Transparent Assignment Design

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When faculty make the purpose, tasks and criteria of an academic assignment clear before students begin to work on it, students are more likely to experience greater academic success with that assignment, developing the knowledge, disposition, and skills necessary to succeed both at school and in life (in comparison to when students experience less clarity around purpose, tasks and criteria for their academic work).

[Winkelmanes et al., Peer Review 2016]
What is Transparency?

• Transparent teaching and learning methods explicitly focus on:
  • How students are learning course content
  • Why we arrange their learning experience in particular ways
  • How students will use this learning in their lives after college
Research

• Two small teaching interventions
  • Impact
    • Increase academic confidence
    • Increase sense of belonging
    • Increase metacognitive awareness of skill development
  • Higher retention rates at least 2 years out
Why is using Transparent Assignments Important?

- Small adjustment to teaching that has a large impact
- Impact is statistically significant for all students studied
- Greater impact and benefits for underserved students
- Something you can do right now
# Transparent Assignment Design Template

## Purpose
- Skills practiced. Includes long-term relevance to students’ lives
- Knowledge gained. In relation to stated learning outcomes

## Task
- What students will do
- How to do it (steps to follow, avoid)

## Criteria for success
- Checklist or rubric in advance so students can self-evaluate
- What excellence looks like (annotated examples where students/faculty apply those criteria)
Purpose – Task - Criteria

Which skills will the student practice by doing this assignment?

What knowledge will students gain from working on this assignment?

How do those specific skills and knowledge gained relate to the student's lives?
CRJ 104
Interactive Activity 1: Identifying Crime Types

Description: You will be presented with a list of different crimes. You must determine whether the crime described is a violent, property, organized, public-order, or white-collar crime.

Instructions: To complete this IA, simply “drag” the person being arrested down to the appropriate jail cell. If you select the correct cell, the jail cell will open and the arrestee will go to jail. These interactive activities require you to be precise with your mouse movements. Be sure to deliver them right to the “center” of the cell.

(MORE TRANSPARENT)

CRJ 104
Interactive Activity 1: Identifying Crime Types

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to differentiate between crime types.

Skills: Upon completion of this activity, you will be able to distinguish between criminal behaviors and classify them under broad crime type categories.

Knowledge: This assignment will help you understand the dimensions or the criteria in which crime types can be classified.

Task: To complete this interactive activity, simply “drag” the person being arrested down to the appropriate jail cell. These interactive activities require you to be precise with your mouse movements. Be sure to deliver them right to the “center” of the cell.

Criteria for Success: This assignment is graded as a pass/fail. If you select the correct cell, the jail cell will open and the arrestee will go to jail. An incorrect placement will bounce the arrestee back to the description. Once all arrestees are moved to their correct jail cells, a message of successful completion will appear on your screen. You have an unlimited number of times (prior to the deadline) to successfully complete this assignment.
BIOL 111L
C. elegans Mutant Phenotypes Assignment

Name __________________________

For each mutant, complete the following:

1. How does this mutant differ from the wild type worms you’ve been observing?
2. Hypothesize: what developmental defect (molecular, structural, physiological) could underlie the phenotype? (It does not matter if you’re correct as long as it’s a plausible explanation!)
3. Find (& cite) a peer-reviewed study that explains the root cause of the phenotype.

(MORE TRANSPARENT)

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Transparent Assignment Design: Redesigned C. elegans Mutant Phenotypes Assignment

Purpose: The purpose of the exercise is twofold: first, to simulate the process developmental biologists go through in the laboratory when observing a novel mutant, and second, to help you think about downstream physiological effects of loss of function of various genes.

This assignment will help you practice the following skills:

✓ Observing and describing a mutant phenotype as compared to wild-type organisms
✓ Formulating a hypothesis to explain a biological phenomenon
✓ Critical thinking and experimental interpretation
✓ Finding, citing, and summarizing research from a peer-reviewed scientific journal

This assignment will help you gain the following knowledge:

✓ Familiarity with the appearance and physiology of the C. elegans nematode
✓ Understanding of the functional roles of a variety of organs and tissues of the C. elegans nematode
✓ Understanding of the links between embryonic development and adult phenotypes
Purpose – Task – Criteria

What does the instructor expect the students to do?

How should they do it?
Visual Assignment


ASSIGNMENT: Create a “visual narrative” consisting of approximately 3-6 images with one-paragraph captions and list of sources. You should also include a “mind map,” as discussed, explaining the evolutions of thought, culture, politics under review. Imagine this will be part of an exhibit open to leading scholars of the field but also a general audience and undergraduate students. Due March 17 in class.

**Tasks:**

1. Carefully survey the *Landscapes of Southern Nevada digital collection* (link below) and note photographs that you wish to study in more depth.

2. Survey the primary documents and historic maps included in the collection.

3. Choose an individual image to analyze

4. Search for one related primary document in the collection and one related historic map that will aid your analysis of your image.

5. Decide what broader environmental history topic, theme or research area these three sources might support. For example, land use, resource conservation, water, etc....

6. Use the Library of Congress Photo Analysis worksheet (attached) to guide your deep reading of your photograph keeping in mind that you are using these sources to better understand an environmental history research topic, theme or issue.

7. Based on your analysis and notes from the worksheet write a concise but detailed analysis of your photograph. Then explain how this photographic primary source expands our knowledge of your chosen environmental history topic.
Purpose — Task — Criteria

Include a checklist for students to self-check they have all the parts of the task completed.

Share examples of what the expectations look like, and sometimes what they do not look like.
Purpose – Task – Criteria

FINANCE EXAMPLE

LIBRARY RESEARCH EXAMPLE
Feedback and Editing

• Self-Reflection
  • Did the product of the assignment meet your expectations?
  • What parts did the students miss?
  • Where did you students struggle?
  • What questions did they ask you?

Self-reflection is only useful when followed by thoughtful action.
WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO:

Before you begin working on an assignment or class activity, ask the instructor to help you understand the following. (Bring this document to help frame the conversation.)

**Purpose**
- Skills you’ll practice by doing this assignment
- Content knowledge you’ll gain from doing this assignment
- How you can use these in your life beyond the context of this course, in and beyond college

**Task**
- What to do
- How to do it (Are there recommended steps? What roadblocks/mistakes should you avoid?)

**Criteria**
- **Checklist** (Are you on the right track? How to know you’re doing what’s expected?)
- **Examples of real-world work in this field**
  (What’s good or lacking about these examples? Use the checklist to identify the successful parts.)
Additional Editing Resources

• Transparent Assignment Checklist  
  • [https://tilthighered.com/assets/pdffiles/Checklist%20for%20Transparent%20Assignments.pdf](https://tilthighered.com/assets/pdffiles/Checklist%20for%20Transparent%20Assignments.pdf)

• Measuring Transparency: A Learning-Focused Assignment Rubric  
  • [https://www.clemson.edu/otei/documents/Learning%20focused%20assignment%20rubric.pdf](https://www.clemson.edu/otei/documents/Learning%20focused%20assignment%20rubric.pdf)
Contact CETL for an appointment

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