



# Supporting the Writing Process through Explicit Teaching

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## 1980

- 44% lesson: Pen on paper
- 3% para-length writing
- Typical assignment: 1 p. or less, overnight
- 3 minutes instruction
  
- Summary & report writing; little argument, analysis

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*A. Applebee, Studies of Writing in US Schools*

## Now

- 49% pen on paper (finger on keys)
- 8% para-length writing
- Typical assignment: 2 pp. over 6 days
- English -- significant time on instruction; slight increase in other subjects
  
- More argument, analysis but formulaic, driven by high-stakes testing
- **Science writing very limited; fill-in-the blank**
  
- **Student brain developing; synthesis difficult**

# Scaffolding

- Break assignment into smaller tasks so students get practice and early feedback.
- Assign writing to a group to facilitate peer learning
- Incrementally increase difficulty of tasks , weaning students from support.

## EXAMPLE

Students choose problem A or B, are given 2 sources.

1. RSCH PLAN In groups, propose *rsch questions & method for locating more sources* (key words, databases, primary sources).
2. ANNOTATED BIB Submit annotated bib of 8 additional sources (summary + implications).
3. OUTLINE Outline headings for lit review, organized by research question. Under each, they bullet findings from sources, with in-text citations.
4. DRAFT – INDIVIDUAL INTRO & LIT REVIEW
5. FINAL DRAFT

# Sequencing in a Large Lab Course

Lab 1 FULL Report  
Lab 2 FULL Report  
Lab 3 FULL Report  
Lab 4 FULL Report  
Lab 5 FULL Report  
Lab 6 FULL Report

Lab 1 Results  
Lab 2 Results + Discussion  
Lab 3 Group Methods, PP of  
Results, Discussion  
Lab 4 FULL Report  
Lab 5 Group PP Presentation  
Lab 6 Group FULL Report

70 students

**420  
FULL  
Reports**

**49 FULL Reports**

35 Results

70 Result and Discussion

14 methods and PP slides

14 PP presentations or posters

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**Around 1250 pages plus slides vs.  
6300 pages**

