Creativity and Innovation in the Writing Classroom

Session 1: Introduction to Design Thinking

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Theodora Goss

Why are we here? The new WR153 . . .

WR150: 4 credits + 2 BU Hub Units

– Writing; Research and Information Literacy

WR153: 4 credits + 3 BU Hub Units

– Writing; Research and Information Literacy; Creativity and Innovation

We're still teaching writing and research/information literacy, but with an added emphasis on creativity and innovation. What does this mean for us in terms of how we design our courses and structure our classes?

(*Woman Writing* by Pierre Bonnard)

Why is this important to the BU Hub?

"BU students across all fields of study will benefit from learning how to think in new ways, imagine new possibilities, take new approaches, and/or make new things. Creative activity is a source of deep human satisfaction and common good. In addition, the ability to generate and pursue new ideas is quickly becoming a prerequisite for entry into the skilled workforce, which places a premium on applicants' creative skills and potential for contributing to creativity's more applied offspring, innovation. BU graduates should understand how the creative process moves from need or desire to design to draft to redesign to execution; they will have personal experience of taking risks, failing and trying again; and, in this way, they will have developed the patience and persistence that enables creativity to come ultimately to fruition."

—Introduction to the Creativity & Innovation HUB Guide

Why is this important to us?

Creative activity is a source of deep human satisfaction and common good.

"Creativity is a central source of meaning in our lives for several reasons. Here I want to mention only the two main ones. First, most of the things that are interesting, important, and *human* are the result of creativity."

"The second reason creativity is so fascinating is that when we are involved in it, we feel that we are living more fully than during the rest of life. The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal fulfillment we all hope to get from life, and so rarely do."

—Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Creativity: The Psychology of Creative Invention*

To be human is to be creative . . .

"Are you considering becoming a creative person? Too late, you already are one. To even call someone a 'creative person' is almost laughably redundant; creativity is the hallmark of our species."

"If you're alive, you're a creative person. You and I and everyone you know are descended from tens of thousands of years of makers."

"The guardians of high culture will try to convince you that the arts belong only to a chosen few, but they are wrong and they are also annoying. We are *all* the chosen few. We are all makers by design."

—Elizabeth Gilbert, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*
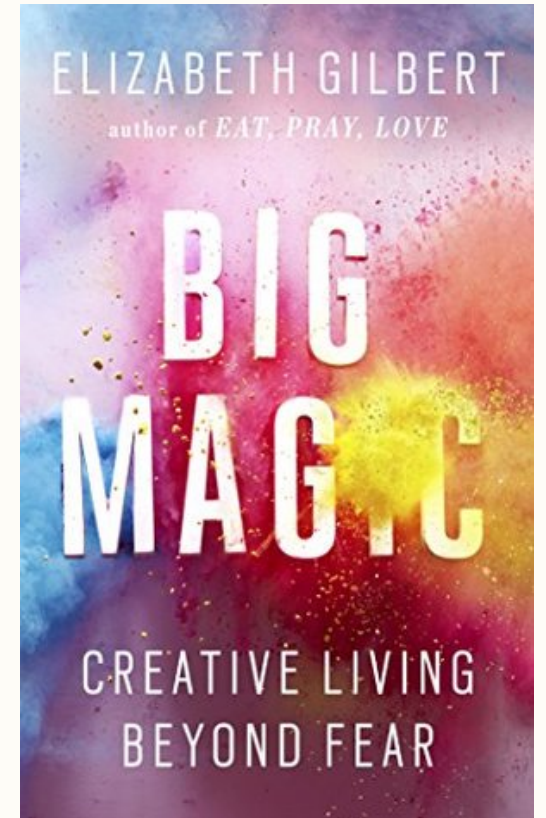
Two assumptions underlying WR153:

Everyone can be creative.

Creativity can be taught.

"Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a conservative tendency, made up of instincts for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and saving energy, and an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk—the curiosity that leads to creativity belongs to this set. We need both of these programs. But whereas the first tendency requires little encouragement or support from outside to motivate behavior, the second can wilt if it is not cultivated."

—Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Creativity: The Psychology of Creative Invention*

What are the BU Hub learning outcomes?

– "Students will demonstrate understanding of creativity as a learnable, iterative process of imagining new possibilities that involves risk-taking, use of multiple strategies, and reconceiving in response to feedback, and will be able to identify individual and institutional factors that promote and inhibit creativity."

