

## Writing Assignments

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Writing assignments allow instructors to assess students' knowledge of their subject, critical thinking skills, and written competence in different modes and formats for a variety of purposes and audiences. Whether the assignment specifies a concise paragraph or a researched report, successful completion usually requires an answer in a specific format to questions like the ones below:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Typical Formats and/or Purposes</b>
What does it say?	abstract, summary, paraphrase, report
What does it mean?	definition, interpretation, explanation
What is it like/unlike?	compare/contrast, analogy
What is it worth?	reaction, evaluation, persuasion
How does it work?	analysis, explanation
How can it be improved?	revision, imitation, synthesis

### A Sample Short Writing Assignment: Writing an Explanation

This sample assignment for pharmacy students provides a realistic context, an audience, and four traits (in the form of questions) that instructors can score to assess students' knowledge of the subject and their ability to communicate effectively.

#### Context for Writing:

BH is a 24-year-old female with a 15-year history of asthma. Recently, she has been so poorly controlled that she has been unable to work or attend college classes. She has been refilling her Proventil™ inhaler twice monthly. She responds to your questions:

"I wake up and need my inhaler at least once each night. I'm supposed to use a peak flow meter but I don't know how to use it and it doesn't seem to help. I really want my doctor to prescribe something stronger. I'm not using that Azmacort™ inhaler; it's just too expensive; I don't think it even works, and it's a steroid and they're dangerous drugs. I just have seasonal allergies in the fall, no big deal. No, I don't smoke and don't use any OTC drugs, except Aspirin sometimes. I've been hospitalized 5 times for asthma episodes."

#### The Writer's Task and Expected Traits

The patient's lack of knowledge about asthma is a contributing factor. In a short paragraph, educate her about asthma and explain how she can better control her symptoms and disease. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is my explanation *accurate*?
2. Is my explanation *complete*?

