

Suggestions for Designing Effective Writing Assignments

Seek to establish a rhetorical situation that encourages a spirit of inquiry and promotes critical thinking. How?

- ❖ Aim high. Let students know you hold them to high — but reachable — standards.
- ❖ Go for full disclosure. Continually share your pedagogical goals with students — for the course as a whole, for each writing assignment, and even for each day.
- ❖ Take baby steps. Sequence writing assignments so that they move from easier cognitive activities (i.e., summaries, pointed questions) to more complex activities (i.e., arguments, developing questions for research).

Consider each writing assignment a contract between you and your students. What to include?

- ❖ Clear, concise articulation of the central task at hand (what you want the students to do)
- ❖ Information about audience (popular, scholarly, discipline-specific?)
- ❖ Criteria for evaluation (perhaps including some of the language from your syllabus)
- ❖ Expectations for the process (dates when drafts are due, dates and format of peer review, dates revisions are due, dates for conferences)
- ❖ Formatting information (length, resources to be used, style)

Don't assume your students understand the assignment as perfectly as you do. How can you get them on the same page as you?

- ❖ Discuss the assignment (at length) in class.
- ❖ Allow time for questions.
- ❖ Ask students to turn over their copy of the assignment and reiterate it back to you as a pop quiz or journal entry.
- ❖ Model by giving out past students' successful versions of the assignment.
- ❖ Do the assignment yourself beforehand and hand out copies of *your* work.
- ❖ Ask students how they plan to approach the assignment, or have students get in their peer groups to work out individual "plans of attack."

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