

The Anti-Racist Classroom

Scaffolding assignments

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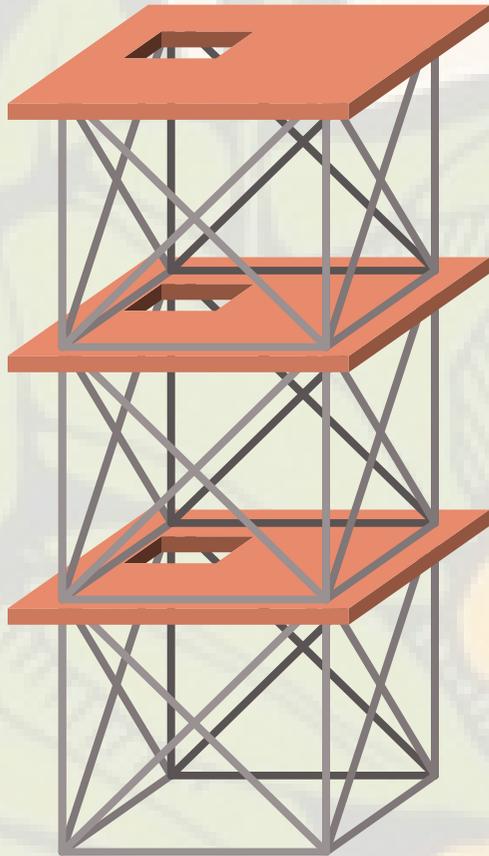
Writing Center

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What is scaffolding?

Scaffolding is a technique by which an instructor breaks down major assignments into smaller, more manageable tasks that prepare students for larger, more complex work.



Examples of scaffolding assignments:

- **Pre-writing:** Students gather their knowledge on a topic or task before they begin
- **Outlining:** Students begin to brainstorm and think about structure
- **Annotated bibliography:** Helps students learn effective research skills
- **Multiple drafts:** Students feel supported to take greater intellectual risks if they are not worried about being assessed immediately.
- **Minor assignments:** Allow students to use work from smaller tasks as seed for their larger project.

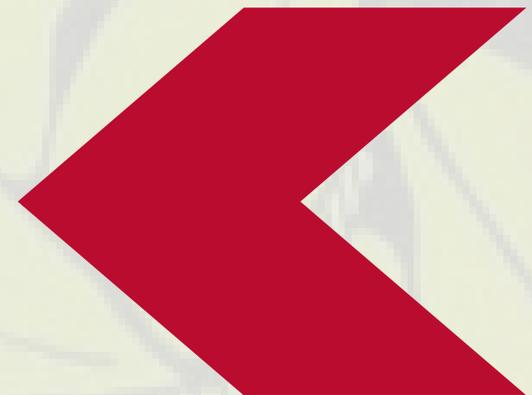
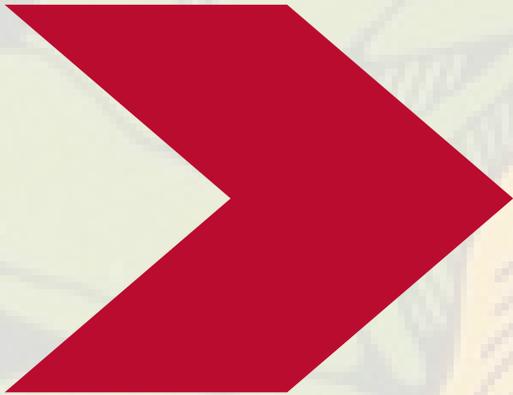
Why scaffold?

- Scaffolding allows students from diverse educational backgrounds to build the critical competencies they need to complete major assignments successfully.
- Scaffolding helps students manage their time effectively.
- Instructors can provide interventions when and as necessary to support student success. If students are struggling with major projects, breaking the work into component parts can help an instructor diagnose the difficulty and provide meaningful help.

Let's get scaffolding!

Once you have your major assignment designed, it's time to plan the scaffolding you will provide to support your students. The following questions may help you get started:

- What are the learning outcomes for this assignment? How can you target specific outcomes with smaller, lower-stakes assignments that allow students to build toward a critical capacity?
 - For example: If your major assignment requires an argumentative thesis statement, you might remove the first paragraphs from existing essays and invite students to develop thesis statements for those essays. If you then ask your students to explain why their proposed thesis works for the essay they just read, they will have ample opportunity to develop and demonstrate their mastery of this concept.
- What skills or capacities might you be taking for granted? Remember: there will always be a range of educational backgrounds in your classroom, and it is too easy and too harmful to assume that all students have received the same opportunities to practice academic writing.
 - For example: If you are asking students to write an essay that uses literary analysis to make an argument, you might ask them to first practice close reading and identifying literary devices. A scavenger hunt could be fun!
- Are there resources that would be useful for this assignment, but of which students may not be aware? A full-class session with a librarian can be very helpful for students who may not know about all the different services the library offers!



This resource was created from a scaffolding assignment designed by Sidonia Serafini for her ENGL 1102 class.

Example of effective scaffolding:

From the assignment sheet:

To shed light on/give additional perspective to your interpretation of [Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God], you will incorporate two (2) additional sources: 1) a primary non-fiction work by Hurston (autobiography, essays, articles, anthropological writing, folklore collections) and 2) a historical document (newspaper articles or advertisements, speeches, court cases, etc.)

The guidelines for your assignment can provide you with scaffolding ideas. Because this instructor requires her students to use specific types of sources, she also creates a scaffolding assignment to help students learn how to access and use those sources **BEFORE** they start to draft their papers!

For this scaffolding assignment, this instructor gave each student (working in small groups) a research task and several reflection questions. This scaffolding activity not only allowed students to develop a familiarity with the databases they would need to find sources for their paper, but they also honed their analytical skills!

Historic Advertisement Analysis Activity

Circle one: Runaway slave ad OR Lost family member ad

Year:

Newspaper:

City and state of publication:

Page # (if available):

Questions to ponder:

What details are included in the ad and why?

What is *not* said in the ad?

What can the ad tell us about this period of American history and culture?