

Creating Effective Assignments

0:04	Francesco: Welcome everyone to part two of the Writing in the Disciplines Training Series offered by Excelsior College in partnership with the State University of New York campuses in Rockland, Clinton, and Monroe.
0:20	This installment focuses on creating effective writing assignments.
0:29	Before we get started, I just want to introduce myself. I am Francesco Crocco—the director of the Online Writing Lab at Excelsior College.
0:37	I want to give you a chance to introduce yourselves.
0:39	So, just tell us your name, your title, and where you are—where you work, I should say.
0:46	We do have some people outside of Excelsior here today.
0:51	Let's start with Alice.
0:55	Alice: Good Afternoon. My name is Alice Roberson. I am currently employed with the New York State Office of General Services as the assistant director of minority and women owned business enterprises and also serve as an adjunct for Excelsior.
1:07	Francesco: Thank you. Welcome Alice. Amy, you're up next.
1:14	Amy: My name is Amy Erickson, and I'm an adjunct faculty member at Excelsior and also an assistant professor at St. Mary's University in Minnesota.
1:21	Francesco: Welcome. We'll jump to Jeff.
1:26	Jeff: Hi everybody. I'm Jeff McLean. I'm an assistant professor at SUNY Rockland Community College near New York City.
1:33	Francesco: Glad to have you Jeff. Thank you. Thank you for coming. Michael? Michael, if you hear us could you please introduce yourself? He may be muted.
1:45	If you see that your microphone is orange, then it is muted. You can just click on it to unmute.
1:53	All right. Well, we'll jump to Robin.
1:55	Robin: Hi. I'm Robin Dewald. I'm a faculty program director at Excelsior College in the nursing program.
2:02	Francesco: Thanks for joining us Robin. Susan?
2:07	Susan: I'm Susan Honea. I am a faculty member here at Excelsior and also subject matter expert for course development at Excelsior.
2:15	Francesco: Great to have you Susan.
2:17	And I see that we have someone else who is joining us. Do you hear us? If you do, would you please introduce yourself?
2:27	So, I'm going to move forward. If you do begin to hear any feedback or get any feedback on your end, please mute yourself and remember to unmute yourself when you want to speak.
2:41	I'm going to start with an overview.

2:45	We're going to start by sharing the genres that we submitted through the proposal form. That was preparation for this webinar. We'll walk through a couple of samples there applying that five-part rubric that was in the form.
3:00	Then we're going to talk about learning gaps, which are basically what do our students know, what do we want them to know in order to be able to complete the assignment. We'll talk about some solutions there.
3:12	Then we're going to go into the nuts and bolts of how to write clear instructions for an assignment.
3:17	We're going to get some tips, and we're going to take a look at a sample prompt, work on it together, and then we're going to look at the prompts that you submitted in the proposal form. We will workshop those together, as many as possible.
3:32	Finally, we're going to end with some tips on scaffolding and how to take a process approach to a writing assignment and breaking it up into steps over the semester and why that's important.
3:43	We did send out some handouts at the beginning of the week, and I encourage you to have those available.
3:50	There is a handout on the learning gaps and a handout on how to write clear instructions, and we'll make use of those during the webinar.
3:58	Finally, we're going to end with looking ahead and get a preview of the installments to come which will arrive next spring.
4:10	I'm going to open the floor here, and I want you to share a genre that you submitted in that Google form. I'd like you to describe what that genre is and use the five-part rubric as best you can to describe how it works.
4:27	So, who'd like to go first? I'm going to click over to the next slide which shows the rubric: purpose, audience, structure, diction, and citation.
4:37	Do I have any volunteers?
4:41	Abby: Hello Francesco. This is Grace Abby Adan with Health Sciences.
4:45	Francesco: Oh, hi Abby. Thanks for joining us.
4:47	Abby: Hi. I'm really glad to join you guys. I'm on the phone only, but I just wanted to share that my genre that I submitted was for global health, and specifically it was the case study format.
5:01	The purpose of the assignment would be for the students to possibly do sort of a swap, where they would swap with another peer and develop some language related to evaluating a low- or middle-income country and pretend that they are the minister of health for that country and actually implement some interventions to attack and tackle infectious diseases and also chronic diseases.
5:24	Specifically, the style would be that they would use APA format and develop some analytic questions to consider asking the minister of health.
5:33	The expected style would be to mainly follow the case study format of writing.

