Articulating the Purpose of Course Assignments

Students are more likely to engage with an assignment when they understand why they are being asked to complete it. Without a clearly articulated purpose, assignments may feel aimless and students may focus on completion rather than learning. Articulating the purpose of an assignment makes your reasoning visible and helps students connect the work to their own goals. This resource guide offers a few tips and examples for writing a purpose statement.

- **Specify the learning action:** The first step is to state what the assignment will do for student learning. Is it to help introduce a topic, practice a skill, brainstorm ideas, or something else entirely? All learning activities should align with your objectives, so referring to the objectives can help if you are unsure what the learning action may be.

- **Name the topic or skill:** Second, state what topic or skill the assignment addresses. Name the specific concept or skill that students will be working on in the assignment. For example, avoid only saying "writing", but specify what aspect of writing such as, writing a thesis statement, an argument, or a response paper.

- **Explain why it matters:** Last explain how the assignment relates to future assignments, their personal goals, or everyday life. This part of articulating the purpose helps students connect the skills to what is important to them. No two students have the same motivation, so consider adding more than one reason.

- **A couple of examples:**
    - We are writing this lab report to practice interpreting data and explaining experimental results because it will help you practice how scientists communicate their findings, which is also applicable to your future careers.
    - We are doing this group project to apply what you have learned about how misinformation spreads by creating a resource for a general audience because it will help you practice explaining complex topics to nonexperts and respond to misinformation you come across.

Resources

Winkelmes, M.-A. (2013). Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning. *Liberal Education*, *99*(2).

TILT Higher Ed. (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2026, from https://www.tilthighered.com/

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by email at cttl@slu.edu.