

**Writing Assignment Guidelines**

1. Take some time to explain how students should use the prompts. Differentiate between a list of general topics to choose from, a list of possible prompts, and guiding questions to help them think of an argument.

2. Have a discussion about organization in class or have students send you a memo in which they explain their topic and potential method of organizing the paper.

3. Explain *how* you want the student to use source material.

4. Avoid any formatting in the prompt that might mislead students (Roman numerals, numbers, sequences, paragraph groupings). Students may interpret these literally or read more into them than you intended.

5. Detailed assignments usually intend to be clear and give students a full understanding of the professors’ expectations, ways to succeed, and pitfalls to avoid. However, sometimes such over-engineered assignments lead students to focus on accomplishing tasks, instead of on learning.

6. Explain to students why they should follow certain guidelines, like not using “I,” so that they understand their purpose, instead of thinking of them as arbitrary rules.

7. Make sure that your assignment guidelines reflect objectives (i.e., that they help students achieve the assignment’s objectives).

8. Remember that not all students think like a professor does. Overly engineered assignments tend to be very linear and formulaic and can limit students’ originality and creativity.

9. Provide “how to” samples, etc. as separate documents from the assignment (so that the assignment isn’t overwhelmingly long). Examine both professional and student models as an assignment; use the models to direct students' attention to notable features like in-depth analysis or a strong thesis.

10. Discuss different ways groups can research and write together: each student can be responsible for a different section, or group members can divide up labor differently, with some doing research and others doing writing.   
  
11. Have the groups determine each person's responsibility to the group: give the groups as much autonomy as they can handle. Explain that learning to work as a group is part of the assignment.  
  
12. Let students know they will be held accountable for their parts: each member's contribution to the group should be acknowledged.  
  
13. Hold the group responsible for progress reports that a) give you the opportunity for feedback and b) keep the group writing ongoing rather than stalling until deadline. This gives students time to overcome writing issues.

14. Carefully consider assignment language, and be specific: "analyze," "argue," "develop and support a thesis or claim," "respond to," and "reflect upon" are more direct than "discuss," "explore," "examine," and "consider."

15. Tie class discussions to the project whenever possible (this keeps the project in mind for students and offers opportunities for questions).

16. Allow students to submit questions anonymously; answer them publicly so that other students can benefit.

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