



Assignments Across Disciplines

The Forgotten Beginning of Student Writing: Assignment Prompts

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Presentation Overview

1. Assignments matter yet are an occluded genre
2. This occlusion turns on authorship: assignments are not attributed
3. The consequences of this occlusion for teaching and teaching writing



Assignments are
building blocks of learning





Assignments as a Key Teaching Genre

"Students fail assignments and sometimes assignments fail students."

(p. 95)

"if student work is the engine of a course, then the assignments are the creative centre of our teaching practice" (p. 110)

William Germano & Kit Nicholls, *Syllabus: The remarkable, unremarkable document that changes everything*

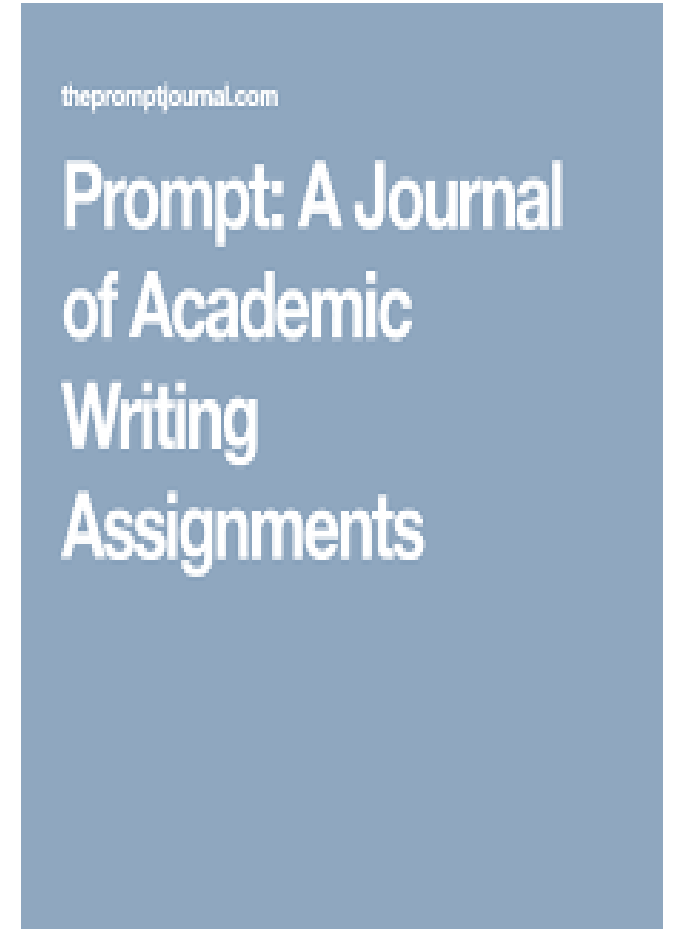
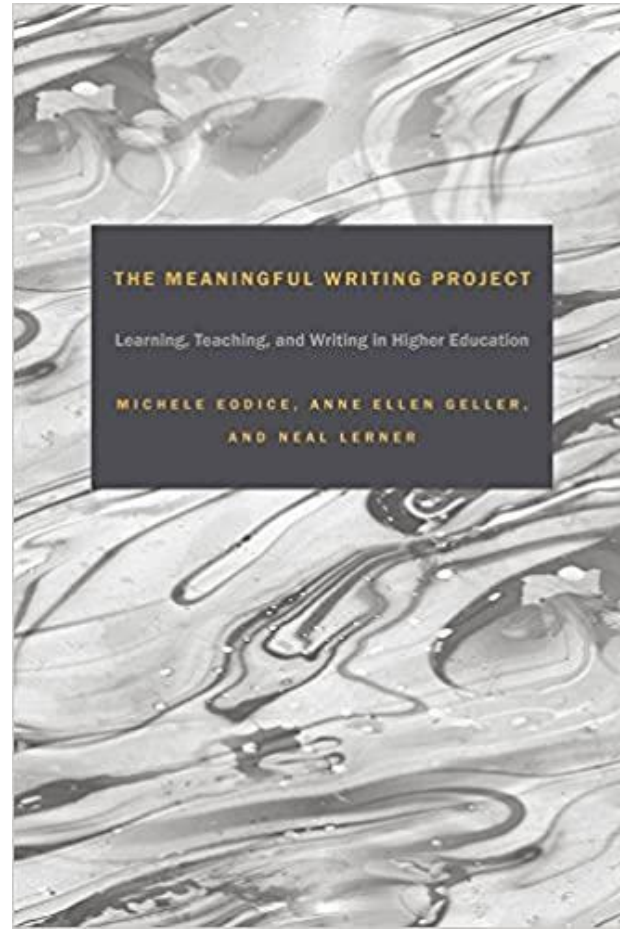
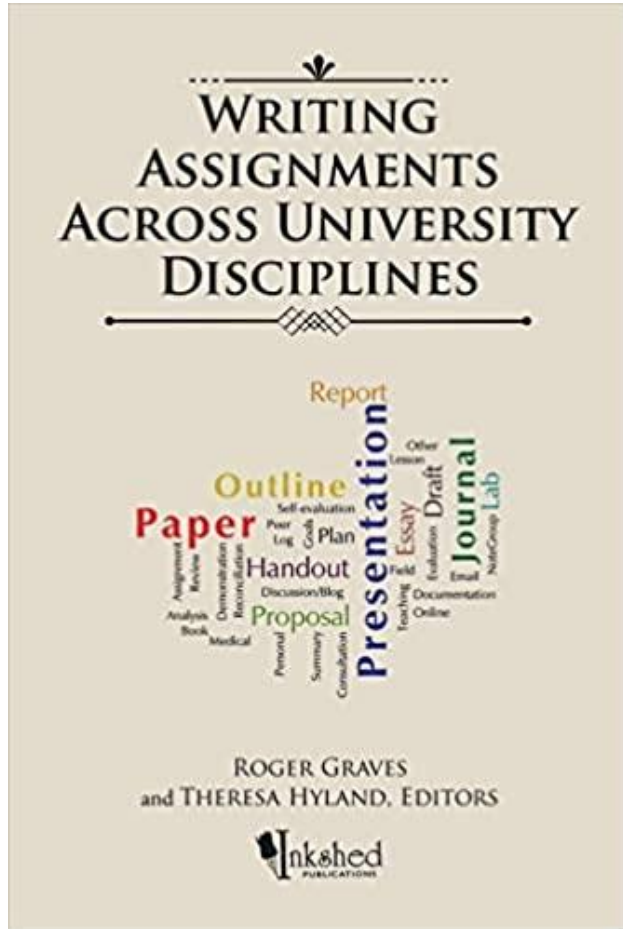
Why Assignments Matter

