

The Perfect Prompt:  
Getting Students to Write What You Want to Read

- I. Determine purpose(s) for having students write: what is your objective for the paper? How does the paper help you fulfill course objectives and goals?
  - a. Develop content knowledge (writing to learn)
  - b. Demonstrate content knowledge
  - c. Use disciplinary methods or foundations
  - d. Acquire and/or experiment with critical thinking
  - e. Apply course knowledge to new areas of inquiry
- II. Help students understand the prompt. As a class, unpack:
  - a. Key terms
  - b. Purpose
  - c. Evidence
  - d. What are the objectives of the course, and how does the paper fit in?
  - e. What is the audience for the paper?
  - f. What are the disciplinary conventions students should expect to practice?
- III. Keep it simple, silly!
  - a. The more details your prompt has, the more daunting it becomes.
  - b. Keep it open so that students can write something they are interested in!
  - c. Avoid too-personal question
  - d. Be aware of students' knowledge base
  - e. Consider specific/immediate situations
  - f. Encourage personalized approaches
  - g. Avoid yes/no, true/false questions
  - h. Only ask **one question**
  - i. Find a balance: not too short, not too long!
  - j. Sequence and scaffold whenever possible
- IV. Get eyes on your prompt
  - a. Circulate your prompt or discuss it with others teaching the same or a similar course
  - b. Solicit feedback from mentors/the writing program administrator (Courtney Werner)
  - c. Ask your colleagues to help you proofread the assignment
  - d. Look at the assignment from a student's point of view (**write for your audience**)
- V. Encourage students to seek feedback
  - a. Office hours
  - b. TA
  - c. Klooster Center writing assistants
  - d. Embedded writing assistant

Review the references on the reverse side for great sources for more information and sample course assignments.

### References and Resources

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