Writing Across the
Curriculum
Faculty Resource Binder

Thinking About Formal Writing Assignments

Analyzing Assignments

Event Structure

OCCASION

*Assigned
(Pretended)
Problem or Need*

*Pedagogical
Goals
(Teacher's)*

WRITER'S PROBLEM OR NEED

HYPOTHETICAL
OBJECTIVE

ACTUAL OBJECTIVE
(Grade/Approval)

GOAL
STRUCTURE

RHETORICAL
STRUCTURE

[DISPLAY]

SCENE

SETTING

SITUATION
STRUCTURE

PERSONAE

PARTICIPANTS

Text Structure

GENRE

GLOBAL FORM

THEME

FOCUS

STYLE

REALIZATION

THE OCCASION refers to the event or situation that causes writers to write and gives them a set of goals and motivations. With academic writing, the occasion is virtually always an *assignment*, given by the teacher and responsive to the teacher's pedagogical goals (that students read, research, learn, synthesize, discover, etc. and the teacher evaluates, monitors, etc.). The responsibility to assess the situation lies largely with the teacher; the student-writer's responsibility is to assess the teacher's assessment. In professional writing, occasions vary greatly, even for individual writers, and the goals for writing are generally subordinate to a larger set of goals.

THE WRITER'S PROBLEM OR NEED gives the writer a reason to write. It generates a series of objectives, usually tied to a *specific* desired outcome (in addition to the generalized goals as to do well, to be well regarded, etc.). In academic writing, the chief objective is almost invariably to get a good grade and approval from the teacher, but students must usually achieve that objective by adopting hypothetical objectives. The default hypothetical objective is to enlighten an imagined audience, and it always includes the need to display the student's knowledge and ability to reason. Many academic assignments leave the task of formulating a problem to the student, and students often struggle to do so. In professional situations, writers normally decide to write only because they have already identified a problem or need, and their objectives are as varied as their circumstances. In some cases (one prominent instance is law), professional writers must reformulate the problem, much as students do.

THE RHETORICAL ACTION is the objective that the writer must adopt for the text in order to achieve some effect on the world: to inform, to explain, to convince, to persuade, etc. *in order* to let readers know, to help readers understand, to get readers to believe or act, *but also* to flatter, warn, make a sale, justify one's actions, get a grade, etc.

THE SETTING is the actual situation in which the text is created, exchanged, and read.

THE SCENE is the socially defined scenario which gives sense and points to producing a particular kind of text. In student writing, settings and scenes tend to be only abstractly related. The default scene for academic papers in the humanities is the community of educated inquiry; for scientific lab reports, the default is a research community asking real questions and testing results. In professional writing, scenes and settings tend to be closely allied: the scene of the courtroom, of the sales contract, of the engineering proposal, of the progress report, of the user manual, etc.

THE PARTICIPANTS are the actual persons involved in creating and receiving the text.

THE PERSONAE are the socially defined roles specified in the scenario of the Scene.

THE GENRE is the conventional form of the text. Is usually has a name: term paper, lab report, five paragraph essay, exam, *but also*, grant proposal, sales contract, courtroom brief, research memo, office memo, etc. While some genres are relatively fixed in form, many are not. Some are even created for the occasion.

THE FORM of the text is its global discourse structure. It concerns where the point of the text is made, how the point is made, how and in what order the point is supported, and how the issue (introduction) sets up the text.

Point (Thesis, claim, main idea, chief observation, final result, etc.): (a) Does the text make a single, controlling point? (b) Is it a point worth making? (c) Is the point located at the end of the introduction or at the end of the whole?

Issue or Introduction: (a) Does the introduction announce a problem, question, or need important enough to motivate the rest of the text? (b) Does the Introduction end with the main point? If not, does it end with a "launching point" that sets up the rest of the text?

Discussion or Body: (a) Does the body of the text follow from the introduction? (b) Does it support or establish the point?

THE THEMES of a text are the set of concepts around which readers are invited to organize the information in the text. They must be established early and appropriately highlighted thereafter. They must help make the point and they must be appropriate to the scene and genre.

