

Worksheet for Designing a Writing Assignment

Remember that in designing a writing assignment you need to establish guidelines for the assignment that will not stifle creativity nor encourage plagiarism.

What is/are the objective(s) of the assignment? (What do you hope to accomplish with this assignment? What is the purpose of the assignment?) Tie the assignment to your course objectives.

Decide what you want your students to do:

- ✚ The task—Writing is a process, a logical sequence of activities, which the student must follow. Telling the student he must write a 20-page research paper on a topic selected by him and due at the end of the semester will result in a potpourri of materials with no real focus. If instead, the instructor breaks the overall task into several steps, students can focus their efforts and organize their ideas. What do students need to do first—prewriting activities? What must they do to write their papers—observe, read, experiment, interpret, analyze? (Think of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive function.)
- ✚ Place it in some sort of context (tie it to the real world, academia, this class, whatever) with some audience (an effective writing assignment identifies the audience other than the instructor because writing for the instructor stilt the students' form). Creating an audience of peers or a fictional audience will help the student to be clearer and more specific in explaining his ideas and make the task more real. Peer review can take place when students exchange final papers or students present their papers in an oral report. Writing for a fictitious audience can help students see the practicality of the writing task.
 - An example of setting a specific audience is in an assignment that one of JCCC's biology instructors gives her students. Her students are asked to read a professional journal article and then rewrite it for a layman, defining terms and paraphrasing scientific jargon. They are asked to put their writing at an eighth grade level, using readability tests which are available in the JCCC Writing Center or in the Academic Achievement Center.
- ✚ Decide how you want them to manage the assignment—in small groups, alone, partners—series of tasks or steps, i.e., outlines, research, reading, etc. (In designing the assignment, state what the assignment asks the student to do, setting up a hypothetical situation can help the student to see his motivation, and explain the steps students are to take in completing the assignment. Break a larger assignment into smaller assignments leading up to the "big one." Also, when possible, give students specific tasks such as gathering information, visiting sites for observation or study, reading assignments, lab work, etc.) Have you considered time in class allotted to peer critiquing one another's drafts, opportunities considered for your reviewing drafts and

then conferencing with students, and support provided for students to visit the Writing Center with their drafts?

- ✚ Do they have deadlines for the tasks?
- ✚ What form does the assignment take: journal or log, letter, paper (essay), portfolio, research essay, review or critique, summary or abstract, analysis, etc.? (Do you have guidelines for the format of the assignment? Margins, headings, page numbers . . . do not assume that students know this information or that the form you require is what other instructors assign.)
- ✚ If research is required, what documentation style will you require?
- ✚ Will you discuss what resources are acceptable?
- ✚ What will you do with the assignment?
- ✚ What are the evaluation criteria?
- ✚ Will you design a checklist to assign a value to each criterion?

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