

Writing Fellows Workshop Series #3: Formal Writing Assignments

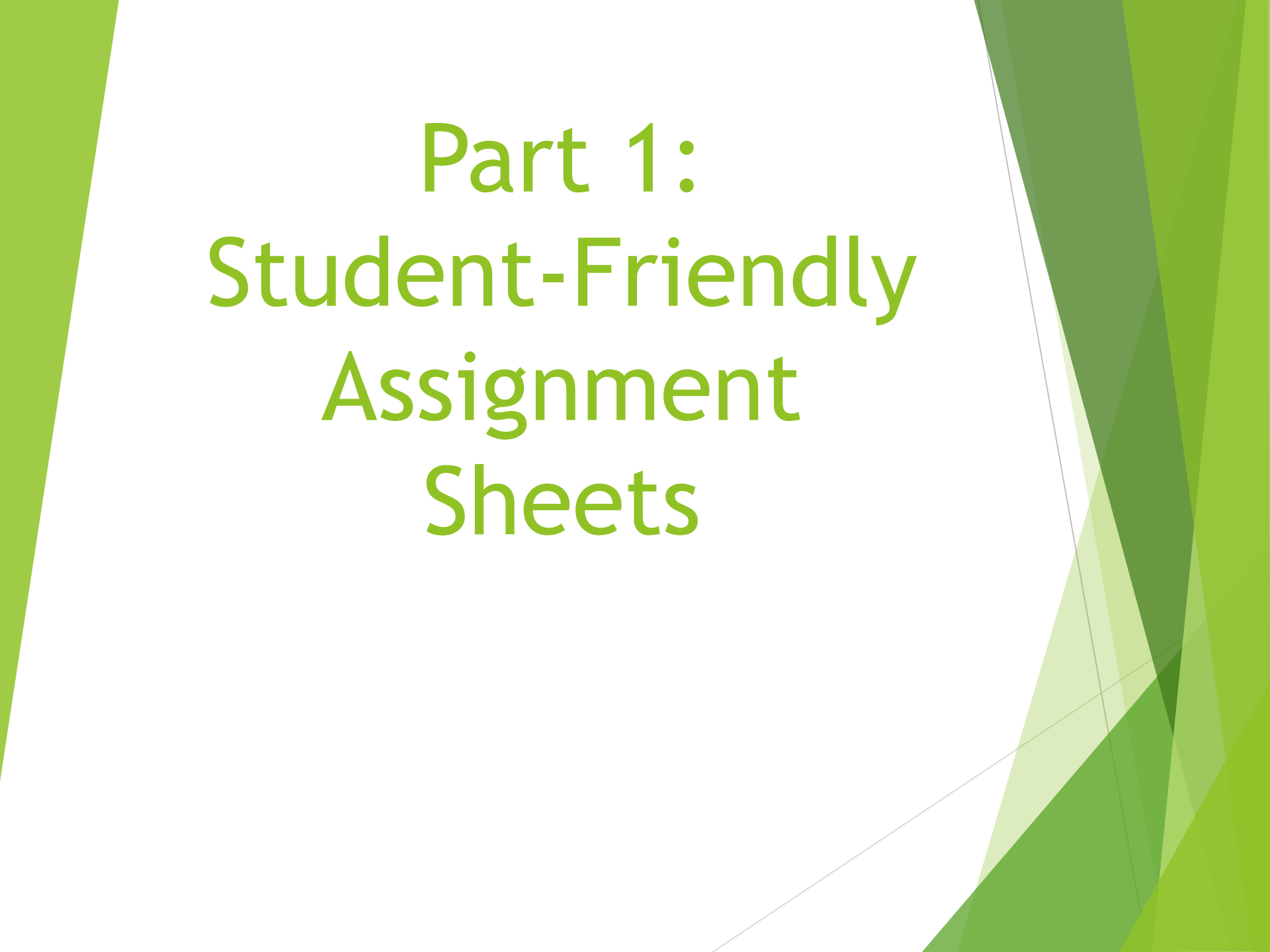
**(Student-Friendly Assignment Sheets, Revising
Assignments, and “Unplagiarizable” Assignments)**

Prepared for CETL’s Writing Fellows
Workshop Series Fall 2019

Prepared by
Megan Schutte

(she/her/hers)

**Associate Professor of English and
Director, CCBC Writing and Literacy Centers**

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, including light lime green, medium green, and dark forest green, creating a modern and dynamic feel.

