



Writing Assignments: A Selection

The following writing assignments are ways to connect with the goals of the FYOS and encourage the “Habits of Mind” the Council of Writing Program Administrators identify as important to success in college writing. Most of these are informal (low stakes) writing exercises, but some of them can be adapted into more formal assignments as well.

50 Word Assignment	Given at most fifty words, students must distill their arguments’ fundamentals and phrase them concisely; they may respond to a prompt or simply summarize the reading.	Goal 1 Curiosity, Engagement, Metacognition
Analysis of Events	After an event is reported in the general news media or in your disciplinary media, ask students to reflect on what happened, why it happened, what it means to your field. Alternately, take an actual event and ask students to write about how the outcome might differ if one crucial condition were changed. For example, what if Dolly, the famous cloned sheep, had been successfully produced on the first try?	Goal 1 Creativity, Curiosity, Engagement, Openness, Metacognition
Annotated Bibliographies	An annotation typically asks students to note key ideas and briefly evaluate strengths and weaknesses in an article with a discipline-specific citation and a one-paragraph response that requires students to note the purpose and scope of a reading and to relate the reading to a particular course project.	Goal 1 Engagement, Responsibility
Believing and Doubting Game	Students write briefly in support of an idea, concept, methodology, or thesis, and then in opposition to it. As students complete this writing activity based on a course reading or controversy in the field, they become more adept at understanding the complexity of issues and arguments.	Goal 1 Engagement, Openness, Responsibility
Bibliographic Trace	Ask students to use a GALILEO database to locate and read a journal article on a subject, ideally one related to a current topic or class discussion/reading. Students will then examine 3-5 citations from that article and trace how the information was used and passed along. Students could then summarize their findings from the 3-5 sources and discuss how information was “traced” from one researcher to another.	Goal 1 Engagement, Curiosity Persistence
Brainstorm by Questions	Ask students to write a list of questions on a topic by brainstorming in writing, or ask students to respond informally to open-ended questions. In such activities, the goal is to encourage student speculation in writing.	Goal 2 Curiosity, Openness, Responsibility

Career Opportunities	Students compose a profile of a company they might wish to work for some using information like company reports, statistics, and news/magazine articles. Pair students and have them play the roles of employer and applicant at a job interview. Each pair will write up three questions an employer would want to ask an applicant and the best answers to these questions that would get the applicant hired.	Goal 1 Creativity, Engagement, Responsibility, Flexibility
Case Studies	Ask students to respond to a professional or intellectual dilemma in your field. For example, a business instructor might use this scenario: Assume that you've just been hired in a local office of a large asset management firm. Your first client has traded stocks conservatively for several years and now wants to try options trading. What basic principles of options trading do you need to be sure your client understands?	Goal 1 Creativity, Openness, Flexibility, Engagement
Class Minutes	The secretary-for-the-day records minutes, duplicates them for all class members, and presents/discusses them briefly at the beginning of the next class. You may require other students to supplement or amend as appropriate.	Goals 1, 2 Engagement, Responsibility
Communication Disaster	Each student researches a disaster (or at least a severe problem) in her field caused by miscommunication or non-communication and writes a report for an audience is a group of managers in the student's future workplace and the goal is to make them aware of a problem that has happened elsewhere, so that it doesn't happen again.	Goal 1 Curiosity, Engagement, Flexibility
Course Dictionaries	Create a glossary of key terms in a course, with students producing definitions, examples, illustrations, maps, diagrams, etc. The audience for the dictionary is students who will take the course in future semesters.	Goal 1 Engagement, Responsibility
Critical Article Report	Students find journal articles related to course topics. Have them cite, summarize, evaluate, and reflect upon the value of the article for understanding the topic. Students can present their article (summary, evaluation, and reflection) to the class using a one- or two-slide presentation, accompanied by a brief, 3-minute oral presentation.	Goals 1, 2 Curiosity, Engagement, Metacognition, Openness
Cutting Edge Issue	Students research and summarize the most (or one of the most) exciting, potentially revolutionary, cutting-edge developments in their fields. They compose a text for a group of high-school students who are considering majoring in the student's field.	Goals 1, 2, 3 Curiosity, Openness, Engagement, Responsibility
Daily Logs	Logbooks (kept physically or electronically) may be structured or unstructured, requiring students to complete frequent short entries, in which they, for example, summarize material, connect course topics with their observations and experiences, answer questions you design, or reflect on their own notes using double-entry notebooks.	Goals 2, 3 Curiosity, Engagement, Metacognition, Persistence
Describe a Paradigm	Students reveal a central or highly significant paradigm of your discipline. Students should identify what that paradigm is, describe how it functions to create problem-solving strategies (the work that one in the discipline does), and what paradigm it replaced. This last, a contrast that reveals the importance of the new paradigm, may be an organizing principle for writing. Paradigms can usually be traced back to one of the big names and a struggle to supplant the older paradigm.	Goal 1 Engagement, Metacognition
Evolution of an Idea	Students analyze the reception of a particular idea or concept over time by finding books/magazines/journals from various time periods, from the idea's inception to the present. Students evaluate these sources to create an annotated timeline of the discourse.	Goal 1 Engagement, Curiosity, Persistence, Metacognition

