

MULTI-STAGE ASSIGNMENTS: THE “EXPLAINER ARTICLE”

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SUMMARY

Students develop their writing and critical thinking skills through multiple stages of feedback. As the first step of the “Explainer article” assignment, each student chooses a peer-reviewed journal article in their area of interest. The student then “translates” key aspects of this article into a 500-600-word newspaper-style explainer article, targeted for a general audience. Students submit their writing in four stages and receive feedback at each stage either from peers or the instructor.

“Most students say that they aren’t used to getting feedback they can act on, so they’re usually pretty delighted to have insights and ideas about how to go forward.”

- Diane Dechief

GOALS

- Introduce strategies for distilling and explaining specialized content
- Foster ongoing dialogue around student work
- Improve quality of work through multiple drafts

STEPS

- 1 Students attend a class session in the library to help them pick a topic and begin their research.
- 2 For Draft 0, students bring a draft of their writing to a peer feedback class where they exchange feedback in small groups. The instructor provides [3-6 open-ended questions](#) to guide the peer feedback. The questions align with the criteria for Draft 1.
- 3 Students submit Draft 1 a week after the Draft 0 peer feedback class. Students also submit an [interactive feedback form](#) that identifies what they most want feedback on and provides a self-assessment of their work.
- 4 The instructor provides feedback on Draft 1. Students then have one week to revise it and submit Draft 2.
- 5 Students have one week to revise their writing. Draft 3 is then posted online to a private class website for peers to read.



Find more information and examples of multi-stage assignments in **[Feedback strategies: Engaging students in dialogue](#)** (see Strategy 4, pp. 17-20).

ASSESSMENT

- Draft 0 receives in-class peer feedback and earns the student 1% for participation.
- Draft 1 and Draft 2 are each worth 8% and receive instructor feedback. If a student submits Draft 2 without revisions, it receives a zero.
- Draft 3 is not graded, but students receive participation points (1% of overall grade) for posting it to the website.

READY TO TRY IT OUT?

HERE'S SOME ADVICE ...

- Identify the desired learning outcomes and where students may need the most support. Then plan the stages of the assignment.
- Structure the peer feedback and guide students through the process so that they can attain the learning outcomes.
- Strive to provide students with timely and meaningful feedback. Return drafts to students with plenty of time for revision.

BENEFITS

- Multi-stage assignments help students manage their workload, as no single stage of the assignment feels too intimidating.
- Emphasis is on process rather than product.
- The peer feedback class helps students develop their critical reading skills and allows them to see what they're doing well and what they can improve in relation to their peers.

CHALLENGES

- Providing meaningful feedback to students who excel on the first draft is challenging, but the interactive feedback form ensures that each student identifies areas for improvement.
- During the peer feedback class, some students might be critical of the quality of their peers' writing. It is important to define the peer reviewer role in assignment materials and do an in-class example of peer feedback.

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