5:40	I don't have a copy of it with me here on the phone, but that is an example of a genre that I submitted which was the global health case study context.
5:50	Francesco: Wow. That's such a creative assignment. I think you did a good job of applying the rubric there and describing it. Thank you.
6:01	Would anyone else like to share a genre that they submitted?
6:06	I'm going to call on Susan here just to prod some...
6:10	Susan: Somehow I...
6:13	Francesco: Why don't you share that neat assignment that you submitted. I thought it was a pretty interesting genre.
6:19	Susan: I submitted a proposal.
6:22	The class is a scientific and technical writing class and we ask the students to write a variety of documents to expose them to not only scientific and technical writing in their purest forms, but also to business documents that employ certain technical and scientific methods.
6:43	Obviously, the purpose of the proposal is to persuade.
6:47	We asked the students to choose a very specific audience for the proposal.
6:54	It should be one person, a very small organization, or a local government type organization, that sort of thing, although, and we'll talk about this later when we're workshopping, the students always want to gravitate toward going directly to Congress or the EPA with their proposals for some strange reason. I've never been able to put my finger on that one.
7:15	We don't teach a thesis statement with the proposal.
7:18	Instead we use a purpose statement, which is more in line with a research document such as a thesis or dissertation.
7:24	We do that because it allows the students to explore the notion of significance as it relates to the business document, but also ties it back to what they already know from their academic experience.
7:37	It's a formal document.
7:38	We don't allow the students to use informal personal pronouns or casual language.
7:44	We provide a template.
7:46	We do not provide exemplars because we've found in the past that when students are given an exemplar for this assignment, they just copy it.
7:54	We do require research.
7:56	We require them to provide a minimum of three scholarly sources, and students really struggle to meet that requirement, which is another conundrum that we face with that particular class in general.
8:12	I'll be interested when we get to the workshop point later today to talk a little bit about that.

8:18	Francesco: Okay. Great. We will workshop some of these assignments. I have Susan's. Susan talked ahead of time, so we'll be using hers.
8:27	If you would like to submit your assignment to be workshopped today, you can just email it to me and I can dig that up, if we have time. We have a few already in the docket to look at later this webinar.
8:44	Thank you, Susan.
8:45	Would anyone else? One more. Share the genre that you submitted. A genre that you would like your students to write.
8:55	Okay. I'm going to call on Amy.
8:58	Amy: I was just unmuting my mic. to volunteer.
9:03	Francesco: Great. Good. Then I don't feel that bad.
9:04	Amy: You're kind of a mind reader.
9:07	So, I submitted an annotated bibliography.
9:11	The purpose of that is to examine resources students are going to use prior to writing a paper.
9:19	I'm just scrolling over to try to find my information here. Sorry, I have it all written down.
9:25	So, to briefly summarize and critique the selected literature.
9:29	The intended readers would be academics.
9:32	As far as structure, the annotated bibliography starts with an APA reference for the article being examined.
9:38	It's followed by a brief summary and critique of the source.
9:40	I typically like students also to put their research question at the top of their annotated bibliography to make sure that these sources are answering the question or elements of their question.
9:51	The diction and style is academic. It's definitely a scholarly tone students will be using.
9:58	Citation—they obviously require APA formatting for their reference.
10:02	Also, since the annotation is directly beneath the source, in-text citations aren't necessary unless they're doing specific direct quotes. So, that's what I submitted.
10:18	Francesco: Great. Thank you. Thanks for the breakdown.
10:21	Amy: You bet.
10:24	Francesco: Let's move forward here.
10:30	We're going to talk about learning gaps now. Learning gaps are basically anything that stands between where the learner currently is and where they need to be to get them to accomplish their assignment. And you can see that visualized there in the little graphic. It's one of my favorites. So, how do we get them across that divide?
10:52	First, let's talk about some common types of learning gaps.

10:57	Learning gaps tend to fall into these categories, these five categories. This is adapted from research by Dirksen.
11:05	So, in order to complete this assignment, the students need to have—one, they need to have knowledge. Knowledge is a learning gap. What is it the students need to know?
11:14	Two, they need to have skills. They need to have certain skills. What are those skills that they need to be able to perform or to demonstrate in order to complete the assignment?
11:24	Three, they need to be motivated. So what attitudes or beliefs do the students need to have or overcome?
11:32	I'll give you an example. For instance, they talk a lot about math anxiety, right? That becomes an obstacle to being motivated.
11:40	Environment—What contexts, resources, and tools do the students need to complete the assignment? So, what's part of their physical or interpersonal environment that they need to complete the assignment?
11:52	And then finally, the fifth gap has to do with communication. Is the assignment sufficiently clear and detailed? If not, that becomes a learning gap.
12:03	We're going to talk more about that when we get into the how do we write clear instructions.
12:07	So, I want to pause here and give you a chance to think about this.
12:12	What are the learning gaps that your students have when they come into your class? And you can think about them in terms of those five categories, or I'll try to make that connection.
12:24	Do we have any intrepid souls out there?
12:28	Does anyone have a problem with students not possessing the skills they need to succeed?
12:36	Susan: Frank, this is Susan. I think one of the biggest issues that we see right now is an information literacy gap.
12:44	Students are uncomfortable assessing the credibility of sources and, as such, often default to Google searches and other quick means of finding supporting information irrespective of whether it's good information.
13:05	Francesco: Wow. Okay, that's a great one. There's so much information out there but they don't know how to evaluate those sources.
13:14	Amy: This is Amy. My students typically come in with very little experience with APA formatting, and I think a lot of them struggle with formal writing.
13:23	I think a lot of them read a great deal of informal material online: blogs, twitter, that kind of thing. So, it's a struggle to adopt a tone that's more formal in nature.
13:39	I agree totally, about kind of library avoidance I call it, with Susan. It seems students really try to avoid that at all costs.

