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WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

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WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

PURPOSEFUL

What do I want students to gain from this assignment?
Why are those objectives important, valid, and reasonable?
What can I learn from the exercise about my students’ learning . . . and share with my colleagues?
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

COLLEGIAL

Developed not in isolation, but in discussion

Builds from talking with colleagues, pursuing shared learning goals, filling in skills gaps
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

CONNECTED

Tied to the key course goals you have identified and, if possible,
tied to the other exercises in the class
the key curriculum goals of a major
the key program goals of Gen Ed
the key institutional goals of a campus
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

CLEAR

In terms of *instructions*  
*(how might a student understand the assignment differently?)*

In terms of *evaluation*  
*(what are the components, considerations, and calculations that go into a grade?)*
How would a discipline expert approach the assignment?

Explore the steps an expert in the field would go through to accomplish the task in question.

Move “the focus from large, potentially overwhelming challenges, . . . to more discrete and manageable tasks.

Students’ . . . sense of mastery can increase as they move to ever more complex tasks.”
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

SEQUENTIAL

Occupies a logical place in the students’ path through a course or a curriculum

Pitched at a reasonable appropriate skill level
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

FLEXIBLE

Variable formats
Poses a range of disciplinary questions
Allows for revisions
Open to collaborative work
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

EXERCISES THAT ENGAGE STUDENTS IN ONGOING, SIGNIFICANT, ENGAGING DEBATES

EXERCISES THAT SPEAK TO THE PROVISIONAL NATURE OF HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS

“College must prepare learners to deal with the complex and uncertain, not just with the rote and routine. Assessments [*and our assignments*] ought to show how well students can integrate context, inquiry, evidence, applications, and implications.”
Prepare “students to tackle nonstandard, unscripted problems and questions . . . where ‘right answers’ are not known and where the nature of the problem itself is likely uncertain at best, and often actively contested.”

Focus on students’ “adaptive and inventive competencies” on what “students can actually do with nonstandard problems . . ., the ultimate test of students’ competence — at work, at life, and in the community.”
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

INSTRUCTIVE

Documents student learning

Demonstrates the development of knowledge and skills that we can track and report

*(especially if the assignment is tied to any available assessment features in your institution’s course management system)*
Assessment of student learning: From mid-1980s
- assumed unreliable nature of faculty-awarded grades
- focused on “add-on” measures (esp. standardized tests)
- emphasis on compliance with mandatory measures
Assessment of student learning: TODAY

- focus on faculty evaluation + actual course work of students
- “progressively more challenging exercises, performances, and assignments for demonstrating student mastery at multiple points.”
- emphasis on learning about student learning
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

PRACTICAL

Addresses key disciplinary competencies

Offers students a range of transferable skills

Helps students construct a more persuasive narrative of their educational experience
WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

- PURPOSEFUL
- COLLEGIAL
- CONNECTED
- CLEAR
- SEQUENTIAL
- FLEXIBLE
- OPEN-ENDED
- INSTRUCTIVE
- PRACTICAL
RESOURCES

GENERAL INFORMATION ON ASSIGNMENT WORKSHOPS FOR FACULTY:

Organizing Assignment-Design Work on Your Campus: A Tool Kit of Resources and Materials
http://degreeprofile.org/assignment-design-work/

EXAMPLES OF ASSIGNMENTS:

DQP Assignment Library
http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/search

Key features of good assignments
http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/uploaded/files/Faculty%20Charrette%20Participant%20List%20of%20Other%20Desirable%20Characteristics%20of%20Assignments%20doc.pdf

CREATING RUBRICS FOR ASSIGNMENT EVALUATION:

VALUE rubric project (Association of American Colleges & Universities)
(model rubrics for 16 learning outcomes) https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics

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RESEARCH:

_Catalyzing Assignment Design Activity on Your Campus: Lessons from NILOA’s Assignment Library Initiative_

_Designing Effective Classroom Assignments_

MATERIAL FROM THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION:

_AHA Tuning Project: History Discipline Core_
https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning/history-discipline-core

_Classroom materials: rubrics and syllabi_

_Classroom materials: sample assignments_
“DECODING” THE DISCIPLINE:

Joan Middendorf, David Pace, “Decoding the Disciplines: A Model for Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking the Reading of History”

David Pace, “Decoding the Reading of History”

Additional publications by David Pace: