

Meaningful Assignments in Our Contexts

Assignment at a Glance:

1. Overview: Develop a formal writing assignment for students of your choice. Write a reflection in the genre of a letter that draws connections between the assignments and our readings.
2. Due Date: At the end of week 7 (in a 15-week course)
3. Length: Assignment should be no more than 3 pages single-spaced; reflection should be no more than 6 pages double-spaced.
4. Format: Please format according to the rules of MLA 8 (the most recent MLA edition). Information on this format can be found on the [Purdue Owl](#).
5. Submission: Please submit the paper as a Word document or PDF to Canvas (Module Two, Week Seven)
6. Time: I expect this writing and revising this essay will take 12-15 hours, spread over two weeks.

Course Learning Objectives / Why do this assignment?

This assignment is designed as the culminating activity of the first two modules of the course, during which we've discussed what kind of writing undergraduate students find most meaningful, what kind of assignments are typically found across the curriculum, and what role first-year writing plays in a student's academic trajectory. Specifically, this assignment was designed to address course learning goals 2 and 3, copied below:

- Explain several theoretical issues associated with writing in the university, with regards to both writing across the curriculum and first-year writing.
- Compose original assignment prompts that are aligned with learning outcomes for first-year writing courses or other relevant contexts, including guidelines for assessment.

By engaging with this assignment, you will be actively synthesizing and applying the material we've read so far, which will also be helpful for the work that we will do the second half of the course.

Introduction to the Assignment

Designing compelling and clear assignments prompts can be a true challenge, especially ones that will lead to the kind of meaningful writing we have been exploring in this class. This assignment invites you to address that challenge. To complete this task, you will write (or revise) one or two formal and wholly original assignment prompt(s). I borrow the term "formal" from John Bean, who explains that formal assignments that "call for finished prose" and usually "require multiple drafts" (89).

You are encouraged to tailor your assignment prompt(s) to your context. You might revise prompts that already exist. Alternatively, you can design new prompts for classes you hope to teach, such as first-year writing. Whatever approach you take, your response to this assignment will have two components: the assignment sheet(s) and the reflection.

The Assignment Sheet Scenario

Write the assignment sheet to an imagined audience of students. You are free to format the prompt in any manner that you wish. You may use this assignment sheet as a model. There are also sample assignment sheets in the Bean excerpt (page 97-101), as well as our other readings

from this term. You can also find many examples online, especially on the journal *Prompt* (supplemental reading for week four). The work you submit for this task should be original. Your assignment should be tailored to the students you are addressing in as much detail as seems realistic to you.

If you are not teaching, it may seem difficult to design assignments for an imagined group of students. In this case, consider designing an assignment for a generic first-year writing class that aligns with the WPA Outcomes for First-Year Composition (reviewed during week one) If you want to incorporate readings into your assignment, you may imagine that you are using the freely available *Writing Spaces* as your textbook, or you may incorporate any readings/media of your choice.

Your assignment sheet should, as Bean indicates, explain the process by which papers will be developed, as well as a definition of the task. Finally, there should be clear explanations of writing expectations (see Bean 97). Although it is not required, consider developing a rubric to make your assessment criteria clear for students.

The Reflection Scenario

Choose a recipient of a letter that draws connections between your assignment prompt and the scholarship we've read this term.

Option #1: A sponsor or administrator

Imagine an administrator or financial sponsor you think would be interested in the writing you've produced. Your sponsor is a sympathetic and invested audience, however she doesn't know much about research in writing studies. Ideally you can imagine an actual administrator you know and use those details to shape your response.

Use this letter as a space to explain to the sponsor why you structured the assignment as you did. How did research in the field of writing studies (represented by readings we've done so far) inform your curricular decisions? Why do you expect that this assignment prompt will be effective for the students you are teaching? Be specific and incorporate short quotations and paraphrases from our texts.