13:49	At another school that I work for, I made a webinar with the librarian and another instructor.
13:57	We just went through fake news, and all these kinds of things, and how to sort through information and find information, and how easy it is to use the library.
14:06	Just a familiarity thing to make students more curious about it and try to put it in terms of current issues.
14:14	Francesco: Okay. Yes. That's a great one.
14:16	So not being aware of the sort of style or conventions of academic writing, maybe specifically APA, how to format, how to cite, what's the proper tone, the proper voice, and just like how you said how to identify valid sources.
14:34	Anyone else? Learning gaps that your students possess?
14:41	Jeff: Hi Francesco. My assignment that I submitted is a simple argumentative essay for a science class. I'm a biology professor.
14:47	I have to concur with the previous speaker that our kids really just default to Google at all times. I'm busy grading a writing assignment that they submitted last week, and it really is just Google, Google, Google the entire time.
15:00	So, one of the things I'm trying to do is get them into peer reviewed resources and then have them develop a strong thesis statement—we actually have a whole recitation about the thesis statement thing—and then basically just provide good evidence around the science.
15:14	That's a challenge for us so far, which is why this is the assignment that I'm working on.
15:18	Francesco: Sure. Okay. So, it sounds like you have to spend a lot of time addressing in particular that issue of sources: what's a reliable source, how to identify a peer-reviewed source, where to find them, and how to cite them and document them.
15:34	Jeff: And so far, we actually bring them into the library. The librarian shows them all of the resources, and still they're really hesitant to get back in there once lab is over to go in and do the work.
15:46	Francesco: Okay.
15:47	Jeff: There's a comfort gap.
15:49	Francesco: Yeah. There's a comfort gap. I think, in particular we're talking about the libraries and so on.
15:55	I think these would fall under the environment as a learning gap there.
15:59	We need to introduce our students to what we consider more legitimate academic resources—resources that will lead them to sources that are scholarly.
16:14	There's also that skills gap—how to identify and how to evaluate sources, and so on, and then what to do with that, with APA, or MLA, or whatever style manual we're encouraging them to use.

16:29	There are solutions that we've aligned here with the learning gaps as part of the research on learning gaps.
16:34	If there's a gap with knowledge, you could make sure you address that through your curricular materials, through the research you have the students do, through discussions, and through informal writing, which helps them to think about, analyze, criticize, reflect on what they're learning.
16:54	For skills, again have them practice—either through writing or some other mode—scaffold those skills, sequence assignments, have them review their work, have them revise their work. This is all part of practicing those skills.
17:11	Motivation comes down to some key factors here.
17:15	Have some choice involved in the assignment even if that's just having to pick a topic and you help them narrow it.
17:25	Help them identify what they're competent at and what they're not.
17:29	Help them see the relevance of the assignment. Connect it to what they're doing in the class as a whole, to what they might do once they graduate.
17:37	Provide some support.
17:39	The environment—we've talked about libraries, labs, online resources like the OWL, whatever software they may have to use.
17:47	Some assignments might be multi-modal. The students have to do a PowerPoint. Spend some time helping them get familiar with that. Don't assume that they know how to use all of the software.
17:56	Also, provide some reasonable time expectations. If you're assigning a 20-page paper, give them more than a week to do the research and write it. Things like that.
18:07	And then using you, and peers, and tutors as resources.
18:11	And finally, the communication gap. I think a lot of the things that came up in the conversation just now about gaps could be addressed in the assignment itself, in the instructions.
18:22	So, for instance, what counts as a legitimate source for this project? Well, Google is not the place to go. You have to go to a library or some subscription service that gives you access to peer-reviewed articles.
18:39	How do you know what a peer-reviewed article is? Maybe this can be explained in the instructions or as a prelude to the assignment, maybe through previous assignments, smaller informal assignments.
18:52	Provide templates, provide models of what sources like that might look like, and also models of the thing that they're creating—what will this look like.
19:03	Make sure to have some kind of rubric or appropriate feedback to help guide their revision, if there's going to be one, or just to help them understand the grade they received and what they could do better.

