Faculty are charged with the responsibility of teaching course content while fostering effective writing skills that lead to academic, professional, and civic success. However, these writing skills are often overlooked in a content-heavy, deadline-driven grading environment.

Scaffolded assignments that provide support of product and process are one way to address this concern and have been shown to result in more robust educational outcomes (Herrington, 1981; Kirsher, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). The problem many faculty have with providing “extra” writing instruction and scaffolded assignments (i.e., several small assignments leading to a larger project) is that it potentially adds more work to their schedules.

To facilitate improved writing across the curriculum and in the disciplines, this workshop offers faculty digital technologies to help students scaffold writing projects. The support for both faculty and students are dependent on the strategy of scaffolding a major research and writing project into smaller, more manageable, low-stakes assignments. To help faculty assign and students complete a major research and writing assignment, this presentation will provide digitally mediated activity/assignment prompts for faculty and students that can be adapted to numerous assignments.

There will be a variety of activities for each of the following scaffolded steps: 1) Identify Topic/Problem/Question; 2) Find & Track Secondary Resources; 3) Read & Evaluate Secondary Resources; 4) Synthesize Ideas & Resources; 5) Draft & (Peer) Review; 6) Present Final Project; and 7) Reflect.

Who Should Come:

Instructors who have online or hybrid courses that include writing assignments

For This Workshop:

Bring your laptop to this workshop, along with your syllabus and major writing assignment prompts.

If you do not have a UA Google Apps for Education account with your NetID, sign up at account.arizona.edu. Workshop materials will be shared with registered attendees in a Google Drive.

For more information and registration:
Information is Power!

Research Evolves:
Formulate research questions based on curiosity and gaps in information or data available.
Reflect on how the research process is iterative and requires persistence.
Apply research methods that are appropriate for the need, context, and type of inquiry.

Authority is Contextual:
Determine attributes of authoritative information for different needs, with the understanding that context plays a role.
Recognize that traditional notions of granting authority might hinder diverse ideas and worldviews.
Acknowledge that oneself may be seen as an authority in a particular area, and recognize the responsibilities entailed.

Knowledge is Co-constructed:
Critique and evaluate information to contribute to the construction of knowledge and make it stronger.
Implement strategies to recognize co-constructed knowledge and the role of a co-creator.
Reflect on the usefulness of making mistakes in the search process and how research is not solely transactional.

Information is Power:
Value the Why of using citations, rather than solely focusing on the How (go beyond just avoiding plagiarism).
Identify scholarly publication practices and how they provide and/or hinder access to scholarly information.
Identify why some groups/individuals may be underrepresented or systematically marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information.

Foundations, Tier One, and Tier Two classes should explicitly introduce students to important sources of information related to the content of the course. Instructors who require use of library resources, including online resources through the library, are strongly encouraged to consult with librarians in designing assignments. Students should also be informed about legal and ethical implications of using information, especially plagiarism.

Policy Reminder: General Education Courses Should Address One or More of the Information Literacy Standards
As defined by the Association of College and Research Libraries, information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." "Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. Information literacy is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education." The expected information literacy outcomes for the General Education Program follow:

Scholarship is a Conversation:
Recognize the metaphor of conversation to describe the purpose of research.
Identify the contribution of specific scholarly pieces and varying perspectives to a disciplinary knowledge conversation.
Contribute to the scholarly conversation at an appropriate level, through the lens of becoming a creator/critic.

A BIT OF UA HISTORY
Since 1938, when it was declared unsafe, Old Main had stood unused and locked up. One could only walk around the lower area under the verandas. There were various proposals and arguments for its demolition but Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, Billy Bray -- after making a survey -- said it would cost more to tear it down than to let it stand.

It was, in the end, the U.S. Navy which kept Old Main from sinking. In September 1942, the Navy awarded a contract for the repair and rehabilitation of the UA's most treasured building for use of the wartime Naval Indoctrination School. The entire structure was refurbished at a cost of $89,000.
Reminder! Thank you if you have already sent in your GE Fall 17 Syllabus. If you have not, please email it to evm@email.arizona.edu as soon as possible.

From the Editor

Last week I received a Facebook message from student that I had in class about 4 years ago. She started Veterinary Medical School in California this semester and wished I were there teaching about muscle contraction and the heart, because in her words, “You did a better job explaining and drawing out pics.” I was not sure what to say, but messaged her back a thanks and asked her how she was doing. I also asked her if she wanted my power points from class to use as a reference. I have sent them to quite a few students over the years and made them into pdfs to make emailing them easier. Needless to say, she accepted my offer!

Whenever I question myself as to why I am spending nights grading exams, or reading term papers, I think about those students who have reached out and reminded me of “why”. I will bet that every teacher reading this will have someone in their past that will remind them of the “why” we teach, and I think that is the greatest reward a teacher could ask for. You make a difference in our General Education Program, thank you!

