Assigning Student Writing: You Get What You Ask For

10 February 2012
Colby Writing Project

Laura Saltz
American Studies

Robert Gastaldo
Geology
Seven Ideas for Creating Effective Assignments

1. The writing comes first. Plan the readings around the writing assignments.

2. Sequence your assignments, working backwards. Imagine the most advanced/complex writing that you want your students to produce in the class and work backwards to the least complex. Then sequence the assignments with the simplest writing tasks coming earlier in the course and the more advanced ones later.

3. Ask yourself: what intellectual moves would students need to know how to perform to complete the assignment successfully?

4. Assign pre-writing or exercises that enable students to practice these moves, one at a time. Sequence these smaller exercises to give students the change to try out ideas and receive feedback.

5. Look carefully at the wording of your assignment. Do you ask them to analyze, critique, argue, explore, discuss? Are you asking for what you really want? Do students understand what is being asked of them?

6. Show examples of writing that illustrates components of the assignment.

7. Integrate the handbook into assignments to show students where to find instruction and support.
Colby Writing Project Course Development Proposal:
The Social Life of Chinese Things

Course Description

Long before Wal-mart stitched the “Made in China” label into your t-shirt and Apple slapped a similar sticker on your iPhone, China was known for its stuff – that is, for producing, trading, and consuming luxury items and everyday goods. This course introduces students to writing about China’s long history of material culture, covering “things” from ancient China’s “bronze age” to today’s consumer revolution and tracing the social life of Chinese things through production, circulation, and consumption. At each stage, students will develop basic skills in critical thinking and writing: analyzing primary and secondary sources, crafting a sentence, forming an argument, and writing a research paper. This course will take a consciously interdisciplinary approach, drawing on art, economics, history, anthropology and sociology, helping students to develop a strong writing foundation for liberal arts scholarship in the Colby tradition.

Outline of Topics and Assignments

I. Making Things: the history of Chinese material culture; modular production and the modules of writing
   • Writing what you see: primary source – close analysis
   • Assignments: 2 object studies based on visits to the Colby Museum (2-3 pages each, revision optional)
   • Reading:

II. Circulating things: debates in Chinese economic history
   • Writing what you read: secondary source - close analysis, finding the argument,
   • Assignment: historiographical essay, single source or comparative (3-5 pages, revision required)
   • Reading: selections
     Fairbank, Jonathan, TBD

**III. Consuming Things**: Chinese consumerism from the early modern period to the present day
- Writing what you think: comparing multiple sources, forming an original argument
- Assignment: critical essay on changes in Chinese consumerism over time, consumerism during a particular time period or consumption more generally; must use at least three different sources as evidence; must have an original argument (4-5 pages, revision required)
- Reading: *selections*

**IV. The Social Life of Things**: analyzing objects in context
- Writing the social life of a thing: conducting original research in primary and secondary materials, forming an original argument
- Assignments: Write a paper on an object “made in China” that considers the social life of the object, tracing the object from production to consumption. The paper must have an original argument, use at least three primary sources (written, visual or material), and engage the arguments of at least 5 secondary sources. Smaller assignments guide the students step-by-step through the research process.
  (1) Object study (2 pages)
  (2) Annotated bibliography (at least 2 books, 3 journal articles)
  (3) Critical literature review (3 pages)
  (4) Draft and peer review session
  (5) Final paper (6-8 pages, revision required)
Essay 1: Close Reading and Analysis of a Single Text (5 pages)

Students analyze a written text by focusing on some problematical aspect of the text, a gap or inconsistency, for instance. The assignment asks them to explicate the problem, relying on the evidence of the text and their own analysis. Students choose one of three source texts to work with: *Crito*, Justice Stewart’s dissent in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, or philosopher James Rachels’s essay “Active and Passive Euthanasia.”

*Predrafts:* One predraft writing assignment asks students to summarize, in a paragraph, the text they’ve chosen and, in a second paragraph, to explain what particular aspect (or aspects) of the text they find problematic and the question(s) it raises.

*Writing Tasks of E1:* Close reading, summarizing, analyzing, developing a question based on the analysis of a single text, using that question to focus the essay, orienting readers, drawing inferences from textual evidence, handling quotations, documenting, and organizing their thinking into a clearly structured essay.

Emphasis on focus, evidence, idea, structure.

Essay 2: Analysis of an Argument (6-8 pages)

Students analyze an argumentative essay and engage the author’s argument; that is, they push beyond or against the author’s ideas to offer an idea of their own. This requires that students bring additional evidence to bear on the central source text. Students choose one of six or seven source texts, such as “God as a Hobby” by Stephen Carter or “Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim’s Story” by Mari Matsuda.

*Predrafts:* There are three predraft assignments in this sequence, all of which ask students to engage the same text but in different ways: summarize it, affirm the author’s point of view, with evidence; challenge the author’s point of view, with evidence.

*Writing Tasks of E2:* The same as Essay 1, plus examining assumptions, defining terms, and integrating evidence from more than one source into an argument.

Emphasis on assumptions, key terms, movement of thought, argument.

Essay 3: An Argument Using Primary and Secondary Sources (8-10 pages)

Students analyze the opinions of a Supreme Court case in the context of related primary and secondary sources. The assignment asks students to handle multiple sources and different types of evidence, and to focus and develop their own arguments.

*Predrafts:* Three predraft writing assignments ask students to: (1) summarize the key points of argument in the briefs and opinions; (2) consider the legal texts in the context of at least two of the other primary sources, noting connections between and among them; (3) draft a beginning.

*Writing Tasks of E3:* All of the tasks of the first two essays, plus handling and documenting multiple sources, integrating primary and secondary evidence, and developing a complex argument.

Emphasis on interpretation and integration of evidence, organization, transitions, argument.

Essay 4: An Essay of Students’ Own Design (5-7 pages)

This assignment asks students to work independently, within the context of the course, to choose their own topic and sources (though I make suggestions). The challenge of the essay is to do it on their own.
*Predrafts:* One predraft assignment asks students to write an informal proposal for their essays, which we then discuss in conference. No draft conferences are required for E4, but I have plenty of open office hours.

*Writing Tasks of E4:* Organizing, focusing, and developing their own essays. Emphasis on clarity of thought, prose.
Common Assignment Types

ANALYZING A SINGLE IDEA, TEXT, EVENT, OR SUBJECT

1. **Summarize and evaluate an argument:** requires concise describing and often adducing of assumptions, evaluating evidence, drawing out implications, imagining counter-arguments.

   *e.g.:* Write a 3-5 page essay on the argument of Mary Wollstonecraft’s work. Consider the virtue of, but also the problems that arise from, the fact that Wollstonecraft grounds claims for female equality in the capacity to reason.