19:20	I want to get into writing these clear instructions. We've come up with, actually adapted a four-part rubric from Beth Hewett. This is the <i>What, Why, How, and Do</i> rubric. This is one of the two handouts that I sent around earlier in the week.
19:40	Under <i>What</i> —basically this focuses on using straightforward language to describe what the assignment is and what it's not. So, you want to avoid jargon, avoid technical terms, avoid digressions. Stick to the main point. Try to clearly and concisely convey what the assignment is and be specific about the purpose of the assignment.
20:03	Under <i>Why</i> —You want to explain to the student why they are doing this assignment. Why it is important? What they will learn from it? Maybe this isn't in the assignment instructions, but it's part of the presentation of the assignment to give them a sense of the overall purpose and value of the assignment. Explain how the assignment fits into the larger context of the class, how it's building on skills and knowledge that they've already learned, and how it's leading them to future assignments too. Give them a sense of that progression.
20:41	Under <i>How</i> —This is about explaining how they're going to do the assignment—providing the resources that they'll need, the skills they'll need to complete the assignment, how to use the library, how to cite sources, how to use any required technology. Provide templates, models, or examples.
21:04	Under <i>Do</i> —Here basically you're explaining what they're going to do—a step-by-step set of instructions for what they're doing, especially if you're scaffolding this assignment and it's a multi-stage assignment.
21:20	But, even if it's not an assignment with multiple parts being turned in, there still might be steps: there might be a research stage, there might be a brainstorming stage, a research stage, there might be a drafting stage, and so on.
21:35	Break the complex tasks down into simpler parts.
21:37	The question—you might have some kind of prompt and that itself can be broken down to further clarify what you're asking.
21:45	We're going to use this rubric here, this four-part rubric, and we're going to talk about this prompt.
21:52	This is the sample prompt submitted by one of our coordinators for this project. It comes out of a history discipline.
22:03	So, I'll read the question and then I want us to think about what it's doing right and what it could do better. Think of it in terms of <i>What, Why, How, and Do</i> .
22:16	"In a 3-4 page paper, explain how the Nazis came to power in Germany. Your paper should draw on materials from our textbook, lectures, and Ian Kershaw's <i>Hitler: Profiles in Power</i> ."
22:31	Is this assignment describing what needs to be done, why it's important, how it's going to be done, and what the steps are?
22:41	Open the floor.

22:46	Attendee: Well, I'll start because I just don't like all this uncomfortable silence. I think I would like a little more <i>Why</i> . In terms of it's important to understand the circumstances that permitted Nazis to come to power in Germany for obvious reasons such as we don't this to ever happen again. We want to understand the circumstances. We want to be able to identify circumstances in the future that start looking like this sort of behavior.
23:17	Give a little more why to it so students feel a little more invested and understand you're not just ticking a box. This is because we have to learn from history for fear of repeating it if we don't.
23:33	So, make that connection to why it's important that they understand it's not just ticking a box as an assignment.
23:42	Francesco: Okay. All right. Good point. So, maybe prefacing it more with what's the importance of this assignment.
23:49	Susan: And following with that, to me there's not enough <i>What</i> in terms of purpose other than explanation, in terms of the specific genre.
24:04	I mean, I could easily extrapolate from this little paragraph, these two sentences, that I could write a letter, I could write an essay, I could write a number of different types of documents here. So, I'd like to see a little more definition, or explicit latitude for students to choose.
24:29	Francesco: Great point. This is a really broad question. I don't even know if I could handle this in three to four pages.
24:35	Susan: Me either.
24:38	Francesco: How far back do we trace their rise to power? The roots of it could, I guess, theoretically go back decades—the ideological roots, the social political landscape and so on.
24:54	Asking some more clarifying questions. Maybe some bullet points that need to be addressed as part of the answer to this question would help to define the <i>What</i> a little better.
25:05	Someone online has shared a comment and I'll just read the comment. Expand the language to clarify the time period. Would the students trace only the events leading up to World War II or go even more in depth to the World War I early years of Germany's Nazi underpinnings?
25:21	So, I think that's getting out what we just said. What are the historical parameters of this investigation realistically for a three to four page paper?
25:32	What else could this do better as far as maybe explaining the <i>How</i> or the <i>Do</i> ?
25:41	Attendee: It could also be clear in terms of your paper should follow APA formatting—one-inch margins, double spaced, use proper in-text citations. That sort of thing. Some of the little housekeeping items.
25:53	Francesco: The <i>How</i> to do it. Yes. What are the style requirements? The formatting requirements? It says, "your paper should draw materials from our

textbook, lectures, and Ian Kershaw’s *Hitler: Profiles in Power*.” Is it all three? Only one? You know, it seems quite a bit open there. And for a three to four page paper, that’s quite a lot of citing to do. It seems to me.