Part 1: Student-Friendly Assignment Sheets

Discuss with a colleague...

What is the difference between an essay and a paper?

The Problem

When asked “What do you need help with today?” in a Writing and Literacy Center survey, most students checked every single box on the list.

Students either do not know what they need help with, or they lack the academic vocabulary with which to ask for that help.

As many of our students are under-prepared for higher education in general and academic writing in particular, they may not have anyone at home they can ask about what Rebecca Cox (2009), in *The College Fear Factor*, calls the “abstruse and mangled language” of academia (p. 141).

The Solution

- ▶ **Assignment sheets that are...**
 - ▶ **Clear**
 - ▶ **Simple**
 - ▶ **Easy to read**
 - ▶ **Explicit**
 - ▶ **Specific**
 - ▶ **Detailed**
 - ▶ **Repetitive**
 - ▶ **(And repetitive)**

Template for a Student-Friendly Assignment Sheet

- ▶ Assignment “Title”
- ▶ Due Date(s)
- ▶ Specific Assignment
- ▶ Purpose
- ▶ Audience
- ▶ Grading
- ▶ Formatting

(Just an FYI: my Assignment Sheet Template handout will include the above categories plus specifics and examples.)

Assignment Title

- ▶ Which, if any, of these do you assign?
 - ▶ Research essay?
 - ▶ Research paper?
 - ▶ Research term paper?
 - ▶ Research project?
 - ▶ Research report?
 - ▶ Research assignment?
 - ▶ Research paper assignment?
 - ▶ Research essay assignment?
 - ▶ Do you think it matters??

Due Date(s)

- ▶ Students often take multiple classes, have jobs, and need to deal with familial obligations. Thus, anything we can do to help them plan ahead is helpful.
- ▶ Consider multiple due dates with low-stakes grading.
- ▶ Adding a research due date (or, even better, due dates) helps the students organize their writing process (good for them) and improves the final product (good for you).

Specific Assignment

- ▶ **Students need to be told as clearly as possible what the assignment is. For example, many of them may not know what research entails (google!) or what kind of sources (and how many) are academic, acceptable, and appropriate. The only effective way they will learn these expectations is from their professors.**

Purpose

- ▶ There can be multiple purposes for writing, but the first thing students need to know is if they are *entertaining*, *informing* and/or *persuading* their audience. They also need to be told of any specific purposes as well.
- ▶ Having a clearly-stated purpose also helps students understand the connection of the assignment to the course specifically and their education generally.

Audience

- ▶ Knowing the audience of any piece of writing (especially college assignments) is hugely important since it informs everything including diction, level of detail, types of sources, style, etc.

Grading

- ▶ This is probably the most important section—according to the students. The more specific you can be here, the fewer questions/arguments/complaints you will have to deal with. Grading rubrics or sample assignments that cover a range of grades can also be very helpful.

Grading Continued

- ▶ Consider including some or all of these...
 - ▶ Format/submission:
 - ▶ What style guide should the student follow?
 - ▶ How long should the assignment be (e.g. word count vs. number of pages)? Does it matter?
 - ▶ Does the citation page count towards the length?
 - ▶ Do you want a title page? Does it count towards the length?
 - ▶ Do you care about font and font size?
 - ▶ How should it be submitted? Hard copy? Online? Both?
 - ▶ Should the student include his/her name? ID number?
 - ▶ Should the pages be numbered, stapled, etc.?

Grading Continued

▶ Ideas/Content:

- ▶ Are students entertaining, informing, and/or arguing?
- ▶ Do you have a specific topic for the student to cover?
- ▶ If not, do you have parameters for choosing a topic?
- ▶ How specific/in-depth should the assignment be?
- ▶ Are an introductory paragraph and a conclusion necessary?
- ▶ Are students required or allowed to include their own opinion?
- ▶ Should students be citing their textbook and/or your class lectures in addition to any research they have conducted?