Good assignments support

- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (Felton et al. 2019; Transparency in Teaching Learning and Teaching)
- disciplinary learning and disciplinary writing (Bean, 2011; Meltzer, 2014)



Research informing this project



Why have assignments been overlooked as a site of authorship and how does this impact teaching and learning?

Observation: Assignments play a major role in student learning, yet remain an occluded academic genre (Clark, 2005; Neaderhauser, 2016; Swales, 1996)

Hypothesis: Assignments are an occluded teaching genre because they are collaborative, heteroglossic (“remixes” and “mashups”), ephemeral texts, exclusively student-focused texts that lack the author-function (Foucault, 1969)



Knowledge Gap and Questions: Production and circulation of assignments

We know little about the factors that influence instructors in assignment design (Polk, 2019)

1. How do we support assignment sharing while also giving credit?
2. How do assignments circulate and how can we track their (re)creation and circulation?
3. Can assignment libraries like AAD and NILOA (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment) accomplish this?



Why are assignment prompts/briefs not credited?

- Heteroglossic nature
- Part of a “gift” economy (Bourdieu 1990), which distinguishes teaching from scholarship



The Problem with Ignoring Assignment Prompts

- Refusing to acknowledge assignment creators/adaptors ignores the expertise and labour (Anderson et al 2016) involved in creating and/or adapting effective assignment prompts



A Solution: Assignments as Scholarship

1. [Prompt: A Journal of Academic Writing Assignments](#)
2. Assignment Libraries:
 - [NILOA Assignment Library](#) (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment) US-based
 - [AAD \(Assignments Across Disciplines\)](#) Canadian-based



Recognizing the Assignment Genre

- Elevates the status of teaching and teachers



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