

FOCUS ON WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

IT'S ALL ABOUT DESIGN

PRESENTERS: WRITING LEARNING SPECIALISTS
DJANE FLORES-KAGAN* AND *WENDY RIDER



GOOD DESIGN IS ALL AROUND US





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GOOD DESIGN STARTS WITH AN IDEA OR OBJECTIVE IN MIND



I feel a need for speed.....



and comfort.

**GOOD DESIGN IS UNIFIED AND
INTERESTING TO LOOK AT**



THE DESIGN OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: WHY IT MATTERS

Aids learning and understanding

Enhances thought processes

Encourages student independence

Gets the results you want



WRITING: THE LAST LANGUAGE SKILL WE LEARN



performance based



Design related to courses and assignments: What does it involve?

GRAND DESIGN

Department Standards

Course Outlines

Curriculum/course
content/pedagogy

Assessment

Student Learning
Outcomes (SLOs)

PRODUCT DESIGN

Assignments

Heuristics (underlying thought processes)

Bloom's Taxonomy/Critical
Thinking Skills

Discipline-specific conventions
and pedagogy

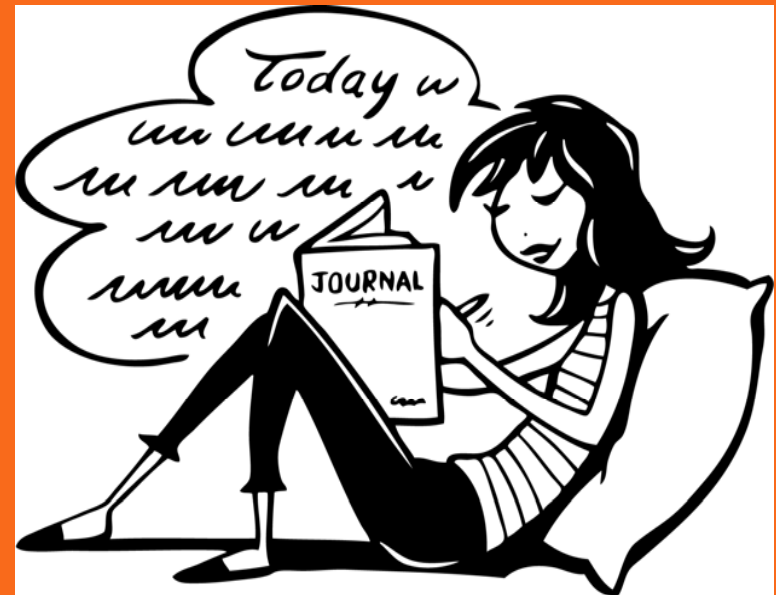
Evaluation

GENRE THEORY

Genre (as a composition term): “a mode of written communication that shares characteristics (linguistic & rhetorical) as dictated by social convention” (108).

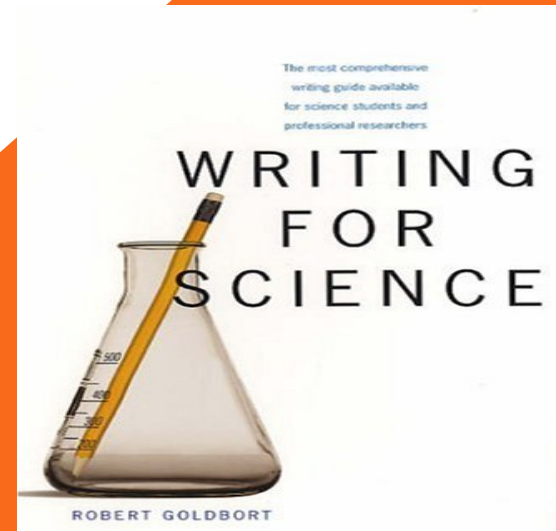
Examples:

- letter of application
 - abstract
 - essay
 - research paper
- and more....



WAC and WID

The Writing Process



“I think that learning to write well is not discipline specific.”

Coe College Professor of Mathematics

“Basically, we are trying to teach them how to write for the discipline as opposed to just writing for writing’s sake.”

