

Three Steps to Teaching Abstract and Critique Writing

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The instructional model presented is based upon the premise that abstracts and critiques are initial stages of scholarly writing. The pedagogy described is grounded in principles of effective lesson planning, instruction, and evaluation techniques. Step 1: 'Laying the Foundation' describes how to teach students the difference between 'good term paper' writing and scholarly writing. Step 2: 'Communicating Expectations and Evaluation Criteria' presents the content and use of guidelines and rubric. Step 3: 'Scaffolding for Success' outlines the use of journals, peer review, specific instruction, and resources. Initial students' success and positive feedback suggest that this instructional model has merit.

Many graduate students enter their programs with basic writing capabilities and the ability to comprehend and summarize journal articles (Buck & Hatter, 2005; Granello, 2001; Harris, 1997, 2005). Generally speaking, these students are able to relate the literature to their own experiential knowledge and offer their opinions. However, some students are not successful writers which may mask or thwart their critical thinking skills. For these students, specific instruction is essential and may need to begin at a writing lab. Both students and faculty assume that undergraduate writing skills will easily transfer to the graduate level performance (Buck & Hatter, 2005; Granello, 2001; Harris, 1997, 2005). Typically, the majority of students produce work at a beginning graduate level, not at a polished scholarly writing quality.

Unfortunately, these basic capabilities do not necessarily translate into scholarly writing skills. Why? First, within baccalaureate programs students are expected to master writing 'good term papers' that demonstrate comprehension and the ability to articulate opinions. However, a significant difference exists between scholarly writing style and term paper writing style. This difference creates a struggle for students and necessitates instruction from professors. Second, as beginning graduate students attempt to articulate the depth and breadth of their understanding, they frequently become immersed in jargon, fragmented ideas, unsupported opinions, and a disorganization 'fog' (Buck & Hatter, 2005; Granello, 2001; Harris, 1997, 2005). Fearful that they will leave an important point out, they spill every thought on the page. Ironically, the old adage 'less is more' applies to scholarly writing. The impact of unsuccessful writing cannot be fully measured, but it certainly includes frustrated instructors and discouraged students. We can speculate that, when students' writing stagnates, so do their critical thinking abilities. The premise of this article is that, by providing specific instruction to address abstract and critique writing, students will enhance their scholarly writing and critical thinking abilities. Generally speaking,

graduate courses require a research project for the purpose of increasing critical thinking abilities. Graduate projects may vary from abstract writing and critique writing to literature reviews or research proposals. In graduate teaching, I found myself frustrated with the quality and variance of my students' writing skills. Additionally, I was concerned that students were not connecting to critical principles.

Literature Review

So how do we teach the elusive scholarly writing style? First, let us consider that scholarly writing has several different learning stages or developmental levels that build upon each other. This author conceptualizes the stages as the following: abstract writing, critique writing, literature reviews, research/grant proposals and reports, and journal articles. These stages easily fit into Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956), a useful description of learning hierarchy and a well proven pedagogical tool (Granello, 2001). Abstract writing requires knowledge and comprehension, the beginning levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956). An abstract is defined as "a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the article" (American Psychological Association, 2001, p.12). The ability to comprehend and summarize an article is foundational in all fields of study.

Critique writing includes the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956): knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. A critique differs from an abstract in that it includes student's opinions, while the abstract does not (White, 2004). Within a critique, students analyze the article's clarity, organization, purpose, research methodology, findings, and recommendations. Additionally, students are expected to link their analysis to their field-based experiences. One could argue that both "summaries" and "critiques" are discipline specific; however it is not within the scope of this article to delineate those differences. The proposed

instruction model attempts to present a design that can be appropriately modified to meet the needs of various disciplines.

Abstracts and critiques are building blocks for more complex writing such as literature reviews, journal articles, and research/grant proposals and reports. A literature review demands expansion of the understanding of several articles into knowledge, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas. Journal articles and research/grant proposals and reports include comprehensive literature reviews. Abstracts, critiques, and afore mentioned scholarly writing products must be objective, organized concise yet comprehensive and formal (Hacker, 2003; Henson, 1999). Skills used for abstract and critique writing are integral components of scholarly writing. Thus, this author hypothesizes that increased attention to the development of abstract and critique writing skills provides the foundation for improved scholarly writing and enhances students' critical thinking abilities.

University faculty members often express concern about graduate students' scholarly writing (Buck & Hatter, 2005; Harris, 2005). Students express their frustration that they don't understand the expectations. The assumption that students who have completed undergraduate work will be able to transfer those skills into scholarly writing fails students and faculty (Buck & Hatter, 2005; Granello, 2001). Another misjudgment made by both faculty and students is the assumption that writing automatically leads students to accomplish critical thinking skills (Granello, 2001). Froese, Gantz and Henry (1998) suggest that the gap between "expectation and performance may arise from instructional deficiencies" (p. 103). A literature review reveals many topics such as training, conducting literature searches, learning to read and understand research, and writing in American Psychological Association format (Redish & Racette, 1979; Jeske, 1985; Jones & Steinber, 1987; Haswell, 1989; Oliver, 1995). The current literature does not tend to address instructional techniques with Granello's (2001) work being the exception. Granello believes that the assumption that definitions and examples are sufficient instruction fails both students and faculty. Granello (2001) recommends that Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1956) be used as a pedagogical tool to promote cognitive complexity in graduate writing. Granello found that graduate students achieved cognitive complexity in literature reviews when they had a clear understanding of the desired outcomes.

Piercy, Sprenkle, and McDaniel (1996) emphasize that graduate students learn best by "being supported, engaged, and challenged. They also learn best when the have good models, opportunities to practise and receive feedback" (p.164). Designing instruction rich learning

environments is the inherent challenge for every educator. Scaffolding is the effective instructional design that weaves together a sequence of content, materials, tasks, and supports to optimize learning (Dickson, Chard, & Simmons, 1993; Larkin, 2001). The application and effectiveness of scaffolding instruction is addressed in the literature found across disciplines and age levels including adult learning (Kao & Lehman, 1997; Larkin, 2002; Tabak, 2004). Additionally, scaffolding is viewed as a vehicle to accommodate the needs of diverse learners (Kame'enui, Camine, Simmons, & Coyne, 2002; Kirk, Gallager, Anastasiow, & Coleman, 2006; Palinesar, 1998; Salend, 2001; Stone, 1998). Larkin (2002) describes two essential elements of scaffolding instruction as engage students in establishing and actively pursuing a goal. Achievement of the goal is facilitated by "actively diagnosing student needs and understandings, providing tailored assistance and specific feedback, and controlling for frustration and risk (Larkin, 2002). Tabak delineates "synergistic scaffolds" as a pattern "which refers to multiple co-occurring and interacting supports for the same need" (2004, p.307.). Within Tabak's discussion of patterns of scaffolding, she emphasizes that the consideration of the demands of the learning task are an essential component of constructing the puzzle (2004). This proposed instructional model considers the demands of the learning task and uses a synergistic scaffold to achieve the goal of improved graduate writing.

An Instructional Model

The 'Three Steps to Teaching Abstract Writing and Critique Writing Model' is a unique combination of (a) recognizing that abstract writing and critical writing are initial stages within scholarly writing; (b) scaffolding instruction; and (c) believing that adult learners need support, engagement, and challenge (Piercy et al., 1996).

The purpose of this model is to improve graduate students' writing. This model was developed over several semesters within my special education and educational administration graduate courses. In the process, my students improved their abstract writing and critique writing skills and reported transfer of their scholarly writing skills to other graduate courses (Harris, 2004a).

The Three Steps to Teaching Abstract Writing and Critique Writing model follows principles of effective lesson planning, instruction, and evaluation techniques. The three steps are (1) Laying the Foundation, (2) Communicating Expectations and Evaluation Criteria, and (3) Scaffolding for Success. Application of this instructional model early in the semester gives students the tools to refine their writing

skills throughout the course.

