

Crown Center for Teaching DocuGuide  
Using **Possibility Books** in Courses

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Possibility Books (PB) are a pedagogical approach that privileges non-traditional methods of education by providing students and teachers with a notebook and materials to respond to a series of prompts at the start of each class through visual mark making. In the fall of 2022, nine courses used PB; in AY 23-24, fifty-four courses (over 700 students) used PB with promising results indicating students' growth in a "sense of community" and "safe place to learn." A majority of students agreed in post surveys that the method contributed to their learning process and recommended PB be used in other courses. Materials and support are provided by C&I.

Possibility Books (PB) start with:

- simple strategies to access and *practice* creative and visual ways of thinking.
- initial skill building to create safe spaces, both as a community of learners and as an open process- specifically for many students who equate visual communication with sketching or art practices; abstract responses through mark making are not images or drawings.
- reflection questions and exercises that connect to course content;
  - repeated prompts to enhance metacognition and ownership of learning.

**The Possibility Books (PB) method** serves **outcomes** related to:

- **Course content:** by providing a safe space to process ideas and reflect on questions, students become reflexive learners. PB allows students to iterate their understandings of course material by connecting the content to themselves, prior knowledge, and nuanced discernment of concepts. (ie: for CC100 classes, PB supports thinking about the nature of academic disciplines and the liberal arts).
- **Creativity & Innovation:** PB explicitly prompts students to practice creativity mindsets including possibility thinking, openness, unexpected connections, tolerance of ambiguity, willingness to take risks, and curiosity.
- **Institutional Antiracism Commitment:** by introducing modes of learning that have been excluded from traditional, colonial-based academic inquiry, and providing space that centers various identity perspectives as assets.

In many higher education classrooms, certain ways of learning are privileged, including use of the English language, text-based reading and writing, logic (as opposed to intuition), and understanding with the mind more than the body. Visual notetaking creates an inclusive space where students feel comfortable using their own languages (linguistic, metaphorical, and symbolic), backgrounds, and modes of learning. Using Possibility Books also supports the increasing neurodiversity and mental health needs of our students.

First time users of PB come to understand PB as a process and a practice. Encouraging faculty and students to try new approaches, to linger with ambiguity, to stay open to many perspectives, and to explore a range of methods for knowing, contributes to equitable educational experiences.

## **Format**

10-15 minute daily morning prompts that can be adapted to the individual course -

- first activity of the class; PowerPoint can be put up before students enter. Often this leads to students coming on time to get started on the prompt.
- at the start time of class, *ask students to focus on the exercise.*
  - Working in silence allows them to be more in tune with visceral ways of knowing.
- incorporating use of PB during other times of class as well, encouraging class note taking in PB and/or doodling to process as they listen, prepare for an assignment, etc.
- emphasizing that visual mark making does not need to contain realistic images or look pleasing, might not feel comfortable, and can seem simplistic or disconnected. Learning takes time and effort; this non-graded teaching tool supports many approaches to do that.

## **Evaluation**

Possibility Books should not be graded or assessed. They are process-oriented, providing a space for students to think in non-traditional ways to better prepare them for class, explore possible ways of knowing, and bring their whole selves to the academic space.

Additional prompts given as assignments can be completed in PB, with a photo of that page being submitted to Canvas, as long as students understand ahead of time that the page they create for that designated prompt will need to be submitted.

## **How to use begin using Possibility Books:**

1. Email Kris Stanec with the course title, block #, and # of students. She will then give you access to the PB Microsoft Teams site.
  - a. This provides Creativity and Innovation (C&I) with time to purchase and deliver the materials to your office or classroom.
2. In PB Teams site:
  - Download the PowerPoint: “PB fall 2024” (to be iterated in early summer 2024)
  - Copy & edit slides into your daily PowerPoint, keeping the first week as written but adapting and reordering other slides to connect to your content.
  - Teams site also includes rationale/research, annotated bibliography, risk/mitigation strategies, and suggestions for additional uses of Possibility Books.

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For support using Possibility Books to scaffold assignments and integrate course content more specifically, contact Kris Stanec [kstanec@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:kstanec@coloradocollege.edu)