Coe College Professor of Biology

**Writing assignments:
a performance oriented, text genre
Dr. Irene Clark, Cal State Northridge**



**Dr. Pennebaker's
Basic Writing Assignment**

Over the next four days, write about your deepest emotions and thoughts about the emotional upheaval that has been influencing your life the most. In your writing, really let go and explore the event and how it has affected you. You might tie this experience to your childhood, your relationship with your parents, people you have loved or love now, or even your career. Write continuously for 20 minutes.

- presumably, performer or student can understand seemingly explicit cues about format, language, and style (genre familiarity)
- implicit assumptions re: performance (genre familiarity)
- constructing an acceptable response is at stake (little or no genre familiarity)

GROUP ACTIVITY: READ A WRITING ASSIGNMENT AND BE PREPARED TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW

1. What cues/signals does the instructor give regarding format/arrangement of the assignment?
2. What cues/signals does the instructor give regarding the use of language?
3. What cues/signals does the instructor give regarding style/distinctive way of writing?
4. What is implied in this writing assignment?



Many college students

- have little understanding of the “situation” the writing assignment intends them to address
- read assignments without understanding the performance expected of them
- are unfamiliar with the community/ audience toward which their essays should be addressed
- may be non-specialists in the genre
- may misinterpret the written instructions
- may not be aware that they are expected to play a role

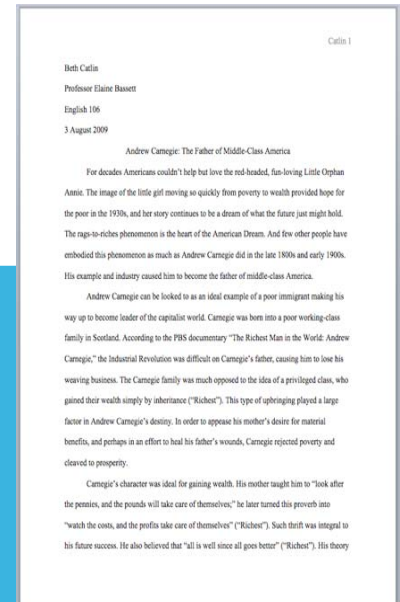
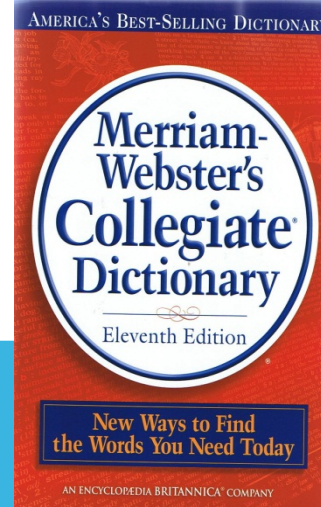
Dr. Irene Clark



• do not think of themselves as scholars (DFK)

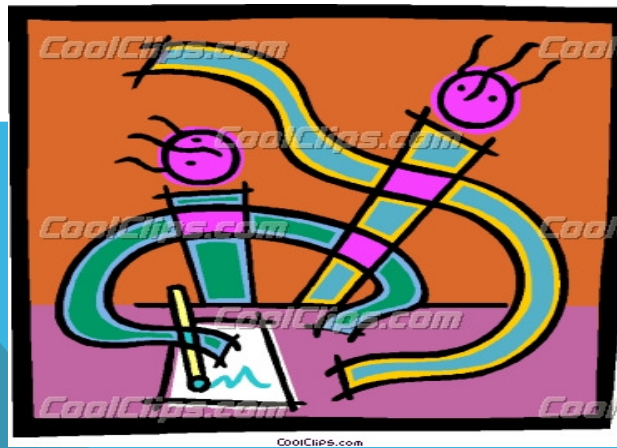
What instructors can do to raise student awareness of performance, according to Dr. Irene Clark

- Avoid writing prompts that ask too many questions
- Make implicit assumptions explicit
- Define terms
- Provide sample papers



What instructors can do to raise student awareness of performance (continued)

- Call attention to the use of technical language that may seem familiar but which has a specialized meaning within the genre
- Discuss purpose, format, audience, and the role the writer must assume
- Compare the essay genre to other genres with which they might be more familiar



