



# **Writing in the Disciplines: Practical Strategies for Effective Assignment Design**

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## Why Assignment Design Matters

In 2008, the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College surveyed 23,000 students in 82 randomly selected four-year institutions about writing practices and assignments. They found that the design of writing assignments themselves, more than the amount of writing assigned, was the most important factor for promoting deep learning (Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, and Paine, 2009).


# Paper #1

## Assignment


### Prompt:

- Explore the complexities of an issue; develop and support your own perspective. Possible topics: (1) Bilingual education in schools. (When funds are limited should money go to bilingual education or to other language/support programs?) or (2) Low-income student performance on standardized tests: family issue or test issue?


# Features of Effective Writing Assignments:

- **Clear Task:** What is the central task of the assignment? What are students supposed to do?
  - **Goals:** How is the assignment learning goals connected to your course objectives? What do I want my students to achieve?
  - **Audience:** Who's the audience?
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# Features of Effective Writing Assignments:

- **Genre:** What type of writing, length, style, organization, documentation, etc. is required? What are the discrete steps required to write in this genre? Consider providing models/samples.
  - **Evaluation Criteria:** How is the assignment being evaluated?
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# Features of Effective Writing Assignments:

- **Scaffolding:** Build a purposeful sequence of assignments that encourages writing as a process.
  - **Usability:** How can format, font, design of the assignment prompt promote ease of access for students?
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# Thinking Rhetorically

“When designing formal writing assignments, instructors should consider how variations in the rhetorical context—purpose, audience, genre—can create significant differences in students’ writing and thinking processes as well as in their final products” (John Bean, *Engaging Ideas*, 93).

# Analysis of Assignment Sheet

Using the criteria we have outlined, consider the strengths of the assignment. Try to read from the perspectives of both student and faculty. Are there any changes might you suggest for the assignment?



# Summary:

1. Clear central writing task
2. Helps achieve course learning goals
3. Engaging, relevant contexts
4. Specific audiences
5. Explicit genre and format requirements (length, documentation style, etc.)
6. Criteria by which work will be evaluated
7. Scaffolding, when possible (drafting, peer review, revision etc.)



Questions?

Key Points and Lingering  
Questions

## Works Cited

- Anderson, P., Anson, C., Gonyea, B., & Paine, C. (2009, July 19). *The consortium for the study of writing in college*. Paper presented at the Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas. The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

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