Success in Writing, Information, and Research Literacy Initiative

SWIRL

Writing and Research Instrument for Transfer and Equity (WRITE) in Higher Education

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October 2020

Santa Clara University

About SWIRL

The [Success in Writing, Information, and Research Literacy (SWIRL) Initiative](#) was launched in 2016 as a project of Santa Clara University's [Faculty Collaborative for Teaching Innovation](#).

SWIRL introduces faculty from across the disciplines to research-informed best practices around the teaching of writing, information literacy, and critical thinking for application to their teaching at the assignment- and course-level. One of our main tools for doing this is the [WRITE Assignment Design Tool](#), which can be used individually or in a group setting to guide faculty in creating or revising research- and writing-intensive assignments.

What SWIRL Offers

SWIRL facilitates stand-alone workshops, Faculty Learning Communities, and one-on-one consultations on assignment and course design. We also facilitate department-wide conversations that place individual faculty assignment and course development within larger departmental curricula, learning outcomes, and planning. For more information, see the [SWIRL website](#) or contact SWIRL team members Julia Voss (jvoss@scu.edu) or Christine Bachen (cbachen@scu.edu).

About The WRITE Tool

The SWIRL [Writing and Research Instrument for Transfer and Equity (WRITE)](#) in Higher Education Assignment Design Tool guides faculty through the process of designing or revising the most critical elements of an assignment, along with suggestions on how and when to support assignment expectations with classroom instruction or activities. The WRITE Tool explicitly addresses equity by extending and adapting the core principles of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework -- which improves learning outcomes and other predictors of academic success for *all* students, especially students of color, low-income students, and first generation students (see Wilkelmes, 2019[1]) -- *to assignments calling for disciplinary writing and research*. Building on the TILT framework, the WRITE Tool is designed to make more transparent the often unspoken assumptions about what constitutes effective disciplinary writing and research so that students are better equipped to be successful.

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[1] Wilkelmes, M-A. (2019). Introduction: The story of TILT and its emerging uses in higher education. In Winkelmes, M., Boye, A. & Tapp, A., eds. (2019). *Transparent Design in Higher Education Teaching and Leadership*. Stylus.

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WRITE Assignment Design Tool

WRITE Tool Downloads
[Printable PDF](#)
[Editable Microsoft Word](#)

Foundational Framework: Designing Transparent Assignments

The WRITE Assignment Design tool is grounded in the [Transparency in Teaching and Learning](#) (TILT) framework establishing the rationale and evidence for faculty to engage in transparent teaching practices to promote equitable learning among students. We include the TILT criteria as the initial check for any assignment to consider how clear the assignment's purpose, task, and criteria for success are laid out.

1. The Transparency Framework for Assignments contains three key elements: Purpose, Tasks, Criteria for Success	Assignments that clearly lay out purpose, tasks, and criteria for success level allow all learners to do their best work, feel included in the learning environment, and achieve higher levels of learning.	Explicitly lays out assignment's: ● Purpose: What knowledge or skills will students gain from completing the assignment and how that knowledge or skill will be valuable to students? ● Tasks: What steps should students take to complete the assignment? ● Criteria for success: How will the assignment be evaluated? What rubrics or checklists can guide a student in producing their best work? ([TILT checklist](#))

What is the Transparent Assignment Design Framework and Why is it Important?

Students come to their classes from different academic and social backgrounds and have different levels of exposure to university-level writing and research assignments. Transparent design is an explicit attempt to create more equity across students with different levels of academic experience by making assignment goals and expectations very clear. This enables all students to learn more and produce their very best work. Research shows that students who understand the purpose, tasks and criteria of an academic assignment before they begin to work on it (in comparison with students who don't share that understanding) experience higher academic confidence, an increased sense of belonging, and greater awareness that they are mastering the skills that employers value, as well as higher rates of returning to college the following year (Wilkelmes, 2019). Similarly, research demonstrates that small changes in assignment design lead to big improvements in student learning.

