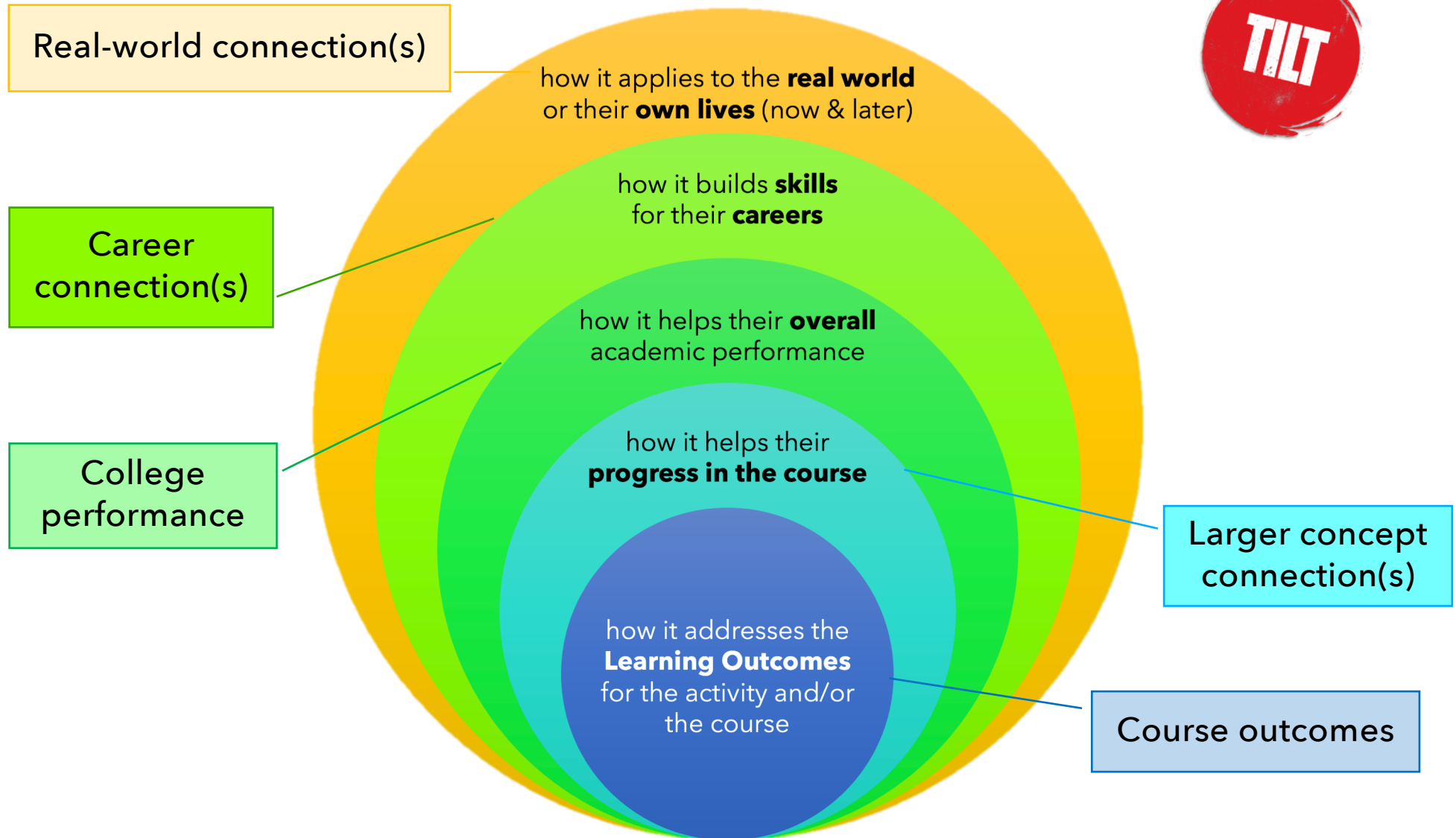


The Purpose Statement in a TILTed Assignment



Decoding a Pre-TILT Assignment



Purpose

- Can the students tell what specific skills they will practice and/or what content knowledge they will gain by doing this assignment?
- Are the connection(s) to course/assignment learning outcome(s) clear?
- Is the relevance to students' lives (even five years later) articulated clearly?
- Does the assignment rely on student-centered, motivating, promising language?