*Step One:
Laying the Foundation*

The first step of the model evolves by connecting students' knowledge and previous experiences in writing to the challenge at hand and by setting goals and objectives. Identifying the learning goals and objectives creates a concrete foundation for learning. The strength of the foundational cement depends upon connecting to students' prior knowledge and experiences and building upon that base. The goal is to improve scholarly writing. The objectives are to learn abstract writing and critique writing.

Connecting to Prior Knowledge and Experience

Through discussion, students are familiarized with the concept of scholarly writing by comparing it to 'good term paper' writing style. The essential elements of that comparison are that scholarly writing is more formal, more objective, more concise, yet comprehensive, and linear in its organization. Typically, this open and frank discussion leads students to share their experiences; frequently, they express their dismay at not understanding the expectations for the elusive scholarly writing style. Indeed, I remember the agony of a three hour negative review of my first scholarly paper and the defeat of leaving the Professor's office not understanding the expectations. Another graduate student enlightened me: "...[scholarly writing] is brief but comprehensive. It's linear and like journalism so you tell who, what, where, when, and how. Just the facts! Save your opinions!" After sharing my experience, students seem to appreciate the shared learning struggle and straight-forward advice. Then we are ready to move forward to meet the goal.

Setting Goals and Objectives

Adult learners are particularly concerned with the relevance of what they are expected to learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Many graduate students will instantly and emphatically state they are not interested in writing grants, articles, or research. Some see writing as another 'hoop to jump through' on the way to graduation. Some will accept scholarly writing as a goal because it contributes to their course grade. Many are interested because these skills will enhance their success in other courses (especially the intimidating required research course). Of course, there are students who are deeply committed to learning and believe that the process of writing contributes to their learning and future professional success (Harris, 1997, 2005).

After accepting the goal and objective, the class explores specifics. The purpose and style of abstracts are explained. "An abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of an article" (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 12). An abstract informs the reader about the article and should address six components of the article: purpose, scope, method, results, recommendations, and conclusions (Kies, 2004). Students should be reminded to answer the journalist questions: who, what, where, when, how, and why. Next, the differences between an abstract and a critique are addressed. The abstract is the summary while a critique includes supported opinions and analysis (White, 2004). For the critique, students should be advised to address the following questions: (a) what is the value of the information represented in the article? (b) how does this article relate to my own experiences and beliefs? and (c) how does this article relate to the course frameworks?

Teaching students to differentiate abstracts from critiques helps them to recognize the need to direct changes in their writing style. A class discussion of the questions to be addressed helps students see the differences between abstracts and critiques. Understanding that brevity and clarity are essential for both the abstract and critique is a beginning step towards accomplishing concise writing. Further support and practice addressing 'how to' write concisely are imbedded in this instructional model.

*Step Two:
Communicating Expectations and Evaluation Criteria*

Communication of expectations and evaluation is the cornerstone of success (Buck & Hatter, 2005; Harris, 2005; Granello, 2001; Jones & Steinberg, 1987; Larkin, 2001, 2002). To ensure that students understand, the instructor presents the assignment guidelines and the evaluation rubric. During the first class, hardcopies of the guidelines and rubric are provided and time is allotted for students' questions.

Guidelines

Often in graduate courses, the syllabus is the main descriptor of written assignments and research projects. Instructors explain the tasks and answer questions in class, yet many students report they do not fully understand the expectations and their work fails to meet assignment criteria. To address this problem, specific detailed guidelines beyond the syllabus should be developed and shared with students. For each of my courses, the guidelines address three components: general description of the assignment, format, and content. For example, "Guidelines: Abstracts and Critiques" delineate

FIGURE 1
Guidelines: Abstracts and Critiques

Topics and journals:

Students will complete ten abstract/critique assignments. The first assignment will be completed using an article provided by the instructor. For the other nine assignments, students are expected to locate and use articles from the following professional journals:

Exceptional Children
Teaching Exceptional Children
Learning Disabilities Research & Practice
Behavioral Disorders
Journal of Early Intervention
Young Exceptional Children

Format:

- Use single space for the following information: your name, date, and course number on one line; second line identify the article by using **APA referencing format**.
- Must be typed, double spaced, pages numbered and stapled, 12-point font with 1-inch margins.
- Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are expected.
- Staple Abstract/Critique to a copy of the journal article.
- NO title pages or folders needed!
- REMEMBER: In special education professional writing includes the use of non-labeling language.

