

# Designing Writing Assignments

## 5 Keys to Good Writing Assignments:

- Purpose
- Audience
- Research
- Format
- Evaluation

## Assignment Design: Planning (Part I)

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- 1) Select a course (or unit) in which to include a writing assignment.
- 2) List the main objectives of your course.
- 3) List several concepts or thinking tasks central to your course. Consider concepts or tasks that have given your students difficulty in the past.
- 4) What would you like your students to learn from a writing assignment?
- 5) Write a preliminary description of an assignment. (Consider explaining the purpose; defining a special audience; providing grading criteria; and including format requirements for the assignment.)
- 6) How will you evaluate this assignment?

- 7) What problems do you anticipate your students will have in completing the assignment to meet your objectives?

### **Assignment Design: Prewriting (Part II)**

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The amount of time you spend in class on prewriting activities depends on the complexity of the assignment. Short, directed assignments require less time than research projects. Consider tying regular classroom activities to writing assignments.

- 8) What activities will help students succeed with the assignment?  
(Examples: classroom discussion, teacher modeling, group-work.)
- 9) Can you use writing activities that will help students write their papers?  
(For example, after a lab demonstration, you could ask students to answer the following questions in a quick-write: What did you learn from the lab demonstration? How would you explain the demonstration to a friend who wasn't there? Or after having students read a chapter in the textbook, you would assign a freewriting exercise, which answers a discussion question about the chapter.)

## **Assignment Design: Design (Part III)**

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Once you have a preliminary sense of what the assignment should be, its goals, and some techniques for helping students get started, decide on the assignment's formal qualities.

10) Write out the assignment for the students. Specify its objectives, the intended audience, and the writing task. Tell students the criteria by which their assignments will be evaluated.

11) Describe the process (steps) students will follow in completing this assignment. (I recommend that you include prewriting activities, opportunities for at least one preliminary draft, and peer critiquing of the draft(s).)

Adapted from the work of Mark L. Waldo, University of Nevada Reno; and Adele S. Pittendrigh, Montana State University.