2. **Produce a compositional or rhetorical analysis:** says how something is composed to produce its general effect or meaning (could be a painting, symphony, building, poem, novel, passage, photograph, film, advertisement, etc.).

   *e.g.:* Write a critical analysis of a full-page magazine advertisement in which the North American landscape is the primary image.

3. **Infer the significance** of a text, object, or event for our understanding of a particular culture or event within that culture, demonstrating the presence of implied values, attitudes, purposes, ideologies.

   *e.g.:* Analyze critically one of the popular, book-length memoirs in the following list. What does it reveal about the character and meaning of post-war American society?

4. **Compose an explanatory narrative,** saying how and why some event, institution, idea, or attitude came to be, explaining the main causes or the main results, or the role that a certain element played in the story.

   *e.g.:* Describe the repeated failure of liberal nationalism in Iran during the 1950s and ‘60s. How did the government originally gain momentum and what were its main objectives? What led to its demise?

---

RELATING MULTIPLE TEXTS, EVENTS, OR OBJECTS (sometimes using one as context for another)

5. *Do a comparative analysis*, relating two or more texts or events by comparing them on some topic or question (may also involve judging between the texts, e.g., between two secondary articles; a variant is a hypothetical reply by one thinker to another, or hypothetical dialogue between two thinkers on a topic).

   e.g.: *Who was more faithful to the intentions of the Founders on the question of slavery, Lincoln or Douglas?*

   *Discuss the concept of “territory” as it is manifest in any three of the texts we have read.*

6. *Take a position on a given issue or question*, bringing together various sources and ideas from lectures to argue yes or no to a question, or to agree or disagree with a short quoted passage or article.

   e.g.: *“A moral theory of international relations can only be consequentialist and utilitarian.” Explain why you agree or disagree, referring to specific readings.*

7. *Apply or test a theory* (or model, definition, method, or category) on some data, whether textual, ethnographic, statistical, empirical, or personal.

   e.g.: *Choose one of the theoretical approaches to immigration that we have studied in the past week and use it to analyze NAFTA or Proposition 187.*

8. *Contextualize an event, work, or debate*, saying how its circumstances (artistic, cultural biographical, institutional) played a role in making it what it is, or how we understand it differently, knowing this context, than we otherwise might.

   e.g., *In a paper of five to seven pages, discuss Berlioz’s Fantastic Symphony or Schumann’s Fourth Symphony specifically as a reaction to Beethoven’s legacy.*

9. *Recommend a course of action*, having been supplied with a set of real or imagined circumstances and asked to write a memo recommending one course or approach over others, after defining the issues and options.

   e.g., *Prepare a memo (not exceeding five pages) advising Secretary of HUD Cisneros on his options regarding the MTO housing program and recommending which option he should pursue, after discussing policy objectives, advantages, and disadvantages. Use the tools of economic analysis and the knowledge about economic behavior you have acquired in this course, and make sure you address the criticisms raised in the Wall Street Journal article.*
Crafting an Assignment: Some Basics

Provide a topic
- Provide a few options
- Provide suggested but not required topics
- Specify that students must design their own questions/topics
- Decide who determines the stakes of the argument (the “so what” question), you or the student, and provide a few options/examples if relevant

Describe the intellectual operations entailed by the assignment
- Explain the purpose of the assignment
- Explain the relationship of the current assignment to previous assignments (and/or pre-draft exercises)
- Use precise language about what you’re asking students to do: Describe? Analyze? Argue? Evaluates? Contextualize? Formulate a problem or dilemma? Compare or contrast (rarely do you really want them to compare *and* contrast!)? Consider a counterargument? Consider an implication or connotation? Etc.

Describe what the essay might look like
- Explain what kinds of evidence are appropriate
- Explain how many sources, what kinds of sources, and what their relationship to each other might be (what kinds of secondary/primary sources? should there be a focal text? text in context? Etc.)
- Describe possible structures (point-by-point, text-by-text) or structural features (complication, counterargument, reversal, change of emphasis)

Describe some customary pitfalls; articulate cautions (refer to pages in handbook)
- Unacceptable responses to the assignment (use of extra sources, failure to use extra sources, evaluation rather than argument, etc.)
- Challenges/snares in the writing (description rather than argument, undefined terms, organization by example rather than idea, etc.)

Lay out the logistics
- State the exact date, place, and time the essay is due and how long it should be
- Specify the number of copies you want to receive
- Specify whether you want a hard copy or an email attachment
- List other mechanics (spacing, font size, pagination, etc.)

Special instructions (refer to relevant pages in the handbook you are using)
- Ask students to perform a stylistic move (start your essay with an example; use a colon in your title, etc.)
- Ask students to focus on a particular part of the essay (introductions, transition, conclusions, etc.)
- Ask students to focus on a particular grammatical challenge (don’t use “to be”)
Essay #2: Image and Text

During your time at Harvard, it is likely that you will be asked to write about two texts together: to consider one in light of the other, or to produce a comparative analysis. Essay #2, an essay of 6-7 pages, asks you to analyze two texts—one visual (a Gardner photograph) and one written (by Whitman, Lincoln, Douglass, Trachtenberg, or Danto). You will use the same methods of close reading that you learned in Essay #1, but in Essay #2 your main text will be a photograph chosen from the list on Exercise 2.1. From your close reading, you will craft an argument in which you bring to bear insights you have garnered from one of the written texts. A central task will be to motivate the pairing of image and text that you choose: first, to demonstrate the appropriateness of the pairing (that the image and text really speak to each other); and second, to demonstrate a conflict, problem, or question that arises out of looking at these two particular texts together (that they don't simply say the same thing).

In thinking about the photo and text together, you might ask yourself some of the following questions: Does what you see in the photo echo any moments in the literary texts you have read? Clash with them? Does it raise questions that cannot be answered from the internal evidence of the photo itself, but that can be answered if you bring in an outside text? What information from outside the photo will help you understand it better? In other words, look for bridges or points of entry from one text to another. Your written text might frame, illuminate, add a new twist to, or contextualize your interpretation of the photo.

Note: Your essay should include, but not confine itself to, a brief, straightforward description of the photo you have chosen. In describing what the photograph pictures, you demonstrate to your reader what you deem significant when you look at the image.

Strategies for Balancing Two Texts

Part of the challenge of this essay will be to weave two texts together gracefully and convincingly. Should you write about one text first, then the next? Or should you integrate them point-by-point? The structure of your essay (text-by-text or point-by-point) will depend on the argument you are making. Possible strategies for organizing your essay are:

- Use the written source to frame your argument about the photograph. Such a strategy entails opening (and probably closing) your essay with a discussion of the written source that leads into your argument about photo. In this arrangement, your written text becomes a lens through which you look at the photograph, which becomes your focal text. Your lens may help you pose questions or suggest interpretations (by providing a key term or concept) about the photo. Stitch back periodically to your frame text as you discuss the photo.

