

Reimagining Your Syllabus for Responsiveness:

Aligning Goals, Assessment, and Strategies for Teaching

Slides available at:
bit.ly/ACM-Week-3

Let's Frame Things Up

Using backward design principles we will consider fall course contexts and how the syllabus and course structure can:

- Set expectations
- Build a learning community
- Give students agency
- Assess student learning

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3 Big Things

1

The syllabus

A reflection of our course structure and philosophy

2

Backward Design

We start at the end and end at the start

3

Assessment

Finding out how well we achieved our goal

Workshop Learning Outcomes

Workshop participants will be able to...

- Feel more confident in facing the challenges ahead
- Align learning outcomes, assessments, and instructional approach
- Use the syllabus to accurately signal the kind of course learning environment they want to build

Uncertainty

 un·cer·tain·ty

/ˌənˈsɜrtɪn(t)ē/

noun

the state of being uncertain.
"times of uncertainty and danger"

Similar: unpredictability unreliability riskiness chanciness precariousness

• something that is uncertain or that causes one to feel uncertain.
plural noun: uncertainties
"financial uncertainties"

Similar: doubt qualm misgiving apprehension quandary dilemma

 dis·rup·tion

/disˈrɛpSH(ə)n/

noun

disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity, or process.
"the schedule was planned to minimize disruption"

Similar: disturbance disordering disarrangement disarranging interference

Disruption



Jim McGrath

@JimMc_Grath

hearing from friends about some of the local university plans to offer students their pick of a class experience this fall (in-person, hybrid, asynchronous) and then just expect that each class can accommodate all student choices simultaneously (?) and I am losing my mind

9:32 PM · Jun 9, 2020 · [TweetDeck](#)



Ryan Cordell

@ryancordell

I can, at this point, plan a decent online class—I can plan a good in-person class—though I would do so reluctantly, you know, during a pandemic—Asking me to prepare a simultaneously online/in person/hybrid course that can turn on a dime is a recipe for disaster



Participant Reflection

**Think about your fall courses.
What questions, concerns, or
anxieties arise?**

Reflect: Take notes for 2 minutes.

Share: Type your thoughts in the
Zoom chat (if desired).

Where do we go from here?

How Do We.....

- Set expectations
- Build a learning community (foster trust, promote engagement)
- Give students agency (with an eye toward flexibility as an equity principle)
- Assess student learning (different temporal and spatial modalities)