Task

- Can students extract *exactly* what steps/work they need to do?
- Does the assignment refer to recommended steps to complete the work?
- Does the assignment offer tips on what roadblocks or mistakes students should avoid?

Criteria for Success

- Can students discern if they are on the right track or if they are doing what is expected of them? (Rubric or self-assessment checklist?)
- Are there annotated examples of successful work?
- Is the rubric clearly linked to the assignment and available?

A national study with the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) funded by TG Philanthropy demonstrated that transparent instruction about problem-centered assignments has significant, equitable benefits for undergraduate students (Winkelmes, et al., *Peer Review*, Winter 2016), while a separate UNLV study indicated those benefits are long-term (Winkelmes, et al., forthcoming). Just two instances of transparent instruction in a term significantly enhanced students' success, with even greater gains for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented college students. These findings offer implications for how faculty and educational developers can adopt transparent instruction to help their institutions to right the inequities in college students' educational experiences across the country, especially in the first year of college (when the greatest numbers of students drop out).

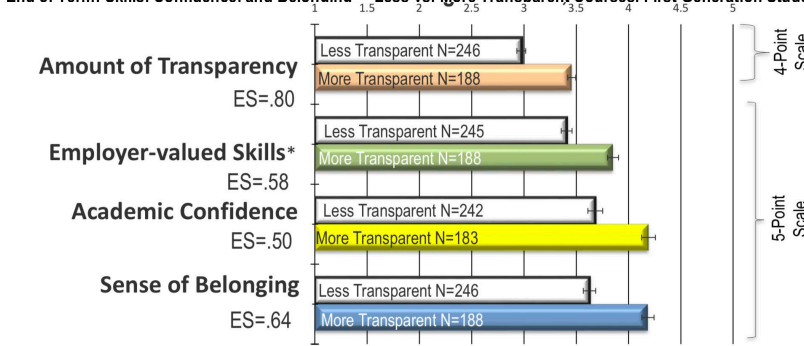
- **AAC&U study:**

In 2014-2015, a group of 7 Minority Serving Institutions launched a pilot project that included 1180 students and 35 faculty. Tia McNair and Ashley Finley at AAC&U led the project in partnership with Mary-Ann Winkelmes at UNLV's Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project (TILT Higher Ed), with funding from TG Philanthropy. The main research goal was to study how faculty transparency about the design and problem-centered nature of student assignments would affect students' learning experiences and the quality of students' work. Faculty received training on how to make two take-home assignments in a course more transparent (accessible) and problem-centered (relevant) for students, and each instructor taught a control group and an intervention group of the same course in the same term. Results were measured via online surveys about students' learning experiences before and after each course, and direct assessment of students' work. Students who received more transparent instruction reported gains in three areas that are important predictors of students' success: 1) **academic confidence**, 2) **sense of belonging**, and 3) **awareness of their mastery of the skills that employers value most when hiring**. While the **benefits for all students** in the aggregate who received more transparency were statistically significant, **the benefits for first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students were greater, with a medium-to-large sized magnitude of effect**. Important studies have already connected academic confidence and sense of belonging with students' greater persistence and higher grades (Walton & Cohen, 2011; Aronson, et al., 2002; Paunesku, et al., 2015). Scholars have identified metacognition as an essential learning skill (NRC, 2000; Wang, et al. 1994), and recent national surveys identify the skills that employers value most when hiring new employees (Hart, 2015, 2013).

