**Crafting a Good Prompt**

Writing a good prompt for a writing assignment is a difficult task. How can you produce writing assignments that clearly convey the tasks and questions you want your students to undertake?

**Before writing your prompts, you will want to consider a few matters:**

* Consider how can this literacy lesson fit within the overall scope and sequence of your course? How can you connect the writing piece to the content learning target? In that way, the writing more fully develops the big learning (think big ideas) in the course, rather than detracting from the goals of the course.
* Do you want your students to define, illustrate, compare, analyze, or evaluate? You will want to come up with prompts that clearly direct students as to the kind of thinking they will have to do.
* Do you want students to create an answer to a prompt, a thesis statement, a response integrating claim-evidence-commentary/reasoning or an extended body paragraph? This will generally be dictated by the grade level of the literacy lesson, but could also be used to differentiate for students if you have multiple grade levels in your class.

**Elements of a prompt:**

* Generally speaking, prompts will include each of the following:
  + Context
  + Directional verbs that clarify what types of thinking you want your students to do
  + Clear writing expectations including specific instructions regarding what evidence to include

*context* **type of writing** verb **evidence to include**

Example:

*Scientists are developing a sneaker that will enable athletes to perform better. Though technology affords athletes distinct advantages, people might say that the measure of the contest should be the person rather than the product.* Write a **letter** to persuade the Olympic Committee to adopt **or** to ban the use of technology-assisted sneakers in international competition. **Justify your response with evidence from the text provided.**

**Context**: The context should provide students a framework through which to write. They should be able to read the context and understand what you view as important in the reading and recognize the focus for their writing. Sometimes context is unnecessary depending on the prompt. Other times you may want to use a table, graph or other previous information to provide background information for the prompt.

**Verbs**: Word choice is very important regarding the types of thinking you want students to do. Possible directional verbs to use include:

* + **Explain:** Describe something in detail so that it is more clearly understood.
  + **Identify:** Indicate what a thing is, when and where it occurs.
  + **Illustrate:** Give one or more examples of the topic, relating each to the topic.
  + **Interpret:** Explain what something means in your own words
  + **Relate:** Show how the topic had an effect on something else and/or the connection(s) between two things.
  + **Analyze:** Separate something into parts and discuss or examine each part.
  + **Describe:** Give an account of something by giving details of characteristics, qualities, and parts.
  + **Summarize:** Give a shortened account, including the main points and highlights and leaving out uneccessary details.
  + **Compare:** Show how two things are both alike and different. In math compare includes contrast.)
  + **Contrast:** Show only the differences between two things.
  + **Evaluate:** Give an opinion telling the positive and negative qualities of something.
  + **Agree / Disagree:** Give your opinion about the topic.  Express *either* a positive or a negative opinion and support your opinion.

**Writing Product and Evidence Requirements**: The prompt should always direct students to the type of writing product you want them to create. The type of literacy lesson will dictate that product. You could ask students to:

* + Write a thesis statement (or)
  + Write a thesis statement to guide your extended body paragraph

**(and)**

* + justify their thinking with evidence from the text provided (or)
  + provide evidence to support their stance (or)
  + answer the prompt using claim, evidence and commentary/reasoning (or)
  + create an extended body paragraph that uses evidence and commentary/reasoning to support your claim (or)
  + write an extended body paragraph that answers the prompt incorporating claim, evidence and commentary/reasoning
  + answer the prompt through an extended body paragraph. Justify your response with evidence from the text provided.