

## Designing Writing Assignments

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Here are some general areas and questions that you may want to consider as you design writing assignments and as you discuss assignments with students. Your own students' needs will determine the amount of detail you'll need or want to give on each of these points.

1. **Context.** What is the topic, subject, or principle behind the assignment? Has the instructor specified an exact topic, or is the student supposed to find a topic by narrowing down the subject area? If so, what kinds of narrowing might be productive? What kinds of skills are students expected to demonstrate? What questions does the assignment raise?
2. **Purpose(s).** For what purpose is the author writing (to explain, to persuade, to summarize, etc.)? A clear sense of purpose can sharpen a writer's focus and provide motivation for writing. How does the purpose shape choices about the type and level of detail? How does a specific purpose affect organization?
3. **Characteristics of the Reader(s).** Who is the audience? While the teacher is usually the implicit reader for every academic assignment, teachers usually have hypothetical readers in mind, too. As with purpose, detailing reader traits helps students focus, become motivated, gather and arrange information appropriately, select the tone and style, etc.
4. **Format and Physical Constraints.** When is the assignment due? When are drafts due? What form is it to be in (essay, lab report, editorial, etc.)? What would be a reasonable length? Must it be typed? Should all notes or drafts be submitted? What kind of documentation should be used?
5. **Process.** Have you explained the stages of writing and review that the student's writing will go through? Have you discussed particular prewriting, drafting, and/or revising activities that might be helpful?
6. **Resources.** Where in the text can the student seek help? What class discussions are relevant? May the students seek outside help from fellow students, authorities, and librarians? Is the student expected to consult secondary scholarship? If so, what kind(s)?
7. **Evaluation Criteria.** What will determine success or failure in completing this assignment? Will students have an opportunity to receive feedback before they submit the assignment for a grade?

## Sources

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Tarvers, Josephine Koster. "Designing Writing Assignments." *Teaching in Progress: Theories, Practices, and Scenarios*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1998. 92-99.

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