

MENTORING SPARK

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► WRITING



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

If students do not have experience with academic writing, getting started can be hard. Variations in expectations across disciplines introduce additional challenges when attempting to find appropriate resources. Without understanding the specific purpose of the document they are generating, students may generate artifacts that do not meet advisor or disciplinary expectations. This can be frustrating for students and advisors alike, so **it is important to get started off right!**.



FACULTY FYI

This **Spark** aims to guide students in their writing approach, beginning with an evaluation of the document's objective and moving toward effective strategies for initiating the writing process.

Good written products require a basic understanding of how the written artifact is intended to function and being able to get "*words on the page*." For example, written exams demonstrate knowledge to the faculty in the department, whereas conference papers communicate research outcomes to *peers*.

Good written products require a basic understanding of how the written artifact is intended to function...



► LEVEL 1

LEVEL 1: GETTING READY TO WRITE

LEVEL 2: WRITING MECHANICS

LEVEL 3: GETTING WRITING DONE



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Facilitate a discussion with students on the typical writing products across the degree (e.g., exams, proposal/dissertation, conference papers, journal articles). Talk about the purpose of the artifacts and where to find examples.
- Help students understand that with a few exceptions, academic writing is not intended to be creative, and there are formats and structures that align with purposes. Looking at multiple examples could be helpful in illustrating what is common content and what varies.
- Discuss disciplinary norms with your students. For example, how does author order work on conference or journal papers? What are expectations for author contributions?

CONTINUED ...

A RESOURCE FROM:



Use this QR code to access this and other Mentoring Spark tip sheets:





DIGGING DEEPER

- Disciplinary standards for author expectations can provide guidance. For example, the American Educational Research Association has standards for reporting research.
- Existing conference and journal manuscripts and dissertations can serve as useful models. Pay attention to *how* they are written, not just *what* is written.
- **Feedback is important for improving.** Books and websites help with learning how to give and receive useful feedback.

Please visit the RDI Mentoring Sparks website for examples and links to these tools and resources!



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. Have students read and reverse-outline a conference or journal paper. In this exercise, they could create a new template, or they could check how the manuscript aligns with the existing template. The focus is not on the content topic itself, but rather on what is being accomplished within the section. For example, the Methods section of a conference paper describes what data was collected and how, how it was analyzed, etc.
2. Scaffold students through a new writing product. Have them open a template and start outlining in each section. The next step is turning the outline into paragraphs. Start one section at a time so they do not get overwhelmed.
3. Have students practice free writing in the various sections of a template. This is just about getting words on the page, not editing to perfection.
4. Ask students to share writing with you *before* it feels done, so that together you can practice the giving and receiving of feedback.



REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

- **Faculty:** Writing is a skill, and like all skills, it takes practice to develop. How can you establish and keep that frame of mind as you guide your student?
- **Student:** Feedback can be hard to hear, but is very important in the development of writing skills. How can you remain open to feedback?



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Create templates for common written artifacts such as conference papers, etc., used by your students. Include the section headers but also an estimate on what kind of content goes in each section and about what length is expected (*# paragraphs*) for each section. Talk through these templates with students.
- Start a conversation on when or how the student will ask for feedback, and how you will respond. Normalize imperfect drafts right from the start, and encourage sharing rather than waiting for perfection.
- If your campus has a Writing Center, encourage students to leverage the resources.
- **GOAL Setting:** Agree on a goal designed to help the student identify the appropriate structure of different written products they will be expected to generate, and get started writing.

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