Accessible Assignments Through Document Design

Assignment Prompts: Directions and Disconnect

There is often a disconnect between how instructors and students interpret the content of assignment prompts, which can lead to students not meeting learning objectives. Gen Z students are part of the No Child Left Behind generation and are used to reading in highly structured environments. Digital natives are also part of a very visual culture who are used to colorful user interfaces and minimal text. Students consume information differently and may feel intimated by text-heavy assignment instructions. Instructors may overlook document design in creating assignment prompts to meet the changing needs of students.

Although the assignment prompts themselves can be useful in teaching students how to read "at the college level," the prompt itself ultimately doesn't matter—what matters is that students are able to do the projects we give them.

Formatting Failure: ENGH 101 Annotated Bibliography Assignment

In Fall of 2019, I provided the prompt below—which was designed by the Composition Program—to students for an annotated bibliography project. Just by looking at the document, I realized that students would have problems with it. It was a four-part assigned that was divided into two sections, which many students had trouble understanding. It's text-heavy, inconsistent with indentation, and uses bolding/underlining in a way that isn't helpful and makes it more visually cluttered.



Out of 14 students who turned it in, the average score was an 86%, which isn't bad, but it's largely an assignment of ticking off boxes. A lot of it had to do with getting extensive feedback on it, and the rough drafts for it showed just how confused students were when trying to complete this assignment. I polled students at the end of the semester and more than 50% of them said they didn't read them entire prompt. Others said that it was hard to find specific instructions within it. All of them indicated that it was confusing.

Revised Prompt: ENGH 101 Annotated Bibliography Assignment

In Spring 2020, I revised the prompt to make information more concise and clearly divided. I added a little bit of color to make it more visually organized and used more bullets and white space. Students were not confused about the various parts anymore and the average grade went up by almost 10 points.

Part	related bibliography is a tool to help you assess, select, and evaluate sources. If also helps you in the ways that your sources come bipather in conversation and answer, shift, or modify your in question.
8.	One: Annotating Sources
	Choose eight highly credible sources that present a variety of perspectives in your tapic. Bources much have an identifiable author of it is not an acceptable source.
2	Place your sources in alphabetical order in proper APA or MLA format.
3.	Compose an annotation with the following two parts:
	 Paragraph 1: Evaluate Source Credibility Research the authors or publication to evaluate the source and include a link to where you found the internation.
	 Paragraphs 3-3: Summarize the Source Communit specificity on the Persis, purpose, audience, and what specific points and facts are important for answering your research spectrum. Shrue that you understand the context and paragraphic of the source.
Part	Field: Source Cennections
	Make a list, diagram, or paragraph(x) in which you connect each source to at least one other source
z	For each connection, septen in 2-3 sentences how these sources are related. You might consider the following questions:
	 Do the sources agree or disagree with each other? Why?
	 Does one source help you to understand another source? How?
	 Does one source complicate your understanding of another source? How?
Part	Dree: Research Evaluation
Y2 de	ar research evaluation should be about 400-503 words and is likely to be longer if you primarily online your body of research. You should answer the following questions in your paragraphs:
	 What publication do you envision your HAG anticle being hypothetically published? Hein Has the audience of that publication shaped your research that descrete selection? Heine Has your ensemb has integrated, complicated and confirmed your status? What intermetion has obtigged your project or research quadation? Heine? What intermetion days us it mater?

Document Design Strategies for Approachable Assignments

- Make use of white space.
- Use color with enough contrast for blind, low-vision, or color blind students.
- Include numbered or bulleted lists instead of dense paragraphs.
- Use meaningful bolding, italicizing, or underlining—but not in excess.
- Include titles and headings for students who use screen readers.

Additional Resources

Andersen, Rebekka. "Teaching Visual Rhetoric as a Close Reading Strategy." *Composition Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, University of Cincinnati on behalf of Composition Studies, Oct. 2016, pp. 15–38, 233, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1873941985/.

Lowe, M. Sara, et al. "Impact of Assignment Prompt on Information Literacy Performance in First-Year Student Writing." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 42, no. 2, Elsevier Inc, Mar. 2016, pp. 127–34, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2016.01.002.