

Tips for Designing Effective Writing Assignments

1. Help students see the connection between the assignment and your course goals by making explicit what the assignment will help students learn or how completing the assignment will help them meet the course objectives.
2. Help students see how the assignment connects to work that people who work within your discipline typically do. What patterns of thinking, writing strategies, formats, or genres in the discipline does the assignment help them to learn and to practice? How does the assignment connect to “real world” disciplinary problems, skills, and strategies?
3. Help students understand the process they might follow to complete the assignment. For example, if you are asking students to write a research review, you might help them understand a strategy they might use to organize the research review thematically or topically or historically. How would an “ideal” student go about completing the assignment? What steps would he or she take? What discipline-specific resources would he or she consult?
4. Provide information about the purpose, intended audience, appropriate resources, approximate length, format, and style conventions. Use strong verbs to convey the single task you want them to accomplish; present one question you want them to address. If you want students to do more than one task or address more than one question, help them by bulleting each task or question, and then reminding students to complete all parts of the assignment.
5. Help students understand the criteria you will use to evaluate their performance. Encourage students to use the evaluation criteria to self-assess before they submit their assignments to you.
6. Assign frequent, short assignments, if possible, rather than a single, lengthy term paper. Frequent writing opportunities, coupled with helpful feedback from professors, may better support students’ writing development. For lengthier assignments, help students by segmenting the whole into smaller, manageable parts. Establish due dates for completing parts of the assignment and make the final deadline clear.
7. Encourage your students to visit the Writing Center well before their assignments are due. Professional tutors can help students think about clarifying their focus, organizing ideas more logically, developing and supporting claims more effectively, and editing more carefully.

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