

Making the Erudite Accessible

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My starting points

- ① Arts and Humanities and other “soft” subjects are increasingly under threat in neoliberal societies.
- ② We, as academics, all really care about our subject matter and think what we do is intrinsically valuable, not just instrumentally valuable.
- ③ But what we do is often erudite, abstruse, arcane. . .

The problem

How do we demonstrate to people outside of our research spheres that what we do is

(1) important

(2) valuable

(3) accessible

?

So... what works?

Very big sheep

The MERL (Museum of English Rural Life) and its Absolute Unit

📌 Pinned



The Museum of English Rural Life (The MERL) @themerl.bsky.social · 5d

Happy 8th anniversary to the tweet that changed us forever. Look at this absolute unit.



Very niche interests

Surprised Eel Historian: Any excuse to talk about eels



A wooden surface with Scrabble tiles spelling out "ANY EXCUSE TO TALK ABOUT EELS". The tiles are arranged in two rows. The first row contains "ANY", "EXCUSE", and "TO". The second row contains "TALK", "ABOUT", and "EELS". There are also some individual tiles scattered around, including "M" and "C".



A circular profile picture showing a green eel with a red and blue pattern on its body, swimming in water.

Surprised Eel Historian, PhD

@greenleejw.bsky.social

29K followers 343 following 9.1K posts



Surprised historian, not surprised eels.

Doctor of medieval things. Talkin' eels, history, and maps. Spaniel mourner. Alt-text artist.

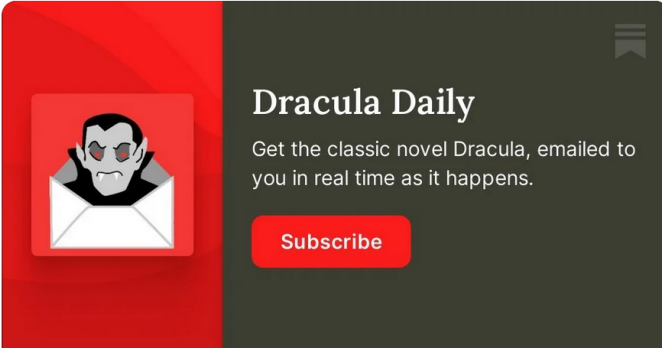
Following

Audience participation

Dracula Daily read-a-thon

  r/books • 1y ago
bunny_387 ...

Dracula Daily starts today!



The promotional graphic is split into two vertical panels. The left panel has a red background and features a white envelope icon with a stylized Dracula character's head and shoulders inside it. The right panel has a dark grey background and contains the text 'Dracula Daily' in a large white serif font, followed by the text 'Get the classic novel Dracula, emailed to you in real time as it happens.' in a smaller white sans-serif font. At the bottom of the right panel is a red rounded rectangular button with the word 'Subscribe' in white. In the top right corner of the dark grey panel is a small grey bookmark icon.

draculadaily.substack.com Open

If you're interested in reading (or rereading) Dracula, this is a great opportunity! You can read Dracula in real time with each journal entry being emailed to you as they occur in the book. The book is sent in chronological order so it's a fun way to read it even if you've already read the novel. Runs from May 3rd until November 7th!

What if your subject matter is not so engaging, amusing, or already well known?

My own research

- Logic

My own research

- Logic
- *Formal* logic

My own research

- Logic
- *Formal* logic
- *Modal and dynamic* formal logic

My own research

- Logic
- *Formal* logic
- *Modal and dynamic* formal logic
- *Modal and dynamic* formal logic *in the Middle Ages*

My own research

- Logic
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- Modal and dynamic formal logic in the Middle Ages, *written in Latin*

My own research

- Logic
- *Formal* logic
- *Modal and dynamic* formal logic
- Modal and dynamic formal logic *in the Middle Ages*
- Modal and dynamic formal logic in the Middle Ages, *written in Latin*

...it doesn't get much more abstract/dull/dry/boring than that!

Where my quest for accessibility started

March 2020



Doctor Logic Awkwardly Does Logic: Fundamentals of Logic Covid-19 Lecture, Part 1



Doctor Logic

2,46K subscribers

Analytics

Edit video



Share



Promote



Save

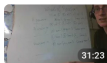


...

All

From the series

From Doctor Log



31:23

Doctor Logic Awkwardly ...

Does Logic: ...

Doctor Logic

213 6y ago

Bob Ross and the Art of Learning (Art) Online



But oil painting \neq formal logic. . .

