

## VI. Assignments, Classwork, Groupwork & Feedback

*The military student is a unique and disciplined member of the student body with needs that differ from the traditional student.* -- Thomas M. McGovern. "Supporting the military veteran-student: how higher education can respond to the exclusive needs of military students." *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* 16 Aug. 2012: 21.



### Three top learning goals:

- 1) Understand the value of the checklist, for parts, rubric, and even calendaring, as a familiar tool from military operations and training;
- 2) Review some of the group work problem scenarios common to student veteran team members or group work leaders;
- 3) Consider the preference for direct, limited freedom of choice assignments

### ABSTRACT:

Without creating additional work for faculty, there are 'add-ons' or choices in explaining assignments, describing expectations and requirements, deadlining/calendaring, and delivering instructor feedback that work best for retention and success of student veterans. These include approaches to explaining assignments prompts at the start, addressing common misunderstandings/expectations of group work, and one of the most useful aids: creating a 'checklist' version of a rubric or grading key or calendar-divided steps and making its application part of the assignment.

### BRIEFINGS:

What does a clear assignment prompt mean to a student veteran who hasn't been in school for a while and doesn't understand the common parlance of assignments?

Why is a checklist a better understood tool than a rubric for student veterans (even if almost identical to a rubric in content)? Students straight out of high school will know what the rubric is, may even use to 'prescore' their essay, or take it to tutoring. A student veteran will read the rubric, think about all the details, and probably put it away and continue writing or completing the assignment the way they understood it from the

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original assignment prompt. Now if they had a checklist – a structured, sequential (when possible), itemized version of what gains/loses points in the rubric -- the way that an anti-artillery team member, a tank driver, a mechanic/motor pool may have had a checklist while they were in service...

What about groups? Aren't student veterans used to squad leadership, group division of labor? Then why may you get a student veteran who says, "I gave my group their orders and they didn't comply?"

Structured versus free choice? How do assignment topics (and their prompts, descriptions, choices, and sample/models) work best for student veterans?

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### Faculty TIPS:

**Faculty TIP 1): CHECKLISTS:** Generate a checklist from rubric for big projects, a mini-checklist for assignments. “Structure work as steps: step1, step2 , etc.”<sup>1</sup> Student veterans are used to checklists for operations and METL approaches to tasks and standards (mission essential task list (METL)). Familiarity is not the only reason. If you request they attach a REQUIRED checklist to an assignment and check off each item from the checklist, it creates a better awareness of WHY the grade/ what they missed, enabling communication and eliminating the perception that educator’s grade to their private standards. See ‘vet friendly’/any-student effective [2 page CHECKLIST \(rubric was 5 pgs\)](#)at the end/after Scenarios

**Faculty TIP 2): Model example assignments:** Provide assignment/have Groups work on a sample essays w/ think aloud sharing/walkthrough a sample answer with instructor’s ‘director’s commentary’ to mirror/model process. Model the ‘A’ assignment first, then explain exception or problem cases or things that can go wrong. This helps the student veteran observe the process and “standards put to practice” they may not have seen for several years, if, at all, and gives them that standard to mimic towards mastery.

**Faculty TIP 3): For assignments that have too much free choice...have a small sample topics list** with caveat that they’ve been done so the research/work exists, but have seen strong A’s in each, so a high bar is set for those ‘canned’ topics.

**Faculty TIP 4): Always give an example of what’s wrong or details of what leads to a specific grade**, not just the note naming the type of error. Again, student veterans have been away from ‘edu-speak’ for some time. Communicate exactly what’s in violation of syllabus/requirements: “You used the Straw Man fallacy” is good but not great feedback: consider “You used the Straw Man fallacy in paragraph 3 where you argued zzzz. This lost you 3 points.”

**Faculty TIP 5): Military Topics are fine, as options:** “While many student veterans may seek opportunities to discuss their service, others may need to have space to reinvent themselves as students, as civilians, or as members of a new community. We recommend that faculty facilitate opportunities for veteran students to research and write about topics related to their military service or veteran status, even while faculty conduct classes and craft assignments that also allow veterans to maintain their privacy about their histories of that service”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Wheeler, Monroe Community College – SUNY; - Hamaria Crockett, Cedar Valley College. “Barriers in Higher Education: Supporting Transitioning and Returning Service Members.” League of Innovations 2014 Conference, Anaheim CA. Forum Session

<sup>2</sup> D.Alexis Hart and RogerThompson “An Ethical Obligation: Promising Practices for Student Veterans in College Writing Classrooms.” June 2013. <http://www.ncte.org/library/nctefiles/groups/cccc/anethicalobligation.pdf>

