



Cornerstone Guide to Designing Essay Assignments*

1. As you design an essay assignment, please consider the following:

- **Think creatively.** Develop a question that proposes writing that you would *want* to read and that students would *want* to produce on topics relevant and interesting.
- **Lesson learned.** Keep the Learning Outcomes in mind, by asking yourself, what Learning Outcomes will your students demonstrate by writing this paper?
- **Audience.** To what audience should they imagine themselves writing?
- **Key words.** What do the key words in my instructions mean to students (e.g. *analyze, argue, critique, explore, evidence, support*)?
- **Evidence.** What form will evidence take in this paper (e.g. block quotations? paraphrase? graphs or charts?). What documentation style should they use and should their bibliography be annotated?

2. Take time in class to prepare students to succeed at writing

- Discuss the assignment in class so students can see that you take it seriously, so they can ask questions about it, and so they can have it in mind as they read and discussion the transformative texts.
- Speak to what you mean by the analytic vocabulary used in your assignment.
- Speak to how they can get started on this assignment. Should they do research and where should they look for sources?
- Have students practice the key tasks in the assignment in class discussions or in informal writing they do in before or after discussions.
- Present writing samples that successfully demonstrate the criteria of the assignment.
- Speak to the issue of plagiarism (what the temptations might be, how to avoid risks)



3. Build in the process of writing

- Smaller assignments should prepare for larger ones later.
- Students should do some thinking and writing before they write a draft and receive feedback (even if only a response to a proposal or thesis statement).
- For larger papers, students should submit drafts and receive feedback.
- If possible, meet with students individually about their writing. Nothing inspires them more than feeling that you care about their work and development.
- Students should reflect on their own writing in brief cover letters attached to drafts and revisions (these may also ask students to perform certain checks on what they have written before submitting).
- Have clear and firm policies about late work

*Loosely adapted from the “Harvard Guide to Responding to Student Writing,” Harvard Writing Project Brief Guide Series, with consultation from Harry Denny, Purdue Writing Lab.