The Syllabus

Backward Design

Assessment

The Syllabus

As a rhetorical
act/gesture

As a place to set
expectations and
establish norms

As a means of
promoting student
agency and multiple
pathways for
success

Two Thought Experiments to Begin Reimagining the Syllabus

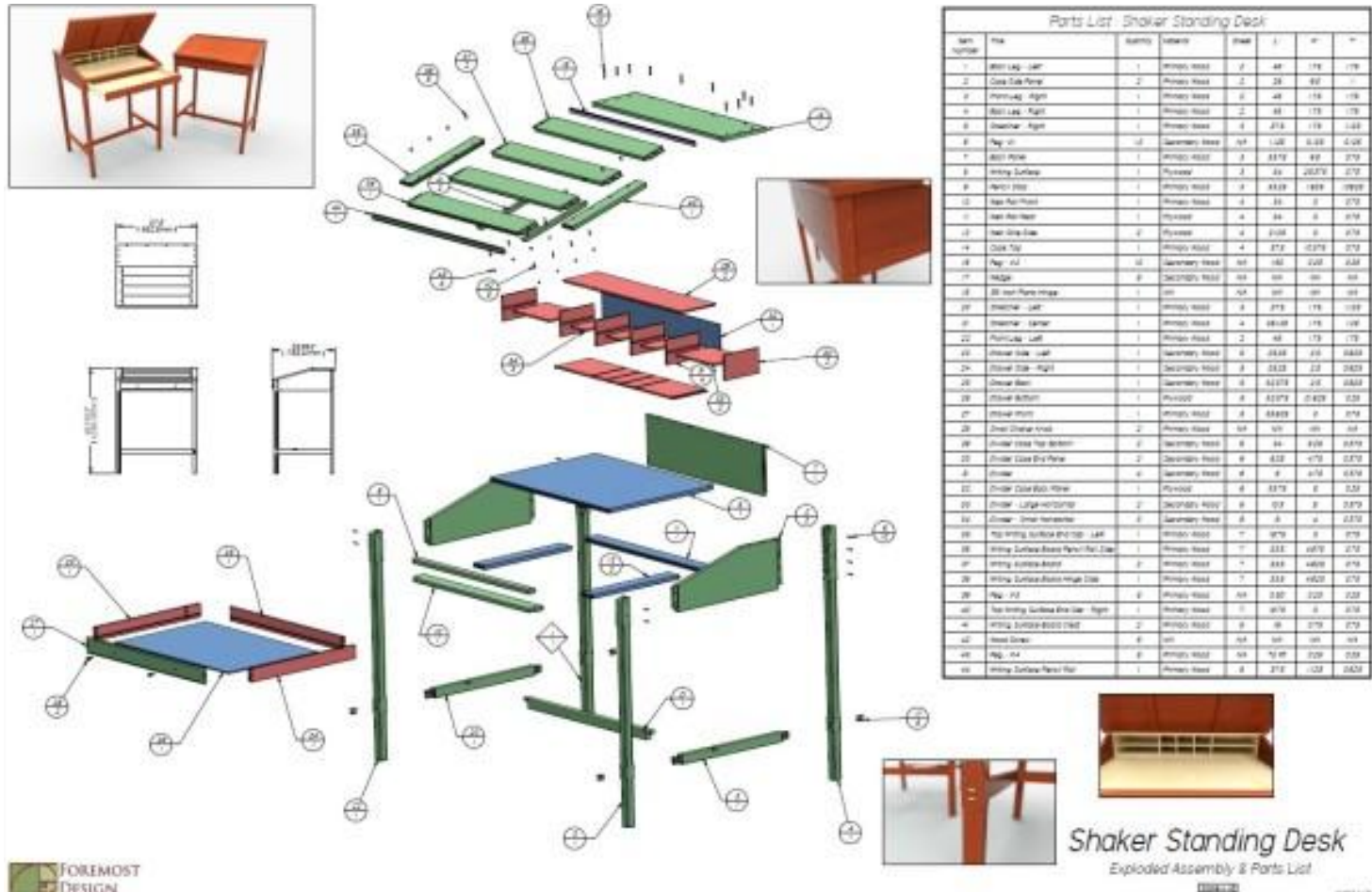


Syllabus Metaphors

“My syllabus is a _____”

Share: Type your thoughts in the Zoom chat.

De-compose your syllabus: the “exploded view”