- Introduce your written text 1/2 or 2/3 of the way through the essay. Such a strategy entails taking your analysis of the photo as far as you can given the evidence it (and its accompanying caption) provide. You would then turn to the written source to answer questions raised but not answered by the photo (a problem-solution structure); to introduce a complication or confirmation of your argument; or to invoke and set to rest a counterargument. Such a strategy
works best if you indicate to your reader in your introduction that the essay will consider two
texts; it may also entail constructing a final section of the essay that discusses the two texts
together.

- Weave evidence from your literary source into your argument about the photograph from
beginning to end. Such a strategy entails building many small bridges from image to text
without losing the main path of your argument.

**Cautions**

- As in Essay #1, where your thesis needed to be about the text rather than Douglass himself,
here your thesis needs to be about the image/text rather than the war itself.

- Avoid the compare-contrast seesaw (see the attached Lampoon essay) in which you argue that
your image and text are the same but different—who would disagree? Remember, you should
be analyzing the conflict or tension between the texts (the slight misfit), or bringing a question
or problem articulated in one text to bear on the other.

- Make sure to give specific evidence for your claims. If you say that the photo directs your eye
to a particular spot or on a particular path, describe the visual cues that direct you. The angle of
a tree, the repetition of diagonals, the use of vanishing point perspective are all examples of
visual elements that lead the eye. Objects that look dangerous (e.g., a sword pointed at the
viewer) or imposingly large are examples of items that might repel the eye, forcing it to follow
a certain trajectory through the image.

- Avoid generalizations such as "nature," "man," or "symbol." Instead, specify particular natural
elements, identify specific individuals or groups of people, or identify precisely what a symbol
means. Otherwise, you run the risk of writing an essay that is vague and that offers platitudes
and generalizations rather than an argument.

- "Symbol" corollary: avoid claiming that an object equals some larger construct. For example,
if a photo is divided horizontally into two halves, they don't "equal" the North and South,
although internal evidence from the photo (uniforms, heads facing in different directions) might
allow you to look for clues about the way the image offers a representation of conflict. In other
words, avoid an overly allegorical reading of the photo.

*Two copies of Essay #2 are due in my mailbox Mon., March 15, by 11:00 am. Two copies of
revisions plus the draft with my comments on it are due Fri., March 26, by 4:00 pm. Include cover
letters on both the draft and the revision.*

**Exercise 2.1**

This will hardly be an exercise at all—you deserve a break! Read the "Introduction to
Dover Edition" of Gardner's *Sketchbook* and the preface to the original edition (which follows the
intro). Then look through the entire *Sketchbook*, paying special attention to the following plates
and the captions printed opposite them: 2, 14, 18, 22-24, 27, 39, 44-7, 49, 57, 62, 63, 73-6, 80, 83,
85, 91, 93, 94, 99, 100. You will only write about one of these images in Essay #2, but it will
nevertheless be important to have a sense of how the photo you choose fits into the larger design of the Sketchbook. So choose 10 images from the list above that seem especially interesting or representative to you. Put the images in three groups (of three or four each) according to a scheme that makes sense to you. Then write a sentence or two that explains the rationale of your categories. (For example, you might have a group of images that are united by their emphasis on the landscape, or by some other theme, or by the way the images seem to address the viewer, etc.).

Exercise 2.1 should include three lists of images (refer to them by plate number and title) and a sentence or two that explains each list. It is due in class on Tuesday, February 23.

Exercise 2.2

This exercise will help you read two texts together. It calls for you to record observations and inferences about a single photograph, determine which literary text you think best connects with your photograph, and explain how they connect. By determining which sources you will use and making some preliminary claims about how they resonate with each other, you will see, ideally, what organizing strategy will work best in your essay. The ideas you develop in this exercise are fair game for your essay.

1. Return to the photographs you examined for class last week: Plates 2, 14, 18, 22-24, 27, 39, 44-7, 49, 57, 62, 63, 73-6, 80, 83, 85, 91, 93, 94, 99, 100. Review your notes about the images and select one that particularly captures your attention. Write a very short paragraph in which you identify the image you've chosen and explain, in a sentence or two, what key elements in the photo draw you or puzzle you—cause you to look again or look away.

2. Write a paragraph in which you describe the content and form of the photo. Use the "Analyzing Photographs" handout as a guide, and make your description as vivid and detailed as possible. Your essay will include such a description, though it will be shorter than the one you write here. For now, be exhaustive in your description—you won't know in advance which details might prove important.

3. Write a paragraph in which you analyze or interpret some of the observations you just made. Include the observations as evidence; also use your "critical imagination" as you analyze (for example, imagine the photograph from a different point of view—would the effect of the image be significantly different? If so, note it; if not, exercise your critical imagination on some other aspect of the photo).

4. Finally, in a paragraph, name the literary text you think will best speak to this photograph. (You may use Whitman, Lincoln's "Fragment" or the Gettysburg Address, Danto, or Trachtenberg; you may also draw from Orwell). Quote specific passages or concepts that bring the connection between the two documents to light. If you can, begin drawing inferences about this connection. Note: try to avoid bringing two documents together solely on the basis of plot. For example, the passages in Whitman about Lincoln are not necessarily the best pairing for a photograph of Lincoln. Two elements that are too similar won't make for a very interesting essay because there won't be enough tension or friction between them. If you've got friction, you've got a problem, and if you've got a problem, you've got a motive.
Exercis e 2.2 should include the four paragraphs specified above, and should be about 2 pages long. *It is due in my mailbox on Friday, March 5, by noon.*

**Exercise 2.3**

This exercise will prepare you to write your essay by coming up with a plan or road map. In Exercise 2.2, you began the process of moving from observation to interpretation of your image, and you paired the image with a text. In order to come up with a good plan for your essay, you'll need to go through the circular process of moving from observation to analysis to claim to observation to analysis to claim a few more times.

Here's the *suggested* process. Make some notes (which you will not need to hand in): do you see any interesting patterns in your observations/analyses? Can you formulate a question or claim about the image? How would the text help make that claim, or help complicate or modify that claim? Sort through the evidence from the image again. Make some more notes (which you will not need to hand in): which evidence supports your claim? Which details contradict it, or force you to modify your claim in some way? Which details are irrelevant? Discard the irrelevant details, but keep all the rest. Arrange them into categories (including relevant categories from the"Analyzing Photographs" handout: line, shape, point of view, etc.). Now repeat the process, this time focusing on the text instead of the image. (Obviously, you will use different categories for textual evidence—patterns, images, metaphors, repetitions, etc.)