Writing Tip of the Month:

Engaging with reading: Previewing a text

Taking time in class to preview texts can help increase student engagement with and comprehension of course texts (Bean, 2011; Hopson, 2003). Here are just a few strategies for previewing texts that range from 30 seconds to 10-15 minutes:

1. Tell students why the reading will be important for the course topic and their success in the course
2. Pique curiosity by presenting the problem explored in the text and asking students to discuss what they think it will be about
3. Model your own reading strategies. How do you read in different situations? Show them your notes or annotations from when you’ve read something similar to their expected reading

Ask students to write about the text before they start reading. The following are a few questions presented by Leora Freedman at the University of Toronto:

1. Read the title and write about the subject matter. Have you read about this topic before? Where and when? What do you already know about it, or what might you guess? Is it linked in some way to your personal experience? Do you already have opinions about some aspect of this topic?
2. Who wrote this text? What information do you have about this author? Does any information about the author appear anywhere on the title page or elsewhere in the text? If the author is an historical figure, what do you already know about him or her?
3. Where was this text originally published? What type of publication is this, and where does it fit into this field of study? Who would be the audience for this kind of writing? What would the audience expect to find in it?

Read the chapter titles or the headings that break up the chapter or article. What seems to be the general progression of ideas?

References


It was a dark and stormy night...
Honors Contracts

Honors Contracts are an agreement between an Honors student and faculty that identifies what the student will accomplish in the class in order to receive Honors credit. To graduate with Honors, these students must complete a minimum of 30 units Honors credit.

Unfortunately, Honors students are often assigned extra work, such as a written assignment, that does not significantly differ from the kinds of assignments given to the rest of the class. This can result in disappointment, frustration, and a missed opportunity, since the work of Honors students can benefit the entire class.

These assignments often result from a misunderstanding of the Honors experience, which is meant to be more than just performing extra work. As someone who teaches Honors classes and who has participated in Honors contracts for many years, I have had to identify what this experience involves firsthand. Drawing upon my own education, I realized that the best approach I could adopt was to model my own experience as a graduate student.

My graduate classes were smaller and more collaborative with my instructor and fellow students, emphasizing the soft skills—communication, collaboration, and diplomacy—in addition to the technical skills that formed the content of the class. From this I’ve been able to create Honors classes that are significantly different from non-Honors counterparts.

How does this extend to the Honors contracts that affect at most a few students? For these students I’ve assigned a class presentation of a topic that connects my class to the specific interests of each. For example, one of my students was interested in working in a vineyard, and we identified that grapes have very specific soil fertility requirements, relevant for my intro to soil science class. Her project allowed her to make the connection of the class to her job, and visa versa. In this way her Honors assignment was a benefit not just to her, but to the entire class.

In developing your Honors contracts with a student, you can ask yourself a few questions:
--Is the assignment specific, measurable, and clearly understood by yourself and the student?
--How is the assignment relevant to both the class and the particular background of the student?
--In what way is the assignment beneficial to the student, the class, and yourself?

I hope this provides some useful guidelines in developing Honors contracts, and thank you for the work that you do in helping these students! Tom Wilson, Honors College

Book Review

*Teach Students How to Learn: Strategies You Can Incorporate Into Any Course to Improve Student Metacognition, Study Skills, and Motivation* by Saundra Yancy McGuire (Author), Thomas Angelo (Foreword), Stephanie McGuire (Contributor)

What is preventing your students from performing according to expectations? Saundra McGuire offers a simple but profound answer: If you teach students how to learn and give them simple, straightforward strategies to use, they can significantly increase their learning and performance.

For over a decade Saundra McGuire has been acclaimed for her presentations and workshops on metacognition and student learning because the tools and strategies she shares have enabled faculty to facilitate dramatic improvements in student learning and success. This book encapsulates the model and ideas she has developed in the past fifteen years, ideas that are being adopted by an increasing number of faculty with considerable effect.

The methods she proposes do not require restructuring courses or an inordinate amount of time to teach. They can often be accomplished in a single session, transforming students from memorizers and regurgitators to students who begin to think critically and take responsibility for their own learning.

Saundra McGuire takes the reader sequentially through the ideas and strategies that students need to understand and implement. First, she demonstrates how introducing students to metacognition and Bloom’s Taxonomy reveals to them the importance of understanding how they learn and provides the lens through which they can view learning activities and measure their intellectual growth. Next, she presents a specific study system that can quickly empower students to maximize their learning. Then, she addresses the importance of dealing with emotion, attitudes, and motivation by suggesting ways to change students’ mindsets about ability and by providing a range of strategies to boost motivation and learning; finally, she offers guidance to faculty on partnering with campus learning centers.

She pays particular attention to academically unprepared students, noting that the strategies she offers for this particular population are equally beneficial for all students.

While stressing that there are many ways to teach effectively, and that readers can be flexible in picking and choosing among the strategies she presents, Saundra McGuire offers the reader a step-by-step process for delivering the key messages of the book to students in as little as 50 minutes. Free online supplements provide three slide sets and a sample video lecture.