Issue: (a) Does the introduction mention, near the end, key words that announce or lead the reader to expect the major concepts developed in the rest?

Discussion: (a) Does the body of the text regularly repeat words that refer to the major concepts announced in the Introduction? (b) Are those words familiar enough for the reader to recognize them as forming a related set?

THE FOCUS in a text is a sentence-level structure that determines how well the text seems to "flow." In general, sentences should move from older to newer information. Focus also determines which characters or ideas seem central. The decision to focus on a character or idea by putting it first in a series of sentences must serve the point and be appropriate to the scene and genre.

Topic$_1$: (a) Does each paragraph have a single, clear topic? (b) Does the topic of each paragraph connect explicitly to previous paragraphs?

Topic$_2$: (a) Does each paragraph begin with an old and familiar idea? (b) Do the ideas at the beginnings of sentences form a relatively coherent group? (c) Do most sentences begin with the main idea or main character of the paragraph?

THE STYLE is determined by the details of sentence syntax. Its nature (academic, journalistic, legalistic, etc.) must be appropriate to all of the above.

Verbs/Actions: (a) Do the verbs almost always express actions? (b) Are most of the crucial actions expressed as verbs (rather than abstract nouns)?

Subjects/Characters: (a) Are the subjects almost always either the main characters or major concepts or objects that function as characters? Are the subjects short and simple phrases? (b) Do most clauses have both the subject and the verb within the first five or six words?

THE REALIZATION is the specific means by which the text is instantiated, and includes such considerations as spelling, punctuation, formatting, etc.

Some Questions about Assignments

I. The Context of the Assignment

    A. Where in the sequence of social development is the student in terms of
        • knowledge of the subject matter?
        • analytical skills within the discipline?
        • knowledge of the conventions of the particular discipline?
        • control over the voice of the discipline?

    B. What does the assignment demand in terms of
        • knowledge of the subject matter?
        • analytical skills within the discipline?
        • knowledge of the conventions of the particular discipline?
        • control over the voice of the discipline?

    C. How does the assignment relate to other assignments?
        1. Does it stand alone? If so, is this the first time the student has been asked to do what the assignment requires?
        2. Does the assignment develop or relate to a previous task? If so, does the assignment specify the relationship?
        3. If the assignment is part of a sequence, does every student have a basis for moving on in the sequence?

II. The Text of the Assignment

    A. What information does the assignment provide?
        1. Which aspects of the structure of an assignment does it specify?
        2. Which aspects does it merely imply?
        3. Which aspects does it take for granted?

    B. What information does the assignment deliberately NOT specify?

    C. Does the assignment present a recognizable situation? Does it give students a role they can understand and step into?

    D. Which aspects of the structure of a writing performance does this assignment force students to invent?

    E. Which levels of their own texts do students have to create for themselves?

Some Guidelines for Assignments for Novice Students

Students who are new to a discipline or new to college (or graduate school) often struggle with their writing for reasons that have more to do with their status as novices than with their writing skills. Typically, their problems have three sources.

First, they do not know enough. They know too few of the "facts" that in part define the discipline, and they do not command the facts they do know. As a result, not only are they likely not to know or recall crucial information, but the information they have learned is not likely to be structured for them in a way that their teachers recognize or expect. Even as their body of knowledge grows and takes on a more disciplinary organization, novices are unlikely to recognize how that knowledge is formulated in response to the typical sets of problems and questions that, even more than its knowledge base, define an academic discipline. They simply do not know what makes a good (i.e., interesting, productive, pursuable) problem or question or how to recognize a point worth making, and so they lack one of the most essential elements of good papers.

Second, they have little or no acquaintance with the forms of discourse they are asked to produce. They do not know what a good paper looks like. They do not know how they are typically organized, or why. They do not know how to deploy evidence or other support for their points. They do not know what it means to "sound like" a member of the discipline in question. Unfortunately, many novice students are left to flounder with the small (and misleading) set of disciplinary models they find in their textbooks and other assigned readers. But even those students who find or are given models do not easily recognize what is pertinent about those models. Thus new law students are more likely to imitate the long and funny words of legalese rather than the subtle patterns of legal argument; new chemical engineering students are more likely to worry about avoiding first person constructions than about making their results evident; and new literature students are more likely to produce an elaborate style they think of as literary than to explain what is pertinent about the passages they quote.