The Three Components to Transparent Assignment Design

Purpose

By specifically identifying the purpose and goals of the assignment, faculty help students identify what they will learn by doing this assignment and why it will be valuable in terms of the course's learning outcomes, their program, or in their lives. Use accessible language and terms to help students recognize how the assignment will benefit their short and long-term learning. The purpose should address both content knowledge as well as any skills. The purpose of an

assignment may relate to course requirements/future assignments, major requirements/future courses, professional competencies/certifications, civic responsibilities, personal growth, and/or many others.

<u>Tasks</u>

The tasks focus on what students will do in the assignment from the beginning to the end, and the steps to follow and avoid. Attention to clear language and distinction between the parts of the assignment help all students understand what they are actually being asked to do, and where they might encounter pitfalls. Break down the assignment into steps necessary for completion. Scaffold or stage parts of the assignments when possible (see WRITE Tool Part 3). In thinking through the tasks, consider if you can build in opportunities for students to get feedback on parts of the assignment before the larger assignment is due.

<u>Criteria for Evaluation and Success</u>

Define the characteristics of the finished product. Transparent assignment design recommends the use of detailed assessment rubrics. Checklists with the characteristics of high quality work and/or rubrics (see WRITE Tool Part 4) are useful for self-assessment, peer assessment, and faculty feedback. Consider providing opportunities for students to evaluate their own work or other student work using the rubric or checklist that you have provided. A rubric or checklist can also be used in evaluating a model or sample piece of work.

Ensuring your assignments maximize student understanding and equal access

1. Use the TILT assignment design template to think through the goals of transparency in assignment design by attending to purpose, tasks, and criteria for success.

2. Use the checklist for designing and reviewing transparent design assignments to ensure you've addressed the key elements.. The checklist developed by the University of Houston is especially useful. Ask a colleague to review your assignment using the checklist.

3. Identify how you can use classroom activities to promote understanding of the assignment's purpose, tasks, and expectations, including reviewing the assignment in small groups. Would students benefit from some sort of practice exercise to prepare them for the larger assignment? By having students analyze a model paper or project using the assignment as a guide, they will become more familiar with what you're asking them to do.

4. Invite your students to review a handout about steps they can take to better understand assignments developed by the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Bonus: it's quite funny.

Readings and Resources

To learn more about the "transparent design" approach, check out the TILT Higher Ed website. A 7-minute video presents a useful overview of the project, rationale, and findings. Resources on assignment design include video introductions to TILT, sample assignments (pre- and

post-TILT), and conference presentations and publications based on empirical evidence about the project.

Winkelemes, M-A., Boye, A., & Tapp, S. (eds.) (2019), *Transparent Design in Higher Education Teaching and Leadership: A guide to implementing the transparency framework institution-wide to improve learning and retention.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

WRITE Tool Part 1: Helping Students Learn the Language and Forms of Your Discipline

Context of student work? (*rhetorical context*)	Framing writing tasks in terms of rhetorical concepts (genre, audience, purpose) helps students transfer skills between writing contexts (in academia & beyond).	Explicitly explains assignment's rhetorical context: 1) Genre or disciplinary features of the writing students produce. 2) Audience(s) students should be addressing in the writing they produce (not just the teacher or "academic readers"). 3) Purpose of the text(s) students will produce.

What is Writing in the Disciplines (WID)?

WID acknowledges that writing conventions within various disciplines differ. Hence, "good writing" in one field might not align with the expectations and conventions of "good writing" in another. For example, the ways in which information is used--and even the types of information that are valued--will differ, and such differences are further exacerbated when the forms and genres of disciplines vary. Ultimately, teaching writing in the disciplines allows you to teach what it means to write using the conventions and expectations of a specific field.

Why focus on WID?

Students take classes in multiple disciplines, exposing them to different disciplinary expectations for writing. Therefore, one of the most helpful tools you can provide is a way for them to understand the expectations regarding language and form within your discipline. In short, help them to understand how and why people in your discipline write in a given manner.

Consider the following: if your students consistently seem to write in ways problematic for your assignments (i.e, they're introducing sources in ways you wouldn't expect, they're formatting memos more like essays), understand that they're likely trying to apply their past learning about writing to your assignments. Students might have been taught that an introduction should take one form, but that might not be what's expected in your discipline. Hence, help them to see what your discipline requires and expects.

