

## Effective Assignment Sequencing for Scaffolding Learning

### Overview

Whether you're teaching a course flagged as writing intensive, or a content-heavy course with minimal writing, you can effectively incorporate writing tasks to enhance student learning. The secret to effective writing instruction that integrates with your course content is to move from simple tasks to more complex tasks. Think in stages of skill development, as coaches do when training athletes. For instance, in baseball, players build their skills through batting practice, fielding practice, strength training, agility training, sliding, etc. In general, no one executes a home run before they learn to swing, or build their strength, or learn base-running strategies. It's the same with writing. So, to integrate writing instruction effectively, you'll want to do two things:

1. Sequence the assignments in your course strategically by creating a series of assignments that build on each other over time, each adding to—and even to some extent repeating—skills and knowledge gained in the ones before, and
2. Scaffold the tasks within your assignments by breaking assignments or units into manageable tasks that add up to a whole.

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### General Considerations

The key to integrating more writing is to do away with the assumption that writing and content are mutually exclusive. They actually inform each other. For instance, if you're an instructor who only assigns one formal writing project in your content-based course, you may find that what you think of as comprising *one* assignment may best be structured as a sequence of smaller assignments that provide scaffolding: some that focus on developing content knowledge, and some that focus on synthesizing knowledge through simpler writing tasks that build toward the formal assignment. This process allows students to learn the content by practicing different aspects of writing, which composition scholars call "writing to learn." If you're an instructor who's committed to fully integrate writing with your course content, strategically sequencing your course assignments and providing scaffolding for students to build skills within assignments makes writing instruction manageable.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you build your assignment sequences:

**Build a sequence of assignments from simple to complex tasks.** It's important to develop a sequence of assignments over a course that allows students to develop discrete skills before they move on to more complex skills. When assignments are sequenced this way, each assignment provides a scaffold for the next, and so on. You can find some examples of successful assignment sequences for different types of courses in "Strategies for the Classroom" below and in **Supplement 1: "Assignment Sequences & Skills Templates"**

Whether or not you're teaching a writing-intensive course, you might consider how professionals in your field approach writing tasks, and mirror this professional process in your sequence of assignments, or in mini-assignments built in as scaffolds for larger assignments. For instance, if you're teaching a writing-intensive course in the social sciences, it wouldn't be effective to have students write a research report before they know how an Introduction differs from a Discussion, and so on. Thus, having students analyze existing scholarship before writing their own reports can provide a way for them to learn how those arguments are structured. Alternatively, if your course isn't writing intensive but you want students to write analytical reading responses, you may want to have them practice summarizing course readings before they attempt to analyze them.

**Each writing assignment, formal or informal, should serve as a bridge to the one that follows and allow for some repetition.** The most effective assignments build on one another, so that no assignment is entirely disconnected from what came before, and each assignment practices old skills and provides new skills students will also need to finish the next assignment. Further, research shows that students need repetition to begin to master a new skill or concept, so it's best if some of the skills from previous assignments carry over into the next.

**Revision options or requirements can be a great way to incorporate more writing.** If you want students to write a lot, one way is to require or encourage revision. The goal is to delay students' urge to consider their work "done" after a first draft by making the process of revision (of rewriting and rethinking) a normal and necessary part of writing. Taught to view their writing in this way, students can develop their thinking and gain confidence as writers. Built-in, low-stakes revision activities also have the benefit of undermining common bad habits by positioning writing as more than the typical two-stage drafting process—which often can boil down to the minor sentence-level revisions students make before they turn a first draft in, and the "final" revision that responds only to what was "marked" by the instructor. Approaching revision as an ongoing process allows students to gain ownership of their writing through collaborative discussions with peers and teachers, as well as the opportunity genuinely to "re-view" their writing. And it doesn't need to take a lot more class time, as the activities outlined in Strategy 1, below, make clear.

