Scenarios, Micrograding, Modeling: Engaging Students in the Moment

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Engagement through scenario activities: Students learn best when they can apply the skills and concepts they are learning in class to a specific problem. Scenario activities are particularly helpful in this regard, and can be designed for individual work as part of an asynchronous online course, or as collaborative work in online synchronous sessions/face-to-face class sessions, so they work across teaching modalities. They are also wonderful for formative assessment.

Scenario activities create a fictional situation that place students in a specific role with a specific task or series of tasks to accomplish. The tasks/problems students are asked to solve should reflect the related skill they are practicing, or concept they are learning. For example, when my students are exploring the concepts of the rhetorical situation, genres, and modalities, we engage in a scenario activity that asks them to choose a specific genre that will be most effective in addressing a specific audience. One example of a scenario places students in the role of researchers at a university in rural central Virginia studying environmental science, tasked with raising awareness in the local town about toxic chemicals leaking into the groundwater from a weapons manufacturing plant nearby. By giving students a specific role and task, I can help them focus on developing the skills to choose genres that are most rhetorically effective. Practicing through this scenario activity can both help them prepare for doing something similar with their projects, and helps me gauge how well they are learning the associated concepts and skills.

Micrograding to provide timely and structured feedback: Many writing assignments are positioned almost like tests. Students are introduced to the assignment, given a deadline, and then left to their own devices for days or weeks. Sometimes assignments will be broken into a rough draft and final draft. But our students are still learning that writing is a process, and not a one-time event. To help them understand writing as a process, and to help alleviate the stress of projects with large wordcount minimums, I recommend a micrograding approach, which breaks a writing assignment into smaller pieces, on which instructors provide smaller amounts of feedback. This way, grading can be less of a slog for instructors, and students can have more frequent and actionable feedback to improve their work as they go. For more information on this feedback approach, see *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching and Writing in Higher Education* by Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016).

Modeling new tasks and complex processes for students: Students often struggle with new skills and concepts. They also may not be familiar with the expectations of a certain discipline or academic context. For my writing students, I've found modeling certain writing tasks for them can be the most effective way to clear up any confusion. For example, when I task my students with an annotated bibliography, I model how to write annotations for them. This is because annotations in writing and rhetoric classes focus on the rhetorical nature of a text, and not as much on the material itself. To avoid students simply providing summary or discipline-specific insight, I model how to write an annotation by recording a video in which I annotate a real scholarly article I have used in the past in my

own work. As I write the annotation, I stop intermittently and explain what I just did and why I did it. While I model via an instructional video due to the hybrid nature of my courses, modeling can also be done in a face-to-face class. This can be repeated for all kinds of tasks and processes; for example, I also model how to write feedback comments and navigate the peer review process for rough drafts of projects.