How to help students before you pass out the assignment

1. Query students about their experiences in writing in different disciplinary contexts: In their introductory critical thinking and writing courses in college, they will likely have thought about "rhetorical context." Especially, if you're teaching an introductory class in your discipline, invite discussion about the academic writing students have done previously: which genres, audiences, and purposes have they written in/for? This will help students connect (and differentiate) the kind of writing they've done before with what you will be asking them to do.

2. Specify the expectations of your discipline and of the genres students will be reading/writing in your course: 1) Define what genre or disciplinary features are expected; 2) Explain what audience(s) students should be addressing when writing (not just the teacher or "academic readers"); 3) Emphasize the purpose of the text(s) students will produce.

3. Since your course readings may include a variety of genre conventions, use these as sample work and point out the conventions within them. How do the readings display the conventions of your discipline? This will help students become familiar with a variety of genres they may find in your discipline (policy briefs, literature reviews, meta-analyses, commentaries, grant proposals, executive summaries, etc.) and the variety of audiences and purposes served by these texts. What can you tell students about how these need to be structured, how they should incorporate information, and what readers might find "out-of-place" in these texts?

4. With your students, identify and analyze model texts that are similar to the disciplinary writing you want students to develop. Start by carefully analyzing model writing in your discipline. This can help you to break down some of the expert blindness you've developed through years of writing and reading in the same discipline. Regardless of how diverse or how uniform writing in your discipline is, there are certain conventions of expectations that unify it as a discourse: these hallmarks are the parameters your students need to know to write effectively in your discipline. Once you can define better what conventions and expectations are important within your discipline, you can explain those to your students and can emphasize them in your assignments. Eventually, you can practice this analysis alongside your students and can help them to pinpoint what writers are doing well--based on the expectations pertinent to your discipline.

   Consider the following questions when analyzing model texts in your discipline:

   ● Who is the primary audience for the model text and what purpose is the text serving?

   ● How is the model text organized? You can consider how section headers are or aren't used, what the purpose of the different sections of a text are, and what different sections (e.g., the intro, the conclusion) traditionally emphasize.

   ● Do you expect the author to be present in the text in the first person? Is the audience explicitly addressed in the 2nd person? If so, how? If not, why?

   ● What types of texts do professionals in your field often compose? For this, think beyond peer-reviewed journal articles. Consider also policy memos, grant proposals, executive summaries, etc. What can you tell your students about

how these need to be structured, how they should incorporate information, and what readers might find "out-of-place" in these texts?

- Now, how would you define good writing? Think beyond abstract descriptors like clear prose, thoughtful research, etc. Instead, as you list criteria for good writing, consider what information/research you find relevant, how you expect research to be cited, what you expect in terms of a text's structure, how much background information you should assume the audience has, etc. You can also start to define good writing in your discipline by considering what conventions writers should *not* use (i.e., Should they try to avoid quotes? Should they try to avoid inserting themselves into the text explicitly?)

How to help students through your assignment instructions

1. In your assignment(s), be sure to describe in detail the three key components on the SWIRL framework: genre, audience, purpose.

   a. Describe the particular disciplinary conventions of organization, style, or use of sources you expect students to adopt.

   b. Who is the audience (beyond you as instructor): are students writing for a professional audience in your field, for decision-makers who may not be deeply informed with disciplinary background but are charged with making a recommendation, etc. When an authentic audience is specified, students often become more engaged and think more critically about writing conventions. An authentic audience also provides students with a robust situation to help them make decisions about rhetorical appropriateness.

   c. Be sure the purpose of the writing is clear (this often overlaps with the audience as noted above): what should the student's writing itself accomplish?

2. Use modeling:

   a. Refer your students to the model text(s) you've analyzed.

   b. Supplement your own instruction with a guide to writing in your discipline (see below for suggestions). You might consider writing your own guide for your students tailored to the priorities and learning outcomes for your discipline at SCU and with SCU resources in mind (e.g., the HUB Writing Center for student support in writing, the Library for library specialists' support in assignment design and support for student research). Even better, collaborate with colleagues and draft a disciplinary writing guide for use in your department.

