A semester of investigations on the effect of space on writing and language. Spatial considerations move language beyond 2-D flatlands and into the physical environment. Each assignment becomes progressively more dimensional in its use of media and formatting. The final project, Spatial Poetry, places language within an environment.

The first three investigations are based on writing prompts. Writing prompts are often used in creative writing classes to instigate ideas and make the writing flow quickly, without too much second-guessing. The writing happens spontaneously within established boundaries and limitations. The final project, Spatial Poetry, looks at language in the environment. While the writing and typography may be more minimal within the environment, the documentation of the installation requires extensive writing. The documentation of Spatial Poetry is based loosely on the structures of a thesis, artist statement or funding proposal (RFP). This format is a useful means for the student to analyze their ability to develop and support a concept from its inception to its conclusion. Writing forces a clearer articulation of the process at all levels, and moves the designer beyond the aesthetics of the piece.

Graphic designers are familiar with language in the environment, though most often in the form of wayfinding, identification, or advertising. However, environmental language has been used in less functional ways, in order to enrich and enliven public spaces. Spatial poetry asks the designer to think about text in the landscape in an experimental manner. Ideas of intimacy and personal space are explored in the context of public spaces. How does the designer alter our experience with public space, and does the role of language in the installation form a different experience from the non-typographic?

Typographic expression is affected by space, whether on a 2-D surface or an installation. The designer often develops formats best suited for the language they are given. In these self-authored works, the language and formats work back and forth in a symbiotic relationship.

This series of assignments was conducted within a graduate course, but could be adapted and used in an undergraduate curriculum.
Writing Prompt 1: A Story in Six Parts

Form a group of 5 people.

Start with an 11 x 17 sheet of paper folded in thirds and a pencil. Begin a story about yourself, true or fictitious. Write in the first person. Use a first initial or invented names for any other people in the story. Do not write beyond the fold. When time is up, continue your thoughts by writing an open ended sentence on the next side of the fold. Pass this it to the person on your right. The next person continues the story by finishing the open ended sentence and expanding the situation through invention. Continue to pass the story to the person to your right at the indicated times. Eventually the story you have started will be returned. The original author will write the conclusion to the story. (Optional: Writers are allowed to read the previous excerpt before continuing the story.)

Project
Take the 6 part story and rewrite it, editing for grammar as necessary. Consider the "voice" of each author and whether to retain differences or give it a single voice. Once edited, design the Story in Six Parts using a format that reinforces the effects of the prompt. Formats may range from a large scale flat format, accordion fold, bound as a booklet, or other more unusual folds inspired by the writing prompt. Compose, as in writing a composition, and compose, as in formally arranging the handwriting/typography on the format. Consider the quality of the paper stock. A portion of the text must be handwritten. Written text may be transferred or xeroxed. For critique 1, use type only. On subsequent critiques, drawn or photographic images may be added. Please bring images to class for critique 2.
Writing Prompt 2: Chinese Whispers

A whisper, when associated with the wind, is almost nonexistent. It is subtle and gentle. To whisper in another's ear may be amorous—"sweet nothings." A whisper may be vicious gossip or rumor, most often spoken at very close range to the subject of the gossip. Parental whispers, almost hissed ("sit-up, "wipe your face") become commands.

Form a group of 5 students

Spend a few minutes writing a provocative, poetic, thoughtful, creative, harsh, judgemental, onomatopoeic, alliterative—statement, memory, thought, poem. Keep the phrase around 10 words in length. Do not discuss the phrase with your classmates. The phrases will be reviewed between faculty and student before the prompt begins.

Sitting in a wide circle, whisper your phrase in the classmate’s ear to the right of where you are seated. After it is whispered, the receiver writes it down on a slip of paper, then without reading it, whispers it to the next person on their right, and so on. When the circle is complete, collect all 5 whispers based on your original statement.

Project
Take the 5 whispers and present them as individual phrases but "together"—joined, contained, linked—in a conceptual manner. Text may be repeated for emphasis and embellishment as needed. Edit for grammar and spelling as necessary. Present the whispers using 3-D formatting, with a 2-D source for the typography (paper, cloth) as one of the primary media.

* The World Record for the largest game of Chinese Whispers was set by entertainer Mac King, January 6, 2004 at Harrah’s Las Vegas Casino and involved 614 people. (web source)
Writing Prompt 3: Memento

Ask each student to bring five small objects to class, each one unique and significant to the student. Have them carefully consider the objects for aesthetics, meaning, significance, tactility. Consider the relationship of the objects to each other. Keep each object smaller than a fist. After the objects are brought to class, assign the Writing Prompt.

