

In the Classroom 49

How to Use the RAFT Strategy in Your Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Thanks a lot for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I recognize you can be doing other things and you're hanging out with me, so I really appreciate it. This week, we are going to look at an assignment strategy called RAFT. RAFT stands for role, audience, format, and topic. This provided choices for students, resulting in more engagement and creativity. It also takes the boredom out of grading assignments for faculty.

As I'm preparing for my spring term, I decided that I'm going to change out one of my major assignments. Instead of having students work on an OER chapter, which I've had them do for the past two terms, I'm going to have them do three mini-projects focusing on multi-media learning.

One of the primary reasons is because I'm the bottleneck. I have all this OER stuff that I still need to sift through and turn that into OER book as promised. I have fallen woefully behind. I think this particular assignment is still going to be extremely useful. This is going to provide them with a lot of latitude on what they're going to create as well as how they're going to do it and what specific topic that they're going to work on. I picked this assignment strategy up from Katie Novak in her book *UDL Now!*. For me, it looks like a wonderful strategy to allow the flexibility, increase the ownership of the assignments and the strategy is called RAFT.

As I mentioned before, RAFT stands for role, audience, format, and topic. It seems to have originally originated out of the language art disciplines as a novel way to approach writing, that you're focusing on a specific audience, you're presenting it from a certain point of view, what the overall format is, then certainly picking the topic. I think this worked really well for my multi-media learning class.

In RAFT, basically, you are creating a table. This table will have four columns. The first column as you're listing it out will have the role of the writer. Who are they as the writer? They could be a warrior, a homeless person, an auto mechanic, what have you. In my case, they'll probably be an instructional designer, instructional technologist. They could be an administrator. They could be a faculty member, so they have a choice that way.

Column number two is the audience. Who are you writing to? Is your audience new students? Is your audience new grad students? Could it be new faculty? Could it be tenured faculty? You have a lot of choices. It could be that you're writing for a newspaper, whatever your cause is. That will define your audience.

Next is your format. In what form will this writing take place, this project takes place? In my case, it's going to be a project. What format is it going to be taking place? It

could be a letter. It could be that you're writing a classified ad. It could be you're writing a magazine article and laying that out. It could be you're creating a website or a podcast or a video. You have lots of options on how the format is going to look.

Then finally is the topic, what are you writing about? What's the subject or the point of this piece? Are you persuading them to do something specific? Are you, for example, explaining why accessibility is important or universal design for learning or why you should use the RAFT format in your instruction? Lots of different ways that you can approach this. You're going to fill out, basically, these columns and give your students some options in what format or what items that they're going to choose. They, then, need to choose one item out of each column. That provides the context for their assignment.

When creating a RAFT table, I see two different ways of doing it. One is predesigned relationships. What I mean by this is when you fill out that column, you can actually assign rows where you have predetermined what the relationship is going to be. That you may say that you're an instructional technologist talking to new faculty. It's going to be a presentation and it is about introducing RAFT as a teaching strategy, or it could be that you're an administrator talking to new faculty that you are drafting an email to layout what benefits of your program and how to engage with them.

It could be a variety of different ways that you would do this, but then the student would just choose a row. That would be the context that they would build their assignments around. I am going to go for the open choice. In this scenario, students must choose one item from each column, so they get to build their own scenarios. Some of the things that I'm thinking about. In terms of role, I am somebody applying for a new job. It could be an instructional designer, an instructional technologist. I could work in disability services, a librarian, an administrator, something like that.

My audience could be a search committee that I'm presenting to. It could be to new faculty or to experienced faculty. It could be faculty who were set in their ways and you need to convince them of a new path. I could be talking to administrators. Other format, lots of options dealing with multi-media learning, so we have video, podcasts, infographics, magazine articles, blogs, websites, presentations, social media campaigns, e-books, posters, brochures. Students would get to pick from all those.

Some of the topics that I'm thinking about are the importance of multi-media learning in education, accessibility, universal designs for learning, video in the classroom. Lots of different ways that they can approach this. For my assignment, students will need to identify their scenario. When they turn their project in, they're going to have to let me know which items that they chose, so that way I can better assess them.

As far as the three assignments, they're not going to be able to repeat any item across the four columns for the three assignments. They're going to have to choose in each case four new items that have not been put together in any combination before because you don't want to make it too easy. I want them to stretch in their learning. For a rubric, how do you build rubric that is going to be able to fairly assess all the different products that you can put in? As I was pulling this together, I was thinking about that because I want to make sure that they're assessed fairly.

Here is some things that I'm definitely going to put on my rubric. First of all, perspective. Did they stay in the role that they chose? If they were presenting this as an instructional technologist, did they stay in that role? How effective were they assuming their role and convincing the audience of their participation in that role? Focus, did they stay within the assigned format? They pick one of the formats in order to present, how well did they satisfy that? How well did they present their material using that format?

Infographics, for example, there is a lot of imagery. There is different ways of presenting statistic. How well did they do that? The mechanics, that comes down to the technical piece. Were there any grammatical errors? How many were there?

When you're talking about putting together a video. There are some basic principles that they should've learned and should be using when they create that. Content, their content, how accurate is their information? Did they support this? Do they have good references that they're using to support their material? Do they exhibit knowledge of that particular topic? How well are they doing that?

As far as creativity, creativity certainly is a measuring skill that you get some extra points if you just knock it out of the park. That if you're going out there and you're displaying originality and creativity and thoughtfulness, all this come into practice. Then finally, the presentation, was it easy to consume, visually appealing? Just all those different factors. I think I could put together a really good rubric to focus on this idea of the RAFT strategy.

One of the reasons that I really like the RAFT strategy is that it is very much in line with UDL, universal design for learning. This allows students to have a choice in how they complete their assignments. It lets them provide more ownership, exhibit more creativity. Those are the reasons I like it. While still demonstrating that they know what they know, that they're able to do it. I want to keep the assignment relatively short because I do realize how much time and energy goes into really putting energy into a multi-media product. I don't want to make it overwhelming for students.

That is the idea of RAFT. I think it's really exciting. I think that it can be used across all kinds of disciplines from the sciences, certainly from the language arts. All these different disciplines we have, I think you can build out very creative assignments where students are presenting information. Like I said, it makes it more interesting for them. If they're more interested, they're more engaged in the topic, but it also makes it more interesting for the faculty member in the fact that you're not sitting there and grading 30 relatively identical papers. Each time you get one of these assignments turned in, you know, it's something new. It's something exciting. It kind of keeps it interesting for you as faculty members.

That's why I'm interested in doing this. Remember for RAFT, basically four major parts. What's the role that they're assuming? Two, the audience that they're creating this product for. Three, the format that they are going to create the product in. Then, finally, what's the topic that they're going to focus on? Really easy strategy. I think it's easy like chess. The moves are easy and pulling it all together, I think, can make it very interesting. With that said, here is a plug from my book.