



Assignment Design: Questions for Constructive Collaboration and Peer Review

The questions that follow here are based on work by faculty participants in the Assignment Library Initiative, a project of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). The list is meant to be suggestive, not comprehensive, and to provide useful starting points for faculty working together on assignment design.

Note that the list will be refined and expanded based on suggestions from individuals and groups engaged in work on assignments.

For other resources related to assignment design, see <http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/resources>

Purpose and Alignment

What is the main purpose of the assignment and how well does it meet that purpose?

How is the assignment related to course goals? Could that connection be made stronger or more explicit?

How is the assignment related to larger program goals (e.g. general education goals, or institution-level learning outcomes)? Could that connection be made stronger or more explicit?

Do students understand these connections? Would it be useful to help them do so? What would that look like?

Does it succeed (how well?) in eliciting the performance of student understanding and abilities you wish to assess?



Clarity and Communication

Is the assignment clear to students? Is the central purpose clear? Are the important mechanics and parameters of the assignment clear (length, format, etc.)? (See assignment template, Ewell, 2013).

How might students misunderstand the assignment or understand it differently than intended?

Could the assignment be rewritten or reframed to communicate more clearly with students and thereby increase the chances that the assignment will elicit a performance that can be scored?

Value for Learning

What do students learn—or what do you hope they will learn—in responding to this assignment?

Does the assignment push students to a next level of understanding or skill development? If not, could it do so?

Is there an opportunity to open up the assignment to other media and genres of performance? Does it, for instance, need to be a research paper for the instructor? Could it be a (real) newsletter article intended for the wider community? Could it be a group dramatic performance rather than a Powerpoint presentation?

Scaffolding

Does the course provide sufficient practice and sequenced activities on the assignment's topic to allow students to be successful with the target assignment?

Does the assignment help to prepare students for subsequent assignments, in this course and/or beyond?



What kinds of feedback on this assignment are most useful to students? How are opportunities for feedback, as well as responses to feedback, built into the assignment?

Have you shared this assignment (and samples of the student work it prompts) with faculty teaching subsequent courses? Might that be useful?

Motivation and Engagement

Is the assignment pitched at the right level of expectation given students' preparation and experience?

Is the assignment likely to motivate students to do their best work? Does it present an “intriguing problem” (Bean, 2011, p. 98)?

How might the assignment be made more engaging for students?

Is the assignment sufficiently challenging? Is the assignment too hard?

Assessment Rubrics and Criteria

Does the assignment as written provide sufficient background information for students to be able to generate a scorable answer in response?

How will (or can) students' responses to the assignment be evaluated, assessed, scored? Does the assignment present any special challenges when it comes to assessment and scoring?

Do you employ a rubric or explicit set of criteria for evaluating student work on the assignment? Are the criteria for assessing student performance on the assignment clearly aligned with the purpose and goals of the assignment?

Are the criteria for assessing student performance on the assignment sufficiently clear to students? How do you know?

What does a “good” student response to the assignment entail or look like?



Ongoing Development and Improvement

Are there aspects of the assignment that you'd like to reconsider or redesign?

What kind of feedback, from whom, would help you in this regard?

How can your colleagues (or students?) help you improve this assignment?

What does "improved" mean?

November 2014



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