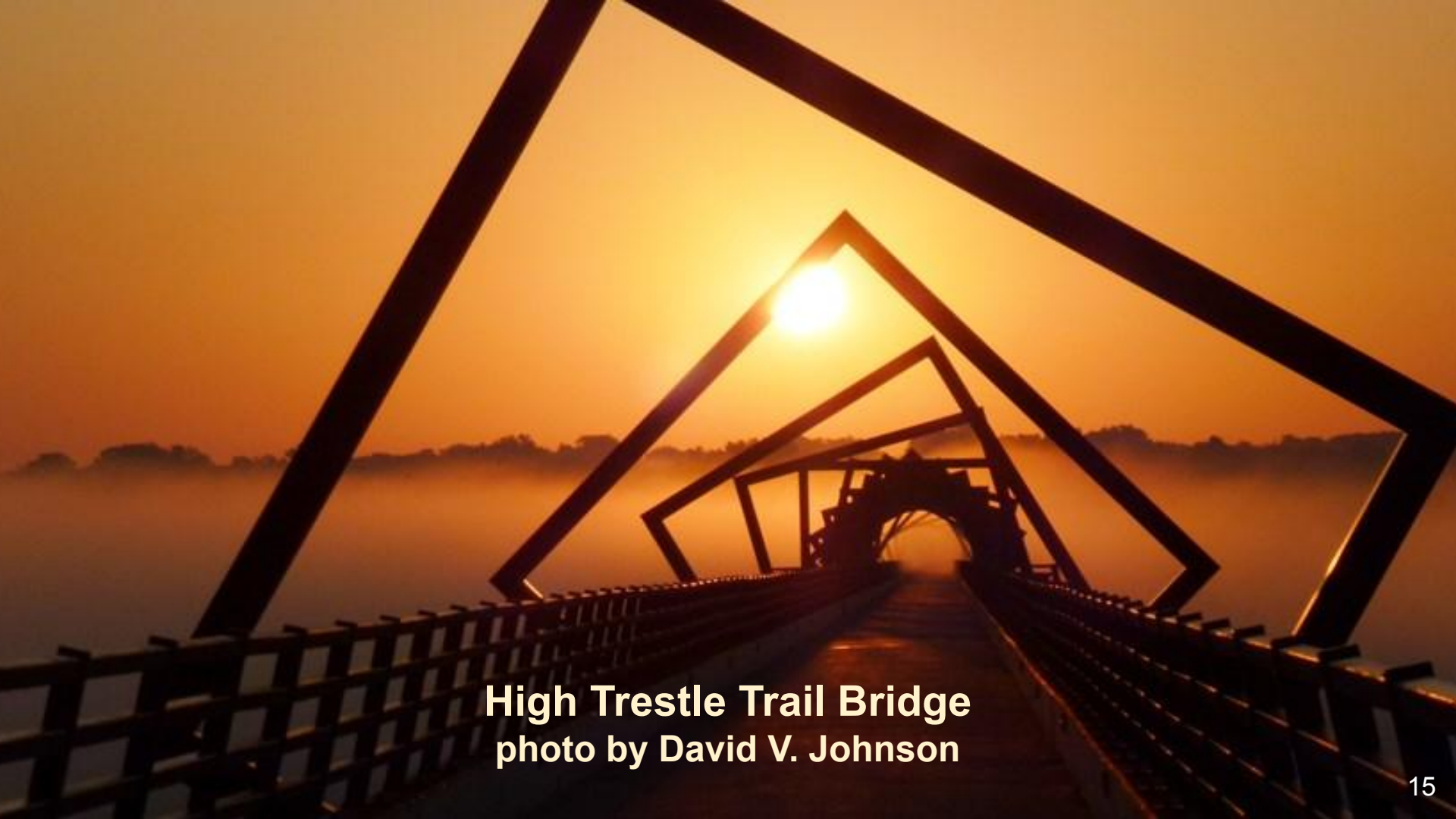


Arundhati Roy: Pandemic as portal

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. **Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.**

As we pass through this portal, let's think about what we might take to the other side, and what we want to leave behind. One or two sentences per question. No more.

1. What one book from class would you want to take with you?
2. What, if anything, from your old life do you want to leave behind?
3. What do you appreciate that you would like to take with you?
4. What change, if any, would you like to see, and commit to bring about, on the other side?



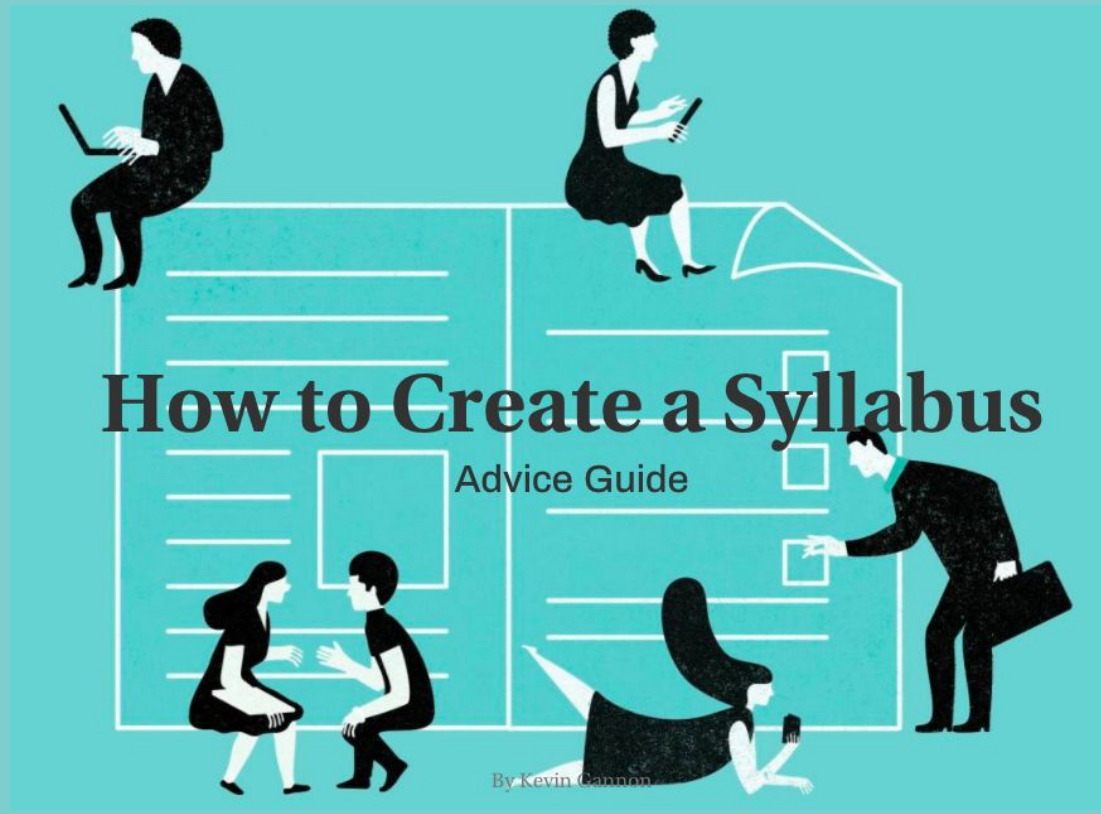
High Trestle Trail Bridge
photo by David V. Johnson

