

# TEACH@ CUNY HANDBOOK

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The Graduate Center Teaching & Learning Center, CUNY



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# Introduction

The primary audience for this handbook is Graduate Center students preparing for their first semesters as college professors in CUNY's classrooms. The handbook has been built in dialogue with students at the Graduate Center who have sought guidance and assistance from the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) in the two years since we opened. Hundreds of GC students have visited our office hours, attended our workshops and other events, emailed us for support, and pulled us aside in the hallway to share suggestions for how we might support their teaching. The TLC team logs these conversations, and has used them to shape both our programming and this first iteration of the Teach@CUNY Handbook.

Teaching across CUNY's classrooms has been a transformative and invigorating experience for thousands of Graduate Center students, and our goal at the TLC is to help current and future GC students successfully navigate their teaching at CUNY. Teaching is challenging for even the most seasoned, committed instructors. Every group of students presents a new mix of personalities, preparedness, and needs. Every semester renews the challenge of translating our scholarship for undergraduates, and making our work and classes accessible. And in every year evolving political and social realities create contexts that impact the lives of both faculty and students, especially those from the diverse and underrepresented communities that make up the majority of the undergraduate population at CUNY.

It is these students that make CUNY's classrooms unique and vibrant spaces, and whose time, labor, and attention should be met by their instructors with a profound sense of duty and responsibility. To

Graduate Center students: teaching at CUNY can enrich and propel both your scholarship and your career prospects, while giving you a powerful way to have a lasting impact on the people of the city. You will also learn *a lot*.

Know that you are not alone in meeting this challenge. The TLC is always available to support you, but there are also dozens of other spaces throughout CUNY that value and create opportunities for the exploration of pedagogy. CUNY's campuses have generous and available teaching centers, vibrant writing programs, resourceful and helpful librarians, engaged department-based organizations, and committed faculty and staff who share the belief that pedagogy is best conceived of as a collaborative, communal pursuit.

What follows offers some practical guidance for students across the disciplines who are just beginning to conceive of themselves as college teachers. It will walk you through course and syllabus preparation, assignment design and assessment, and offer some suggestions for navigating CUNY borne from our collective experiences in the system.

This handbook is not intended to be exhaustive or conclusive, but rather to provide a snapshot of some of our thinking and work at TLC. It will evolve in dialogue with the CUNY community, and the TLC will prepare a second version for distribution in 2018. Please share your thoughts and feedback on the text at <http://handbook.common.gc.cuny.edu>.

*The Staff of the Graduate Center Teaching and Learning Center*  
<http://cuny.is/teaching>  
May 8, 2017

## SECTION 1: Getting Started

*This section offers information and tips on preparing for your first semester teaching. We begin with places and networks where you might want to seek support, offer suggestions about different preparation strategies, and how to imagine different aspects of your course before it begins. The section concludes with guidance for thinking about both accessibility and the use of educational technology in your course.*

### **SUPPORT**

As you prepare for your class, it's helpful to identify early what kinds of support you'll have outside of the classroom. You can expect a range of support from the department and campus where you are teaching, and you can also tap into both formal and informal support networks. Many departments will provide you with answers to the questions below, though you will often need to take the initiative of seeking out this information yourself. The department secretary and department chair are usually the best places to start.

### **Departmental and Campus-Based Support**

#### ***Work Space***

Desk space for adjuncts varies greatly across and even within CUNY campuses, so be sure to ask your departmental contact if you will have an office with space to store materials, hold office hours, and/or meet privately with students; you should also check to see if you'll have access to a computer, photocopier, and printer. Another good question: Will you have a mailbox in the department? Will that mailbox always be accessible to students?

### ***Supplies***

In some departments, printers and photocopiers are stocked with paper; at others, you'll need to ask the department administrator for paper before trying to print or make copies. It's also possible your department may request large print jobs (or any print jobs) be sent to a print shop. Your department may be able to supply you with some very basic materials, such as whiteboard markers, erasers, chalk, pens, and notepads, but it's not guaranteed. Be sure to check before your first day, or bring your own supply.

