EFFECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Designing Effective Assignment Sheets

The effectiveness of an assignment sheet will vary with the nature and purpose of the task, but all assignment sheets need to give students the information they need to understand the assignment.

To do that, writing assignment sheets should include an explanation of Audience, Purpose, Occasion, Recommended Strategies, Grading Criteria, and other details. Research on writing assignments suggests that students respond most favorably to assignments that clearly outline these elements, resemble the kinds of writing they might do in the workplace, and allow them to do something with their knowledge other than merely regurgitate it.

AUDIENCE: To Whom Are You Writing?

Decide to what extent you will define the audience for students based on your goals for the assignment. The more specifically you define the audience, the more you constrain or focus the final product. Consider the following audience characteristics: age, ethnicity, gender, education, religion, political affiliation, position within an organization, knowledge of subject, opinion/feelings toward subject.

PURPOSE: What Do You Hope This Piece Of Writing Will Accomplish?

Students need to know the key verb or verbs—the goal of the piece of writing. The more specifically you can state that goal, the more likely they will be able to meet your expectations. Some common purposes for writing in the workplace include the following—informing,

requesting, explaining, persuading, proposing,problem defining, problem solving, documenting, evaluating.

Example Of A Well-Defined Purpose:
Describe an employee's strengths and weaknesses to support a year-end evaluation.

OCCASION: Why Are You Writing To/For This Audience At This Time?

Defining an occasion for a piece of writing completes the description of a context. By understanding a situation that generates a piece of writing, students get a sense of how writing might occur in the "real world." Think about situations that might generate a piece of writing by imagining day-to-day communication in the workplace. Some examples include the following:

- A complaint from a customer
- A letter of application
- Support documents to be shipped with a product
- Grant proposals
- An upcoming meeting
- Announcing a promotion
- Yearly evaluations
- A marketing campaign
- Updating policies and procedures
- Documenting research processes
- A progress report

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES: Process Tips

Suggest ways to approach the task. Breaking a large, complex task into smaller, more manageable units can help, and may also be an effective in-class, student-directed activity. Since approaches to tasks depend on individual learning styles, encourage students to

experiment so they find what works best for them. Here's an example of process tips for an abstract:

- Read the article several times and separate it into stages of thought
- Write a one-sentence summary of each stage of thought and of the main claim
- List the idea transitions that link those stages of thought

GRADING CRITERIA

Be sure students know your expectations, and how they will be graded. Since students will want to know what constitutes an A paper, a C paper, and an F paper, you may want to give detailed descriptions of a high, middle, and lower-range paper. Tell them on what criteria you will grade and how much weight those criteria have. Consider using a rubric. See links to Grading Models, Holistic Grading, Portfolio Grading, and Reduce Grading Stress for examples and suggestions.

Details: The number, type, and variety of sources, preferred style/format for documentation and organization, length, and due date(s).