Ideas to Consider

- set a tone of welcome, promise, and radical hospitality
- share the syllabus in an editable and collaborative format; for example, invite students to comment upon and annotate the syllabus as the first assignment of the course
- leave part of the syllabus unfinished, and invite student collaboration to fill in the missing pieces (“skeletal syllabus”)
- be flexible, and give students multiple pathways through the course ... include some options about assignments, readings, etc.



**For further
reading**



Kevin Gannon, “How to Create a Syllabus”

<https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-syllabus>

ACCESSIBLE SYLLABUS

Accessible classroom resources promote student engagement and agency



IMAGE



TEXT



RHETORIC



POLICY

Tulane University, “Accessible Syllabus”
<https://accessiblesyllabus.com>



Remi Kalir

@remikalir



It's that time of the year & we're talking syllabi: How to create or tweak, how to co-design with students, whether or not they're a contract, what purposes they serve & whose voices are included and excluded. Here's a THREAD about ANNOTATING your syllabus with your students 1/10

♡ 114 10:04 AM - Aug 13, 2018



Remi Kalir, “Annotate Your Syllabus”

<http://remikalir.com/courses/annotate-your-syllabus/>



Jacob Gowell, “Syllabus-as-Metaphor”

<https://hybridpedagogy.org/syllabus-metaphor/>

 EPISODE 289

SYLLABUS RESOURCES

WITH ANGELA JENKS | DECEMBER 26, 2019 |    



00:00

00:00



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Angela Jenks on episode 289 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast.

“Syllabus Resources,” episode of Teaching in Higher Ed podcast
<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/syllabus-resources/>

Where do we go from here?

How Do We.....

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The Syllabus

Backward Design

Assessment

Backward Design

What is
backward
design?

How can it
promote student
engagement and
buy-in?

How can it help
you organize
your course?

TO BEGIN WITH THE

end

IN MIND MEANS
TO START WITH A
CLEAR
UNDERSTANDING OF
YOUR DESTINATION.

IT MEANS TO KNOW
WHERE YOU'RE GOING
SO THAT YOU BETTER
UNDERSTAND WHERE
YOU ARE NOW AND SO
THAT THE STEPS YOU
TAKE ARE ALWAYS IN
THE RIGHT
DIRECTION."

~Steven Covey

What is backward design?

Typical Approach to Designing a Course

consider the learning activities & resources
(how will I teach the content)

How will I know my students learned
anything (developing assessments around
the learning activities)

Last; attempt to draw connections to the
learning goals of the course

TO BEGIN WITH THE

end

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What is backward design?

Backward Design Approach to Designing a Course

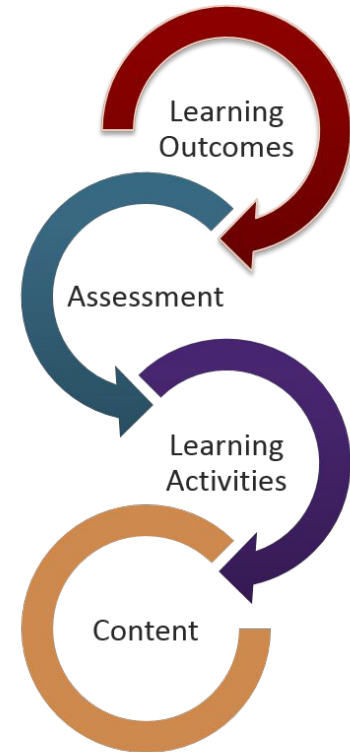
FIRST: Consider the learning outcomes of the course