Readings and Resources

To read more about the "writing in the disciplines approach"
- The WAC Clearinghouse: What is writing in the disciplines?
- The WAC Clearinghouse: Integrating Writing into Any Course: Starting Points
- Bedford Bits: Why WID?
- Bedford Bits: Genre Writing and Teaching Genre Ideas: Toward a Genre Bridge Theory for Writing
- The WAC Clearinghouse: Writing in the STEM Disciplines
- West Virginia University Libraries: *Bad Ideas about Writing*, especially Wardle's "You Can Learn to Write in General" and Carillo's "Writing Knowledge Transfers Easily"

Disciplinary guides and model papers to share with students
- Harvard University's Writing Project (has many disciplinary guides)
- Duke University: Genres for writing
- Duke: Short guides for tips for writing within specific academic disciplines.
- State University of Minnesota: these resources have been collected to help familiarize students with the conventions of academic writing in specific disciplines
- Yale: Model student papers

WRITE Tool Part 2: Guiding Students' Information and Source Use

	Students will select and use information more critically and effectively when source/research expectations are clearly defined and contextualized based on use.	Explicitly describes: 1) Sources expected for the project, and why—provide students with more criteria than an arbitrary number of sources and general types such as primary, secondary, or scholarly 2) How to evaluate sources' authority, relevance, etc. 3) How to use sources (given source type and assignment's genre, audience, purpose) 4) Expectations for citation/documentation
Guidance for information and source use?		

The WRITE assignment design tool's focus on critical use of information (information literacy)

Librarians and faculty have historically focused on source type (e.g. scholarly sources, primary sources) and mechanics (e.g. how to search a database) as the primary guidance students get in how to use sources. This approach has led to a limited interpretation of information literacy and downplays the complex, critical skills needed to develop research and information literacy. As a result, faculty members often express disappointment with students' ability to select high quality sources, critically evaluate sources, and integrate sources into their work. In reality, information and research literacy encompass a number of skills including selecting and developing a topic, identifying the appropriate type of source for the task (often including multiple types of sources), evaluating and analyzing sources, effectively using sources, acknowledging the work of others, and developing and sharing new knowledge.

Studies show that undergraduate students struggle with the amount and variety of information sources (see Head & Eisenberg, 2009[2]). Additionally, graduate students who are re-entering higher education after several years or from parts of the world with less access to scholarly sources face similar challenges. College and university libraries typically have significantly more resources, from substantially more access points, then high school libraries. Students often struggle with this vast amount of information and fall back on strategies that they are most familiar with. Additionally, students are novices within their own disciplines, but are often expected to work with expert sources. To compound the problem, students frequently move between disciplines and disciplinary practices in their courses. Students will be more successful in finding and using information sources if we are explicit about what information sources are typically used, why those sources are used, how to evaluate sources, and how to use sources in their work.

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[2] Head, A. J. & Eisenberg, M. B. (December 1, 2009). Lesson Learned: How College Students Seek Information in the Digital Age. Project Information Literacy, The Information School, University of Washington.Retreived from https://projectinfolit.org/pil-public-v1/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/pil_fall2009_finalv_yr1_12_2009v2.pdf

Broadening our definition of information literacy

SWIRL draws on The Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) definition of information literacy:

> *the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning. (ACRL, 2016)*

Its underlying framework is based on threshold concepts in information literacy and research and is organized into six interconnected frames:

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

Mapping ACRL Framework to the WRITE Tool

The WRITE tool encompasses elements related to each of the Frames. The table below maps each Frame to the WRITE tool element.

Frame	WRITE Element
Authority is Constructed and Contextual	- Sources expected in the project, and why - How to evaluate sources' authority, relevance, etc.
Information Creation as a Process	Steps/stages of the research and writing processes *(see WRITE Tool Part 3: Scaffolding)*
Information Has Value	- Sources expected in the project, and why - How to use sources - Expectations for citation/documentation
Research as Inquiry	How to use sources
Scholarship as Conversation	Expectations for citation/documentation
Searching as Strategic Exploration	Steps/stages of the research and writing processes *(see WRITE Tool Part 3: Scaffolding)*

How to help students develop information literacy skills

- Collaborate with a librarian. Subject Librarians are available to design and conduct sessions on information literacy, help develop research assignments, and meet with students individually or in small groups.