Your department may have other resources that can assist you in preparing to teach your course. You might ask about sample syllabi and exams, instructional materials, proctoring support and free blue books for exams, or anything else you might imagine might help you in your planning.

### ***Academic Support Services***

All CUNY campuses offer a range of support for instructors and students. These services may include librarians who can work with your students to shape research projects, instructional designers who can support your use of educational technology, writing center staff who can help refine your assignments and work with your students on their papers, tutorial services focused within specific disciplines, offices that support students and faculty with disabilities, and other administrative units. Like most offices at CUNY, however, these units are often overextended and under-resourced, and the earlier you can integrate them into your planning for your semester, the better. For a list of such services by campus, see <https://tlc.common.gc.cuny.edu/navigating-cuny-2/>.

At minimum, you should be aware of what services your campus offers so that you can pass such information to your students via either your syllabus or other means.

*Tip: If you have a disability be sure to reach out to the department in which you will be teaching and inquire about the services the institution might be able to provide. They may be able to offer support and resources for your classroom to accommodate you or your students.*

## **Additional Support**

### ***Peer Networks***

In addition to the resources and services outlined above, another important source of support are your fellow educators: colleagues in the department where you are teaching, in your program at the Graduate Center, and across CUNY who can offer camaraderie, inspiration, and opportunities for collaboration. Consider sharing materials, assignments, and projects with other instructors teaching sections of the same course, or people teaching courses in other departments or even at other schools. Make it a habit to talk with your peers about their experiences in the classroom, and with faculty and staff at both the Graduate Center and the campus where you teach. Teaching can feel like a lonely enterprise, and it's useful to remind yourself that you are part of a community of educators pursuing a shared set of goals.

### ***The Teaching and Learning Center***

The TLC is here to support you. We hold office hours and phone consultations, offer workshops and focused inquiry groups, sponsor experimental teaching through a grants program, and foster the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning within the CUNY context. Don't hesitate to reach out to us to discuss any issue that is impacting your teaching; you can find all our contact information on our web site: <http://cuny.is/teaching>.

## PREPARATION STRATEGIES

It's always advisable to start planning for your courses early. That said, it's not always possible to devote as much time as we might like to planning. Sometimes you might even be asked to teach a class a few days before the semester, or even *after* the semester has begun. Whatever your timeline, it's helpful to keep what's below in mind as you prepare your course.

### Modes of Instruction

First, it's important to understand what kind of course you've been assigned. CUNY offers various types of courses, and uses the following codes to designate how much online time you can allocate in a class. You may be told by your department that you're teaching an "online" or a "hybrid" course, but students will see the codes below in CUNYFirst when they register for classes. Be sure that your understanding of the structure of the course matches the information that students are given when they register.

**P = In-Person.** No course assignments and no required activities delivered online. (Note: this designation does not mean that digital tools won't be deployed in the course. You may still integrate educational technology into your face-to-face class)

This is the default mode of instruction when no other information is given to CUNYFirst about the course.

**W = Web-Enhanced.** No scheduled class meetings are replaced, but some of the course content and assignments, as well as required or optional activities, are online.

*In practice, most courses probably fall under this category, but this needs to be clarified by your department and the registrar so that it can be listed properly in CUNYFirst.*

**PO = Partially online.** Up to 32% of scheduled class meetings are replaced with online activities or virtual meetings. *Between twenty minutes to fifteen hours of required online work per semester could replace time spent in the classroom.*

**H = Hybrid.** Between 33% and 80% of scheduled class meetings are replaced with online activities or virtual meetings. *Between twelve to thirty-seven hours of required online work per semester will replace time spent in the classroom.*

**O = Online.** More than 80% but less than 100% of scheduled class meetings are replaced with online activities or virtual meetings. *Between twenty-eight to forty-six hours per semester will replace time spent in the classroom.*

**FO = Fully online.** 100% of scheduled class meetings are replaced with online activities or virtual meetings. *All of the class work, including exams, is online.*

Note that a major difference between O and FO is that in an Online class, the final exam can be given in person, but in a Fully Online class, the exam must be given online.

