Video Transcript*: Using Perusall: What Has Worked for Me* with Dr. Eliza Gettel, Assistant Professor of History, September 2022

EG: Hi folks. My name is Eliza Gettel, and I am an assistant professor in the Department of History here at Villanova.

EG: I have been using Perusall for about 3 or 4 semesters now. I love it, my students rave about it.

EG: They say that it contributes greatly to their learning, and it keeps them really engaged with readings, especially primary texts, the way I use it throughout the semester.

EG: They also love the community that it helps build, since I also use the small groups in the classroom for other activities, and so they get really tight with their small groups in a lot of cases.

EG: VITAL asked me to put together a little video about how I use Perusall, and some tips and tricks that I figured out through experience on how to make it work for me.

EG: So, firstly, I'll talk a little bit about how I grade using Perusall.

EG: When I first started out using this tool, I largely graded it like participation. They didn't really get a grade for it, it was more, "Did you engage or did you not?"

EG: Given how much time students were spending on Perusall, I got the sense that they did not like this system—that they wanted more credit for what they were doing on Perusall.

EG: I now make it a substantial part of their overall course grade. In most classes Perusall is going to count for 20-25% of their course grade, and I have considered bumping that up.

EG: That being said, the reason why I have it at 20-25% is that I still do grade it largely as, "Did you engage?" "Did you engage a little?" "Did you engage zero?"

EG: So, I'm going to share my screen with the information that I provide students in the syllabus, and I'm going to stop sharing my video while I do the screen-sharing.

EG: Here you see the syllabus portion of one of the classes that I use Perusall in—my core history class.

EG: And the idea is that these assignments, I mean, we do them about once a week. There's a part of the semester where they do short ones twice a week, and so overall they're doing about 15 Perusall assignments across the course of the semester.

EG: These end up being fairly low-stakes assignments in that they're each only worth about 1-2 points since Perusall is worth 20% of their overall course grade

EG: I set my Perusall comments to be due by noon on the day of class—this course is usually offered around 3:00 pm, so students have the evening and morning to do them.

EG: And then I have a couple hours to go in, read at least some of the comments, and use them to prepare for class.

EG: I tend to start reading a day or two before class to get a sense of the early comments and read some of the later ones the day of.

EG: I grade each Perusall comment out of 3. This is a standard grading system on Perusall, at least as they used to set it up.

EG: It's fairly straightforward in that if you show that you're engaging with the text, you're not just summarizing the text, you're actually asking questions, giving some interpretation, you've posted all the necessary number of comments (or more), you're going to get full credit and a "3.

EG: So, I would say usually about 75% of students are going to end up with a 3 on any given assignment.

EG: It can be much higher than that, it can be pretty close to 100% some weeks.

EG: A score of "2" means you're doing the assignment, but you're often summarizing or repeating what's already in the text, or you are summarizing and repeating other peers' comments or just agreeing with them—basically your content is not adding to the discussion all that much.

EG: One means you didn't complete the whole assignment usually.

EG: So, if the assignment is, "Add 4+ comments." you might have only done 2.

EG: And 0 is you did not sign in, you did not engage, you did not do anything.

EG: So, this is kind of a sliding scale.

EG: Perusall gives automatic grades to the comments the way I have it set up, but then I manually go in and check them and change them, if need be, and I'll show you how I do that.

EG: I do give partial credit for comments that are posted up to 5 days late because some students have bad weeks, and they have a lot of assignments due.

EG: And so, I do use Perusall's automatic option to give partial credit for late comments and it declines as you get farther and farther away from the deadline.

EG: I use the Perusall gradebook feature. I have never integrated Perusall with the Learning Management System, so I just used the Perusall gradebook and then manually transferred grades at midterm and final grades into either Blackboard or my own gradebook.

EG: On the left you'll see the scale that I use. The scale is based on my first few semesters using Perusall and trying to get one that works with patterns and getting a kind of spread in grades.

EG: If you've largely gotten 3s all semester, then you're going to end up in the A range. You can still get a number of 2s and still make it into the A range.

EG: If you're largely posting comments which are a 2, which again, is just signing on and adding the minimum number of comments, you're going to end up in the B range.

EG: If you're frequently missing assignments, frequently not posting enough comments, then you're going to end up in the C, D, or F range.

EG: One of the reasons why I've given a significant amount of weight to Perusall grades is that I think it models good skills for the workforce in that you have to show up once or twice a week on Perusall, you have to do your part, you engage with your colleagues.

