

FEEDBACK STRATEGIES: ENGAGING STUDENTS IN DIALOGUE

A RESOURCE DOCUMENT FOR INSTRUCTORS



McGill

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Learning Services
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INTRODUCTION

You've assigned students a term paper and told them what it should include. Once students have submitted their papers, you psych yourself up to tackle the hours of reading ahead of you. After providing feedback comments on a stack of papers, you're discouraged: instructions weren't consistently followed; arguments lack support; some papers don't even argue anything; much of the writing hasn't been proofread. And you wonder what the point is of providing comments that many students will never read once you've assigned grades. You rationalize your time on task by telling yourself that the comments justify the grade.

Have you ever had this experience? Are you interested in learning about pedagogically sound and efficient strategies for getting students to better understand your expectations for their assignment submissions? To pay closer attention to assignment instructions? To pay attention to your comments? And for possibly saving you time when marking students' papers? In this resource document, we describe strategies that address these questions by involving students in dialogue about their writing assignments from the moment you assign these assignments to the time students submit completed pieces of writing. If your curiosity has been piqued, read on.



A DIALOGUE APPROACH: THREE TYPES OF FEED

A dialogue approach to commenting on students' writing involves a shift from a typical approach where instructors write feedback comments on students' papers to an approach that involves instructor and student interaction with the comments (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989). It assumes three types of feed: *feed up*, *feed back* and *feed forward*, each of which is associated with a question for students to reflect on (Figure 1). This approach also assumes that the *feeds* are intended to promote student learning, an assumption that is in contrast to the use of instructor comments solely to justify assignment grades.

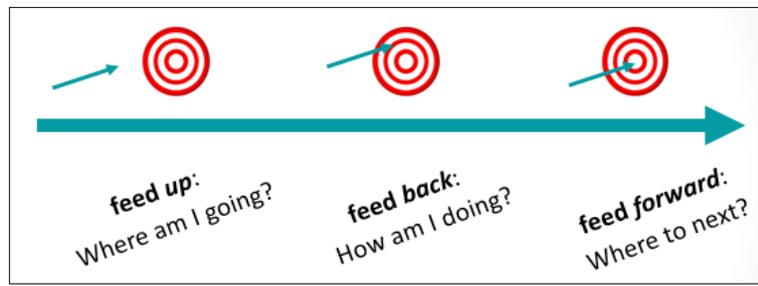


Figure 1. Three Types of Feed

Feed up: Where am I going?	Feed back: How am I doing?	Feed forward: Where to next?
Students need to know what a writing assignment that meets the criteria looks like so they are not put in a position where they have to guess what their instructors' expectations are. To allow students to know "where they are going"—in other words, what the target is—instructors should be explicit about what the submission criteria are. Feed up refers to letting students know what the target is.	Students need to know to what extent the writing they have produced meets the criteria, in other words, whether or not they are on target. Instructors should provide feed back that helps students see what gaps exist between the target they were aiming for and the work they handed in. Note that explaining to students how their performance reached or exceeded expectations (i.e., the target) is just as important as commenting on weak areas. To intentionally produce good work in future assignments, students need to know what they have done well.	Students need to know how to close the gap between their current work and the target. Instructor comments feed forward when they help students see how to improve the quality of future work. It is key in this context that students have opportunities to make use of instructor comments in subsequent writing assignments; otherwise, they are simply "dangling data" (Sadler 1989, p. 121).

With a dialogue approach, students are more likely to (Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006):

- develop an understanding of how to actually improve their writing;
- act on instructor comments;
- produce work that corresponds to instructor expectations; and
- become more independent learners.

As with all types of comments on student work, a dialogue approach requires constructive comments. For guidelines and examples on how to respond constructively to student work, see the [Providing Constructive Feedback Rubric](#) (Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning at UC Merced, n.d.).



STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING A DIALOGUE APPROACH

In this section, we present four strategies for implementing a dialogue approach: (1) Annotating writing submissions; (2) Submitting interactive cover sheets; (3) Collaborating on evaluation criteria; and (4) Dividing assignments into multiple stages. Each strategy incorporates at least one of the three types of feed.

STRATEGY 1: ANNOTATING WRITING SUBMISSIONS

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE STUDENTS ANNOTATE THEIR ASSIGNMENTS?

