ENGINEERING
Fictions
*Engineering Fictions* is a creative process-based technique for thinking and writing in small groups, through focused conversation and language experiments.

In the spirit of Donna Haraway’s scholarship, *Engineering Fictions* operates according to the principle that “it matters which ideas we think other ideas with”\(^R\). It matters what stories tell stories and it matters what worlds world worlds.

*Engineering Fictions* is not, therefore, “an innocent universal gesture, but a risky proposition in relentless historical relational contingency.”\(^R\)

What’s more, it’s enjoyable.

This handbox holds indexes of Engineering Fictions sessions that have happened since 2013 through CONNECT.
Its seeds and constraints are offered here as both a record and as a prompt for transdisciplinary conversation and creative practice in divergent research contexts.

Reference:
Donna Haraway, SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far, 2011, Pilgrim Award Acceptance Comments, Poland.

*Engineering Fictions* is curated and hosted by Jessica Foley. The workshop began within a telecommunications research centre at Trinity College Dublin, called CTVR, as a technique for supporting creative and critical practices in engineering research.

www.engineeringfictions.org
THE WRITING CONSTRAINTS

Once the catalyst of the session has seeded her material with the group and conversation has unfolded a bit, constraints or scores are introduced to focus individual thinking and response through writing.

Whatever is written is afterwards usually read aloud, but no one should feel obliged to do this.

Many of the constraints for writing were improvised by participants during the sessions in response to the seed.

Improvising constraints is an important part of the learning generated through the process of Engineering Fictions.
A round-table group exercise for collaborative writing learned from theatre group Wreckio Ensemble, NYC (http://www.wreckio.com/).

After some discussion of a topic, each person in the group places one word at the centre of a blank page. Next, each person passes their sheet to the person on their left (or right, you decide!), who then adds a word to the page in response. Make fast associations, like popcorn popping! Pass the pages around for two or three cycles until each page is filled with associative words. Once each person has their original page returned to them, you each in turn read aloud all the words on your page. The group listens to each reader and writes downs any words they like. The words you
choose become a vocabulary set for you to write with. For about 20-30 mins, write using all of the words you have selected. If you feel ready, read what you have written to the group. Alternatively, mix up the texts and read them aloud anonymously.

**EXQUISITE SENTENCES**
This is a cut-up technique, where words and punctuation are cut out from ready-made texts and placed into a vessel. The writing is produced by selecting one word at a time and arranging them into sentences.

**ADOPT-A-QUOTE**
Select any number of quotes made in relation to a specific topic (e.g. Limits). Make a pile of quotes. Adopt one of these quotes. Use each word in the quote as the first word in a sentence. Complete the sentences and arrange in stanza’s or as prose, or however seems appropriate.
GLOSSING (Medieval Hypertext)

Using an A3 sized sheet or larger, free write for about 10 minutes in response to the seeded conversation. Next, pass your sheet to another person in the group. They must select a word or sentence from your text and create a Gloss or Hyper-link, that expands in some way upon the word or sentence. This can be factual or complete whimsy, it’s up to the Glosser!

PALINDROMES

A word or sentence that reads the same in both directions.

YOU MEAN...?

Write a sentence in response to the seed, a reflection, thought or comment. Pass this sentence to another person in the group. They must paraphrase your sentence. Then they must fold the paper so that the
original sentence is hidden to the next receiver. The sentences are passed around and paraphrased in this way until the page can be folded no more.

REVERSE REDACTION
Write a sentence in response to the seed. Read over your sentence and re-write it, leaving some words out. Pass the redacted sentence to another person in the group to complete. Read aloud the original with the reverse redaction.

FREE WRITING
Writing for a set period of time (e.g. 15mins) without concern for spelling, grammar, etc. A way of bring thoughts into form through sentences. If you can’t think of anything to write, write that down – write down your actual thoughts.
GLOSSARY

Like any practice, Engineering Fictions has over time developed its own vocabulary. Below are some of the key conceptual terms that have been used during the process.

SEED

This is the topic, material or concept which the catalyst brings to the attention of the EF gathering. The seed must have meaning for the catalyst and the context of the session. This meaning does not need to be identical. The seed acts as a key for communication within the gathering.

CATALYST

The catalyst is the person who wishes to seed conversation and writing through the context (e.g. CONNECT). Very often, the
catalyst is in the process of devising an aspect of her own research and wishes to open this process up to divergent ways of thinking. To be a catalyst is to act generously, critically and courageously.

**FOIL or HOST**
The foil is the person who draws out the qualities of the seed with the catalyst and helps to frame the session. The foil helps to make the seed a little bit strange so that the catalyst and those gathered can begin to discuss it in a fresh and diverse way. The foil also prepares the technical set-up and hospitality for each session and acts as an ally to the catalyst during the session. She also helps to choose and/or devise constraints for writing.

**CONTEXT or MEETING-PLACE**
The context is the place where the EF session’s take place. For the most part,
the context is one informed by the everyday practices and languages of technological and scientific research (e.g. CONNECT). Sometimes, however, the EF session happens in contexts informed by practices and languages of art research and exhibition (e.g. The Blue Coat Gallery, Liverpool).

**CONSTRAINT**

A constraint is a rule, limit, affordance or framework that supports EF participants to generate writing of some kind, e.g. a diagram, a haiku, a sentence, a couplet...

**REFERENCE**

A reference is a source of information, knowledge and/or material that has in some way informed and/or conditioned the seed, the catalyst, the constraints, the foil and/or the context.