26:21	There are no steps here. It seems to be like a single step thing. You’re doing this. That could be broken down more, potentially.
26:31	Now I want to take us into a slightly revised version of this prompt. Again, ask the same questions: How could it say <i>What</i> to do better? How can it explain <i>Why</i> to do better. The <i>How</i> and the <i>Do</i> .
26:50	I’m going to give you a moment to read this. In this version of it, there are actually two slides. The second slide is a grading rubric. It says this is what you’re going to be graded on. And that was something missing from that first version of it.
27:05	The first slide, it provides the assignment and then it has the main question, but it breaks it down into some sub questions. That last paragraph there really lays out the structure of the essay—how their essay should be organized.
27:28	What is this version doing better? What could it potentially do better?
27:38	I’ll click on the next slide here so you can read through.
27:49	So, any thoughts on this prompt? What do you like about it? What do you think could be improved?
27:59	Attendee: I like how it asks if students have understood the readings and it’s asking them if they’ve integrated material that fits with their argument. So, it shows a level of comprehension and obviously interaction with the resources.
28:17	Asking is it well-written is a little bit vague. Obviously typographical and grammatical errors, that’s helpful. I think that could use a little tightening up.
28:34	Writing style—is it awkward? Maybe, is the writing style informal? Just right off the top of my head, well written seems... Is it following APA conventions? That’s an easier yes/no question than is it well written. I’d be interested to hear what other people think too.
29:01	Jeff: I would like to see it get more concrete. Instead of asking the questions, just this is what’s expected and here are your points. More like a rubric.
29:12	Francesco: I see. Okay. When you say, “here are your points,” do you mean adding some kind of point spread here? To show...
29:18	Jeff: Yes. Exactly. Just give specific direction as to what is expected in the paper instead of this open-ended thing. I think that actually just leads more to that comfort gap.
29:33	Francesco: Interesting. Okay. So there is an attempt here to provide a grading rubric, but the rubric itself has some flaws that maybe are muddying the waters a bit, it sounds like.
29:44	Jeff: That’s what I would say. Yes.
29:45	Francesco: Yes. What about the revision of the central question? Do you think that it helps? It’s better than the way it was worded earlier?

29:56	Jeff: Well, I think it starts to imply the historical importance, but again, I think more specific would be better.
30:03	Attendee: I think it's also challenging to write a thesis statement for three different questions.
30:07	You know, typically we say your thesis statement is the answer to your research question, and you've got three different questions here. So, coming up with one thesis to how did they rise to power, what were the elements that contributed to success, and why did... You know what I mean? That's hard to kind of jam into one thesis statement.
30:24	It's definitely clearer having these questions, but this might be more challenging to organize for a student.
30:35	Francesco: Good point.
30:35	Jeff: I agree entirely. I think what he was trying to do was imply the historical importance without actually getting to it explicitly, but I think he would be better served if there was just a paragraph about it and then a single question to answer.
30:49	Francesco: So, the <i>Why</i> still wasn't addressed here. Go on. What was next?
30:53	Jeff: I think he's trying to get at it with the question stream that he's got, but I don't the question stream is actually doing it enough service. I think she's right.
31:03	Susan: This is a lot of information to try to put into three to four pages even still. I think that's really the big issue here, especially depending on the level of the student that we're working with. If this is a 100-level course, as an example, the student would, at best, be expected to respond with a very high-level overview. I think that's part of the issue.
31:31	I think there are lots of ways we could break this apart and put it back together to make it into a better assignment. It's still just not... It's too broad. Too much going on.
31:50	Francesco: Yes. I can see that point. And I like the idea that with the multiple questions, it sometimes makes it harder to focus. Especially, how do you develop a thesis addressing three questions?
32:03	What if it were rephrased as How did the Nazis rise to power in Germany? In your response, address these points, and the other questions could be sub-topics that come up. Would that be more manageable? Be more focused? Or still problematic?
32:24	Susan: I still think we have the thesis statement issue. I mean, we could craft a really broad thesis statement to address the previous speaker's point, but if we're really wanting students to hone in on writing a solid thesis statement here—and clearly that's covered in this last paragraph on the slide that is showing right now, that emphasis on a strong thesis statement—we're giving them too much to work with to get there.

32:53	Francesco: Okay.
32:56	Attendee: I guess you could even do something like—if you want this kind of overarching question of how did the Nazis rise to power in Germany—you could give students the opportunity to select a, b, c, or d, and they answer one of those.
33:12	How and why did ordinary Germans go along with this? That could be a three to four-page paper in and of itself. They could select maybe... What are some of the ideas behind the German rise to power? How were those ideas put into motion? What were the different elements that involved everyday Germans in this...? You get my point.
33:48	Francesco: Right.
33:48	Attendee: If the overarching question is about the rise to power, then students could choose: do they want to look at how ordinary Germans did it, how militarily things were put into action, how kids were brought into different elements of the war effort. That sort of thing.
34:05	You could have entirely different questions so they could really hone in on one thing and write three to four pages instead of a book.
34:13	Susan: And one of the real benefits of that is giving the students that choice. When students are given a choice as to how they respond to a particular question or a prompt like this, they're more likely to give it a little bit more effort if they're interested.
34:29	Francesco: Right.
34:31	Susan: If given that explicit choice, whether it be in terms of which question to answer, or which approach to take, or even what genre to use, it gives them buy-in to the assignment and potentially helps them learn more through the process.
34:51	Francesco: Great point. I do think that this version is an improvement from the last one in terms of choice. The last one to me suggested go back and mine the notes and the textbook and then Kershaw's book and recite back the steps of the rise to power.
35:11	This one at least says that you need to present a clear argument which suggests that there are different arguments to be made.
35:20	There's a difference of opinion. You can develop your own point of view.
35:27	So, I think that that might be a strength of this one, but notwithstanding I think all the comments that were made, we're right on point here that this could definitely be improved.
35:37	So, I'm mindful of time, and I want to move on and make sure that we have time to look at some of your assignments that you submitted.
35:47	I do have some volunteers, so we're going to start with those here. I'm going to pull them up and give you some time to read them.
35:58	Amy, why don't we start with yours?
36:05	Do you want to give us a little bit of context for this assignment?

