

Shaping Thinking

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15 minute presentation at Creative Skills Week 2025 on Thursday 25th September 2025. Accepted submission and presentation slides attached.

Creative Skills Week 2025 (CSW2025) is co-organised with EIT Culture & Creativity, the Creative Pact for Skills, SACCORD, and CYANOTYPES, and was held in Prague from Monday 22nd September to Friday 26th September.

Programme & event information available online: [Creative Skills Week 2025](#)

Photos of the conference are available online: [Conference Photos](#)

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Abstract:

Shaping Thinking

Sam Rowe

2024



OVERVIEW

Shaping Thinking started in 2019, and has been broad and varied in its impact and output. The objective of Shaping Thinking is to empower individuals and organisations in any field to employ the kinds of creative problem solving which have historically (and unintentionally) been siloed within creative education. It has been a very collaborative project overall, initiated by myself, Mel Brown, Jason Hirons, and Dr Mark Kerrigan. The project began in response to a perceived need for visual problem solving skills for academics engaged with STEM research; as a way of effectively communicating complex ideas. Over time we have seen the potential of this project beyond academia, collaborating with other researchers, graduates and organisations to build towards something which could benefit any organisation aiming to solve a creative problem.



Final Shaping Thinking cards



CONTEXT & QUESTIONS

Shaping Thinking has evolved from workshops delivered in 2019 which were designed to help academics visualise complex STEM research. These workshops were requested by the Society of Research into Higher Education in response to a perceived deficit in this area. They felt that valuable research wasn't being represented as well as it could, and sought to empower researchers with the skills to do so.

After many iterations of these initial sessions, we could see the value in these ways of thinking being applied beyond academia. Most of the tools we'd developed to deliver workshops were adapted from undergraduate delivery in BA (Hons) Illustration, and it became clear that as well as helping individuals and groups visualise their ideas – they were also helping people actually *think* of their ideas.

Shaping Thinking came from this, expanding the project beyond its initial scope with external funding, and asking bigger and more difficult questions:

- How can the modes of delivery we use in creative education be turned outwards to benefit those in other areas?
- Is it possible to present or package these approaches in a way that removes the need for a specialist's involvement in real-time?
- What assumptions do we currently make about the way our students think of ideas, and how are these revealed by working with others outside the creative industry?



INSIGHTS

Shaping Thinking has joined together several ideas, providing insights on the value of delivery models borrowed from creative education for use with individuals and small organisations, combined with the application of theories on self-managing teams.

A particularly valuable insight is the impact of delivery by different facilitators, and the resulting need for clarity and consistency in materials when designed to be delivered by anyone. Further to this, a key learning has been the value of breaking down workshop elements into smaller pieces – bite-sized chunks which can be adapted and owned by facilitators who are not creative specialists.



Shaping Thinking Pilot Workshop 2 at Light Studios,
run with Jess Holliland



METHODS

Shaping Thinking emerged in 2022 as a consolidation of learnings following delivery of several Visualising Research workshops. Myself and Mel Brown applied for funding via the Knowledge Exchange fund from UKRI to initiate Shaping Thinking and move the research forward. We were awarded an initial £5000 of funding to produce a suite of workshop materials and facilitate a session with a local business. This was followed by further funding to refine the materials after running a pilot workshop.

The was spent primarily on commissioning freelance creatives, as well as 'buyouts' for work days for myself and Mel Brown to work on the project or facilitate sessions. Two freelancers were commissioned: Julia Takorska, a YR2 AUP BA (Hons) Graphic Communication student, and Charlotte Leadley, alumni from AUP BA (Hons) Illustration.

Initially I produced a creative brief for the project; with a full framework of the workshop delivery. This included a proposed website, slideshow, and accompanying 'sketchbook'. I directed Charlotte and Julia to produce the slideshow and sketchbook, while coordinating with Diversity Business Incubator and the Projects and Development Team at AUP to arrange the pilot workshop.

I ran the pilot workshop in 2022, and refined the process and format with Mel following that. In 2023, we worked on adjusting the format to be a modular card deck, and ran a second pilot workshop at Workroom in Light Studios.

