

Action Research @ UniSA College

Decoding the hidden curriculum in final essay preparation in a sociology course

Dr Heidi Hetz

UniSA College

My school and community context

- Enabling pathway programs at UniSA College
- Cohort: High representation of equity groups (highest proportion across university), including low-SES, CALD, Aboriginal, students with disability, first-in-family, regional / remote.
 - Diverse student cohort with diverse needs; students with social or educational disadvantage.

My class context

e.g. Year level(s), curriculum area, cultural heritage of students

- **SP5, 2021: Introduction to Global Issues and Identities**
 - Global sociology course
- **Weeks 1-10: students learn a new sociological concept each week.**
- **Weeks 11-13: students learn how to conduct research / write essay in sociology**

What was the pedagogical challenge?

- Loss of motivation for final essay.
- Class time for final essay prep is not used effectively.
- Previous feedback in the course is not used effectively.
- Previous learning is not incorporated effectively in the final essay (weekly reflective posts, presentation and short essay).
- Students do not follow essay structure taught in core course University Studies.

Connecting with enabling pedagogy

- Scaffolding.
- Setting challenging tasks.
- Student funds of knowledge.

(Bennett et al. 2018; Luke 2000, 2012; Stokes 2014)

Research question

How does utilising enabling pedagogy – specifically scaffolding and challenging tasks – support student engagement and increase the rigor of the final assignment in the introductory sociology course Introduction to Global Issues and Identities, through the introduction of a template that prompts the students to build on the scaffolded knowledges developed over the study period and in the core course University Studies.

What I tried to do differently. Why?

- Created template that prompts the students to build on the scaffolded knowledges developed over the study period and in the core course University Studies.
- Template was completed in week 12 through individual / group work / one-on-one tutor support and class discussion.
- Students returned completed template to tutor.
- Tutor summarised main challenges and reported back to class in week 13.

Week 12: Final essay preparation template

Activity 1: Self-reflection / motivation

As you begin working on the final essay, take a moment to reflect on your experiences over the past 12 weeks in Global Issues. What are you proud of? What are you hoping to achieve in the final essay?

Activity 1a: My achievements in Global Issues

First, reflect on the last 12 weeks of Global Issues. What are you proud of? This could include your attendance, submitting the reflective posts every week, giving your presentation, building your understanding of a specific topic, etc.



My achievements in Global Issues so far:

Week 12: Final essay preparation template (cont'd)

Activity 1b: My goals for the final essay

Next, take a moment to think about what you are hoping to achieve in the final essay. What are your goals? This can include aiming for a specific grade (a Credit? A High Distinction?), submitting on time, improving your referencing or essay structure, developing your understanding of a specific topic, etc.



My goals for the final essay:



Week 12: Final essay preparation template (cont'd)

Activity 2: Using feedback to improve your work

By now, you have received feedback for the nine reflective posts, your presentation, and the short essay. It is likely that this feedback highlighted areas for improvement. It is important to read through these comments carefully so you can address them in the final essay. That way, you avoid losing marks for the same mistakes – and chances are that you improve your grade in the process!

If you have been receiving high grades (and therefore limited feedback), you can also reflect on what you generally find difficult and how you can work on these areas.

By drawing on your feedback and self-reflection, use the table below to identify your main areas for improvement (such as structure, writing, understanding of key concepts, referencing etc.) and how you will address these points in the final essay.

 What are your main areas for improvement?	 How can you address these in the final essay?
1.	
2.	
3.	

Week 12: Final essay preparation template (cont'd)

Activity 3: Using content from the reflective posts and short essay to inform the final essay




You are allowed to draw on the reflective posts and short essay for the final essay. This means that you can copy and paste sections from these assignments into the essay – you may need to slightly reword them to produce a coherent essay. You can also draw on the reflective posts and short essay to refresh your memory about key concepts that you will need to discuss in your final essay.

For this activity, you need to have chosen your essay question. If you are working on the question about global citizenship, you need to have identified your two examples (one example that embraces global citizenship and one example that rejects global citizenship). If you are planning to conduct an interview for the second option, you need to have identified some of the key themes that are likely to come up in the essay (for example, the interview may touch on race, social class, or sexuality).

