Transparent Assignment Design: Clearer Assignments, Better Results

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This page offers additional videos talking about transparent instruction, sample assignments, and tools for creating your own transparent assignments.

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TRANSPARENT ASSIGNMENT TEMPLATE

Adapted from work by Mary-Ann Winkelmes © 2013

This 3-part template can be used as a guide for developing, explaining, and discussing class activities and assignments, making them explicitly clear for students and enhancing their learning.[1]

ASSIGNMENT NAME:
Due Date:

PURPOSE

*Define the **learning objectives** of the assignment, in language and terms that help students recognize how the assignment will benefit their learning. Ideally, you should be able to indicate how these are connected with institutional learning outcomes, and **how the specific knowledge and skills involved in the assignment will be important in students' lives** beyond the contexts of this assignment, course, and college.*

- **Skills:** The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course/ in school/ in this field/ in professional life beyond school. …

- **Knowledge:** This assignment will also help you become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:
  - Topic 1
  - Topic 2…

TASK

- **What to do:** *Define what activities students should do/perform to complete this assignment.*

- **How to do it:** *Explicitly list any steps or guidelines students should follow, or provide a recommended sequence for the students' efforts. Specify any extraneous mistakes to be avoided.*

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

- **Checklist:** *Define the characteristics of the finished product. Consider providing students with and utilizing an organized rubric for assessment.*

- **Examples:** *Provide multiple, annotated examples, if possible, of what these characteristics look like in practice.*

  - *It is recommended that you collaboratively analyze the examples with students before they begin working on the assignment. Explain how excellent work differs from adequate work. Consider compiling a checklist of characteristics of successful work **with** students, which enables them to evaluate the effectiveness of their own work. Students can also use this checklist to engage in peer critiques.*

[1] Winkelmes, Mary-Ann. "Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning." *Liberal Education* 99,2 (Spring 2013); Winkelmes et al, "A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success." *Peer Review* (Winter/Spring 2016).

Example 1: BEFORE REVISION: LESS TRANSPARENT

Intro to Social Sciences: Interview Assignment

1. Select a professional in your prospective academic discipline and/or career field that is considered an expert in an area in which you are interested.
2. Secure an interview with the professional for a date and time that is convenient for both of you.
3. Prepare 8-10 questions to ask the professional about their knowledge of a particular academic discipline/career field.
4. Conduct a 20 – 30 minute, face-to-face interview to gather knowledge that will help you make an informed decision about the major/career you are considering. You will want to audio/video record the interview with the interviewee's permission.
5. Prepare a typed transcript of the questions and answers using the audio/video recording
6. Write a 400 – 500 word reflection paper in which you address the following items:
    1. Who you selected and why?
    2. What you learned from them that is most interesting?
    3. What this assignment helped you learn about your major/career decision?
    4. What questions you still have?
7. Submit the typed transcript and reflection paper to your instructor.

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Example 1: AFTER REVISION: MORE TRANSPARENT

Intro to Social Sciences: Interview Assignment

Due dates:

- Draft interview questions – September 30, 2014
- Transcript of interviews – October 15, 2014
- Report - November 17, 2014

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to help you make an informed decision about the major/career you are considering.

Skills: The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in school and your professional life beyond school. In this assignment you will:

- Access and collect needed information from appropriate primary and secondary sources.
- Synthesize information to develop informed views.
- Compose a well-organized, clear, concise, report to expand your knowledge on a subject in your major.

Knowledge: This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:

- Issues facing professionals in a field
- Scholarly research formats for documenting in-text sources and creating reference pages (i.e., bibliographies).

Task: To complete this assignment you should:

1. Select two professionals in your prospective academic discipline and/or career field that are considered experts in an area in which you are interested.
2. Secure an interview with the professionals for a date and time that is convenient for both of you.
3. Prepare 8-10 questions to ask the professionals about their expertise in a particular academic discipline/career field. The questions must be based on a review of the field using 5 credible sources as defined by the librarian in our research module. Sources should be cited using APA formatting.
4. Conduct a 20 – 30 minute, face-to-face interview with each professional to gather knowledge that will help you make an informed decision about the major/career you are considering. You will want to audio/video record the interview with the interviewee's permission.
5. Prepare a typed transcript of the interviews
6. Compare and contrast the information provided by both professionals in an **8 page (1.5 spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, 1 inch margins) report** that documents the advantages and disadvantages of a career in the selected field.

Criteria for success: Please see the attached rubric.

Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Accomplished	Good	Developing
Content	34-40 (34%-40%) Addresses all essay components; each topic is given thoughtful consideration, depth, and detail	20-33 (20%-33%) Most essay components are covered; topics are somewhat given thoughtful consideration, depth, and detail.	0-19 (0%-19%) Zero to few essay topics covered; topics significantly lack detail, thoughtful consideration, and depth.
Style	9-10 (9%-10%) Uses appropriate grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and effective transitions. Clearly written in a logical, progressive way and engaging style.	7-8 (7%-8%) Somewhat uses appropriate grammar and transitions; somewhat logical progression.	0-6 (0%-6%) Significantly lacking in appropriate grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and/or transitions.
Structure	9-10 (9%-10%) Includes introduction, body, and conclusion. Organizes ideas in well-defined paragraphs. Meets formatting requirements (typed, double-spaced, 12-pt font, style requirement, page length) and includes citations/reference page.	7-8 (7%-8%) Includes intro, body and conclusion. Somewhat organized main ideas in well-defined paragraphs. Some formatting elements included. Some in-text citations and references.	0-6 (0%-6%) Significantly lacking intro/body/conclusion and/or organization. Substantial formatting/citation deficiencies.
Interviewee	18-20 (18%-20%) Person interviewed is well qualified and relevant to area of interest	15-17 (15%-17%) Person interviewed is somewhat qualified and relevant	0-14 (0%-14%) Person interviewed is not qualified and/or relevant
Transcript	18-20 (18%-20%) Detailed verbatim account of 5 questions and answers. Interview questions are relevant and purposeful.	15-17 (15%-17%) Transcript lacks detail; fewer than 5 questions or some lack relevance.	0-14 (0%-14%) Transcript lacks detail and includes insufficient description of questions and answers questions. Less than 5 questions. Questions lack purpose.

Example 2: BEFORE REVISION: LESS TRANSPARENT

Assignment: Simplify Expressions

Name: _____

Directions: Simplify each.

1. $\dfrac{2w^2 - 50}{x^2 - 4w - 5}$

2. $\dfrac{-3w^2 - 9w + 54}{w^2 - 9w + 18}$

3. $\dfrac{16v^4w^2}{12w^2 + 20u^4w}$

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Example 2: AFTER REVISION: MORE TRANSPARENT

Assignment: Simplify Expressions
Due Friday, Sept. 18

Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to (1) improve your mathematical writing and (2) demonstrate your algebraic manipulation skills. This assignment will help prepare you for simplifying expressions from calculus and help you communicate where your understanding and misunderstanding are. Knowing how to simplify expressions is similar to using correct grammar -- it makes the written mathematics easier to read and understand. Real-life modeling problems are everywhere such as modeling the spread of COVID-19 or predicting future global temperatures. Simplifying the mathematical models as they are developed reduces possible errors.

Student Learning Outcomes addressed in this assignment:

1. Simplify Algebraic Expressions
2. Communicate algebraic reasoning

Task: Simplify one of the following problems, and include justifications for each manipulation.

1. $\dfrac{2w^2-50}{x2-4w-5}$ 2. $\dfrac{-3w^2-9w+54}{w^2-9w+18}$ 3. $\dfrac{16v^4w^2}{12w^2+20u^4w}$

Sample Product:

Problem: Simplify $\dfrac{u^2-7u+6}{5-5u^2}$ Answer: $\boxed{\dfrac{-(u+7)}{5(1+u)}}$

$\dfrac{u^2-7u+6}{5-5u^2}$	restatement
$\dfrac{(u+7)(u-1)}{5(1-u^2)}$	factor the numerator and denominator
$\dfrac{(u+7)(u-1)}{5(1-u)(1+u)}$	factor the denominator (difference of two squares)
$\dfrac{-(u+7)(1-u)}{5(1-u)(1+u)}$	factor out a negative one in the numerator
$\dfrac{-(u+7)}{5(1+u)} * \dfrac{(1-u)}{(1-u)}$	rearrange factors (commutative property of multiplication)
$\dfrac{-(u+7)}{5(1+u)} * 1$	$\dfrac{1-u}{1-u} = 1$ assuming $u \neq 1$
$\dfrac{-(u+7)}{5(1+u)}$	multiplicative identity

Criteria: This assignment is worth 10 points. The rubric you will be graded with is below.

	Proficient	Emerging	Needs Improvement
Algebraic Accuracy	Includes most steps and steps are accurate (5)	Missing a few steps and/or some steps are inaccurate (3)	Many missing steps and/or many inaccurate steps (1)
Mathematics Language	Reasoning is correct and mostly correct math language (5)	Reasoning is mostly correct and mostly correct mathematics language (3)	Many incorrect reasoning (1)

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