Providing Guidelines for First Year Assessment Tasks: Nurturing or Spoonfeeding?

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Developing written and oral communication skills are an important part of the first year university experience. Subject convenors have clear expectations of their students but do they clearly communicate these requirements? During the first year of a course it is important to set the tone and standards for later studies. Despite the fact that different disciplines may have differing writing and oral presentation requirements, with a little thought and effort students can be given guidelines, which will provide them with a blueprint for future success. This can be achieved and reinforced in a variety of ways without overloading the student at any one time. This paper will describe the rationale for providing thorough instructions for assignments and case studies to first year students enrolled in a core business subject with the objective of guiding students into deep approaches to learning which lead to qualitatively better learning outcomes, and to developing core generic skills. Finally some recommendations as to how clear requirements can be developed and communicated are provided.