36:09	Amy: Yes. This takes place at about week four in an eight-week class where students are writing a literature review.
36:19	They go through and the librarians have created this entire tutorial about using the C.R.A.P. criteria and making sure that material is current and reliable, and the authors are credentialed, and the purpose is certainly not a study on hydration funded by Gatorade.
36:42	Just making sure that students are not trying to Google their way through it as we mentioned earlier.
36:49	Making sure that they look at every source and evaluate it with this criteria in mind. Otherwise, it gets eliminated from their list of potential resources.
37:02	The week prior, they submit a preliminary list of references. They go through and make sure they all meet this criteria.
37:14	Francesco: I think this is a bit of serendipity. Everyone has been... A few people have complained about source selection, and I think this criteria could help us with our students. So, this assignment seems, to me, really apropos.
37:29	So, this is your assignment. This is the write up and below it is a rubric, a grading rubric, for the assignment. There's about a page long rubric. Is this the rubric created by Excelsior, or is this your own rubric?
37:48	Amy: No. This was for a different college.
37:50	Francesco: Okay. This is a different college. Okay.
37:52	I'll still leave this on the screen here and give everyone a chance to read it. With the <i>How to Write Clear Instructions</i> handout in mind here of <i>What, Why, How, Do</i> , I'd like us to give Amy some feedback on this prompt.
38:14	So, I've had a chance to read it, and I'm just going to jump in here. Some things I like about it. I like that it situates the assignment in the context of the class and how it fits in with this other assignment to come.
38:37	The annotated bibliography will allow you to evaluate the articles chosen for your final literature review. I assume that's sort of one of the major assignments of the course?
38:53	Amy: Yes. Exactly.
38:54	Francesco: Okay. I also like how you explain why it's important. You have this purpose statement: The purpose of this assignment is to summarize the source in relation to your research question and evaluate it.
39:06	I guess that also touches on the <i>What</i> . What are they doing here?
39:12	I did have a question about the <i>How</i> .
39:16	When they write this annotated bibliography, do they have to use those categories—currency, reliability, authority, purpose—in their summary of each source?
39:34	Amy: Yes. Well, we can see right away obviously with the reference at the top if it's met the currency standard.

39:45	They will typically write in the annotation—even though this author is say, a professor at such and such university and has written several books on this topic to address the authority and reliability—they’ll typically say this is a peer-reviewed article and its purpose is to educate. That is all contained within that annotation.
40:10	Typically, the currency is not simply because it’s something that you can see right away from the date.
40:15	The reliability, authority, and purpose should definitely be part of the annotation, and that isn’t really clear in those instructions, is it?
40:23	Francesco: Yes. I like that you say here, to begin with this.
Highlighted on screen	Begin your annotation with an APA-formatted reference for the source, followed by a brief summary and evaluation of the source.
40:29	To me that speaks to the steps—the <i>Do</i> part.
40:36	I guess the next sentence then goes back to <i>What</i> .
40:40	If I were to rework this, I would probably pull this out and kind of start to list the steps here.
Moved on screen below Purpose.	Begin your annotation with an APA-formatted reference for the source, followed by a brief summary and evaluation of the source.
40:48	Maybe step one is to begin with that. Step two is to apply the next part of the rubric and do this and kind of stage out what it is they’re doing a little better.
41:01	Amy: Sure, sure. And maybe even give instructions on how to create, maybe a link, for a proper hanging indent because that’s something that students seem to struggle with.
41:11	Francesco: Yes. How to do that.
41:14	Amy: Yes. Since we’ve started out with the reference, now put in the hanging indent—directions for that—and then here’s your annotations...
41:22	Francesco: A little hyperlink here to the OWL, just to toot our horn. How an APA format is sourced. A reference. Sure.
41:31	I do like that you have the sample here. That’s great. That’ll help them see what it is that they’re creating.
41:38	I think that the use of the... providing the criteria really helps them to structure the assignment as well. Whether we expect them to or not, I think they’re going to use those categories to describe this. You know, each source.
41:55	Amy: Yes.
41:55	Francesco: That’s really great.
41:57	Susan: Can I ask a question?
41:59	Francesco: Yes.
42:01	Susan: What level course is this?

