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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERPRETING THE ASSIGNMENT</th>
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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
References


References


• Skene, A. & Fedko, S. Assignment Scaffolding. CTL - Educational Technology, University of Toronto Scarborough. Available online: http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/technology/assignment-scaffolding


