



DESIGNING ASSIGNMENTS



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An effective assignment provides opportunities for students to practice, consult resources, learn from feedback, and refine their performances and products accordingly (Wiggins 1990). It is a proven scientific fact that assignments enhance



the creativity in students as they learn a lot more when they practice or read something on their own. So the basic reason of giving assignments is to provide a practice exposure and knowledge enhancement of a subject.

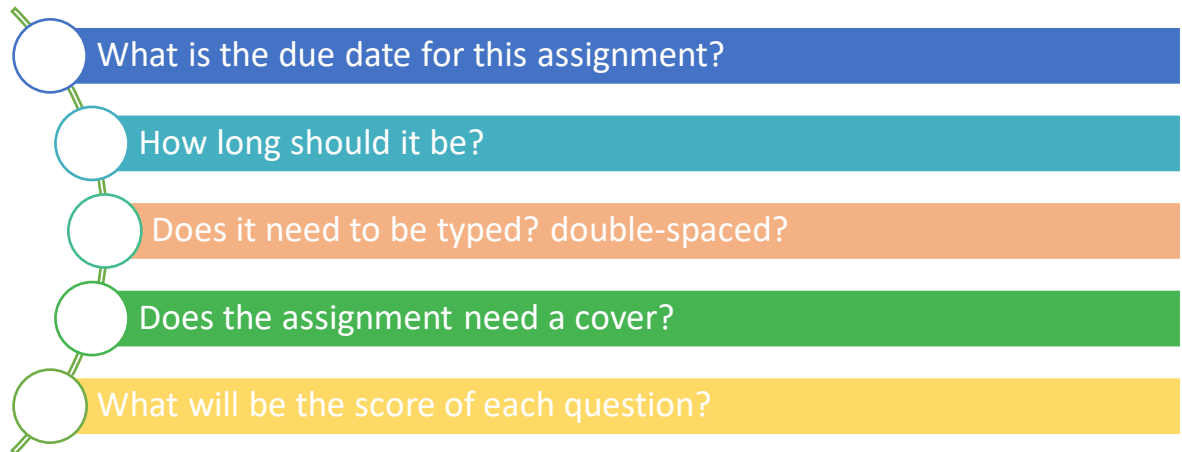
The instructor's design of the assignment often determines the success of student's responses to the assignment. You can ensure that your assignments will not only serve as effective assessment methods, but will also engage your students.

Here are some suggestions to create your assignments;

- **Identify assignment title.** Instead of using a title of 'Research Essay' or 'Final Project,' the title of the assignment should convey, in some way, the expectations of the assignment. Is this an argumentative essay, a research project on Social Media Trends or a Business Plan?
- **Provide detail in your assignment description.** According to Bean (1996), students frequently prefer some guiding constraints when completing assignments and that more detail within reason can lead to more successful student responses. Also, you can explain the purpose of the assignment. Being transparent with your students and explaining why you are asking them to complete a given assignment can ultimately help motivate them to complete the assignment more thoughtfully.



- **Specify the parameters.** If you have specific parameters in mind for the assignment (e.g., length, size, formatting, and APA citation style) you should be sure to specify them in your assignment description. Otherwise, students may misapply conventions and formats they learned in other courses that are not appropriate for yours. You can need to answer questions such as the following:



- **Use open-ended questions.** The most effective and challenging assignments focus on questions that lead students to thinking and explaining, rather than simple yes or no answers.
- **Do not ask too many questions in your assignment.** In an effort to challenge students, instructors often error in the other direction, asking more questions than students can reasonably address in a single assignment without losing focus.
- **Share examples or models.** You can provide both successful and unsuccessful models. These models could be provided by past students, or models you have created yourself. If you have examples and models that you can share with students, take the opportunity to pass them out and discuss them in class.



