

Developing and Implementing Scaffolded/Constructivist Writing Assignments

Scaffolded, or constructivist writing assignments are an often-recommended teaching strategy in WAC/WID classrooms to foster the development of writing skills progressively through a series of interconnected tasks. Below, are three specific approaches to use in developing scaffolded writing assignments.

The Building Block Approach.

The building block approach involves breaking down a large, complex writing task into smaller, manageable components that build upon each other. This method ensures that students develop and refine their skills incrementally.

Step-by-Step Implementation:

- **Identify the Final Assignment:** Start by defining the final assignment or project, such as a research paper, literature review, or policy analysis.
- **Break Down the Assignment:** Decompose the final task into smaller assignments, each focusing on a specific skill or component. For instance, for a research paper, the smaller tasks could be:
 1. **Topic Proposal:** Students submit a brief proposal outlining their chosen topic, research questions, and preliminary sources.
 2. **Annotated Bibliography:** Students compile a list of sources with summaries and evaluations of each source's relevance and quality.
 3. **Thesis Statement and Outline:** Students develop a thesis statement and a detailed outline of their paper.
 4. **Draft Sections:** Students write and submit sections of the paper (e.g., introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion) for feedback.
 5. **Peer Review:** Students participate in peer review sessions to critique each other's drafts.
 6. **Final Draft:** Students revise their work based on feedback and submit the final paper.

Benefits:

- Students gain a clear understanding of each component of the writing process.
- Frequent feedback helps students improve iteratively.
- The approach reduces student anxiety by making the assignment more manageable.

The Iterative Feedback Loop.

This approach focuses on continuous feedback and revision cycles to help students refine their writing through multiple drafts.

Step-by-Step Implementation:

- **Initial Draft:** Assign students to write an initial draft of the entire paper or a specific section.
- **Feedback Session:** Conduct a feedback session where students receive detailed feedback from the instructor and peers. This can be done in class or online.
- **Revision:** Students revise their drafts based on the feedback received.
- **Subsequent Drafts:** Repeat the feedback and revision process for two or more iterations, depending on the complexity of the assignment.
- **Final Submission:** After several rounds of revision, students submit their polished final draft.

Benefits:

- Students learn to view writing as a process rather than a one-time effort.
- Iterative feedback helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement.
- This method encourages deeper engagement with the material and promotes critical thinking and self-reflection.

The Integrated Skills Approach.

The integrated skills approach combines writing tasks with other academic skills, such as reading, critical thinking, and research. This method ensures that students develop a well-rounded skill set.

Step-by-Step Implementation:

- **Reading Assignments:** Assign readings that are directly related to the writing task. Ensure that students engage with the material through reading journals or discussion posts.
- **Critical Analysis:** Have students write critical analyses or summaries of the readings, focusing on key arguments, evidence, and methodologies.
- **Research Skills:** Incorporate tasks that build research skills, such as finding and evaluating sources, summarizing articles, and synthesizing information from multiple texts.
- **Writing Assignments:** Link these tasks to the final writing assignment. For example, a literature review assignment could be preceded by a series of reading responses, source evaluations, and synthesis essays.
- **Peer Review and Workshops:** Integrate peer review sessions and writing workshops to help students refine their work through collaborative learning.

Benefits:

- Students develop a holistic understanding of the subject matter.
- The integration of various skills helps students see the connections between reading, research, and writing.
- This approach promotes active learning and critical engagement with the course material.