Content:

Abstract:

- Use the word “Abstract” in bold as a heading.
- An abstract is a summary written in a scholarly writing style that represents a thorough comprehension of the article.
- The text of your abstract should be 100 to 150 word count.
- Six components to include
 - Purpose
 - Scope
 - Method
 - Results
 - Recommendations
 - Conclusions

Critique:

- Use the word “Critique” in bold as a heading.
 - This section should be one full page.
 - A critique is your professional judgment and analyses of the article and should include:
 - Your opinion as to clarity and organization
 - Your opinion as to the validity of the research methodology and results
 - Analyses that relate article to course content and/or other research
 - Analyses that relate article to your experiences in the field
 - Analyses that relate article’s premises to ‘course frameworks’
 - ‘Course frameworks’ are Turnbull’s “Values to Guide Teaching.”
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assignment details in three sections: (a) topics and journals, (b) format, and (c) content (See Figure 1).

Topics and journals. In this section of the guidelines, the instructor sets parameters by describing general topics, number of articles, and specific professional journals to be used. If the instructor

chooses to limit the types of journals and topics, students can focus on the assignment; conversely, if the instructor chooses to broaden the scope of journals and topics students’ horizons are expanded. These decisions will vary from course to course. Topics may be linked to larger research projects and require instructor’s approval.

Format. In this section of the guidelines, the instructor explains that students are to use American Psychological Association (APA) format and describes acceptable headings, line spacing, font, margins, length, and other requirements. For example, it is helpful to require students to submit copies of the article that they have highlighted. This provides the instructor with easy access to read the article and check for plagiarism. From my experience, taking valuable class time to explain format details, beyond just “use APA,” eliminates confusion for students and gives them confidence.

Content. In this section of the guidelines, the instructor addresses general and specific requirements for the abstract and critique. The guidelines state that professional writing includes correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation because an articulated expectation is more likely to be achieved. Additionally, this section of the guidelines should address specific professional writing criteria that are germane to the academic field. For example, in special education non-labeling language is a current standard; therefore, a brief explanation and written examples of non-labeling language are provided.

Next, the guidelines should delineate the abstract content and the critique content. The directions for the abstract content are simple. Students must create a concise summary that represents a thorough comprehension of the article. In contrast, directions for the critique content are detailed. First, these directions explain that in the critique the students should discuss their opinions, analyze the article’s content and research, synthesize their learning, and relate the article to their experiences and the “course frameworks.” Second, the critique directions should emphasize that opinions and analyses need to be substantiated. After reviewing the guidelines, the instructor should present the “course frameworks” and explain that students are to use these to analyze the article.

Frameworks. A course framework is a principle or a set of principles that the course is built upon such as a conceptual model, code of ethics, or belief statements (Harris, 2005). A carefully selected framework takes the learner past trivial mechanics into critical thinking and provides a catalyst for their analysis. Essentially, core course frameworks are the principles that an instructor selects for emphasis. More than one framework may be appropriate for some courses. For example, in my special education courses I use “Values to Guide Teaching” (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 2002) as a framework. In a graduate course that prepares educational administration majors to work with students with disabilities, I use two frameworks: “Levels of

Principle-Centered Leadership” (Covey, 1990) and “Values to Guide Teachers” (Turnbull et al. 2002).

In special education we encourage university students to understand and embrace the 21st century paradigm that individuals with disabilities are entitled to full participation and citizenship in our society (Turnbull et al., 2002). This paradigm, which promotes the philosophy of inclusion, proposes a set of belief statements entitled “Values to Guide Teaching.” These values include a description of six components of an inclusive philosophy: (1) Envisioning Great Expectations, (2) Enhancing Positive Contributions, (3) Building on Strengths, (4) Acting on Choices, (5) Expanding Relationships and (6) Ensuring Full Citizenship. I believe these values challenge students to expand their paradigms and operationalize their inclusive philosophy (Harris, 2005).