**While your feedback is an important part of a course's sequencing and assignment scaffolding, you don't have to grade everything you assign – ungraded, informal writing is also effective.** You can find further suggestion for informal writing in the Sweetland Teaching Resources "**Integrating Low-Stakes Writing into Large Classes**" and "**Metacognition: Cultivating Reflection.**" You'll lighten your grading burden and empower your students by responding differently to different aspects of this process and relying more on formative feedback (e.g., feedback on the draft as a work-in-process) rather than summative feedback (e.g., evaluation of the finished product), until you collect final drafts. Further, engaging even in small writing activities that you never see (in class, for instance) helps students practice skills and consolidate content knowledge.

**Explicitly talk with your students about what to expect in terms of feedback and what they'll gain from doing each assignment.** It's a good idea to provide assessment guidelines with assignment prompts. There are a variety of rubric styles to suit your needs from those as simple as a series of checkmarks to complex analytic rubrics. (For more information, see the supplement "**Designing and Using Rubrics**" under the the Sweetland Teaching Resource "**Giving Feedback on Student Writing.**") Even if you don't use rubrics, be clear and specific about how, when, and in what form they'll get your feedback. It's helpful to leave time in class to talk about this process with your students.

## **Strategies for the Classroom**

In this section you'll find three sequencing and scaffolding strategies:

1. Sequencing writing tasks around the pre-writing→writing→revision cycle, which may be useful both for writing-intensive and content-based courses;
2. Scaffolding writing-to-learn sequences into your course, which is ideal for content-based course instructors who want their students to consolidate content knowledge by writing about it; and
3. Sequencing new media-based assignments, which may be adapted as larger or smaller projects for both types of courses.

All of these strategies can be adapted usefully for both writing-intensive and content-based courses. While a sequence of Assignments 1-12 below *could* be used to structure an entire writing-intensive course or unit that culminates in a large essay or project, very few instructors will have the luxury of time needed to incorporate all of the activities. At the end of the first strategy, we offer some possible shortened assignment sequences for both kinds of courses and advice for mixing and matching them.

### **Strategy 1: Scaffolding a Course, Unit, or Project Around the Pre-writing→writing→revision Cycle**

You can get students actively engaged in thinking about the material of the course as well as about their writing processes by creating a sequence of assignments that build on each other and culminate in a polished essay (or research report or other genre in your field). Whether you're teaching a writing-intensive course or a primarily content-based course, building structured revision processes into your assignment sequence has the added benefit of interrupting students' tendencies to decide their work is "done" too early or to use your feedback merely as a checklist.

Even if you're teaching a primarily content-based course where you assign only one formal project, you can break that large project into smaller, manageable writing tasks along the way to a complete rough draft, a revision (or multiple revisions, depending on your timeframe), and a final draft. This way, students can practice processes of inquiry and knowledge-building like those in your field, where smaller, simpler tasks are often embedded within larger, more complex writing projects.

## Stage 1: Pre-Writing Assignments

Assignment 1: Project Pre-write. As you begin a new project (or exam, or unit, etc.), consider asking students, alone or in pairs/groups, to examine the project prompt and write a reflection that does some or all of the following:

- Paraphrases what the assignment is calling for them to do
- Identifies (again, in their own words) the individual pieces, or tasks, or things that will need to happen for them to successfully complete the project
- Identifies areas of the prompt that need some clarification, if any
- Identifies what their role as the author/architect/etc. of this project is (That is, who are they in the big picture? Who are they speaking to? For what purpose?)
- Thinks through the purpose of this assignment—what is its role in the course, but also how might it help them in the future?
- Lists or sketches out what they will need to know and/or know how to do (i.e. technical skills they may need to acquire) in order to complete the project
- Lists or sketches out what they already know/know how to do
- Lists or sketches out what they will need to learn (whether that’s a research question to pursue, a skill they need to develop, a tool they need to figure out how to use, etc.), and
- Lays out a plan of action (this may be “broad strokes,” but the more specific it can be, the better—even with self-imposed deadlines for “deliverables,” etc.)

