Creating Assignments to Help Students Think Critically

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A Great Resource!

- *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment* (2nd ed.)
  - Barbara Walvoord & Virginia Anderson
Students Learn What They’re Graded On.

- Grade them on your most important goals.
- Limit the number of outcomes, goals, competencies, & skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This is what you’ll learn how to do.</th>
<th>This is how you’ll learn it.</th>
<th>This is how you’ll show that you’ve learned it.</th>
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“Backwards Curriculum Design”

• Give students sufficient opportunity to achieve every key goal.
  – *Introduce*
  – *Practice*
  – *Demonstrate*
Help Your Students Understand What They Are to Do and Why

• Spend more time giving the assignment and guiding it
• And less time grading it.

» Walvoord & Anderson
Guide Students with a “Prompt”

• Explain what you want students to learn through the assignment (learning goals).
• Aim students in the right direction without giving anything away.
  – *What should the completed assignment look like?*
  – *What resources can they use?*
• Give students the rubric.
• Break large assignments into pieces.
• Ask students to complete a checklist.

– Where do you waste time grading?
Write a Prompt!
• Project and presentation with real life application
• Paper and group presentation on *The Other Wes Moore*
• Build website with solutions to common first-year student problems/challenges.
• Create a guide to deciding on a career path – presentation and pamphlet – for students in any career.
Time to Talk!
Ask Students to Include a Short Reflection on Their Work

- What did you try to learn in this assignment?
- What problems did you encounter in this assignment? How did you solve them?
- If you could start over, what would you do differently?
- What suggestions would you give other students on ways to get the most out of this assignment?
Reflection Helps Students Learn

• Metacognition
  – Learning how to learn by understanding how one learns

• Synthesis
  – Putting pieces together and seeing the big picture
Make Grading Faster & Easier!
How Do You Make Marking Faster & Easier?

• Everything online; use clickable rubric.
• Break down big assignments into smaller pieces.
• Use + check – for smaller assignments.
• Grade each others’ drafts.
• Use paper submissions and rubrics.
• Use a Word list of generic comments; cut and paste.
• Use a cheat-sheet of bullet points they should addressed.
Keep a Log of Time Spent Grading

• How much time do you spend grading each assignment?
  – *How much time do students spend preparing it?*
  – *How much do they learn from it?*

• Balance of time and importance?
Limit the Volume of Grading Information

• Shorter assignments
• Group projects & presentations
• Alternatives to writing
  – Lists
  – Graphs, charts
  – PowerPoint presentations
  – Websites
Use Venn Diagrams to Frame Compare/Contrast

--Virginia Anderson
Get Students Involved

Self-Checklist

Peer Checklists

• Are the tables clear & easy to understand?
• How well is the conclusion supported by evidence?
• List the 3 most important steps the author should take to complete the assignment.

» Mark Curchack, in Walvoord & Anderson
Grade Minor Assignments Simply

+  ✓  -  0

...or spot-check a sample
Establish “Gateway Criteria”

- Do not waste time on careless student work.

» Walvoord & Anderson
Focus Your Feedback.

- Many students don’t read comments.
- Rubrics save time writing comments.
- Mark/comment only on major issues.
- Grading is not editing.

– Richard Haswell’s “Minimal Marking”
# Arriving at an Overall Grade

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Time to Reflect!