For my course in education administration, Turnbull’s values challenge educators to expand their views of special and general education, as well as change their expectations for teachers and staff. Since graduate courses in educational administration focus on leadership skills, Covey’s Levels of Principle-Centered Leadership is an appropriate framework. In particular, the combination of these frameworks force students to (a) thoughtfully examine their values and principles, (b) crystallize their leadership style, and (c) develop an inclusive paradigm (Harris, 2005).

From this author’s perspective, the selection of frameworks for my courses enabled me to define and articulate the paradigms, values, and principles I hoped to teach. First, the instructor should carefully select course frameworks and provide written and oral explanations to students. Second, the instructor should require students to reflect, relate, and synthesize the frameworks with other concepts and information in their written work and class discussions. Instructors may require students to discuss all components of the course frameworks or to select several significant components for their written discussion (Harris, 2005).

Evaluation Criteria

All too often at the graduate level, communication of the evaluation criteria and process is vague. Students want to know what the assignment is and how it will be evaluated. The combination of clear guidelines and an evaluation rubric creates a win-win situation for both the students and instructor.

Constructing the rubric. Instructors should use the guidelines to construct the evaluation rubric. A parallel construction of the guidelines and rubric ensure that

assignment details are consistently communicated to students (See Table 1). From “Guidelines: Abstracts and Critiques”, I developed the following basic evaluation categories: Format, APA Format, Professional Writing, Comprehension and Articulation, Scholarly Writing Style, and Critique. Next, the instructor must decide whether to use a quantitative or qualitative rating scale, or a combination. I believe that qualitative rating scales assist students in achieving the assignment criteria. For this holistic rubric, the rating scale includes Beginning, Developing, Accomplished, and Exemplary. For each of the categories there is a qualitative definition for each of the four possible ratings. The rating scale for the Scholarly Writing Style category is different from the other categories (See Table 1). First, a quality definition for Exemplary is given, but the lower ratings (Beginning, Developing, and Accomplished) are combined into “Areas to Improve.” The purpose of this unique rating scale is to delineate specific aspects of scholarly writing that the student should examine.

Using the rubric. The rubric is used several times within this instructional model. During the first class, the instructor presents the rubric and describes how it will be used. First, students are encouraged to check their work with the rubric. Second, the rubric is used for a peer review of Assignment #1. Finally, the instructor uses the rubric to evaluate and give feedback for subsequent assignments. The advantages of using a rubric are a clear communication of the evaluation criteria, less grading time, more consistent objectivity, and more specific feedback.

Refining the rubric. At the end of each semester, the instructor should refine the guidelines and rubric. Miscommunications and/or learning gaps can be addressed by clarifying the guidelines and improving the rubric. From my experience, this on-going refinement process contributes to increased student success from semester to semester.

Step Three: Scaffolding for Success

Scaffolding instruction is an effective teaching strategy that, in this author’s opinion, should be used from preschool to graduate school. The design of Assignment #1, instruction sequence, and evaluation process are woven together. As a whole these elements create the ‘steel’ frame upon which students’ learning is enhanced.

Assignment #1

As described earlier, the instructor presents the guidelines, evaluation rubric, and frameworks to the students during the first class session. A specific article

is given to students for Assignment #1 and their first draft is due next class. Students are assured that there will be additional instruction and that, after peer review, they will have the opportunity to refine their first draft.

Article selection for Assignment #1. The appropriateness of the first article is a key factor to success. Two pedagogical decisions must be made: (a) topic and source of article and (b) whether to use one article or several different articles. The first pedagogical decision is selecting an appropriate topic that focuses students on important course content. The instructor should select a topic that sparks students’ interests, contributes to their foundational knowledge, and lays groundwork for future course content without overwhelming students. The topic should contribute to the foundational content. For example, my special education course focuses on inclusion; therefore, inclusion articles from *Teaching Exceptional Children* are used. In my educational administration course, the first unit addresses abuse/neglect and safe schools; therefore, articles from *Educational Leadership* about bullying are selected. Thoughtful topic selection and attention to the difficulty level of the article[s] used for Assignment #1 contribute to student success. The instructor should review the effectiveness of the article[s] each semester, modifying and updating as necessary.

