

Sequencing Writing Assignments

Benefits of sequencing writing assignments:

- Sequencing provides a sense of coherence for the course.
- This approach helps students see progress and purpose in their work rather than seeing the writing assignments as separate exercises.
- It encourages complexity through sustained attention, revision, and consideration of multiple perspectives.
- If you have only one large paper due near the end of the course, you might create a sequence of smaller assignments leading up to and providing a foundation for that larger paper (e.g., proposal of the topic, an annotated bibliography, a progress report, a summary of the paper's key argument, a first draft of the paper itself). This approach allows you to give students guidance and also discourages plagiarism.
- It mirrors the approach to written work in many professions.
- Uses your responding/grading time more effectively. You'll be familiar with the project, and it should be better than a project without response along the way. As teachers, you'll be more confident that your students work is original and thoughtful.

Ideas and Suggestions for Sequencing Assignments:

- The concept of sequencing writing assignments also allows for a wide range of options in creating the assignment. It is often beneficial to have students **submit the components** suggested below to your course's Blackboard site or course website.
- **Use the writing process itself.** In its simplest form, "sequencing an assignment" can mean establishing some sort of "official" check of the prewriting and drafting steps in the writing process. This step guarantees that students will not write the whole paper in one sitting and also gives students more time to let their ideas develop. This check might be something as informal as having students work on their prewriting or draft for a few minutes at the end of class. Or it might be something more formal such as collecting the prewriting and giving a few suggestions and comments.
- **Have students submit drafts.** You might ask students to submit a first draft in order to receive your quick responses to its content, or have them submit written questions about the content and scope of their projects after they have completed their first draft.
- **Establish small groups.** Set up small writing groups of three-five students from the class. Allow them to meet for a few minutes in class or have them arrange a meeting outside of class to comment constructively on each other's drafts. The students do not need to be writing on the same topic.
- **Require consultations.** Have students consult with someone in the Writing Center about their prewriting and/or drafts. The Center sends a form back to the teacher informing you that the student has been to a consulting conference.
- **Explore a subject in increasingly complex ways.** A series of reading and writing assignments may be linked by the same subject matter or topic. Students encounter new perspectives and competing ideas with each new reading, and thus must evaluate and balance various views and adopt a position that considers the various points of view.
- **Change modes of discourse.** In this approach, students' assignments move from less complex to more complex modes of discourse (e.g., from expressive to analytic to argumentative; or from lab report to position paper to research article).
- **Change audiences.** In this approach, students create drafts for different audiences, moving from personal to public (e.g., from self-reflection to an audience of peers to an audience of specialists). Each change would require different tasks and more extensive knowledge.

- **Change perspective through time.** In this approach, students might write a statement of their understanding of a subject or issue at the beginning of a course and then return at the end of the semester to write an analysis of that original stance in the light of the experiences and knowledge gained in the course.
- **Use a natural sequence.** A different approach to sequencing is to create a series of assignments culminating in a final writing project. In scientific and technical writing, for example, students could write a proposal requesting approval of a particular topic. The next assignment might be a progress report (or a series of progress reports), and the final assignment could be the report or document itself. For humanities and social science courses, students might write a proposal requesting approval of a particular topic, then hand in an annotated bibliography, and then a draft, and then the final version of the paper.
- **Have students submit sections.** A variation of the previous approach is to have students submit various sections of their final document throughout the semester (e.g., their bibliography, review of the literature, methods section)
- **Have students pre-write.** Bringing what they know already to a writing task, gives student writers a place to begin—even five minutes of class time helps.
- **Encourage planning activities.** In groups or individually. Lists, idea trees, tables, concept maps.
- **Consider building in specific drafts.** Zero draft (thinking draft of ideas); thesis draft; planning draft with the major sections, ideas for visuals; rough draft for conferencing with tutor; revised draft for their writing groups, oral draft to present in class, editing draft for fine tuning.
- **Write parts of the whole.** Students submit various components of the project. Use a kind of logical sequence to devise this.
- **Reflect on learning during the process.** Do this in writing.
- **Build assignments in complexity.** Move from have students know, then comprehend, then apply, then analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

Adapted from MIT's Resources for Teachers: <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/resources/teachers/creating-writing-assignments/#creating>, the WAC Clearinghouse, and other information provided by many Writing Centers, Centers for Teaching and Learning, and Writing Program documentation