

# Writing Assignment & Rubric Design

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# Our plan for this session:

- Identify an assignment to improve
- Discuss options for rubrics
- Discuss assignment sheets
- Takeaways and questions

# Let's get started.

Think of a specific assignment you'd like to create for a class. Is the assignment new, or is it one you'd like to update? Is the class new to you, or is it one you've taught many times before?

When you have your assignment in mind, turn to a neighbor, introduce yourself (including your department), and briefly discuss the class and assignment you are thinking about.

# Now, let's brainstorm.

- **What exactly** do you want students to do in this assignment?
- **Why** do you want the students to do this?

Jot down a few ideas in response to each question - they'll help as we move through the rest of today.

# Developing assignment sheets:

**What** do we need to include in an assignment sheet to ensure that students *can* do what we want them to do?

# Common assignment sheet components, pt. 1:

- **Front Matter:** Due dates, value, format requirements, assignment title, word/page length
- **Description:** Explain the purpose, audience, and genre students are being asked to develop - and why this assignment is an important learning experience. It is helpful to connect the specific assignment to a more general outcome, like professionalization, learning, critical thinking, or scholarly development.
- **Instructions:** Is there an order of operations you'd like students to undertake in this assignment (as they plan, research, draft, and revise)? If so, enumerate those steps.

# Common assignment sheet components, pt. 2:

- **Requirements:** Is there anything you want to require students to do in this assignment? For example, use a certain citation style, have a certain length, include a certain number or type of sources, summarize a certain text, etc? Requirements should be used when students *must* do something to learn what you're asking them to learn (grounded in the assignment's purpose).
- **Assessment and Grading:** How will the submission be assessed?

# Think about your instructions' *usability*.

One potentially helpful way to think about this is from the perspective of usability (a common practice in website design, technical writing, etc.). Using the assignment sheet, can students

- **Find** the information they need to complete the assignment?
- **Understand** the information when they find it?
- **Use** the information to complete the assignment?



# Let's practice.

Going back to your earlier brainstorming, what are some specific things students might need to know so they can accomplish the goals of this assignment? Identify 3-4 critical details (though there certainly might be more!).

What jargon might potentially confuse students? Identify 2-3 words/phrases (and, if there's time, how you might clarify that jargon).

# Sample assignment sheets:

- [100-Level, Informal Creative Assignment](#)
- [300-Level, Formal Collaborative Research Assignment](#)
- [400-Level, Formal Analysis Assignment](#)

# Common rubric pitfalls:

- Learning doesn't occur if you don't slow down and teach the features you grade (e.g., “clarity and concision” might mean different things in different fields!)
- Rubrics can lead to threat-based grading – “Make sure you follow the rubric. I'm gonna take off a lot for...” (e.g., APA).
- Rubrics can be impersonal and mechanistic (a justification for the grade you put on the paper, not related to what you taught).

# Common rubric pitfalls:

- Using one general, all-purpose rubric for all assignments doesn't work as well as a genre-specific rubric.
- It's easy to include jargon that's perfectly clear to an academic, but less so to a student (e.g., “put sources into conversation with each other”).

## **A key takeaway:**

*The writing classroom should be focused on revision. Good rubrics center on opportunities for revision, rather than some part of the student's work being right or wrong.*

# Sample rubrics:

- Informal Writing Rubric
- Analytic Rubric
- Holistic (Narrative) Rubric

# Questions? Takeaways?

Do you have any questions for us?

If not, feel free to share one thing that you'll take away from today's session.