GOALS OF A WRITING ASSIGNMENT

There are at least two major goals for writing assignments:

— to help students learn the material in the course;
— to evaluate how well students have learned that material.

The kind of writing assignment that you give depends in part upon the goal for that assignment. You will also, of course, give assignments with mixed goals, although one goal will usually be predominant.

Writing Assignments That Help Students Learn

These assignments can be a part of how you help students to master the material in your course. They can also play an important part in the students' mastery of your discipline, by helping students to acquire the "language" of that discipline. They offer students the chance to use the concepts, analytical moves, and vocabulary that other writers in the field regularly use. Writing is an important way for students to become "socialized" into academic disciplines.

These kinds of assignments more readily depart from the traditional term paper; they can include, for example, journals or informal writing.

Writing Assignments That Evaluate What Students Have Learned

These assignments are more familiar to most of us; they include, for example, the traditional term paper. They evaluate how well students can speak the "language" of a discipline—that is, use its concepts, analytical moves, and vocabulary. A student's ability to write in a discipline is often an important measure of the student's mastery of that discipline.

Nevertheless, students are almost always still learning the language of the discipline when they write within it. For that reason, even assignments whose primary goal is to evaluate can still include help with the process of arriving at the final written product.