

ASSIGNMENTS

- Authentic Assessment
- Creating Meaningful Writing Assignments

Authentic Assessment

As you prepare your fall semester syllabus, you might consider including supplementing some traditional forms of assessment – such as multiple choice and essay tests – with “authentic assessment.” This form of assessment corresponds, as closely as possible, to what scholars in your discipline actually do.

You might ask your students to summarize critical aspects of a reading assignment, relate data to theories, take a position on an issue, and analyze or synthesize information and ideas.

Examples of authentic assessment include:

1. *A policy recommendation*
2. *A literature review*
3. *An article abstract*
4. *A process analysis (describing the steps required to solve a problem)*
5. *A policy brief*
6. *An op-ed essay*
7. *An evaluation of a theory, thesis, concept, or methodology*
8. *An interview or oral history*

Creating Meaningful Writing Assignments

Too often, writing assignments provide insufficient direction. Such assignments encourage papers that are vague, highly general, over overly descriptive, and insufficiently analytic.

1. *If you want students to learn how to argue effectively, give them a writing prompt*

Prompts offer a particularly effective way to generate thoughtful, provocative thinking. By presenting students with a carefully defined problem, they challenge students and make the criteria for evaluation clear.

2. *Build your prompt around an active verb.*

Analyze, compare and contrast, evaluate, assess—these words provide students with a clear focus.

3. *Identify an audience.*

Who should a particular paper be “pitched” to: for example, an academic audience, policy makers, or journalists.

4. *Incorporate the grading criteria within the prompt.*

Spell out your expectations. For example, an effective paper will present a compelling argument and carefully consider counter-arguments.