- **UNLV study:**

A study of 871 UNLV students' retention rates indicated that increases to academic confidence, sense of belonging, and perceived mastery of employer-valued skills were indeed followed by **greater persistence**. First-time, full-time, first-year students in primarily transparent courses in Fall 2016 were retained as registered students one year later at a rate 15.52% higher than the rest of their cohort. Two years later, those students who had received transparent instruction when they were first-time full-time first-year students persisted as full-time students at UNLV at a rate 13.92% greater than the rest of their cohort. As in the AAC&U study, the gains were greater for underserved students. For example, the mean retention gain for the group of 361 low-income students who received transparent instruction in their first year was **19.74% greater** than the rest of their cohort after one year, and 19.52% greater than the rest of their cohort after 2 years (TILT Survey, 2015-2017; UNLV Data Warehouse, 2018).

End of Term: Skills, Confidence, and Belonging - Less vs. More Transparent Courses. First Generation Students



KEY: N: number of students responding |—|: one standard error
ES: effect size (Hedges' G) Effect sizes of 0.25 standard deviations or larger are "substantively important" (US Dept of Education *WWC*, 2014, p. 23).
Less Transparent: mean perceived transparency < 3.3/4
More Transparent: mean ≥ 3.3/4
 * Hart Associates employer surveys, 2015, 2013.

TILT Higher Ed and the AAC&U continue to promote transparency and problem-centered learning. TILT Higher Ed participants include more than 25,000 students in hundreds of courses at over 50 higher education institutions in the U.S. and five other countries. Publications and information about the Transparency in Learning and Teaching Project are at TILTHigherEd.org

Transparent Assignment Template

© 2013 Mary-Ann Winkelmes (adapted in 2020 from the 2013 original)

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

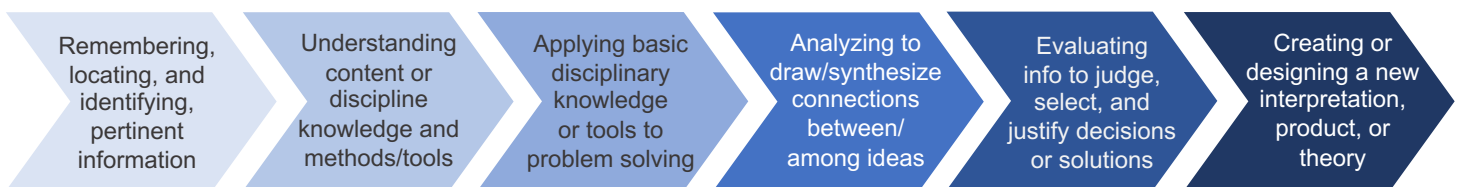
Assignment Name

Due date:

Purpose: Define learning objectives in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning. Articulate how objectives 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, college, this field, and professional life beyond college.*

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



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

•
•

Task: Define what activities the student should do/perform. "Question cues" from [the Bloom's Critical Thinking Cue Questions chart](#) might be helpful. List any steps, guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students' efforts. Specify any extraneous mistakes to be avoided. If there are sound pedagogical reasons for withholding information about how to do the assignment, protect students' confidence and sense of belonging in college with a purpose statement something like this: *"The purpose of this assignment is for you to struggle and feel confused while you invent and test your own approach for addressing the problem..."*

Criteria for Success: Define the characteristics of the finished product, including these elements:

- Indicating whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the course grade;
- Providing several real-world examples of work in the discipline, inviting students to use the your criteria for the students' upcoming work as a way to discuss and evaluate how the real-world examples meet, exceed, or fall short of the criteria for the upcoming work. (Doing so prompts students to own the TILT Framework and apply it actively to parse examples of real-world work. That also encourages students' creativity, minimizes performance anxiety, and reduces the incentive to copy an example too closely.)
- Analyzing examples of work collaboratively with students *before* students begin work on the assignment.
- Discussing how excellent work differs from adequate work enables students to evaluate the quality of their own efforts while they are working, and to judge the success of their completed work.
- Providing or compiling with students a checklist of characteristics of successful work. Doing so enables students to evaluate the quality of their own efforts—and to predict the success of their completed work. Students can also use the checklist to provide feedback on peers' coursework.
- 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.