EG: I think it's a good chance to practice life skills, even if the grades are not always completely mapping onto deep intellectual engagement with the class.

EG: There is a sense of participation here and I think, that is a valid educational choice.

EG: I'm happy to share a version of this via email if it would be helpful, but now I want to show you this class set up on Perusall, so let me just switch my screen.

EG: Alright, so now you should be seeing one of my classes from last Spring semester

EG: And you'll see there are roughly 15 or so assignments set up here.

EG: I did find that students started going to Perusall and not to Blackboard because a lot of the reading was just on Perusall, so I started putting all of the assignments…included the other reading instructions on here for most assignments.

EG: For instance, we go down to this one, this tells them what they're supposed to do besides the Perusall assignment.

EG: For most assignments I also include some questions to keep in mind and some instructions or background, depending on if they need more background for a text.

EG: There is the grade assignment feature for actually going in and grading these assignments, I tend to use just the open assignment option, then I go over and load up all conversations because I like to read through the comments in order, vs. by student.

EG: That way I can see all the conversations that are happening and it also helps me keep track of where we are in the text when I'm reading a comment.

EG: So, for instance, if I load up this one, you'll see an example of what I do.

EG: So here Perusall is set up to grade automatically and I'll show you what grading criteria I used in the settings in a moment.

EG: Here Perusall automatically gave it a 3. I read it, liked it, gave it a 3.

EG: Same with the second one.

EG: Here you see an example of my TA responding and having a social presence online with the class, which is amazing.

EG: We would both read and comment on conversations and this would really help the students feel comfortable engaging with us in class and also gave us more of a presence outside of class time.

EG: Otherwise, here on this bottom comment you see the comment is largely agreeing with previous points, it's not moving the conversation forward as much, so I overrode it and gave it a 2.

EG: This is where I keep on the automatic grading for simplifying things and saving my own time and then I just override as necessary.

EG: I will say that Perusall has a bit of a difficulty grading on content. A lot of these scores tend to be how long is the comment, how well written is it, does it follow proper grammar, and this is not always an equitable approach to grading.

EG: So, I do read and check that the grade is reflecting the content more than the grammar and style of the comment itself.

EG: I do sometimes filter by student, so I'll go down to a specific person and load just their comments.

EG: If, for instance, Perusall has given them a 2 and I want to double-check that they deserved a 2 overall on the assignment.

EG: I also frequently filter by unanswered questions, so I can go back and check that.

EG: So, my criteria are largely weighted towards content.

EG: You can see I have the automatic grading on here now.

EG: And then I make annotation content worth a good bit.

EG: And I've played around with these criteria, I'll probably keep playing around with these, especially since Perusall changed them.

EG: As a disclaimer all of the percentages were established before Perusall changed its grading structure over this past summer.

EG: So, I do weigh content more than other aspects of the annotation.

EG: I make opening assignment less than what it originally was given under the holistic reading criteria.

EG: I do still count reading to the end as big though and I give a middling amount to active engagement time.

EG: Sometimes I make getting responses and upvoting worth more or less than others, but essentially, it's not necessary to get full credit for the assignment.

EG: Depending how you're using it; you might want to shift that a bit.

EG: The quiz function is new, so I have not used it.

EG: I'm interested to see how that works in the future.

EG: That's generally how scoring has worked for me.

EG: I set the score range from 0 to 3 as you saw in my syllabus instructions and then I choose to manually release scores in the gradebook.

EG: Here you can see various settings that I have on.

EG: And there's one more note on groups.

EG: I do use these groups in other aspects of the course.

EG: I'll use them for group projects, I'll use them for in class discussions.

EG: I'll tell them to get into their Perusall groups.

EG: Students have generally reported that they like being in the same group all semester because they know what to expect when they go into groups.

EG: They get a chance to figure out the expectations for interaction and they like getting comfortable and close with their groupmates.

EG: You see them, especially coming out of the pandemic, they've been really wanting this small community in the classroom.

EG: They really seem to enjoy working in groups and get a lot out of that.

EG: I tend to scaffold these groups into the rest of the course, so that they're interacting face to face in person, as well as on Perusall.

EG: I think that's the main things on how I use Perusall and grade.

EG: If you have other questions feel free to email me.

EG: I'm happy to give you read access to some of my courses, if possible.

EG: I hope you enjoy using Perusall and that your students do as well.

Transcribed by Kimberly Muldoon Ivenz, VITAL, September 2022.