



Assignment Design: Checklist

(Cited from the University of Waterloo - <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/assignment-design/assignment-design-checklist>)

Careful planning and implementation of assignments will help your students produce what you expected. Consider using this checklist as a tool to trouble-shoot your assignment design and identify possible areas to refine. Other considerations may be required for your specific assignment, but this will give you a great start, no matter what type of assignment you plan to give.

Stage one: Planning

When planning the assignment, decide how it can

- Fit with main learning objectives for the course, term, and program
- Relate to previous work done in this course and past courses
- Be new and different from the type of assignments given in this course and other courses (e.x., seek alternatives to the proverbial term-paper or problem set)
- Benefit from an audience other than yourself (e.x., peers, community professionals, liaison librarian, politicians)
- Use current topics and current resources
- Be broken into a series of smaller assignments to avoid overwhelming students
- Be completed – in groups, pairs, or individually
- Be completed – in the online environment
- Build on students' previous experience and current skill set
- Develop important skills for students, both for your course work and beyond (e.x., skills for the workplace, skills for life)
- Require a reasonable amount of work and be successfully completed in the allotted time, given other courses and demands outside of school
- Have value to you (e.x., will be interesting to grade, lead to a research project)
- Require a level of commitment you can meet (e.x., student support, grading)

Also, prepare by considering the support demands students may have

- Identify types of assistance students will require to complete the assignment
- Contact liaison librarian, community professionals, or other people who can assist you and your students in completing the assignment



- Arrange guest lectures relevant to assignment process (e.x., liaison librarian, community professional, colleagues)
 - When possible, use class time for activities to help students complete the assignment (e.x., discuss how to write an annotated bibliography, run lab activities to demonstrate a requisite skill, discuss material related to assignment topic)
 - Decide if students are required to meet with you or your teaching assistants (TAs) as they complete the assignment and set times and policies for availability to help students avoid procrastinating
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Then, make evaluation decisions by choosing the

- Assignment length limitations and due dates
- Type of feedback to give – written, oral, anonymous
- Evaluators – you, peers, community professional, liaison librarian
- Type of grade required (e.x., check mark, pass/fail, numeric grade)
- Parts to evaluate – effort, research process, thinking process, progress, sequence of assignments, drafts, final products
- Weighting of components – how much is each part worth
- Turnaround times for marking to make the assignment meaningful for students
- Policies for possible problems – late or incomplete assignments, missed meetings, poor group work practices, plagiarism

Stage two: Implementing

Prepare an assignment description or handout that

- Comprises the key parts – **situation** (background information, audience, relevance), **task** (what to do), **stages** (a timeline for completing key stages of the assignment), and **evaluation criteria** (specific grading scheme, special policies)
- Uses plain language – avoids jargon
- Provides advice from past experiences with the assignment
- Explains proper referencing and acceptable sources for information – be specific and expect to be taken literally

Have a colleague (preferably someone not familiar with your course) read the handout and identify any unclear instructions and jargon, then revise accordingly. As well, do your assignment before giving it to students whenever possible, so you can identify problems before they do. And when you distribute the handout in class, take time to discuss it and allow for questions and clarifications about the task.



Consider giving ongoing support

- Share useful student feedback with the class and TAs
- Keep in touch with support people (e.x. liaison librarian)
- Ask for mid-assignment feedback since no news is not necessarily good news
- Have a backup plan for areas identified as difficult to complete (e.x., if a document is hard to get, have a copy available for reserve) – but take care not to modify the assignment too much from the handout because this confuses students

Stage three: Assessing

When the assignments are all submitted and returned

- List 5 strengths and 5 weaknesses of the assignment and suggest changes for next time
- Ask for evaluative feedback from students and support contacts – find out what worked well, what could be improved, where students had the most difficulty, and how you can better facilitate the process next time
- Use feedback and experiences to modify assignment plan for the next time