Conference Presentation:

Shaping Thinking

Sam Rowe
2025

SHAPING THINKING

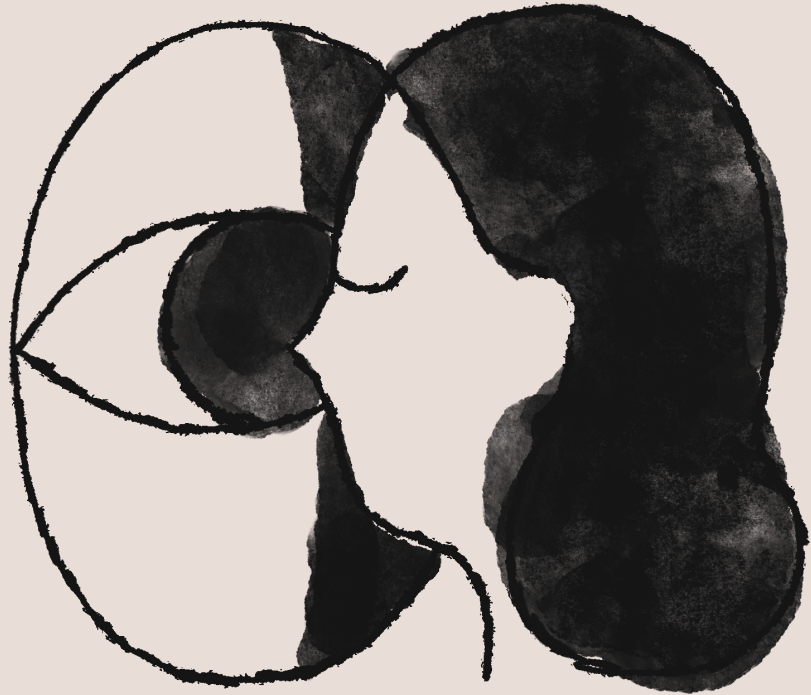
We're not
special,
we just have
good tools

SAM ROWE

ARTS UNIVERSITY PLYMOUTH



We're not
special,
we just have
good tools





Where did
we get them?



Visualising and Communicating Your Research

Good practice and practical applications.

