



Course Design and Grading using Learning Outcomes

Once the most important aspects of learning for the course have been established – that is, the course learning outcomes – faculty will want to ensure that the assignments, teaching methods, grading, and other parts of the course are “aligned” to support student achievement of these outcomes. Best practice suggests that readings and assignments listed in the syllabus relate directly and transparently to the learning outcomes. Starting with the learning outcomes, faculty members can ask, “How are these taught in the class? How will I know students have achieved them?”

One way to plan your course around learning outcomes is to create a map connecting course learning outcomes to learning activities as well as ungraded and graded assignments. Each learning outcome should be taught through learning activities and assessed, since learning outcomes represent the most important aspects of student learning in the entire course. A simple map can be created by repeating the rows below for each learning outcome.

Course Learning Outcome: What will students be able to do after successfully completing the course?	What learning activities (in-class work, assignments, projects readings, etc.) will support this outcome? How will students learn this?	How will students demonstrate that they’ve achieved this outcome? How will you assess/grade how well students have learned this?

Remember that students do not always have to demonstrate their learning through formal, graded assignments. Frequent “low-stakes” and classroom assessments can be a useful way for gauging student learning. However, since learning outcomes are statements of the most significant learning in the course, graded assignments should be largely based on student demonstration of these outcomes. Students tend to focus their efforts around what they are graded on, so graded work should emphasize the most important aspects of learning (the learning outcomes).

One common method for consistently evaluating student learning is to use a rubric, which is a type of scoring guide that outlines specific criteria for an assignment. Rubrics vary from simple checklists and numerical rating scales to the so-called “full rubric” used to describe a student’s performance at each of several levels. Rubrics can be developed for any type of assignment, such as an oral presentation, a dance performance, or a research paper. Rubrics are useful for helping students understand the components of an assignment and the grading criteria, and can help faculty grade quickly and consistently and provide effective feedback. More information on rubrics can be found on FIT’s Center for Excellence in Teaching website (www.fitnyc.edu/cet). Workshops on creating rubrics are offered regularly through CET.