Assignment 2: Project Proposal. Having students draft proposals can be the most important part of a writing project, particularly for a longer, more formal research-based project or a complex new media piece (which you’ll find examples of in Strategy 3 below). Proposals provide an opportunity for students to articulate what they want to accomplish with a project as well as generate feedback from you and/or from their peers. For instructors, proposals offer a chance to course-correct if students’ plans seem unviable or off-task, or to offer guidance about potential resources, strategies for success, etc.

A good proposal includes the following:

- a statement of the student’s planned topic and its potential significance (to them, or to the course, or to a larger context, depending on the assignment’s purpose),
- a working thesis or line of inquiry,
- a list of potential sources (or types of sources), and
- the identification and description of model(s) on which the student will base their work.

Assignment 3: Reverse Outline of 2-3 Models. We often tell students that one of their best strategies for understanding good writing is locating models of what people have done before. Even when we explicitly tell them to find models that they can use as guides, though, often the resulting papers are perplexingly unlike the models. This happens when students “look” at models but don’t *see how they work*. Creating a “reverse outline” helps students to understand the piece’s characteristics, structure, language conventions, etc. Here is a basic approach to creating a reverse outline:

- Number each paragraph of the model source.
- In a separate document, type the number of each paragraph, and then

- write a sentence that explains what that paragraph’s purpose is (for instance, “this paragraph is providing context for the author’s argument”) and paraphrase its main idea. Now, laid out in a document in front of you, you have the structure and main points of the model piece.
- Finally, write a paragraph or two in which you note:
  - the kinds of language the piece uses (jargon? everyday speech?) and what the tone is like,
  - what kinds of evidence it employs (scholarly work? new media? interviews? anecdotes? Statistics? something else?),
  - how evidence is integrated (direct quotes? paraphrases? summaries? hyperlinks? graphs/charts?), and
  - how the evidence is applied (used as a model? used to establish context, fact, etc.? analyzed and taken further?)

Assignment 4: Present Work-in-Progress. Having students create and deliver class presentations on their work-in-progress can provide an opportunity for immediate, in-process feedback on their work. Depending on the conventions of sharing knowledge in the field you teach in, you might have them:

- Read papers, as in a conference panel,
- Create poster sessions,
- Contribute to a listserv or blog
- Present a Powerpoint or Prezi pitch

Assignment 5: Build in deadlines along the way for students to summarize reading/research before analyzing, interpreting, evaluating, or drafting their own arguments. Too often, because of their assumption that learning means *having* all the right information, rather than *synthesizing* information, students jump directly from reading to cobbling together bits of information. This way they inadvertently undermine their ability to create knowledge. One way to help students avoid this pitfall is to require research summaries for each source they consult on their way to their final project.

For example:

- Ask students to keep a research/reading log with bibliographical citations and précis for each source. This can help them to consider what they’re reading methodically—to articulate *what* someone is saying and *how* they’re saying it before rushing to judgment on its value or making their own argument, which they may not yet be equipped to make. For an example of one way to handle this process, see **Supplement 2: “Research Log & Summary Worksheet”**
- Ask students to keep a journal that chronicles basic terms and concepts in your field as they encounter them in the readings or other course materials. This work could even happen electronically, with students collectively building a glossary on a CTools Forum or course blog, for instance,
- Have students write a brief paper that maps out (verbally or visually) where different writers stand on an issue they’re exploring, without yet inserting their own opinions

## Stage 2: Writing Assignments

Assignment 6: Multiple Introductions. Often students draft introductions once and only once, marrying themselves to their first notion of what their argument is. If you ask them to draft at least two substantially different introduction possibilities before deciding on one, they may find a new way into their argument, or they may even find that they're arguing something different altogether.

Assignment 7: Counterarguments. One way to help students complicate their thinking is to ask them to seek out potential counterarguments and give them a fair hearing. If they can clearly articulate what some possible objections to their argument may be, they have a better chance at being persuasive. This has the added side effect of reminding students that not everything has one clear, simple answer in college writing.

