Teaching Writing as a Process

While faculty use many different strategies to teach writing, most if not all adopt a **writing process** approach. This foundational writing pedagogy recognizes that writing happens in stages and encourages instructors to design assignments accordingly. It shifts primary focus away from the final product and distributes the development of a writing project through a sequence of stages and tasks. This **scaffolding** ultimately aims, however, to help students produce high quality writing.

Stages: What is the process?

Composition researchers and many writers will say that there is not *a* writing process (that processes vary depending on writer, task, and context), but writing instructors typically identify a few core stages of a writing process and use these stages when they support student writing. These stages are typically described as **recursive** rather than linear, meaning that writers might return to earlier stages of the process as they develop their projects.

> **Invention:** in this early stage, writers research, develop, and organize ideas.

> **Drafting:** in this stage, writers begin writing and arranging the structure of their projects.

> **Revision:** after composing some text, writers begin to refine initial drafts in order to clarify ideas, rearrange content, and more directly consider their audience(s).

> **Editing:** at this final stage, writers attend to surface-level issues such as grammar and mechanics.

Applications: How to teach writing as a process

Writing instructors have developed many activities to support each of these stages. Below are few ideas that can be easily incorporated into any course.

> **Invention/pre-writing:** instructors might begin several weeks out or more with short reading, writing, and researching activities to help student begin thinking about writing projects. Reading or research journals, mind-maps, free-writing, outlining are a few activities that can be integrated at this stage. Simply getting students to talk to each and you can help them generate ideas.

> **Drafting:** instructors might ask students to multiple drafts as they work to completing their projects. Some faculty use zero drafts (sustained free-writing) and additional rough drafts (more composed writing). These can be discussed in class in peer review and given quick targeted feedback about next steps.

> **Revision:** instructors can help students re-see their writing through peer reviews, conferencing, reverse outlining, and writing to a new audience

> **Editing:** instructors can provide students with a quick in-class editing session right before assignments are submitted; students can also work in pairs to help each other conduct final edits; instructors can also provide students with a list of grammar pet-peeves to prioritize.

Example: What might teaching writing as a process look like?

Invention/prewriting:

1. In-class activity: Ask students to talk in small groups about thte assignment prompt: what does the assignment ask them to do, and what questions do they have?
2. Reflective assignment: Have students write about their interests and goals for the project. What do they know; what would they like to learn; what are their personal goals; why?
3. Project plan and proposal: Have students conduct some early research and sketch their initial ideas about the project; have them include a plan for how they intend to complete the project.
4. Research summaries: ask students to summarize their sources and include a section where they synthesize sources (e.g., connect each source with at least one other source)

Drafting:

5. First draft: schedule an early deadline and require students to submit a draft; this could be a whole or partial draft (that targets a specific section like a literature review); students can peer review these and/or you can provide quick, targeted feedback.
6. Progress update: have students revisit their initial plans and reflect on their progress: What have they learned? What adjustments have they or will they need to make? What bottlenecks are they experiencing? What would they like feedback on? Students can submit these with a draft and talk about them in class.

Revision:

7. Second draft: schedule an early deadline and require students to submit a draft; this could be a whole or partial draft (that targets a specific section like a literature review); students can peer review these and/or you can provide quick, targeted feedback.
8. Revision plan: have students compose plans for revising their drafts after they have received peer and/or faculty feedback. What feedback will they incorporate and how? What feedback did they give that they might adopt for themselves? What adjustments to their original plans do they need to make?

Editing:

9. Final draft: on the due date, give students 15-minutes of class to make final edits
10. Reflection: after submitting, ask students to reflect on the project: what did they learn about the topic and about themselves as writers? How will they carry this knowledge forward?

Further reading

University of Michigan's Sweetland Center for Writing. (2020). Sequencing and scaffolding assignments. *Teaching resources.* https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teaching-resources/sequencing-and-scaffolding-assignments.html

University of Wisconsin's WAC Program. (2020). Sequencing assignments in your course. *Resources for instructors.* https://dept.writing.wisc.edu/wac/resources-for-instructors/