

PROMOTING EQUITY WITH TRANSPARENT ASSIGNMENT DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

An important tenet of equity-focused teaching involves “deliberately cultivating a learning environment where students experience parity in achieving positive course outcomes” (University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, 2021). One way instructors can cultivate this parity is by engaging in transparent teaching practices, such as the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT) framework. TiLT is a high-impact assignment design strategy that helps remove barriers to student success by making the learning process more explicit and connecting learners to the “why” and “how” of their learning.

A CLOSER LOOK

The beauty of designing an assignment via the TiLT framework is the simplicity and adaptability of the process. An instructor can retain the essence of any assignment *and* make it more transparent with just a few tweaks. The “TiLTing” process is straightforward and quick. Here’s how to implement it in your assignments.

THREE STEPS TO “TILT” AN ASSIGNMENT

Step 1: Define the Purpose

Explicitly defining the purpose of an assignment is your chance to connect students to the bigger picture of their learning. As you craft an assignment’s purpose statement, be sure to define the:

- Specific skills students will practice/hone from doing this assignment.
- Knowledge students will gain from doing this assignment + how this knowledge will benefit them.

Clarifying the purpose of an assignment is an equitable teaching practice that inspires student achievement in multiple ways. Learners will better understand *why* they are being asked to do the work, *how* it will benefit them, and *how* it is relevant within the context of the unit, the course, and their broader lives. This will gain you more buy-in, increase student motivation, and promote equity by giving *all* students the information they need to succeed.

FIGURE 1. TRANSPARENT ASSIGNMENT TEMPLATE

Purpose	}	relevance to students 5 years out
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Skills practiced▪ Knowledge gained		connection to Learning Outcomes
Task		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What to do▪ How to do it		
Criteria		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What excellence looks like (multiple annotated examples)▪ Criteria in advance to help students to self-evaluate		

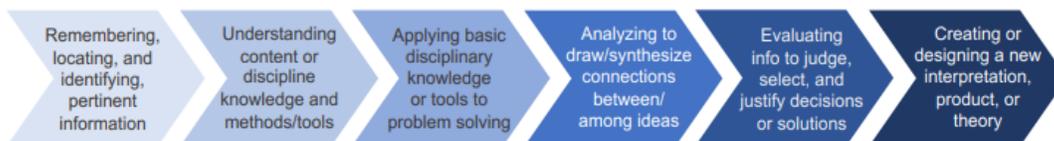
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Source: AACU Peer Review - A Teaching Intervention

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:*

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Source: The Purpose Statement in a TiLTed Assignment - Transparent Assignment Template

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THREE STEPS TO “TILT” AN ASSIGNMENT (CONTINUED)

Step 2: List the Tasks/Instructions

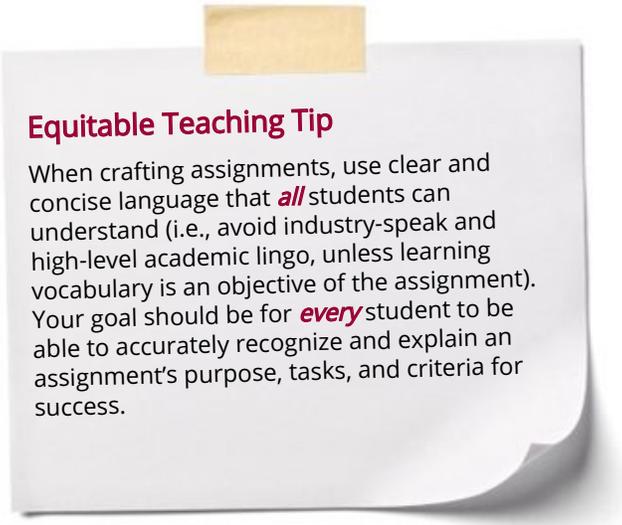
The “Tasks” section of an assignment is where to detail what you expect students to do and how to do it (a.k.a. the instructions). As you map out an assignment’s instructions, consider specifying what mistakes to avoid, so students can move forward confidently within the parameters of the assigned work. With a clear task list in hand, students will spend less time figuring out how to do an assignment and more time actually doing it.

Bonus: Writing transparent instructions will help eliminate the need for students to ask—and you to answer—avoidable procedural questions, which will save everyone time and energy!

Step 3: Define the Criteria for Success

In the “Criteria” section, you’ll lay out the characteristics of successful work. Here’s where you can point students to the assignment rubric (and where to find it) so they know how their submissions will be assessed. No rubric? That’s okay. Just be sure to specify the criteria by which you intend to evaluate your students’ work. Doing so will give them insight into your grading expectations and provide them the opportunity to self-evaluate their work before submitting it.

Tip: Consider including annotated examples of high-quality work, adequate-level work, and low-quality work (or snippets thereof) in the “Criteria” section, so students can more accurately frame performance expectations and make adjustments to their work as they see fit.



Equitable Teaching Tip

When crafting assignments, use clear and concise language that **all** students can understand (i.e., avoid industry-speak and high-level academic lingo, unless learning vocabulary is an objective of the assignment). Your goal should be for **every** student to be able to accurately recognize and explain an assignment’s purpose, tasks, and criteria for success.

TILT BENEFITS AT A GLANCE

Benefits of using the TiLT framework to design transparent assignments include:

- Promoting equitable learning opportunities for **all** students by eliminating confusion in assignment prompts.
- Increasing student buy-in and motivation, as students are able to connect assignments to the bigger picture.
- Ensuring alignment of assignments to unit- and course-level learning goals.
- Having an explicit assignment design blueprint, resulting in better overall organization of course material.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- AACU Peer Review - Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students’ Learning
- TILT HigherEd.com
 - TILT HigherEd Examples and Resources
 - TILT HigherEd Transparent Assignment Template
 - TILT HigherEd Checklist for Designing a Transparent Assignment
- Transparency Framework 1 - Purpose [Video]
- Transparency Framework 2 - Task [Video]
- Transparency Framework 3 - Criteria [Video]
- University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching: Equity-Focused Teaching Strategies