Designing Effective Writing Assignments Questions

Take a few moments to think through your description and requirements for an essay/project. There are no right or wrong answers and most likely some of these will spur other questions you want to ask and answer. If you’d like talk about your responses and receive more ideas, please contact the WAC Director.

1. Thinking of your assignment... How much time do you spend on Q&A for the assignment? How often do you engage with your students on their essay/project before it’s due and what types of scheduled interactions do you have with them?
2. Take a few minutes to see if you can break your assignment into parts. That is, where can you break up the essay/project into smaller steps (units, sections, modules)?
3. If you have your essay/project broken down, can you explain on the syllabus how the pieces build to an essay or connected project?
4. Once you begin breaking down the essay/project, assign the amount of time you think it will take to accomplish each section in and out of class; this will most likely evolve so don’t worry about too much/little time in your estimate.
5. What thinking/writing/research skills are you trying to develop in each section? For example, are you trying to teach ways of observing, ways of developing questioning strategies, ways of discovering and using evidence? (Think of whatever thinking/writing/research processes are important in the course, major, discipline). Are you trying to get students to think like historians, engineers, or accountants? How so?
6. From your past experience teaching this type of essay/project, what types of problems do students have most trouble with? That is, where are their essays/projects, or how they produce them, the most challenging, troublesome, or weakest?
7. When have you been least pleased with your students’ work?
8. What types of study habits do you see in your students, and, if you could, what would you change to improve them?
9. How do you want your essay/project (or course for that matter) to change your students’ lives, from their sense of self worth, values, disciplinary ways of thinking?
10. In a few years if you overheard a few of your former students from this class talking about the class and you, what would you like them to remember about your course, about you?