Write a descriptions, labels, phrases, or story that unifies all 5 objects. The objects serve as mementos and as metaphors. The final piece presents both the objects and the text. Consider how to contain the story and how to contain the objects.

Zack Zwicky, Mementos

David Damico, Mementos

Noora Alsalman, Mementos

Luisa Hernandez, Mementos
Environments: Spatial Poetry

"...poetry might be defined as a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language." Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense (3)

"...it is not primarily to communicate that novels, short stories, plays and poems are written. These exist to bring us a sense and a perception of life, to widen and sharpen our contacts with existence." Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense (4)

"poetry is the most condensed and concentrated form of literature." Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense (9)

e.e. cummings
Gertrude Stein
Charles Bukowski
Donald Barthelme
Dadaists
Futurists
Beat Poets (William Burroughs, Alan Ginsberg)
Haiku
Other Languages (Pablo Neruda)
hip hop

emerge
unfettered
daydreams
memories
hiding place
workplace
imprisoned
cocoon
nest
shadow
web
habitat
shelter

Project
Gaston Bachelard's Poetics of Space presents an examination of physical space and how it is shaped. Bachelard’s muse is interior spaces and the memories connected to them.

Create an environment within an interior space through the use of language and structure. The constructed environment should be intimate and to some extent transportable. To begin, select a single word to generally define the concept, scope and atmosphere. Bachelard referred to nests and shells as a way to metaphorically define spaces. Terms such as intimate, shadow, cocoon, web, habitat, meditation, shelter—all potentially define a spatial concept. Language and typography must be a component of the environment, although recorded language may be used in addition. The writing does not have to be self-authored in totality. Interpretations or excerpts from a found source of poetry or prose may be used. Consider everyday language, slang, cliché, jargon as well as “high-writing”. Whatever inspires the text, present it “poetically.”

This presentation of environmental language involves text in a spatial context; a place where the reader has multiple viewpoints conceptually and physically. The forms, structure, and text need to emphasize the viewer’s placement and movement within the space. Media choices are broad, but the construction must be sturdy and technically clean. (Review work by artists and designers. Why Not Associates, BJ Krivanek, Joan Brossa, Maarten de Reus, Hamish Fulton)

Individually photograph the completed construction and create a 18 x 28 poster titled “The Poetics of Space” (or the title of your piece). Other text will be discussed and will include an installation date, time, location and showing. A booklet (the Visual Essay: Proposal/Documentation) will accompany the installation and the poster.

Components of the Project:
1. Spatial Poetry: Environment, Installation
2. Poetics of Space Poster
4. Video Interaction (optional)

Poetry and Writing
Poetry is a process of making language special. Often it is sparse; with words carefully chosen for specificity of meaning, for the images and mood created, and for rhythms of form and sound. It is not language of fact. Unlike the language of science, it is not spare to avoid confusion or nuance; rather poetry thrives on interpretation and metaphor.

Documentation: Visual Essay
Document the conceptual proposal, the process, and results of the Spatial Poetry in a bound booklet. Provide a clear and dynamic representation of the proceedings. The aesthetics of the booklet will reinforce the thesis of your Spatial Poetry. The booklet will present these requirements:
1) research (data and influences)
2) concept, theory
3) process
   (early sketches, options, notated ideas)
4) scaled models, plans, drawings, materials
   photographs, fabrications drawings
5) final installation, photographed

Text
1) title and date, 2) introduction, 3) concept development and proposal, 4) process,
5) conclusions.

Imagery
1) influences (antecedent, precedent)
2) drawing, sketches and models (process)
3) site selections, locations
4) photomontage of installation (proposals)
5) full-scale installation
6) documentation

The visual essay forms a scenario which presents the problem, the process of exploration and development, the final construction and its interaction with the environment and the people. This form of documentation, by presenting the process in a physical form, is useful in establishing a dialogue between the client and architect-designer. "The visual essay documents the development of thought, records interim solutions, research results and images, argues the ideas and illustrates the context of the problem." It gives insight into motives and actions while providing a public statement of proof of the design process. The visual essay provides the public (client) a platform for communication, a report of investigation and provides a clear proposal for deliberation. For the student, it provides a structure for reviewing the complete sequence of development.

Readings:
_CopyProof: A New Method for Design Education_, Post St. Joost, edited by Edith Gruson & Gert Staal

Post St. Joost, edited by Edith Gruson & Gert Staal (010 Publishers, Rotterdam) 2000
Luisa Hernandez: Sensorium
Spatial Poetry
Noora Alsalman: Recollection
Spatial Poetry
David Damico: Abandoned
Spatial Poetry

Zack Zwicky: Distraction
Spatial Poetry