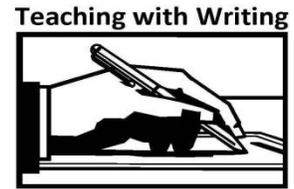


*Greetings! The University of Minnesota's Writing Across the Curriculum program happily launches a series of monthly Teaching with Writing tips. Our goal: to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.*

## Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip



### Devising Clear Writing Assignments

**Rationale:** Assignments that contain imprecise task descriptions and expectations lend themselves to multiple interpretations. Effectively crafted assignments answer students' questions about why they are writing (**context** and **purpose**), the **formats** they should use, the **target audience's** expectations, the **grading criteria** that will be used to assess their final drafts, and the **deadline**.

An example of an unclear assignment in a 3000-level science course: "Write a paper about the human impact on watersheds."\* (Although further details may have been discussed in class, this is the written assignment students have before them as they sit down to write.)

A possible revision: Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) such as zebra mussels and milfoil have affected many Minnesota waterways. The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's Board of Managers (MCWD) recently established the AIS Plan Task Force, and charged the group with developing a plan to prevent, contain, and control AIS. [**Context for writing**]

As an intern for the MCWD AIS Plan Task Force, you are on a team devoted to AIS containment strategies. **Your assignment is to write a one-to-two page, single-spaced memo that, based on research, recommends two containment strategies to "limit the spread of established populations of aquatic invasive species to and from the District"** ([www.minnehahacreek.org/AIS/ais-task-force](http://www.minnehahacreek.org/AIS/ais-task-force)). [**Writing purpose and form**]

Your audience is the MCWD Board of Managers. [**Target audience**]

Your memo should accomplish the following: [**Grading criteria**]

- Synthesize your team's critical analysis of published research to date on best practices in AIS containment strategies. (20 points)
- Describe and persuasively rationalize two specific containment strategies that your team recommends, based on its review of the literature and knowledge of best practices in AIS containment. (What should MCWD and district residents do to inhibit the spread of AIS? Why does your team recommend these actions--what evidence is there that the strategies would work?) (30 points)
- Describe in a concise manner the evidence that supports your recommendations. (10 points)
- Consistently use audience-appropriate language and information. (15 points)
- Identify the timeline and resources (human, material, and financial) necessary to implement the containment strategies. (10 points)

- Organize the document in standard memo format (see the attached sample). (5 points)
- Edit for clarity. (10 points)

This assignment is due on February 15, 2013; submit a PDF version to Moodle and bring a hard copy to class. **[Deadline]**

Comment: The sample revision includes the ingredients necessary for a clear writing assignment without becoming overly prescriptive; the revised sample also makes transparent the thinking-and-writing moves necessary for assignment completion.

**Learn more:**

<http://writing.umn.edu/tww/assignments/designing.html>

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/wassign/pop2d.cfm>

<http://writing.mit.edu/wcc/resources/teachers/createwritingassignments>

**Questions?** Visit us online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/index.html>

**Further support:** Contact a member of the WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) team for a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation: <http://z.umn.edu/twwconsultation>

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