- Art:
 - ▶ If you're happy with your painting, you've succeeded in making art.
 - ▶ Art comes from exploration, not slavish copying.
 - ▶ What is true in Ross's world is not true in someone else's world.
- Logic:
 - ▶ Formal proofs have to follow certain rules in order to count as proofs.
 - ▶ Sometimes, you have to understand exactly why your logic teacher is doing what she's doing, before you can experiment.
 - ▶ You don't always get to decide what is right and what is wrong in logic.

On the other hand...

- Art

- ▶ Repeat the same techniques over and over, to learn how they can be combined.
- ▶ Start with a plan, have things not go to plan, learn how to recover.
- ▶ Learn from someone who cares both about their subject and about you.
- ▶ Learn from someone who is convinced that just giving it a go will make you happier.

- Logic

- ▶ Repeat the same techniques over and over, to learn how they can be combined.
- ▶ Start with a plan, have things not go to plan, learn how to recover.
- ▶ Learn from someone who cares both about their subject and about you.
- ▶ Learn from someone who is convinced that just giving it a go will make you happier.

What I learned from Bob Ross

- You don't need bells and whistles (just good preparation!)
- Break the fourth wall (you're not teaching into a vacuum)
- Care about your students (it comes through, no matter the medium)
- Slip-ups are part of the game (and help your audience to care about you)
- Mistakes don't exist (or rather, they are part of the process)
- Repetition works (as anyone who has learned multiplication knows)
- 30 minutes is a good length (but *only* if you're actively painting along with!)

Guiding principles

- *No one* wants to listen to a 50 minute video lecture on logic.
- That's good, because I don't want to be responsible for generating 50 minute video lectures on logic. I will make too many mistakes.
- I'm an academic, not a video producer/editor, and I do not want to be one.
- The ideal “chunks” are 3–5 or 5–7 minutes long. 15 minutes is the absolute maximum cap!
- Lean into the awkwardness!

Doctor Logic Awkwardly Does Logic

- “What is Logic?” playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbEJNppcCD6VCb1-sWPGtjV7jnK_PIIYj
- Videos 1–150: The entirety of my Fundamentals of Logics (introductory) class (= roughly 20 hours of content)
- Videos 151–256: About 85% of the modal logic half of my Formal & Philosophical Logic (advanced) class — still being created!

My process

- I record using zoom and the classic whiteboard, with a drawing tablet so I can write easily/effectively.
- If I screw up within the first 30–45 seconds, I'll pause recording and start again.
- If I screw up later than that, then I keep the mistake in the video and fix it in real time.
- I use (variants of) the same sign on/sign off each time.
- I put on a persona.
- I have no shame.

Has it worked?

- 2.46K subscribers
- 38,500+ views
- Genuine interaction in the comments
 - ▶ People do the homework assignments I give them
 - ▶ People ask questions, knowing I will answer them
- Stranger recognition
- Student recognition

The key to my success?

If there is one thing that people tell me they've taken away from my videos, it's *You really love logic*.

I try to ensure that love and passion shines through in every single video. Even people who don't care about logic might keep watching my videos in hopes of finding out why I care about it so much.

So what can you do?

- Find the right media: Bsky/twitter/threads; youtube; TikTok; tumblr/reddit; instagram. Pick what is right *for you*.
- Figure out what the optimal size/length/format is for your medium.
- Build yourself a persona.
- Keep in lo-tech.
- Keep yourself human.
- Remember you're talking to a real audience.
- Care about your subject—whatever it is—so much that your care bleeds through everything you do.

It is possible to make the erudite accessible, whether it's oil painting or formal logic.



A screenshot of a YouTube channel page for 'Doctor Logic'. The channel name is 'Doctor Logic' with the handle '@DoctorLogicVideos'. It has 2.46K subscribers and 262 videos. The channel description includes 'More about this channel ...more' and a link to 'community.dur.ac.uk/s.l.uckelman/whatislogic'. There are buttons for 'Customize channel' and 'Manage videos'. Below the channel info, there are tabs for 'Home', 'Videos', 'Playlists', and 'Posts'. A 'For You' section shows three video thumbnails with titles: 'What is Logic? #24: Transformation Rules', 'What is Logic? #82: The Deduction Theorem for Propositional Logic', and 'What is Logic? #251'. The first video is 15:56 long and was uploaded 5 years ago. The second is 14:19 long and was uploaded 1 year ago. The third is 4:52 long and was uploaded 1 year ago.

