

# Five Steps to Effective Course Design

First, you must know what you want your students to know and be able to do when they complete your course. [Dee Fink: Designing Courses for Significant Learning](#), identifies these five steps to effective course design.

## STEP 1: Situational Factors

In Step 1, we start by identifying important situational factors that might affect your course.

Review the following questions:

- What department, college or university outcomes are expected of the course?
- How/where does your course fit into the students' degree program?
- How many students are in the class?
- What level is the course?
- How often will the course meet and how long is each meeting?
- What expectations will the students have of the course and its content?
- What prior knowledge will the students bring to the class?
- What cultural factors might be important to the students' success?
- What is the life situation of the students and how might this affect the class?
- Are there any physical elements that will affect the class?

## STEP 2: Learning Outcomes

Once you can identify the key situational factors for your course (Step 1), you can move on to identifying learning outcomes.

Review the following questions:

- What do you want students to know and be able to do when they complete your course?
- What would you like the impact to be on your students in 2-3 years?
- What key information is important for students to know?
- What key ideas are important for students to understand?
- What kinds of thinking are important for students to learn?
- What skills do students need to gain?
- What kinds of projects should students be able to complete?

- What connections should students be able to recognize?
- What should students learn about themselves?
- What should students learn about others?
- What changes/values do you feel your students should adopt?
- How does the course help students learn how to learn?

## STEP 3: Assessment of Learning

Once you have identified the learning outcomes for your course, you can move on to creating assessments that let you know if the students have met the learning outcomes. **This is a crucial step to knowing if your students are learning.**

There are three types of assessments.

1. *Pre-Assessments*: Pre-assessments are conducted prior to a learning event and help both the student and instructor identify how the student's prior learning will play a part in the course. A short quiz or background knowledge probe can help identify misconceptions about a topic and provide a starting point for instruction.
2. *In-Class Assessments*: In-class assessments happen during instruction. These are designed to gauge where the learner's knowledge base is at a certain point in time. They are generally formative in nature and can help students better understand difficult concepts. They help the faculty understand when and how to move forward from that point.
3. *Post-Assessments*: Post-assessments are generally summative in nature and designed to assess the learner's knowledge after instruction has taken place. The most common form of assessment, these are generally exams, projects and papers done at the end of a course for a grade.

Your syllabus should include all assessments that are given for a grade. Graded assessments should adequately measure the student outcomes listed in your syllabus.

Consider:

- What are the best ways to assess knowledge, skills and attitudes in your course?
- Will you administer exams and/or quizzes?
- Will you require students to write, formally or informally?
- Will your assessments be forward-thinking (require students to solve a problem) or backward-thinking (require students to recall content)?
- What does "quality" work look like in your course?
- Will you incorporate self-assessment and/or reflection?

- How much time do you have to provide quality feedback to students after completion of an assessment?

## STEP 4: Content Delivery

Now that you have identified your outcomes and the assessments you will use in your course, you can begin to think about how you will get your students from point A (beginning the course journey) to point B (success on the assessments). In this step you will begin to think about delivering the course content. What strategies will you use inside and outside of class to help students learn what you think they need to know?

\*Review the **Active Learning Resources** page and use the questions below to help guide you to the ones you use.

- How will students receive information (lecture, reading, viewing)?
- What will you have students doing during class time?
- How will you reinforce learning?
- Will you use technology (Canvas, laptops, etc.)?
- Will your activities allow for reflection?
- Will your activities include direct learning or indirect learning?
- Will you use debates, games or role-play?
- Will you share your own stories or those of others?
- Will you require group or partner activities?
- Will you require activities that take place outside of class?

### REVIEW

Before you get too far along, you should check what you have done so far for alignment. Fink (2003) provides an effective way of reviewing the alignment of your learning outcomes, assessments and activities with the use of a table. Using all of the information about your course you have collected so far, create a table like the one below. Enter each learning outcome and its corresponding assessment, teaching/learning strategy and any resources you might need. Every outcome should have an assessment and a noted strategy. If you are unable to complete these elements, go back to Steps 1-4 until you can complete the table.

Learning Outcome	Assessment	Teaching/Learning Activity	Resources
Outcome 1			
Outcome 2			
Outcome 3			

## **STEP 5: Build the Course**

Now that you have your outcomes, assessments and activities, you can build your course! Two things are essential for this final step in the course design process: A syllabus and a course calendar.

### **CREATE A SYLLABUS**

The syllabus is a document designed to be a contract between you and your students.

South Louisiana Community College requires each faculty member to include certain items in their syllabi. You can find the required information under **Related SLCC Policies & Resources** page.

Make sure you include holidays and other important events in your course calendar.