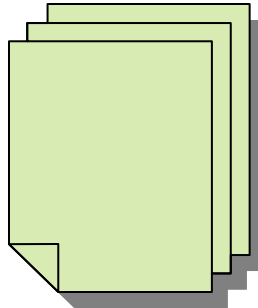
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS CAN BE FORMAL AND INFORMAL

Examples

Abstract
Annotated Bibliography

Essay
Essay Exam

Lab Report
Proposal
Research Paper

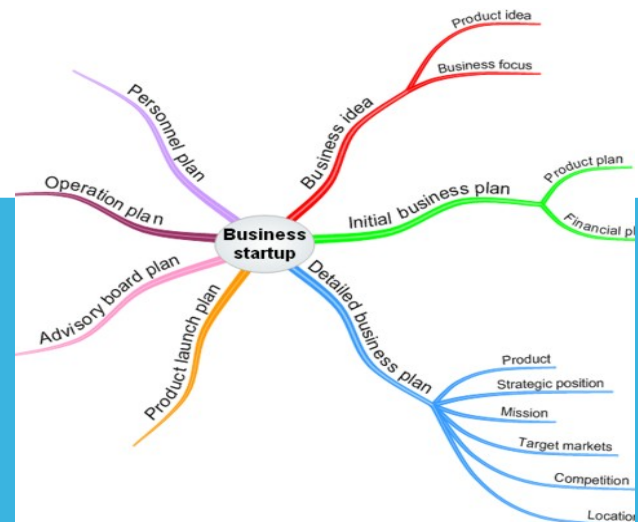
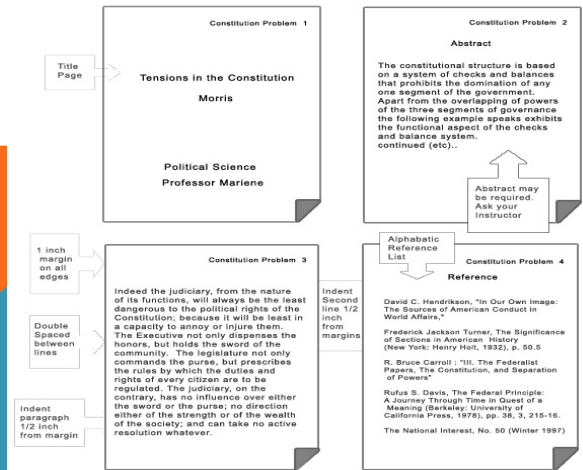


Examples

Free Writing
Mind Mapping

Peer Reviews
Response Paper

Summary
Journal



“THE QUALITY OF STUDENT WRITING CAN SOMETIMES REFLECT THE QUALITY OF THE ASSIGNMENT.”

**“CLEAR, MEANINGFUL
ASSIGNMENTS**



can lead to

insightful responses
and
student investment.”

**“VAGUE OR CONFUSING
ASSIGNMENTS**



may frustrate students

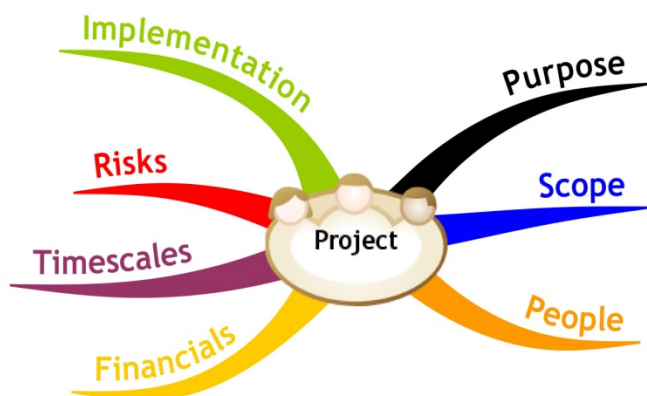
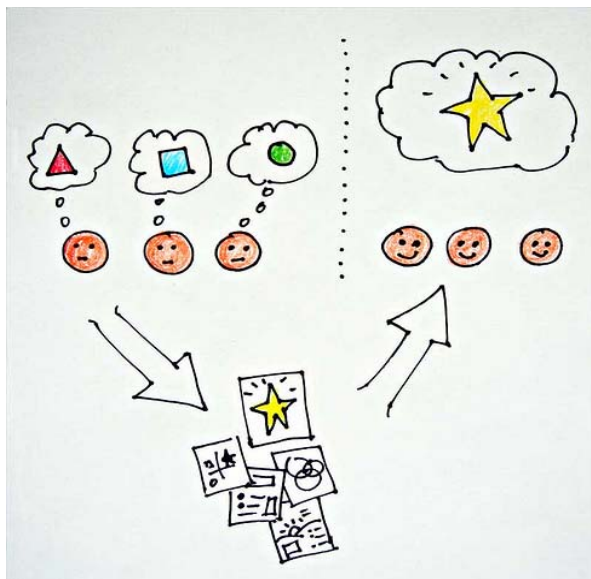
or

