



Idaho State University

# ***GREAT IDEAS IN TEACHING***

## ***MINI CONFERENCE***

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ISU College of Education, ISU Center for Learning and Instructional Excellence,  
and the ISU Graduate School

### **Bridging the Gap: Scaffolding Writing and Research Skills**

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Research indicates that many incoming college students are less prepared than in previous years when it comes to essential academic skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, writing, close reading, and analysis. This trend suggests that we cannot assume students already possess the foundational skills needed for success. This is my second year teaching at a 4000 level, and I have seen a wide range in student preparedness. Some students struggle to form complete sentences, while other students demonstrate strong proficiency in advanced research techniques. To address this disparity, I have developed a scaffolded instructional approach that is designed to rebuild fundamentals and gradually lead students to more advanced academic work.

The process begins with re-teaching foundational writing skills, including sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, APA 7 formatting, identifying appropriate academic sources, critical thinking, and writing in an objective third-person voice. During the first three weeks of the semester, students complete short assignments that strengthen these skills, paired with extensive individualized feedback. Students are then given the opportunity to revise their work and earn back lost points, shifting the emphasis from simply earning a grade to engaging in the learning process. This scaffolded approach allows me to maintain high standards while ensuring student success.

While giving extensive feedback requires a significant time commitment, the payoff is worth the effort. Investing in students' learning early on in the course leads to significant growth, increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and higher-quality work in later assignments. By explicitly teaching basic skills that are often assumed and gradually increasing rigor, instructors can help upper-level students develop the competencies they need to be successful in their field. This teaching practice is replicable across disciplines and offers an effective best practice for addressing the current preparation gap in higher education.