Example 1: Unclear Focus and Vague Criteria
Political Science Course – Research Paper – from Reid, Joy and Barbara Kroll

The purpose of this paper is to examine the origins and results of Soviet control and influence in the Soviet satellites of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Poland, as well as the current reforms and their implications. Your paper must be 6-10 double-spaced typewritten pages. The written quality of your paper will be graded. This will include the use of proper grammar, correct punctuation, spelling, and word usage as well as the citation of references and the inclusion of a bibliography in the proper form.

Example 2: Directing Process not just Product
Agricultural Economics – Formal Research Paper – Dr. Henry Kinnucan, used with permission

Your goal is to identify a topic for research. Here are some suggestions (adapted from a similar course taught at the University of Maryland):

1) Develop a list of readings on a topic of interest using Google Scholar and EconLit as sources. Focus on papers published in “good” journals, i.e., those with a Google Scholar h-index of 25 or higher. (To get a journal’s h-index download the software available at http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm)

2) As you read, compile a list of puzzles or weaknesses in the existing literature. Look for incomplete explanations, overly restrictive models, or explanations with holes. Think about empirical questions that are unanswered or not answered correctly. Where is existing knowledge incomplete in a way you can complete?

3) Enumerate questions you believe are important and chart out ways that you plan to answer the questions.

4) Select one or two tentative topics/ideas for presentation in class and try them out on faculty members, your thesis advisor, or fellow students. Don’t be discouraged by others’ lack of enthusiasm. Listen carefully to their comments, and try to understand them. Don’t jump to conclusions about criticisms. Hear them out and then respond.

5) Turn your literature review into a 20 minute presentation of your ideas, 10 slides maximum.

Comment [mjm1]: Overly broad topic, especially for space and time allotted
Comment [mjm2]: Criteria focuses on surface features rather than thinking required to be successful
Comment [mjm3]: Models acknowledgement of sources
Comment [mjm4]: Defines terms and explains how to determine this standard
Comment [mjm5]: Directs process.
Comment [mjm6]: Directs end product.
Example 3: Linked to Learning Objectives and Expectations of Field

Purpose: This laboratory exercise and the subsequent report are intended to permit you to compare actual data obtained from the class, and a data sample of your own, with theoretical values, obtained from the development of Punnett squares.

Procedure:
(a) A data collection sheet will be passed around each laboratory group. You should answer each question (e.g., your blood type, do you possess a widow’s peak, or dimples, attached or free ear lobes, etc.). You will also be provided with an individual collection sheet. Note that at the bottom of the sheet is an area regarding color perception. Following your instructor’s directions, complete this section of your sheet. Remove it at the broken line and turn it in before the end of the period. All of the data for the entire class will be pooled and provided to you at the next laboratory period.
(b) Before the next period, obtain an independent sample of your own from about 35 persons OTHER than members of the class – for example, your dormitory group, a club, or just the first 35 persons you encounter on campus. Select any TWO traits from the data collection sheet (additional traits are not necessary.) NOTE: Retain your tally sheet and include it as an appendix with your report.

Report: The report should include the following sections:
(a) Introduction – the purpose of the study
(b) Material and methods – how were the data obtained?
(c) Observations – the actual data
(d) Discussion – develop Punnett squares for each of the following, and each should be included in your report: a di-hybrid cross, a sex-linked trait, and a multiple-allele system.

Example 4: Fostering Collaboration with Accountability
Nutrition – Field Work –

Keep a food diary for one week, recording all intake and approximate amounts. Bring your intake diary to class on Monday to exchange with a classmate. Analyze the data you receive from your classmate and present your findings in a 2-3 page nutritional report. Include recommendations of how the diet might be improved.

Comment [mjm7]: Defines expected learning as purpose for assignment
Comment [mjm8]: Requires format typically expected in this discipline.
Comment [mjm9]: By using someone else’s data collection, assignment mimics a situation typical for professionals in the field, though it may cause difficulties if data is incomplete.
Comment [mjm10]: Assumes format is already known.
Example 5: Real World but Too Many Tasks for the Length Required
Language and Gender -- Field Work to connect to readings and begin to identify a possible research topic

This assignment asks you to consider how gender roles are embedded in the language used with young children.

Visit a toy store and take careful inventory of the language used on the packaging of toys directed toward boys, girls or both. You’ll want to have at least 10 specific examples. Notice the interactions between language and images on these packages. How do the manufacturers target their intended audience? How do they make room for breaks in the stereotypes of who should/can play with these toys? What patterns do you see and how would you connect these to the readings we’ve been doing this term? How would you describe the performance of gender in toys or their packaging?

Present your work for your classmates in a short paper (2-3 pages). Include a consideration of how the objects you analyzed are portraying and creating expectations of masculinity and/or femininity. Be certain to include specific examples not just your general impressions. What questions for further research would you pose based on this work?

Example 6: Progressive Assignment
Legal Rhetoric – critical analysis done as a progressive assignment

Assignment #1: Writing the “Summary of Facts” for your long paper
Assignment #2: Writing the “Summary of Facts” for a Classmate’s Case
Assignment #3: Revising your “Summary of Facts” and creating an outline of the case
Assignment #4: Analyzing a single quotation
Assignment #5: Investigating the background of your case
Assignment #6: Characterizing the rhetoric of the opinion
Assignment #7: Writing the introductory frame for your paper
Assignment #8: Outlining your paper – arranging evidence to support your characterization
Assignment #9: Reading a Judicial Opinion: A long paper of rhetorical analysis
Assignment #10: Polishing and Revising for Publication

Comment [mjm11]: Moves course content into real world situation.
Comment [mjm12]: Too many questions not clearly marked as possible areas of focus, so students might expect to answer all even though length is limited.
Comment [mjm13]: Format not defined.
Comment [mjm14]: Additional information to be included.
Comment [mjm15]: Yet another additional task for the assignment.
Comment [mjm16]: By breaking a long assignment into multiple, shorter assignments the final product is developed throughout the term and work load for faculty and students is more manageable.
Each of these assignments would need specific details to direct both process and product.
Comment [mjm17]: Multiple opportunities to practice important skill.
Comment [mjm18]: Includes possible non-classroom audience for final product.