From your notes/thinking about both the image and the text, choose four or five of the categories that are most interesting for your thesis. For each of these categories, write a sentence (which you eventually will turn in—see below) that describes the category and makes a claim about how it relates to the overall thesis. These are your sub-claims, the theses for individual paragraphs or parts of the essay. Toy with different orders for these sub-claims. What order seems most logical to you? Remember to let the needs of your argument order the presentation of your evidence.

You are now ready to make a plan for your essay:

Thesis
Sub-claim #1, with brief notation of evidence
Sub-claim #2, with brief notation of evidence
Sub-claim #3, with brief notation of evidence
Sub-claim #4, with brief notation of evidence
Sub-claim #5, with brief notation of evidence
(Note: you don’t need to have exactly 5 sub-claims; your plan should contain as many as makes sense at this point in your thinking.)

Exercise 2.3 should include only your plan (thesis and sub-claims with evidence). *It is due in class on Thursday, March 11.*
Sojourner Truth was a powerful symbol for white writers and artists of the nineteenth century. In representing Truth in texts and images, they imposed onto Truth their own interpretations of what she symbolized. Likewise, in deciding to pose for and sell photographic portraits of herself (cartes-de-visite), Sojourner Truth promoted yet another construction—perhaps equally fictional—of her identity. Your task in this paper is to make an argument about what was at stake for Truth in her self-representations. To make your argument, you will need to:

- Provide a close analysis of one or more of the cartes-de-visite of Sojourner Truth
- Place Sojourner Truth’s self-representations in the context of at least one of the following: the way white people represent her; the ways black women tended to be represented in the nineteenth century; the ways the “ideal” white woman was represented in the nineteenth century

Your paper should about 7 pages long and is due in class on Monday, March 7 in my box (Miller 254) by 10 am.

**Evidence**
In writing your paper, you should draw on at least one of the other images or texts we have examined so far: the daguerreotypes produced by Zealy and Agassiz (in the Wallis article); images from Godey’s; Hiram Powers’s *The Greek Slave*; William Whetmore Story’s *The Libyan Sibyl*; the image created textually by Harriet Beecher Stowe in “The Libyan Sibyl”; the image created textually by Frances Gage in “Ain’t I a Woman.”

**Sources**
You will most likely need to engage with Nell Painter’s argument in “Truth in Photographs.” You should quote and cite Painter, whether you are extending one of her arguments or disagreeing with it. Painter makes some suggestive remarks, but she only scratches the surface, as it were, in her discussion of the cartes-de-visite of Truth, so there’s plenty of room for you to develop your own ideas about the images. Your challenge will be to not simply repeat her analysis but to advance your own argument and analysis of one or more of the cartes-de-visite.

You may consult sources other than those we have read in class if you wish, but this is absolutely not required, nor is it necessary to produce a first-rate paper. If you do consult outside sources, including online sources, be sure to cite them properly in footnotes, endnotes, or a works cited page.

**Mechanics**

- NUMBER YOUR PAGES.
- Give your essay a title.
- Your paper should be about 7 pages long.
- You should turn in a hard copy of your essay.
- Include your name, the date, and the course number at the top of the first page.
- Please type, double-space, and left-justify your paper.
- Proofread, do not simply spell-check.
- Staple or clip your paper together.
- Always save a copy for yourself.
Become a Close Reader of Your Own Assignment

1. How many questions does the assignment ask students to consider? Are the questions prioritized? Is it clear which question is most important?

2. What verbs does the assignment use to describe the intellectual work students must perform in the essay? Are they the right verbs?

3. What language describes the relationship of the sources/evidence to each other, and to the student writer? Is this language clear?

4. How is the assignment arranged graphically on the page?
Assigning Student Writing: You Get What You Ask For
R.A. Gastaldo, Whipple-Coddington Professor of Geology

In the updated version of his book Engaging Ideas, John Bean (p. xvii) writes that “one of the most successful movements to sweep through American higher education is known as writing across the curriculum, now more than a decade old.” That was in 2001, five years after the book’s debut. It is now more than a decade later, and Bean’s premise still holds today. That is, students learn more when writing and other critical thinking activities are integrated, teaching them how to pose questions, propose hypotheses, gather and analyze data, and justify a position or argument.

Student engagement, though, doesn’t occur through singular epiphanies, miracles, or Google searches but, rather, through practice and skill refinement. We don’t expect our athletes to enter and win a contest without significant training and prior preparation. Successful athletes devote years of conditioning and repetition to help secure success. In contrast, we expect our students to write an insightful, comprehensive, and logically argued term paper without such activities, relying on their high school preparation for success in college. As we’ve seen, and is documented in the professional educational literature, students entering higher education are less prepared to undertake and write a college essay than previous first-year classes. Bean (2001, p. xvii) notes that practice makes students not only better writers but also better thinkers.

Writing is critical to understanding the thinking process; students must be able to demonstrate not just an understanding of what they have read, but also recognize how this information relates to bigger scale questions in a discipline. They must learn that information should be presented as dialogic rather than informational. But, how to develop these skills often is difficult because a single writing assignment is required (term paper) without the mental preparation necessary for success. Without a series of phased exercises allowing a student to practice and acquire the expected skill set in our courses, we are bound to be disappointed in what is submitted for our consideration.

Preparatory Writing

It is necessary for students to focus their ideas on the subject of an assignment early rather than the day, night, or early morning before it is due. Building a series of short, exploratory writing essays as a lead up to writing the assigned essay or report allows a student to focus his/her ideas and, potentially, gain additional insight into the topic beyond what is presented in lectures, outside readings, or independent research. The following are strategies from Engaging Ideas designed to provide students with such preparatory exercises. One or more of these can be incorporated into either regular class time or as a formal (graded) or informal (ungraded) assignment outside of the classroom.

• During class, have students write to ask a question or express confusion about material covered that you consider fundamental to course content.
Ask students at the end of class to write one question about the materials covered during the lecture. Have each turn these in for your consideration. You will learn more about what they have, or have not, acquired by assessing their confusion, and address these problems at the beginning of the next class meeting.

Develop a series of short (300-500 word), formal writing assignments designed to explore the complexity of the problem or issue. Using Colby’s Moodle platform is an easy and efficient way to collect and assess these prior to class.

There are two sides to many assignments, and a series of short essays, either supporting or negating the assignment’s thesis, provides students with options that can be used subsequently in the final document.

• You may provide the student with a proposition (thesis) that they must either defend or refute (their choice), or to defend one of two opposing proposals.
• After providing background information (lecture or readings) and a context for the problem, have students write a one-sentence thesis statement in response to a specific question about the material.

Have each student or student groups write an interview with the author/investigator of the book or reading. In this way, individuals explore those subjects or topics of interest to them, increasing their engagement in the assignment.

Provide students with a problem-focused writing assignment in which a thesis is developed and a response required to affirm it.

