



ELON
UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR
Writing
Excellence

Scaffolding Long Writing Assignments

Main Takeaway

Scaffolding long writing projects into shorter sections or pieces is a best practice in writing pedagogy because it engages students in the writing process (allowing for multiple drafts, peer-response, revision), it makes what could be an overwhelming project into a manageable one, and it allows instructors to check students' comprehension in a timely manner and help steer them in the right direction.

Designing Effective Writing Assignment Handouts

Scaffold long writing assignments into shorter, more manageable sections.

- Long written assignments that are broken up into shorter pieces are achievable in shorter amounts of time for students and are more quickly commented on and given credit for completion by faculty

Consider assigning fewer long writing assignments and covering them in more detail.

- Instead of assigning multiple longer pieces of writing, consider focusing on each section of a single piece of writing in more detail.
- Discussing each section in detail can help engage students in metacognitive talk about their writing—why they made certain writing choices, how they might revise to make a piece more effective or more appropriate for their audience, etc.—an essential activity for student learning and one that facilitates the transfer of learning and writing across different contexts and disciplines.

Build in the writing process and slow down.

- Plan due dates for the different sections that give students enough time to brainstorm, research, draft, engage in peer-response, and revise. Writing long texts is a complex task requiring multiple skills and intellectual activities, so it's appropriate even in face-to-face contexts to assign fewer long assignments.

Designing Effective Writing Assignment Handouts

Long writing assignments that are broken up into shorter sections are sequenced to help students learn content, one or more skills, or ways of writing. These sections may:

1. Build on one another. (Figure 1)
2. Be based on the genre's form. (Figure 2)
3. Comprise of discrete activities that end in a final, integrating assignment. (Figure 3)

When guiding students through a sequence:

1. Preview the relationships among the assignment when starting/designing the first one.
2. Explain the place of each assignment in the overall sequence.
3. Remind students often about the sequence.

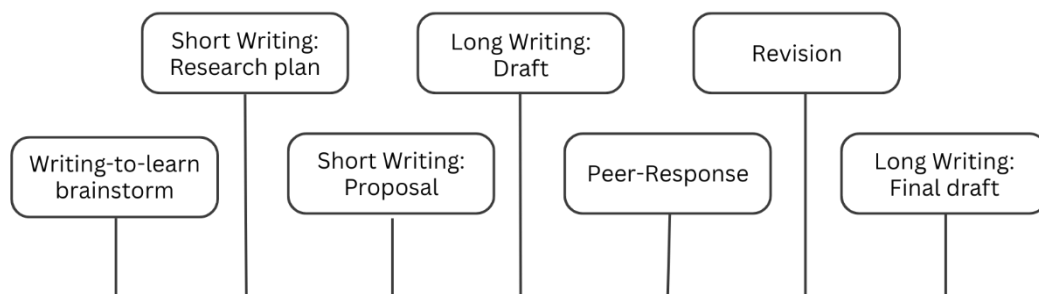


Figure 1. Sections build on one another.

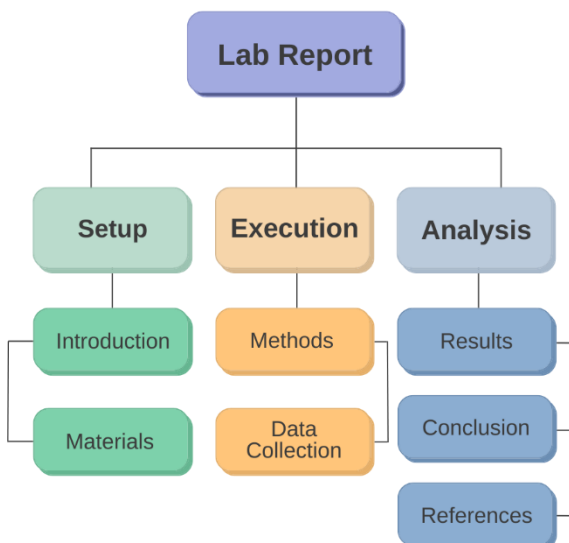


Figure 2. Based on the genre's form.

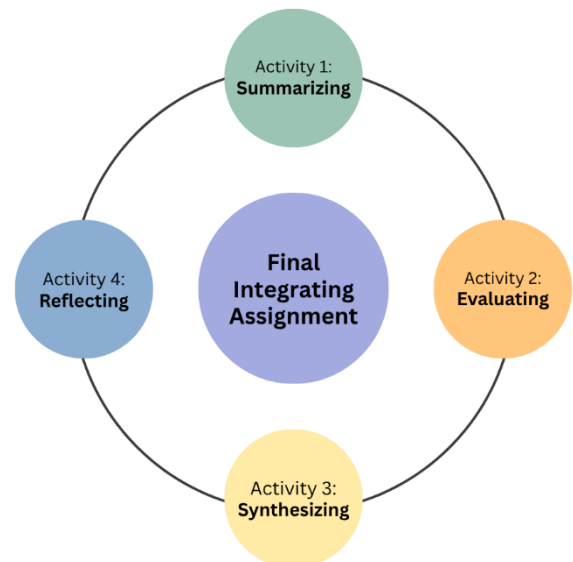


Figure 3. Comprised of smaller activities.