

Creating Writing Assignments: Planning for Student Success

Writing Matters Handout by SuEllen Shaw

Examine your goals

- What is the purpose of the assignment?
 - What do you want students to learn from the assignment?
 - What do you want students to show you? Mastery of a concept?
Development of an original idea? Demonstration of procedures or practices? Connection to “worlds” outside of your class?
 - Review knowledge already learned? Find additional information?
Synthesize research? Examine a new hypothesis?
- How is it connected to course content?
 - How does the assignment help reach course objectives?

Wording the Assignment

- State the purpose or rationale.
- Define the writing task.
- Give the required form (expository essay, lab report, memo, letter)
- Suggest strategies for doing the assignment.
- Make the business details clear.
- Define your evaluative criteria.

Attending to the Mechanics

- Hand out printed copies of the assignment.
- Offer sufficient, but succinct, explanation.
- Give students sufficient time to consider the assignment, write, and revise.

Other Matters

- Clarify the audience.
- Clarify the writer’s role, I.e. “professional in training”
- Point to available resources or help.
- Share models and student samples.

Sequencing Writing Assignments

- Provides a sense of coherence for the course
- Helps students see progress and purpose
- Encourages complexity through sustained attention, revision, and consideration of multiple perspectives
- Mirrors professional work in many professions

Options for Sequencing

- Use the writing process.
- Submit drafts.
- Establish small groups.
- Explore a subject in increasingly complex ways.
- Change audiences.
- Create a series of assignments culminating in a final writing project.
- Submit sections.