Third, they have little or no personal acquaintance with their readers. One of the most important strategies that writers use to deal with complex questions of audience is to use particular persons to exemplify the audience or segments of the audience. Beyond their teacher, novice writers know few or no persons who are members of a given discipline. If they do know one or two others, their perceptions of those persons are likely to be distorted by the student-teacher relationship. As a result, novice writers must deal with a disciplinary audience entirely in the abstract—which is, by and large, not how more socialized writers do it and is by far the harder way.

Assignments for Novice Students

Given these predictable difficulties, classes designed for novices need to have writing assignments designed for novices:

I. Avoid assignments that ask students to produce complete and finished documents all in one step.

Though one goal of a writing class is to make students able to produce complete and finished documents on their own, it is predictable that most novice students will at first be defeated by assignments that ask them to do so. Novice students need to work both on large-scale issues (such as formulating problems and questions worth asking, devising points worth making, and finding appropriate evidence for supporting their points) and on learning to use the language and discursive patterns of the discipline—and they need to work on these matters separately.

When novice students concentrate on text-level matters, they regularly lose control over the local structures in their texts (making errors they otherwise would not, falling into greater incoherence than usual, and producing the most amazing turns of phrase). When novice students concentrate on producing the language and discursive patterns of the discipline, they regularly produce the most primitive text structures (summary rather than analysis, chronology rather than argument, etc.). When they concentrate on both, they fall into problems whose genesis is undiscoverable.

Since their problems are predictable, assignments should be designed to anticipate and avoid them. When students are first asked to summarize a text before they are asked to analyze it, the result of the second, analytical assignment tends to be more of an analysis than a summary —and it tends to be more coherent and correct. When students are asked first to record their observations in the form of a chronicle before they are asked to analyze a process, the result is less likely to be a mere chronology. When students are allowed to practice describing works of art in a "professional journal," their subsequent papers tend to address issues of greater substance and interest (from the point of view of art history).

II. Help novices to understand the scenario within which they are asked to write.

Novice students tend not to be able to imagine themselves into the default scenarios of a discipline. They do not easily recognize what will matter to the personae, what kinds of problems they find worth pursuing, what kind of support will lead them to accept a point, and so on. But students can learn to understand a scenario if it is made a part of their explicit instruction.

III. Prefer shorter, more frequent assignments to longer, more difficult ones.

Novices need practice more than they need testing. Students learn more about formulating a worthy topic and problem by writing three two-page papers than by writing one six-page paper: the short papers let them practice these text-level skills three times over. Students learn more about using evidence to support a claim when they have to do so in three different contexts than when they do so at length in a single context. The skills that can only be learned in longer assignments—for instance, synthesizing disparate materials or sustaining a complex argument—are better learned after students can reliably construct coherent shorter texts.

IV. Let students learn to write as they write to learn.

Some of the work of helping novice students to become accustomed to writing in a disciplinary context can be accomplished with writing assignments designed more to help them assimilate the material in a class than to let them display their knowledge. Summaries, outlines, questions for discussion, position statements, lists of evidence for and against a position, annotated bibliographies, electronic discussion groups—these and other "writing to learn" assignments give students experience writing while they help them learn the disciplinary material in a class.

Designing a Formal Writing Assignment

Everyone who sets out to write confronts a series of choices and makes adjustments based on certain boundaries: the purpose, the knowledge of the subject, the audience, the length and format the topic or assignment demands. What the writer interprets these boundaries to be determines the content of her written response.

In academic settings, we teachers determine these parameters for each assignment, and the best way to ensure that a student has a clear understanding of what we expect of her is to give her the assignment in writing. Before we make any assignment, however, we should be aware of our own purposes in making it: what tasks are we asking the student to perform and to what end? Above all, our assignment must be clearly tied to our course objectives.