THEN: Consider how you'll know your students know (*ASSESSMENT*)

LAST: Plan and develop *HOW* you will teach the content

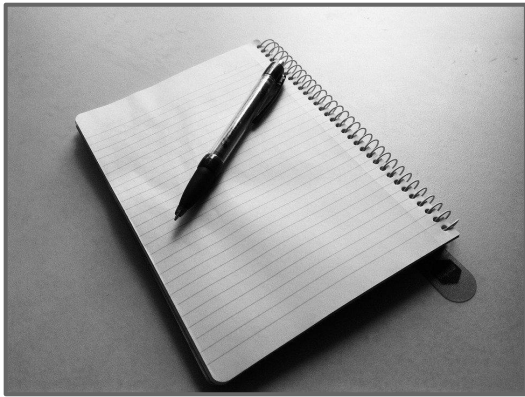
3 Stages of Backward Design

1. Identify desired results. Why does this course exist? (**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:** *where do we want to go?*)
2. Determine acceptable evidence (**ASSESSMENTS:** *how will we know we've arrived?*)
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction (**CONTENT/INSTRUCTION/ASSIGNMENTS:** *what will we need to help us get there?*)



STAGE ONE: Identify Desired Results

The big WHY? Why does this course exist?



Let's take 5 minutes:

1. pull out a piece of paper
2. write down in one paragraph: why does this course exist?

BREAK

Let's take 5 minutes:

1. pull out a piece of paper
2. write down in one paragraph: why does this course exist?
3. Take a short break if you need to

Next step: Writing Learning Outcomes

So...you basically just started your learning outcomes for this course...

Now narrow it in:
What do we want students to do/apply by the end of the course?

STAGE TWO: Determine acceptable evidence

1. How will I know if students have achieved the desired results?
2. What will I accept as evidence of student understanding and proficiency?

STAGE THREE: Plan learning experiences & instruction

1. What enabling knowledge (facts, concepts, principles) and skills (processes, procedures, strategies) will students need in order to perform effectively and achieve desired results?
2. What activities will equip students with the needed knowledge and skills?
3. What will need to be taught and coached, and how should it best be taught, in light of performance goals?
4. What materials and resources are best suited to accomplish these goals?

What does this look like?

| What do we want students to be able to demonstrate by the end of the course? (Learning Outcomes/ Learning Objectives) | Evidence of Learning (Assessment) | | How will we scaffold the learning? (Content/Instruction/ Assignments) |
|--|--|--|--|
| | What will we see, hear, feel, taste, smell? (Desired evidence) | What tools and process will collect the information? (Assessment approaches) | |
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |

Why this way of thinking benefits your students

Students ***know why*** they're taking this course

You're tying this specific time and place to the rest of the world:

You're helping students see how the course relates to REAL life

You are answering the questions: *why do we need to know this?*

Why am I taking this class?

You're engaging students in a **FULL PICTURE.**

Backwards Design & the online classroom tips

- Begin work on the final assessment during week one
- Clarify the purpose of class activities & assignments
- Assign tasks that foster self-reflection on learning as it relates to course outcomes
- At end of semester, have students reflect on where they've come and what they intend to do to continue

Where do we go from here?

How Do We.....

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The Syllabus

Backward Design

Assessment

Assessment Framework

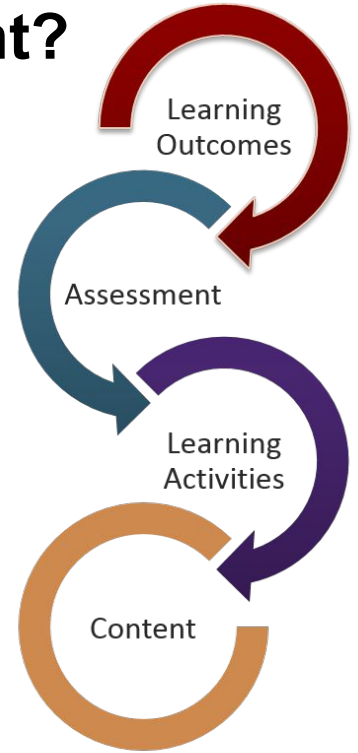
What do we
mean by
assessment?