Assignment 8: Author's Notes on Each Draft. Author's notes are a post-draft note to an author's peers or instructor to articulate where the draft is in-process, how it got there, and what help is needed. They can be a terrific way to encourage students' reflection and metacognition, getting them to think about their processes and also explicitly about their audiences. It can be helpful to require author's notes with every major draft of an assignment—for development and revision purposes in early drafts, and for evaluative purposes in final drafts.

For example:

- A typical in-process author's note attends to the following types of questions: At what stage of "readiness" is your draft at this point? How did you get here? What are some struggles you've encountered, and how have you dealt with them? Where are you still struggling? What do you have left to do? Where do you most need another set of eyes? What kind of feedback is going to be most helpful for you at this point?
- A typical final draft author's note attends to the following kinds of statements: here are the kinds of changes I've made and why, and here's what's working and why/how (see post-write below).

## Stage 3: Revision Assignments

Assignment 9: Peer Reviews. Conduct full-class or small group peer reviews that deal primarily with global issues: argument, structure, evidence, etc. Hold off on editing/proofreading until the content is set in a truly final draft. For information on how to structure full-class and small-group peer review, please see the Sweetland Teaching Resource "[Using Peer Review to Improve Student Writing.](#)"

Assignment 10: Conferences. Having students conference with you to discuss drafts is an excellent way to save time on feedback and be certain that you're making your expectations clear. You can read the drafts during the conference (either aloud, with the student, or silently) and respond in conversation on the spot, or you can read the drafts ahead of time, making notes about what you'd like to address with students, so that you save more time for conversation in the conference itself.

Assignment 11: Revision Plans. Have students draft revision plans based on their peer reviews: A revision plan is a written list of *substantive* tasks (not editing!) the writer needs to complete in order to create the strongest essay possible. It incorporates all feedback the writer has received and articulates how and why the writer will make use of the advice. This can be done in class or outside of class. For a handout to provide to your students, please see **Supplement 3: “How to Write a Revision Plan.”**

Assignment 12: Post-Writes. Have students turn in a final paper with a reflection on their revisions. For example, you might have them submit it with a final author’s note that describes the following:

- Changes they’ve made to their final draft
- Why and how they made those changes
- What those changes demonstrate about their thinking/writing development

For a handout you can provide to your students, see **Supplement 4: “Sample Post-Write,”** and for further post-write ideas, see the Sweetland Teaching Resource **“Metacognition: Cultivating Reflection.”**

Below, you’ll find a chart of all of these assignments, divided into “Pre-Writing,” “Writing,” and “Revision” categories. Following the chart, we’ve provided some possible sequences using these assignments: some for writing-intensive courses and some for content-based courses. You should feel free to mix and match these assignments as you see fit, though we encourage you to select at least one assignment from each category.

“Pre-Writing”	“Writing”	“Revision”
1. Project Pre-Write	6. Multiple Introductions	9. Peer Reviews
2. Project Proposal	7. Counterarguments	10. Conferences
3. Reverse-Outline Models	8. Author’s Notes w/ Drafts	11. Revision Plans
4. Present Work-in-Progress		12. Final w/ Post-Writes
5. Research Summaries		

**Possible Sequences for a Writing-Intensive Course:**

While the sequence of Assignments 1-12 above *could* be used to structure an entire writing-intensive course or unit that culminates in a large essay or project, very few instructors will have the luxury of time needed to carry it through. The following sequences, or others you could imagine, might serve as scaffolding for a whole course. Alternatively, they might make up a unit structure, or simply a structure for one project—pick and choose which assignments are appropriate for your course, unit, or project.

- Assignments 2, 8, 12: This sequence represents a very basic choice, which has the benefit of allowing you to spend ample time on each of the assignments, while ensuring that students have at least one assignment at each stage of their writing.
- Assignments 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 &/or 10, 12: This longer sequence has the benefit of checking in on students’ progress via presentations (during which you can also provide instant feedback) and ensuring they engage in self-reflection with each draft. Plus, it dedicates focus to some of the most difficult writing tasks—introductions and counterarguments. It also incorporates multiple avenues of peer and instructor feedback without overwhelming you.

