Strategies for Student Success with Writing

Writing Across the Curriculum+
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Workshop Objectives

By the end of today's workshop you will:

1. Reflect on your writing process and compare it to the writing process of students;

2. Recognize and evaluate some strategies for scaffolding the writing process of students; and

3. Consider how you might incorporate a writing to learn/low-stakes writing activity into your teaching.

Defining the writing process

Reading references	collecting	Reading references materials (textbooks, articles, lecture notes, etc.).
Writing notes	collecting	Making notes from reference books or journal articles, but not writing text that will appear in the essay.
Thinking about content	planning	Thinking of things to say in your essay (rather than thinking about how to say them).
Writing plan or outline	planning	Writing a plan of what you are going to say in your essay.
Reading plan or outline	planning	Reading your outline or plan.
Changing plan or outline	planning	Making alterations to your plan or outline.
Thinking about wording	translating	Pausing whilst writing your essay and thinking about how to write the current or next sentence.
Writing text	translating	Writing your essay (rather than notes or an outline).
Reading text	revising	Reading through all or part of your essay.
Changing text	revising	Making changes to text that you have already written.

Source: Torrance *et al.* 1999

Defining the writing process

•Fifth phase: orientation or assessing the writing task (Proske *et al.* 2012)

Student writing strategies

•**Planning strategy ("think in advance")**: spend more time planning what they want to say before starting to write

•**Revision strategy ("think by writing")**: figure out the content during writing and change the content over a series of drafts (Galbraith and Torrance 2004)

Student writing strategies

•Breaking down the writing process into sub-steps (scaffolding) helped students spend more time planning and writing and improved the writing (Proske *et al.* 2012)

•Adapting writing tasks to students' writing strategy increased their learning (Kieft *et al.* 2008)

Scaffolding writing: Assessing the task

- Example activity

INTERPRETING THE ASSIGNMENT

Ask yourself a few basic questions as you read and jot down the answers on the assignment sheet:

- Why did your instructor ask you to do this particular task?

- Who is your audience?

- What kind of evidence do you need to support your ideas?

- What kind of writing style is acceptable?

- What are the absolute rules of the paper?

(Source: The Writing Centre, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/understanding-assignments/

- UBC Learning Commons Student Toolkits – Managing Your Time
http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits/managing-your-time/

Scaffolding writing: Collecting

- UBC Library Faculty Resources
http://about.library.ubc.ca/teaching/faculty-resources/

  – Faculty Information Literacy Toolkit
http://about.library.ubc.ca/teaching/faculty-resources/faculty-information-literacy-toolkit/

- UBC Library Research Help (for students)
http://help.library.ubc.ca/

  – Basic Library Skills Tutorial
http://guides.library.ubc.ca/library_tutorial

Scaffolding writing: Planning

•Students spend more time in the planning phase (Proske *et al*. 2012)

•A mental, or paper, outline results in better writing, while a rough draft alone does not (Kellogg 1988; Galbraith and Torrance 2004)

•Focuses students on turning their ideas into text when drafting; improved usage, coherency, development, and effectiveness, but not mechanics (Kellogg 1988; Galbraith and Torrance 2004)

Scaffolding writing: Revision

- Multiple drafts or a series of assignments

- Providing feedback on drafts
    - Have students respond to feedback (e.g. Guilford 2001)

- Peer review

- Self-assessment
    - Review their draft
    - Reflect on revisions (e.g. Meta-statement, Skene and Fedko)

- Allowing students to revise and hand-in assignments a second time (remarked)

- In-class writing instruction (e.g. Fallahi *et al.* 2007)

Scaffolding writing: Revision

•Scaffolding the writing process (sub-steps) helped students spend more time writing and improved the clarity of the writing (Proske *et al.* 2012)

•In-class instruction on mechanics/grammar/style resulted in significant improvements over 4 writing assignments (Fallahi *et al*. 2007)

•Helping students detect errors by error marking, or even giving the general location of errors, helps students at all skill levels with revision (McCutcheon 1996)

Scaffolding writing: Examples

• Scaffolding a bio-engineering research project to resemble the writing process for a journal article
  – Students submit a point-by-point response to the peer/instructor reviews

(Figure 1, Guilford 2001)

• Scaffolding an organic chemistry capstone project
  – Increase scaffolding with progressive assignments and changed to a research proposal
  – Included low-stakes reflective writing

(Table 1, Jacobs *et al.* 2015)

Strategies to help students learn concepts: writing to learn/low-stakes writing

•"5 minute writings" on discussion topics, compared to thinking only, improved scoring on factual and conceptual multiple choice questions on the topics (Drabick *et al.* 2007)

•Ungraded writing assignments (reflective/generic on assigned topics) performed better on content questions related to the writing, than on other questions (Nevid *et al.* 2012)

•Students writing microthemes scored higher, than the control group, on writing quality and knowledge and application of material (Stewart *et al.* 2010)

Helping students develop a growth mindset

- **Growth mindset**: holding the belief that intelligence can change and develop over time

- **Fixed mindset**: seeing intelligence as an innate trait that cannot change (Dweck 2007)

- Mindset predicted future math achievement of Grade 7 students (Blackwell *et al.* 2007)

- College organic chemistry students with a growth orientation had higher final grades than those with a fixed orientation; caused by deeper learning strategies (Grant and Dweck 2003)

Helping students develop a growth mindset

•Talk about developing a growth mindset in class (e.g. stories of students that succeeded with persistence and effort).

•Talk about what it takes to effectively learn the material (amount of time, activities outside class).

•Explain that writing is hard work, by sharing your own challenges in writing and discussing your own writing process.

•Break down difficult/complex tasks into their parts, so students see their progress over time.

Workshop Summary

- Stages of the writing process and strategies students employ, which may differ from more experienced writers

- Process-oriented strategies to help students improve their writing

- Helping students think more deeply about concepts through writing to learn/low-stakes writing

- Growth mindset

WAC+ Program Services

- Workshops

    - Writing Assignment and Assessment Design

    - Providing Effective Feedback on Writing Assignments

    - Teaching Succinct and Accurate Science Writing

    - Teaching Oral Communication in Science

    - Non-traditional Communication Assignments

- One-on-one consultations

- TA Training

- Class visits to discuss writing assignments

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