Expanding the Discipline	Have students do a search of the UGA website to look for programs that involve undergraduates in research, teaching, service, and possibly one extracurricular activity. Challenge them to connect these programs to the course content, to their prospective majors, or to their larger career goals. Possible programs may include CURO, Service Learning, Study Abroad, and GORP.	Goals 1, 3 Engagement, Responsibility, Creativity, Flexibility
How to Respond?	Give students a set of questions or problems from which to choose and, rather than asking them to detail an answer to a particular item, ask them to write a brief strategy for going about responding to it.	Goal 1 Responsibility, Engagement
Journals/Blogs	You can encourage your students to journal privately and/or blog publicly and require classmate responses. Make sure students understand how this task relates explicitly to course material with prompts or clearly established guidelines.	Goals 2, 3 Curiosity, Engagement, Persistence
Just the Facts	Give students an editorial, website or political speech to read and ask them to verify the information, using a variety of library resources. Before beginning the assignment, the class could examine the FactCheck.org website as an example of professional fact checking in the public interest.	Goal 1 Curiosity, Responsibility, Engagement
Letters	Students write letters of application, responses to an author, and/or acceptance or rejection notices in response to assigned readings. This assignment encourages students to interact with source material and use their own creativity.	Goals 1, 2, 3 Creativity, Engagement, Flexibility
Microthemes	The Microtheme is a brief essay limited to one side of a 5" x 8" index card, or comparably limited media. Students can summarize a reading, create and support an argument, provide data with explanations of its relevance, or offer a solution to a puzzling occurrence.	Goal 1 Engagement
Minute Papers	Students perform short, informal writing exercises that can be done over readings, in-class or out-of-class questions, or in-class activities (e.g. a speaker, a video, an article, etc.). Questions can encourage students to summarize a topic, list three main points of a reading, or briefly describe a most difficult/interesting/alarming topic.	Goals 2, 3 Curiosity, Engagement
The Non-Paper Paper	Research Paper without the final product During the first week, they develop a topic and leading questions, followed by successive stages: W3: Students turn in descriptions of paper to be evaluated; W6: Students submit list of works they've consulted and those they still plan to; W9: Students select the most important part of their paper and turn in a 1-2 page abstract with citations of that part; W12: Draft of outline due; W14/15: Final thesis, polished outline, and a careful bibliography/annotated bibliography.	Goal 2 Curiosity, Engagement, Persistence
Overcoming Obstacles	Have students write about a time when they struggled to accomplish something that was challenging but intrinsically motivating. The professor can find and discuss commonalities between the students' stories and his or her own journey.	Goals 1, 2 Flexibility, Responsibility
Portfolios	Portfolios are either paper-based or electronic collections of student work from the course of the semester. Students choose work to include in their portfolio and then write a critical reflection on these "artifacts." Often, one work from the semester is rewritten and students are asked to comment on the changes they made and what that change means.	Goals 1, 2, 3 Engagement, Metacognition, Persistence, Responsibility
Prioritizing Questions	Students create a list of questions from a difficult reading assignment/s or a class meeting, then they prioritize the questions and suggest methods for answering them. This assignment can be a useful follow-up to a brainstorm with questions.	Goals 1, 2 Engagement, Metacognition, Responsibility

