

## Not Your Mother's Everyday Examples

Sometimes it's hard to remember how much language, experience, and what is familiar, differs for people based on their age. Some of us, for example, started listening to music on LPs while others have no idea what an LP is. Others may have started listening to music on tapes, CDs, or even MP3s. To remind professors just how much students' life experiences differ from ours, each year Beloit College publishes a Mindset List<sup>1</sup>, identifying experiences that have shaped the lives—and formed the mindset—of entering students. Items from the most recent lists include:

- Your students have never used a card catalog to find a book.
- Your students have always been able to read books on an electronic screen.
- IBM has never made typewriters in their lifetime.
- The Web has been an online tool since they were born.
- Bar codes have always been on everything, from library cards and snail mail to retail items.

To be most effective the examples that we use in class need to be engaging and familiar to students—to be part of their everyday life. Too many of the common examples used in engineering—artillery, metal plates, and steel bars don't meet these criteria. Luckily there are many examples that do meet these criteria such as:

Bikes	Current Events (oil spills, earthquakes)
Food (apples, cookies)	iPods
iPhones	Reusable water bottles
Skateboards	Wii

While these examples are pretty ubiquitous there are other examples that may be familiar to some students but not others. For example, students from southern states may be unfamiliar with cars skidding on ice, while students from northern parts of the country regularly deal with ice and snow related driving conditions. Students from coastal areas know a lot about hurricanes, while students in the lower midwest know more about tornadoes than they probably want to. Not all students are ESPN or car junkies, so while having examples centered on sports or cars is great, a diversity of examples serves your students better.

If you're not sure what everyday examples to use, look around the campus for inspiration or even better, ask your current or former students. Finding everyday examples can be a great intellectual and creative challenge as well as being fun. The *Everyday Examples* on the ENGAGE website is a great starting point: go to [www.EngageEngineering.org](http://www.EngageEngineering.org) and click on *strategies*.

<sup>1</sup> The Mindset Lists are available at <http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/>