Sometimes our students' written responses marginally approximate the responses we sought or anticipated. The student-writer sees each assignment as a contract she must fulfill. We, too, must view our assignments as contracts. If we can clearly match our instructional objectives to our performance objectives, if we can learn how to elicit the specific cognitive tasks we wish our students to perform, and if we can set for our students clearly defined boundaries in regards to (1) purpose, (2) knowledge, (3) audience, (4) length and format and (5) evaluation criteria, we will find that there is no surer way both to develop our students' thinking abilities and to assess their progress than through the exercise of writing skills.

Let's take a closer look at these five essential components of formal writing assignments.

I. PURPOSE
- What course objectives are addressed by this assignment?
- What intellectual tasks (refer to Bloom's taxonomy, page 17) are required of the student in completing this assignment?

Generally speaking, academic writing has two purposes: to inform and/or to influence or persuade. We complicate this rather straightforward concept for our students, however, with the range of instructional objectives available to us. If we want our students' written responses to approximate those we anticipate, we must be aware of both our purpose in making the assignment as well as the course objectives we want the assignment to address. Above all, we must clearly and effectively ask the student for exactly what we want.

II. KNOWLEDGE
- What is the topic or subject matter of the assignment?
- What do we expect our students to know about this topic or subject? What do we want them to find out?
- Will they know where and how to look for the information they will need to complete the assignment?

The answers to these questions are so closely tied to course objectives that instructors must answer them to their individual satisfaction. The answers to these questions however, will determine what we, as instructors, can reasonably ask of students and how we will assess

the content of the students' written response.

It is reasonable for us to expect students to learn material we present in class. There is no guarantee, though, that a student will garner from an assigned reading information we consider relevant. Without checking, we cannot assume that a student can use the library to do meaningful research within a discipline. Certainly the acquisition of such skills is part of a college education. But be aware, especially in dealing with freshmen or sophomores, that we may be the ones introducing those skills.

What a student does or does not know about a topic obviously limits what she can say about it. Different assignments, too, require different kinds of knowledge. Effective assignments leave no doubt in the student's mind as to the level and extent of knowledge we expect her to implement in supporting and completing our assignments. Often we can help students by including data with our written assignments in the form of tables, graphs, or short readings, along with suggestions as to how the student might use the information provided.

Finally, if the student will need to do research outside the classroom in order to finish the assignment, we can say so in writing.

III. AUDIENCE
- Is the audience for this assignment the instructor, other students, or a specific imagined audience?
- How familiar is the writer's audience with the subject and material being presented?
- Does the reader hold a viewpoint different from the writer's?
- Are there conditions regarding an imagined audience--such as age, sex, or nationality which should influence the writer's presentation?

The most important reason to limit audience in our assignments is that students may not. If we do not specify otherwise in writing, the student assumes that we, and we alone, are the readers; one result of not clearly establishing audience is that the student will be "writing for a grade," regardless of the purpose we have established in our assignment. Cautions aside, establishing the audience for our students can have a number of advantages.

Dramatizing an audience--that is, inventing a reader who, in the real world, could conceivably both assign and read what we might expect our students to write--forces the student to address a purpose as well as make decisions regarding the kind and amount of information she will incorporate. Such an audience is useful, too, in moving information and objectives which, in the classroom, can seem sterile to an arena where their real-life implications are emphasized.

Other students also make a useful audience for our assignments. As a resource, they have the advantage of being living, immediate and (we hope) interested.

Finally, for some students, nothing is more immediate than the threat or promise of a grade. For such students, we make the ideal audience. They value our approval and they fear our disapproval, and sometimes this alone is ample motivation.

These are the three most common audiences, and all three have different implications for a student addressing a writing assignment. Students make language and stylistic choices (such as vocabulary and tone, for example) based on their assessment of their audience.

IV. LENGTH AND FORMAT
- Is length an important consideration in completing this assignment? How long would an 'ideal' response be? What form should it take?
- Is there a time limitation? If so, is the format matched to the time allowed?
- Is the student-writer familiar with the format?

We have all, at one time or another, assigned writing by the number of words or pages we expect a paper to be. We presume that the more important the paper--that is, the more it is to count in our grade books--the longer it should be. We pass this confusion of quantity with quality on to our students. They, in turn, count the number of words they write, line by line, or stretch out material to fill the expected number of pages, and in the process forfeit their opportunity of writing to learn.

