

Writing Better Writing Assignments¹

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While many instructors care deeply about student writing, they often pay little attention to the part of the writing process over which they maintain complete control: the prompt. Yet the prompt is often where student confusion, and thus confused writing, begins. Using a classic taxonomy as inspiration, we offer here a new typology that provides practical support for instructors looking to create prompts that are both easy for students to interpret and directly linked to course objectives.

Faculty members care deeply about student writing and turn a critical eye to their syllabus, lesson plans, and teaching style in an effort to improve student writing. However, they do not directly examine the part of the assessment process over which they maintain complete control and on which they rarely receive direct feedback: the formatting of assignments. We argue that instructors fail to recognize how powerfully the intent, structure, and wording of a prompt may promote or impede student learning.² To address this issue, we have developed a typology of assignment objectives as well as a series of suggestions for structuring and wording prompts. We review each in turn.

Constructing Assignments with a Specific Purpose

Over the past three decades, numerous authors have bemoaned the quality of writing on college campuses. One result, the development of writing centers, we have experienced as graduate students. The following observations and suggestions draw on our experience there as well as our experience as we have developed our own writing assignments for the first time. Each of us directed writing center at a major research university in the northwest. The second result has been a push to develop curriculum that more fully incorporates writing into course structures. Scholars have offered a number of suggestions for how to best accomplish this goal. First, evaluation measures including exams and longer paper assignments should be linked directly to the overall learning objectives of the course. Rather than treating assignments as just a way to measure content mastery, writing assignments should be conceived alongside learning

¹ Please note that this is a work in progress, prepared for presentation at the 2013 WPSA Conference in Hollywood, CA. Please do not circulate or cite without written permission from the authors. That said, we welcome your suggestions about how to improve this draft, ranging from additional sources we should consult to overall structure to improving our examples to particulars of our typology. The authors can be reached at arank@uw.edu and hpool@uw.edu.

² For the past four years, one of us has served as the director of the Political Science/Law, Societies & Justice, and Jackson School of International Studies Writing Center at the University of Washington. The development of on-campus writing centers is one of numerous strategies colleges have employed in an effort to improve student writing. Our particular Writing Center offers discipline-specific writing support for all types of writing projects at any stage of the writing process and performs more than 1,000 tutoring sessions with students each academic year. While we spend a considerable amount of our time working with students on basic writing issues – poor grammar, lack of clarity in their argument, no topic sentences, etc. – we have been surprised by the amount of time we spend helping students decipher prompts.

objectives. David R. Russell in his work *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* observes that the shift to mass education and the development of specific disciplines created “specialized text-based discourse communities, highly embedded in the differentiated practices of those communities” within which “knowledge and its expression could be conceived of as separate activities.”³ The effort of instructors to couple “knowledge and its expression” in their courses is best exemplified in the course design process created by McGill University. In forming courses, instructors are encouraged to begin by conceptualizing learning objectives that will be communicated directly to students and to create assignments that correspond directly to the learning objectives in both form and function.⁴

Second, emphasis is increasingly placed on the need to incorporate multiple types of writing with multiple objectives within a course rather than just allowing a one shot, graded assignment. Çavdar and Doe emphasize that if writing is being used as a means of teaching critical thinking skills then assignments need to be linked or scaffolded so that students have an opportunity to respond to feedback and build their skills by completing preparatory assignments first rather than single, high-stakes ones.⁵ Coffin, et al. emphasize the value of non-graded writing as a means of teaching students the value of iterative writing and free writing as means of separating “the idea-generating phases of writing from more critical editorial stages.”⁶ Bain similarly suggests that instructors use free writing assignments as a place for students “to struggle with their thoughts without facing assessment of their efforts, to try, come up short, receive feedback on their efforts, and try again before facing any “grading.””⁷ We find Scriven’s assessment of the difference between formative and summative assignments to be a particularly useful means of distinguishing between the types of writing assignments. Formative assessments emphasize feedback over evaluation while summative assessment involves “making a final judgment about the learning at a particular point in time.”⁸

Finally, instructors have turned a critical eye on the way in which writing skills themselves, particularly those that are discipline specific, are conveyed to students. This is particularly important in introductory classes, where students are expected to grasp the basics of discipline-specific writing, which they are then expected to apply at higher levels in upper division coursework. And yet, it is often in introductory level courses where writing instruction takes a

³ David R. Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 5.