Annotations are a way for students to show where and how they have addressed criteria in their assignments by using, for example, square brackets, highlights, and comments written in the margins. Students annotate their assignments prior to submission.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO ANNOTATE THEIR WORK?

Annotating work prior to submission is a type of self-assessment that allows students to see the extent to which they are addressing assignment criteria before the instructor reads the submitted assignment and provides comments. This strategy promotes students' active engagement with the assignment criteria—**feed up**—so that they are better positioned to succeed at the assignment (Sheriff LeVan & King, 2015). Therefore, it is important to ask students to annotate features of writing that align with what you want them to learn from doing the assignment. Since annotations inform readers (i.e., instructors) about the writers' (i.e., students) intentions, the annotations give you, the instructor, insight into students' thinking. Your **feed back** comments on the annotations are a response to students that helps them readily see where they have succeeded and where they need to improve in order to meet the assignment criteria. In addition, the annotations can help you focus both your **feed back** and **feed forward** comments. Knowing what to focus on when assessing students' work has the potential for saving you valuable marking time.

HOW CAN THIS STRATEGY BE IMPLEMENTED?

- Explain to students what annotations are in the context of the assignment.
- Show students several examples (in class and/or in myCourses) of annotated writing so that they understand what the assignment is and what your expectations are.
- Ensure that students understand the features of the writing assignment that you are asking them to annotate. For example, if you ask students to underline the thesis statement, be sure they know what a thesis statement is.
- Explain your rationale to students for asking them to annotate their writing, including how this assignment **feeds forward** with respect to fostering their ability to achieve learning outcomes.
- Ask students to annotate all or some of the criteria you expect them to address in the assignment. Often, these criteria are listed in the assignment instructions.
- Be explicit in the instructions about how you would like the annotations to appear, for example, as highlighted text, underlined text or written comments. (Your choices may be influenced by whether you ask for hard copy versus soft copy submissions.)
- Optionally, have students practice annotating existing pieces of work in class (possibly in pairs) before submitting their own work; then, debrief as a whole group.
- Have students submit their work on the due date with the annotations already completed.



VARIATIONS

Plan two submission dates: On the assignment due date, give students time to annotate their writing in class. If their annotations illustrate to themselves that they have met the assignment criteria, they can submit their work that day. If their annotations suggest to themselves that their work has not addressed all the criteria, extend the assignment due date so as to allow students time to improve their writing before you provide **feed back** and **feed forward** comments.

EXAMPLES

In this section, we offer three examples of assignment instructions—for a research paper, lab report and position paper—and two examples of annotated student writing.

1. RESEARCH PAPER

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. In the right margin, explain the structure of your introduction.
2. Put square brackets around your thesis statement and write *thesis statement* in the right margin.
3. Circle the part of your thesis statement that lets readers know the main ideas you will address in your paper.
4. Put square brackets around any definitions and write *definition* in the right margin.
5. Within the body paragraphs, put square brackets around each sentence that introduces a main idea and write *main idea* in the right margin.
6. Put square brackets around every instance of support for your main ideas and write *support* in the right margin.



ANNOTATED STUDENT WRITING

Biological clocks

Life in modern, technological societies is built around timepieces. People set clocks on radios, microwave ovens, VCRs, and electric coffee makers. Students respond to bells that start and end the school day as well as dividing it into blocks of time. Almost everyone relies on clocks to manage time well. While carefully managing the minutes and hours each day, individuals are often encouraged or forced by current styles of family and work life to violate another kind of time: their body's time. [Biological clocks, which are also known as circadian cycles, are a significant feature of human design that greatly affect personal and professional lifestyles]

Circadian cycles are in tune with external time cycles such as the 24-hour period of the earth's daily rotation as signaled by the rising and setting of the sun. In fact, says William Schwartz, professor of neurobiology and a researcher in the field of [chronobiology (the study of circadian rhythms)], "All such biological clocks are adaptations to life on a rotating world" (Lewis, 1995). The term [circadian," which is Latin for "about a day,"] describes the rhythms of people's internal biological clocks. Usually, humans set their biological clocks by seeing these cycles of daylight and darkness. Carefully designed studies conducted in caves or similar environments that let researchers control light and darkness have shown that most people create cycles slightly over 24 hours when they are not exposed to natural cycles of day and night (Allis & Haederle, 1989; Enright, 1980). Researchers have found that human perception of the external day-night cycle affects the production and release of a brain hormone, melatonin, which is important in initiating and regulating the sleep-wake cycle.