Some length restriction, however, are necessary. Tests and measurement experts suggest that the wider the variation of the test, the less reliable the measurement. For example, an essay test with options is less reliable than an essay test with a single question or one where all students answer the same questions. Likewise, allowing students to write papers of six to twelve pages is breaking down the reliability factor because the six page paper is not judged in the same manner as the twelve page paper. It is unfair, they argue, to downgrade the six page paper because the ideas were not as developed as they were in the twelve page paper when the assignment allowed for papers of six pages. Keep these considerations in mind when assigning the length of a paper.

Term papers and other projects that involve extensive writing have their places, but in most courses short pieces of writing better serve the day-to-day purpose of learning. And, as a rule, it is wise to let the length of a piece of writing depend not on a predetermined number of words or pages, but on the amount of time students have to write. Given ten or fifteen minutes to recall, sort out, and compose, a student can hardly be expected to write much more than one good paragraph; given an entire class period, several pages.

Format is the shape, size, organization, and appearance of the written response we elicit from our students. As stated earlier, our written assignments are contracts we make with our students. If we ask for a paragraph, an essay, a critique, or a research paper, it is important that the students understand our concept of each of those forms. In this regard, it is often helpful to present, early in the semester, models (our own or previous students') from which our students can learn proper format. Also, the student-writer should realize that appearance and readability are important considerations in communication.

V. EVALUATION CRITERIA: IDEAS, ORGANIZATION, STYLE, GRAMMAR, AND MECHAN- ICS
- What features of the paper should be given the most weight?
- What specific features of content (ideas) are expected?

- How heavily, if at all, will criteria other than ideas (content) count?
- How will grades of A, B, C, D, and F be determined?

Students need to know how their papers will be evaluated and faculty in disciplines other than English can utilize the evaluation criteria language SSU students have from English 101 and 102: ideas, organization, style, grammar, and mechanics. This is not to suggest that you weigh them the same as we do in those courses. It is simply to suggest that they already have a framework you can build on. In addition, it is highly likely that the criteria you are presently using fall under one of these categories already. By using the same language, we can indicate to students that while we might weigh categories differently from department to department or assignment to assignment, we have a common basis for our evaluation of their work. We can reinforce what each other is doing by using these terms consistently across the curriculum; at the same time, we retain our individual rights to emphasize what is important in our assessment of the formal work we assign.

Because purpose, knowledge, audience, length and format are often discipline specific, these are only basic guidelines to consider. Evaluation, however, has a more common ground. The following pages are devoted to a discussion of evaluation criteria. Following that, you will find a more specific discussion of ideas, organization, style, grammar, and mechanics.

Evaluation Criteria (example)

An example of the criteria listed for an assignment:
Based on the five criteria used in English 101 and 102 (ideas, organization, style, grammar, and mechanics)--criteria all students having taken those courses are familiar with--one can see that the first five items listed fall under the realm of ideas, meaning 80% of a student's score on this paper is based on ideas. Organization counts 10%. The last criterion is titled readability and, judged against SSU English 101 and 102 criteria, combines style, grammar, and mechanics for 10%. The bulk of the grade depends upon how well the student handles ideas. To write the paper without concentrating on ideas or to grade the paper heavily weighing areas other than ideas is a violation of the contract. All of this, however, is simply to indicate that students need to know what we consider important in our evaluation of their papers. They don't like surprises, especially when grades are at stake. Weigh the criteria any way you like, but tell students in writing on the assignment sheet how papers will be evaluated. This topic always brings to mind a graduate school professor who, when asked by a student, "How did you grade these papers?" replied, "Whimsically." The laughter quickly faded under the weight of possibility. While the whims of the moment, especially at 2 a.m., are often tempting, we and our students must know that our evaluation is precisely grounded in something substantive.

Include qualities that are essential to good writing, regardless of content (ideas) or form

> Style, grammar, and mechanics (e.g., punctuation, spelling, format) do affect the quality of writing and therefore should be given weight. In the English Department we often hear, "Other departments don't care about how you say it, just so you get it down." We take comfort in knowing that this statement simply is not true. However--and this is a big HOWEVER--you can indicate your desire for stylistic preferences and grammatically and mechanically correct papers by including these items in your grading criteria on the assignments you hand out.