- Integrate activities or assignments that support students to learn how to develop a topic that is appropriate to the scope of the assignment.

- Scaffold the process of finding sources (ideally with feedback that allows students to develop their skills in locating relevant sources as part of an iterative process).

- Provide context for why certain sources are used, when, and how.

- Check to ensure the sources required by the assignment are appropriate for the genre/purpose of the project.

- Provide exercises and other experiences to support students in learning how to read and use sources.

Readings and Resources

Foundational Documents

- *[Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](#)*, Association of College & Research Libraries: Full description of the information literacy Frames, including knowledge practices and dispositions for each.

Theory

- *Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice*, James Elmborg: This seminal article was the first to coin the term *critical information literacy*, which applies critical theory to information literacy. Critical information literacy is now a major theoretical approach that informs the practice of many library educators. Available through the [University Library](#).

- *[Librarians as Disciplinary Discourse Mediators](#): Using Genre Theory to Move Toward Critical Information Literacy*, Michelle Holschuh Simmons: This article articulates the interconnections between disciplinary discourse, genre theory, and critical information literacy.

Research (On info lit and higher education)

- *Publications*, [Project Information Literacy](#): A research institute dedicated to studying information literacy, with an emphasis on higher education. Includes several reports,

including an assignment analysis, post-graduation information literacy trends, and how students engage with news.

Course Integration (resources for lesson plans, activities, assignments)

- *ACRL Framework for [Information Literacy Sandbox](#):* The Sandbox is a repository for information literacy lessons and instructional materials.

- *Designing and Sequencing Assignments to Teach Undergraduate Research, in Bean, J. C. (2011). Engaging Ideas. The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical:* This chapter provides direction for both scaffolding assignments and for contextualizing sources. Available electronically through the [University Library](#).

- [*Critical Information Literacy for Faculty*](#), California State University, San Bernardino: This website provides a number of different activities/approaches support student in critically evaluating sources, both academic and popular.

- [*Project CORA*](#): The Community of Online Research Assignments is an open access repository of assignments and lessons to support the development of information and research literacy skills. Anyone can contribute an assignment or lesson.

WRITE Tool Part 3: Using scaffolding to support research & writing learning

		Explicitly identifies:
Scaffolding of writing and research processes?	Breaking assignment tasks into phases and offering feedback improves the quality of both students' work AND their skills.	1) Steps/stages of the research and writing processes to make writing and research processes clear to students 2) Contextualizes each step/stage with previous steps, other assignments/course readings, etc.

What is scaffolding?

Scaffolding has two meanings when applied to the design of research- and writing-intensive assignments:

- Moving from simpler to more complex tasks (see [Bloom's taxonomy](#)), either within a single project or across sequential projects

- Breaking a project into smaller component tasks, focusing on different aspects of project/course learning goals

Scaffolding is based on [Vygotsky's zone of proximal development](#), which states that learners learn most when asked to do things that are *just outside* their current capabilities. Scaffolding describes the process of offering support through guided experiences, direct instruction, modeling, and feedback to building knowledge and skills incrementally. Scaffolding encourages learners to rely on the knowledge/skills they've accumulated through previous steps, withdrawing old supports and providing new ones to guide students through a sequence of increasingly challenging/complex tasks that build on one another.

Why scaffold?

Scaffolding helps instructors to map course learning outcomes onto different aspects of an assignment or project, helping ensure that each learning outcome gets specific attention and increasing students' uptake of it. Although the culmination of a major project may encompass many or all course learning outcomes, students have a better chance of understanding and engaging with each of them when given a chance to do so one or a few at a time to avoid cognitive overload that students risk when working with unfamiliar material and attempting new skills.

