

Transcript: Assignment Design

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Slide 1	Designing Assignments
Slide 2	Keith Webster Distance Education Consultant Distance Education Services Division of Continuing Studies
Slide 3	Designing Assignments In this video, we're going to talk about a 4-step process for designing assignments. We'll start by settling on an assignment idea, then translate the idea into tasks, determine what instructional resources and supports students will need, and define the assignment parameters. We'll finish up with some tips for drafting the assignment description and instructions.
Slide 4	Step 1: Settle on an idea The first step in assignment design is to settle on an idea. When I'm looking for an idea for a major assignment, the first thing I'll do is consider the course goals. These are the statements that describe what students in my course should know and be able to do when the course is over. When I'm thinking about an assignment for a course module, I'll consider the module objectives - the statements that tell my students what I want them to know and be able to do when they've completed a module of study in my course. So, my assignment idea should clearly relate to a course goal or a module objective. In fact, the strongest assignment idea will link with both.

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Slide 5	<p>Step 1: Settle on an idea</p> <p>Here’s how I use a course goal to help me come up the assignment idea. Let’s say I’m developing an introductory economics course and one of my course goals is for students to be able to use their evolving understanding of the economic decision-making process to analyze economic issues.</p> <p>I’d rework the course goal by writing the phrase “I want my students to be able to” and then use active, measurable verbs like <i>demonstrate</i> or <i>apply</i> to describe what I want them to do. So, here, I’d say:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“I want my students to be able to demonstrate their evolving understanding of the economic decision-making process by analyzing a current economic topic or issue that interests them.”</p> <p>And now I have my assignment idea.</p>
Slide6	<p>Step 1: Settle on an idea</p> <p>To see if this language will lead students to achieve the course goal I’ve set, I can ask myself “How will this assignment “</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ help students synthesize course materials, ▪ deepen their understanding of course topics and/or practice skills, and ▪ promote critical thinking. <p>This particular assignment asks students to demonstrate their understanding of an economic topic by analysing it. To do this analysis successfully, they’ll have to think about what they’ve read and discussed in the course and apply this thinking to their topic. The assignment will indicate how well they’ve understood the course topics and thought critically about them.</p> <p>I think my idea does stand up to this test. So, I’m ready to move onto the next step.</p>

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Slide 7	<p>Step 2: Translate the idea into engaging and relevant tasks</p> <p>Step 2 is all about translating your idea into tasks that are engaging and relevant.</p> <p>In step 1, I worked out that I want students to demonstrate their understanding of the economic decision making process by analyzing an economic topic or issue that interests them.</p> <p>Now I need to work out what the students will actually do for the assignment.</p>
Slide 8	<p>Step 2: Translate the idea into engaging and relevant tasks</p> <p>To focus my thinking, I ask myself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What kinds of tasks does this idea suggest (for example: group discussions, description of a process, review of the literature, research paper)? ▪ What kinds of thinking do I want to assess? (for example: explaining, interpreting, examining critically) ▪ Will the students be able complete the assignment tasks with the knowledge and skills they've gained so far in the course? If not, where and how can I build in the needed knowledge and skill development activities? ▪ Will the tasks encourage academic integrity – that is, the correct use of materials produced by others? ▪ Will the tasks help students develop important skills both for the course and for their workplace and life? <p>So I'll plan the assignment around these 5 questions.</p>

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Slide 9	<p data-bbox="634 312 1373 384">Step 3: Determine what instructional resources and supports are needed</p> <p data-bbox="634 426 1360 535">Step 3 in the process is to determine what instructional resources and supports the students will need to successfully complete the assignment tasks.</p> <p data-bbox="634 577 1365 686">I want my students to engage with their assignments and feel confident about their ability to be successful, so at this step, I usually ask myself</p> <ul data-bbox="634 716 1380 1140" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="634 716 1354 863">▪ Can students complete the assignment tasks with the instructional resources I'm planning to include in the course – for example, readings, instructional notes, class discussions, learning activities? <li data-bbox="634 873 1365 940">▪ Would the assignment engage and challenge them if they had to find additional resources to work with? <li data-bbox="634 951 1380 1140">▪ Would it be useful for students to get some feedback early on as they work on the assignment? (Because I know that giving students feedback early on in their assignment work can result in more effective or productive learning and thinking.) <p data-bbox="634 1167 1349 1434">So, as I think about how to make the assignment both engaging, and challenging by getting them to go beyond the provided resources, I'm starting to think that a multi-stage written assignment could be the way to go. A staged assignment – where they turn in various parts on different due dates, and get marks for each part – would make it easy for me to build in feedback early on.</p> <p data-bbox="634 1476 1365 1703">I also need to think about a title. Students can be misled by inappropriate assignment titles. For example, if you want students to analyze the strengths and limitations of a process but you call the assignment a “process description”, students might focus their energies on the descriptive elements of the task and not the critical one.</p> <p data-bbox="634 1745 1243 1812">So, a key structural component is a title that clearly communicates the intention of the assignment.</p>

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Slide 10	<p data-bbox="634 317 1146 348">Step 4: Define the assignment parameters</p> <p data-bbox="634 390 1336 499">By this point in the assignment planning process, it's likely that you have specific parameters or guidelines in mind for the assignment.</p> <p data-bbox="634 541 1365 611">Here's a generic checklist to help you plan. By the way, not all the items on this list will be relevant for all assignments:</p> <ul data-bbox="634 636 1377 1142" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="634 636 1300 705">▪ What are the assignment length limitations and due dates?<li data-bbox="634 716 1377 825">▪ What aspects of the assignment will be evaluated – effort, thinking process and/or progress, research process, drafts, final product?<li data-bbox="634 835 1349 905">▪ What is the weighting of assignment components – how much is each part worth?<li data-bbox="634 915 1097 947">▪ Who will evaluate the assignment?<li data-bbox="634 957 1305 1026">▪ What type of grade is required (numeric, alphabetic, pass/fail, complete/incomplete)?<li data-bbox="634 1037 1370 1142">▪ How will students submit the assignment? For example, through the Assignment tool? Through a discussion forum posting? <p data-bbox="634 1167 1349 1276">At this stage, you should also think about what your policies will be for late or incomplete assignments, plagiarism, grade appeals, etc.</p>

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<p>Slide 11</p>	<p>Assignment Description and Instructions</p> <p>Now you're ready to draft the assignment description and the instructions. Your students will have a wide range of learning skills and approaches to reading assignment descriptions and instructions, so you want to make these to be as clear and as comprehensive as possible.</p> <p>The purpose of the description is to explain to your students why they are doing the assignment and what purpose it serves. The instructions provide the "how to".</p> <p>The assignment description and instructions should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ include the key parts of the assignment (background information, relevance to course goals or module objectives), task (what to do), and key stages and the timeline for completing them, ▪ use plain language – avoid jargon, ▪ explain acceptable sources for information and your preference for proper citation of references, ▪ specify the assignment parameters (for example, length limitations, due date, weighting of components), and ▪ outline clearly how the assignment will be assessed. <p>And, don't forget about the title – compare it to your draft description. Does it communicate the assignment intention accurately? If not, now's the time to revise.</p>
<p>Slide 12</p>	<p>Designing Assignments</p> <p>The PDF <i>Assignment Design in Four Steps</i> linked from this web page outlines this approach in a little more detail.</p>