⁴ For an overall picture of the McGill University program for course design see Adenoush Saroyan and Cheryl Amundsen, eds., *Rethinking Teaching in Higher Education: From a Course Design Workshop to a Faculty Development Framework* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2004).

⁵ Gamze Çavdar and Sue Doe, “Learning through Writing: Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in Writing Assignments,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (2012), 299.

⁶ Caroline Coffin, Mary Jane Curry, Sharon Goodman, Ann Hewings, Theresa M. Lillis, Joan Swann, *Teaching Academic Writing: A Toolkit for Higher Education* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36.

⁷ Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 57.

⁸ Scriven 1981, quoted by Cynthia Weston and Lynn McAlpine, “Evaluating Student Learning,” in *Rethinking Teaching in Higher Education: From a Course Design Workshop to a Faculty Development Framework*, eds. Adenoush Saroyan and Cheryl Amundsen (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2004), 98.

back seat to content acquisition; that is, introductory courses may rely on “knowledge-telling” assessments rather than ones that assess “knowledge-transformation.”⁹ In recognition of this issue, Baglione specifies the need to break down the specific steps of a research project and subsequent paper for students rather than assuming students understand how to work within the research format.¹⁰ Souva contends that students’ inability to engage in theory building can be addressed in part by instructors placing “greater emphasis on learning at least a basic system of logic” so that student can better understand the “construction of theoretical arguments.”¹¹ Ideally, by receiving instruction on the expected format and logic of work in our discipline, our students will be better equipped to be both readers and writers of disciplinary specific content.

These scholars offer useful suggestions regarding how course structure and assignment types can work together to support efforts to improve student writing. Yet, they do little to explain how faculty members should structure the prompts themselves as opposed to the course as a whole. Our objective is to provide a typology for writing prompts that melds these two components and provides practical support for instructors. In 1956, the publication of the *Taxonomy of Education Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*, commonly known as Bloom’s taxonomy after its original editor B.S. Bloom, provided educators “a basis for test design and curriculum development.”¹² The 1956 text outlines six cognitive objectives, each of increasing complexity, which should be included in an education program: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Nearly fifty years later, an original contributor to Bloom’s taxonomy suggested a revision that recognized the considerable changes that have taken place in education since the publication of the original volume. This text, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Education Objectives* updates the original cognitive objectives to the following cognitive processes¹³:

Cognitive Process	Definition
Remember	Retrieve knowledge from long-term memory
Understand	Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication
Apply	Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation
Analyze	Break material into its constituent parts and determine how these parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose
Evaluate	Make judgments based on criteria and standards
Create	Put new elements together to form a coherent or functional whole;

⁹ Çavdar and Doe, “Learning through Writing,” 299.

¹⁰ Lisa Baglione, “Doing Good and Doing Well: Teaching Research-Paper Writing by Unpacking the Paper,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (2008), 595-602.

¹¹ Mark Souva, “Fostering Theoretical Thinking in Undergraduate Classes,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*(2007), 557.

¹² Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwhol, eds, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2001).

¹³ The following cognitive processes are outlined in Anderson and Krathwhol, *A Taxonomy for Learning*, 67-68.

The authors of the revised taxonomy designed their work to support primary and secondary education in particular.¹⁴ Our intent is to adapt the revised taxonomy to the concerns of the college-level political science class. At the same time, we seek to provide instructors additional tools in creating assignments that help students move from content summary to producing their own synthetic and analytic writing as a result of their deepening ability to process, evaluate, and create content. To start, we change the first two cognitive objectives from ‘remember’ and ‘understand’ to ‘summarize’ and ‘relate.’ These are more complex objectives than those given in the revised taxonomy, which we felt was reasonable given the shift to higher education. Our following three objectives overlap those in the revised taxonomy, though again, we made revisions reflecting our focus on the work of students in college level political science courses.

Within our typology we provide a list of associated command words for each of the cognitive objectives. In the next section we provide an extended discussion of each cognitive objective along with definitions of the command terms and sample prompts for a number of subfields. Terms like “define” or “describe” work well with summary assignments; “compare” and “contrast” with relational assignments, etc. In short, not only do we need to consider the goal of each assignment, we need to make sure that the language we use in writing the assignment matches that goal. If the goal of the assignment is to test recall, asking students to “justify” their reasons does not make sense. Likewise, if you are doing a final, big application assignment, a term like “define” might be used, but it will not be a substantial part of the assignment. It may be a guiding question under a secondary prompt, but if we are asking students to apply recently learned theories to new domains, definitions should not take center stage.