[A group that suffers greatly from biological-clock disruptions consists of people whose livelihoods depend on erratic schedules. This situation affects 20 to 30 million U.S. workers] whose work schedules differ from the usual morning starting time and afternoon or early evening ending time (Weiss, 1989). [Charles Czeisler, director of the Centre for Circadian and Sleep Disorders at Brigham and Woman's Hospital in Boston, reports that 27% of the U.S. workforce does shift work (Binkley, 1990).] Shift work can mean, for example, working from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for 6 weeks, from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. for 6 weeks, and from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. for 6 weeks. Many shift workers endure stomach and intestinal-tract disorders ...

In the intro,
I'm trying to
go from general
to specific

time in society
time in the
individual

thesis statement

2 main ideas

definition

definition

main idea

support

Modified excerpt
from: Troyka, L. Q.
(2002). *The Simon
& Schuster
handbook for
writers, Third
Canadian edition.*
Toronto, ON:
Pearson Education,
pp. 717-720.



2. LAB REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS¹

You will write two lab reports this semester to communicate your experimental findings. Each report should be organized according to the format of a scientific paper. Use the following section headings:

Abstract: Summarize the purpose, experimental method, major results and general conclusion described in the report. The abstract should be a single paragraph (no more than 200 words) that stands alone as a summary of your experiments.

Introduction: Provide background and context for your experiments to help readers understand what you did and why.

Methods: Describe how you performed the experiments. Do not copy/paste protocols from the lab manual. Instead, briefly explain each procedure and highlight any relevant details that are specific to your experiment. Note any deviations from standard methods.

Results: Present your data in clearly labelled figures and tables, and describe what you observed.

Discussion and conclusions: Discuss what your results mean and what conclusions you have drawn from your data.

References: Cite any sources of data or information that are not your own, including primary literature and manufacturer (i.e., Invitrogen, Qiagen) protocols.

You will be working in pairs throughout the semester. Although you and your lab partner will share raw data, the analyses and interpretation in your respective reports must be your own, independent work.

1. Annotate your report according to the following instructions:
 - a. In the abstract, put square brackets around each of the following sections and label them in the right margin:
 - Experimental method
 - Purpose of the experiment
 - Results
 - Conclusions
 - b. In the body of the report,
 - For each figure and table, highlight in yellow where in the report you refer to them.
 - Highlight in green your first in-text citation and write the citation style (e.g., ACS, CSE) in the margin.
2. Submit your annotated lab report on myCourses.

¹ Lab Report assignment instructions provided by Prof. S. Weber, Department of Biology, McGill University, and adapted with permission.



STUDENT SUBMISSION

The example below² illustrates annotations for a portion of the Lab Report assignment, namely, the abstract and the first few lines of the introduction.

Abstract

[To feed on materials that are healthy for them, flies (order Diptera) use taste receptors on their tarsi to find sugars to ingest. We examined the ability of blowflies to taste monosaccharide and disaccharide sugars as well as saccharin]. [To do this, we attached flies to the ends of sticks and lowered their feet into solutions with different concentrations of these sugars. We counted a positive response when they lowered their proboscis to feed]. [The flies responded to sucrose at a lower concentration than they did of glucose, and they didn't respond to saccharin at all. Our results show that they taste larger sugar molecules more readily than they do smaller ones. They didn't feed on saccharin because the saccharin we use is actually the sodium salt of saccharin, and they reject salt solutions.] [Overall, our results show that flies are able to taste and choose foods that are good for them.]

Purpose

Method

Results

Conclusion

Introduction

All animals rely on senses of taste and smell to find acceptable food for survival. Chemoreceptors are found in the taste buds on the tongue in humans (Campbell, 2008), for example, for tasting food. Studies of sensory physiology have often used insects as experimental subjects because insects can be manipulated with ease and because their sensory-response system is relatively simple (E. Williams, personal communication).

² Hamilton (2009)

3. POSITION PAPER

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

You are an Environment Canada research scientist investigating whether massive pesticide spraying to control the spruce budworm has been effective. You will be presenting a public statement to convince city officials to either maintain, modify or stop current practices. Assume this statement will be shared at a hearing and that your audience will be made up of concerned citizens and city officials who are not necessarily familiar with the scientific literature on the topic. However, they will be very interested to know your perspective on the problem and potential courses of action for addressing the problem based on new evidence.