Most campuses offer additional support for faculty teaching in modes other than face-to-face. If your department tells you your course is being offered in one of these modes, ask them about resources for faculty in your position. Most importantly, keep the instructional mode in mind when you're designing your course.

## **Creating, Adapting, or Receiving Your Course**

The amount of freedom you have to craft your course will depend on the department and campus at which you are teaching. Figuring out whether you will be creating a new course, adapting an existing one, or receiving a course that's been fully planned (perhaps as a teaching assistant) should be one of your first steps, as it will help determine how you might manage the balance between your work as a doctoral student and your teaching. Even if you are told you have complete autonomy in designing your course, it's a good idea to ask if there are particular learning outcomes for your course and if it's expected they'll be included on your syllabus.

### ***Creating a Course***

When designing a course from scratch, you'll need to budget time to consider how you will organize readings and assignments to satisfy the required learning outcomes. It can be helpful to consult fellow instructors and/or refer to previous syllabi used for this course or similar ones, as reviewing other people's approaches can help you clarify your own. Planning a course from scratch is time consuming, but also an experience that every instructor should have.

### ***Adapting a Course***

You may be assigned a course that has certain required units, but that also allows you space to teach topics of your choosing. This should be made clear to you by your departmental contact. If this is not clear, then ask for clarification about what kinds of flexibility you have in the course.

If you are adapting the course from one previously taught in your department, then it's a good idea to get a copy of the existing syllabus and reach out to any colleagues who taught it in its previous iteration. What worked and what didn't? If they could change something, what would they change?

### ***Receiving a Course***

Some departments will require you to teach a syllabus that's already set in stone, or that allows very little space for modifications. There are always reasons for situations like this, but many times those reasons are not made clear to part-time instructors. You should feel comfortable asking the department why the course is organized the way it is, and when the syllabus was last revised. You should read through the assigned readings and see if the logic aligns with your understanding of the discipline, or whether your approach to the topic is in tension with the one currently represented by the course.

If you are receiving the structure of your course rather than constructing it yourself, it's important that you understand the implicit argument the course is making. If you disagree with the argument, you might raise your concerns with a trusted colleague at the Graduate Center or on the campus where you're teaching, or on a visit to the Teaching and Learning Center's office hours.

If you have been appointed as a teaching assistant for a course, you may have little say in determining the structure or contents of the course, but you can (and should) engage in dialogue with the instructor about the pedagogical rationale behind the course. Developing a strong, collegial relationship with this faculty member is important, and will allow you to ask questions that can improve both your teaching and your experience in the course.

### **Your Students**

CUNY's classrooms are famously diverse. In the same classroom you'll have students just out of high school and students who spent the day taking care of their grandchildren. You may have a classroom with as many first languages as students. Some in your class will be well-prepared for academic work, and others won't.

This range of experiences and identities makes CUNY's classrooms vibrant and interesting places, but it also can make engaging all students equally a challenge. Even the most seasoned and committed faculty struggle to make sure their courses are appropriately responsive to the needs of individual students while also serving the broader curriculum. It's important that beginning faculty members acknowledge and accept this challenge, and commit to making their classrooms the most inclusive spaces that they can be.

### ***Considering Numbers***

The number of students in your class matters. Check your classes' course caps (the number of spots allotted to a particular course or, usually, the number of chairs that can fit in a particular room). You can find course cap information on CUNYFirst (CUNYFirst is the university's integrated resources and services tool, and facilitates course registration, grading, and many other functions at CUNY. If you need training on CUNYFirst ask your departmental administrative assistant).