We are not suggesting that you limit the words you use in your writing assignments to only these command terms. But using terms precisely in a writing assignment matters. For example, the difference between asking a student to describe (“Give a detailed account.”) or discuss (“Offer a considered and balanced review that includes a range of arguments, factors or hypotheses. Opinions or conclusions should be presented clearly and supported by appropriate evidence.”) is a significant one. If we ask students to describe and they discuss, we might be thrilled with the extra effort. But if we ask students to discuss and they describe, their answer will be fundamentally lacking. It is up to us, as instructors, to use terms that ask for what we want, and not to penalize students if they do what we ask rather than what we wanted them to intuit. Being clear and consistent regarding command terms is one way to ensure that you are, in fact, asking the question you want them to answer.

¹⁴ While this is not stated explicitly, the text does not provide examples set in a college-level classroom while it provides numerous examples that fit primary and secondary school settings.

Third, we identify the benefits provided to both student and instructor through particular types of prompts as well as listing the necessary coursework required for students to succeed in writing assignments related to a particular cognitive objective. By providing a brief description of the benefits to both the student and the instructor of specific cognitive objectives, we hope to help instructors think more critically about the prompts they create and how they explain those prompts to their students.

Finally, we have identified the prerequisites we see as necessary for students to succeed in answering a particular type of prompt. As instructors we often view the route to a correct answer as obvious. The challenge is that we look at prompts with an already disciplined eye – we know the assumptions and limitations of our field as well as the types of evidence considered appropriate. Asking students to employ the same knowledge absent specific instruction inadvertently leads us to give students prompts they find mystifying.

Table 1: Cognitive Objectives, Associated Prompt Terms, Benefits, and Prerequisites

Cognitive Objective	Command Terms	Benefits for Students (S) and Instructors (S)	Prerequisites
1. Summarize (demonstrate grasp of previously presented material)	Define, summarize, describe, identify	S: Low-stakes participation opportunity	Information previously covered in lecture, reading, discussion
		I: Identify weaknesses in reading comprehension, instructor clarity	
		Promotes participation	
2. Relate (develop connections among concepts, events, actors)	Exemplify, classify, compare, contrast, distinguish, to what extent	S: Identify common themes and connections among known subject areas	Identifying, labeling and invoking terms consistently
		I: Establish context for upcoming theories and authors	Identifying and communicating course themes
3. Analyze (deconstruct arguments using logic and disciplinary standards)	Organize, attribute, examine, analyze, deconstruct, to what extent	S: Learn disciplinary foundations/assumptions	Explain logical constructions and logical fallacies
		Build skills in logic	Define ideology and assumptions of field/subfield
		I: Communicates standard for logic and argument types present in coursework	In class practice at deconstruction

4. Evaluate (assess claims according to disciplinary standards)	Assess, examine, explain, justify, to what extent	S: Clarifies the stakes of concepts/conclusions; Provides space for multiple voices to offer critique; Establishes field/subfield distinctions	Explain boundaries, purpose, and evidence appropriate for field of inquiry Situate course material within larger discipline
		I: Exposes students to evidence based inquiry, limitations of the discipline Synthesizes prior skills and content development	Clarify terms such as claim, argument, evidence Provide a compelling case that obviously draws on course material
5. Create (students generate content ranging from research questions to policy proposals)		S: Allows selection of topic(s) of interest; Allows incorporation of material from other disciplines/subfields	A well-structured assignment with multiple opportunities for guidance and feedback
		More complete demonstration of both skill and content mastery	Practice with all of the previously discussed skills
		I: Makes for more interesting papers to read and grade Allows for a more thorough assessment of students' skills	

Structuring the Prompt

Having identified the cognitive objective and preferred terms, there remains the question of how to format the overall prompt. As mentioned earlier, instructors regularly bemoan students' sub-par writing skills.¹⁵ We are not arguing that these assessments are incorrect. Rather, we are arguing that we, as the writers of writing assignments, might play a role in our students' inability to write clear papers when we give them assignments that do not make clear how to respond. We offer here some suggestions on how to set students up to understand the purpose of a paper.