Write a less structured, thought letter that is exploratory in nature, focused on a major concept or idea from the book or lecture. Such an informal, non-graded, assignment allows you to observe the writer’s thought process.

Insure that students develop an original thesis statement, a one-sentence summary of the essay’s position or argument, around which their essay will be based. You can assign them to provide you with a one-sentence (1) thesis statement and (2) summary of their argument. This insures that students have thought about the position each will take and how they will defend it.

Keep hard deadlines for each phase of writing assignments; using the Moodle platform allows you to set a deadline for upload of a student’s response and close the website afterward. Return all informal, non-graded or graded assignments in a prompt manner because frequent and timely feedback provides encouragement. Use a holistic rubric [see attached examples] to provide feedback, demonstrating to the student that all aspects of the writing are of importance.

Strategies for Designing Critical Thinking Tasks

One student outcome of a college education, and particularly true of a liberal arts education, should be an individual’s ability to take information from a variety of sources and synthesize these into a coherent, logical, and robust document in support of a thesis or argument. Providing students with an orthodox or popular topic in your discipline, one written about for decades, easily opens the door for “web assistance” in a multitude of formats and availability.
Numerous vendors exist and provide “free” or “modestly priced” essays to satisfy nearly every college assignment. For example, free college essays can be obtained from, among others:

- www.free-college-essays.com/
- www.antiessays.com/
- www.123helpme.com
- www.echeat.com/83/College.aspx (boasts 150,000 essays)
- www.termpaperwarehouse.com/
- http://www.rlingo.org/
- www.essaybank.com/
- www.thepaperexperts.com/ (65,000 term paper library)
- www.customwritings.com/college-essay.html (as little as $10/page)

and each service offers higher quality papers for prices ranging from $5.95 to whatever you may be willing to pay for consulting services. Essays, or parts thereof, from these vendors may satisfy the instructor’s desire to assess what a student may have learned from the assignment, but it often is difficult to determine the extent, if any, a student has used such services.

In-class or homework assignments can be designed to provide a student with developing their own skills. Exercises can be produced to evaluate data and analyze their meaning, defend positions or controversial theses that may be unfamiliar or contrary to their beliefs, or develop writing scenarios that place students in realistic situations relevant to your discipline, where they must resolve a conflict. Such alternative exercises provide a student with new perspectives and critical thinking skills and, often, are not available in the marketplace because of the assignment specificity.

Bean (2001) recommends the following assignment strategies, which can be uniquely tailored to an instructor’s course, that engage students in content.

- Think of tasks that allow students to link course concepts to personal experiences or prior knowledge.
- Think of controversial theses in your discipline that can be defended on either side of the controversy.
- Think of problems, puzzles, or questions that students can address based on instructional materials.
- Have students write summaries or abstracts of selected articles in the field.
- Have students write dialogues between characters with different points of view, taking both sides of a controversial question.

Designing Assignments

The only time that many of our students will write an essay or position paper designed for a professor or professional discipline is during his/her college career. Too often, students believe that they are writing only for the professor. And, as such, there is no
stake in the document they produce other than the grade assigned. In reality, most Colby students do not pursue advanced, terminal degrees, and ultimately will write for a different audience than us, their professorate. Writing assignments should reflect the variety of audiences for whom our students may one day write. Hence, it is important to indicate to the student not only the task but also with the audience and purpose of the assignment. Provide your students with the reason for the paper and to whom it is designed to educate. Short, formal and informal preparatory writing assignments can help facilitate a student’s ability to identify these criteria.

Indeed, Gottschalk and Hjortshoj (2004) note that assignment clarity is paramount if the instructor is to receive an appropriate document. For each assignment, students should be able to answer the following questions.

- What am I, the author, writing about?
- For whom is it being written?
- What is the purpose of the document?
- In what form or format must it be written?

And, to accomplish these successfully, we, the instructors, also must identify these facets before we write our assignment. Too often, assignments are constructed without providing the student with a carefully formulated text to which they can refer. If your assignment is clear, students should be able to answer these questions easily, and not struggle to understand what you want. But, if you don’t know exactly what you want from your students, how are they supposed to figure it out?

Focused writing is easier to evaluate and grade. Hence, before a student begins to write his/her text, each should develop either a thesis statement or the “question” to be addressed in the essay. The instructor can quickly identify if a student is on the right track by having each submit two sentences for review (Moodle is an efficient platform):

- one sentence summarizing the problem
- one sentence thesis statement summarizing the writer’s argument or position

And, provide the class with a handout about the assignment in which the length (word limit rather than pagination), manuscript form or format, and grading criteria are provided. Again, the Moodle platform provides the opportunity to post these documents as downloads if the dog happened to eat the student’s hard copy.
The End Cretaceous Mass Extinction, the result of a bolide impact with Earth, witnessed the demise of the ruling class of reptiles, the dinosaurs, and many other parts of the ecological landscape. Estimates are that the planet lost up to 85% of its biodiversity in a matter of months to years in response to what has been termed a “nuclear winter.” There are, literally, hundreds if not thousands of websites from which students can obtain text for essays on the subject, and there are numerous “free” and “nominally priced” essays on the topic.

The second book in GE115 is Walter Alvarez’s T. rex and the Crater of Doom that outlines the ideas behind a shift in scientific thought from uniformitarianism to catastrophism, particularly with respect to this extinction event. To avoid the obvious, the following writing assignment was designed such that students would learn about (1) the KT event, (2) the way in which scientific inquiry progresses, and (3) how a community reacts to transformative new ideas. From their insights, each student had to write a white paper to a member of Congress (their choice) explaining how science is performed and why government should continue to fund scientific inquiry.

Assignment (draft, critique, and revision required): The purpose of the second assignment is for you to develop an understanding of how scientific inquiry functions in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries, using Alvarez’s account as a model. No longer is an individual researcher an “island” of knowledge, able to confine him/herself in a laboratory and generate data without connection to other scientists or disciplines. Rather, as technology advances and we have come to learn more about planet Earth—a complex system of interacting physical, chemical, and biological processes—it is imperative that multi-disciplinary approaches be used to understand this natural laboratory in which experiments have been running for more than 4 billion years. The goal of this exercise is for you to write a 1500 word (1475 min/1625 max) essay in which you will explain to a member of the U.S. Congress how current scientific inquiry is undertaken, using specific examples from Walter Alvarez’ account, and why it is important that government continues to fund scientific research. From this exercise you will learn (1) how scientists use empirical observation to identify a research question; (2) how these individuals develop methodologies and techniques to assist in addressing that question; (3) what personal and professional interactions provide for scientific progress; (4) how scientific thought is altered; and (5) how our understanding of planet Earth progresses, as a result of such endeavors.

