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