Please use the table below to list the topics you have covered in the reflective posts and short essay. Key terms such as “transnational corporation” or “global citizenship” are sufficient for the column on the left-hand side.

If these topics are useful for the final essay, you can tick the column in the middle. If a topic is less likely to be useful for the final essay, you can leave the column in the middle blank.

On the right, you can write any comments. For example, you can state where in the essay you will include them or whether this requires further research.

 Topics covered in the quizzes and short essay:	 Tick if useful for final essay:	 Comments:
Quiz No. 1:	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quiz No. 2:	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quiz No. 3:	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quiz No. 4:	<input type="checkbox"/>	

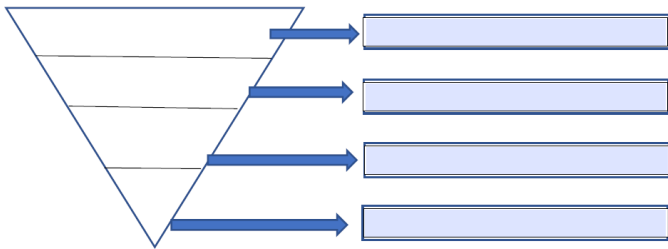
Week 12: Final essay preparation template (cont'd)

Activity 4: Essay Structure

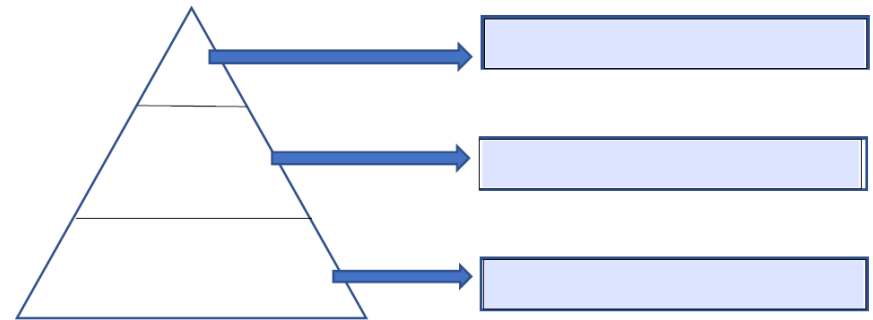
The good news is that you've already been taught the essay structure in University Studies – you can follow the same structure for your essay for Global Issues.

As a refresher, please label the main components of the intro, conclusion, and body paragraph below.

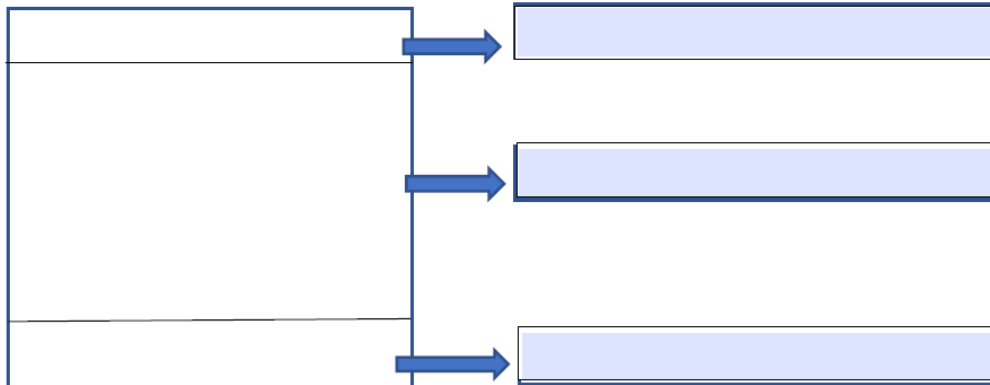
Intro:



Conclusion:



Body paragraph:



Week 12: Final essay preparation template (cont'd)

Activity 5: Remaining questions?

Now take some time to think about the requirements for the final essay. What questions do you still have? How will you find the answers? Write down your questions in the table below, then begin the process of finding the answers.

