

Who's afraid of the big bad research paper?

Improving Student Writing through Assignment Sequencing

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Resource page: <http://library.ok.ubc.ca/wrs/wrc/faculty-resources/sequencing-writing/>

Sequencing, sometimes called scaffolding or the process approach, involves breaking a complex assignment into smaller steps so that students incrementally build the necessary skills to successfully complete the larger assignment (e.g. a secondary research paper).

Because some feedback is given during the process, the instructor's expectations for the overall assignment become more transparent.

Application of Bean's principles to address the skills needed to write a secondary research paper:

Sequence Item	Bean: Principle Skills Needed	Associated Activities
<i>Workshop:</i> Brainstorming, Selecting and Refining a Topic	How to ask research questions How to find sources Why to find sources	In class brainstorm and discussion of topics with class Instructor and writing specialist feedback
Annotated Bibliography	How to find sources Why to find sources How to manage sources	Example provided Rubric Marked by instructor
Outline	How to manage sources How to cite sources	Example provided In-class workshop Marked by instructor
<i>Workshop:</i> How to write paragraphs and incorporate research	How to work sources into the paper How to cite sources	Provided examples Brainstorm categories for paper In-class exercise on creating transitions
Draft of paper	How to work sources into the paper How to cite sources	Peer-evaluated using Nursing Year 2 form Understand and apply assessment criteria for an assignment
Final version	Integrating the skills	Rubric Marked by instructor
Reflection	Integrating the skills	Written outside of class

Bean, John C. (2011) *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Make scheduling and sequencing of assignments support your goals

Questions to ask and examples of strategies:

Is the task complex (i.e. requiring a number of steps)?

- If so, can you layer the assignments for a complex task? For example, a formal research paper can be layered by making a first assignment a review of secondary research and the second one an application of that research to a particular problem.
- What lower-stakes assignments (like brainstorming a topic, one-minute papers, summarizing an article, or creating an outline) can you assign and have the students workshop or discuss in class?

Is there a research component?

- Is it possible to schedule some class time (e.g. 30 minutes) for students to bring in critiques of their sources to discuss in groups.

Are you asking students to analyze a problem?

- Can you schedule class time to explain the methods of analysis in your field and have them apply it to their developing paper in a quick informal writing assignment (e.g. 20 minutes).

Can you identify a clear sequence in which students should accomplish the tasks?

- Does the order reflect an increasing difficulty in tasks?
- Does one assignment build on the skills developed in the preceding one?
E.g. does a long analytical paper follow a short summary piece?

To which components of the sequence can you assign some marks without assessing it yourself?

- Can you assign some marks and/or class time for student to exchange drafts before the final paper is due? (*Peer review can take place during class time or outside of class time - if outside, then points should probably be assigned for completing it*).

Miller, Hildy. "Designing effective writing assignments." University of Minnesota Center for Writing.
Retrieved from <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/assignments/designing.html>