- **Do not expect or suggest that there is an “ideal” response to the assignment.** A common error for instructors is to dictate content of an assignment too rigidly, or to imply that there is a single correct response or a specific conclusion to reach, either explicitly or implicitly (Flaxman, 2005). Likewise, avoid assignments that simply need repetition (Miller, 2007). Again, the best assignments encourage students to participate in critical thinking rather than just repeating lectures or readings.
- **Do not provide vague or confusing commands.** Do students know what you mean when they are asked to “examine” or “discuss” a topic? Return to what you determined about your students' experiences and levels to help you decide what directions will make the most sense to them and what will require more explanation or guidance.
- **Double-check alignment.** Return to your learning objectives after constructing your assignments to ensure that there is still a reasonable match between what you want students to learn and what you are asking them to complete. If you notice a mismatch, you need to modify either the assignments or the learning objectives.
- **Provide appropriate available resources.** Giving information about various sources can help them get started on the right track on their own such as specific journals or books, or even sections of textbook, or providing them with lists of research ideas or links to acceptable websites.
- **Determine the evaluation criteria and create a rubric.** To ensure equitable and consistent grading of assignments across students, make transparent the criteria you will use to evaluate student work. The criteria should focus on the knowledge and skills that are central to the assignment. Build on the criteria identified, create a rubric that makes explicit the expectations of deliverables and share this rubric with your students so they can use it as they work on the assignment.



- **Ask for evaluative feedback from students.** Find out what worked well, what could be improved, where students had the most difficulty, and how you can better facilitate the process next time.

Here's a checklist for writing assignments:

Checklist

- Do the instructions explain the purpose(s) of the assignment?
- Does the assignment fit the course objectives?
- Are there any special instructions, such as use of citation format, kinds of headings and page layout? If so, are these clearly stated?
- Is the due date clearly visible? (Are late assignments accepted? If so, is it stated how many points will be lost?)
- Have you created a checklist or rubric that indicates the expectations of the grading levels? Have you decided what an A, B, C, D and F “looks like”?
- Are the grading criteria spelled out as specifically as possible? How much does content count? Organization? Writing skills? One grade or separate grades on form and content?
- Is there sample assignments or models (strong, average, and weak) that you can show the students?
- What readings, reference materials, and technologies are they expected to use?
- Can students collaborate with others? If so, to what extent?





References

Bean, J.C. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Flaxman, R. (2005). Creating meaningful writing assignments. *The Teaching Exchange*.

Miller, H. (2007). Designing effective writing assignments. *Teaching with Writing*. University of Minnesota Center for Writing. <https://wac.umn.edu/tww-program/teaching-resources/designing-effective-writing-assignments>

Wiggins, Grant (1990). [The Case for Authentic Assessment](#). *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 2(2).

Creating Assignments, University of Carnegie Mellon, Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation

<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assesslearning/creatingassignments.html>

Assignment Planning Guide and Questions, Brigham Young University, Center for Teaching and Learning.

<https://ctl-staging.byu.edu/tip/assignment-planning-guide-and-questions>

Assignment Design: Checklist, University of Waterloo, Centre for Teaching Excellence

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/assignment-design/assignment-design-checklist>

Teaching Guide: Designing Writing Assignments, Colorado State University.

<https://writing.colostate.edu/teaching/guide.cfm?guideid=101>



How Do I Create Meaningful and Effective Assignments? Prepared by Allison Boye, Teaching, Learning and Professional Development Center, Texas Tech University.

https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/Resources/Teaching_resources/TLPDC_teaching_resources/CreatingEffectiveAssignments.php

Designing Assignment for Learning, Columbia University. Center for Teaching and Learning

<https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/teaching-with-technology/teaching-online/designing-assignments/>

Further Reading and Resources

- [Checklist for Designing a Transparent Assignment](#)
- [Resources for Teachers: Creating Writing Assignments](#)
- [Brief Guide to Designing Essay Assignments by Gordon Harvey, Harvard College Writing Program.](#)
- [Designing Assignments, Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning.](#)