Assigning Real-world Genres

Our assignments are often designed to teach specific skills or habits of mind that are transferable to other, more real-world contexts. A compare and contrast essay, for example, won't be assigned outside the classroom context, but students will certainly be expected to produce logically organized, evidence-based comparisons. In some cases, however, you might consider assigning student work that hews more closely to real-world genres. Projects that reflect real-world genres clarify an assignment's purpose for students, facilitate the development of audience awareness in communication, and provide intrinsic motivation for success. These assignments facilitate **metacognition**, and, for the instructor, can have the benefit of producing greater variety in students' work, enlivening the process of **responding to student writing**. Depending on how you implement them, they may also provide students a readership or other audience that extends beyond the classroom into public communities, thereby enhancing experiential learning.

Some ways to design meaningful real-world genre assignments:
- Backward plan from your learning goals, identifying the skills you want students to master.
- Identify the real-world genres in your field (e.g., white papers, memos, pitches, op-eds, peer-reviewed journal articles).
- Identify real-world genres that span academic disciplines and general audiences (e.g., letters to the editor, interviews, websites).
- Select purposefully from these options, accounting not only for your learning goals but also issues like feasibility, depth of impact, and the needs of the genre's audience.
- Build a **scaffolded** assignment series that includes or leads up to real-world genre assignments.
- Share model texts to familiarize students with the genre's audience, purpose, and rhetorical moves.
- Consider providing access to the real-world context itself (e.g., have students present at a community board meeting, bring an executive to class for a case discussion on that guest's company, or have students submit their letters to the editor to a local or student newspaper).

References

Anhalt, Cynthia O., Susan Staats, Ricardo Cortez, Marta Civil. "Mathematical Modeling and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *Cognition, Metacognition, and Culture in STEM Education*, edited by Yehudit Judy Dori, Zemira R. Mevarech, Dale R. Baker. Switzerland: Springer, 2018.

Arola, Kristin L., Jennifer Sheppard, and Cheryl E. Ball. *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*. New York: Bedford St. Martin's, 2014.

Wiggins, Grant. "Real-World Writing: Making Purpose and Audience Matter." *English Journal*, no. 98, vol. 5, 2009, 29-37.

See also

Metacognition
Responding to Student Writing
Scaffolding Student Learning