Professional Problem Solving	Working in groups, students are given a typical ‘problem’ that a professional in their field would confront, e.g., a teacher dealing with a 3rd grade math class with students of widely varying ability. The groups must find a website and/or journal article that would help them solve the problem.	Goal 1 Creativity, Flexibility, Openness, Responsibility
Proposals	Students compose a detailed plan that fits a given timeframe and budget. An effective proposal answers certain questions about the kind of project, methodology, hopeful outcomes, resources required, duration, and expenses.	Goals 1, 2, 3 Creativity, Responsibility, Engagement
Research Guide to the Discipline	Students describe major library and Internet resources in your field for an audience of other students who are new to the field. They must organize and format this information so that other students can use the university library and internet efficiently for research by following your guide.	Goal 1 Engagement, Metacognition, Responsibility
Session Recap	Less formal than the Class Minutes assignment, this task requires students to recap the day’s discussion in four or five points, focus on a more lengthy explanation of class’s most important point, or identify a relationship between two or more ideas in less than one page.	Goal 2 Engagement, Metacognition, Responsibility
Social Issues & Media Bias	Ask students, working in groups, to select a current social issue relevant to the course content (i.e. immigration, global warming, education reform, etc.) and find and compare two articles from either a domestic and foreign news source or from a scholarly and non-scholarly source. Ask them to write a group report detailing any evidence of bias and/or differences in the way a story is reported in different types of sources.	Goal 1 Curiosity, Engagement, Flexibility, Metacognition, Openness
Student Goals	Have student write about their long-term professional and personal goals. Where do those goals come from? How do students intend to use their college career to help pave the way toward those goals?	Goal 1 Creativity, Engagement, Responsibility
Survey Says?	Using an assigned reading, ask students to brainstorm several ‘what, how or why’ research questions on a specific issue. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a question. The groups will find a specified number of sources to answer their question (a book, journal/magazine article, website, etc.) and present a summary of their findings to the class. Taken together, the work of each of the groups will provide the class with the “big picture” of the issue.	Goal 1 Curiosity, Engagement, Metacognition, Openness, Responsibility
Three-Panel Argument Poster and Oral Presentation	Students express an argument or summary of ideas in multi-modal format (a poster, a visual presentation, etc.). Students use both visual and verbal communication skills to present a clear topic overview with a specific emphasis encouraged or designed by the instructor.	Goal 1 Creativity, Engagement, Metacognition, Flexibility
Website Evaluation	Working in small groups, students are asked to examine and evaluate two websites relevant to a specific research topic. Students must determine whether these sites are authoritative, reliable, and current in the field and summarize their findings.	Goal 1 Curiosity, Engagement, Metacognition
Weekly One-Pager	In response to readings, students select the most interesting, problematic, or conversation-worthy ideas and organize them into a brief one-page paper that is collected in class and often serves as a starting off point for discussion.	Goals 1, 2 Curiosity, Engagement, Persistence

Writing for Academic Aims: Discovering Argumentative Writing in Your Discipline	Students will analyze the way that academics write in a specific area of study. To do this, they will need to choose an article from a scholarly journal in the major area (students may ask for recommendations). Once they have selected and carefully studied the article, analyze the rhetorical strategies that the author(s) employed. This assignment differs from the Critical Article Report because it focus on <i>how</i> , not <i>what</i> , a particular scholar communicates. A successful thesis will be a claim about how scholars communicate in a discipline and why they might communicate in this particular way, given the aims of the discipline.	Goals 1, 2 Curiosity, Engagement, Metacognition, Responsibility
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Assignments for this handout were compiled from a number of different sources. Please feel free to review these sources for new and/or more detailed ideas.

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