

BACKWARD DESIGN MODEL HANDOUT

Course design has traditionally been thought of “*teacher-focused*”: the instructor has the knowledge and it is their job to give the information to the students, and a primary concern is effective teaching. In recent years, there has been a shift in theory towards being “*learner-focused*”: the instructor designs the course with the primary factor of consideration being what the student will know at the end of the course. The backward design model for course design (below) is one approach to take in creating a learner-focused course. It’s called “*backward*” because it starts with visioning the desired results.

Below are the three stages for the backward design model, along with some questions that may help you identify what you want your learners to accomplish in your course.

Stage 1: Identify Desired Results, Determine your Learning Outcomes.

Establish explicit learning outcomes for the course. In determining what your learning outcomes or objectives will be, to try to determine what the “big ideas” at the heart of the discipline are that also have value beyond the classroom. Some questions to ask yourself are:

- What are the three or four most important things I hope students will master during this course?
- What do students in this course need to learn to prepare them for subsequent courses?
- What would I like my students to be doing consistently 5 years from now?
- How can I engender a love of this subject matter that will foster my students’ commitment to lifelong learning?
- Assuming that students will master the content of this course, how might they use this information outside of a philosophy course setting?

–from Whetten, p.345

- To what extent does the idea, topic, or process being considered as an objective reside at the heart of the discipline?
- To what extent will the idea or process have enduring value beyond the classroom?
- To what extent does the idea, topic, or process offer potential for engaging students?

–from Allen & Tanner, p. 86

In writing your Learning Outcomes be sure to check that it ...

- Contains an active verb that describes an observable or identifiable action. Draw on one of the many theories related to preparing learning outcomes such as:
 - Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives
 - Wiggins and McTighe’s facets of understanding
 - Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning
- Focus on the student as the performer,
 - What is the student expected to be able to know?
 - What is the student expected to be able to do?
 - How is a student expected to be able to think?

Stage 2: Determine Acceptable Evidence, Decide on Learning Assessments

Determine what will count as evidence for students having achieved the learning outcomes. This involves deciding how you will assess student learning. Some questions to consider at this stage are:

- Given the stated learning outcomes for this course, how can I best assess student learning?
- How can I effectively assess higher level learning outcomes?
- How can I assess learning in ways that enhance and extend, rather than culminate, students' involvement with the subject matter?
- If I were asked to provide evidence of learning for this course, what would be the best evidence I could provide?

–from Whetten, p.347

Consider what types of assessments will actually reflect your students having learned,

- Exams, quizzes, essays, journals, class discussions, group projects, performances, or something else?

Stage 3: Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction, Plan Learning Activities

This stage involves thinking about how you will help your students learn, the day-to-day running of the course, and the specifics of assignments. Begin to think about the learning experiences and type of instruction your course will take that will help you achieve your learning outcomes. Select course activities that will help to foster active and engaged learning.

And remember, as your course goes on, systematically and continuously align your course design elements and learning outcomes.

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