**Faculty TIP 6): "Keep your work and notes!"** Student veterans don't always know they should keep their notes etc for 'portfolio submission at end,' 'check against plagiarism,' etc: Instruct students to KEEP all paper/working drafts and notes as evidence of work completed and sometimes proof against risk of plagiarism getting flagged. Will also help in decisions of Fail vs Drop – a student with work to show is more likely to fail a class than to get dropped for no work. If they keep notes electronically: if using Microsoft WORD or other program to build paper etc and may activate deploy (or just in case they need to retake the class after an F or drop), they should use cross-out on notes etc instead of deleting notes (and take camera snapshots of hand-written notes) in case rapidly deployed or activated or get an F and need to retake course. With notes crossed-out (font setting that allows you to draw a line through text) student can reconstruct papers, reuse old notes, or if continuing with the same paper/essay topic when activation/deployment ends, prove to instructor or remind if same instructor with PROOF of notes that they didn't plagiarize.

**Faculty TIP 7): One student vet's preferred topic is another's trigger:** Though rare, study or simulations of disasters have sometimes triggered some PTSD among student veterans with moral crime exposure or saliency-triggered hypervigilance. On the other hand, these kinds of projects capture the attention of 95% of veterans like nothing else. Problems usually center on the subject matter (eg if Energy focused, a topic on the Japan Nuclear disaster) and graphic images or mortality related exploration.

What does this mean to teachers involved? A student veteran loved topic in one class/one semester, may not work in the next. if a veteran student should have an assigned aspect related to morbid related matters with no opt-out, might be good for teacher to have a 'change of assignment' option or option to switch groups in the back of their mind in case of this rare, rare 'perfect storm'.

**Faculty TIP 8): Don't suggest tutoring. TELL THEM to go to TUTORING/it's a 'Mandatory suggestion'**. Tell them to take 1)the actual assignment description/prompt; 2)rubric or grading rules or checklist; 3)let the tutor know the instructor's name (many tutors have particular tips or insights into some specific instructors' preferences and solution-expectations). They are 'training to the standard, not to time.'" Tutoring is where they can get help and review UNTIL they are ready to succeed at the paper, exam, or assignment.

**Faculty TIP 9): Application of course content to real world applications always make for better assignments** for student veterans (among other students). Service Learning (as long as explained with dates up front in the syllabus or calendar on first day) makes for excellent opportunities.

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Make sure to give student veterans general options/choices if you also offer military-related service opportunities. For example, if for a reading or presentation class you allow veterans to read out to WWII Vets and Korea war vets in hospice, make sure to also explain to the student veteran that he or she may choose standard options.

### **Faculty TIP 10): Give out or encourage the student vet create a**

**checklist calendar hybrid:** List assignments, by #, with a check off column in far left, in table format, with due dates and dependencies (must submit all notes, must be stamped by writing center, needs to be peer reviewed, etc). Again, this helps with organizing and plays upon the checklist format familiar to military personnel.

### **Faculty TIP 11): Quck tip for class management of meandering ‘war stories’ :**

If you have a student veteran who begins with or over-opines with ‘When I was active’ or ‘In combat we...’ suggest they save it for writing – ‘I want you to get it out but we need to stay on point here’.

### **Faculty TIP 12): SET GROUPWORK etiquette rules and discussion etiquette.**

Discuss WHAT NOT TO ASK in GROUPS. Give examples of Insensitivity, dealing with opposition opinion without blow outs, dealing with topics offensive or harming to a group member. Model the netiquette with examples of what not to do, include something such as a student should not ask, how was it to kill, etc.

### **Faculty TIP 13): GROUP WORK TIMING:**

:use cell phone alarms to break up different tasks for group work

### **Faculty TIP 14): Group Work culture shock/problem types (and problem people) student veteran may encounter in group work:**

“Veterans may find small group discussion and group decision-making processes difficult. Survival in the military depended upon decisions being made quickly, by a superior, or by the individual when circumstance demanded. Quick and decisive responses and actions were the norm in the military, especially in combat.”<sup>3</sup> Many student veterans assume groupwork will have a leader who dispenses tasks. Each member completes their task, they bridge between all their work, and everyone works towards the same goal: success. However, Collaboration and crowdsourcing can go bad, fast. Common Causes of GROUP PROJECT Failure are: 1)Unrealistic schedule; 2)Not having a reasonable plan that everyone understands/some straying from a clear group agreed goal; 3)Group Solution just not that good; 4)Abandoning the plan midway; 5)No proper backup plan for notes, presentation and technology fails; and most commonly: 5)An INDIVIDUAL. Assigned tasks do not automatically mean compliance. Here are a list to share with student veteran of problem types/problem people archetypes they may encounter. If they are aware of these up front, the group may run smoother:

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<sup>3</sup> *Veterans Guidelines and Best Practices in the Classroom.* American Council on Education.  
<http://www.acenet.edu/higher-education/topics/Pages/Supporting-Student-Veterans.aspx>

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<p>1) "goal &amp; plan changer"</p> <p>Sample: returns with better idea on 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting than task agreed to</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> 1<sup>st</sup> meeting: write down goal and have everyone sign off on it.</p>	<p>2)"incompetent"</p> <p>Sample: "I couldn't find any research on ADD"</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> document failure and goto instructor</p>	<p>3)"time waster"</p> <p>Sample: "Did you see that episode of Jersey Shore? OMG! "</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> timetabling and limiting each discussion to agreed upon minutes</p>	<p>4)"emo"</p> <p>Sample: "Look, you don't know what I'm going through right now. Would it make you happy to see my cry? Is that what you want?"</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> ???</p>	<p>5)"abusive expert"</p> <p>Sample: "Fine that you guys want to do that. But I've done this before and I know what the teacher wants. I don't want to get a bad grade because no one listened to me."</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> lets all go explain it to teacher and if necessary change groups.</p>
<p>6)'Time delayer/ procrastinator'</p> <p>Sample: I will get to it, but I'm waiting for my new laptop and then... OR... Soon, I promise... I need to do more research... what I have is still not good enough...</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> Time limit per task to guarantee moving on</p>	<p>7)"chronic disagreeer"</p> <p>Sample: What you have just don't feel right...sorry... but there's got to be a better Z...it's wrong...I can't go along with something that is wrong"</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> Everyone has to compromise a bit or else nobody succeeds. You are welcome to walk away</p>	<p>8)"Heckler"</p> <p>Sample: picks on some member of group, snarky or says "Really? You know what X said about you behind your back?"</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> Voice record and let teacher know</p>	<p>9) "Bully/ Self-serving ****"</p> <p>Sample: just takes over, delegates without asking, takes easiest tasks for self; or challenges with insults</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> take notes, all group members sign it and bring behavior to teacher</p>	<p>10)"Clique-buddy"</p> <p>Sample: talks, makes decisions with their buddy in the group; doesn't pay attention or doesn't value the input of others in group.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> a good set of assigned tasks</p>

## 7 Sample SCENARIOS\* relevant for Assignments, Classwork, Groupwork & Feedback

for instructions on how to use Sample Scenarios, go to HOW TO USE TOOLKIT chapter/module and read: "How to use SCENARIOS: Teachable Moments strategy or as Faculty Development exercises"

<b>SCENARIO 1:</b>	Can I make up/submit all my missed homework (and/or quizzes) at one time/at end of semester?
<b>SCENARIO 2:</b>	Group members report to teacher very unusual behavior from student vet group member during, after class, or in off-campus meeting
<b>SCENARIO 3:</b>	I had to leave class because of an anxiety attack related to giving a presentation/triggered by the previous presentation's content (eg previous group showed picture of torture or violence, or anti-military sentiment). Will this be counted against me?
<b>SCENARIO 4:</b>	My presentation group refuses to follow orders and assignments as agreed. Can you enforce what they agreed to do? Will I be penalized for their inability to comply with what they said they would do?
<b>SCENARIO 5:</b>	Student claims it's unfair in group when others are not doing their work. Mentions person Z aggravates so much they feel like punching him/her
<b>SCENARIO 6:</b>	Student vet discussion/participation is escalating to 'rant' and attempt to simmer down the conversation is met with accusations that only one side is presented in class. How to recover/de-escalate the situation?
<b>SCENARIO 7:</b>	Student Veterans want to stick to other veterans-only in group or collaboration or team activities/want to appeal random group members / do not want changing-rotating of group members

**\*Where are the solutions?** There are too many different ways to 'solve' each, agreeing and disagreeing, similar and dissenting, so instead you have 1)the scenario 2)suggested steps in Chapter "[HOW to USE Toolkit](#)" to find your own localized solutions. **Forcing people to start discussions - active learning -- rather than reading/skimming what I thought/found worked in MY location/culture is the key to action and owning the problem and approaches.** Only homegrown solutions SOLVE WITH PURPOSE

