2. FIVE PRINCIPLES OF ASSIGNMENT DESIGN

Tie the writing task to specific pedagogical goals.
- What specific course objectives will the writing assignment meet?
- Will informal or formal writing better meet your teaching goals?
- Will students be writing to learn course material or writing conventions in your discipline or both?
- Does the assignment make sense to you?

Working Backwards from Goals
- Why should students write in your class? State your goals for the product as clearly and concretely as possible.
- Determine what writing products will meet these goals and fit your teaching style/preferences.
- Note specific skills that will contribute to the final product.
- Sequence activities (reading, researching, writing) to build toward the final product.

Note rhetorical aspects of the task, i.e., audience, purpose, writing situation, etc.
- **Audience**: To whom are you writing? Decide to what extent you will define the audience for students based on your goals for the assignment. The more specifically you define the audience, the more you constrain or focus the final product. Consider the following audience characteristics: age, ethnicity, gender, education, religion, political affiliation, position within an organization, knowledge of subject, opinion/feelings toward subject.

    For example, "Address your paper to students who missed last week's classes," or, "In your argument on old-growth forests, address your essay to the group that opposes your position--either the logging industry or Earth First," or "Address your essay to peer-scholars in this discipline who are interested in your proposed question and will look forward to reading your findings and analysis" (Bean 84).

    For example, "Your report will be read by the president of the company, who is not a finance or accounting specialist. (Hint: Consider using appendices for technical data for these officers.) The president has a reputation for being very customer-oriented and generous to employees--though impatient with consulting firms, of which we, as you know, are one" (Thaiss 45).

- **Purpose:** What do you hope this piece of writing will accomplish?
    Students need to know the goal of the piece of writing. The more specifically you can state that goal, the more likely they will be able to meet your expectations. Some common purposes for writing in the workplace include the following: informing, requesting, explaining, persuading, proposing, problem defining, problem solving, documenting, evaluating.

> *For example*: "The main purpose of your report is to offer two to three practical solutions to the identified problem. Since your second purpose is to convince the company to enact at least one of those solutions, you'll need to convince them that the recommendations are based on careful study and will be worth the expense" (Thaiss 45).

- **Writing Situation:** Why are you writing to/for this audience at this time? Defining an occasion for a piece of writing completes the description of a context. By understanding a situation that generates a piece of writing, students get a sense of how writing might occur in the "real world."

Make all elements of the task clear.
- The number, type, and variety of sources
- The preferred style/format for documentation and any pattern of organization that might be important for this piece of writing. *For example*, a business report might include a list of the following sections:
  - I.   Executive Summary
  - II.   Problem
  - III. Methods
  - IV.   Findings
  - V.   Recommendations (Thais 44-45)
- The length
- Due date(s)—include dates for preliminary work, peer review, final drafts
  *A*sking students to save all doodles, notes, outlines, and drafts and to submit these along with the final essay/report as well as photocopies of all borrowed information encourages students to follow the recommended process and effectively discourages plagiarism. (Bean 84).

Include grading criteria on the assignment sheet.
- Possibly include detailed descriptions of a high, middle, and lower range paper. Make sample copies of such papers available.
- Tell students on what criteria you will grade and how much weight those criteria have. Consider using a rubric and give a copy to the students along with assignment.

Break down the task into manageable steps.
- Suggest ways to approach the task.
- Sample process tips for an abstract:
  - Read the article several times and separate it into stages of thought
  - Write a one-sentence summary of each stage of thought and of the main claim
  - List the idea transitions that link those stages of thought

Taken from "An Introduction to WAC: Five Principles," WAC Clearinghouse, 23 May 2005. http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop10a.cfm and "Designing Effective Assignment Sheets," Campus Writing Program, Colorado School of Mines, 23 May 2005. http://www.mines.edu/Academic/lais/wc/wac/effective/designing/html