Grading Continued

▶ Organization:

- ▶ Does the assignment need a clear and explicit thesis statement?
- ▶ Do you want topic sentences?
- ▶ Are transitions/connections between paragraphs necessary?

Grading Continued

▶ Style:

- ▶ How formal should the assignment be?
- ▶ Are abbreviations and contractions acceptable?
- ▶ What about any discipline-specific jargon?
- ▶ Can the student use first person singular? First person plural? Second person?
- ▶ Is conversational language acceptable?
- ▶ What about idioms or clichés?

Grading Continued

▶ Grammar and Mechanics:

- ▶ What errors do you feel are the most egregious?
- ▶ How severely will the student be punished for making those errors?
- ▶ Is there a point at which you will stop grading?
- ▶ How much of the grade is based on grammar and mechanics?
- ▶ Do you have any pet peeves?

Grading Continued

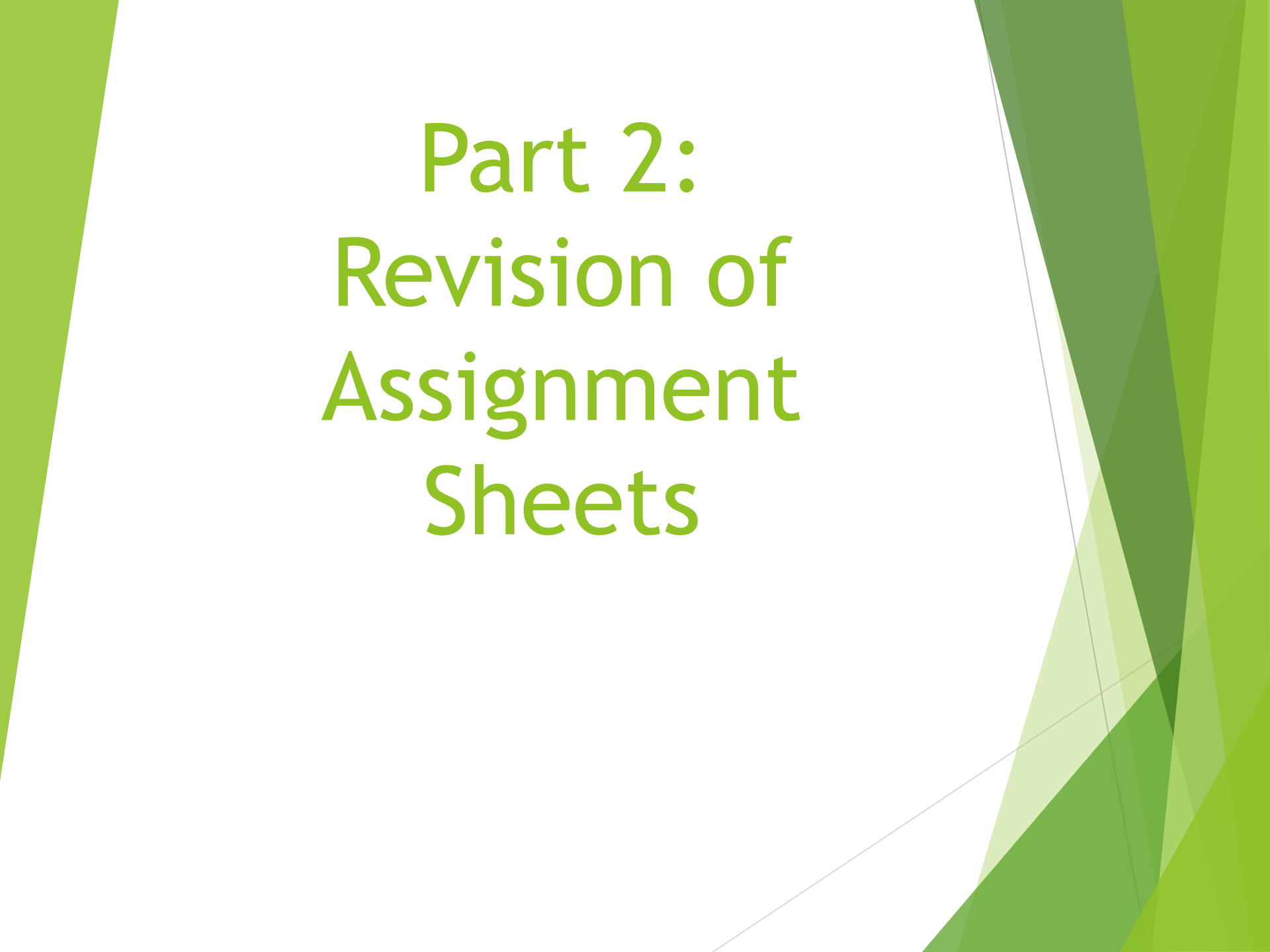
▶ Sources/Citing:

- ▶ What criteria do you want students to use to evaluate possible sources? Will that be factored into your grading process?
- ▶ How many sources are required and will students get extra points for having more than the minimum?
- ▶ Do you want or require a variety of source types (e.g. newspaper, magazine, and/or journal articles; books/ebooks; reports; websites; videos; class notes; textbook; interviews; etc.)? Are these sources available at your school?
- ▶ Do you want an annotated bibliography *before* the assignment itself is due (i.e. a research due date) or for the students to give you annotated copies of their sources?

Grading Continued

▶ Revision:

- ▶ Will students be allowed or required to revise for a better grade?
- ▶ If so, what do they need to do to be eligible to resubmit (e.g. proof of a Writing Center and/or Library visit)?
- ▶ How will resubmissions be graded?
- ▶ When are resubmissions due?

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, including light lime green, medium green, and dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the slide, framing the central text. The central area is white.

Part 2: Revision of Assignment Sheets

Revising Your Assignment

- ▶ Consider your goals/objectives for the assignment.
 - ▶ What do you want students to learn?
 - ▶ Does your assignment sheet make that clear?
- ▶ Take note of what is not working.
 - ▶ Ask students what was unclear to them.
 - ▶ Use the librarians and WLC staff to help analyze.

Sample Assignment Revision Process

(Thanks, Martha!)

(Let me know if you'd like a copy of the packet being passed around.)

Writing Assignment #2 – "Math & Me" (Outline)

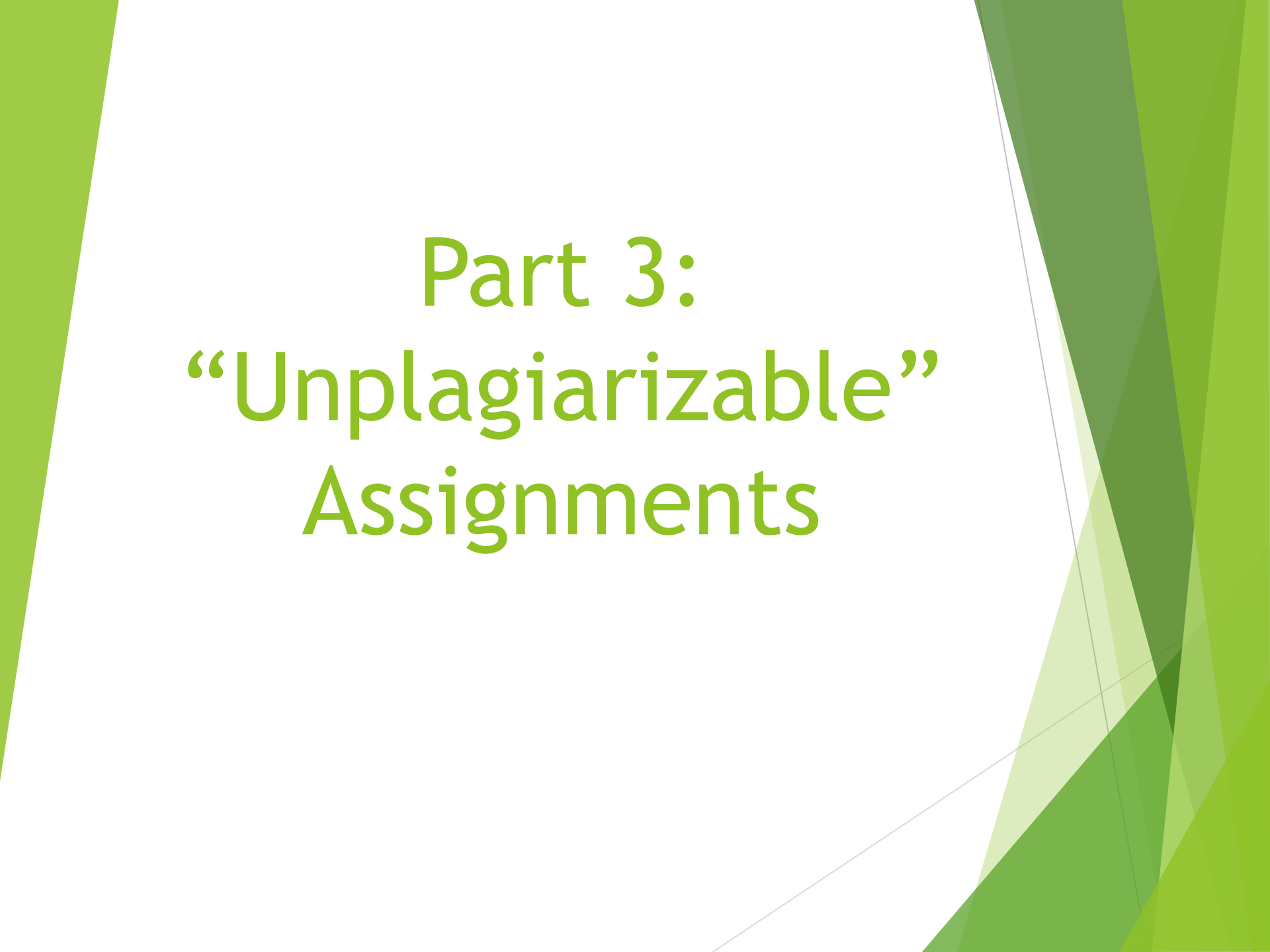
This assignment involves looking back and analyzing your relationship with mathematics since childhood. At the end of the semester, you will have an autobiographical paper about your educational journey but for now, you will just create an outline for the paper. Aspects of the final paper will include the following topics:

- 1.) What is your history with mathematics?
 - Start with elementary school and work your way up until now.
 - Share at least one positive experience you had related to mathematics.
 - Share at least one negative experience in your life that relates to your knowledge, or study, of mathematics. It could be a memory from school, a job, a store, a friend, a teacher, etc.
- 2.) How do you feel about the subject of mathematics today?
 - How would you describe your relationship with math?
 - In what ways do you use math in your daily life?
 - How do other people in your family view mathematics?
 - Have your past experiences influenced how you feel about math today?
- 3.) What role do you think mathematics will play in the rest of your life?
 - What types of math do you envision needing or using in your future career?
 - What math do you envision needing or using in your daily life?
 - What areas of math do you wish you understood better for life in general?

Criteria:

- ☆ Outlines may be typed or handwritten.
- ☆ Outlines may be emailed as attachments, or submitted in class.
- ☆
- ☆

I look forward to reading about you!

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, including light lime green, medium green, and dark forest green, creating a modern, layered effect.

Part 3: “Unplagiariizable” Assignments

Ways to Avoid Plagiarism

(Let me know if you'd like a copy of any of these assignments.)

Thanks to Cohen Ambrose for the theater assignments!

Make it personal...

(i.e. something about them and/or their learning)

- ▶ [ENGL 101 essay 1](#)
- ▶ [ENGL 101 formal assignment 3 part 2](#)
- ▶ [ENGL 102 drama assignment part 2](#)
- ▶ [THTR 155 concept essay](#)
- ▶ [THTR 180 final essay \(script analysis\)](#)

Make it random...

(i.e. something that cannot be found on the internet)

- ▶ [ENGL 102 drama assignment part 1](#)
- ▶ [ENGL 102 novel essay](#)
- ▶ [THTR 180 formal analysis \(script analysis\)](#)

A final reminder:

When students receive an assignment sheet, many of them are reluctant to ask anyone other than their peers to explain what it means.

As agents of academic and information literacy, *faculty* need to do their best to address those questions on the assignment sheet—because they may never be asked in class.

- ▶ **Questions?**
- ▶ **Comments?**
- ▶ **Issues?**
- ▶ **Suggestions?**

Thank you for your time!