How can it be
used to facilitate
student
learning?

How do I choose
an assessment
strategy?

What do we mean by assessment?

Learning outcomes assessment is an ongoing process designed to monitor and improve student learning. (*Allen*)



How can we use assessment to facilitate student learning?

Assessment provides:

- Information **students** can use to confirm they're on the right track and/or to understand how they can improve.
- A method for **students** to share perspectives about the learning environment.
- Information **faculty** can use to confirm how well the learning activities they've designed helped students meet the learning outcomes and whether adjustments are needed.

We assess to know learning happened

So, what is Learning?

So, what is Learning?

We enter the black box
inside our brain...



Learning is invisible

Knowledge
of

Understand

Know

Learning is invisible



Knowledge
of

Understand

Know

Learning is invisible



Explain



Perform



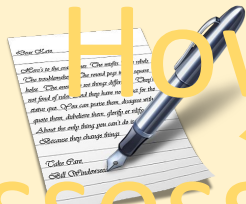
Create



Make learning visible



Explain



Perform



How do I choose an
assessment to represent
the learning?



Make learning... exiting the brain...
visible

Create



How do I choose assessment strategies?

1. Verify that the learning outcome and the “evidence” of student learning are in **alignment**, then apply teaching strategies to scaffold the learning to the outcome.
2. Clarify the **purpose** for the assessment
3. Consider the learning **context**

1. Align Assessment with Desired Learning Outcome

| Learning Outcomes/Objectives | Assessment | |
|--|---|---|
| | Desired evidence | Assessment approaches |
| Recognize plant structures (Cognitive: declarative knowledge) | the student can name each part of a given plant | Students select the name for the labeled structure on a test |
| Choose the best growing technique (Cognitive: critical thinking) | the student explains why their choice is best | Student writes a persuasive essay justifying a technique |
| Propagate plants asexually (Psychomotor) | the student grows a new plant by using cuttings | Observe student using given supplies to grow new plants |
| Live their values as it relates to the world of plants (Affective) | the student articulate their values and describe one way they demonstrate their values. | Students write reflection journals with prompts about their values and actions taken. |

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2. Clarify the Purpose for Assessment

| | Summative | Formative |
|------------|--|--|
| Purpose | Determine student mastery level | Feedback for student growth and adjusting teaching approach |
| Timing | End of a unit; no further practice or growth opportunities are available | Throughout the unit while practice opportunities are available |
| Audience | Mostly instructor | Student and Instructor |
| Risk level | Higher-stakes | Lower-stakes |

*When the cook
tastes the soup, that's
formative. When the
guests taste the soup,
that's summative.*



-NSF Handbook for Project Evaluation

3. Consider the contexts

Learner context:

Can every student access and complete the assessment?

Instructor context:

What is my ability to manage the changes in my courses?

Environmental context:

What conditions are likely to be in place during my course?

WAIT! Can I just use grades as my Assessment?

It depends. Usually not. Learning outcome assessment and grading overlap, but they are typically not interchangeable.

NO: If your grades include criteria, like timeliness (meeting deadlines), that might not be explicitly connected to the specific learning outcomes

YES: If your grading criteria are identical to your learning outcomes.

How this approach to assessment can facilitate student learning

- Aligning assessments with key learning outcomes helps students to focus on what's most important
- Using low-stakes as well as high stakes assessments provides opportunities for growth and can help to build confident learners
- Taking into account the learning context and identifying equivalent assessment options allows instructors to provide students with a more flexible and equitable learning environment

Wrap Up

- What element of this course do you want to take with you?
- What from previous iterations of this course do you want to leave behind?
 - What from previous iterations of this course will you *have* to leave behind?
- What do you value or appreciate about this course that you would like to take with you?
- What change would you like to see in this course on the other side?

Spend our final minutes recording individual reflections or thoughts on these questions.

Formative Assessment

1. What's your key takeaway from today's session?
2. What points need further clarification?

<https://bit.ly/ACM-week3-feedback>

For Friday

Take a course you are teaching this fall. Start to think about the course “why” statement and learning outcomes.

Backwards Design Template

| What do we want students to be able to demonstrate by the end of the course? (Learning Outcomes/ Learning Objectives) | Evidence of Learning (Assessment) | | How will we scaffold the learning? (Content/Instruction/ Assignments) |
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