State Your Expectations

This is perhaps one of the most important best practices. It seems apparent, but is very often overlooked in online. How do students know what you want (expect of them) if you don't tell them. Ideally, the best place is the syllabus.

When designing an assignment for a course paper, you need to develop the process for revealing the assignment and the stages necessary to get the student to the point of submission. If it is a sophomore course, then …

1. You want the assignment in stages, for instance, an overview of the assignment, a topic selection, thesis presentation and approval, paper outline, first draft, and final submission.
2. You may want to consider specific instructions and expectations for each of these stages to keep the students on track, using the right format (APA, MLA, etc.), on time, and doing the necessary research.

Just requiring an 8-10 page paper in APA format really opens the door for variation. And unless, you provide your "real" expectations, you can plan on lots of variation. Font type and size will vary, page width and length will vary, pictures of various sizes will be used, some students will use a cover page and others won't. Did you want a bibliography, footnotes, endnotes, figure table, etc.?

Tell students what your expectations are … they can't read your mind. This is especially true with group assignments and activities. Expectations define group behavior and without it, most online groups will face chaos, unless they are lucky enough to have a member or two with previous experience with groups.