– "Students will be able to exercise their own potential for engaging in creative activity by conceiving and executing original work either alone or as part of a team."

In other words, students should both do something creative and learn how to be creative. They should learn that creativity is a process they can learn and use in a variety of contexts. The suggested process involves the core principles of design thinking.

How does the BU Hub define design thinking?

– "As a process of creative innovation, design thinking involves asking questions and gathering information related to an individual's or society's needs, generating multiple ideas for solutions to meeting those needs, prototyping artifacts and solutions, iterating designs based on user feedback, and producing a final product."

– Design thinking "emphasizes the role of human empathy throughout the solution design process, with an end goal of improving the quality of life for a given end-user or community."

https://www.bu.edu/ctl/buhub/bu-hub-guides/creativity-innovation-hub-guide/

Let's try to define design thinking in a clearer and more specific way, so we know what sort of process we're working with . . .

What is design thinking, where does it come from, and how can we use it in our courses?

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(And what does all of this have to do with creativity?)

What is design thinking?

Let's watch two videos:

An interview with David Kelly of IDEO:
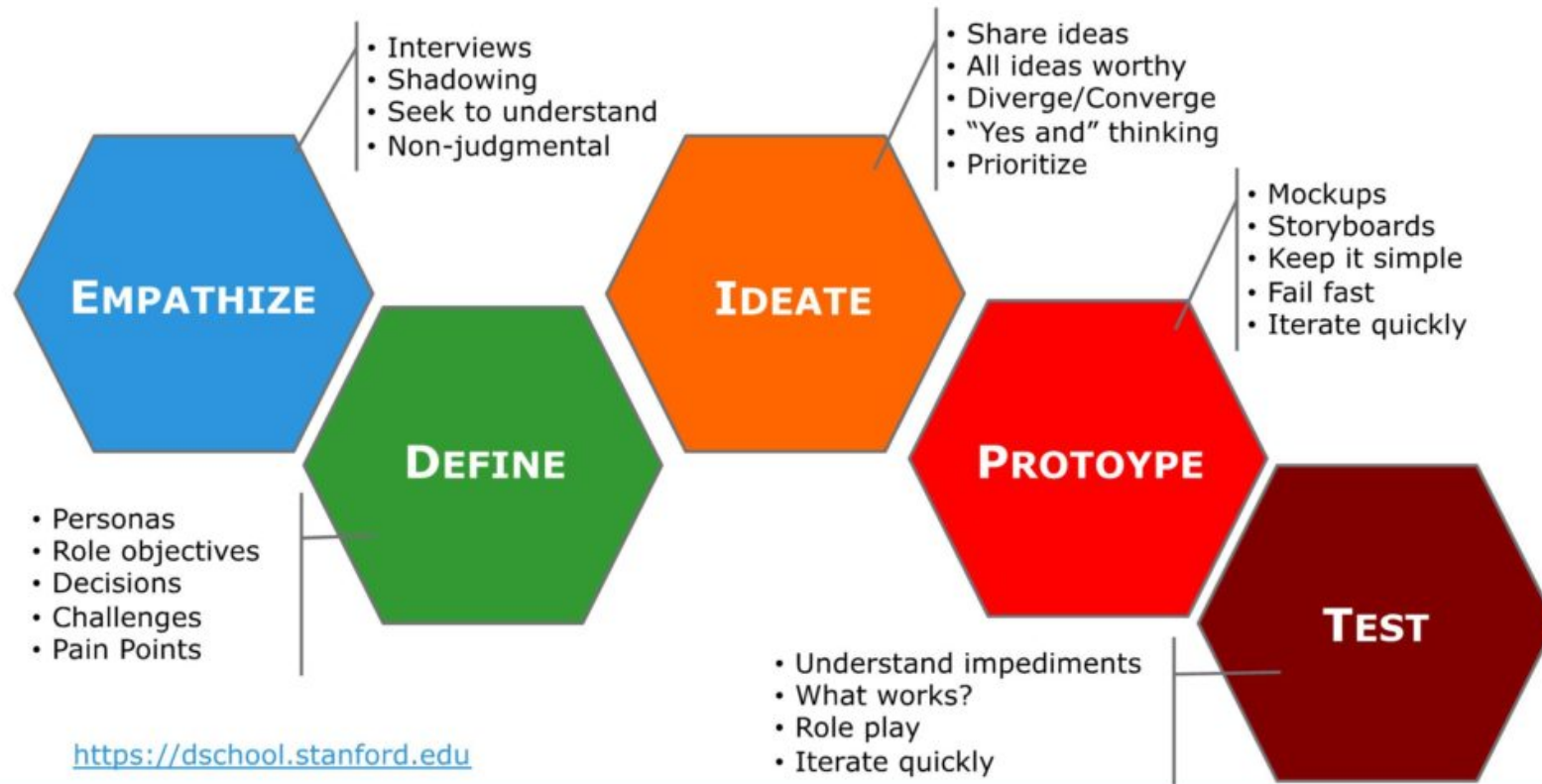https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9TIspgTbLM

