Some Guiding Principles for Developing Effective Technical Communication Assignments

Guiding Principle	Comments
❖ Make the goals of the assignments explicit and measurable.	Use goal statement language in the same way you might in a project of your own. Making goals measurable can be as basic as describing the conditions that will exist when the assignment is completed successfully.
❖ Define fully the audience and context.	As much as possible, we want to avoid "context-neutral" communication, which almost never occurs anywhere outside of a classroom. You can be creative and have some fun with this principle, and its application allows you to easily vary assignments from semester to semester.
❖ Include some sort of rubric or set of markers of a successful assignment, both in terms of final product and in habits practiced in getting there.	Rubrics can be tricky and easy to do badly, but many faculty will find that a rubric seems natural to them. A well-annotated model can cover some of the same ground, but if students are *really* focused on grades, you will find a rubric or list of markers helps them at the beginning and helps you when you want to grade with consistency.
❖ Provide students with a checklist for completing assignment tasks.	A checklist helps to cast a communication assignment as a kind of work process that includes some defined stages and steps. Having a checklist to review helps students with their own revision and can help you with grading.
❖ Provide students with an annotated model of a successful assignment.	Models alone do not guarantee success. Nonetheless, a well-designed and annotated model shifts the ground of discussion from routine questions of format and appearance to more interesting questions of the expression of engineering knowledge.
❖ Provide an "advice table" based on your experience.	Students really can profit from your insights and accumulated wisdom. These advice tables can be enormously helpful.

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❖ Create some sort of structure that allows revision.	Revision can occur through traditional feedback on a draft or through a set of resources and routines that occur before a draft gets submitted. When you think about opportunities for revision, you are essentially confronting a decision about whether "less can be more" in a writing assignment.
❖ Make sure your assignment sheets model the quality of achievement and polish you expect from students.	Perfection may be an impossible standard, but we should give students an assignment sheet that displays all the virtues we might expect of them. The harsh reality is that *any* time you give students a document of *any* kind, you are teaching how to write. They see you as models as well as mentors. We should make the lessons good ones.