

## Approaches to Assignment Design

To achieve critical thinking in assignments, Bean (2011) suggests the course be “assignment centered rather than text and lecture centered. Goals, methods, and evaluation emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it” (p. 5).

### **Sample Syllabus Statements for WI Goals and Objectives**

***Student Learning Goals:*** Through this Writing Intensive (WI) course, students will think more critically as they use writing as a tool for learning and learn about writing in this particular discipline.

### **Mapping to Program and/or NACE Competencies (National Association of Colleges and Employers)**

- **Communication**: “Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives”
- **Critical thinking**: “Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of context and analysis of relevant information”
- See the NACE [website](#) for the full list of competencies.

***Student Learning Objectives:*** Students successfully completing the WI course will be able to [fill in as is appropriate for your course objectives]:

- Pose worthwhile questions by...
- Evaluate and know types of arguments by...
- Give feedback and know how to use feedback on pieces of writing through...
- Distinguish among fact, inference and opinion by...
- Articulate complex ideas clearly by...
- Consider purpose and audience by...

### **Assignment Objectives and Design**

For an assignment, objectives should--

- include an action verb of what the student will do
- provide specific, measurable, and attainable actions
- build complexity (moving through Bloom’s Taxonomy: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Synthesize, Evaluate, Create)

### **RAFT Technique for Writing Assignment Handouts (Bean, 2011, p. 98)**

- **Role & purpose:** A writer’s role may be that of a “teacher” or “persuader” writing from a knowledgeable position to an audience that knows less about the topic than the writer or those whose views on the topic differ from the writer’s. Multiple purposes may include informing, persuading, describing, reporting, arguing.
- **Audience:** Typically, the assignment will specify an audience other than the instructor. What does the audience know about the topic? What information will they need?
- **Form or Genre:** What form will the writing take? Essay, brochure, poster, blog, poem, song, letter, proposal?

- **Task:** A clear explanation of what the writing will address: a problem, use of data, assignment expectations.

Additional considerations for assignment design:

- **Evaluation criteria:** An explanation of how the process, versions, and final product will be graded.
- **Expectations about writing process:** A time schedule for drafting, peer exchanges, revisions.
- **Example Papers:** Analyze all or parts of representative examples, strong and weak, that students “grade” for themselves in an in-class collaborative session. Students’ grades can then be compared to these “anchor” papers to clarify expectations.

### **Instructional Considerations for Supporting the Writing Process (Bean, 2011)**

- **Choice:** Include opportunities for student choice as much as possible, from topic, to problems, and to genuine areas of inquiry.
- **Range:** Use a range of writing: in-class rehearsing/quickwrites, lists and concept maps to share ideas, paragraphs from certain parts of a longer paper, and eventually a more complete version of the writing.
- **Build in response:** self, peer, and instructor. Writing conferences—even once a semester – can provide important teaching and assessment opportunities.
- **Share** your own writing processes, struggles, and successes.
- **Reflection:** When assigning writing and even when collecting drafts/final versions, have students write a note that explains their understanding of the assignment, the process they intend or did follow, and their feedback (what they would revise next).
- **Mentor Texts:** For a brief writing lesson (mini-lesson), share a strong piece of writing in your discipline and have students read it as writers, noticing the qualities of the essay that make it effective. Then, the instructor also talks through the strengths of the piece. We may view strengths differently, and this will also vary by discipline. Instructors and disciplines will name and describe writing terms differently. Students are better able to transfer from one writing context to another if they have had a chance to see and discuss what an instructor’s expectations are for effective writing of the particular genre.

### **A Sampling of Genres Used by WI Faculty at University of Missouri**

- **Nanotheme:** 1-2 sentences (or a Tweet)
- **One-minute essays:** Students have one minute to write an essay to the topic discussed in class that day (quick formative assessment). Variations: Notecard essay –essay must fit on a notecard; One-sentence essay (similar to a six-word memoir).
- **Double-voice writing:** Students will write the conversation between two or more people discussing a topic from the course. This is helpful for preparing to write persuasive and argumentative papers.
- **Comparative Study of Media:** In this assignment, students select a text constructed for general viewing: online/television advertisement, billboard, song, movie trailer, slogan on restaurant/fast food cup, etc. Writers analyze the text: language, style, audience, message, and other elements. Students connect the theme to what is being studied in class. This is ideally presented orally in class and submitted in written form.

- **Interview/Article:** Find someone who is making a living doing what you want to do in the future. Construct your list of questions. Conduct the interview and transcribe. Code the interview and pull themes and main ideas. Write your final paper as an article for a selected magazine/journal.

Find more examples of writing assignment used by MU Writing Intensive instructors at <https://cwp.missouri.edu/instructor/wiassignments/>.