Choose five readings from among those in the course pack, supplemental course readings and readings mentioned during lectures/class discussions. Based on this literature, decide which position to support. Write a 750-word (typed, double-spaced) statement to either maintain, modify or stop current courses of action. Submit your assignment on April 7.

Assignment criteria	Annotation instructions
<p>In your statement, provide:</p>	<p>Include the following annotations when you submit your assignment. Annotations can be hand-written or added using the “Comments” tool in Word.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. a description of the context for the problem b. a description of the problem c. an explanation of the importance of the problem, including its root causes and implications d. a critique of previously proposed means of addressing the problem e. your recommendations for action <p>Provide support from the literature for your recommendations. Include a list of references following the APA style guide.</p>	<p>Put square brackets around your</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. description of the context for the problem and write “context” in the margin. b. description of the problem and write “problem” in the margin. c. explanation of the importance of the problem and write “importance” in the margin. d. critique of previously proposed means for addressing the problem and write “critique” in the margin. e. recommendations for action and write “recommendations” in the margin <p>In your statement (not in the list of references), highlight in yellow every instance of support from the literature for your recommendations.</p>

4. ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF FEATURES THAT CAN BE ANNOTATED

To illustrate the flexibility of this strategy, we offer examples of features of writing that can be annotated in a variety of writing assignments (e.g., research paper, lab report, reflection writing, blog post, position paper, policy brief, case study). These examples, which are written as instructions to students, are organized according to three key considerations in academic writing: *audience*, *purpose*, and *organization* (Swales & Feak, 2012). Since the features of writing that you ask students to annotate should align with the learning outcomes of a given assignment, the example instructions should be selected and adapted to suit your students’ learning context.



Audience

- At the top of the page, write *Audience*, followed by who your target audience is (e.g., audience: senior citizens; high school students; first-year PhD students; my thesis committee).
- Throughout your writing, circle the words or phrases that you specifically chose because they address your target audience.

Purpose

- At the top of the page, write *Purpose*, followed by what you would like to accomplish with this piece of writing (e.g., *inform* or *convince* your audience of something).
- Throughout your writing, highlight in yellow the words or phrases that you specifically chose to achieve this purpose.
- Underline the purpose statement and label it in the right margin.
- Underline the sentence that expresses your argument.
- Highlight in yellow all instances of support for your argument and write “support” in the right margin next to each instance.
- Put square brackets around each claim and its supporting evidence, and label each in the right margin (e.g., Claim 1, Claim 2).
- Choose three of your instances of support and write in the right margin why you chose each one.

Organization

- At the top of the page, indicate how you have organized your ideas, (e.g., causally, chronologically, thematically) and circle all words and phrases throughout your writing that signal this organization to your readers (e.g., for chronology: first, then, next, after that; for theme: adherents to this school of thought ... adherents to another school of thought ...; ... fall into different categories ... in this category; this text addresses two different themes ... in this first theme ...).
- Underline the sentence that lets readers know how the paper is structured and label it in the right margin (e.g., This paper begins with ... after that, three examples are provided that illustrate ... the paper concludes with recommendations ...).

STRATEGY 2: SUBMITTING INTERACTIVE COVER SHEETS

WHAT IS AN INTERACTIVE COVER SHEET?

An interactive cover sheet (ICS) is a single page on which students have identified specific aspects of their work they would like comments on and which they submit attached to the front of their writing assignments (Bloxxham & Campbell, 2010). Instructors then focus their **feed back** and **feed forward** comments on addressing student queries, but they need not feel limited to addressing these queries.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO SUBMIT INTERACTIVE COVER SHEETS WITH THEIR ASSIGNMENTS?

Having students choose what they would like you to comment on means that students do not passively wait for your comments; they engage in **dialogue** about their work. Sole responsibility for **feed back** and **feed forward** comments from the instructor shifts to a shared responsibility between the instructor and students (Bloxxham & Campbell, 2010). This strategy has the potential for saving instructors' time as the cover sheets afford a focused and systematic approach to commenting on students' work.



HOW CAN THIS STRATEGY BE IMPLEMENTED?