In Devising Writing Assignments, talley about the importance of assessing knowledge, purpose, audience, and length/format. I then indicated that the grading criteria for English 101 and 102 (courses at the foundation of SSU's WAC program) are ideas, organization, style, grammar, and mechanics. While the latter are ostensibly English oriented, they do parallel the former. Knowledge is clearly the domain of ideas/content. Similarly, purpose corresponds to organization, audience to style and grammar, and length/format to mechanics. The most important thing we can do to make our writing assignments meaningful is to carefully design assignments that address knowledge, purpose, audience, length/format and grading criteria. We will help our students understand why they are writing the papers and how we will grade them. In turn, we will also help ourselves grade those papers fairly.

Ideas (Content)

The essay treats the topic in a manner worthy of adult consideration. The writer has narrowed the focus of the essay sufficiently so that the topic may be fully explored within the limits assigned. The thesis of the essay is quite clear, even if implicit, and gives the essay a unified sense of direction. The writer's reasoning is valid. Points are stated accurately to avoid misleading overstatements or vague generalizations, and terms are carefully defined where necessary in order to avoid confusion. The points of the essay are treated in proportion to their importance, and accurate and effective substantiating materials (examples, facts, details) are employed to support general assertions and to illustrate abstractions. No necessary points are overlooked and there is no padding.

from ***"The Yellow Wallpaper": A Manual/Casebook for Freshman English,*** SSU, 1989

30%--recognition of main points:
10%--ability to summarize:
5%--ability to distinguish and analyze the
    differences between two approaches/
    viewpoints
20%--ability to take a position
15%--ability to support a position with informatio
    derived from the articles
10%--organization
10%--readability, organization, mechanics

Papers have to be about something, and students are often overwhelmed by having too little or too much SOMETHING. That is when they come to us for help, seek out a friend, or fret. We want them to come to us and we can help by reminding them to consider ideas in terms of breadth and depth. If they are writing about the causes of the Civil War, the artistic beauty of a Wagner piece, or the benefits of social security, they need to begin by looking at the spectrum: The causes of the Civil War range from ___and ___ to___ and ___. The beauty of the Wagner piece lies in its ___ , ___, and ___ . The benefits of social security vary from ___, ___, and ___ to ___ and ___. Here the student has indicated breath.

Once the ranges have been established--and these can be expressed in a thesis statement--the student's task is to prove and develop each point. She needs to explore the first cause she lists which contributed to the Civil War. Now the student must go beyond generalizations and pinpoint specific details, use data, color in and trim the outline established in the breadth (thesis) statement. A shrewd student will quickly learn that this is the point to indicate knowl-edge but dismiss obligation: While the causes of the Civil War ranged from ___, ___, ___ and ___ to ___, ___, and ___, the most critical were ___, ___, and ___. Here the student has indicated breadth but dismisses the many in favor of the few which she will develop in the paper. Call it narrowing the topic or whatever, but the student has staked out a claim she will work throughout the paper.

Not all students are ready to begin at this point, however. Some need a catalyst to get them started. You might remind them of two invention strategies they learned in English 101 and 102: freewriting and brainstorming. (Freewriting is discussed on page 28 of this manual; brain-storming is a discovery technique whereby the writer employs the journalistic questions who, what, when, where, why, and how, writing down the answers. Any source can be incorporated

into this prewriting: class notes, assigned readings, conversations with friends, newspaper or magazine articles, television and radio programs, etc.) By introducing these strategies in conjunction with our assignments, we can help students select and limit topics in a way that is both meaningful and consistent with our course objectives.

Finally, the best judge of ideas is the content professor. You know best whether the student has adequately defined and supported the topic.