We suggest starting with a primary question that is quite broad: for example, "what is the conception of citizenship in liberal political thought?" This question is the one to which a student's thesis statement should respond. While one might initially think this is too broad of a

¹⁵ See, for example, the introductory section of Lisa Baglione, "Doing Good and Doing Well: Teaching Research-Paper Writing by Unpacking the Paper," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (2008), 595.

question for an undergraduate course (and perhaps even for a dissertation), the area of inquiry is then narrowed by the inclusion of secondary questions used to frame the students' response. We might follow the primary question, "What is the conception of citizenship in liberal thought?" with two or three secondary guiding prompts featuring clear command terms. For example:

Secondary prompt 1: "Using Locke's *Second Treatise*, analyze how citizens should view the state."

Secondary prompt 2: "According to Locke, to what extent does a citizen bear an obligation to participate in politics?"

You might include under each secondary prompt additional focusing questions to get students thinking about the significance of these secondary questions. For example, under Secondary Question 1, we might include questions such as "Does the state protect us? From whom?" or "If the purpose of the state is to protect property and we have none, why would we agree to join the state?" Depending on the length of the assigned paper, its place in the syllabus (whether a first or second paper, an evaluation of one text, or an assignment asking students to relate one text to another), and your goals for this assignment, you may want to include additional secondary prompts. These secondary prompts make clear to the student how they should structure their response, while ensuring that they grasp that the primary question is the one to which their thesis should respond.

Why structure questions in this way? We've found that instructors often use a host of questions that seem clear and in order to them, but students' response to this flurry of questions is often paralysis. They come into writing centers and TA offices and ask "which of these questions should I answer? Do I answer all of them? Which is the main question?" We suggest this is one reason why students fail to write clear thesis statements – they are not sure to which of the questions they should respond. When we throw three or four questions at a student, it can be challenging for early-career writers to know which question is central (that is, what is the main point of the assignment) and which questions are there to encourage focus on particular texts or concepts. Using a primary/secondary question framework can help students clearly see the main point, and then structure their essay or exam in relation to that main point, while ensuring that they hit on the more specific topics posed by the secondary questions. Moreover, this structure helps the instructor focus on a main overarching theme that aligns with course themes, while providing additional structure that addresses the specificities of each text or the goals of the assignment.

In the following section, we provide a more detailed discussion how we see each cognitive objective fitting into a particular course along with defining associated command terms and providing sample prompts from a variety of subfields.

Tips, Definitions, and Example Prompts

1. *Summarize*

Prompts focused on the cognitive objective summarize ask students to demonstrate their grasp of previously presented material. These questions require students to use their own words to communicate information covered in lectures, assigned readings, or prior classes if the course has established pre-requisites. While lower level courses may employ ask students to summarize in high stakes assignments (e.g. mid-term or final exam), they are best used in free writes designed with one of two purposes in mind: (1) to allow the instructor to determine if the groundwork of the course has been reasonably established so that the course can move on to more complicated material and (2) to provide a springboard for classroom discussions. Moreover, these questions should help students identify their own weakness with regard to content mastery and provide an opening for class participation. The following command terms are associated with summary:

Define: “Give the precise meaning of a word, phrase, concept or physical quantity.”¹⁶

Describe: “Give a detailed account.”¹⁷

Summarize: “Abstracting a general theme or major point(s)”¹⁸

American Politics Example: Identify and describe the four Constitutional moments in America’s political history.

Political Theory Example: Describe how property is acquired in Locke’s state of nature and how natural law limits one’s acquisitions.

We suggest avoiding terms such as *specify* or *identify* unless (1) they are coupled with one of the above words or (2) you consider a word or phrase to be an acceptable answer to the question. For example, if the above question asked students to *identify* the type of electoral system used in the United States of America, England, and Australia it would be correct to simply write the following: “The United States of America has a majority rule system while England and Australia use a proportional system.” Asking students to *identify and define* or to *describe* the electoral systems of America, England, and Australia communicates the expectation that you not only expect them to name the systems used but outline the characteristics of a particular system.

2. *Relate*

Prompts focused on the ability of students to relate ask students to develop connections among some combination of concepts, events, and actors. These prompts might attend to how different theories use the same word to describe different things, how they use different words to describe

¹⁶ *Diploma Programme: History Guide* (Cardiff: International Baccalaureate, 2008), 90.

¹⁷ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

¹⁸ Anderson and Krathwohl, *Revised Taxonomy*, 67.

the same thing, where one event or person fits in a larger narrative, or how two theories approach one event.