- Show students an example of an ICS and explain to them what it is.
- Explain to students your rationale for asking them to submit an ICS with their writing, including how the ICS **feeds forward** with respect to fostering their ability to achieve learning outcomes.
- Help students pose meaningful questions. It is important to keep in mind that the meaningfulness of the questions hinges on the desired learning outcomes. Consider these examples:
 1. Questions that may be appropriate for almost any research paper:
 - a. Did I provide enough detail in the explanation of the context?
 - b. I still don't understand why we are using primary sources. Am I using them correctly in this paper?
 - c. Last time you said my conclusion was actually a summary. Did I do better this time?
 - d. Did I accurately summarize Carmen et al. (2015)? If not, what did I misunderstand?
 2. Questions that may be appropriate for writing and rhetoric courses:
 - a. Should there be a comma before "because"?
 - b. Should I use *em* dashes to create emphasis?
 3. Questions that are likely never appropriate:
 - a. What do I have to do to get an A?
 - b. Is this paper long enough?

First-year students in particular, though potentially all students, might have difficulty posing questions that address complex or abstract features of their writing. Help them by providing:

- The grading criteria for the writing assignment
- Examples from previous students of well-written and poorly written questions
- Class time to generate and discuss questions
- Online activities for individual practice
- Structured opportunities for feedback from peers

EXAMPLES

In this section, we offer an example of interactive cover sheet instructions and two examples of student interactive cover sheet submissions.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. When you have finished writing your assignment, type identifying information on a blank page:
 - Interactive cover sheet
 - Assignment submission date
 - Your name
 - Your McGill ID number
 - Course name and code
 - Title of your paper

This information should take up no more than a quarter of the page. Do not double space.
2. Below the identifying information, write at least two questions that address particular aspects of your work to which you would like the instructor to respond.
3. Attach the interactive cover sheet to the front of your submission.



SAMPLE 1: STUDENT INTERACTIVE COVER SHEET SUBMISSION 1

Interactive cover sheet

Robin Soto
ID 260012345
Sociology 301
Title: *Biological Clocks*
Initial submission: February 23, 2018

Questions

1. I'm trying to use sources better so they support my arguments. How did I do? And did I integrate them properly?
2. I always have trouble writing introductions. Does my introduction include what a reader expects to see?
3. What's one thing I should focus on improving when I revise my paper for the next submission?
4. Is there anything I did really well?

SAMPLE 2: STUDENT INTERACTIVE COVER SHEET SUBMISSION 2

Interactive cover sheet

Kim Fox
ID 260054321
Biology 301
Title: *Blowflies Respond to Different Sugars*
Initial submission: March 12, 2018

Questions

1. Did I give too much background information?
2. Can you tell me if I provided the right amount of detail in my experiment description?
3. How well did I integrate supporting sources?

STRATEGY 3: COLLABORATING ON EVALUATION CRITERIA

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO COLLABORATE ON DEVELOPING OR REFINING EVALUATION CRITERIA?

Collaborating on evaluation criteria is a **feed up** strategy whereby students collaborate with the instructor and perhaps amongst each other to develop evaluation criteria, either in part or in whole. This strategy is instead of the instructor providing students with a fixed set of criteria for their writing assignments.

WHY SHOULD WE HAVE STUDENTS COLLABORATE ON DEVELOPING OR REFINING EVALUATION CRITERIA?

This **feed up** strategy serves to:

- Clarify assignment expectations: Instructors' and students' interpretations of assignment requirements do not always match (MacLellan, 2001; Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003), and assignment expectations vary from instructor to instructor. For these reasons, involving students in refining or defining evaluation criteria raises their awareness of what the expectations are for writing assignments in your course and can promote a deeper understanding of your expectations (Carless, 2006).
- Clarify the language that describes the criteria: Language used to describe assignments and evaluation criteria can be opaque to students (Chanock, 2000). Descriptions of performance standards such as "demonstrates logical and subtle sequencing of ideas" may not help students meet the criteria if they do not understand what "subtle sequencing" means or if they interpret the phrase differently from the way their instructor does.
- Empower students: Involving students in co-creating evaluation criteria gives them a stake in their work. It also helps them talk about writing and their understanding of disciplinary conventions (Godbee, 2011; Meer & Chapman, 2015).

HOW CAN THIS STRATEGY BE IMPLEMENTED?