distract them from the course’s
objectives, thwarting growth
and achievement (17).”

Carbajal Van Horn, M. *Teaching with Hacker Handbooks*.
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010

WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DO YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO DEMONSTRATE IN WRITING?

Bloom's Taxonomy



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SEC. 12 THE STRUCTURAL THEORY 3

Organic chemistry is fundamental to biology and medicine. Aside from water, living organisms are made up chiefly of organic compounds; the molecules of "molecular biology" are organic molecules. Biology, on the molecular level, is organic chemistry.

It is not unfashionable to say that we are living in the Age of Carbon. Every day the newspapers bring to our attention compounds of carbon: cholesterol and polynaturated fats, growth hormones and steroids, insecticides and pesticides, carcinogens and chemotherapeutic agents, DNA and genes. Wars are fought over petroleum. Two catastrophes threaten us, both arising from the accumulation in the atmosphere of compounds of carbon: depletion of the ozone layer, due chiefly to the chlorofluorocarbons, and the greenhouse effect, due to methane, chlorofluorocarbons, and, most of all, carbon dioxide. It is perhaps symbolic that for 1990 the journal *Science* selected as the molecule of the year diamond, one of the allotropic forms of carbon. And for 1991 the choice was another, newly discovered allotope of carbon, C_{60} , buckminsterfullerene—which has generated excitement in the chemical world not seen, it has been said, "since the days of Kekulé".

1.2 The structural theory

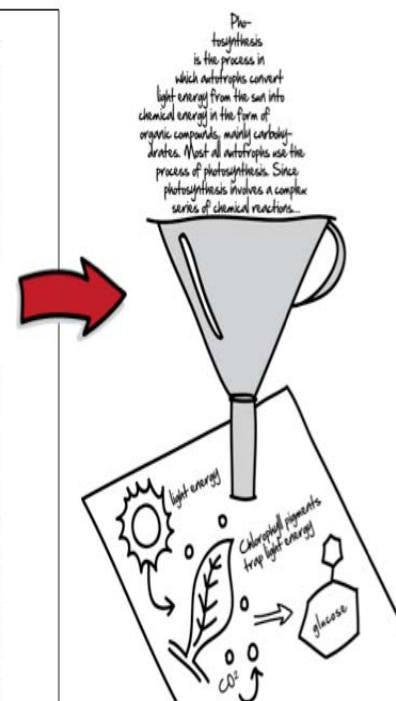
"Organic chemistry nowadays almost drives me mad. To me it appears like a primed catapult loaded with the most remarkable things, a dreadful machine jangle into which one does not dare enter for there seems to be no way out."—Friedrich Wöhler, 1815.

How can we even begin to study a subject of such enormous complexity? In organic chemistry today as Wöhler saw it a century and a half ago? The jungle is still there—largely unexplored—and it is more remarkable things that Wöhler ever dreamed of. But, so long as we do not wander too far too fast, we can enter without fear of losing our way, for we have a chart: the structural theory.

The structural theory is the basis upon which millions of facts about hundreds of thousands of individual compounds have been brought together and arranged in a systematic way. It is the basis upon which these facts can best be accounted for and understood.

The structural theory is the framework of ideas about how atoms are put together to make molecules. The structural theory has to do with the order in which atoms are attached to each other, and with the electrons that hold them together. It has to do with the shapes and sizes of the molecules that these atoms form, and with the way that electrons are distributed over them.