These kinds of questions work best when the central themes of the course or questions that guide the course have been identified and discussed in advance and can be used to shape the relational question. That is, asking students to relate two distinct analyses works best when they have been prepared by thinking about theories or events in conceptually related ways that are held together by big ideas or questions. One way to help students prepare for these types of assignments is to consistently use the same language or terms in one's lectures and ensure that during in-class discussion, key terms and concepts are clearly defined. The following command terms are associated with prompts that ask students to relate:

- Exemplify: "Finding a specific example or illustration of a concept or principle"¹⁹
- Classify: "Determining that something belongs to a category"²⁰
- Compare: "Give an account of the similarities between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout."²¹
- Contrast: "Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout."²²
- Distinguish: "Make clear the differences between two or more concepts or items."²³

American Politics Example: Provide two issues or stories from the last presidential election that exemplify the shift of election coverage from 'news' to 'infotainment.'

Political Theory Example: Contrast the proper role of religion according to Machiavelli in *The Prince* and according to Luther in *On Secular Authority*.

3. Analyze

Prompts that ask students to analyze a particular piece of content should assess student ability to deconstruct arguments using logic and/or disciplinary standards in order to identify key elements. Our courses, readings, and assignments are bound by the disciplinary standards of the field and more specifically by the expectations of each subfield. These standards often include a set of unstated assumptions that are readily apparent to us as scholars and instructors, while ranging from invisible to mystifying for our students. And most texts, by necessity, feature a set of unstated assumptions ranging from what constitutes power to what is meant by the term 'institution.' We often accept these assumptions without comment despite the influence they may have in the overall direction of a text. When we ask students to analyze, or deconstruct, a

¹⁹ Anderson and Krathwohl, *Revised Taxonomy*, 67.

²⁰ Anderson and Krathwohl, *Revised Taxonomy*, 67.

²¹ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

²² *Diploma Programme*, 90.

²³ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

particular text we ask them to engage with these structures and provide students an opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of (1) argumentative structure and (2) disciplinary expectations.

While understanding the contours of a subfield may not be necessary for students in introductory courses, elucidating the often hidden ideological assumptions that structure our field can help develop students' critical analysis skills along with improving their ability to break down arguments into component parts. These prompts will work best in classes where there are overt discussions about the ideological underpinnings of the subject matter, as well as those including discussions about structures of logic and argument. Such prompts presume that students have some period of time to read and analyze new material, making them best suited to take home exams or papers where students have time to review new material and apply the skill set. The following command words are associated with prompts asking students to analyze a piece of text:

Organize:	“Determining how elements fit or function within a structure” ²⁴
Attribute/Deconstruct:	“Determine a point of view, bias, values, or intend underlying presented material.” ²⁵
Examine:	“Consider an argument or concept in a way that uncovers the assumptions and interrelationships of the issue.” ²⁶
To What Extent:	“Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Opinions and conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.” ²⁷

American Politics Example: To what extent do you agree with the following claim: “The very design of Congress and the presidency means that representation is geared to reinforce ascriptive hierarchy.”

Political Theory Example: Examine Locke's assumptions about the necessary connections between natural law and limited government.

4. Evaluate

Prompts that ask students to evaluate test their ability to assess claims according to disciplinary standards through synthesizing the skills already discussed. The move to evaluation assumes that students are prepared to insert themselves into the intellectual back and forth that characterizes the development of any subfield. This type of prompt can benefit students in three ways. First, it exposes students to the standards of evidence-based inquiry. Acceptable evidence will vary from subfield to subfield and explicitly noting the differences will help students better understand the field of political science more broadly.

²⁴ Anderson and Krathwohl, *Revised Taxonomy*, 67.

²⁵ Anderson and Krathwohl, *Revised Taxonomy*, 67.

²⁶ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

²⁷ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

Second, asking students to evaluate helps them consider the implications of the theories being discussed in a given course. The expectations for answering these questions may differ based on subfields; that is, the question of how to consider implications for a theoretical inquiry (“How does liberalism conceive of citizenship?”) might be different than a policy one (“How will shifting revenue streams affect services for this group of citizens?”). We think these types of questions are crucial to ask in all subfields and at all course levels because they help students understand what our discipline as a whole has to offer, and to differentiate between the various contributions of our subfields.

Third, this type of assignment may choose to evaluate claims through the lens of gender, race, or post-colonial studies, among others. Integrating this type of prompt into a course demonstrates recognition of the historical and contemporary limitations of political science as a field as well as asking students to rigorously examine rather than accept the conclusions offered by various authors.

