

CIVITAE CORE CURRICULUM

LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY
FARMVILLE, VA

Transparent Assignment Template for Civitae courses

adapted from materials by © 2013 Mary-Ann Winkelmes

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 outcomes 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 (choose one or two) course/in school/in this field/in your professional life beyond school:

This list may help you explain these skills in language students will understand. Keep in mind if this is an introductory course, you may only be working in the first three bullets:

- 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: List any steps or guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students' efforts. Specify any extraneous mistakes to be avoided.

Criteria for Success: Remember that students learned in English 165/265 that disciplinary writing conventions can often be deciphered by changes in Language, Structure, and Reference. Consider providing examples of what the desired characteristics look like and indicate what language, structure (format), Reference (to outside sources) you expect. Examples will also encourage students' creativity and reduce their incentive to copy any one example too closely. With students, you might collaboratively discuss how excellent work differs from adequate work. For this discussion, it is often useful to provide students a checklist of characteristics of successful work. This enables students to begin with an equitable understanding of how to evaluate the quality of the examples and 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. Reflection extends their work from English 165/265.

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).

Sharing The Unwritten Rules:

Helping Students Decode Assignments and Decipher What's Expected

Did you know?

- UNLV researchers 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). [Winkelmes et al., [Peer Review 2016](#)]
- 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 students experience less clarity around purpose, tasks and criteria for their academic work). [Winkelmes et al., [Peer Review 2016](#)]
- For UNLV students, benefits also included a significantly higher rate of returning to college the following year. [Gianoutsos and Winkelmes, *PADE Proceedings* 2016].
- 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, [Science, 18 March, 2011](#)].
- 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, [Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38, 2 \(2002\)](#)].

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO:

**Encourage the students to ask their instructors to help them understand the following.
(They could 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* (Winter/Spring 2016).