>2026/2/9</p>      | <p><a href="#"><u>AY 2025 FD/SD Seminar on supporting students with disabilities</u></a><br/>           Theme: “Supporting Students with Mental Health Conditions: Strategies for Faculty and Staff”<br/>           Speaker: Peter Bernick (Associate Professor, Student Accessibility Office, Nagasaki University)</p>   | <p>69</p> |
| <p>2026/2/24</p>     | <p><a href="#"><u>EdTech Forum #3</u></a><br/>           Theme: “Getting Started with jamovi: Basic Skills and Teaching Strategies”<br/>           Speaker: Associate Professor Mioko Sudo</p>  | <p>16</p> |