

# *Writing Spaces*

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### “Read, Feed, and Seed”: Fostering Research Writing in Classroom Spaces

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## “Read, Feed, and Seed”: Fostering Research Writing in Classroom Spaces

Mustafa Masihuddin Siddiqui

### Overview

During my first two terms teaching first-year composition classes at the University of Toronto, I faced multiple problems—my classes were not engaging enough; many of the students’ essays did not showcase deep understanding of the key course readings; some students did not apply the evidence into their essays; and most students struggled conforming to the basic referencing guidelines. To address these issues, I developed an interactive approach called “Read, Feed, and Seed” (RFS), aimed at fostering “collaborative learning in writing” (Hunzer 1) while reinforcing research writing skills.

The activity begins with the “read” phase where students actively annotate the introduction of a course reading, highlighting significant points. They then compare annotations within small groups to recognize diverse perspectives. After they have grasped the intent of the reading, the group members are assigned exclusive sections of the remaining text, which they skim through, preparing points for group discussion.

The “feed” phase of this activity is a simple session in which all group members share insights from their respective sections, which cultivates a supportive environment for diverse learning capacities. Groups then use this comprehensive understanding of the text to craft a research-style response to a question I give options for. To bolster their arguments, they “seed” evidence from the text while using a source integration technique. Meanwhile, a group member is tasked with ensuring that the in-text citations strictly follow APA guidelines and creating a reference-list entry for the reading. At the end, I provide feedback on the quality of responses, source

integration, and APA compliance.

These one-hour RFS sessions not only encourage “co-construction of knowledge” (Dobao 55) but also reinforce most students’ research writing skills, as evidenced by the quality of their subsequent essays.

### Time Commitment

50-60 minutes

### Materials

For Students: Either a digital or hardcopy of the course reading; Either a writing gadget or a paper and a pen.

For Instructor: Either computer-projector setup or dry erase/ chalkboard and dry erase markers/ chalk.

### Activity Process

- Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students, ensuring mixed capacities. So, a class of 20 students will form 4 or 5 groups.
- After this, conduct the activity in the following three phases.
- Read Phase:
  - Students will begin this phase by annotating the introduction section of a course reading, which could either be a book chapter or a research article. They may take 6-10 minutes to highlight points they feel are crucial.
  - Then, ask them to compare these annotations within their groups. They must explain why they felt those parts were significant.
  - After they have understood the reading’s central idea,

assign different sections of the remainder of the course reading to each group member and ask students to skim through their assigned parts in the allocated time. While reading, students could note down points for the group discussion to follow. This step should take around 8-10 minutes.

- Feed Phase:
  - Students will now take turns to share insights from the sections they skimmed within their groups.
  - The instructor must time this step and ensure that each group member gets an equal opportunity to speak.
  
- Seed Phase:
  - After students in each group have gained considerable knowledge of the course reading, the instructor will display at least five questions that promote critical thinking. These questions must be related to the text. As an example, if the course reading is Gopen and Swan's "The Science of Scientific Writing," one of the five questions could be about the length of a sentence—Does having a lot of words in a sentence hamper readers' understanding?
  - Next, ask groups to choose any two questions from the five displayed.
  - Then, students will work with their group members and compose a 50–80-word paragraph for each chosen question. Therefore, each group will have two answers written by the end of this step, which may take around 15-20 minutes.
  - The instructor must ask students to integrate evidence

from the course reading to support their answers and create a reference-list entry. Groups must be encouraged to keep their source integration diverse. So, if for the first answer, a group chooses ‘direct quote’ integration, they must paraphrase or summarize their evidence in the next answer.

- During this step, groups may split tasks among themselves. To illustrate, two members can work on the one answer; two on the other; and one on the reference-list entry.
- After all groups have written their responses, the instructor should provide feedback on each answer. For example, if there are 5 groups in the class, the instructor will review a total of 10 paragraphs and 5 reference-list entries. This feedback session can be conducted collectively using a projected display, or it could be done privately with each group, depending on the students’ preference.

## Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity will:

- Participate in active reading and annotation and learn how reading perspectives can vary among readers
- Develop skimming and summarizing skills in a supportive environment
- Demonstrate understanding of the course material by crafting research-style paragraphs to answer questions that promote critical thinking
- Practice source integration, citation, and adhering to referencing guidelines

- Learn from peers and the instructor how to compose effective academic paragraphs

### Learning Accommodations

- The instructor may provide hardcopies of the course reading to the students who do not have gadgets or prefer reading from a physical copy.
- The instructor may form balanced groups, considering the learning capacities of each student.
- Students in the group may assign tasks to each other based on their learning styles. For example, a student with proficient writing skills may compose the paragraph; other members may suggest ideas; a member with good knowledge of citations may work on referencing.
- Groups may post their paragraphs anonymously if they are uncomfortable receiving feedback in class.
- The instructor should periodically walk around the class to ensure that the students have understood the instructions clearly.

### Works Cited

- Dobao, Ana Fernández. "Collaborative Writing Tasks in the L2 Classroom: Comparing Group, Pair, and Individual work." *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2012, pp. 40–48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2011.12.002>.
- Gopen, George, D. and Judith A. Swan. "The Science of Scientific Writing." *American Scientist*, vol. 78, no. 6, 1990, pp. 550–58. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29774235>.
- Hunzer, Kathleen, M., editor. *Collaborative Learning and Writing: Essays on Using Small Groups in Teaching English and Composition*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012.

### Further Reading

Moses, Joe, and Jason Tham. *Collaborative Writing Playbook: An Instructor's Guide to Designing Writing Projects for Student Teams*. Parlor Press, 2021.

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