Number of articles for Assignment #1. The second pedagogical decision is the number of articles to be used for Assignment #1. This can be approached in two different ways: (a) the same article is given to every one or (b) three or four different articles are randomly distributed. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. Finding one article for the entire class is easy; however, the students may collaborate too much or their writing becomes so similar that they fail to recognize individual problems. Finding several articles and allotting more class time can be a challenge. Multiple articles provide opportunities for further discussion or additional peer reviews. The multiple-articles approach immerses students in the foundational topic and the literature. The instructor can choose to frame the nature of the discussions or allow the discussions to evolve differently within each group. The timing of these additional discussions is critical. After experimenting with the timing of the discussion from semester to semester, I have found that students can focus on sharing their articles best after the peer review. The unexpected benefit is that students feel that their written assignment enhanced their understanding of the topic and wasn’t just another exercise.

APA mini-lesson for Assignment #1. Novices to APA (2001) are easily confused and struck with APA phobia. Before students write their first draft, instructors should present a quick lesson on APA

referencing. In lieu of a title page, students are directed to place the APA reference above the abstract. A simple demonstration explaining APA referencing calms students' fears. Students typically make errors such as using first names of authors, capitalizing the article title, or omitting commas. Another point that escapes students is that, generally speaking, they should not use citations within an abstract (Harris, 2004b). Students mistakenly believe they must quote and cite the very article they are writing about within the abstract (Harris, 2004b). Finally, provide information as to

where students can find the current APA book, APA website, or on-line services that automatically produce APA references.

Lesson

By the third class meeting students have a starting point, their first draft, and the following lesson provides a pathway for improvement. This lesson includes an extensive peer review, a presentation of sample rewrites, and resource materials.

TABLE 1
Evaluation Rubric: Abstracts and Critiques

Criteria	Rating Scale			
	Beginning	Developing	Accomplished	Exemplary
Format	Incorrect margins, font, headings, insufficient length, copy of article omitted.	Several errors in format or headings, sufficient length, and included copy of article.	Minor errors in format or headings, sufficient length, and included copy of article.	Correct margins, font, headings, sufficient length, and included copy of article.
APA Format	Three or more errors in APA format of the reference.	Two errors in APA format of the reference.	One error in APA format of the reference.	Correct use of APA format of the reference.
Professional Writing	Three or more errors in grammar, spelling, &/or punctuation.	Two errors in grammar, spelling, &/or punctuation.	One error in grammar, spelling, &/or punctuation.	Correct grammar, spelling, &/or punctuation.
Comprehension & Articulation	Summary covers several points but lacks objectivity &/or accuracy. Includes some misinterpretations. Needs more clarity in the articulation.	Summary covers main points accurately but lacks objectivity. Includes some main points and supporting details, need to be more concise. Needs more clarity in the articulation.	Summary covers main points accurately & with objectivity. Includes main points and supporting details, need to be more concise. Clearly articulated.	Thorough yet concise, objective, and accurate summary. Includes main points and supporting details, yet concise. Clearly articulated.
Scholarly Writing Style	Areas to Improve: Vocabulary: unnecessary words; repetitive; too simplistic/informal; use terms from article; avoid pronouns/use precise nouns. Phrases/clauses: eliminate prepositional phrases; use adjectives/adverbs & precise nouns/verbs to replace phrase Sentences: combine sentences; combine ideas; use parallel clauses; use listing; write in positive format.			Scholarly writing style throughout the assignment. Concise and positively written.
Critique	Includes simplistic, general statements that are not substantiated or supported.	Includes some analytical statements that relate article to course content &/or real-life problems.	Includes some analyses that relate article to course content &/or real-life problems.	Includes several analyses that relate article to course content, real-life problems, &/or other research. Analyses are presented in a logical conceptual strong organization.
	Does not include statements that relate article to the course 'Frameworks.'	Includes vague or weak statements that relate article to the course 'Frameworks.'	Includes relevant statements that relate <u>implicitly</u> article to the course 'Frameworks.'	Includes relevant statements that <u>explicitly</u> relate article to the course 'Frameworks.'

