

Assignment Sheet Template: Helping Your Students Meet Your Expectations

DUE DATE(S):

A specific due date (or due dates if a draft(s) and/or research component is/are required) is necessary for the students since many are taking multiple classes, have jobs, and need to tend to familial obligations. The further in advance they have an assignment—and the clearer the due date is—the easier it is for students to plan accordingly.

A lateness policy is also important. Clearly articulating your expectations for prompt submission of assignments helps students understand the severity of failing to complete their work on time. For students who already know they have to hand a paper in late, it also allows them to gauge how high on their list of priorities an assignment should be.

Due Date(s) Samples:

“Due: X by 11:00 pm” (SPCM 250)

“[Research] projects are due per the syllabus on X, the night of the presentations. Projects submitted after will be reduced 25 grade points. Projects not submitted by the beginning of the next class will receive a zero point grade.” (MNGT 101)

“The annotated bibliography is due on X. The rough draft is due on X. The final draft is due on X, at the beginning of class. Late papers lose a third of a letter per class day (e.g. a B would become a B-) and two-thirds per weekend. Failure to complete this paper results in failure of the class.” (ENGL 102)

“Late papers will be penalized 10 points per calendar day, so please make sure to submit your paper on time or early. Any paper submitted more than 5 days after the due date will receive no credit.” (PSYC 201)

“Due at the beginning of class on X. If you hand your paper in late, you will not be allowed to revise and resubmit for a better grade.” (ENGL 052)

ASSIGNMENT:

Most importantly, a clear assignment is needed. If you are looking for an essay, students need to be told what you feel that entails as clearly as possible. Students are also often unclear of academic language regarding what constitutes an “essay” versus a “paper.” Since some academics use the words interchangeably and most have a preferred term, you should be as clear to your students as possible about what your expectations are. Many of our students are first-generation and do not have individuals at home whom they can ask about academic jargon.

Clearly stating what documentation style you would like the assignment to be in is also imperative. The Writing and Literacy Centers and the libraries have multiple helpful handouts and resources for students if they are aware of which style guide you prefer. If a Works Cited (MLA)/Reference page (APA) is required, stating that explicitly is helpful since students often don’t know if in-text citations are enough. If a certain number of sources is required, that should also be clearly stated. Additionally, some professors care about students using a variety of sources; if this is important to you as well, you should say so specifically.

Assignment Samples:

“Students are expected to answer [these] questions by obtaining appropriate scientific information in resources available through the CCBC library. All work must be properly cited. Answers should be thorough and in complete sentences.” (BIOL 109)

“The essay must include an introduction, conclusion, thesis, and [quotations] that support the thesis....The page layout and citations must be in MLA. You must include in-text citations and a works cited page.” (ENGL 102)

“Choose a situation in today’s world which has its historical basis in the history of Western Civilization, and trace the roots of the situation from its origins to the present....You must engage AT LEAST FOUR SOURCES (none of which can be Wikipedia!).” (HIST 101)

PURPOSE:

Providing a purpose—to entertain, to inform, to persuade—is monumentally important to the students. Without this, they may write a wonderful document that does not fulfill your expectations. Any specific purposes would be helpful as well.

Purpose Samples:

“Nurses face real challenges in advocating for the mentally ill and expressing sound reasons for their advocacy. The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to express your position about a mental health issue.” (NURN 217)

“The purpose of this project is threefold: 1) to help each student become more self-aware of his/her own thoughts about diversity through introspection, self-examination, and active questioning of [their] own biases and stereotypes, 2) to allow for an open dialogue about diversity topics, and 3) to promote teamwork and collaboration” (PSYC 105)

“[The purpose] is to build on existing literary criticism and write your own critique of Hamlet.” (ENGL 102)

“[T]he purpose of this assignment is to find and summarize some of the evidence-based literature that supports best patient care practices in nursing and to write about how you might use the best practices in your future nursing care.” (NURN 153)

AUDIENCE:

Is the student writing for you, the instructor? For the class? For a general college audience? This section helps students with specific issues like determining appropriate diction; for example, they need to know if acronyms that are common in the field (but not often known outside it) are acceptable. Also, this helps students determine the level of detail; if the audience is a general, educated, adult audience (rather than a professor in the field), they would need to explain much more fully.

Audience Samples:

“The audience of this paper is your classmates and instructor (we are representative of an educated, adult, academic audience). However, while you can assume your reader knows the work of literature being discussed, do **not** assume that he/she understands the point you are trying to make. Explain everything!” (ENGL 102)

“Your audience will be your instructor and other members of the class.” (ENGL 101)

GRADING:

Students often care about this the most, and you can minimize questions/arguments/complaints if this section is clear and specific. A grading rubric clearly stating the characteristics of an ‘A’ assignment, a ‘C’ assignment, and a failing assignment is often very helpful also, or you might want to provide sample assignments. Consider including some or all of the list below:

Format/submission: How long should the assignment be? Do you care about word count or number of pages? Does the citation page count towards the length? What style guide should the student follow? Do you want a title page? Do you care about font and font size? Should it be submitted on Blackboard? Should the student include his/her student ID number? Should the pages be numbered, stapled, etc.?

Ideas/Content: Are students entertaining, informing, 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 the research they've conducted?

Organization: Does the assignment need a clear and explicit thesis statement? Do you want topic sentences? Are transitions/connections between paragraphs necessary or should different sections have clear headings?

Style: How formal should the assignment be? Are abbreviations and contractions acceptable? What about discipline-specific jargon? Can the student use first or second person? Is conversational language acceptable? What about idioms or clichés?

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?

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? Is a variety of source types needed and/or acceptable (e.g. newspaper, magazine, and/or journal articles; books/ebooks; reports; websites; videos; class notes; interviews; etc.)? Are all of the sources you've asked for available at CCBC? Do you want an annotated bibliography *before* the paper/essay itself is due (i.e. a research due date) or for the students to give you annotated copies of their sources?

Revision: Will students be allowed 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 and Literacy Center and/or Library visit)? How will resubmissions be graded? When are resubmissions due?

FORMATTING:

Professors often try to fit all the assignment information onto one page; however, this can often be difficult for students to read and retain. Lots of information in a small amount of space causes students to absorb less. Clearly labeled sections, important components bolded, space between paragraphs, step-by-step instructions, and simple language and sentences all help students better understand the information you are trying to convey to them.

AND WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE DONE...

...reread it like you're a student!!

If you have *any* questions or comments or would like someone to review your assignment sheet, please feel free to contact me.

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Thank you so much!