Organization

The essay possesses a clear sense of purpose and its design is an orderly and coherent expression of the underlying idea or thesis. The essay normally contains three identifiable parts--an introduction that identifies the essay's purpose, sets the tone, and gives some idea of how the thesis will be developed; a body which fulfills the purpose following the pattern of development suggested in the introduction; and a conclusion which strengthens the purpose of the essay by means of emphasis, summary, or evaluation. Each part of the essay is developed completely and there is a clear and logical sense of the interrelationship of the parts and of their relation to the whole. Each paragraph is likewise unified, coherent and complete. The writer employs effective transitions between paragraphs and avoids needless repetition.

from ***"The Yellow Wallpaper": A Manual/Casebook for Freshman English***, SSU, 1989

Once students have established what they will write about, they must organize and connect their data in a meaningful way. This is partly accomplished by the format we ask the students to use. For instance, in English courses an essay must have an *introduction* that incorporates a clear thesis statement, a *body of paragraphs* which support the thesis and which have clear topic sentences, and a *conclusion* which summarizes the presentation, draws conclusions, and generally does something more than simply restate the thesis. Most disciplines have their own formats which follow a comparable pattern even if it is a problem statement followed by proofs or evidence.

The most common means of organizing materials are (1) chronological order (order of occurrence), (2) emphatic order or order of importance (least important to most important, or vice versa), (3) spacial order (relationship in space: left-to-right, top-to-bottom, etc.), and (4) topical order (arrangement by idea).

Organizing principles require, however, that the writer give the reader clear signals as to how the various concepts presented relate one to another. This can be accomplished through the effective use of transitions both at the beginning of and within paragraphs. (It is sometimes helpful for writers to think of this process as building bridges between paragraphs and between sentences.) These signals speed up the reader's understanding and tie together ideas before they can be forgotten. Transitional words and phrases establish coherence between sentences and paragraphs, and they provide the links that set a chronological pattern for a passage.

If you sense that students are having difficulty making transitional connections, you might remind them of some commonly used transitional phrases.

Assignment Planner

COURSE OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED:

KNOWLEDGE MASTERED:

SKILLS DEVELOPED:

PLACE IN SEQUENCE:

AUDIENCE:

PURPOSE:

INFORMATION GIVEN TO STUDENT:

INFORMATION TO BE CONTRIBUTED BY STUDENTS

DESCRIPTION OF SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE:

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Checklist for Assignments

Ask yourself the following questions about the assignment:

How does the assignment help fulfill a course objective?

How does the assignment promote the mastery of specific knowledge that is appropriate to the course?

How does the assignment promote the development of specific skills that are appropriate to the course?

How does the assignment relate to preceding and ensuing course assignments in developing students' skills sequentially?

Now examine the assignment handout to answer the following questions:

Does the assignment state the audience for which it is intended?

Does the assignment state its purpose?

Does the assignment explain what information will be given to the student?

Does the assignment explain what information the student should bring to the assignment?

Does the assignment describe and possibly illustrate a successful response?

Does the assignment state the criteria that will be used in evaluation?

Checklist:
Designing a Formal Writing Assignment

In summary there are certain questions we must clearly answer when designing a writing assignment that promotes learning as an objective:

I. PURPOSE
- What course objectives are addressed by this assignment?
- What intellectual tasks are required of the student in completing this assignment?

II. KNOWLEDGE
- What is the topic or subject matter of the assignment?
- What do we expect our students to know about this topic or subject? What do we want them to find out?
- Will they know where and how to look for the information they need to complete the assignments?

III. AUDIENCE
- Is the audience for this assignment the instructor, other students, or a specific imagined audience?
- How familiar is the writer's audience with the subject and material being presented?
- Does the reader hold a viewpoint different from the writer's?
- Are there conditions regarding an imagined audience--such as age, sex, or nationality--that should influence the writer's presentation?

IV. LENGTH AND FORMAT
- Is length an important consideration in completing this assignment? How long would an 'ideal' response be? What form should it take?
- Is there a time limitation? If so, is the format matched to the time allowed?
- Is the student-writer familiar with the format?

V. EVALUATION CRITERIA: IDEAS, ORGANIZATION, STYLE, GRAMMAR, MECHANICS
- Which features of the paper should be given the most weight?
- What specific content is expected?
- How heavily, if at all, will criteria other than ideas (content) count?
- How will grades of A, B, C, D, and F be determined?