## SAMPLE assignment w/tasks CHECKLIST:

**ENG 102 CHECKLIST: \* COMPLETE & ATTACH this to each PAPER\***

**DON'T CHECK OFF ITEMS UNLESS THEY ARE TRUE – otherwise FIX THEM!!**

**Paper killers:** Instant F Grade, regardless of rubric points, IF:

<b>FIRST PAPER:</b>	<b>FINAL PAPER:</b>
Has <b>No Works Cited Page</b> with all sources used	Has <b>No Works Cited page</b> with all sources used
Has Less than 8 total sources	Has Less than 10 total sources
Has zero books (2 required,each missing= -10pts)	Has zero books (2 required,each missing= -10pts)
Has zero academic journals (3 required, each missing is -10 points)	Has zero academic journals (3 required, each missing is -10 points)
Less than 6 arguments for your side (7 total)	Less than 8 arguments for your side (10 total)
Shorter than 4 pages (allowed fonts only!)	Shorter than 6 pages (allowed fonts only!)

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I. SIGN HERE: "I do **NOT** have any of the paper killer problems listed above"

signature \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

II. Thesis: What is your EXACTLY as approved THESIS (make sure on paper it is underlined )

## III. COVERED YOUR BASICS

\_\_\_\_ 1. MARGINS: 1 inch top, right, left, bottom margins (**NOT 1.25!!!** – default of Microsoft Word). Body of paper is double spaced.

\_\_\_\_ 2. THESE ARE THE ONLY FONTS AND SIZES ALLOWED: Calibri 11 pt, Tmsrmn 12, Verdana 10, Helvetica 10, or Arial 11 (use wrong font = -5 + converted to tmsrmn 12)

\_\_\_\_ 3. Pages are numbered (Do NOT number title page or Works Cited).

\_\_\_\_ 4. Title page includes a) Title, b) Your name, c) ENG102 Class sec#, d) Date. It is a separate, unnumbered page at front of paper. Do not use a header on page 1. That's what title page is for. Writing/Intro starts AT THE VERY TOP of page 1.

\_\_\_\_ 5. Intro NEVER longer than ¾ of first page. NO PICTURES or CHARTS in the paper

## IV. SOURCES:

VERY IMPORTANT!!!: CQ researcher and Opposing Viewpoints are NOT peer reviewed

At least three sources must be PEER REVIEWED from academic journals:

Journal Source 1: \_\_\_\_\_

where in the source did it say it was peer reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

Journal Source 2: \_\_\_\_\_

where in the source did it say it was peer reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

Journal Source 3: \_\_\_\_\_

where in the source did it say it was peer reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

Book1 used was \_\_\_\_\_

Book2 used was \_\_\_\_\_

(Y/N)\_\_\_\_\_ You have at least 8 sources (first paper) or You have 10 sources (final paper)

## V. ARGUMENTS:

**REMEMBER: EACH ARGUMENT** must have at least 2 quotes from DIFFERENT SOURCES (Okay for 3<sup>rd</sup> quote from same source) WRITE OR CUT & PASTE YOUR ACTUAL ARGUMENTS + counters BELOW

**First paper = Total of 7** (6 arguments + 1 counter or 7 arguments)

**Final paper = Total of 10** (8 arguments + 2 counter/ OR 9 arguments + 1 counter OR 10 arguments)

Argument 1:

Argument 2:

Argument 3:

Argument 4:

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Argument 5:

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Argument 6:

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Argument 7:

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Argument 8:

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Argument 9:

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Argument 10:

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Counter 1:

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Counter 2: (final paper only)

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### VI. CITATIONS in your paper & WORKS CITED PAGE

- \_\_\_ 1. CANNOT use Encyclopedia, book of famous quotes, or dictionary except in intro/conclusion.
- \_\_\_ 2. \*Wikipedia or personal interview (not required!) can ONLY be used for 1 quote for ENTIRE PAPER
- \_\_\_ 3. No single source can be used more than 6 times throughout the entire paper – no matter how good!
- \_\_\_ 4. **DO NOT USE blacklisted Websites as sources for paper or any free essay website (usually flag as plagiarism)**
- \_\_\_ 5. Works Cited PAGE in MLA format. **Include the http/URLs of websites!** (do not just put WEB!)
- \_\_\_ 6. Every Source that is quoted in paper appears in Works Cited! **Double check this!**
- \_\_\_ 7. IMPT: **Each citation in PAPER MUST!** Match **the first words** of the corresponding Works Cited entry.
- \_\_\_ 8. **When sending papers via email send to both [Miguel.fernandez@cgc.edu](mailto:Miguel.fernandez@cgc.edu) AND [eng102papers@gmail.com](mailto:eng102papers@gmail.com)**