Writing Assignment Design

Research in the field of Writing Studies has shown that writing abilities cannot be developed once (in a single class or following a single assignment, for instance) and that writing abilities rarely *automatically* transfer into new contexts. New kinds of writing demand new capabilities and new understandings, as well as reminders about common processes, resources, and expectations.

Writing assignments that are closely integrated into the learning goals of a course will support the development of student writing ability.

The basics:

- Assignment sheets of about one page are recommended. (Clearly organize longer assignments with sections and subheadings.)
- Include a description of the task and note how students will meet course learning goals through the writing task.
- Be sure to include due dates, page requirements, format, and criteria for a successful paper.
- Not all writing needs to be graded. Give students opportunities to write to discover, ask questions, and summarize key points.

As you think about the assignments you offer your students, it may also help to consider:

- Learning Outcomes for the Course or Major—Which skills do you and your colleagues most value at this point in a student's writing development?
  - How might you focus an assignment on one or two of those key aspects of learning?

- What is the Student Writer's Purpose?—What should the writer attempt to accomplish? How is this purpose related to prior/future assignments, or course goals?
  - Be as specific as possible. Pay special attention to the action words you use: analyze, define, research, question, argue, compile, etc.

- Audience—What reader is being addressed in the paper? The teacher? Readers of a particular publication or within a key community? How knowledgeable is this reader? Does this reader have a particular bias or expectation that the student needs to know about?

- Process—Will the project be written in stages? (If so, describe them.) Will the student be asked to revise following your feedback or the feedback of peers?

- If revision is required, how might the criteria for the draft differ from those of the final version?

- How will the assignment be graded?