

Quick Guide to Transparent Assignment Design

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU faculty and programs consider good practices for designing or refining assignments to be more transparent. ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs to design effective assignments for learning outcomes assessment. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

What is Transparent Assignment Design?

Transparent assignment design refers to teaching practices aimed at making learning processes more explicit for students.

How Does Transparency Benefit Students and Faculty?

Carefully crafted assignments are a critical part of the teaching, learning, and assessment process. A growing body of research indicates that incorporating elements of transparent assignment design, into student assignments, can:

- Serve as a 'road map' for students, providing them with a greater opportunity for successfully meeting the expectations of the assignment.
- Benefit all student groups, with particular benefit to underrepresented student groups, in terms of achievement, retention and graduation rates, and students' confidence and sense of belonging.
- Promote equitable learning opportunities for student success by demystifying the learning process for students who may be less familiar with college success strategies.
- Provide faculty with opportunities for reflection on their assignments and how they meet student outcomes.
- Strengthen the curriculum and assessment, as students are able to do their best work.

How Can Faculty Make Assignments More Transparent?

Stating the assignment purpose, task, and criteria. Incorporating these simple, but powerful, elements can help make assignments more transparent for students.

- **Purpose:** Describe why students are completing an assignment and what knowledge and skills they will gain from this experience. Additionally, explain how this knowledge and skill set are relevant and will help the students in the future (e.g., relevance to students' major, lives, employment).
- **Task:** Explain what students will do to complete the assignment and how to do it (e.g., steps to follow, things to avoid).
- **Criteria:** Show the students in advance what successful submissions look like (e.g., provide annotated examples and a checklist or rubric so students can self-evaluate).

Note: ACE is available to share samples and provide workshops for WSU departments/schools and other academic groups.

Research on Learning and Transparent Assignment Design (selected)

This approach is built on considerable research, including work from the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), Winkelmes, Mazur, Felder, Tanner, Light, Dweck, Fisk, Dweck, Yeager, and many others. Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes, specifically, has researched transparency extensively:

- Winkelmes, M., et al. (2016). [*A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success*](#). AAC&U Peer Review. 18 (1/2).
- Winkelmes, M. (2015). [*Equity of Access and Equity of Experience in Higher Education*](#). The National Teaching & Learning Forum. 24 (2).
- Winkelmes, M. (2013). [*Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning*](#). AAC&U Liberal Education. 99 (2).

Additional Resources

- [TILT Higher Ed](#) website
- [Transparent Assignments Promote Equitable Opportunities for Students' Success](#) – 45-minute presentation by Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes
- [National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment Assignment Library](#)