There's nothing more frustrating than thinking you have given a writing assignment that will bring a major part of the course into focus, and finding, as you grade the fourth or fifth paper, that no one in the class got the message! Following are some guidelines that will help you avoid such a situation:

1. Specify the purpose of the assignment:
   - to evaluate sources
   - to synthesize data
   - to solve an unknown
   - to argue for an interpretation
   - to refute an opinion or argument
   - to explain a process.

2. Specify the audience.

3. Specify the topic or ask students to specify the topic (the topic is not the complete assignment).

4. Ask students to specify the question or problem raised by the topic.

5. Specify the necessary research: authors, titles, journal, location of the information.

6. Specify the format: literature review, letter to the editor, patient education sheet, etc. Also specify length and type of documentation.

7. Specify the process. For example, have students begin by writing what they know about the topic, what interests them; the next step might be library research organized by conflicting ideas on the subject.

8. Specify time: when each step in the process is due, when you will read a draft.