A molecule is often represented by a picture or a model—sometimes by several pictures or several models. The atomic nuclei are represented by letters or plastic balls, and the electrons that join them by lines or dots or plastic pegs. These crude pictures and models are useful to us only if we understand what they are intended to mean. Interpreted in terms of the structural theory, they tell us a good deal about the compound whose molecules they represent: how to go about making it; what physical properties to expect of it—melting point, boiling point, specific gravity, the kind of solvent the compound will dissolve in, even whether it will be colored or not; what kind of chemical behavior to expect—the kind of reagents the compound will react with and the kind of products that will be formed, whether it will react rapidly or slowly. We would know all this about a compound that we had never encountered before, simply on the basis of its structural formula and what we understand its structural formula to mean.



WHEN DESIGNING ASSIGNMENTS

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Academic writing task (purpose for writing)

Does the assignment fit /meet your course objectives?

Will you choose the topic or let students do so?

Will you allow practice time for the writing process?

What skills are being assessed (Bloom's)?

2. Audience

How can the audience be expanded figuratively?

3. Formal and/or informal

Will the writing task be thesis driven? A take-home assignment? Outside sources used? Will the task be performed in class?

4. Role of the student

Well-informed scholar?

5. Format

Discipline specific? A particular organizational pattern?

Have you specified documentation style (MLA, APA, CMS, etc.)?



MORE TO CONSIDER

6. The process to be followed

Have you clearly outlined the steps in the task from beginning to end (due date)?

7. Presenting the assignment to your students

How much time will you spend on this? How will you explain the task?

What will you emphasize? Have you given enough information about gathering and using sources?

8. Criteria for evaluation

Will the process be graded? Will only the final product be graded? How will you assign grades? Do you need to create a rubric?

9. Plagiarism

Have you reviewed your assignment in terms of how plagiarism can be avoided?

clear expectations

Generic Essay	Subject content	awareness of issues	critical thinking	Takes a position
EXCELLENT A (85 - 100) A Markedly Exceptional Performance	a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter is demonstrated, including an in-depth understanding of the relevant concepts, theories, and issues related to the topic addressed	an awareness of differing viewpoints is demonstrated and a rigorous assessment of these undertaken where relevant	an ability to think critically is demonstrated in the analysis, synthesis and evaluation of relevant information	a thoughtful statement of position is presented and defended through logical arguments and carefully selected supportive detail; the arguments presented build to a consistent conclusion
SUPERIOR B (70 - 84) Clearly Above Average Performance	a thorough grasp of the subject matter is demonstrated	an awareness of differing viewpoints is demonstrated and an assessment of these attempted where relevant	the paper goes beyond description to interpretation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation	a position is adopted and logically argued; appropriate supporting detail is supplied
SATISFACTORY C (55 - 69) A Fully Competent Paper	a basic grasp of the subject matter is demonstrated	asserts viewpoint without acknowledging alternative viewpoints	accurate information incorporating relevant sources and references is conveyed	a position is adopted and logically argued



DESIGN SHOULD HAVE VISUAL APPEAL

Whether the assignment is given to students in print or online or both (preferably), consider the following:

- Make it eye appealing and easy to follow:
bold headings, sections, underlining, bullets, graphics, color, shapes, tables, etc.
- Try not to have too much text; leave some white spaces.
- Provide one page (most desirable) or two pages maximum.
- Include your contact information on the assignment.
- Mention the Writing Center.



GROUP ACTIVITY: COLLEAGUES WILL CRITIQUE AN ASSIGNMENT BY ROLE-PLAYING AS STUDENTS

Instructions:

1. If you brought an assignment, consider pairing up with another colleague.
2. Groups will be provided sample assignments to review and discuss.
3. Among yourselves, answer the questions on the handout. Note-paper is available or you may make notes in the margin of the handout.
4. If time is available, groups can rotate assignments.
5. Designate a member of the group to report back to participants as a whole.



WRITING LEARNING SPECIALISTS OFFER SERVICES TO FACULTY AND STUDENTS

Ask us for a list of resources related to today's topic.

Diane Flores-Kagan
Learning Center, Room 109
661.722.6300, ext. 6018



Wendy Rider
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