42:03	Amy: This is a graduate course.
42:06	Susan: Do you have issues with students exploiting the brief summary and evaluation?
42:15	Amy: How do you...?
42:15	Susan: Meaning... Well, I work primarily with juniors and seniors, undergrads, but if I use phrasing such as followed by a brief summary and evaluation of the source, they're going to give me a single sentence because they believe that that's brief. So...
42:35	Francesco: Wow.
42:36	Susan: Graduate students I know, typically aren't like that, but...
42:40	Amy: Oh, you'd be surprised. If you can see... Well, you probably can't, but I can put it in the box there, the sample annotated bibliography is helpful because it... The other problem I have with some students is they will turn in a 15-page paper because they will go through every single element of the research study which is just unnecessary when they're just trying to annotate it and sort out if this is going to answer elements of their research question.
43:09	Susan: Sure.
43:10	Amy: So, having that sample is helpful because it's probably five to seven sentences each annotation. So, it's not just like this will help me—great.
43:20	I also, for this class, I create weekly videos where I go over the assignments and I just talk about what's expected. I tell them about certain pitfalls that other students encountered, whether it's the one sentence annotation or this is a great source, I really like it. You know, that's not going to be adequate.
43:42	So, I do flesh stuff out in a video as well just because it's more helpful for the students and it also decreases the number of emails that I have in my inbox with multiple, multiple questions about the assignment.
43:59	I thought at first you were going to ask if they simply cut and paste the abstract from a study, which has probably happened to some people.
44:10	Susan: Oh, never.
44:15	Francesco: Okay. Any more comments on this one?
44:19	All right. Well, I'm going to jump to another example. This is one that—since Susan is on here—this is one that Susan submitted. This is a proposal for scientific and technical writing.
44:32	This is a two-page description of the assignment. It starts by reviewing these learning materials. There is a list of, I guess these are sources about how to write a proposal.
44:52	Susan: Yes. That's the reading material for the week that applies specifically to the objectives noted below.
44:57	Francesco: So, these sort of provide templates, models, or examples sort of addressing the <i>How</i> part of our rubric. Is that accurate?

45:07	Susan: Correct.
45:08	Francesco: And then it goes to, “In this assignment, you will write a short proposal on a current issue.” So, here is the <i>What</i> statement, the goal of this assignment, what it allows you to practice.
45:19	This is an assignment that is already built into a course, I think, from what I’m seeing.
45:23	Susan: Correct.
45:26	Francesco: It’s listing the modules. Ah, these are the module outcomes, I’m sorry. It continues to describe what a proposal is. Oh no, I’m sorry, what the assignment is.
45:45	Susan: And how it lays out the discussions for the week.
45:48	Francesco: Okay. List of topics that are appropriate for the assignment. Still describing the <i>What</i> here.
46:03	If anyone needs me to scroll back, please let me know.
46:08	Here you end by basically laying out the structure of the proposal—that it should have an introduction, what that introduction should discuss; a section describing the current situation, the problem; a plan for how to address it, and what the deliverables are; and a conclusion and what will be the benefits.
46:34	There’s a template here—a link to a template.
46:38	Some citing requirements, formatting requirements, using APA. So, there’s quite a bit in this one.
46:48	The question is: Is it hitting all of the categories here. Does it describe what needs to be done? Does it explain why? Does it provide information on how to create this assignment? And then, does it break down what needs to be done.
47:08	Susan: I have really thick skin. Feel free to criticize.
47:22	Francesco: I like the assignment. I think it’s pretty detailed. To me, I think that sometimes the language about learning outcomes gets in the way.
47:36	I know those are more institutional than really for the benefit of the student sometimes.
47:44	I’m not sure if I would put those in there, unless they are required to be there, or maybe I would move them down.
47:52	I love these links to these learning materials that help them understand what a proposal is, but I don’t think I would put them first.
48:01	I feel like I want to start with the assignment. Boom. Here it is: In this assignment you’re going to do this, and then have a section, maybe a bolded heading below with templates, or models, or examples or something and list those. De-emphasize that. Hey, if you need help, if you want to see an example, go here.
48:23	Otherwise, I like this. Maybe using some headings throughout might help too.
48:28	Susan: Yes. I don’t disagree with any of those comments, particularly reordering things.

48:33	Francesco: Yes.
48:35	Susan: I too do not care for the restatement of the outcomes where they are, and, in fact, argued that point more than once because what happens is, especially with students who may be underprepared for this particular class, they read the list of reading materials and they stop right there because it's too much.
49:08	Francesco: Yes. That's my concern is that there's so much language on the page that the student might be overwhelmed by it. Yes.
49:16	Susan: Yes.
49:18	Francesco: I think there's a sweet spot between too little information, like that first prompt about the Nazis, and too much information.
49:26	Susan: Right.
49:27	Francesco: Any other comments?
49:29	Robin: I have one. This is Robin. I like this assignment. I think you were very clear. The point about the module outcomes? Yes, it is institutional, but at least they know why they're doing this. So, I might put a little blurb on why this is important that they do this.
49:43	Francesco: Ooh. I never thought of that. That's a great point. Kind of reframing that, rather than these are the learning outcomes, you will blah blah blah, say here's why this is important.
49:54	Susan: Yes. That's a good point Robin. And one of the things that we've talked about with this particular course is—it goes to what Frank was saying a few minutes ago but—just resequencing the information that's on these two pages, keeping all of that information, but putting it in a different order. So that that information is still on there, but that the outcomes are potentially at the end, so it sort of pulls it all together, if that makes sense.
50:20	Robin: Or even as an introduction to the assignment.
50:23	Susan: Right.
50:23	Robin: This will help you prepare for this in your future.
50:26	Susan: Okay.
50:27	Robin: Go through it, you know?
50:29	Most of the students go why? Why does this pertain to me? Why am I wasting my time with this? And this will tell them. Right?
50:36	Susan: Yes. The reason that I chose this assignment, just so everybody knows, is that this is the one that the students struggle with the most in this particular class.
50:48	Francesco: Well, I'd love to hear if reorganizing and reframing with headings and so on would help to make the assignment more successful or not. But it certainly looks like there's plenty of information in here.
51:03	Okay, I'm going to move forward to the next slide. We are running out of time. I think we're actually out of time, but I just wanted to talk briefly about scaffolding.

