Designing Effective Assignments Workshop Handout

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
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EXAMPLE - Take-Home Final Exam Essay: Turkey and the European Union

Discuss the controversy over Turkey's membership in the European Union. What are the potential benefits for Turkey? For the European Union? Beyond Europe?
What are the arguments for and against membership? Who's making these arguments and why? What are the economic implications? Papers must be typed, double-spaced and stapled. Sources must be cited, using Chicago style. You must include a list of Works Cited.
This assignment represents the equivalent of a final exam. Therefore, I expect you to put considerable time and energy into it. Papers should be focused, make an argument, and draw on course materials. I want to see evidence of thinking. I will reward originality. Points will be deducted for grammatical and syntactical errors. It's a good idea to write more than one draft of your assignment. If you need extra help, you can get it in the Writing Center. I recommend this strongly.

Writing to Learn: A Focus on Critical Thinking Skills (Bean, 2011, pp. 5)
1. Critical thinking is a learnable skill
2. Problems, questions, & issues are a point of entry into subject matter & can motivate inquiry
3. Balance challenges to think critically with your support for students
4. Courses should be centered around assignments instead of texts/lectures
5. Students need to develop and justify ideas in writing
6. Collaboration can enhance learning & thinking
7. Critical thinking & problem solving enhance metacognitive skills
8. Pay attention to students' developmental needs: make standards explicit in addition to how to achieve them

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Scaffolding

What is Scaffolding?
- Implementing multiple small informal writing assignments (ungraded or minimal points) that build up to a more formal high-stakes (graded) project in a course.
- Provides "levels" to your large assignments in that it allows for students to comprehend the information and practice the skills needed to do well before the big project/paper.

Methods of Informal Writing Assignments
1. A question provided at the beginning of class can serve to review material from the previous session, verify completion of the day's assigned reading, or encourage speculation on a new topic to prime in-class discussion.

2. Focused writing during the class period can provide a forum to cool a heated discussion, to stimulate ideas when discussion is lagging, or to summarize (or express confusion about) challenging new information.

3. A dual-entry notebook can promote the pairing of observation and analysis. The student may observe visual information (such as a lab experiment or a work of art), research presented in a scholarly article, etc. on one side of the page. The observation would then be paired with mental process on the other side of the page in the form of a hypothesis regarding the reason for the observed phenomenon or an argument for or against the accuracy of the presented information based on ideas read elsewhere or presented in class.

4. Creative writing such as imagined dialogues between writers, researchers, historical figures, characters, etc. can provide a light-hearted way of engaging deeply with course content.

Misconceptions about Assignment Focused Learning (Bean, 2011, pp. 11-13)

1. **Emphasizing writing in a course will take away from content**
   - Content delivered through assignments, rather than lectures
   - Writing aids students in learning content
2. **Writing assignments are unsuitable in non-English courses**
   - Writing helps students understand and apply quantitative and theoretical problems
3. **"Adding more writing to my course will bury me in paper grading"**
   - Informal writing doesn't need to be graded
   - Encouraging student revision decreases final grading time and instructor frustration
4. **"I am not knowledgeable enough about grammar to help students with their writing"**
   - Focus on thought & writing processes rather than grammatical details
   - If you're not going to grade for grammar, you don't need to teach grammar
   - In assessments and feedback, instructors can focus on ideas and clarity over grammar

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Assignment Handout Checklist
- ✓ Do students know what they need to do? Is the task clear?
- ✓ Do students know what they're being graded for?
- ✓ Do my students know which essay format they are being asked to compose? An argumentative essay? A compare/contrast essay? An analysis? A proposal? A research paper? And have I confirmed that they know how to write that format?
- ✓ Have I expressed who the intended audience is for this paper?
- ✓ Have I listed the assignment requirements? Length? Deadlines? Reference-style and formatting? Font, margins, title page, bibliography?
- ✓ Have I expressed the acceptable and minimum number of sources (e.g.: a minimum of 5 articles from scholarly journals)?
- ✓ Have I stressed the importance of proofreading? (peer evaluation can be helpful.)
- ✓ Has class material prepared students for this assignment?