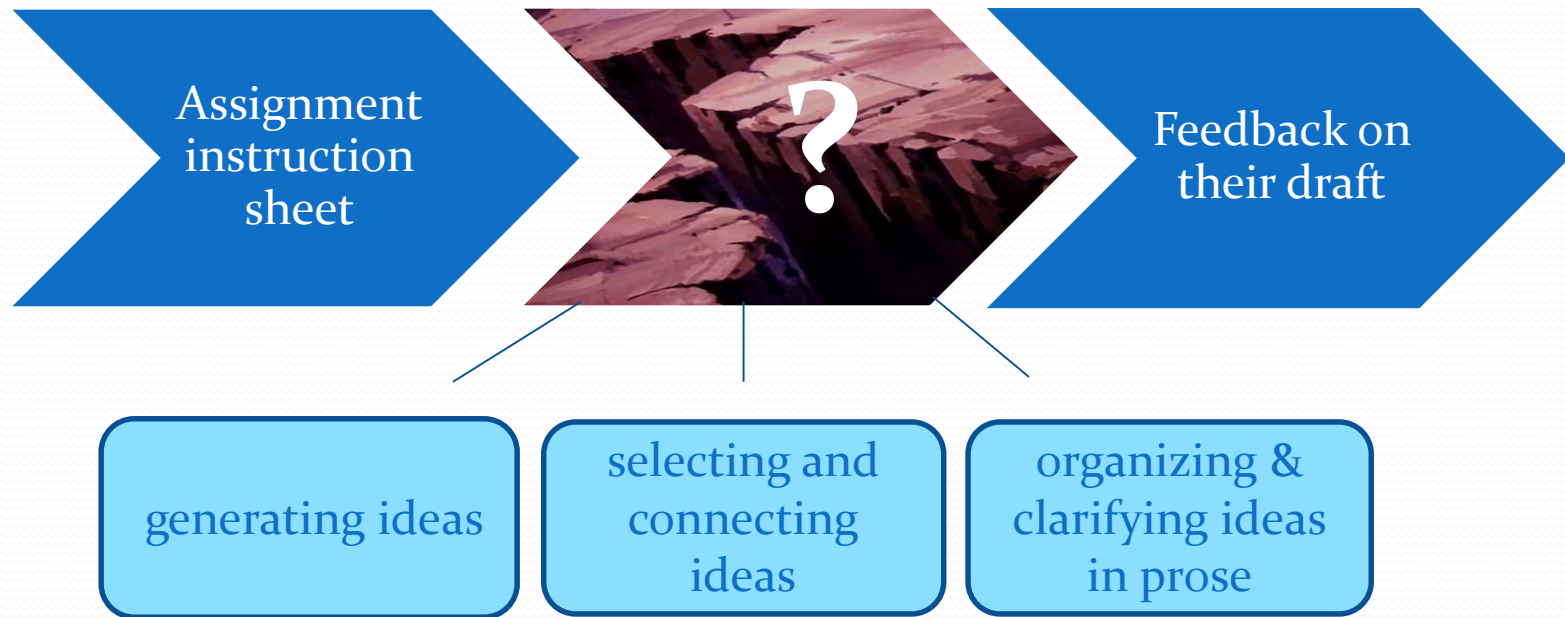


## Pause-write-share

- 1. Choose a writing assignment you've given, possibly one for which you have a sample paper or two. Then choose 1 or 2 below, writing for 10 min.**
- 1. Illustrate (list, flowchart, etc.) how you imagine you'd do this assignment. Narrate your approach in as much detail as possible: Where do you start? What do you do as you plan/research/generate ideas? What is your process as you start to draft? What is your revision process like? Do you involve others as you write and re-write? How might you describe the process and break down the task more in your assignment instructions?**
- 2. If you have sample student papers, identify where in a C-level paper you see a persistent type of problem. Underline where this occurs. If you do not have papers, describe how this problem usually manifests itself in the writing. What would you call this problem? Give it a name. Why / how does this problem confuse or frustrate a reader? At what point in the student writing process might this problem emerge (planning, reading, note-taking, drafting, revising) What might be causing it?**

# Intervening in the Writing Process

Planning->Drafting->Revising->Editing





# 1. Analyze the Genre

- Introduce context, purpose, readers of this type of writing.
- Identify common format & stylistic features, using examples . Explain *why* these features make sense given readers' use of the document.
- Annotate “rhetorical moves” writers should make to answer readers' questions.
- Give short exercises where students practice identifying and using the moves.



## The Recipe as Genre

- What is the purpose of a cookbook recipe? Who writes /who reads them? Is the purpose different in specialty cookbooks with unique readerships (gourmands, busy moms, kids' cookbook, vegan crowd)?
- Despite differences, there are some commonalities in structure and moves across the recipe genre. List these commonalities. Given the way readers use the cookbook and the information they need, why do these conventions make sense? How might subtle differences be accounted for?





## 2. Demonstrate strategies-in-action

- Do a parallel (mini) task together
- Have students name/define the strategies being used
- Have them apply the strategies in teams, working with a small piece of their current assignment
- Have them use strategy cards or checklist later, as they complete the assignment



# Jeff's strategy cards

- Break the question into categories  
legal status social role occupation
- Decide data's relevance to categories—sort
- Decide what info is most believable  
*use own knowledge, repetition of data, data that supports other data*
- Find correlations between categories  
*So a reason they can't get jobs is because their main responsibility is seen as being a mother...Men were doing the industrial revolution jobs and women...just being a teacher or domestic servant, which is kind of like being a mother.*



# Matrix note structure

	jobs	home resp	legal rights	attitudes
Before 1800				
After 1800				



## 3. Provide language templates

- Provide writing templates (write “structuring” language for them and have them fill in content)
- Ask them to read professional samples to find stock terms and phrases
- Later, have them fill in the template but then replace some of its language with other acceptable phrasing



## 4. Structure peer or self review

- Don't have them assess everything at once; they should focus attention on specific problems or strengths
- Teach students to analyze their own or each others' drafts for these problem/strengths
- Have students comment on these problems then discuss revision plan a partner, or have them find and revise *one example* in someone else's draft
- Give them time to apply what they learn to their own draft



# Final thoughts...

- Designing teaching materials is an investment but one that pays off.
- Developing the materials can help *you* as writer, can help with TA professional development, and can lead to improvement in student writing and thinking.
- It may not require as much class time as you think.
- Be economical—teach the hard parts in depth rather than trying to cover /teach everything.
- Providing instruction and feedback in planning and drafting stages will give you less to do later, when commenting on complete drafts.



# For next time...

- Earlier, you attempted to describe a recurrent problem with student writing in one of your assignments. Drawing on the explicit teaching strategies suggested today, design some teaching materials you can use. This may be a homework assignment, a set of guidelines, a teaching demo, a mini-lecture, a set of strategy cards or rubrics, an annotated sample document, peer review instructions, etc.
- Or if you prefer. . . Look across your stack of student papers. Group them into A, B, C level papers. Where are the common weaknesses? Review your grading criteria and then revise those criteria to make them more specific and instructive in light of your list of weaknesses. Consider how you might use excerpts from the student papers to flag what you are and are not looking for. Or design an exercise where students will somehow assess these samples using your criteria (note: take the names off).
- Or, to back up a bit... Return to the assignment or sequence you started planning last week. Put the assignment due date into your course schedule, and work backwards, identifying one or two class periods where you might build in some instructional class activities or create early deadlines for sub-tasks.



## Help in the middle:

### Nine approaches to more explicit writing instruction

1. Scaffold & sequence assignments to build on previous learning
2. Do a parallel task WITH students first, articulating the strategies
3. Analyze the genre and annotate key moves; have students identify and practice the moves with small samples before writing
4. Create a rubric *together*; do a “norming session”, using the rubric on samples of previous papers
5. Assign collaborative planning, brainstorming; approve the plan
6. Demonstrate search strategies and source evaluation
7. Demonstrate note-taking strategies, synthesizing tools (matrices, annotated bibs, source maps)
8. Provide structured, early feedback (you, peers, TA’s) on partial or full drafts
9. Do a reading protocol, narrating a readers’ responses to a draft