(Informal) Writing Assignment 1: You have learned since you early schooling about the concepts behind scientific inquiry. Since then, you also have been bombarded by various media and political organizations with permutations of the scientific method, how it works, and how scientific results can or can not be trusted.

As you begin to read Walter Alvarez’s book “T. rex and the Crater of Doom,” you must have some unanswered questions how science actually is conducted. Therefore, provide five (5) questions you have about How Science Works in the 21st Century. You can bullet point the list in the Moodle space provided.

(Formal) Writing Assignment 2: The idea that Chicken Little was correct and the sky could fall is a concept foreign to both scientists and the general public prior to the studies of Walter Alvarez and colleagues.
In fact, national and international scientific meetings saw a raging debate on his hypotheses, data, and interpretations about how the Mesozoic Era ended. What do you think Alvarez would say to a reporter about how he views scientific inquiry and the progress of the discipline?

You are to act as an interviewer for the Science Section of the New York Times who questions Walter Alvarez about how he views the process of scientific inquiry. In a 500-word essay (2 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font, 1” margins), develop a text around the 5 questions you posed at the beginning of this module with answers you might expect Alvarez to provide during the course of your interview.

(Formal) Writing Assignment 3: Earlier this year, John Ahearne—commissioner and chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, system analyst for the White House Energy Office, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Energy, and U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, amongst other appointments—wrote an essay on Honesty. After reading his position, write a short response to the following two statements. Each response should be no less than 250 and nor more than 300 words.

Explain how the value of honesty is not limited to science, but applies to all of life's endeavors, including a student’s academic performance at Colby College.

Now, state a case for the opposing viewpoint that neither honesty, trust, nor virtue is an essential value when pursuing one’s career. Was Machiavelli correct?

(Informal) Writing Assignment 4: You will find a number of alternate hypotheses about the demise of the dinosaurs available for scrutiny. As Don DeYoung states “There have been nearly one hundred different dinosaur extinction theories offered in recent decades.” DeYoung is a physicist and is Chairman of the Department of Physical Science at Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana. He also is an adjunct faculty member at the Institute for Creation Research.

Read DeYoung’s article published in the Institute for Creation Research’s Impact series which forms the basis of many home-school programs. In a short, 250 word essay, explain your understanding of the hypothesis he favors to account for the demise of the dinosaurs, provide the evidence he proposes to support his position, and evaluate the feasibility of his position.

---

**Grading Rubric for Short Writing Responses**

Each response should begin with a one sentence summary of your argument or position on the assignment, which will be supported by good reasoning and evidence in the remainder of the text. The first paragraph should introduce the reader to the problem, with the remaining paragraphs explaining your ideas about and/or solutions to the problem. In that context, you must demonstrate that your text is clear and interesting, and that you're engaged with the problem. Criteria for grading include whether: (1) you bring something new to the reader and provide an argument versus a data-dump of encyclopedic ideas without regard to logical progression, verifiable fact, or credibility; (2) the text is readable, appropriately written for the intended audience, and balanced; and (3) the piece is clear without significant grammatical and/or spelling errors, making it comprehensible.

6 – Meets all of the criteria presented above. The writer understands the assignment thoroughly, with the development of a strong thesis statement with supporting information that is presented in a balanced manner (that is, the writer does not spend excessive time on one main point while neglecting others). The response is comprehensive, reads smoothly, with appropriate transitions between ideas. Sentences are clear, without vagueness or ambiguity, and without grammatical or mechanical errors.

5 – Text is very good, but may be weaker in one of the grading criteria. It may have an excellent balance of presentation and the information is accurate, but there may be problems in sentence structure, correctness, or logical flow of ideas.

4 – This score means that the text is "good but not excellent." Typically, this text will demonstrate some working knowledge of the assignment, but may not be a balanced treatment. The quality of writing, including the summary statement, is noticeably weaker.
3 – A score of 3 demonstrates strength in at least one area of competence, and should still be good enough to convince the reader that the writer has understood the assignment and acquired some working knowledge of the information. The text typically is not written well enough to convey an understanding of various aspects of the assignment. The writer assumes that the reader already knows what s/he is trying to convey, and doesn't clarify the concepts necessary for clarity. The sentence structure is not sophisticated enough to convey a sense of hierarchy, logical flow, and mastery of the assignment.

2 – An essay assigned this grade is weak in all areas of competence, either because it is so poorly written that the writer can't understand the content or because the content is inaccurate or disorganized. The writer is able to convince the reader that some time has been spent in thinking about the text, but struggles to understand it.

1 – This score indicates that the writer has failed to meet any of the areas of competence outlined above.

Grading Rubric for Congressional White Paper

The rubric outlines six learning goals, each of which are graded as Exemplary (95), Satisfactory (85), or Needs Work (75). A student’s score is calculated by totaling the number of scores in graded category and dividing by six.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Thesis or Main Goal</td>
<td>Paper makes bold central claim that is substantive, stated articularly, and thought provoking. Audience and purpose is very clear.</td>
<td>Paper makes a fine central claim, but it could be more substantive, articulately stated, and/or thought provoking. The audience and/or purpose is questionable.</td>
<td>Paper makes no central claim or one that is irrelevant, unclear, or self-evident. Audience and/or purpose are missing or vague.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Thesis through Supporting Arguments</td>
<td>Thesis is broken down into a series of logical, effectively sequenced supporting arguments with strong transitions between paragraphs and ideas.</td>
<td>Thesis is broken down into a series of supporting arguments, but the arrangement manifests minor lapses in logic and sequencing. Strength of transitions between paragraphs and ideas is inconsistent.</td>
<td>Thesis is not broken down into a series of supporting arguments, or their arrangement manifests major flaws in logic and sequencing. Transitions weak or absent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly and Presentation of Evidence</td>
<td>Arguments supported with plentiful, carefully selected, fully convincing evidence. Evidence is carefully and seamlessly arranged, leaving the reader confident and eager to move forward. When relevant, the use of appropriate and consistent citations and/or sourcing is evident.</td>
<td>Arguments are supported with sufficient evidence, but its presentation manifests minor lapses in selection and arrangement. The reader is satisfied and ready to move forward. Citations and sourcing of evidence are adequate, if not always consistent.</td>
<td>Arguments are unsupported or weakly supported with evidence, and its presentation shows major lapses in selection and arrangement. The reader is unconvinced, disoriented, frustrated, and reluctant to move forward. Citations and/or sourcing are inconsistent, incomplete, or absent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph Development</td>
<td>Paragraphs are structured around a clearly stated, well-positioned central argument. The sentences are coherent (clearly linked to each other) and unified (focused on the central argument). Paragraphs fully present and analyze supporting evidence.</td>
<td>Paragraphs structured around a central argument, but its statement could be clearer or better positioned. Sentences show minor lapse in coherence and unity. The presentation and analysis of the evidence are present, but one or the other may be underdeveloped.</td>
<td>The paragraphs do not state a central argument or it is unclear. The sentences show major lapses in coherence and unity. The presentation and analysis of evidence are minimal, or one or both may be missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Complexity of Thought</td>
<td>The complexity of thought is impressive. The discussion is intricate and original, stretching well beyond what is immediately apparent. Demonstrates insight.</td>
<td>The complexity of thought impresses. The discussion is competent and mildly original, but does not stretch, or stretches very little beyond what is immediately apparent.</td>
<td>The paper shows little or no complexity of thought. The discussion is oversimplified, unoriginal, and self evident. The paper is boring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Command of Written English</td>
<td>The paper is free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. The writer’s voice is engaging and the prose fluent.</td>
<td>The paper manifests minor, occasional errors in grammar, punctuation, and style. The writer’s voice is appropriate and the prose competent.</td>
<td>The paper manifests major, persistent errors in grammar, punctuation, and style. The writer’s voice is inappropriate or inconsistent, and the prose substandard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the paper’s critique, it is then possible to provide the student with an overall assessment of the text whereby the paper may (1) exceed, (2) meet, or (3) does not meet expectations for a writer at this point in his/her college career.
The use of primary literature is critical for students to master to understand the past, present, and future of their chosen discipline. Too often, though, instructors expect a student to be able to read, comprehend, and apply information from the professional literature with little preparation. To begin developing a majors’ ability to access, read, and utilize primary literature, a phased set of exercises is assigned early in Fall semester as a prelude to the course term-project report.