Scaffolding provides explicit opportunities for students to apply what they've learned to new tasks, and makes learning accessible to all by beginning with easier tasks and building from those to more complicated ones. This is particularly important for research-based writing because of its

complexity: John C. Bean explains in *[Engaging Ideas](#)*[3] that research-based writing asks students to perform several complex tasks, which are new to them as novices in a discipline but are naturalized and often implicit for instructors with expertise in the area:

- Ask discipline-appropriate research questions
- Use sources effectively:
    - Find & select appropriate sources
    - Engage sources in sophisticated ways -- summary, synthesis, critique, etc
- Write about research in rhetorically-appropriate ways
    - Write for a specific audience & purpose
    - Use genres and conventions appropriate to specific disciplinary context
    - Use a multi-step writing process that uses feedback and iteration to develop ideas
    - Integrate sources correctly/consistently and with integrity

Identifying the tasks contained within a research-based writing assignment illustrates why it's worth breaking a large project down into scaffolded steps that focus on one or a few of these tasks at a time, to help students master and combine them (transferable "learning to write" skills) as well as producing higher-quality assignments (demonstrating learning/mastery through a "writing to learn" approach). This is especially true for courses that include non-majors, students who are new to the discipline, and/or students who bring research and writing experiences from other cultures, disciplines, and/or levels of schooling, which can conflict with the expectations for the current disciplinary writing/research assignment.

Ideas for Scaffolding Writing- and Research-Intensive Assignments:

Especially in courses that also include significant disciplinary content, one of the most efficient and effective ways to scaffold assignments is to integrate assignment scaffolding and content coverage *throughout the course*, using approaches like:

- Dividing a large project into multiple steps or a series of assignments with staggered deadlines and opportunities for feedback.

    - Remember to include research in this process, considering adding steps for locating sources, evaluating sources, drawing connections between sources, etc.

    - Emphasize the relationships between sequenced assignments or a multi-stage assignment to 1) convey to students what the scaffolded experience adds up to as a whole and 2) to encourage students to apply their learning & feedback cumulatively as they move through the curriculum

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[3] Bean, J.C. (2001). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. Jossey-Bass.

- Demonstrating the kinds of research and writing assignments we ask students to do. This is especially useful both for distinguishing and building bridges from research and writing experiences in other courses/disciplines.

  - Discuss material/readings as models for student work (as well as for their content), tied to assignment phases (source selection, topic/research question/hypothesis generation, data/evidence analysis, writing a specific section like intro/methods/lit review)

  - Provide sample work from former students (ideally annotated/discussed to show how they fulfill assignment goals) as assignments/steps are rolled out throughout the class to illustrate the expectations for research and writing

- Provide feedback on work in progress/incremental assignments. One of the biggest benefits of scaffolding for faculty and students is that it prevents the terrible scenario of a final project that surprises both teacher and student by dramatically misaligning with the assignment expectations. Faculty and fellow students can give feedback: assignment transparency and clarity about the assignment's rhetorical situation are especially important in setting students up to give each other valuable feedback.

  - Add low-stakes assignments like proposals, outlines, research questions/hypotheses, draft thesis statements, etc to the beginning of the research project and use these to give feedback on the overall plan/approach students are taking. Bonus: early assignments like this help prevent procrastination.

  - Assign drafts (possibly multiple drafts) and prioritize different things in them (ideas, organization, style, etc) as the projects become more developed. Faculty tend to over-comment on student drafts: telling students that comments on a specific draft will only focus on one subset of concerns both streamlines the labor of responding to the drafts and helps keep the students' revision workload more manageable.

  - For any scaffolding steps, consider what kind of feedback to offer, considering benefits to students and faculty workload: written or audio/video comments from faculty or students, group or one-on-one conferences, diagnostic self-evaluations, etc (these are most useful when linked to the assignment rubrics -- see WRITE Tool 4: Criteria for Evaluation)

Further resources on scaffolding, with specific ideas for implementing scaffolding strategies

