

Another Angle on Assignments: Tips and Insights from Writing Consultants¹

Helpful Tips to Share with Students about Using the Writing Center

- **You don't need to have a draft:** Visit early in your writing process to talk through the assignment, plan your project, brainstorm, or work on invention strategies!
- **Consultants can support you on any areas of writing:** Consultations can focus on global areas affecting the writing as a whole (e.g., audience, focus, organization, source integration) or on local areas affecting the writing at the paragraph or sentence level (e.g., transitions, word choice, tone, and proof-reading strategies).
- **Be prepared for a collaborative conversation:** Consultations are one-on-one conversations, and consultants ask a lot of metacognitive questions to help you consider your approach to your learning and writing process. Be prepared to ask and answer questions as you work together. It may help to consider in advance what you'd like to accomplish in your consultation so you and the writing consultant can focus on areas meaningful to your drafting process and next steps.
- **Grammar support is also collaborative:** Consultants can support you in identifying patterns in your writing and with proof-reading strategies, but will not line-edit your document. Instead, you can plan for a collaborative conversation about language, words, phrases, and strategies to help you accomplish your grammar goals.

Strategies for Assignment Guideline Documents

Strategy	Rationale	Ways to Enact Strategy
Balance the amount of detail within assignment description.	Overly broad descriptions with little guidance can make it challenging to know where to start. Overly specific assignments with little room for variation can feel like there's not space for the writer to bring their ideas and approach to the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify core components that must be approached in a specific way.• Identify areas of flexibility or places where the writer brings their ideas and process.• Work for transparency in describing the assignment outcomes/goals.

¹ Writing consultants at the [Writing Center](#) support writers at any stage of their writing process. They do this through collaborative, one-on-one conversations that encourage the writer's goal-setting, reflection, and decision-making around next steps for their writing. Consultations occur in-person, via Zoom, and asynchronously via written feedback. These strategies are adapted from those shared by writing consultants Taylor Buccello, Taylor Jenkins, and Trinity Polk during a WIC panel in spring 2022. The tables convey instructor strategies that consultants have observed as particularly helpful to students working on writing projects.

Be clear on goals of the assignment and how they relate to the rubric/scoring/grading.	The rubric is often viewed as reflective of what’s most important in an assignment. Many students are concerned about grades and will use the rubric to choose focus areas for drafting. Aligning the rubric with overarching learning outcomes for the assignment can help students make intentional process decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the most important skills for students to demonstrate in the assignment and align the rubric to match that focus • Encourage students to look at drafting as a process, where global areas have sufficient time and space for development before local areas that can be polished at later stages.
Structure the assignment so that writing occurs over time vs. with a single deadline at the end.	Writing—especially high-stakes or big projects—can be challenging, and modeling how to break up a writing project/process into smaller steps can help students gain project management skills and experience the assignment as more manageable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a timeline on the assignment with specific dates for major process elements • Provide time in class for students to create plans that name anticipatory deadlines in advance of major due dates.
Name feedback opportunities on the assignment document.	Knowing they’ll receive feedback during the writing process can motivate students and help them plan where and when to put time and energy. Including opportunities for feedback—whether from the instructor, peer review, the Writing Center, or other resources—also normalizes using feedback as an opportunity for learning and revision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include feedback opportunities—both required and optional—in the assignment timeline with adequate time for revision after feedback • Include a list of resources to support students at various stages of the drafting process.

Strategies for Introducing Assignments

Strategy	Rationale	Ways to Enact Strategy
Explain the purpose or “why” behind assignments.	Having a rationale for the assignment and its requirements may help students see the value of an assignment and feel motivation around the work. Explaining purpose also adds transparency, helping student see how this assignment fits into the larger course outcomes, potential skill development, and applicability of skills to future writing contexts. Transparency around purpose may also prompt students to see instructors as an ally invested in their learning and growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the “why” behind each portion of the assignment and make time to explain that value or approach to students. • Invite questions about why work is being completed in class and how it relates to larger goals or skills. • Encourage students to brainstorm and consider additional contexts where they could transfer/use these skills in the future.
Avoid assumptions about students and their levels of	College students have a wide range of experiences and paths to the university and course. For some students, this may be the first writing course they’ve taken at	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define key terms within assignment documents, or reference/link to specific

<p>knowledge, experience, or background.</p>	<p>OSU, or their first in years. In addition, instructors may have internalized skills and habits that students are learning and practicing for the first time. Explanations of assignment features and corresponding writing skills can support students regardless of prior experiences with writing. In addition, it can be less vulnerable for a student to ask a question in response to an explanation that was offered to the whole class than to volunteer “I don’t understand this” when there’s an unstated assumption of knowledge or experience.</p>	<p>resources related to those terms within the document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly name and teach writing skills that are required for the assignment. • Create routine space in class for questions about the assignment and potential approaches to it. • Consider using or adapting WIC’s Writer’s Personal Profile resource to get to know your students and their potential needs and goals for the course.
--	--	---

Strategies for Supporting Student during Writing Process

Strategy	Rationale	Ways to Enact Strategy
<p>Acknowledge the emotional labor associated with writing.</p>	<p>Writing can be a vulnerable and lonely process, especially if students do not have a community for writing. When writing is paired with specific disciplinary knowledge and new genres, it can feel even more isolating and challenging. Students who have not taken writing courses in a long time and multilingual students may experience additional challenges in the writing process which creates even more emotional labor. Acknowledging the emotional labor of the work, in addition to the literal labor of the writing itself, can demonstrate awareness of students’ experiences and convey care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge openly (e.g., in assignment directions or verbally presenting assignment) the work that is taking place—both in the writing <i>and</i> the learning process. • Normalize that everyone is learning, that this work is new and challenging, and that learning takes practice and occurs over time. • Name and offer specific resources that could support students throughout the writing process and make the process more manageable.
<p>Create routine class-check-in times for questions about the assignment and writing process.</p>	<p>Making routine space to check-in can demonstrate interest and concern for students’ processes and help instructors better understand how students experience the course and the assignment. Check-ins hold the potential for in-the-moment updates/changes to support students. Students who know they have that time and space to connect with the instructor and their peers may feel less stress compared to those who have to figure out the best approach and timing for reaching out with questions and concerns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start each class or every other class with a brief check-in. • Plan more in-depth check-ins for key moments in the process (e.g., before a major due date). • Create multiple ways for questions to be asked/answered (e.g., during class, office hours, anonymous survey, discussion board). • Encourage and normalize asking questions (e.g., instead of asking “Does anyone have questions?”, assume there are questions. Have

		students pair up and write two questions it would be helpful to answer for the class).
Provide individual feedback in a supportive and generative way.	Individual feedback during the writing process can be motivating for students and an opportunity to identify potential strengths in their writing and areas to work on or develop. Feedback can be time-consuming, but even feedback on a small scale can help student see that instructors are engaged in their process, listening to their ideas, and committed to helping them develop skills and do well in the course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with praise. Research connects praise to student motivation around engagement and revision of writing. • Make feedback manageable for you and for students by focusing on only a few key strengths and areas for development. • Try to observe patterns in the writing so that students can apply feedback across multiple areas of their writing/document. • Consider using low-stakes and ungraded assignments that focus on feedback and helping students advance their drafts.