- Gather examples of student writing: Students benefit from seeing the extent to which other students' work meets assignment criteria. Ask former students for assignments that you can use as examples (see Figure 2); anonymity should be guaranteed. (If obtaining student examples from former students is not feasible, you might find examples on the internet or in writing textbooks. In the case of short writing assignments, you can also write your own examples.) Allowing students to apply their criteria to example assignments can foster their understanding of the desired goal/target and develop their awareness of what to aim for when they write their own assignments.
- Plan according to context: The number of students in your class, the year they are in and the physical classroom setting may influence how you implement this strategy. For example, a large number of students may need more in-class time for discussion than a small number of students; first-year students may need more guidance than third-year students; classrooms where it is difficult to move chairs into small groups for discussion may pose a challenge. Consider having students work in small groups asynchronously online to address time and physical classroom constraints.



Subject line: *Request for example writing*

Hi Everyone,

Your final course grades have been posted to Minerva.

I am writing to ask if you would allow me to use your writing assignments as examples for students who take this course in the future. Your writing would only be shown in class and neither distributed for students to take home nor posted to myCourses. Any identifying information will be removed. Your name will not be shown unless you explicitly request otherwise.

If you are willing to let me use your work as examples, please email me your assignment(s) as Word or pdf attachments. Emailing me your assignments in response to this email will be taken as your consent.

Thank you for considering my request.

Figure 2. Email Template for Soliciting Examples of Student Work at the End of Term

EXAMPLES

In this section, we offer two examples of different ways to implement the strategy and one example of student-translated performance standards (see Figure 3).

1. TRANSLATING RUBRIC³ LANGUAGE⁴

Preparation: Prepare to distribute assignment instructions, rubric, and examples of student writing at the same time. Both the instructions and the rubric can be distributed to students in class or made available to them in myCourses.

Procedure:

1. Provide students with the detailed rubric and a blank rubric template on paper or online that they will fill in.
2. Individually, students “translate” (i.e., rewrite) all or selected portions of the performance standards identified in the detailed rubric (see Figure 3).
3. In pairs, students explain their translations to each other and decide on a single, final version.
4. Still in pairs, students use their translated rubric to evaluate an example of student writing. They should note any questions.
5. Provide an opportunity for a whole class discussion of the criteria so that questions can be addressed and a common understanding can be agreed upon. An alternative to a whole class discussion is to have students submit their translated rubrics to a myCourses discussion forum where you or TAs address

³ If you have questions about what a rubric is, see the Appendix: *Rubric fundamentals*.

⁴ Adapted from Brookhart (2013, pp. 96-97)



questions. In either case, post a final version of the rubric written with students' translations to myCourses before students begin the writing assignment. Note that myCourses has a rubrics tool (https://mcgill.service-now.com/itportal?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011166).

<i>Criteria</i>	Instructors' performance standards	Student-translated performance standards
<i>Organization - structural development of idea</i>	Writer demonstrates logical and subtle sequencing of ideas through well-developed paragraphs; sentences are not convoluted; transitions are used to enhance organization. ⁵	Each paragraph develops an idea. Words and phrases that signal a change to a new idea are included to help readers follow along.
<i>Content</i>	Balanced presentation of relevant and legitimate information that clearly supports a central purpose or argument and shows a thoughtful, in-depth analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains important insights. ⁶	An argument is made. By including relevant and specific evidence, readers will see that the argument has been explored in depth. Writing holds the readers' attention.

Figure 3. Student-translated Performance Standards

2. CO-CONSTRUCTING EVALUATION CRITERIA FROM SCRATCH

Preparation: Have at hand instructions for a writing assignment, such as a research paper, that students will be asked to submit.

Procedure⁷

1. Individually, students read the assignment instructions.
2. Working in small groups, students brainstorm characteristics of a quality research paper and put them into categories, which they label. These categories become the criteria for the research paper.
3. Groups share their respective lists of criteria aloud and the instructor writes them on the board. Guided by the instructor, students discuss the criteria on the board and work toward reducing the list to a manageable number for the assignment.
4. The criteria are divided among the groups (more than one group can work on a criterion). Students spend 10 minutes developing descriptions of the two extreme performance standards (i.e., "excellent" and "poor").
5. Students form new groups such that each new group has one student who has worked on a given criterion (jigsaw style grouping: <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/instructors/strategies/group-work>).

⁵ Excerpt from Cornell University (n.d.)

⁶ Excerpt from Winona State University (n.d.)

⁷ Adapted from Fraile, Panadero, and Pardo (2017, p. 72)



Students share their descriptions and further refine them until consensus is reached within each group—which may require instructor help.