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).

TILT Assignment Rubric*

Purpose Section	Non-existent	Emerging	Transparent
defines the learning objectives in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
states that the assignment will help students practice specific skills essential to success in the course, in school, and in practice/profession.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
uses terms from Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (understanding, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, judging, evaluating, creating, inventing, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
includes a statement and/or list of the kind(s) of content knowledge the assignment will help students become familiar with in the discipline.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes:			
Task Section	Non-existent	Emerging	Transparent
defines what activities students should do/perform.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
lists steps/guidelines and/or recommends a sequence for students' efforts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
includes "question cues." (See over for examples.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes:			
Criteria Section	Non-existent	Emerging	Transparent
defines the characteristics of the finished product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
provides specific examples of what these characteristics look like in practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
includes a checklist of characteristics of successful work to help students assess themselves and know if they are doing high quality work while working on the assignment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
indicates whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the students' overall grade for the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes:			

*adapted from TILT Higher Ed's Transparent Assignment Template at <https://tilthighered.com/transparency>

Bloom's Critical Thinking Cue Questions

Cue Questions Based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Critical Thinking

LOWER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS (BASIC THINKING)	HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS (ABSTRACT THINKING)
<p>3. APPLYING (Using learned knowledge in new situations or to solve a real life problem)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you use ...? • What examples can you find to ...? • How would you solve _____ using what you have learned ...? • How would you organize _____ to show ...? • How would you show your understanding of ...? • What approach would you use to ...? • How would you apply what you learned to develop ...? • What other way would you plan to ...? • What would result if ...? • How can you make use of the facts to ...? • What elements would you choose to change ...? • What facts would you select to show ...? • What questions would you ask in an interview with...? 	<p>6. CREATING (Putting ideas together to form a new and different whole)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What changes would you make to solve ...? • How would you improve ...? • What would happen if ...? • How can you elaborate on the reason ...? • What alternative can you propose ...? • How can you invent ...? • How would you adapt _____ to create a different ...? • How could you change (modify) the plot (plan) ...? • What could be done to minimize (maximize) ...? • What way would you design ...? • What could be combined to improve (change) ...? • How would you test or formulate a theory for ...? • What would you predict as the outcome of ...? • How can a model be constructed that would change ...? • What is an original way for the ...?
<p>2. UNDERSTANDING (Comprehension; explaining the meaning of information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you classify the type of ...? • How would you compare ...? contrast ...? • How would you rephrase the meaning ...? • What facts or ideas show ...? • What is the main idea of ...? • Which statements support ...? • How can you explain what is meant ...? • What can you say about ...? • Which is the best answer ...? • How would you summarize ...? 	<p>5. EVALUATING (Making judgments about the merits of ideas, materials, or phenomena <u>based on criteria</u>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you agree with the actions? The outcomes? • What is your opinion of ...? (Must explain why) • How would you prove ...? disprove ...? • How can you assess the value or importance of ...? • What would you recommend ...? • How would you rate or evaluate the ...? • What choice would you have made ...? • How would you prioritize ...? • What details would you use to support the view ...? • Why was it better than ...?
<p>1. REMEMBERING INFORMATION (Knowledge; recalling facts and information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is ...? • How is ...? • Where is ...? • When did _____ happen? • How did _____ happen? • How would you explain ...? • How would you describe ...? • What do you recall ...? • How would you show ...? • Who (what) were the main ...? • What are three ...? • What is the definition of...? 	<p>4. ANALYZING (Breaking down a whole into component parts; examining critically)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the parts or features of ...? • How is _____ related to ...? • Why do you think ...? • What is the theme ...? • What motive is there ...? • What conclusions can you draw ...? • How would you classify ...? • How can you identify the different parts ...? • What evidence can you find ...? • What is the relationship between ...? • How can you make a distinction between ...? • What is the function of ...? • What ideas justify ...? 