Designing Scaffolded Writing Assignments/Assignment Sequences:
- "Designing and Sequencing Assignments to Teach Undergraduate Research" (John Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*)
- Scaffolding & Sequencing Assignments (University Michigan Sweetland Center for Writing)
- Best Practices in Instructional Scaffolding (Ryerson University Teaching & Learning Office)
- Scaffolding and Sequencing Writing Assignments (University of Colorado Writing Center)
- Assignment Scaffolding (Brooklyn College Center for Teaching & Learning)
- Assignment Scaffolding (University of Toronto Centre for Teaching & Learning)
- "Designing Writing Assignments" (Traci Gardner, *Designing Writing Assignments*)
- Teaching Writing as a Process (Dartmouth College Institute for Writing & Rhetoric)
- Insider's Guide to Academic Writing: Assignment Sequence Ideas (Stacey Cochran, Bedford Bits)
- Sequencing Writing Assignments (WAC Clearinghouse Faculty Tip Sheet)
- Techniques to Encourage Revision between Drafts (WAC Clearinghouse Faculty Tip Sheet)
- Using Writing in Large Classes (WAC Clearinghouse Faculty Tip Sheet)

Giving Feedback via Peer Review:
- Conducting Writing Workshops (Dartmouth College Institute for Writing & Rhetoric)
- Creating Effective Peer Review Groups to Improve Student Writing (WAC Clearinghouse Faculty Tip Sheet)
- Facilitating Peer Review (WAC Clearinghouse)

Giving Feedback via Instructor Commenting & Grading:
- Diagnosing and Responding to Student Writing (Dartmouth College Institute for Writing & Rhetoric)
- Writing Feedback: A New Approach to Student and Faculty Flourishing (Stacey Cochran, Bedford Bits)
- Responding to Student Writing (WAC Clearinghouse Faculty Tip Sheet)
- Managing the Paper Load: How to Avoid the Paper Trap (WAC Clearinghouse Faculty Tip Sheet)
- Responding to & Evaluating Student Writing (WAC Clearinghouse)

WRITE Tool Part 4: Criteria for Evaluation (Rubrics and Evaluation)

Criteria for evaluation?	Clearly understanding the parameters for excellence encourages students to do their best work.	Explicit description of: 1. Evaluation criteria (parallel to the assignment description) 2. Emphasis/weight on different aspects of assignment (signaling where students should focus their effort) 3. Characteristics of high-quality work (in terms of genre, audience, purpose, information use, citation styles, and processes)

Establishing and communicating an assignment's evaluation criteria are the final element of making assignments transparent and motivating students to do their best work. Students should not only know how the assignment will be weighted as a portion of their total course grade, but they should also know how the individual assignment will be evaluated. Although evaluation information can be shared descriptively or through a checklist, rubrics are often the most effective tool for combining evaluative criteria with information about the standard of achievement you want to motivate students to achieve.

What are rubrics?

A rubric is a scoring tool that helps you evaluate an assignment based on pre-identified criteria. The criteria are the skills and knowledge the assignment is asking your students to demonstrate and each criterion should describe different levels of performance, including what excellent work should reflect. In the context of the WRITE tool, rubric criteria for success should parallel the objectives and focus of the assignment. As discussed below, a rubric can take many different forms based on instructor preference and assignment type.

Why use rubrics?

When planned and executed well, rubrics help faculty members and students. Rubrics help students by clearly communicating expectations of the assignments in advance which provides additional transparency in assignments and grading. Students can use rubrics as a checklist before they turn in assignments and can provide a framework for guiding peer review sessions.

Rubrics can also help students to complete peer reviews which can help strengthen the end result. The rubric gives students a clear and concise way to give constructive feedback and helps give them the rhetoric involved in the assignment. Using rubrics for peer feedback can also help faculty identify confusion or misconceptions about assignment expectations before the final projects are submitted.

For faculty, rubrics can help make grading more efficient, consistent, and fair. Each assignment is compared to the criteria on the rubric and not against other students' submissions. In addition,

rubrics can serve as a formative assessment tool for the instructor to check on how well they did in the classroom and to guide changes to course and assignment design.

Analytic rubrics

Analytic rubrics are useful for significant research-based writing assignments. The criteria (rows) are the objectives, individual tasks, or activity components that you want to review. These should correspond to the major components of the assignment that you are prioritizing.

- The levels of mastery (columns) define the extent to which a given student meets each criterion. Within the matrix, text in the cells describes the performance expected at each level, for each criterion. Faculty can label these proficiency levels in many ways as these two examples illustrate.