 What questions do you still have about the final essay?	 Where can you find these answers?	 Write down the answers here once you've found them.
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

As you attend to Activity 5, please note that you have access to the following resources for the final essay:




- The guidelines for the final essay.
- The “deconstructing the final essay questions” document.
- The student example essays.
- The lecture recordings for weeks 11 and 12.
- The tutorial activities for weeks 11 and 12 which you can access in the weekly workbooks.

You might find some of the answers in these resources. You also still have access to the student consults, PASS sessions and Studiosity. You can ask your tutor any questions during the last tutorial in week 13 or via email.

Week 12: Final essay preparation template (cont'd)

Activity 6: Timeline for the short essay

Finally, spend some time planning for the completion of the final essay. What do you still need to do? When will you do it? Complete the table below.

 Remaining tasks	 Complete by	 Tick when completed
1.		<input type="checkbox"/>
2.		<input type="checkbox"/>
3.		<input type="checkbox"/>
4.		<input type="checkbox"/>
5.		<input type="checkbox"/>

Week 13: Follow up in class

Achievements in this course

- Attended class each week /actively participated
- Completed weekly tasks.
- Completed weekly reflective posts.
- Gave class presentation.
- Improved academic writing skills.
- Improved grades.
- Improved research skills.
- Persevered despite challenges.
- Stayed open minded about new topics.
- Learned about new topics.

Goals for final essay

- Start early / submit on time.
- Improve referencing.
- Improve paraphrasing.
- Improve structure.
- Improve academic writing.
- Aim for a specific grade.
- Draw on what I learned over the study period.
- Learn more about a specific topic.
- Complete the course.

Week 13: Follow up in class (cont'd)

Final essay resources

For general information about this assignment, refer to the [Assessment 3 guidelines](#). Refer to the example essays from week 12 ([here](#) and [here](#)) and use the [essay outline sheet](#) to plan your essay. Use the additional readings under the [final essay tab](#).

For further information about Option 1: global citizenship, refer to [Deconstructing the final essay question](#).

For further information about Option 2: identity / inequality, refer to [Week 11 lecture slides](#) (recommended structure on slides 40-41). Use the [interview questions](#) and refer to the [example essay](#).

In week 12, as part of the final essay preparation template, you identified your main areas for improvement, based on previous feedback and self-reflection.

In the following, you find key resources to help you address common challenges.

Week 13: Follow up in class (cont'd)

Area for improvement	Resources
Referencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roadmap to Referencing.• Harvard Referencing Guide.• Academic Literacy Module 2: Academic integrity and referencing
Identifying academic sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic Literacy Module 1: Finding and reading scholarly sources
Academic writing + structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic Literacy Module 3: Summarising, paraphrasing and quoting• Academic Literacy Module 4: Planning and structuring assessment• Academic Literacy Module 5: Academic writing• UniSA assignment help page.• UniSA writing & academic language page.• UniSA academic English page.
Editing and proofreading	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Studiosity• Grammarly (use the free version)• Academic Literacy Module 6: Editing and proofreading
<p>Other resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• See a learning advisor.• Attend a student consult with Snjezana.• Attend a PASS session.	

Evaluation



- Reflections after week 12 and 13 tutorials.
- Audio recording of delivery of the template / activity in weeks 12 and 13.
- Evidence of student learning: completed template; final essays.
- Student voice: online survey.



What happened?

What the students did...

- Ten students across two tutorials completed the template.
- Motivation was still a challenge, but class time was used more effectively for final essay prep.
- The activities in the template were effective.
- Provided opportunity for one-on-one conversations with students / individual guidance.

Completed templates




 What are your main areas for improvement?	 How can you address these in the final essay?
1. referencing	making sure to carefully check all referencing
2. writing	taking the time to check over grammer and not miss mistakes
3. key concepts	take the time to give more detail, not skim over important facts etc
4.	




 What are your main areas for improvement?	 How can you address these in the final essay?
1. referencing/in-text referencing	ask questions study harvard refrancing guide
2. paragraph structure	studiosidy look at the essay examples
3. explain more about topics/elaborate	read more about the topic
4.	explain then example
5.	