Peer review. Each peer review group should have three to five people. If using the same article for the entire class, ask students to form review groups. If using several different articles, ask students to form review groups in which everyone has the same article. Next, students exchange Assignment #1 and complete a peer review using the guidelines, rubric, and tip sheet (See Figure 2). Peer reviewers can scrutinize the abstracts and critiques for clarity, comprehension, and thoroughness because reviewers already know the article's content. The instructor explains the peer review process and guides students through each step, one at a time. Using the rubric the peer review process includes the following four steps:

1. Check for accuracy of APA reference.
2. Check format details using the guidelines.
3. Read and evaluate for overall content.
 - Does the content represent an understanding of the article?
 - Does the abstract thoroughly cover the article?
 - Does the critique offer substantiated opinions and/or analyses?
 - Does the critique relate the article to writer's experiences and to frameworks?
 - Is the writing clear to the reader?
4. Provide specific feedback (written on draft and explained verbally).
 - Use "Tip Sheet".

The effectiveness of the peer review is partially evident in students' questions and comments during the process but most significantly in the differences between first and second drafts. The instructor should require that both drafts and the peer review rubric be submitted. From these, one can identify problems within the peer review process, and therefore refine techniques to lead students to more effective peer reviews.

Presentation of sample rewrites. To emphasize rewriting techniques, the instructor should present examples from student abstracts followed by the corrective rewrite (See Figure 3). I highly recommend developing a set of sample rewrites because the process helps identify typical errors made by students. I have found that presenting sample rewrites both visually and orally to give students a feel for the flow of scholarly writing. As we work through the examples students are asked to identify techniques represented in the rewrite samples from the "Tip Sheet." In my experience, students' responses to this sequential approach have always been positive with comments such as "Now I get it" or "So that's what you mean."

Resource materials. Following the presentation of sample rewrites, the instructor should provide students

with resources to support editing. For example, charts from Henson's (1991) chapter "About Style" clarify both the editing process and specific areas for improvement. These include:

- "Writing Positively" (p.47).
- "Good Editing is A Step-by-Step Process" (p. 49).
- "Replacing Long Expressions with Fewer Words" (p.52).
- "Writers Should Use Small Words" (p.53).

On-line resources or discipline specific resources should be provided.

Evaluation Process

The evaluation process is built around the rubric and several layers of feedback. The most extensive evaluation should center on Assignment #1, in the hopes that these layers of feedback have instructional value. Peer reviewers provide the first feedback layer for Assignment #1. Students generally consider this a risk-free opportunity to get corrective feedback and appreciate the chance to refine their first draft. The exchange of ideas and time to ask the questions are invaluable. The second draft is evaluated by the instructor using the rubric. The instructor then gives detailed written suggestions that demonstrate improvements in organization, vocabulary, use of phrases/clauses, and sentence structure. At this point, students greatly appreciate one-on-one coaching in which the instructor explains written suggestions before students write their final draft. The time invested in written feedback and coaching sessions ensures greater student success. I have found that this approach has actually shortened the time spent on grading. All subsequent assignments are evaluated with the rubric, which is accompanied by specific written feedback.

Summary

The Three Steps to Teaching Abstracts and Critiques instructional model includes (1) Laying the Foundation, (2) Communicating Expectations and Evaluation Criteria, and (3) Scaffolding for Success. Step One: Laying the Foundation starts students in the right direction by connecting to prior knowledge and helping students set goals/objectives. Step Two: Communicating Expectations and Evaluation Criteria includes a review of the guidelines and the rubric. Step Three: Scaffolding for Success uses demonstration of APA referencing, peer review process, and extensive instructor feedback to guide students through the refinement of Assignment #1.

FIGURE 2
Tip Sheet

Rewrite: mastery...improves learning and clarity.

Type-Os & misspelling: Only humans make these errors, but they are less forgivable in the age of computers and spell check.