- Assignments 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 &/or 10, 11, 12: This sequence is more intensive, but it ensures that students are creating a lot of writing, practicing synthesis of their research as they go, and engaging in multiple kinds of feedback and revision.

### **Possible Sequences for Content-Based Courses:**

For these variations we've recommended a couple of condensed sequences that would be more manageable for primarily content-based courses. Keep in mind that you can alter these sequences in whatever ways make the most sense for your course goals and time available.

Notice that assignments 2 and 12 are the only activities that require your formal feedback (as long as you're clear with students up front about how you're responding to their work), and even your feedback to assignments 2 may be informal. It might take place in a 10-minute conference with each student, or 10 minutes in class when you address common strengths and weaknesses you saw in the proposals, so that students can self-correct or make an appointment to see you if they need to troubleshoot.

- Assignments 2, 8, 12: This sequence represents a very basic choice, which has the benefit of allowing you to spend ample time on each of the assignments while ensuring that students have at least one assignment at each stage of their writing. (Alternatively, if you started with Assignment 1 instead of 2, you could save the time of responding to proposals by discussing their ideas in the classroom in small groups, and/or as a whole class.)
- Assignments 1, 4, 8, 9 &/or 10, 12: This sequence has the benefits of checking-in on students' progress via presentations (during which you can also provide instant feedback) and ensuring they engage in self-reflection with each draft. It also incorporates multiple avenues of peer and instructor feedback without overwhelming you.
- Assignments 2, 8, 9 &/or 10, 11, Final draft: This sequence, ensures a lot of self-reflection on the students' part and provides an option for you to check in on their process by scanning their revision plans, without requiring a lot of your time for formally responding.

## **Strategy 2: Scaffolding Low-Stakes, Writing-to-Learn Sequences into Your Course**

If you're teaching a mostly content-based course but want your students to practice writing, consider integrating "writing-to-learn" or "exploratory writing" exercises along the way, which get students actively involved with course material while generating writing. For an extensive discussion of the benefit of low-stakes writing and some additional low-stakes writing activities not mentioned here, please see the Sweetland Teaching Resources "**Integrating Low-Stakes Writing Into Large Classes**" and "**Metacognition: Cultivating Reflection.**" While the first resource is specifically written for large classes, all of its exercises are equally applicable in smaller classes as well.



Assignment 1: Study questions for class readings or lectures: Responding to study questions helps students keep up with reading or lectures while allowing them to frame their experience and make connections to other texts or concepts discussed in the course. Though study questions may require students to do some summary, study question prompts should invite a student to synthesize their understanding of course material with their personal experience or opinions or make connections that go beyond the reading. These questions may be responded to on CTools forums, a class blog, or a private journal kept by each student, depending on the needs of your class.

Assignment 2: Text annotations: Research shows reading effectively and writing well are interrelated. Instead of allowing students to passively highlight or underline their texts, consider providing them with directions for having active conversations with their texts. When they have the impulse to highlight, ask students to think about *why* they were going to highlight, and instead write a note or question in the margin. Some prompting questions you might provide include:

- Why is that passage important? (Is it a shift in the argument? Particularly compelling or weak evidence? An overview of the opposition? etc.)
- Use the margins to summarize, paraphrase, ask questions of the text, argue against it, etc.

In addition to helping students think about what they're reading, these annotations can spur in-class conversations. While you probably won't respond formally to this writing task, it can be helpful to ask students to share some of their annotations during a class discussion.