Integrating this type of prompt into a course requires that, within the context of the course, the instructor discusses the historical and contemporary limitations of political science as a field as well as asking students to rigorously examine rather than accept the conclusions offered by various authors. With the proper preparation, prompts of this type can help students specifically think about what this kind of inquiry helps us see or understand that others do not. Writing assignments that ask student to evaluate (as well as those of the next two types) can go beyond the classroom to help students understand why political science matters not just for their grade, but for their political community more generally. While two of the command terms associated with this type of prompt we have seen before – examine and to what extent – three others are new:

- Assess: Measure and judge the merits and quality of an argument or concept and clearly identify and explain the evidence for your assessment.
- Explain: “Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.”²⁸
- Justify: “Give valid reasons or evidence to support an answer or conclusion.”²⁹

American Politics Example: In light of the changes that have occurred in the media and the party system what, if any, aspects of Neustadt’s analysis of the presidency retain value for understanding the office today? In justifying your answer, reference at least three authors covered in the course as well as the experiences of at least two presidents NOT studied by Neustadt.

Political Theory Example: Assess whether Hannah Arendt’s critiques of Aristotle and Plato in *The Human Condition* are fair, and explain whether her revisions to the sphere of politics adequately addresses the historical exclusion of some groups from politics.

²⁸ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

²⁹ *Diploma Programme*, 90.

5. Create

Prompts that ask students to create new content using the knowledge and skills learned in the course are critically important, not only for their mastery of a field of knowledge but also because developing this ability is a main reason to seek higher education. Asking students to generate their own research questions, research designs, policy proposals, and whatever other type of content is appropriate for a given course helps us as educators evaluate not only what students have learned, but also how well they are able to transfer this knowledge to a new domain. Additionally, asking students to apply already learned knowledge to new hypotheticals or new subject areas engages students' creativity far more than recall or straight comparison questions, and are also often more interesting to grade, as well. That is, there is more scope for students to think broadly and for instructors to evaluate not just knowledge but the ability to transfer knowledge across pre-established boundaries.

Interestingly, the prompts that we have seen asking students to create new content tend to either be the most open ("write a research paper on a topic related to the course material") or the most detailed (3-4 pages of directions on topic restrictions, directions for writing style, lists of issues that must be considered and more). Yet it is often unclear how much class time is spent preparing students with the skills necessary to undertake this level of creation. Within the context of the course, students should see the previously discussed cognitive objectives (relate, analyze, and evaluate) put into practice. Additionally, an assignment with multiple opportunities for guidance and feedback will support students in learning how to turn their critical eye toward their own ideas. We do not offer specific command terms for this type of prompt given the incredible differences in the types of material students could be asked to generate.

6. Reflect

We have one final type of assignment to offer, though we see it as standing outside of the general typology:

Cognitive Objective	Command Terms	Benefits for Students (S) and Instructors (S)	Prerequisites
Reflect (assess views, opinions in light of knowledge – either experiential or static – gained through course work)	Assess, examine, explain, to what extent	S: Encourages students seriously consider feedback; Provides students an opportunity to reassess their views/abilities given new data	Identify for students the specific feedback or experience to be reflected upon Discussion identifying the differences

		I: Provides opportunity to see how students understand the class/assignment in terms of their development	between reflecting on and analyzing an event versus liking or not liking it
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Asking students to reflect and assess their own views and opinions in light of the knowledge they have gained through their coursework provides an opportunity to incorporate an important aspect of the knowledge side of the revised taxonomy – meta-knowledge (or metacognition). While reflection questions increasingly appear in courses with service learning opportunities, we want to encourage instructors who ask students to write multiple papers during their course to also ask students to reflect on how the feedback they received on their first paper has influenced their approach to the second paper. As this prompt asks students to evaluate their own experiences, it should employ the command terms featured under command.

Conclusion

For both of us, serving as director of a disciplinary specific writing center took the place of working as a teaching assistant in our program. Interestingly, while this position limited our time in the classroom, by providing exposure to prompts from a variety of subfields and course levels, it has given us the opportunity to gain a broader perspective on how assignments themselves impact student writing. We hope that our observations about the benefits, formatting, and structure of particular types of writing assignments in the discipline of political science will be of use to other instructors and ultimately provide greater support for student writing and learning.