This book is written primarily for faculty but will be equally useful for TAs, tutors, and learning center professionals. For readers with no background in education or cognitive psychology, the book avoids jargon and esoteric theory.
Using Wikipedia to explore the development of facts

Julia "Jules" Balen  April 4, 2017  Blog Post

“Don’t use Wikipedia!” Educators at every level admonish students: “It isn’t accurate.” Never mind the temptation of plagiarizing. But such edicts at this point are akin to sticking our heads in the sand. As the 5th most searched site globally, with around 8 billion page views a month in English alone, Wikipedia offers easy access “answers,” and plays a substantial role in shifting the site for knowledge acquisition and affecting the quality of knowledge production and dissemination. Scholars need to be paying more attention.

Those of us teaching did not grow up in anything near the same technological soup that the students we teach have. While this has always been to some degree the case, the degree of difference is arguably larger than it has been in the past century. While the challenge for educators is bigger than Wikipedia alone, in a “post-fact” era, we need to reframe how we think about both facts and the practice of teaching. Students have access to more information than anyone could ever use at their fingertips. Pose a question and any student with a cell phone can find an answer in seconds. Of course the quality of the answer will vary wildly and therein lies a clue to the needed shift in our roles from fonts of knowledge to facilitators of learning. How do we sort fact from conjecture, opinion, or fiction? The “how” and “why” of learning as an ongoing process is more important than the “what” as we and our students are increasingly bombarded with “information.”

Admit it: the body of knowledge and our access to it in any area is now far beyond what any one person, even a specialist in a field, is able to fully absorb. I will certainly say that there is no way for me to fully keep up with all of the research in even one small sliver of my own field. Just as scholars are constantly refining our own skills at sorting through the endless stream of information that comes our way in order to keep current, we need to be sharing more transparently with students (and even community members) how we decide what’s worth serious consideration and what is not and why.

The focus of our teaching needs to shift from emphasizing content to emphasizing how to make sense of any relevant materials while engaging students in practicing scholarly methods. The “how” has arguably been the secret sauce that we have traditionally expected students to figure out along the way, but the stakes have changed. Content overwhelms us. How to make sense of it is sorely needed.

Of course subject materials still matter. But sharing the process of curating course content matters at least as much when it comes to helping students understand how to think about the material that they run across outside of class. How do we equip them to carry on as intelligent citizens after they leave our classes?

We can bet that subject matter is expanding by the minute and that it is easily available in any number of ways from all sorts of perspectives—many of them monetized and politicized in less than useful ways. How to sort accurate from inaccurate information has grown increasingly difficult as marketing has turned our internet experiences into individualized media bubbles designed to sell us more than inform us. How do we help students gain the skills they will need to make good sense of it all?

Counter to the common educational edict against Wikipedia, one very useful class project I have begun to use to help students sort the chaff from the grain is not just using, but editing entries. As a form of crowdsourcing to document shared knowledge, Wikipedia offers ample examples of the best and worst of the knowledge production process in all of its human messiness. In both the entries and the extensive editing histories and talk pages, it offers samples of the extremely scholarly to the most amateurish in process and content. These are valuable live examples of humans attempting to establish facts. Scholars need to be more actively engaged in this crowdsourcing knowledge experiment gone viral. Engaging our students in the process serves many purposes. Students see how knowledge is constructed as an ongoing communal refining process. They hone their abilities to assess whether information is misleading and how it might be made more accurate even as they are researching and absorbing course-related content. And with faculty guidance they help make this increasingly used source more useful to everyone.

Wikipedia, in its ideals, models good intellectual practices. This virtual community’s values and rules for engagement offer clear guidelines for what is considered well-documented information and what is not as well as a structure for supporting civil discourse even as people often intensely disagree. What better way to help students understand the messiness of the never-ending process of getting at better facts and some processes for engaging in it? Wikiedu has made integrating such projects into almost any class a relatively easy endeavor. In fact, this last fall, I used their course timeline for the whole course rather than inserting the Wikiedu modules into my own separate syllabus. This way students could simply go to our Wikiedu course page for most everything on a weekly basis. Wikiedu offers faculty training and plug in Wikiedu modules that scaffold student preparation for editing Wikipedia. I learned to edit alongside my students. There is no topic area not important to have a scholarly presence there and Wikiedu offers many samples syllabi.

In my lower-division ethics course I had my students work in groups and choose course-related topics to edit. In the first iteration I definitely gave my students too much freedom of choice about topics. In the second iteration, while I contained the scope a bit more, I plan to focus the work more specifically yet the next time round so as not to overwhelm them with choices.

Each step of the way we discussed their understanding of the quality of the “facts” they were finding and practiced methods for assessing greater accuracy. Many started the class with fuzzy notions of the difference between opinion and fact, or what serves as reasonable evidence. Everyone of them left with a clearer sense of how to assess the quality of the information they found.

Many of my students are shocked to not only be “allowed” to use Wikipedia, but to find out how easily they can participate in expanding and improving this global community knowledge base. Some of my students have continued to edit beyond the class assignment, thereby refining this experiment in exponential communal knowledge creation by adding their bits for greater accuracy.

Perhaps more importantly, they learn a bit about how all knowledge is both expanded and improved through communal efforts over time. No one of us has all the answers and we do better when we come together across the full range of perspectives to better refine what is now a growing global knowledge commons.