Bean (2001) notes that writing summaries of articles is an excellent way to develop reading skills, to practice decentering, and to develop skills of precision, clarity, and succinctness. Summary writers must suspend their own personal views or biases to fairly articulate what often is unfamiliar or an unsettling viewpoint in the article. One strategy is to have the student write a four-sentence summary of the article, one sentence for each of the paper’s sections. The Introduction states the question to be addressed whereas Materials & Methods tell how the question was answered. The outcome of the study is presented in the Results, and Discussion is reserved for the analysis of the study’s results and the impact of the new knowledge. This can be followed by having the student write four questions raised during reading.

Science students, in particular, often have difficulty in handling quantitative data, and the differences between what belongs in the Results versus Discussion section of a report. Students need to learn: (1) how to display quantitative findings in tables, graphs, and charts; (2) how to summarize and focus these data verbally, with proper reference to tables and figures; and (3) how to analyze and evaluate these data, arguing whether they confirm or reject the hypothesis. By assigning readings in the primary literature early in a student’s career, models can be presented against which future writing style can be evaluated.

Formal Assignment 1 (revision required): What do the paleontologists of the present do for a paycheck?

This question is posed to you for you to investigate. The goal of this exercise is to acquaint you with the paleontological literature and periodicals in the Olin Science Library available for your studies. Your first assignment is to search through the current literature (shelved periodicals and/or Electronic Databases; e.g., GeoRef, Web of Science, etc.) and find recent articles published by paleontologists from 2010 to 2011 (ONLY). You are to acquaint yourself with several of the journals and electronic databases to identify paleontological articles.

You must develop a Reference list of twenty (20) articles. You are to find 3-5 articles for any four (4) or more of the following paleontological disciplines: Taphonomy, Vertebrate Paleontology, Paleoclimatology, Evolution, Paleobotany, Palynology, Protist & Invertebrate Paleontology, Microfossils.

The twenty articles (20) must represent manuscripts from at least 5 different journals. There may not be more than 4 articles from any one journal. Submit a typed list of the articles in Word that is in alphabetical and chronological order, following the standard scientific format used by the Society for Sedimentary Geology (SEPM - link to Author’s Instructions). One-half point (1/2 pt) will be deducted for each incorrect format, spelling, citation error.
Formal Assignment 2: Abstracting Scientific Literature

The purpose of this exercise is for you to learn how to read primary, peer-reviewed literature in the paleontological sciences. The goal of the assignment is to have you be able to differentiate the various parts of a scientific article, extract the fundamental information about each part, acquire a working knowledge of the author’s research, and develop a method by which you can apply this skill to other primary literature assignments in this course over the remainder of the semester.

After you have completed your bibliographic listing, your second assignment is to select ONE (1) article from your submitted list of twenty to read and critique. Read the article and present a two-to-three page type-written, double spaced summary (500 words; minimum 450, maximum 525) of that article in the following format.

- Full Bibliographic Citation.
- Abstract - In your own words briefly describe the purpose of the manuscript, the results of the investigation, and the implications or significance of the research.
- Using the block-copy function in Adobe, include the original abstract at the end of the paper (this is not part of the 450 essay you are to draft).
- Materials & Methods - What materials were used in the investigation, and what were the methods employed in the study.
- Results - What did the investigator find and describe?
- Significance - What importance or implications do the results of this investigation have on the original objectives of the study?
- Opinion - Each researcher must objectively evaluate the information that he/she reads. In your opinion:
  - Did the researcher complete all of the project goals?
  - Are his/her data good data?
  - What would you do to have modified the study (if anything)?
  - What problems do you see with the work (if any)?
  - Did the investigator provide sound conclusions based on his/her data set?
  - Did you understand the manuscript? (Was it written in a manner that was easily read?)

Formal Assignment 3: Actualistic Paleontology

The purpose of this exercise is to critically examine two publications related to plant taphonomy. The goal of the assignment is to have you test the hypotheses of a paleontological report with the findings of a modern botanical survey. By comparing two related articles, you will gain an understanding of how primary literature is used for synthetic purposes, and can apply this skill to the Discussion section of the term project.

You must read both of the following articles:


You are to write a short essay on the hypothesis(es), materials & methods, and results of Meldahl et al. (1995). Then you are to compare their results with pertinent data presented in Bray and Gorham’s summary paper. This paper has been cited more than 650 times in the literature since its publication. Use the data presented in Bray and Gorham’s work to substantiate or refute Meldahl’s et al. hypothesis(es) and research conclusions.

Your essay should be a minimum of three (3) and a maximum of five (5) double spaced pages, 12 point font. Upload your document no later than 12:30 am, Monday, 26 September. There will be a one-hour class discussion concerning these assigned readings on the due date. Participation is mandatory.
The Advantages of Moodle

Moodle, “a global development project designed to support a social constructionist framework of education”, is a software package for producing Internet-based courses and web sites. It was adopted as the pedagogical platform by Colby in Fall 2008, and provides the instructor with an easy way to develop, monitor, and maintain course content. Learn more about Moodle at http://docs.moodle.org/22/en/About_Moodle.