Completed templates (cont'd)

	Final essay:	
Quiz No. 1: the sociological imagination	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quiz No. 2: Globalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	help describe globalisation
Quiz No. 3: global citizenship & human rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quiz No. 4: culture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	express traditions from cultures, why people do the things they do
Quiz No. 5: social class & global stratification	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quiz No. 6: Gender and sexuality in a global context +	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	focusing largely on gender violence, this will have a lot of information i can use
Quiz No. 7:		

Completed templates (cont'd)

 Remaining tasks	 Complete by	 Tick when completed
1. organise a time and do the interview	preffreably by the 28th	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. transcribe the intevievw	by the 29th	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. higlight the key themes from the interview	by the 1st Nov	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Find sources on the themes to compliment	continuous	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. have a rough draft	by the 7th	<input type="checkbox"/>

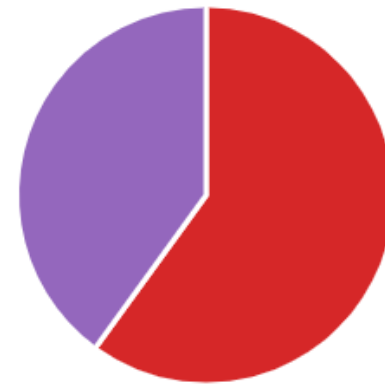
 Remaining tasks	 Complete by	 Tick when completed
1. Interview	Nov 4 th	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. transcribe interview	Nov 8 th	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. find relative/supporting research	Nov 10 th	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. insert into essay format	Nov 14 th	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Studiosity / draft	Nov 16 th	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student voice

8. Overall, completing this template has been useful for me in preparing for the final essay.

[More Details](#)

● totally disagree	0
● disagree	0
● neutral	0
● agree	3
● totally agree	2



Student voice (cont'd)

10. What was most useful to you about completing this template?

5 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	Planning the timeline and the identification on the usefulness of the previous assignments for the final essay
2	anonymous	Reflecting on the feedback forms for the weekly reflections. Using this feedback will definitely prove useful when completing the final essay.
3	anonymous	the help from the teacher in the tutorial
4	anonymous	Organised my structure of the final assessment
5	anonymous	-The most useful about this template was that to know in which area i did well, for e.g. -Coming to class everyday -Submitting my weekly reflection mini post every Sunday night -Watching lecture - Giving my presentation but in which area i did not do well, for e.g. referencing and paraphrasing, doing this template its useful which is i can improve my referencing and paraphrasing for the final essay and it helps me a lot.

What did I learn?

...about my pedagogy

- ‘hidden curriculum’ needs to be made explicit to students, esp. early in the program, e.g.:
 - Using feedback.
 - Drawing on knowledge from other courses.
- Additional scaffolding supports students in completing a challenging task, e.g. final essay.
- Student funds of knowledge:
 - Students already developed understanding of sociological concepts.
 - Students already practiced essay writing.

What did I learn?

... about action research

- Structured and supported approach to address a teaching challenge.
- Immense benefit of mentoring from Dr Sarah Hattam, Emeritus Professor Robert Hattam, and Professor Barbara Comber.
- Great opportunity for tutors:
 - Teach across multiple courses.
 - Teach multiple classes within a course / over several years.

Next steps

- Course coordinator will explore using the template for all students.
- Further evaluation needed, given small student numbers.
- Template can be adapted for other courses.
- Further opportunity at the College to improve student feedback literacy.

References

Bennett, A, Motta, SC, Hamilton, E, Burgess, C, Relf, B, Gray, K, Leroy-Dyer, S & Albright, J 2018 *Enabling pedagogies: a participatory conceptual mapping of practices at the University of Newcastle, Australia, University of Newcastle*, <https://nova.newcastle.edu.au/vital/access/services/Download/uon:32947/ATTACHMENT03>.

Luke, A 2000, 'Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint', *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, vol. 43, no. 5, pp. 448-461.

Luke, A 2012, 'Foreword' in C. Dudley-Marling & S. Michaels (eds), *High expectation curricula: Helping all students succeed with powerful learning*, Teachers College Press, New York, pp. vii-ix.

Stokes, J 2014, 'New students and enabling pedagogies: Supporting students from diverse backgrounds through a university enabling program', *The International Journal of Diversity in Education*, vol. 13, pp. 115-124.