

What Makes a Good Writing Assignment?

Five Principles

As you think about making up writing assignments, use these five principles:

- Tie the writing task to specific pedagogical and course goals.
- Note rhetorical aspects of the task, i.e., audience, purpose, writing situation.
- Break down the task into manageable steps.
- Make all elements of the task clear.
- Include grading criteria on the assignment sheet.

Principle 1. Writing Should Meet Teaching Goals

Work backwards from what you hope the final drafts will look like:

- State your goals for the final product as clearly and concretely as possible.
- Determine what writing products will meet these goals.
- Note specific skills that will contribute to the final product.
- Sequence activities (reading, researching, writing) to build toward the final product.
 - **Library Tip:** For help with sequencing, check out our [guide to the six stages of research!](#)

Principle 2. Consider the Rhetorical Situation

Identify the audience you want students to write to as well as the particular genre or format for the final document and the larger context for the document. Set up your writing assignment so that the target audience is someone other than you. The teacher is not necessarily an audience that will motivate the best work on a writing task--connect them (even hypothetically) with the readers of their future professional settings.

- **Library Tip:** Be sure to [follow best practices](#) if you link to library resources as examples.

Principle 3. Break Down the Task into Manageable Steps

Think carefully about assignment sequence. Consider the importance of not overwhelming students (the Less is More approach). Scaffolded assignments help students reach a larger goal by asking them to collect resources in stages. A final stage requires that students transform each of the earlier stages in a final document. Sequenced assignments, on the other hand, each stand independently, but each task builds on particular skills and challenges to enable students to meet a larger set of goals.

- **Library Tip:** Your [liaison](#) or our [online tutorials](#) can provide short, scaffolded instruction.

Principle 4. Make the Assignment Clear to Students

Identify relevant intermediate assignments and activities, such as topic proposals or literature reviews for longer assignments, as well as providing information about relevant writing, research, and collaboration processes.

- **Library Tip:** Define any [library jargon](#) you use, and check out our [literature review guide](#).

Principle 5. Include Grading Criteria

In general, it is also advisable to list grading criteria on the assignment sheet. Making the assignment clear to students will help them better understand the scope and challenge of the assignment. It also is likely to produce better learning and performance.

- **Library Tip:** Send students to the [Writing Center](#) or [the library's guide](#) for help with citations.

Writing Prompt Checklist

Have I:

- Written the assignment in precise language that cannot be misunderstood?
- Identified course goals this writing task helps students meet?
- Identified the audience and purpose of the assignment?
- Explained all required sub-parts of the assignment (if any)?
- Pointed students toward appropriate prewriting activities and resources (Forsyth Library and the Writing Center)?
- Specified the format (including length, typed, cover sheet, size of paper, documentation, headings or sections, page layout)?
- Provided students with models or appropriate samples?
- Provided a schedule that encourages students to review each other's drafts and revise papers?
- Anticipated and explained any potential problems?
- Included a clearly visible a due date and any late work policy?
- Provided grading criteria on or alongside the assignment sheet?
- Clarified what percent of the course grade is based on the assignment?