A video on "How to solve problems like a designer" including Tim Brown of IDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOrmr5kT-48

From Dam and Siang, *What is Design Thinking and Why Is It So Popular?*:

– "Design Thinking is an iterative process in which we seek to understand the user, challenge assumptions, and redefine problems in an attempt to identify alternative strategies and solutions that might not be instantly apparent with our initial level of understanding."

– "There are many variants of the Design Thinking process in use today, and they have from three to seven phases, stages, or modes."

Stanford d.school Design Thinking Process

EMPATHIZE
• Interviews
• Shadowing
• Seek to understand
• Non-judgmental

DEFINE
• Personas
• Role objectives
• Decisions
• Challenges
• Pain Points

IDEATE
• Share ideas
• All ideas worthy
• Diverge/Converge
• "Yes and" thinking
• Prioritize

PROTOYPE
• Mockups
• Storyboards
• Keep it simple
• Fail fast
• Iterate quickly

TEST
• Understand impediments
• What works?
• Role play
• Iterate quickly

https://dschool.stanford.edu

This is the model you will see most often, with five stages:

• Empathize with the user.

• Define the project.

• Generate ideas.

• Prototype the solution.

• Test the solution.

And repeat . . .

https://lvivity.com/design-thinking-process
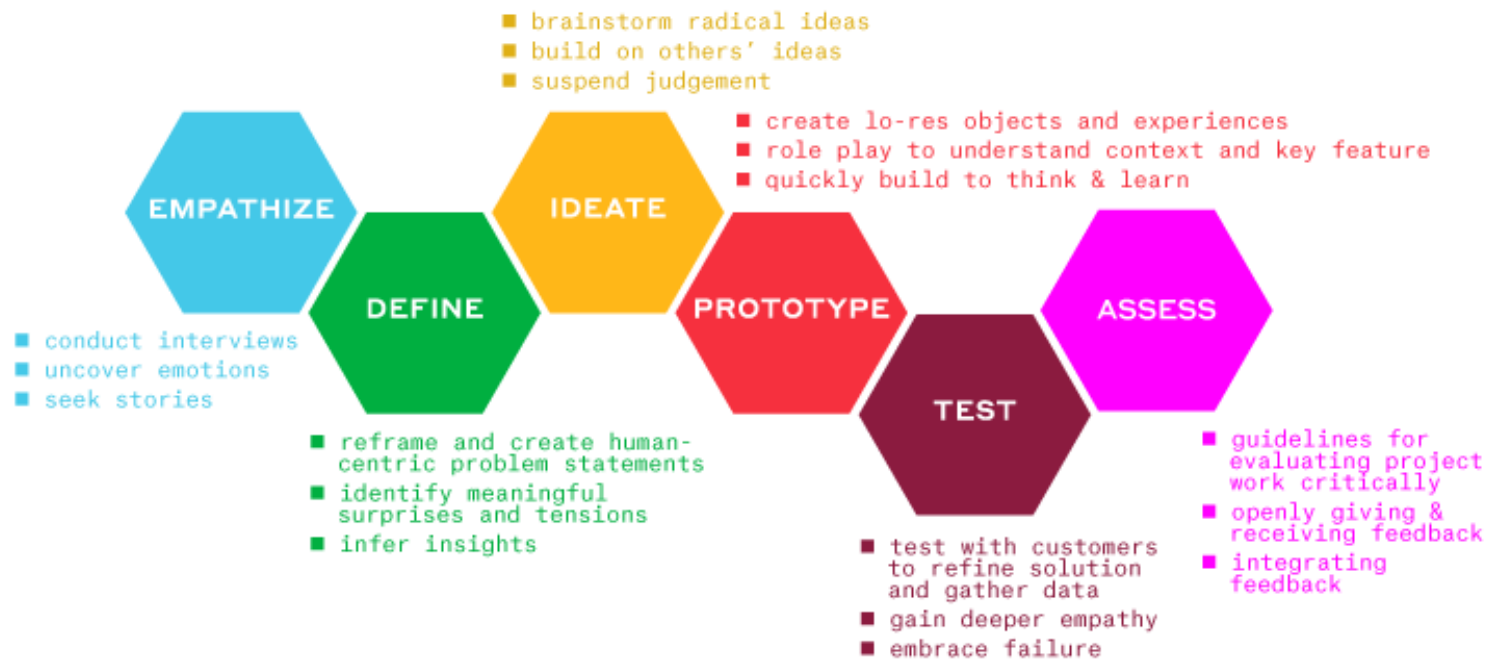
This diagram adds a step at the end:

