

Introduction to an Assignment Sequence

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Seminar paper assignments function not only as a learning and assessment tool but also as a means of helping students make the transition from school to scholarship. The seminar paper can be seen as the culmination of a semester-long process that serves students as a rehearsal for future scholarly writing and for teaching their own students.

The approach I developed over 17 years of teaching a graduate pedagogy seminar re-orientates the seminar paper assignment toward a new set of “3Rs”: responding, reflecting, and revising. By breaking up the seminar paper assignment into a series of writing tasks, a set of scholarly “moves,” we can lead students beyond the boundaries of a school-sponsored requirement towards deep learning and theorizing.

This overview of the semester’s writing assignments, inserted into the initial course syllabus, summarizes the sequence of writing tasks that constitute the seminar paper assignment. Beginning with written responses to course readings and reflective analysis of those responses, the sequence makes scholarly writing itself an object of inquiry. Weekly response/reflection questions engage students in articulating not only their ideas about readings but also their thoughts about the way reading and writing assignments function to support their learning. As they pursue their reading interests into research, an annotated bibliography assignment calls attention to the mechanics of scholarship and prompts online sharing with the class as a scholarly community. The prompt for writing a researched essay clearly situates the seminar paper itself in the context of a conversation about the course focus and scholarship. Moreover, the entire sequence explicitly incorporates a drafting, reflecting, and revising process that encourages

students to examine their scholarly strengths and weaknesses and engage with other students in peer review.

This framework, or “scaffolding,” of the seminar paper assignment aims to foster an intellectual project that embodies a semester of experience, rather than simply measuring student performance, and can serve as a foundation for future scholarly writing and teaching.

Appendix: Syllabus page on writing assignments

Course Writing

1. Reading responses / reflections *

In this reflective writing component at the heart of the course, you can explore and analyze the course material for yourself. I provide **questions** on the week’s readings to guide your thinking through academic writing – and demonstrate the kind of assignment you can use for your own undergraduate teaching as well. Students have found that about 6-8 pages are needed to respond sufficiently to the prompts, and you should give yourself time to draft and revise these papers.

The weekly responses are *not graded individually* but collectively (see assignment sheet). I will read and comment on your responses each week *to establish a professional dialogue in writing* that enhances the course for us both. So for each of these 4 weeks, submit your response either electronically or on paper *by class time*. * Then you’ll collect all 4, revising any or all as you wish in response to comments, and submit for a grade.

2. Researched seminar paper *

Annotated bibliography

This assignment is designed as a bridge between your course reading and your own interests as you explore and establish your personal context for writing and teaching academic writing. You’ll be guided in locating 3-5 articles about a topic or issue you found interesting in your reading. (There will be a full, separate assignment page to follow.)

All annotated bibliographies will be ‘published’ on Blackboard for the benefit of the entire class.

Researched essay

Carrying on with the research you did for the bibliography, this project asks you to *join* the scholarly conversation about your chosen topic in a *short (7-9 page) essay*.

(Full assignment page to follow.)

By this time in the semester, you should be 1. *familiar with scholarship and sources* (e.g., scholarly journals), 2. *involved with a focused topic* that both relates to our course and also, crucially, relates to your own scholarly interests, and 3. comfortable and conversant with your readers: the “*community of scholars*” that your classmates represent. Along with me, this is a receptive audience to keep in mind as you explain your ideas.

3. Reflective writing *

With the aim of helping you develop the essential ‘habit of mind’ and ability to reflect on teaching and learning, I ask for written reflective analysis of all this course work.
(See separate assignments.)

Peer reading and revision are essential scholarly skills that will be encouraged and expected and that you will have a chance to practice in small-group work throughout the semester.

* There will be separate, more detailed assignment guidelines for all these assignments.