

Transparent Assignment Template

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This template can be used as a guide for developing, explaining, and discussing class activities and out-of-class assignments. Making these aspects of each course activity or assignment explicitly clear to students has demonstrably enhanced students' learning in a national study.¹

Assignment Name

Due date:

Purpose: Define the learning objectives, in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning. Indicate how these are connected with institutional learning outcomes, and how the specific knowledge and skills involved in this assignment will be important in students' lives beyond the contexts of this assignment, this course, and this college.

Skills: The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course / in school / in this field / in professional life beyond school:

Terms from Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives may help you explain these skills in language students will understand. Listed from cognitively simple to most complex, these skills are:

- understanding basic disciplinary knowledge and methods/tools
- applying basic disciplinary knowledge/tools to problem-solving in a similar but unfamiliar context
- analyzing
- synthesizing
- judging/evaluating and selecting best solutions
- creating/inventing a new interpretation, product, theory

Knowledge: This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:

- 1.
- 2.

Task: Define what activities the student should do/perform. "Question cues" from this chart might be helpful: <http://www.asainstitute.org/conference2013/handouts/20-Bloom-Question-Cues-Chart.pdf>. List any steps or guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students' efforts. Specify any extraneous mistakes to be avoided.

Criteria for Success:

Define the characteristics of the finished product. Provide multiple, annotated examples of what these characteristics look like in practice, to encourage students' creativity and reduce their incentive to copy any one example too closely. With students, collaboratively analyze examples of work before the students begin working. Explain how excellent work differs from adequate work. It is often useful to provide or compile with students a checklist of characteristics of successful work. This enables students to evaluate the quality of their own efforts while they are working, and to judge the success of their completed work. Students can also use the checklist to provide feedback on peers' coursework. Indicate whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the student's overall grade for the course. Later, asking students to reflect and comment on their completed, graded work allows them to focus on changes to their learning strategies that might improve their future work.

The author developed an earlier version of this template at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

¹ Winkelmes, Mary-Ann. "Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning." *Liberal Education* 99,2 (Spring 2013); Winkelmes et al, "A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success." *Peer Review* 18,1/2 (Winter/Spring 2016).

The Unwritten Rules: Decode Your Assignments and Decipher What's Expected of You

Breaking News

The [Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project](#) at UNLV demonstrated in a national study that transparency around academic assignments enhances students' success -- especially that of first-generation, low-income and underrepresented college students -- at statistically significant levels (with a medium-to-large sized magnitude of effect for underserved students). **When faculty make the purpose, tasks and criteria of an academic assignment clear before students begin to work on it, students are more likely to experience greater academic success with that assignment, developing the knowledge, disposition, and skills necessary to succeed both at school and in life** (in comparison to when faculty do not make these things clear for students). For UNLV students, **benefits also included a significantly higher rate of returning to college the following year** (Winkelmes et al., *Peer Review* 2016; Gianoutsos and Winkelmes, *PADE Proceedings* 2016).

Background

An inclusive learning environment benefits all students and offers more equitable learning opportunities for underserved students. **Research on student learning links college students' academic confidence and sense of belonging with higher GPAs, persistence and retention rates** (Walton and Cohen 2011). In addition, college students increased their test scores when supported by a system that advocated the belief that **intelligence is not fixed but rather malleable**. A year later, these students were 80% less likely to drop out of college (Aronson et al 2002).

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO:

Before you begin working on an assignment or class activity, ask the instructor to help you understand the following. (Bring this document to help frame the conversation.)

Purpose

- Skills you'll practice by doing this assignment
- Content knowledge you'll gain from doing this assignment
- How you can use these in your life beyond the context of this course, in and beyond college

Task

- What to do
- How to do it (Are there recommended steps? What roadblocks/mistakes should you avoid?)

Criteria

- **Checklist** (Are you on the right track? How to know you're doing what's expected?)
- **Annotated examples of successful work**
(What's good about these examples? Use the checklist to identify the successful parts.)

Aronson, J., Fried, C., & Good, C. "Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 38 (2002): 113-125.

Gianoutsos, Daniel and Mary-Ann Winkelmes. "Navigating with Transparency." *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Association of Developmental Educators* (Spring, 2016).

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L.. "A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes among minority students." *Science* 331 (2011): 1447-51.

Winkelmes, Mary-Ann, Matthew Bernacki, Jeffrey Butler, Michelle Zochowski, Jennifer Golanics, Kati Harriss Weavil. "A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success." *Peer Review* 18, 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2016).

Less Transparent

Letter to the Editor

The letter below was published in the Eugene Register-Guard on Jan. 30, 2015.

Your job:

1. Work with a partner to identify the problems with this letter.
2. For your homework, write your own (not with a partner) “letter to the editor” responding to this letter. Submit it to Dr. Mueller via the assignment in Canvas. Keep in mind that letters to the editor must be concise- the Register-Guard limits the letters it publishes to 250 words or less.

The ‘greenhouse effect’ explained

The mind is quite the tool. A person can start with one thought and find themselves talking or thinking about things totally unrelated to the original subject.

I found myself doing that just now. I’ve been wanting puffed wheat cereal, and it seems the only way to get it now is with sugar coating. Americans love their stuff to be sugar-coated – makes it easier to take, swallow, believe, etc.

That got me to thinking about how some Americans have allowed themselves to be taken by sugar-coated science.

For instance, gardeners know the reason greenhouses work so well is that the plastic film prevents carbon dioxide given off by the plants from leaving the greenhouse. That causes the temperature in the greenhouse to rise.

The temperature has to be regulated, i.e., the gasses must be allowed to escape or the temperature would climb to a point where the plants would die. That’s a known and accepted fact.