- Assess your result/process.

Notice that we added this step to the syllabus template. We felt that it fit with our goal of metacognition throughout the semester.

https://empathizeit.com/design-thinking-models-stanford-d-school/

There's something missing . . .

Where's the research? (We still need to focus on research and information literacy.)

Csikszentmihaly says that creativity depends on three factors:

– The domain: a set of symbolic rules and procedures. We could also call this a discipline. Biology, music, and fashion design are all domains.

– The field: the individuals who act as gatekeepers to the domain.

– The person: the individual making a contribution to the domain.

"Creativity occurs when a person, using the symbols of a given domain . . . , has a new idea or sees a new pattern, and when this novelty is selected by the appropriate field for inclusion into the relevant domain."

In other words, creativity includes disciplinary knowledge and critical judgment. Our students need to understand a topic, through coursework or research, in order to be creative with it.
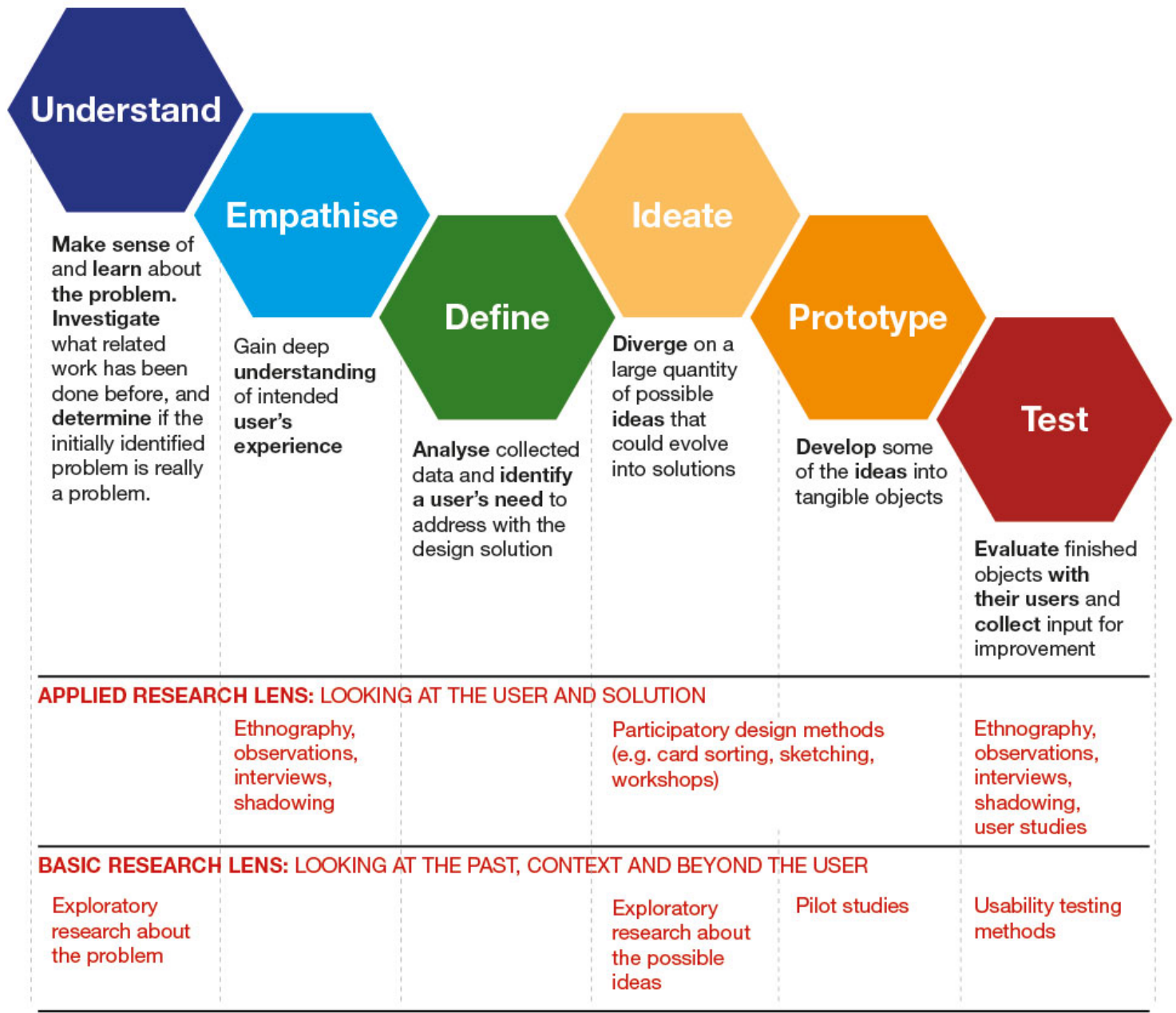
This diagram adds a step at the beginning:

