

Developing and Formatting a Writing Assignment

You will be more likely to get the papers you expect from students if you give them a written assignment that is well planned and carefully formatted. Students report that the most effective assignments are typically no longer than a page, but definitely longer than just a paragraph or even a sentence.

Learning Goals:

As you develop your assignment, ask yourself about your goals for giving the assignment. What will students gain by doing the assignment? How does the assignment further your course goals? How does it connect, in terms of content and writing skills, to assignments which have come before and will come after?

What do you need to tell students on the assignment sheet?

- **Task**

What is the student supposed to write about and why? Can you break the task down into manageable parts or steps? What format will be easiest for students to follow? (Students generally find bulleted directions easier to follow than paragraphs of directions.)

- **Goals**

Have you told students your goals for this assignment? Will students have a good sense of what they are being asked to produce and why?

- **Audience**

Are students writing just for you, the teacher? For another assumed audience? (Depending upon the level of the course, you might consider asking students to address their paper to you and to students at the same level as they are in the discipline. The dual audience helps them make decisions about information they might need to include rather than just assuming the teacher knows it all already.)

- **Format and due dates**

Explain the process to be followed, including due dates for drafts and revisions if applicable. State clearly the expected length and manuscript form. You may want to include other expectations, e.g., Use standard experimental report format.

- **Criteria for evaluation**

How will the final product be graded? What criteria do you need to give students? How much weight will be given to various parts of the paper? What are the criteria for an "A," a "B," and so on? Do you have sample "A" papers to show?

Final advice: Try doing at least one of your assignments yourself!