One attractive feature of using the Moodle platform is an instructor’s ability to construct assignments (add an activity) with posted hard deadlines and respond directly to students about their ideas. Using this feature allows you to acquire and read student’s responses prior to classroom discussion, and learn about their depth of ideas, comprehension, and misconceptions. It also insures that students have attempted the required course materials, given some thought to the concepts proposed in their readings, and are prepared for class discussions.

All Colby courses can use the Moodle platform. All courses are auto-generated and available. Faculty must change settings to make this visible (default state is grayed out) to themselves and students (blackened; see handout pg. 1). The settings link is on the left side of the Course page and, among other things, allows you to select the (1) course format, (2) number of weeks or topic modules, (3) course start date, (4) the ability to show your students the grades for their assignments (Show gradebook), (5) limit the size of file uploads, and (6) make the course available to students. This last function is important because only the instructor has the administrative rights to make the page available for student use.

Topic (or weekly) modules are generated by choosing the module box (see handout) and adding either Resources, Assignments, or both. Resources may include: (1) the topic or weekly lecture topic(s); (2) downloads of readings, lecture notes, or links to external web pages; and (3) other resources to which you may want to direct students. Once you’ve chosen a resource to add, a window is available with a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) application. Essentially, this is a word processing program with all of the features common in Word or WordPerfect. You are able to: (1) change the font format (face, size, bold, italic, etc.), (2) justify text and images, (3) add ordered (1, 2, 3, etc.) or unordered (bulleted) lists, (4) insert hyperlinks to files for download or external web pages, and (5) insert tables, symbols, and images. Saving the document returns you to the Moodle site and a formatted module.

Assignment generation in Moodle follows the same format as the topic or weekly module text, except that these are inserted into the module with programmable features as to when the assignment is made available to students for upload and when the assignment closes. One advantage is that once the assignment is made available for students, an e-mail is automatically generated and sent to each student informing them of the assignment and its due date. In addition, the assignment will appear on the Moodle home page under the course title. You can have students: (1) write their response to an assignment directly in the Moodle platform, or they can block-copy from a Word document into the form;, by using the Online text option; (2) upload a Word file directly to the Moodle page; or (3) direct
them to an offline activity, when an activity or assessment process is performed outside of Moodle. Offline activities can somewhere elsewhere on the web or in person, and students can see a description of the assignment, but can’t upload files. Once you’ve created your assignment, you then set the (1) grading scale, (2) the date on which the assignment becomes available for students to begin uploading their work, (3) the date on which the assignment ends, and (4) the option to prevent late submissions (recommended) or allow students to submit their work after the closing time. If you want students to be able to resubmit revised or substitute versions of the assignment during the time it is open, you must change the Allow resubmitting option for the Online text (see handout). When an assignment is completed, it will appear: (1) in the module where you developed it, (2) under the Assignments link.

You can view, read, and respond to student text at any time during the assignment. Once the assignment is closed, you can view the assignments using the link (see handout), and all students’ responses will be available. You will be able to: (1) determine who completed the assignment, (2) the date and time it was uploaded to the website, and (3) provide each student with a grade for their work along with comments you may want to return to them. Once you’ve commented on their work and given them a grade (or not; informal assignments do not require that a grade be posted), an e-mail with this information will be sent to the student, updating them on their progress in the course.

In case you have a larger class enrollment and want your secretary to download and print student work, you can use the Assign roles link in the left column and add that individual in one or more functions. You can add others as a full administrator (Teacher) who can do anything within a course, including changing the activities and grading students. Non-editing Teachers can teach in courses and grade students, but may not alter activities, whereas a Teaching Assistant (grader) may grade individual assignments in course sites but may not see the gradebook. You also can enroll other students or guests to the Moodle page.

Citations

A QUICK MOODLE Tutorial

- Course Title can be changed in MOODLE Overview Course Offerings
- Summary – Writing text in Moodle works pretty much the way you would expect, but you also have the ability to include "smilies", "URL addresses" and some HTML tags in your text.

LAMS course format – makes the Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) interface central to the course. LAMS requires setting up by an administrator in order to use this format.

SCORM format – displays a SCORM package in the first section of the course home page. (The SCORM/AICC module provides an alternative method of displaying a SCORM package in a course.)

Social format – format is oriented around one main forum, the Social forum, which appears on the course home page. It is useful for situations that are more freestyle. They may not even be courses. For example, it could be used as a departmental notice board.

Topics format – course is organised into topic sections. Each topic section consists of activities.

Weekly format – course is organised week by week, with a clear start date and a finish date. Each week consists of activities.

Weekly format - CSS/No tables – course is organised week by week without using tables for layout.

This option allows you to "hide" your course completely.

YOU MUST allow Student Access to the course once developed

It will not appear on any course listings, except to teachers of the course and administrators.

Even if students try to access the course URL directly, they will not be allowed to enter.

You have the choice of allowing "guests" into your course.

People can log in as guests using the "Login as a guest" button on the login screen.

Guests ALWAYS have "read-only" access - meaning they can't leave any posts or otherwise mess up the course for real students.

You can choose between two types of guest access: with the enrolment key or without. If you choose to allow guests who have the key, then the guest will need to provide the current enrolment key EVERY TIME they log in (unlike students who only need to do it once). This lets you restrict your guests. If you choose to allow guests without a key, then anyone can get straight into your course.
A QUICK MOODLE Tutorial
Module Generation

1. Add a resource...
2. Add a resource...
3. Insert a label...
4. Add a lightbox gallery...
5. Compose a text page...
6. Compose a web page...
7. Link to a file on a website...
8. Display a directory...
9. Add an IMS Content Package...

- Insert Image
- Insert Table
- Insert Symbol (e.g., ä, etc.)
- Insert Hyperlink to Web

Text Justification
- Bold, Italics, Underline
- Subscript, Superscript
- Text color & Fill color
- Ordered lists (1, 2, 3)
- Unordered lists (icons)
- Undo last action (e.g., delete)
- Redo last action

HOW SCIENCE WORKS
Mini-Lecture
Downloads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Number</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 row, 2 column table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell 1 – Image; Cell 2 – text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Link to a file (or website)
- Link to a file (or website)
- Link to a file (or website)
- Link to a file (or website)
- Link to a file (or website)
Grading can be informal (no grade) or a high grade of your choice (e.g., 6)

- Set DATE and TIME when students can begin uploading their responses
- Set DATE and TIME when the last response will be accepted
- Prevent late submissions closes the window for upload.

You can limit the file size of the upload. In the case of class presentations, this requires students to learn to use an image processing program to reduce the size of image files.
Instructor's comments can be written here and forwarded to the student along with the grade.

When using the online text feature, you can see the student's written response and comment back to him/her in the window. You also can assign a grade for this assignment if it is a formal, graded piece.