- Understand the problem.

This term comes from an earlier formulation of the five-step process that started with "understand" and "observe."

The author, Sheila Pontis, proposes this model to emphasize the importance of basic as well as applied research.

https://sheilapontis.com/2015/06/04/design-thinking-revised/

How does this relate to writing?

You have probably already noticed that the steps of the design process map onto what we do in writing classes:

– Understand: Conduct background research for your project.

– Empathize: Identify and consider your audience.

– Define: Pose a central question or problem to motivate your project.

– Ideate: Generate ideas about your project.

– Prototype: Create drafts in various formats (proposals, outlines, storyboarding).

– Test: Get feedback on your drafts (workshops, conferences).

– Assess: Reflect on your project and the effectiveness of your process.

So what's different about WR153?

It's a matter of focus and emphasis . . .

– The student should conceive and execute original work, whether that is an academic paper, a short story, a graphic memoir, a podcast, a video, etc.

– The student should learn that creativity is a process and the steps of that process. The WR153 syllabus template is structured by the stages of design thinking.

– The course should emphasize process as much as product: students should focus on generating ideas, prototyping, and testing their work.

– The student should be encouraged to take risks and experience failure. The student should learn that failure is productive.

– There should be consistent emphasis on reflection/metacognition throughout the semester.

Ideally, how should this work?

Design thinking should be:

- Flexible (during the semester)

- Customizable (to your course)

- Useful (to your students)

- Transferrable (to other courses)

The goal is creativity and innovation. Design thinking is just a way to get there.

https://danceinforma.us/articles/twyla-tharp-dance-returns-to-the-joyce-theater-after-12-years/

Let's look at the syllabus template . . .

The course description refers specifically to design thinking:

"As a course that earns a Hub Unit in Creativity and Innovation, WR 153 will give you an opportunity to design, research, and execute a sustained project or series of projects with an emphasis on the stages of design thinking. Through generating ideas, imagining an audience's needs, developing strategies for implementation, offering feedback to your peers, redesigning in response to feedback and reflection, and risking productive failure, you will develop the skills and persistence to bring your project to fruition. You will also come to understand creativity as a learnable, iterative process that can be applied in any area of study."

The sustained project or series of projects . . .

From the information for faculty:

- Students will develop a sustained project or series of projects guided by design thinking (understand, empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test, assess).

- Student projects may include traditional academic papers guided by design thinking, as well as non-academic genres informed by substantive research. Possibilities include creative reimaginings of material covered in the course such as creating a social media campaign, making a graphic novel or poetry collection, designing an interactive map, or recording an educational TED talk or YouTube video.

- The semester should include significant revision and/or reconception of the student's project design, so that students learn the value of creative failure and response to peer and instructor feedback.
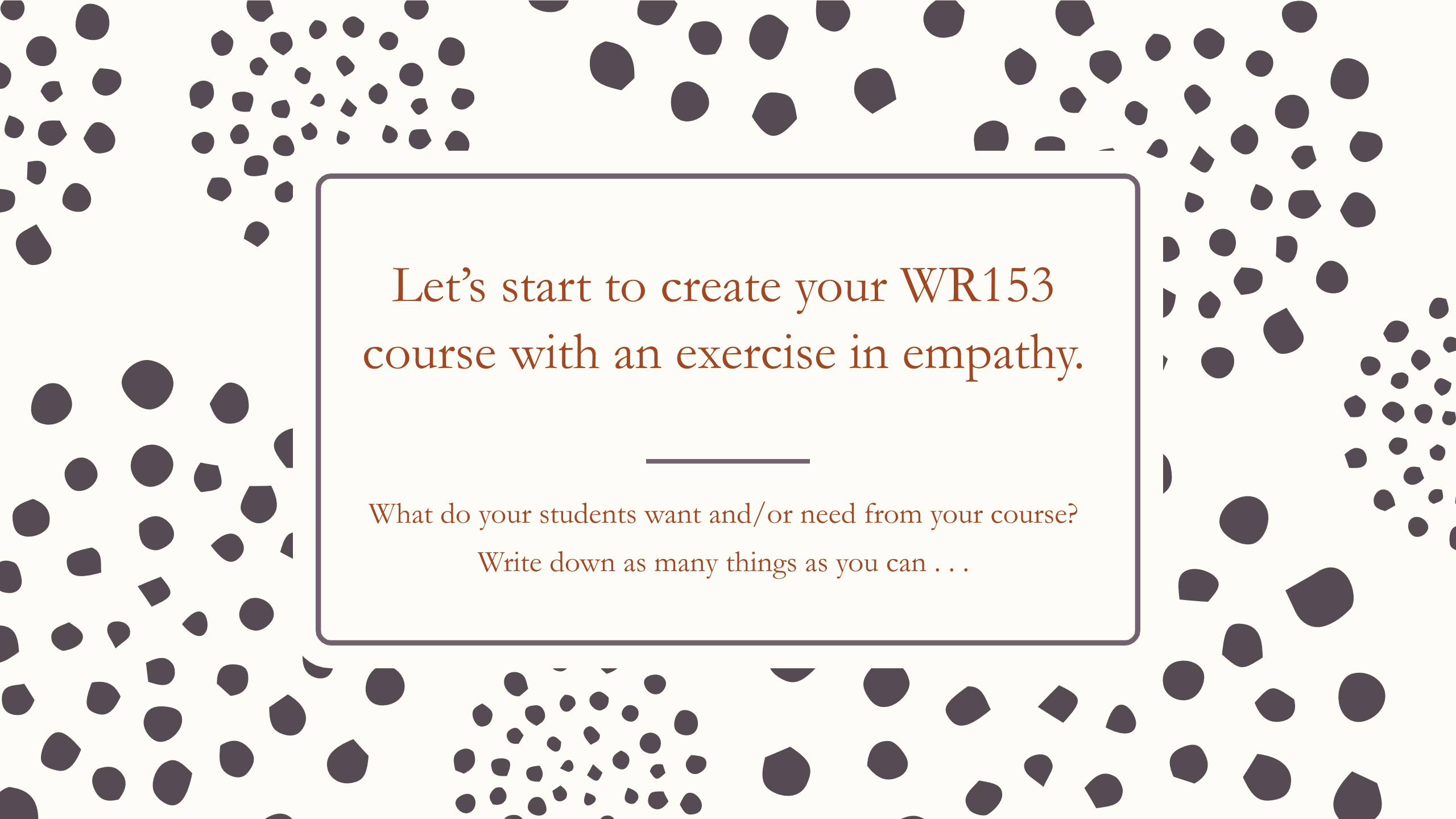
Let's do some design thinking . . .

What do we mean by "empathize"?

"Design Thinking tries to empathize with human beings. That involves ambiguous or inherently subjective concepts such as emotions, needs, motivations, and drivers of behaviors. The nature of generating ideas and solutions in Design Thinking means this approach is typically more sensitive to and interested in the context in which users operate and the problems and obstacles they might face when interacting with a product. The creative element of Design Thinking is found in the methods used to generate problem solutions and insights into the practices, actions, and thoughts of real users."

"Empathize is the first stage of the Design Thinking process. Design teams conduct research to get personal grasps of their users' needs. They set aside assumptions to obtain insights into the users' world by observing and consulting with users. This way, they can understand users' experiences, motivations and problems."

More here: https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/empathize

Let's start to create your WR153 course with an exercise in empathy.

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What do your students want and/or need from your course?

Write down as many things as you can . . .