Hark Kershigan, Mel Eddowes, Jason Hixons, Sam Rowe

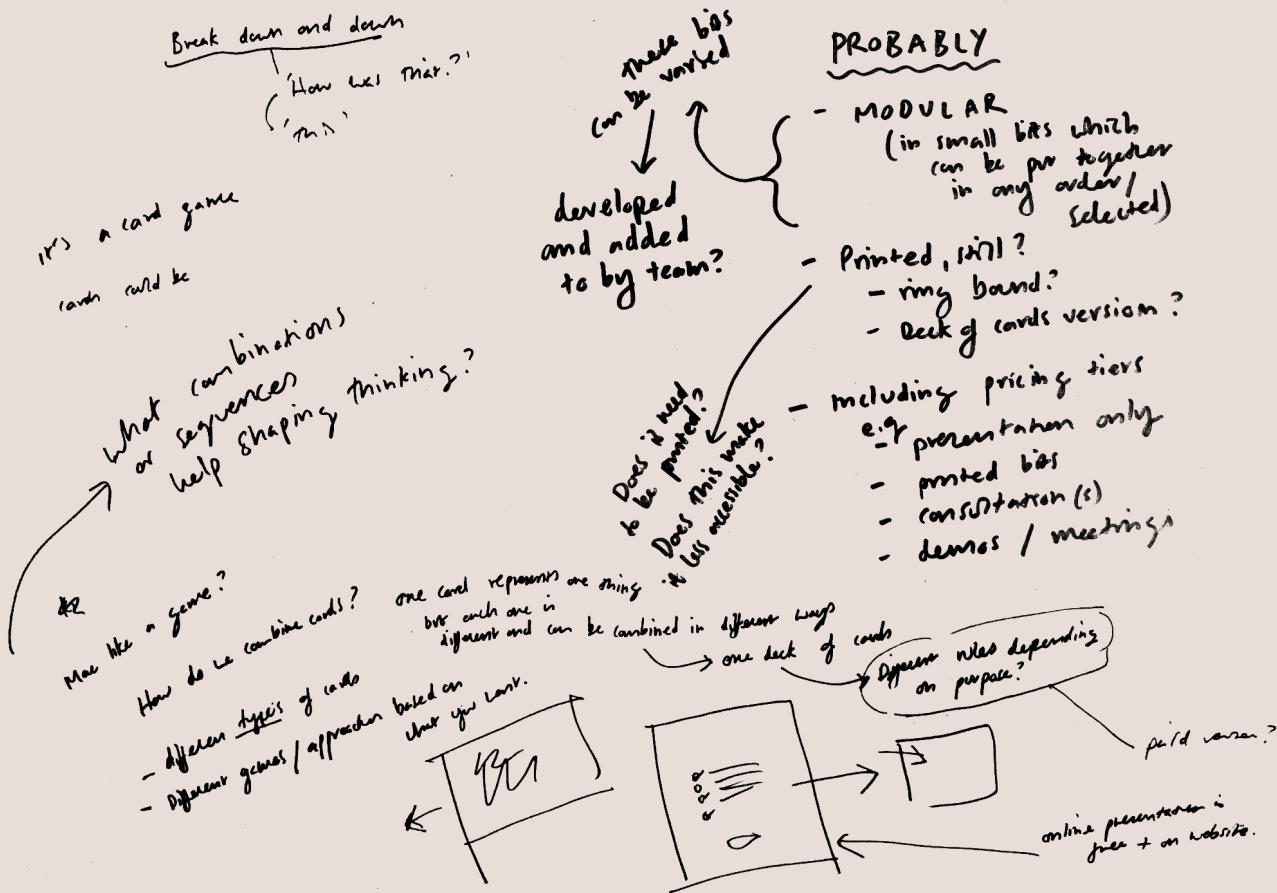


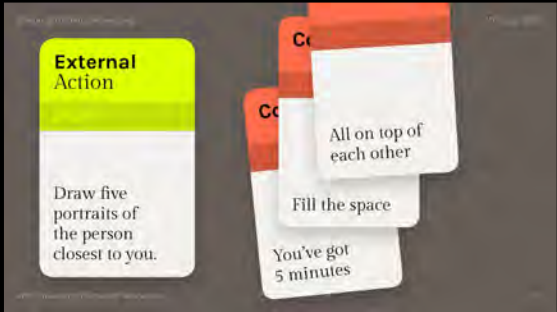
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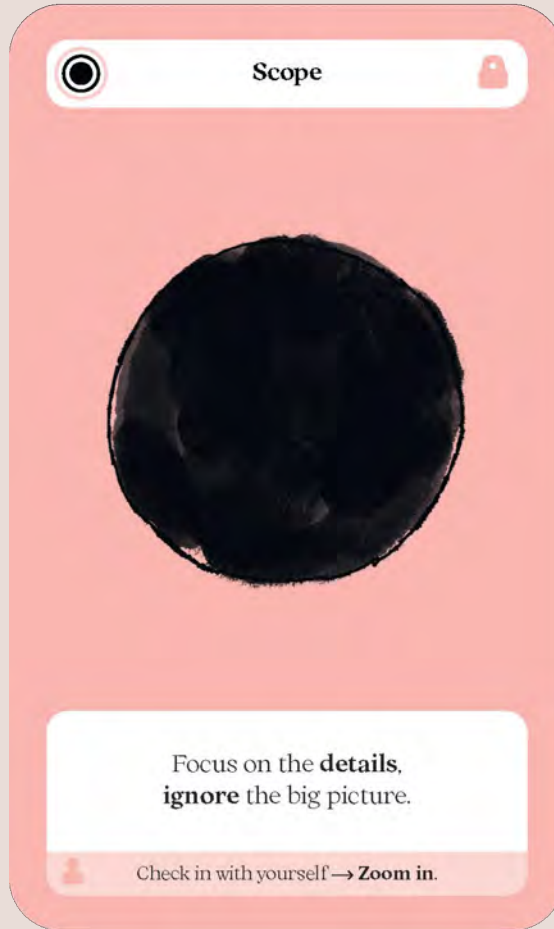
Workshop
materials?