51:15	Both of these assignments were one-offs, but what I'd like to encourage you to think about is how would you scaffold your assignments—that is create assignments that build on each other toward that final product?
51:30	Actually, in the first example we looked at, that was almost part of a scaffold, right? Was it Amy that the annotated bib was building towards the final lib review. So, in a way it was kind of scaffolding.
51:45	Susan: My proposal is too.
51:46	Francesco: It is. Oh, okay. What are the steps? What came before and what comes after it?
51:51	Susan: We start with a brief white paper in the previous module, move to the proposal, which is sort of an expansion on the white paper in that particular module with the proposal, then the next one they actually work backward and write an abstract of the entire proposal for pitching that idea for a conference presentation or article for publication, and then in the following week, they do a collaborative activity that is centered on the same macro topic.
52:23	Francesco: Oh, that's great. Wow.
52:24	Susan: Yes. So we have four weeks in a row where they're talking about the exact same thing.
52:30	Francesco: Wonderful. So, one strategy for scaffolding is to start with that final product and do some backward design and it sounds like in both cases you did that. Think about what steps would help us a student get to that end result.
52:45	By scaffolding, one of the advantages is that the students have opportunities to practice. They can build skills. They can build competencies. They don't have to wait until the end of the semester when they turn in the final paper to finally find out from the teacher that they haven't figured out what to do yet when it's too late.
53:06	So, scaffolding allows the student to move from informal to formal assignments, from low stakes to high stakes assignments, from simple to more complex assignments and that helps a student learn and gives more opportunities for feedback along the way.
53:22	I have an example of a scaffolded assignment here, just to show you what it might look like.
53:27	So, instead of assigning a final paper, you might build that in through the semester and have a series of steps. And make that clear to the student. We're going to start the beginning here with some informal writing, but by the end of the semester, you're going to turn in a final draft and that will be graded and be worth so many points.
53:46	And the informal writing could be discussion boards. It could be response papers. It could be brainstorming. The point of it might be just free thinking, free writing, topic selection, and then get them to the next step.

54:04	Maybe they do some research, build in the annotated bibliography like Amy's assignment. Move from there to an outline, talk about how to construct an outline so they're learning that skill as well.
54:15	Then they submit a rough draft. Instead of grading it, have it be peer reviewed. When they get feedback from their peers, they revise.
54:25	They submit. You grade it, and then they have an opportunity for some reflection as well. Maybe have that as some sort of final assignment tagged to that paper.
54:35	So, this is just one example of how we might scaffold a pretty typical assignment—a final paper, a research paper—and do it in a way that allows the students to have time for practice and to get plenty of feedback along the way and turn in a better product in the end.
54:55	Another thing it does is it tends to inoculate the student from plagiarizing. With all these steps, with all these multiple deadlines along the way, it discourages plagiarism and also builds motivation because they're investing themselves in this project along the way.
55:14	I think you've already answered how you would have scaffolded or you are scaffolding your assignments. That's great. So, I'm going to skip that. Any questions about scaffolding before we look ahead?
55:27	All right. Well, let's take a look at what's coming. The next presentation is going to focus on—actually a couple of topics that just came up in the scaffolding slide.
55:39	We're going to look at how to use peer review effectively in the classroom, both in class and online, and we're going to look at how to build in time for revision and why. Why is that important? What does that add and how does that help the student to learn and master skills.
55:58	So that will be one presentation. We consider these two presentations sort of just-in-time presentations since you'll be using them during the semester, hopefully inspiring you to weave in some time for peer review and revision.
56:12	The second presentation is on designing and using rubrics and providing effective feedback. So that has to do with that feedback that the instructor is giving to the student on that assignment.
56:25	Again, that will be in the spring, probably late spring. Those two presentations will wrap up this four-part series.
56:33	I hope you'll join us for those presentations. I'll definitely alert you when it comes time to schedule those presentations.
56:42	So, thank you for joining us today for the second part of Writing in the Disciplines on Creating Effective assignments. I hope you enjoyed it. Please be in touch if you have any questions. These resources will be made available on the OWL.
56:58	Once again, thank you for joining us.
57:01	Jeff: Thank you, Francesco.