10 Guidelines for Making Writing Assignments

Announcing the Assignment

1. Announce the date of first and final drafts in the course syllabus, with an indication of who will respond to first drafts (i.e., peer groups, peer, TA, instructor).

2. Prepare a handout for each assignment and distribute it when you feel students should begin work on the paper.

3. On the handout, specify topic, the type of paper you expect (e.g., report, research review, argument) and the purpose of the assignment. Also tell the students why you want them to do it.

4. Think about breaking the assignment into several steps. For example, if students are completing a research proposal, ask them to submit a literature review and statement of the problem their research will address before they write the proposal.

5. Specify the audience. Students’ classmates? Other group or person? You as reader and collaborator? You as examiner? Will your role change with successive drafts? (Tell them if it will).

6. Provide, if possible, criteria you will use in responding to first draft and in grading the final draft. (The criteria could be slightly different for each draft.) You might, for example, want to stress the importance of form and mechanics more on the final draft than on the first.

7. Occasionally do an assignment yourself. You will have a clearer notion of the steps required to complete the assignment and will be better able to advise the students on the process of doing it.

8. Use part of a class period to discuss the assignment and answer questions students might have.

9. Students appreciate seeing a model of the type of completed assignment you will expect. Save papers from previous classes that you might share with them.

10. Take some class time for small group activity to encourage discussion and the generation of ideas for the paper. Students might come to class with a brief description of their proposed paper and share this in groups before working further on it.

Adapted from Moss, A. & Holder, C. (1988). *Improving Student Writing*. Pomona: California State University. GEH/3-93