...cards?

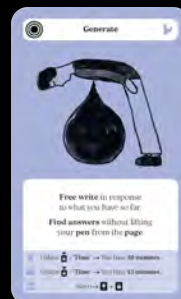
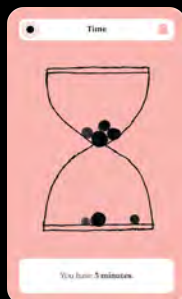
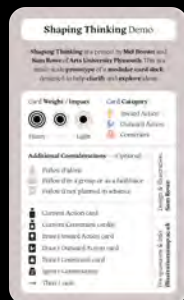
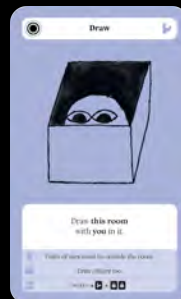
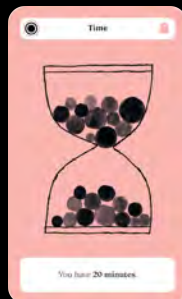






SHAPING THINKING

**CREATIVE
SKILLS
WEEK**
2025



Next
steps

Shaping Thinking Demo

Shaping Thinking is a project by Mel Brown and Sam Rowe of Arts University Plymouth. This is a small-scale **prototype** of a **modular card deck** designed to help **clarify** and **explore** ideas.

Card ~~Weight / Impact~~







Heavy ———> Light

Card **Category**



Inward Action



Outward Action



Constraint

Additional Considerations — (Optional)



Follow if alone



Follow if in a group or as a facilitator



Follow if not planned in advance



Current Action card



Current Constraint card(s)



Draw 1 Inward Action card



Draw 1 Outward Action card



Draw 1 Constraint card



Ignore Constraint(s)



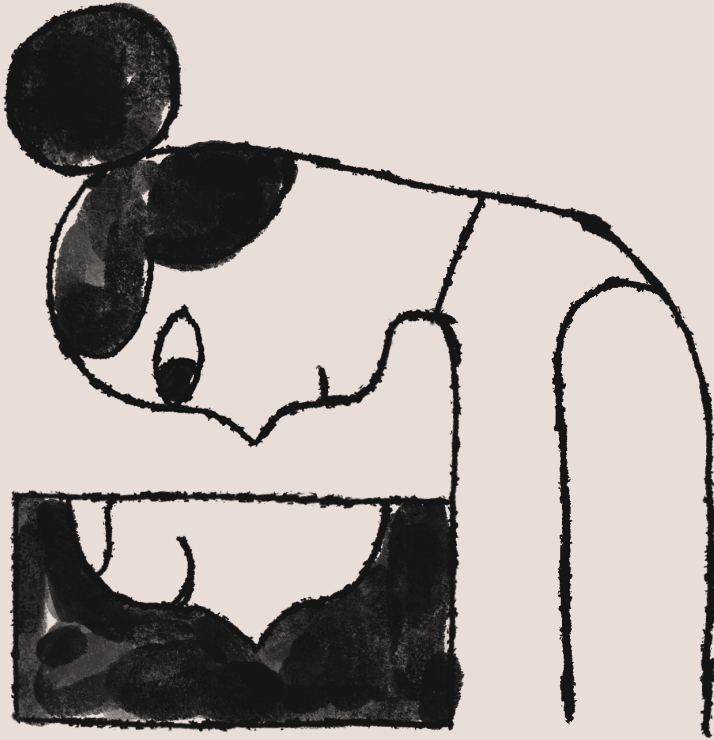
→ Then / next

Design & Illustration:
Sam Rowe

For questions & info:
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SAM ROWE

SLIDE 9



Where do
you see this?

Could you
help it grow?



Thanks

Sam Rowe

Senior Lecturer
& Course Leader

BA (Hons) Illustration

Arts University
Plymouth



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