

JALT 2021

Featured Speaker: Dr. Lindy Ledohowski

Title: Strategies and New Perspectives for Teaching Academic Writing Online

500 Word Abstract:

This presentation takes it as axiomatic that teaching academic writing post-pandemic will incorporate-- either in whole or in part--hybrid and digital strategies. Writing pedagogy based around the core ideas of scaffolding, chunking, and interrogative methodology can be meaningfully adapted and incorporated into distanced and online educational environments. Scaffolding in educational discourse refers to breaking larger tasks down into smaller components that each build successively one on the other. Chunking can be part of scaffolding, in that the components that comprise the scaffolded structure for a learning objective may be considered a “chunk”; however, chunking in language acquisition refers to joining together lexical units into chunks rather than focusing on word-by-word learning and can be considered a stand-alone learning technique in its own right. This presentation provides a scholarly summary of these two techniques--scaffolding and chunking--in the specific use case of teaching English-language academic writing.

The component parts of academic prose for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts are broken down into “chunks,” so that each piece of a whole writing unit becomes a smaller lexical unit within the larger piece of writing. Cognitively, students are able to comprehend these smaller chunks more easily when seeing them in isolation rather than when composing essays and other academic assignments in their entirety. This presentation provides an overview of this theory and some examples of digitizing this process in practice.

These smaller chunks then become part of the scaffold for the writing assignment as students are led through each component part. Successful completion of the first few chunks become the foundation upon which the subsequent components are built. This portion of the presentation provides an overview of scaffolding within a specific English-language academic writing context and demonstrates the use of interactive scaffolding prompts and techniques that can be deployed in distanced learning environments, allowing instructors to be flexible with hybrid forms of writing instruction that may be at least in part online.

In order to make these scaffolded chunks successful learning blocks in the student’s writing process, this presentation explores the use of targeted questions or interrogative methodology. In its simplest form, interrogative methodology emerges from a kind of Socratic questioning, where each question leads students through the process of discovery. Most often this technique is envisioned in full-class settings with whole-class oral instruction. However, it can be adapted to online learning and writing instruction through the use of guided and very specific interrogative prompts as part of the scaffolded chunks that help students build their writing assignment drafts.

These three techniques--scaffolding, chunking, and interrogative prompting--and their place in English language writing instruction in a digital educational setting are the key foci of this presentation.