Professional writing style:

- Language of the article...jargon the professional way
 1. Don't be afraid to use the phrases and terms used within the article.
 2. Double check the terms used in the article's abstract, article's summary or conclusion, and the Eric's abstract.
 3. Caution.....don't plagiarize!
 4. If a term needs to be explained...explain it!
- A thesaurus can be your best friend!
 1. Look for repetition of a word or phrase within your first draft.
 2. Ask yourself what other word or phrase could you use.
 3. Use the thesaurus!
- KISS....Keep it short & sweet!
 1. Look for ways to use the positive verses the negative.
 2. Focus on the educational implications.
- What are you trying to say?????.....Say it more concisely!
 1. Combine sentences.
 2. Combine ideas.
 3. Use parallel clauses.
 4. Use listing within a sentence.
 5. Eliminate prepositional phrase after prepositional phrase after prepositional phrase.
 6. Ask yourself if you could say the same thing by using an adjective and precise noun.
 7. Avoid pronouns and say the real subject/noun.

Try it on for size and look at it more than once!

1. Write a rough draft...or start with an outline...just get the words and ideas down on paper.
 2. Examine the way you wrote it looking for ways to improve, shorten, and clarify!
 3. Compare to the article abstract, ERIC abstract, article summary/conclusion to make sure you haven't left out anything important and have used the professional language.
 4. Take a short break and come back to it then read it out loud.
 5. Experiment with different sentence structures and see which you prefer.
 6. Prooooff REEEEaD it one--I say one more time!!!!!!
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Conclusion

Scholarly writing skills do not develop automatically. Students struggle with the transition from writing 'good term papers' to graduate level writing. If we address scholarly writing in stages and provide effective instruction to meet students' learning needs, it can be a win-win situation for students and instructors. A wise saying in special education is equally applicable to graduate school: "Start where the student is; and take him where he needs to go."

The instructional model presented is based upon the premise that abstract and critique writing are initial stages of scholarly writing. This model is grounded in the belief that adult learners need to be supported, engaged, and challenged. Adults learn best

when they can see the relevance of their learning goals and objectives. This instructional model is built upon the principles of effective teaching: connecting to prior knowledge, clear communication of expectations and evaluation, scaffolding instruction, opportunities to practice, and constructive detailed feedback.

With this model, I have found that students acquire a better understanding of the complexities of graduate writing and specific strategies to achieve the goal. Prior to implementing this model, students complained that they did not understand the intricacies or expectations for scholarly writing. During the initial development of this model, one student shared her enthusiasm: "Everything you taught us about writing has really helped me with the grad research class, the one class I was so afraid of."

FIGURE 3
Sample Rewrites

Example #1

“The law offers no guidance as how to determine the different of the two categories. There have been not law suites to set precedence in this matter. What is offered is a list of opinions given by experts in the filed of special education. The author of this article warns the reader...”
(52 words)

Rewrite:

“The law offers no guidance as to distinguishing the two categories, nor have the courts established precedence. Weinberg summarizes expert opinions which delineate socially maladjustment from severely emotional disturbance. The author cautions readers...” (33 words)

Example #2

“Fours categories of seizures: simple partial, complex partial, absence, and generalized tonic-clonic seizures are defined to give the teacher the ability to recognize the type of seizure occurring in the classroom.” (31 words)

Rewrite:

“Four categories of seizures: Simple partial, complex partial, absence, and generalized tonic-clonic are defined to give the teacher the ability to recognize and record specific observations.” (26 words)

Example #3

“Each of the children was given a battery of language tests and were taught 12 novel words. Each child’s production and comprehension of these novel words were assessed. The brain injured children scored below controls on all language aspects.” (39 words)

Rewrite:

“Language assessments revealed that children with brain injuries scored lower than the control group on production and comprehension of novel words.” (21 words)

Note: Underlined term breaches writing standard addressing non-labeling language in the field of special education. Point out that meeting the non-labeling language standard may require more words.

Since then, other students have remarked to me in subsequent courses, that the training they received through this model has helped they succeed in other writing assignments.

Although this article represents my first attempt at applying this model to graduate writing, student’s positive responses and success suggest that further research is warranted. Hopefully, the Three Steps to Teaching Abstracts and Critiques will serve as a useful beginning for other students and faculty.

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