Types of Sequencing

1. The Iterative Pattern: Repeating the Same Assignment, Varying it by Topic
In this approach, students repeat the same type of assignment, varied by subject matter. For example, Professor Charles Cohen in the History Department sequences his "minor assignments" this way and asks students to write six 50-word analyses of various course readings. Similarly, a literature professor might have students compose several two-page "close readings" throughout the semester, each about a different literary text. Or a science or a social-science professor might have students write several experimental research reports. This approach to sequencing assumes that students will benefit from multiple opportunities to master a particular genre or skill, and that over time, that genre—the *kind* of writing assignment—becomes familiar, even transparent, to students. It also assumes that the genre is central to your discipline, and that therefore the genre offers one of the best ways for students to learn the content of the course.

2. The Scaffolded Sequence: Moving from Simpler to More Complex Assignments
In this approach, students begin with simpler, more fundamental genres or ways of thinking, then move to more difficult assignments. Over the course of a semester, you might, for example, build up to a six-page critical review of several sources by having students complete the following series of assignments: a one-page summary of one source; a two-page summary and critique of a single source; a four-page review of two sources (with revision); a six-page review of four sources (with revision). Or in a history or literature course, you might first ask students to write a close reading of a source, then later have them write a longer paper that includes close readings in support of a larger argument. This approach to sequencing assumes that students will be better equipped to write longer papers or undertake cognitively challenging tasks if they first have the opportunity to build their skills and their confidence.

3. Divide and Conquer: Breaking a Complex Assignment into Smaller Parts
In this approach, you choose to make a challenging, complex assignment one of the central activities of your course. You then break that complex assignment into a series of smaller assignments that all contribute to that final project. For example, Susan Munkres breaks down the research paper in an introductory sociology course into the following stages: Topic Area Statement; Library Assignment; Paper Prospectus; First Version of Paper for Peer Review; Peer Review Comments; Second Version of Paper; Peer Review Comments; Conferences; Paper Outlines; Final Version of Paper. This approach to sequencing assumes students' writing and learning will improve if students have time to concentrate on and master various stages in the process of writing the paper. Students in Psychology 225, Experimental Psychology, follow a similar sequence as they learn to design and report original experimental research.

4. The Grand Tour
With this approach, you vary the genre with each new assignment. So in a public policy or urban planning course, for example, you might assign a book review, then a letter to the editor, and finally a policy analysis. Having a variety of assignments may make them more interesting to students and may make for more interesting reading for you. And different assignments may tap into different strengths and interests students bring. Remember, though, to ask yourself how familiar your students are with each genre and find ways to help them learn how to succeed with each.