ERWC Scaffolds, Accommodations, and Modifications for Writers

By Ginny Crisco and Marcy Merrill

Overview

Below are some ideas for how to provide students greater support – and sometimes greater challenge, when it comes to writing. Please note that a foundational element to teaching writing is to engage the student in the project. This means 1) choosing topics that are interesting to students and about which they have something to say. 2) Helping students see the immediate, real-world application for this. How is this kind of writing already being used in the world? How are their contributions important? And 3) giving students choices in what they write about and how they respond. Additionally, consider collaborating with students about what they need to move to the next level in their writing ability.

Scaffolding Writing

- In the ERWC, we approach writing as a process, and as such provide scaffolds to instruct students rather than assign writing tasks.
- These instructional moves to teach writing start in the reading rhetorically part of the module where students start to write about their ideas and in response to readings. These writings are fair game to use when the writing assignment comes around as draft material.
- You may need to differentiate, scaffold, and instruct beyond what is offered in the module depending upon your students. And some students might not need scaffolds, so consider how you might set these students up for completing more complex, challenging tasks on their own.

Some Examples of Scaffolds at Any Stage of the Writing Process

- Using graphic organizers appropriate to the task
- Encouraging mind maps
- Drawing and writing together
- Listing then categorizing ideas generated
- Taking notes, and returning to those notes when writing
- Providing more resources, such as outside readings or other texts, to those who are interested and want to learn more
- Providing more challenge by pointing students to more complex moves in writing that they can try

- Encouraging students to write longer papers or incorporate more outside sources that they find on their own.

Supports and Scaffolds for Getting Started (and facing writer's block)

- Encourage students to write about what matters to them
- Have students start writing before they get the writing assignment – in relation or response to the reading
- Have students do multiple kinds of no stakes or low stakes writing
- Encourage students to use visual ways to represent thinking
- Remind students that what they write is not finalized or permanent. Encourage revision.
- Give students low stakes opportunities to discuss with one or two colleagues what they are thinking for their writing
- Allow students to use technology, such as word prediction or speech to text, to generate ideas

Supports and Scaffolds for Global and Paragraph Level of Revision

- Provide sentence frames for key places in the writing: thesis, topic sentences, terminal sentences.
- Share textual annotations that lead students to key quotes to use in writing
- Highlight qualities of and / or visual representations of the genres they are writing in.
- Provide questions for peer assessment that relate to genre qualities
- Offer graphic organizers to help organize ideas at the paragraph and whole essay level.
- Break down the writing process into small and/or fewer number of steps. But also support graduated engagement in more difficult writing processes as the year moves on.
- Offer high-performing students scaffolds and supports for engaging ideas at a higher level: more complex questions, more steps in the writing process.
- Provide rubrics, checklists, sample student work, and mentor texts to help students know what is expected of them

Supports and Scaffolds for Language Level Writing and Publishing

- Model how to edit, cite, format a piece of writing
- Teach students how to use technology tools such as grammar check, spell check, Google Translate, Translate function on Google docs (Tools>Translate>Select Language to Translate)
- Have students play with word processing settings to see the text differently (read it backward, larger font and more white space, change the background color or font color)
- Allow students to work collaboratively on editing, citation, and formatting.
- Encourage students to incorporate words and phrases that represent their voice, including the use of Black English, Spanglish, or other dialects or languages.
- Teach students patterns in sentences, both simple and complex, so students can craft their writing at the language level too.

Accommodations

In this section, we discuss accommodation—reducing the impact that writing has on learning without substantially changing the process or the product—as a way to support any writer who needs it. While "accommodation" requirements are often found in legal educational documents such as IEPs, ERWC advocates for offering things that might be seen as accommodations to any student who needs access to writing.

Some examples of ways to accommodate

- Modify the rate of producing written work and allow more time as needed (begin earlier or have longer to complete).
- Adjust the volume of the work to be produced (same goal and standards met, but different amount of writing).
- Vary the complexity of the writing task.
- Consider the tools used to produce the written product (keyboarding tools and help; begin writing assignments creatively with drawing or speaking ideas, allowing students to use speech to text if necessary).
- Adapt the format of the product (allow integration of multimodal texts such as images and videos to support meaning making; use a different template, prompt, or genre for the assignment, but with the same purpose and goals met).
- Revise the number of tasks and steps: have student complete tasks in small steps instead of all at once.
- Alter the amount of low stakes writing.

Modifications

Modifications — change the assignments or expectations to meet the student's individual needs for learning. This provides access for students to complete the work, but it does not have to meet the general education standards. Modifications are generally only reserved for students who have IEPs or 504 plans. For some students and situations, accommodations will be inadequate to remove the barriers that their writing struggles pose, at which point, modifications should be considered. Examine ways assignments can be modified while still attempting to meet elements of the core standards.

- Reduce the copying elements of assignments and tests. Ask students to still complete the generating of ideas, but with phrases or words, drawings or speech to text.
- Reduce the length requirements on written assignments — stress quality over quantity.
- Change the complexity of the task. Focus on one or two of the most important aspects the student should learn on this assignment.
- Grade different assignments on individual parts of the writing process.
- Develop cooperative writing projects where different students can take on roles.
- Provide extra structure and intermittent deadlines for long-term assignments.

- Offer the student an alternative project such as an oral report or visual project. Establish a rubric to define what you want the student to include. You can evaluate the student's visual or oral presentation of that same information, in the alternative format.