Assignment 3: Five-minute in-class writings: Having students take just five minutes in class (at the beginning, middle, or end) to synthesize course material, reorient discussion, or ask questions can yield incredible benefits in a very short amount of time. You can make a habit of assigning in-class writing on a schedule, or you can keep it in reserve and pull it out when it's needed. Here are a few helpful options:

- Write at the beginning of class to get the wheels turning: Having students write for five minutes about the reading they prepared for class, or in response to a discussion question you want to start with, can help them prepare and focus on the task ahead. It can also be useful for students who need time to gather their thoughts and tend to be quiet in class.
- Write in the middle of the session to kick-start a lagging discussion or focus a heated one: Sometimes class conversations can go astray in a couple of ways: either they spiral out of control because everyone has something to say, they all feel strongly about it, and they're all talking over each other; or else they lag because people run out of things to say. In either case, stopping to write and collect thoughts for five minutes can help get the conversation back on course.
- Write in class to check in about comprehension: If you're giving a particularly dense lecture or facilitating a complex conversation, it can be useful to stop at some point and have students either summarize the main points so far or, if they're confused, express their confusion and articulate questions. One professor prompts his students this way: "If you have understood my lecture so far, summarize my main

points in your own words. If you are currently confused about something, please explain to me what is puzzling you; ask me the question(s) you need answered.” You could then either take and address questions in the moment, collect questions they’ve written, or have them submit their questions on a CTools forum or course blog.

- Write at the end of class to synthesize/sum up: Another variation of the exercise above is to have students sum up the day’s lecture or conversation in the last five minutes, preparing follow-up questions or issues to return to in the next class. (You may have heard of “one-minute papers,” which are a variation of this strategy, but in one minute’s time.)

Assignment 4: Self-reflective pre-writing for essays or other projects (even group projects!): As you begin a new project (or exam, or unit, etc.), ask students to examine the prompt and write a reflection that does some or all of the following, according to your class time and needs:

- Paraphrases what the project is calling for them to do in terms of the “big picture,”
- Identifies (again, in their own words) the individual pieces, or tasks, or things that will need to happen for them to successfully complete the project,
- Identifies areas of the prompt that they need some clarification on, if any,
- Identifies their role as the author/architect/etc. of this project (That is, who are they in the big picture? Who are they speaking to? For what purpose?),
- Thinks through the purpose of this assignment—what is its role in the course, but also how might it help them in the future?,
- Lists or sketches out what they will need to know and/or know how to do (i.e. any technical skills they may need to acquire) in order to complete the project,
- Lists or sketches out what they already know/know how to do
- Lists or sketches out what they will need to learn (whether that’s a research question to pursue, a skill they need to develop, a tool they need to figure out how to use, etc.), and
- Lays out a plan of action (this may be “broad strokes,” but the more specific it can be, the better...even with self-imposed deadlines for “deliverables,” etc.)

Because research has shown that reflection is often effective when it’s social, where possible, consider giving students time in class to break into pairs or small groups so that they can talk these items through with each other before writing.

If you read these pre-writes quickly and respond to their questions for clarification as soon as possible, you can help students identify strategies that might need rethinking before they begin, or course-correct misunderstandings about the project. A good time-saving strategy here can be to identify common questions that you can clarify for the whole class, and then respond to those that need individual attention either in writing or via conference.

Assignment 5: Essay, project, or exam post-writes: You can help your students identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing and learning processes by asking them to write reflections after they've completed an essay, project, or exam. These questions encourage thinking about writing process, content, and skills transfer. For example:

- Identify and explain one or two challenges you faced as you wrote this draft.
- What specific strategies did you use to overcome the challenges?
- Did they work?
  - If so, where and how do we see them working in the draft? How successful were they?
  - If not, why do you think they weren't as successful as you would have liked? How would you approach the same type of challenges differently in the future, given what you know now?

### **Strategy 3: Sequencing New Media Assignments**

New media assignments are gaining popularity across the curriculum, and they can generate insightful, thoughtful, and rigorous work in both content-based courses and writing-intensive courses. For instance, if you're teaching a communication studies course, you might ask students to analyze a short video using Popcorn Maker or assign a video podcast as a semester project. If you teach in the sciences, you may want to ask your students to create digital posters to share their research. Social scientists may assign an ethnography that asks students to share their work on a website they create that incorporates audio and images of their interviews and subjects. The possibilities are endless.