For example, one criterion (row) dealing with the *purpose of writing* within a particular discipline from the University of Tennessee Disciplinary rubric reads as follows:

Outcome	1-Ineffective	2-Adequate	3-Effective	4-Outstanding
Purpose: Uses genre or rhetorical framework effectively to communicate with the intended audience.	There is little sense of an appropriate genre or rhetorical framework being used, and the intended purpose and audience are unclear.	An appropriate genre or rhetorical framework is discernible, but multiple violations of the genre conventions (e.g., organization, tone, vocabulary, referencing, etc.) limit its ability to communicate with an audience familiar with the genre or discipline. The paper does not read fluidly, requiring multiple readings to determine meaning.	An appropriate genre or rhetorical framework is clear and generally adhered to, though it may have minor violations of genre conventions (e.g., organization, tone, vocabulary, referencing, etc.). Demonstrates some awareness of an audience familiar with the genre or discipline. The paper reads fluidly.	An appropriate genre or rhetorical framework is clear, consistently adhered to, and there is obvious awareness of writing to an audience familiar with the discipline. The paper reads like an experienced disciplinary insider could have written it. Application of and/or innovations within the genre conventions is/are effective and deliberate.

From a history research paper evaluation, the author created one row that deals with the use of evidence as follows.

Outcome	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Poor
Evidence	Provides compelling and accurate evidence that convinces reader to accept main argument. The importance/relevance of all pieces of evidence is clearly stated. There are no gaps in reasoning—i.e., the reader does not need to assume anything or do additional research to accept main argument.	Provides necessary evidence to convince reader of most aspects of the main argument but not all. The importance/ relevance of some evidence presented may not be totally clear. Reader must make a few mental leaps or do some additional research to fully accept all aspects of main argument.	Not enough evidence is provided to support author's argument, or evidence is incomplete, incorrect, or oversimplified. Information from lectures and readings is not effectively used.	Either no evidence is provided, or there are numerous factual mistakes, omissions or oversimplifications. There is little or no mention of information from lectures and readings.

Tips for Creating or Adapting Rubrics

- Make sure the categories in rubric align with the priorities of your learning outcomes for the assignment. Use the language of your assignment prompt in your rubric.

- Draft your high and low performance descriptions for each criteria category, then fill in the mid-range descriptions. The labels used for each level of performance (typically three or four) should be clear and tactful (e.g., Not meeting, approaching, meeting, exceeding).

- Consider rubric language carefully in order to be inclusive the range of student responses that could realistically fall in a given cell.

- To create properly scaled language that anticipates and captures as many students' responses as possible. "And/or" statements can be helpful in addressing the range of student work.

- Existing generic rubrics for writing or information literacy can provide an excellent starting point for incorporating your priorities for writing and the use of information. The Office of Assessment at SCU maintains a rubric bank with many samples of disciplinary-specific rubrics too.

Tips for Using Rubrics Successfully

- Discuss in class
- Use in class with sample paper or with peer review
- Couple rubrics with other measures or forms of feedback. Giving *brief* additional feedback can highlight strengths and areas for improvement for the future.

Further reading/resources on rubrics and evaluation:

- J.C. Bean. (2011, second edition) *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom.* Chapter 14 - Using Rubrics to Develop & Apply Grading Criteria
- Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching. (n.d.). Grading Student Work.
- IUPUI Creating and Using Rubrics (includes other links)
- Carnegie Mellon Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Education Innovation Creating and Using Rubrics
- University of North Carolina Wilmington. (2009). Scoring rubrics: Converting scores to grades.

Sample rubrics to draw upon for elements related to writing and information/research literacy

- University of Pittsburgh collection of Information Literacy rubrics
- Association of College and Research Libraries Rubrics (contains many examples of rubrics and other tools for communicating expectations for research literacy)
- Written Communication VALUE rubric
- Adapted Written Communication
- VALUE Rubric (Claremont)
- University of Tennessee Disciplinary Writing Rubric
- Sample rubric from Yale English course (incorporates letter grades)