Designing Assignments for Deeper Student Engagement Handout
Companion Handout to Online Tutorial

> "Assignments send powerful signals to students about what matters. Pat Hutchings, Senior Scholar, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2014.

1. Role of assignments
- Practice applying skills, content, and concepts learned
- Assess and provide feedback on student learning

Notes

2. Assignment purpose
Tell students why they are doing this assignment:
- To master content?
- To practice or build skills?
- For experiential learning?
- To lead to better performance on another assignment or assessment?

Example purpose: The philosophy paper is assigned to help you formulate a personal and professional philosophy of leisure that will serve as a guide throughout your career.

Notes

3. Assignment connections

We make assignment connections clear to students to help them:

- See how their work meets learning outcomes
- Improve knowledge and skills for their next assignments
- Build skills for graduation, workplace contribution, and a deeper understanding of important issues
- Demonstrate achievement

Notes

4. Assignment scaffolding

- Break assignment into manageable chunks with feedback as students proceed.
- Promotes progressive mastery and makes the steps in the learning and writing process more visible to students.

Example scaffolding for research essay:

Course timing	Week 6	Week 8	Week 10	Week 12	Week 14
Developmental Assignment Due	Thesis statement	Annotated Bibliography	Outline	Essay Draft	Final essay

Notes

5. Assignment reflection

Students reflect in writing to capture what they learned to solidify learning and assign responsibility to the student to retain acquired knowledge and skills.

Reflection prompts ask students to:
- Think about their assignment process
- Identify what they have learned
- Plan future academic behavior based on their self assessment

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Notes

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Reflect and Plan

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- What elements from this presentation could you apply to an existing or planned assignment?
- How will you incorporate these elements to your assignment?

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Assignment Checklists: Useful steps for launching and rethinking any assignment

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"More transparency is beneficial for all students and particularly good for first-generation students, lower division courses, and high DFW courses." Nancy Quam-Wickham, The NILOA Assignment Design Process, spring, 2018 presentation, Cal State East Bay.

Faculty Assignment Planning Considerations for Assignment Design
- ❏ What is the main purpose of the assignment?
- ❏ How the assignment will provide a means for students to demonstrate the proficiencies you want them to develop?
- ❏ What do you expect students to do?
  - ❏ What will students learn how to do or demonstrate that they can do?(skill)
  - ❏ What will students learn about?(content)
  - ❏ How will students understand how to perform to expectations on assignment?
- ❏ Does the assignment include real-world application helping the work to take on personal and professional meaning?
- ❏ What are the learning outcomes for students?
- ❏ How will you prepare students to perform to expectations on the assignment?
- ❏ Is the assignment respecting and reflecting the different ways students learn, different learning modalities, and different levels of preparation?
- ❏ Does the assignment include a model assignment for students to see what success looks like?
- ❏ How can you help students monitor their own progress on the assignment?
- ❏ Is the end product described satisfactorily?
- ❏ How will students be assessed? How will you know if they met your expectations?

> "Carefully crafted prompts are critical parts of the teaching-learning process because, regardless of what we state in a syllabi or say in class, the assignments we give students are the most powerful way we communicate our expectations to them." *Linda Suskie, WASC Consultant, Assessing Student Learning*, second edition. p. 156.

Crafting Assignment Instructions for Students

- ❏ Provide clear and transparent expectations and instructions in writing so students understand specifically what tasks to do and how to do them. This includes helping students know, "Where do I start?"
- ❏ Provide the purpose of the assignment including the value of the assignment in the field of study and the student's career goals.
- ❏ Align assignment to course student learning outcomes outcomes as well as with previous and future assignments*.*
- ❏ Provide means for students to monitor their progress and evaluate their performance.
- ❏ Scaffold or sequence assignments to help students progressively integrate and connect their learning.
- ❏ Explain to students how the assignment will be evaluated/assessed
- ❏ Check if the directions are clear by having a colleague read the prompt and supporting documentation for the assignment. Would they be able to perform to expectation?
- ❏ Consider including a model assignment for students to see what success looks like.

After the Assignment Has Been Submitted

- ❏ Does student work indicate that the end product described satisfactorily?
- ❏ Provide useful feedback to students beyond the grade. How might they improve their performance?

Sources

Quam-Wickham, Nancy, The NILOA Assignment Design Process: Why Assignments Matter. Presentation to Cal State East Bay, Winter, 2018. Ph.D. NILOA Coach, History Professor, CSU Long Beach.

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Winkelmes, Mary-Ann, "Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students," *Liberal Education*, Vol 99, No. 2, Spring 2013.
https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/transparency-teaching-faculty-share-data-and-improve-students