Teachers who don't consider themselves "new media specialists" often balk at assigning new media work for fear of not knowing how to structure their students' (or their own!) experiences in a way that creates room to learn new skills and build knowledge. It can seem unwieldy or intimidating. Here we break down the most basic steps you can take to assign new media writing without getting anyone lost in the process.

Assignment 1: Help students analyze models that you provide: Whatever kind of media work you want your students to create, it's useful to find examples of work in that media. (Both good and bad examples can be equally helpful!) Then you can guide students in identifying the features of the genre, the audience(s) it appeals to, where and how it's used, and how it makes its points. This process helps students "reverse engineer" the models to see how they work.

Assignment 2: Have students find and analyze models they want to base their own projects on: After working with students to guide them through the analysis process, let them find and analyze their own samples, with particular attention to work they want to emulate (or avoid!).

Assignment 3: Provide a list of resources for students to find and seek help with technologies/platforms they'll need to work with: The ISS Media Center, the Tech Deck at the Ugli, the Knowledge Navigation Center at Hatcher, and the Duderstadt Center all offer a variety of personal assistance, access to technology, and tutorials. Sweetland also works with students on new media projects of any kind in our Writing Workshop and Peer Writing Centers.

Assignment 4: Have students formally propose their projects: As we've discussed in Strategy 1, Assignment 2, above, proposals provide an opportunity for students to articulate what they want to accomplish with a project as well as generate feedback from you and/or their peers. For instructors, proposals offer a chance to course-correct if students' plans seem unviable or off-task, or to offer guidance about potential resources, strategies for success, etc. A good proposal includes:

- An overview of the project's topic, genre, and goals (including a working thesis, hypothesis, or line of inquiry)
- A plan detailing how the project will create and support the argument, what technologies it requires, where help with those technologies is available, and how those technologies will illuminate the research/line of inquiry
- A justification for why and how the chosen media and genre are appropriate to the goal and audience of the project
- A timeline for completion

This proposal could be formally written, and you could provide feedback in writing, in class, or in face-to-face conferences. Another variation is to have students "pitch" their projects to the class for on-the-spot feedback.

Assignment 5: Have students create mock-ups or storyboards for their projects: Mock-ups and storyboards are two forms of early rough drafts (what you might call sketch drafts) for new media projects.

- Mock-ups are visual representation of static pieces, such as web pages or posters. They should provide a sense of the visual design choices and organization of the project.
- Storyboards (a term you may recognize from film and tv) are a sequence of drawings to represent the progression of movement- or time-based pieces, such as videos, podcasts, or animations. They should include visual sequences and descriptions of actions or sounds for each major shift in the project.

Both of these drafts allow for students to seek and incorporate feedback before they go through the painstaking process of editing their material.

Assignment 6: Have students create rough cuts: Rough cuts are one step further in development than mock-ups and storyboards. Like mock-ups and storyboards, they provide an early draft of most of the project's basic elements, in order, but without everything yet in place. A rough cut provides what some people might call a "prototype" of the project, complete enough to understand, and still early enough to allow students to seek feedback and fine-tune their work as they go.

Assignment 7: Have students peer review each other's mock-ups, storyboards, and rough cuts along the way: As with any writing project, peer review of new media work can provide students with helpful insight into how their project is working, and where they may need to make adjustments.

Assignment 8: Have students create final cuts: Ask students to revise their projects, to the extent that they can given the time and resources available, incorporating feedback they've received along the way.

Assignment 9: Assign a final reflection: Because few students' new media work is likely to be at a professional level in the short time they have to create it, it can be useful to ask students to submit reflections with their final cuts. These reflections should explain and justify the rhetorical choices they made as they planned, researched, designed, executed, and revised their projects. This accomplishes two things: Students have to make an evidence-based argument about what they were doing and how it worked, and even if the products aren't high-skill, you have other means beyond the technical for assessing their work.

## Further Reading

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