

Unit 1

Methods of Contextualising Written Response

STATEMENT

The UAL NZSIP frames student travel emissions as national totals. While useful for institutional reporting, this framing can flatten complex human realities into cold comparisons, inadvertently inviting judgment toward international students who often have no realistic alternative to long-haul travel. However, I am also increasingly aware of climate change's impact, as my hometown in Thailand recently experienced flooding from the heaviest rainfall in centuries. This made me connect my own travel to its climate consequences, particularly the high emissions flights produce and how quickly they accumulate as a collective footprint.

Through our group's explorations, I learned that my responsibility as a practitioner is to bridge not only data accuracy but empathy, making the data relatable for fellow students. I began by recalculating national totals into per-student, per-trip figures to ground the data in personal experience. Yet, my initial data visualisations were too sterile and scientific. They were accurate but emotionally uninviting. To address this, we developed a circular-unit system with hand-painted watercolour textures to represent CO₂e as a shared, accumulating atmosphere rather than a static statistic. Using a Powers of Ten zooming structure, we moved from individual journeys to collective impact, fostering climate literacy and shared responsibility without placing blame.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

D'Ignazio, C. and Klein, L. F. (2020) *Data Feminism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

AMO/OMA (2025) 'diagrams as a crytalization point for social thought-processes', in *Diagrams: A Project by AMO/OMA*. Munich: Prestel.

Kallat, R. S. (2023) *Aqua Atlas*. [Exhibition] REENA SAINI KALLAT. Available at: <https://reenakallat.com/aqua-atlas-2023-2024/> (Accessed: 1 March 2026).

Eames, C. and Eames, R. (1977) *Powers of Ten*. [Film] Produced for IBM.

Drucker, J. (2014) *Graphesis: Visual forms of knowledge production*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chun, W.H.K. (2017) 'On Patterns and Proxies', *Accumulation*, e-flux Architecture. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/212275/on-patterns-and-proxies/> (Accessed: 1 March 2026).

Unit 1

Methods of Contextualising Written Response

EXTERNAL READING LISTS

Data Feminism

Data Feminism grounded our approach in the idea that data visualisation is never neutral, as the designer has the power to choose the frame, and that frame shapes how people interpret our project. We used the third principle, 'elevate emotion and embodiment,' to guide how we communicate climate impact without turning the dataset into judgment or a ranking. This directly challenged our first experiments, which were clean and technically clear but felt sterile and emotionally distant. The principle helped us treat emotional tone as part of literacy. If a visual feels cold or authoritative, it can push viewers away or make them defensive, especially when the data is organised by nationality. In response, we developed our circular-unit system toward a more human, embodied visual language. We replaced a simple digital gradient with hand-painted watercolour textures, inspired by the look of atmospheric ozone, to suggest accumulation and its weight, making CO₂e feel present not just in abstract form. This reference also clarified our positionality as international students. We are part of the statistics, so our goal is to create shared understanding and fostering empathy across different national contexts rather than drawing comparisons.

Diagrams

This reference helped me better balance emotional engagement and diagrammatic responsibility in the project. *Diagrams: A Project* by AMO/OMA frames diagrams as machines of transport that convey knowledge across time, but only after information is collected, reduced, and prepared for the medium. This matched our situation with the NZSIP dataset, as publishers, our role was to distil extensive data into formats students can easily read on a screen (our publishing choice) without becoming lost in complicated details. In our project, this reinforced the decision to use an ozone-inspired circular-unit system. The circles function as repeatable units, but their sizing requires careful control to keep the interface legible and comparisons fair. I addressed a scaling issue from week one by using Datylon to size circles by area rather than diameter, so both small and large values remain readable on the same page. The reference also supported our choice of an atmospheric visual language as long as the diagram still functions as a clear record of emissions. This helped me consider my practice of accurately communicating impact rather than simply evoking a mood, ensuring the machine of the diagram successfully transports information to our fellow international students.

Unit 1

Methods of Contextualising Written Response

DESIGN PRACTICES

Aqua Atlas

Reena Saini Kallat's Aqua Atlas shaped our project in two key ways. First, it showed how a repeatable unit can carry complex environmental information without relying on dense chart conventions. This guided the development of our design direction towards a circular unit system, a simple form that can be repeated, scaled, and accumulated to represent emissions at different levels. Second, Aqua Atlas demonstrated that climate data can feel emotionally accessible without losing seriousness. Instead of presenting information on sterile white space, Kallat creates an expressive visual atmosphere that makes the data feel situated in the world. Early in our process, our visuals were clean but felt too scientific and distant. Her practice supported our decision to use texture and place to invite attention. We applied this principle by pairing the circular emission units with daily-life and landscape imagery from students' home countries, grounding the data in lived contexts rather than abstract national totals. In our enquiry into publishing and literacy, Aqua Atlas emphasised that emotion and clarity can coexist. In other words, a visually appealing environment can enhance engagement while keeping essential information easy to read.

Powers of Ten

Powers of Ten was our key reference for building scale literacy and structuring the project as a readable journey rather than a single overwhelming figure. We applied this directly to the gap between one student's one-way trip and UAL's institutional travel emissions. Instead of relying on static charts, we designed a zooming sequence that moves from an individual unit to collective accumulation so that viewers can feel how small journeys compound into a shared footprint. The reference also guided our scaling decisions. When values exceeded the screen's limits, we used proportional scaling and accumulation logic to keep changes visible and comparable. We extended the Powers of Ten idea into our image system as well, placing emissions within a five-step sequence from daily life to neighbourhood, city, country, and Earth. Turning these sequences into GIFs added a sense of change over time and reinforced our message that, despite different starting points, we share the same atmosphere and we are in this together.

Unit 1

Methods of Contextualising Written Response

MAGCD'S READING LISTS

Graphesis: Visual forms of knowledge production

Drucker's 'constellatory mode' reframed our approach from linear reporting to compositional publishing. It helped us combine multiple visual elements and let navigation become part of meaning-making, humanising the digital space and supporting reflective reading, not just numeric interpretation. This was important for our enquiry into publishing and literacy, because our project is not just about recalculating emissions but about how students encounter and move through the data. Using this approach, I built the site in steps: a short welcome message, a CO₂e unit introduction, a personal one-way journey, then scaling up to country and institutional totals, before revealing all countries together. Each section prepares the reader for the next, so the scale change feels learnable rather than overwhelming. This structure helps minimize country rankings by focusing on how emissions accumulate across scales. It shifts our presentation from a single dense diagram to a navigable experience that encourages reflection, reduces comparison, and helps students in understanding step by step.

On Patterns and Proxies

Chun's analysis of proxies, stand-ins for complex phenomena that carry inherent biases, deeply challenged my initial design assumptions. During project development, I found that a simple circle can serve as a proxy that can either humanise or distance the viewer. Initially, our group explored organic circular forms that unintentionally resembled living colonies in a petri dish. Reflecting on Chun's work, I realised that this proxy was risky, as it could make the data appear biological or like a disease, which could worsen judgment toward international students. This shifted our focus toward a more thoughtful interpretation of representation. We looked to scientific visualisations of the ozone hole for inspiration to make our watercolour textures serve as atmospheric proxies. By selecting textures resembling gas stains, we discovered how proxies could convey the invisibility of CO₂e while preserving the humanistic tone essential to our project. This experience enhanced my practice by showing that, as a designer, the proxies I select do more than display data. They influence the ethical way that data is experienced and interpreted.