CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD ASSIGNMENT

Makes the purpose clear.

What are the intellectual activities that the student should engage in? Close textual analysis? Historical or philosophical analysis? Description? Argumentation? Problem-Solution? Comparison? Summary?

Makes the audience clear.

Experts (e.g., professors), lay persons, peers? What is the rhetorical stance of the student writing to an expert?

Breaks up the process for students (e.g., typical steps in a critique).

Identification of specific items Interpretation of items Generalizations or synthesis of several arguments Evaluation of arguments

Top-down or bottom-up? Start with generalization and move to the particular or vice versa?

Builds in motivation.

Is there a way to make the work personally rewarding to the individual student? Do you want their personal point of view? Do you care why this research was important to them? Do you allow choices in topics? What is the appropriate point of view for a student to take?

Avoids mindless regurgitation.

Students need to learn how to use and cite others’ ideas without relying on others for the structure of their essay. What kinds of assignment will require this kind of personal organization, rather than simply a string of quotes?

Asks for evidence, reasons, support.

This seems self evident, but saying it repeatedly is important. Build it into the description of your assignment.

Describes appropriate format and documentation style.

Suggest your preferred style manual. Most students have been exposed to general ones, but they need to understand the requirements of different fields.

Provides models, as appropriate.
Sample texts, old papers, one model paper done together in class.