Further, as this sponsor knew you before you designed the assignment sheet, you might comment on how the assignment sheet is similar or different from assignments that you've produced in the past. Panning back, would you say that the opportunity to engage with colleagues and read relevant research in the field is impacting your teaching beyond the creation of the attached assignment? If so, how?

Option #2: A colleague

Imagine a colleague that you think would be interested in the writing assignments you've produced. You should also imagine a particular reason for addressing the colleague. I encourage you to imagine a colleague you actually know and use those details to shape your response. Otherwise, here are a few options:

- A colleague from another department is interested in moving beyond informational writing assignments. He wonders if such a thing would be valuable to students, and how he might prepare such assignments. Using your assignments and our readings, make a case for meaningful writing assignments and introduce him to writing across the curriculum.

- A colleague in your department who is thinking about pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Rhetoric and Composition from but is uncertain that she will learn anything new. Explain how your own praxis, and particularly this assignment sheet, has been informed by the course.

In each case (or one you imagine), you have slightly different purposes in presenting your work to the colleague, and your presentation of the content would be shaped by your purpose. But, as in the case with the sponsor in option #1, your ultimate goal is to unpack the decisions that you made in designing the assignment prompts, to draw connections between those decisions and the wider research we've engaged so far, and to make a "big picture" argument about the impact of this course for on your praxis—and, by extension, the potential it has to positively impact those with whom you work.

Option #3: A reluctant student

You have a student who is bright but unmotivated to complete the assignment(s) that you've designed. Write him a letter, explaining what your hopes are for this assignment, and how you designed it with student engagement and practical applications in mind. Why should he care about this work? How will it benefit him as he continues through his educational career? What's so significant about writing, anyway?

If you choose Option #3, you might shift your focus from how you've developed as a practitioner to the practical role that writing and critical thinking play in college and beyond, as demonstrated by some of the readings we've completed thus far into the term. You also might want to give the student a "pep talk" about how to engage writing assignments so that they can be as meaningful as possible (drawing, again, from our readings thus far).

You are also welcome to design a scenario of your own. Please run it by me in a conference, just so that I'm aware of what you are thinking. It would be especially neat if you were able to share these documents with an audience beyond this class, including principals, administrators, teachers, or students.

Drafting Plan

Introducing the assignment (beginning week 6)

Available on our Canvas site, please find this assignment prompt, accompanied by optional supplemental readings from Bean about developing formal assignment prompts. There are also four samples of excellent student work from past classes, as well as two introductory videos from me (one introducing the assignment; another walking through the student samples).

Drafting and Peer Review (week 6)

We will post partial drafts of our assignment prompts and reflective letters at the end of week 6. These drafts can be as detailed or as general as you would like. We will have an opportunity to ask for the kind of feedback we'd like at this stage. You will receive feedback from a peer and from me. You can also sign-up for an optional conference with me, which can take place by phone or video chat the following week.

Revising and Finishing (week 7)

Optional conferences will take place during this week. Final drafts of this assignment will be due on Sunday, at the very end of the week. There will be no other writing or responding for the week.

Evaluation Criteria:

Assignment Sheet (135 points)	The assignment sheet is clear and easy to follow. The writing tasks are well described and suited for the proposed student audience. The assignment goals or objectives are identified, the process of drafting is outlined, and evaluation criteria are clearly explained. The assignment sheet is wholly original to the writer.
Creative Reflection (135 points)	The activity or assignment connects in clear ways to the readings we've done in class. The writer quotes directly from the readings and shows how they have informed the instructional design. The writer identifies and addresses an audience who has a stake in assignment design and teaching (sponsor, colleague, student) and shapes the content for that audience. In short, the writer considers how taking this course can/will ultimately improve their teaching and/or student learning.
Format and mechanics (30 points)	The essay is readable, follows the conventions of standard written English, and all sources are cited using MLA 8.

Questions?

Contact me using the inbox feature on Canvas. I'll check there daily. I'm here to support your success in this course!