

## "Assignments by Design: Writing and Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum"



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*Quickwrite #1:* Think of a recent writing task that you found meaningful and that challenged you to think critically. Answer the following questions about this task:

What was the overall purpose(s) of the task?

What was your role as a writer?

Who was the audience(s) for the writing?

What was the genre (type of text)?

What made it a critical thinking task?

### Research on Designing Writing Assignments

- Much of high school and college writing is for purposes of regurgitating information from textbooks and lectures in the form of short-answer exams written to the teacher playing the role of examiner.
- Despite the often limited use teachers make of writing, writing is a primary tool for engagement, critical thinking, getting content into long-term memory, and professional success after college.
- The most meaningful and effective writing assignments have one or more of the following features: they allow students to make personal connections; they are connected to the real work of a discipline or a profession; they challenge students to expand their writing and thinking; they ask students to explore course content more deeply; they allow students some freedom of choice in topic.
- The Cal Poly, SLO critical thinking rubric focuses on a student's ability to create a sense of purpose in his or her writing, conduct analysis and support that analysis with credible evidence, draw inferences, and exhibit self-awareness as a writer regarding writing processes and rhetorical choices.

## **Example Assignment #1: Short Essay**

Directions:

Answer one of the following questions in essay format.

Particulars: DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE ESSAY, instead use the last 6 digits of your “student identification number.” You must type the essay. Make sure you have one inch margins all around, use a 12 point type font (preferably Times New Roman or Arial), double space, and use proper grammar. Make sure you cite appropriate sources if you quote heavily or borrow someone else’s ideas. If you cite someone’s work, make sure you have a reference page. Do not cheat or plagiarize!!!! Academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade.

Questions:

Question #1: According to James Deetz, the Georgian Order is firmly entrenched by the end of the 18th century. Using examples, how does he explain the rise of the Georgian order within a structuralist theoretical perspective and methodology.

Question #2: How do post-processual, processual and structural archaeologists explain cultural change? Use supporting evidence.

Question #3: Compare and contrast processual (scientific) and postprocessual archaeologies. Use appropriate examples to demonstrate your analysis.

## **Example Assignment #2: Research Paper**

Purpose: The purpose of this project is for the student to 1) become familiar with a particular area of research activity in the field of human development, 2) by learning referencing techniques for this discipline, 3) glean information from the primary psychological literature, 4) summarizing this information clearly in a written report, and 5) practicing the format of scientific writing in this discipline.

Format: The format of the paper is a term paper about research, not an original research report. Each paper presents a summary of a single article.

Evaluation: The grade is based on content and form, including: Organization of the paper as a whole and of each section, adequacy of the summaries and interpretations of literature, the explication of controversial issues when appropriate, your conclusions and defense of your conclusions, grammar, punctuation, neatness, listing and citing of bibliographic references.

The grade will be lowered ten points for each of the following:

- errors in citation format
- errors in reference format
- failure to use APA format
- excessive spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors
- inaccurate information

### Example Assignment #3: Business Project

Teams of four students will be formed to research, write and present a report on the feasibility of a foreign direct investment. Each team works for a major U.S. pharmaceutical company. The U.S. home office of this company can invest funds with an average rate of return on equities of 14 per cent and a standard deviation of 1 percentage point. The home office is considering three possible sites: India, Ireland, or Mexico. The strategy for the foreign venture is to serve the local market and the export market. This venture can either be wholly owned by the home company or be in partnership with a local manufacturer. The Board of Directors of the home company has decided to allocate \$200 million and expects a high rate of return on equities than is available on U.S. projects, but has not specified the differential rate of return. Naturally, the Board is cognizant of the tradeoffs between rewards and risks. Foreign direct investment is subject to country risk, currency risk, and industry risk. The team will have to make a convincing case directly to the Board, in the person of the instructor.

The project has three phases. The first phase consists of an assessment of country risk. The team will create a country committee to study differences in country risks. The committee will report to the Team. I will participate as a consultant. In the second phase the Team will formulate a strategy (e.g., wholly owned subsidiary producing primarily for the local market non-patented drugs). Again, I will act a consultant to the Team. In the third and final phase a formal business plan is formulated. Future revenues and costs will be projected under a bad scenario, average scenario, and good scenario. The three scenarios will give a distribution of rates of return. The business plan is presented to the Board for approval. The writing for each of the three phases is in the form of a memorandum.

The project intends to develop the following skills or competencies: evaluation of country risk (not only economic, but also political and social factors), assessment of currency risk, and evaluation of industry risk.

### A Taxonomy for Assignment Design and Sequencing

#### **Rhetorical Situation:**

**purpose** (summarize, define, explain, explore, persuade, synthesize, analyze, reflect, etc.)  
**audience** (self, peers, instructor, wider audiences)

**Genre** (personal genres, disciplinary genres, professional genres, civic genres, digital genres)

**Discourse Community** (disciplines, professions, civic organizations, virtual communities)

*Quickwrite #2:* Use the taxonomy of rhetorical situation, genre, and discourse community to revise one of your current writing assignments or writing assignment sequences. Note the purpose(s), audience(s), genre(s), and discourse community(s) of your redesigned assignment or assignment sequence below.

## Assignment Design Resources

Cal Poly, SLO CTLT WAC Resources: <http://ctlit.calpoly.edu/writing-across-curriculum>

Cal Poly, SLO Expository Writing Rubric: [http://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/ulo/1/documents/university\\_writing\\_rubric.pdf](http://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/ulo/1/documents/university_writing_rubric.pdf)

Bean, J. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gottschalk, K. & Hjortshoj, K. (2003). *The Elements of teaching writing: A resource for instructors in all disciplines*. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's.

WAC Clearinghouse: <http://wac.colostate.edu>

## References

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Caroll, L. (2002). *Rehearsing new roles: How college students develop as writers*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Herrington, A., & Curtis, M. (2000) *Persons in process: Four stories of writing and personal development in college*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Light, R.J. *Making the most of college: Students speak their mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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Melzer, D. (2014). *Assignments across the curriculum: A national study of college writing*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP.

National Survey of Student Engagement (2008). *Promoting engagement for all students: The imperative to look within*. Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Online: <<http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm>>

Soliday, M. (2011). *Everyday genres: Writing assignments across the disciplines*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.

*Quickwrite #3:* Write down one thing you learned about assignment design from this workshop that you will implement in your classes and one question you still have about assignment design.