And yet, when it comes to our atmosphere and how it also traps carbon dioxide from many sources (the largest being burning fossil fuels) some people refuse, absolutely refuse, to see the obvious similarity. Why is that?

Shelly Ohman

Eugene

More Transparent

Letter to the Editor

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to give you practice critically analyzing an item from the media and in communicating scientific ideas clearly, concisely, and effectively, skills that will help you as a citizen to learn, vet, and then communicate about science. You will draw on your knowledge about the societally important topics of climate change and the greenhouse effect to provide the foundation for the ideas you will communicate.

Task: The letter below was published in the Eugene *Register-Guard* on Jan. 30, 2015. Your job is:

1. Work with a partner to identify the scientific problems with this letter.
2. For your homework, write your own (not with a partner) “letter to the editor” responding to this letter. You should explain and correct any scientific misconceptions you find in the original letter. Submit your letter to Dr. Mueller via the assignment in Canvas. Keep in mind that letters to the editor must be concise- the *Register-Guard* limits the letters it publishes to 250 words or less.

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Shelly Ohman
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Criteria for success: Your letter will be graded according to:

1. Whether you successfully identified the scientific misconceptions in Ms. Ohman’s letter.
2. The accuracy and clarity of the explanations you give to correct Ms. Ohman’s errors.
3. Whether you stayed within the word limit and constructed a letter likely to help Ms. Ohman better understand the greenhouse effect and climate change.

Argument Paper #2: Just Food

Due Date: Sunday, February 25, 2018 (15% of Course Grade)

PURPOSE: The purpose of this paper is to provide you an opportunity to summarize a critical perspective on the industrial food system and then articulate your own critical response. It will help you develop and sharpen your skills of analysis, assessment, reasoning, and succinct writing, which are useful not only for completing course assignments but also in a variety of work settings, professions, and other life situations.

TASK: In a thoughtful, well-organized essay of 3-4 pages, approximately 800-1200 words, answer the two parts of the prompt below. Please read the prompt carefully and respond to each aspect of the two parts.

Prompt

Numerous writers and activists have critiqued the industrial, capitalist food system for a variety of shortcomings. For example, Wendell Berry argues that the industrial food system undermines our freedom, eliminates our connection with the earth, and is not democratic. The ETC Group argues that the industrial food system threatens the livelihoods of small-scale (peasant) producers, reduces biodiversity, and contributes to hunger and other significant environmental problems, including climate change. Scholars Ian Werkheiser, Shakara Tyler, and Paul Thompson describe how the capitalist food system excludes certain populations and communities from participation in decision-making or pressures countries to restructure their economies in ways that push small farmers off the land, destroys community, and diminishes food sovereignty.

In the **first** part of your paper, choose one of the critics above (Berry, the ETC Group, or Werkheiser/Tyler/Thompson) and summarize their argument using the following three guiding questions to organize your description:

1. According to the critic, what is a primary problem with the industrial or capitalist food system, and what is at least one significant consequence of this problem?
2. According to the critic, which values does the industrial or capitalist food system promote, and which values does it suppress, undermine, or threaten?
3. What is an alternative to the industrial or capitalist food system that the critic promotes, and what is at least one significant reason they give to support this approach as being more just?

In the **second** part of your paper, explain why you agree or disagree with the critic's claims (you might agree or disagree entirely, or agree with some parts and disagree with other parts). In giving reasons for agreeing or disagreeing, cite at least two other sources from the list below to support your reasoning.

List of sources to draw from to support your reasoning when engaging your chosen critic's claims:

- Hourdequin, Chapter 4
- Hourdequin, Chapter 5 (pp. 117-131)
- Gray
- Arkin, Vásquez, Liévanos
- Harvest of Pride videos
- Marissa Zarate (guest presentation)

USE OF TEXTS: Your essay should demonstrate familiarity with the course texts and discussions, so be certain to cite references to texts by noting the reading and page numbers (for films, note the specific film title and segment). We are not concerned that you use formal citation style. It is therefore okay simply to use the author's name and page number in parenthesis [for example, (Hourdequin, p. 126) or (ETC Group, p. 4) and so on] for your references. What is important is that you support your summary and reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with proper references to the evidence you cite in the texts. Finally, it is preferable that you paraphrase the texts and minimize the length of any direct quotations you use; excessive use of direct quotations will result in a reduced grade.

TIPS: Each of the critics discusses more than one problem with the industrial, capitalist food system, and they describe a variety of consequences of these problems, but the summary asks you to describe a (one) primary problem and at least one consequence. Also, the critics identify a variety of values regarding agriculture and food that they support; these values tend to be the same values that the critics argue the industrial food system suppresses, undermines or threatens. Lastly, when using quotations, don't simply quote a text and assume your reader understands what the quote means; you need to explain what it means or use the quotation to support an explanation you've given.

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS: You will be successful if you complete all aspects of the prompt above in a clear, organized, succinct, and well-reasoned way, with properly-referenced evidence from the texts. A rubric for assessment will be posted on Canvas. Please also proofread your paper for spelling and grammar.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR ASSIGNMENT: Please submit your paper in the Assignments sections on the course Canvas site by 5pm on Sunday, February 25, 2018. Your paper should be a Word document or PDF file.

ASSIGNMENT FORMAT: Please include your name and UO ID number at the top of your paper. Please type your paper and use a standard 12pt font such as "Times," 1-inch margins, and double-spaced lines.

TO ASK QUESTIONS OR GET HELP: Please email Jordan or visit Jordan during his office hours, if you have any questions about this assignment or need assistance. You are also welcome to contact Instructor Schreiner with questions.