

# “Top Ten Tips” for Creating Effective Writing Assignment Sheets

*All SVSU instructors want to encourage best writing practices on our campus; to support achieve this goal, many faculty create assignment sheets designed to develop students' critical thinking and writing skills. Based on our experience working with students on assignment sheets from many different disciplines, the Writing Center tutors offer the following suggestions for crafting effective assignment sheets.*

- 1. Have a clear purpose for the assignment, and take time to explain it.** In the assignment sheet, tell the students why they are being asked to write this assignment. Explain its connection to the content you have covered in class, the overall course goals, and perhaps how it may develop skills needed in the “real world.” If students have a reason to do good work, they are more likely to do good work.
- 2. Organize, organize, organize.** The most effective assignment sheets are like a well-written paper: logically organized. Put the most important information the students need to know first, saving less important information for later in the assignment. Create different headings for the different sections for your assignment sheet, so information is easy to find. (See “Assignment Sheet Template” on the back for an example).
- 3. Consider what matters most.** While recurring issues with sentence errors, passive vs. active voice, or incorrect pronoun usage may bother you as a reader, make sure you focus on “higher order” issues in your assignment sheet, including the importance of developing ideas, demonstrating critical thinking about the subject matter, and supporting claims with evidence.
- 4. Draw on what students (should) know.** Be familiar with the basic terms your students learned in their first-year writing classes, and use these terms (i.e., thesis, topic sentence, transitions, introduction/conclusion, evidence, outside sources, scholarly and non-scholarly articles). Because your students will be writing in your discipline, use terms common to your field (ones that you have used in class and recur in their readings for the course).
- 5. Use one documentation style, correctly.** Pick a current citation style and format in your field (APA, MLA, CMS), and ask students to use the most current version. Don't alter or create your own citation style; this lack of consistency is problematic for students in your course and future courses.
- 6. Think visually.** Although this is a written document, appearances matter. Use a consistent font (Calibri or Times New Roman) and size (12 point). Use underlining, boldfacing or capital letters sparingly. And create white space in the document: a wall of text can not only be intimidating, but hard to read. Consider using bullet points to break up large paragraphs of information.
- 7. Be culturally sensitive.** Remember that non-native English speakers may struggle with idioms, verbose language, or references to culturally specific traditions or beliefs.
- 8. Provide a “toolbox” for students’ use.** Include links to the Writing Center’s various student resources, including handouts on documentation styles, grammar terms, tips on integrating sources, and other useful tools ([www.svsu.edu/writingcenter/studentandfacultyresources](http://www.svsu.edu/writingcenter/studentandfacultyresources)). Provide sample papers, if you have them, and add your instructor comments, pointing out what students did well—and didn’t do well. If you are asking students to do research, include a list of suggested library databases or other resources for students’ reference.
- 9. Make a rubric, include it in the assignment, and use it when you grade.** A good rubric is an operational “abstract” of the assignment sheet: it tells the student what you value, literally. Rubric should be simple and clear, with point values for each category.
- 10. Proofread.** This may seem obvious, but do it anyway. It is always wise to check—and recheck—your assignment sheet for any small errors.

# Writing Assignment Sheets: A Template

## Instructor/Course Information:

- Your name, email, office phone number, office location, and office hours
- The course name and number, title, semester, and year

## Assignment Title/Due Date(s):

- The assignment title
- The due date for final draft (include other dates here as needed, such as the date for first draft, peer review, or submission to Turnitin.com)

## Assignment Overview:

- The purpose of the assignment (How does this assignment help support students learning more about the class content? How does this assignment relate to the course goals and outcomes?)
- The essay topic (or, if the students can choose a topic, a list of possible options to choose)
- The essay structure (argument, lab report, analysis, literature review, etc.)

## Assignment Guidelines:

- The page range or word count (maximum and minimum)
- The required format and citation style (APA, MLA, CMS)
- The number and type of required outside sources
- The point value of the assignment

## Assignment Tips (Optional):

- A short list of mistakes students commonly make on this assignment, with suggestions on ways to avoid these mistakes

## Assignment Resources:

- References (with page numbers) to readings in the course text(s)
- A grading rubric
- Links to citation guidelines ([www.svsu.edu/writingcenter/apa](http://www.svsu.edu/writingcenter/apa) or [www.svsu.edu/mlacms](http://www.svsu.edu/mlacms))
- Suggested library databases / other library resources
- Sample student papers with instructor comments (*optional*)
- The Writing Center's location and hours (We are located in Zahnow 250 and open Mondays-Thursdays from 9 am-7 pm. For more information, visit us online at [svsu.edu/writingcenter](http://svsu.edu/writingcenter) or call x6062.)