

**Teaching First-Year Writing
Assignment-Writing Workshop
September 2007**

Principles for Assignment Development

(drawn in part from Edward White's Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide, 3rd edition. New York: Bedford St. Martin, 1999).

1. Assignments should foreground discovery and revision
 - a. They should come from earlier assignments, readings, and class work.
 - b. They should rely on skills or ideas introduced previously—both within the unit and from the previous unit.
2. Assignments need to be written out and explained orally. Students need a chance to ask questions about the assignment when they receive it and also **after** they have begun to write on it, after the first draft.
3. Assignments should be presented to students several class meetings before the first draft is due so that students can see how readings, informal writing assignments and other class activities are all geared toward the assignment.
4. Assignments need to be located between complete freedom – “write an essay in response to the issues raised in this unit” – and such control that students are all expected to write the same essay – “Summarize Ed Jones’ article, including details of his six main points (pg 4-11) and then respond in 1-2 paragraphs where you explain why you do or do not agree with Jones’ point of view.”

Assignment Checklist. Ask yourself the following questions.

1. What are students supposed to do in this essay?
2. Is it interesting and appropriate for the course? How does it fit my/course objectives?
3. Could I answer this question in essay form?
4. Does this assignment come from the prior work we have completed?
5. Have I given enough information for students to complete the assignment?
6. Are the directions clear?
7. Have I provided examples for how to complete this assignment?

8. Audience: Do I want to define an audience other than the assumed professorial one?
9. Have I addressed subject, purpose, form and tone for this assignment?
10. Have I specified all my hidden requirements (i.e., MLA form, formal prose, rules about personal anecdotes, etc.)
11. Have I provided an appropriate schedule for prewriting, writing, revision and editing?
Have I specified and provided for these (or most of these) within the deadlines?

Does my assignment (or other documents) give students information about assessment—how it will be evaluated, what will constitute a successful

Isaacs 2007