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**Effective Writing Assignments: Writing Tutor Feedback to Faculty**

Based on their experience as student writers and as peer reviewers for other students, writing tutors offer the following suggestions for effective writing assignments, especially for lower-level classes.

**The best assignments communicate clear expectations for the assignment (topic, format, ...) but allow students the flexibility to explore ideas and discover insights.**

**SUGGESTIONS**

- Model clear writing by composing clear assignments. Give particular attention to how you compose the assignment for the first paper.
- Clearly identify your goals for the assignment. For example, make clear if you expect students to **argue** a claim—to take a position on a topic—or to **explain** aspects of the topic.
- **Allow for discussion** of the assignment—in class, office hours, or email. The best assignments arise out of larger conversation between you and your students.
- Specify the assignment **audience**; a paper written to other students in the class differs from a paper written for readers not in the class.
- Share good or poor responses to the assignment (save examples when grading).
- Communicate grading criteria and basic expectations for the assignment: length, documentation method, appropriate sources, ....

**CAUTIONS**

- A **string of questions** that appear to be of equal importance can be confusing. Students aren't always able to separate key questions from sub-questions; some students may use a list of questions as an excuse to avoid formulating a thesis statement. Related to this point: Students need to know how to handle **sub-questions**. Is their purpose to stimulate thinking but students do not need to address them? Or will students lose points if they fail to address them?
- If you give 'design your own topic' assignments, have students focus their topics before writing—preferably by clearing topics with you.
- Avoid asking students to write for a specific publication or audience that may be unfamiliar to them (e.g., write an article for *Esquire*). Or—provide a model of what you are looking for.
- Avoid **dictating a specific structure**. Students will learn more about the topic and their composing process, and will think more independently, if you let them discover a structure.
- Rather than specifying a **precise word count**, suggest a lower/upper word or page limit. Precise counts may distract from the goals of the assignment and shut off the thinking at an important point. A writer's best insights often occur late in the first draft.