6. At the end of class, students submit the final descriptions.
7. The instructor combines students' contributions to produce a final list of evaluation criteria for that assignment. (While some editing may be required, students' own words should be used as much as possible.)
8. In the following class, the instructor solicits students' approval of the final version of the list.

VARIATIONS

Ask students to address only a portion of the evaluation criteria. For example:

- hand out criteria and have students write descriptions; or
- provide students with criteria and descriptions for mechanics and formatting, and assign students the task of articulating the criteria and descriptions for content.

More examples of engaging students in a collaborative approach to writing evaluation criteria can be found in Brookhart (2013) and Godbee (2011).

STRATEGY 4: DIVIDING ASSIGNMENTS INTO MULTIPLE STAGES

WHAT ARE MULTI-STAGE ASSIGNMENTS?

Multi-stage assignments require that two or more components of an assignment be submitted sequentially, that is, at staggered due dates throughout the semester. A multi-stage assignment can mean that students submit at least one draft of a written assignment for **feed back** and **feed forward** comments before the final paper is due. It can also mean that an assignment is broken into several component parts (e.g., outline; working thesis; introduction), with each component or selected components receiving **feed back** and **feed forward** comments prior to the next submission.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO ASSIGN MULTI-STAGE ASSIGNMENTS?

Allowing students to submit components of a writing assignment or whole drafts prior to submitting a single completed assignment has several benefits:

- Students gain a better understanding of the writing task because the different stages of the assignment are made explicit.
- Students can use comments on one component of the assignment to improve subsequent components (**feed forward**).
- The potential for producing better quality work is enhanced when students are precluded from writing entire assignments the night before they are due.
- Instructors can save time providing comments on the final submission if students have already received comments at intermediate stages.



HOW CAN THIS STRATEGY BE IMPLEMENTED?

Preparation

1. Itemize the different components of the writing assignment students will have to complete. For example, a research paper might include:
 - a. an introductory paragraph
 - b. a one- or two-sentence argumentative thesis
 - c. body paragraphs that provide evidence to support the thesis
 - d. in-text citations that serve as evidence or support
 - e. a concluding paragraph
 - f. a list of references, works cited or bibliography
2. Consider which components will be submitted in stages. Ask yourself
 - a. What would be most useful for your students to learn?
 - b. Where would your students benefit most from feedback?
 - c. What do your students typically struggle with?
 - d. Where do you think feed forward would have the biggest impact?
3. Decide which components you will give comments on and which components peers would be able to comment on. In the latter case, provide students with guidelines for this task. (Guidelines can be found in Teaching and Learning Services' [2018] [Peer Assessment Resource Document](#).)
4. Plan submission dates keeping in mind that students should have enough time to receive and incorporate comments before submitting a subsequent stage.

Procedure

1. Explain to your students what your rationale is for having them do a multi-stage assignment.
2. Provide students with detailed assignment instructions. (See examples below.)
3. Provide students with explicit grading criteria for each stage of the assignment.

EXAMPLES

In this section, we offer two examples of instructions for staged assignments—a 5-stage research paper and 2-stage essay.

1. RESEARCH PAPER

The different stages allow for various types of feedback. Note that the assignment can be tailored to your teaching context. For example, you may wish to implement only three of the five stages, such as the Pre-research, Working thesis and Research paper stages.

Rationale for this multi-stage research paper

The research paper is broken down into several stages to help you:

- 1) learn to comfortably navigate the primary literature;
- 2) formulate the question that you want to answer in your paper;
- 3) contribute a research synthesis to the field of ecological science.

You will receive feedback on different stages—either from your instructor or from peers—so that you can refine your work throughout the semester and produce a quality paper by the end of the semester.



Stage 1: Pre-research

Select a topic. Describe the topic and known facts or information about the topic. List questions based on known information. Submit this information through the Assignments tool in myCourses by Oct. 10. You will not receive feedback, but it is a requirement to submit this stage if you would like to receive feedback and a grade on the rest of the assignment.

Stage 2: Research prospectus

A research prospectus is a preliminary plan of your investigation. Include a working research question, e.g., *What are the implications of biological clocks for our daily lives?* Address why this question is important, e.g., *The question is important because biological clocks can affect a person's ability to earn a living.* Indicate sources you think will be useful for this investigation. Submit the prospectus through the Assignments tool in myCourses by Oct. 17. You will receive feedback before you submit the *Annotated bibliography*.

Stage 3: Annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography offers brief descriptive and evaluative paragraphs of your sources. Examples are available in writing handbooks—hard copy and online. You can also speak to a librarian if you need help understanding what an annotated bibliography is. Include 4-5 sources in your annotated bibliography. Describe the main points and how they are relevant to your proposed question. Indicate why you think they are reliable. Submit the annotated bibliography through the Assignments tool in myCourses by Oct. 31. You will receive feedback before you submit the *Working thesis*.

Stage 4: Working thesis

A working thesis guides your research, but it is flexible. It evolves as you develop your ideas from the research you are doing. Example working thesis: *Biological clocks affect people's lives.* The final thesis statement is likely to be more specific. You will be assigned to an online discussion group in myCourses. Post your working thesis to the discussion group by Nov. 14. Your TA, also in the discussion group, will explain a peer feedback task to everyone in the group.

Stage 5: Research paper

Use the assessment rubric posted to myCourses as a checklist to be sure you are following the criteria. Submit the research paper on Dec. 5, the last day of class. The grade for the paper will appear in myCourses. Email your instructor to set up a meeting if you would like to discuss your work and have the paper returned to you.

(D'Errico & Griffin, 2001; University of Minnesota, n.d.)



2. ESSAY⁸

This example illustrates instructions for a 2-stage assignment: draft and revision. Comments can be given by peers and/or the instructor.

Write an essay where you compare [insert topic]. The essay must have:

- an **introduction** that provides readers with context for your argument
- a **thesis statement** that puts forth your argument
- a **roadmap** that explains in one or two sentences how you present your argument/organize the paper
- **body paragraphs** that address the comparison according to your roadmap
- a **conclusion** that reiterates the main points and paraphrases the thesis statement

Write approximately [#] words.

Submit an electronic copy of your essay by 11:59pm on Oct. 2. Follow these submission guidelines:

- Type and double-space your writing. (Single- or 1.5-spaced submissions will be returned to you without comments.)
- Number the pages.

Your essay will be returned to you with comments. Use these comments to revise your writing. Submit the revision by 11:59pm on Oct. 23.

WHAT'S NEXT

With this resource document, we set out to address some challenges related to getting students to engage with their writing assignments. We described a dialogue approach to fostering engagement that assumes three types of *feed*: *feed up*, *feed back* and *feed forward*. Each of these types of *feed* is associated with a question students should reflect on: *Where am I going?* *How am I doing?* and *Where to next?*

Examples of four different strategies for encouraging students to engage in this reflection were included. We suggest you experiment with them. Start by choosing one strategy that you feel will be especially helpful for getting students to do well on a particular piece of writing you assign. Try it out. See what students think about it. Tweak the implementation for a second try, if necessary. Or experiment with one of the other strategies.

If you would like to discuss which strategies are best suited to writing assignments in your courses or how to implement any of the strategies, contact Teaching and Learning Services at <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/contact/consultations> for an individual consultation.

⁸ Essay instructions provided by Prof. C. Samuel, McGill University, and adapted with permission.



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APPENDIX: RUBRIC FUNDAMENTALS

A rubric is an evaluation guide that specifies performance expectations for an assignment by listing the criteria by which the assignment will be assessed and describing the quality of these criteria. Rubrics can guide students in assessing their own work by making explicit the criteria according to which an assignment will be evaluated.

Rubrics have two basic components:

1. **Evaluation criteria** define the dimension that are used to measure how well a student has carried out an assignment (e.g., “integrates course readings”; “develops main ideas”; “addresses counter-arguments”). Criteria should be specific and concrete.
2. **Standards of performance** are qualitative descriptions of the characteristics of levels for judging students’ performance (e.g., excellent/competent/needs improvement) (Stevens & Levi, 2013).

The following example illustrates how criteria and standards can be displayed in rubric form. Additional criteria would follow the first two shown in the example.

Example: Research paper assignment rubric

<i>Criterion</i>	Standards		
	Excellent	Competent	Needs Improvement
<i>Thesis statement</i>	Thesis statement is clear and reflective of the paper’s content	Thesis statement is present	Thesis statement is missing or unclear
<i>Application of course readings</i>	Discusses and critically integrates ideas from the readings	Mentions key ideas from the readings but does not smoothly integrate them	Little or no mention of ideas from the readings

(Teaching and Learning Services, 2017, pp. 8-9)