*Within CUNYFirst, you should also see the following information:*

- a list of the classes you're teaching, with the number of enrolled students/cap for each class
- your assigned classroom
- a roster of enrolled students. If you click on the roster (an icon next to the title of the course), you will find some preliminary information about your students, including their major, if declared, and level

This information is helpful when thinking about who your audience is for the class. Are you teaching a large lecture course or a small seminar? Are they mostly first-year students, or juniors and seniors? What you can do and what you want to do in class is often shaped by how many people are in the course.

*Consider how the following numbers might impact your approach:*

- the type of activities and assignments you're including. (For instance, assigning group projects might make more sense in a larger class than in a seminar, while including opportunities for peer review and individual conferences could work well in a smaller class.)
- the ways you use educational technology. (So, if it's a large group, using an online platform to might provide students hesitant to speak in class another chance to participate in the conversation.)
- the kinds of classroom management strategies that you can implement

### ***Who's Taking Your Class?***

Speak with others at your campus to learn what you can about the student population and student life. Talk to colleagues who have taught there and ask them what they encountered in terms of their students' level of preparation.

Consider whether your course is in a distributed general education curriculum or part of a sequence in the major. What knowledge and skills does the course assume students will have? Many courses are built upon prerequisites and it can be helpful to acquire some knowledge about what your students should have already taken before enrolling in your course. But while a course may presuppose that students will have a certain skill-set, it's not always the case. For this reason, it's a good idea to consider prerequisites as you plan, but also to anticipate how you'll support less-prepared students.

You should also consider how your department is situated within the school, as it will help you develop a sense of what students may expect to get from their time in your course. Does the department where you are teaching offer a major, and if so, how many students are in the

major? Or is it one that's often referred to as a "service department," which offers introductory or skills-based courses to students who will then major in other disciplines? Will the majority of students in your course pursue a career in a different field?

### **Textbooks**

Textbook procurement can be difficult for both you and students. If a textbook is required by the department, ask if there are desk copies on hand for you to use as you prepare. If not, contact the publisher (or get the name of the rep that works with your school and department) and ask for a desk copy. Note that it may take weeks to receive desk copies, so allow time; often, publishers require that books be sent to a departmental address, in which case you may want to alert the department administrator that you're expecting a delivery.

Think, too, about the students. If the department requires a particular textbook, what options do the students have for accessing it? Can they rent it? Are copies placed on reserve at the library? How much is the book, and are there cheaper alternatives? For instance, are used copies widely available for purchase online, or could students use a previous edition instead of the most recent one?

If you are designing the reading list from scratch, think about the range of text options available to you. Do you want to use a textbook, or assemble your own course pack? Is it better to post open-access course material to an online platform, such as your class blog?

Many schools require that you upload your textbook information to CUNYFirst and/or request that you order your textbook directly through the campus bookstore. The date to order books is very early—often it has passed before you've been assigned a course! The bookstore can rush the books for you, if necessary, but you'll need to follow-up (in email or by phone) to confirm that the correct titles and quantities

have been ordered. Frequently bookstores order fewer copies than students enrolled in the course, and they generally return excess copies after the first few weeks of the semester. Is the title something students might have easy access to outside the campus bookstore? Make sure to include the ISBN numbers for all assigned texts on your course syllabus so that students who choose to order the book from an outside source have the correct edition information.

*Tip: Sometimes it takes students some time to get their hands on the book(s). You might think about making the first couple of readings available through other avenues. If you are using an online platform like Blackboard or the Commons, you should upload the materials you want the students to access there.*

## **Classroom Details**

Knowing details about your classroom in advance can help you make decisions about how you'll conduct your class: from seemingly small decisions like how much text you can put on a powerpoint slide (some of those TVs are small!) to what types of group work or are possible. If the classroom to which you've been assigned doesn't fit the needs of your class, you may be able to request a room change. These requests should be made as early as possible and, sometimes, take a bit of negotiating. Depending on the school and department, these questions will be handled through the department or require you to contact the Registrar directly. Always start with the department's program assistant. Just like at the Graduate Center, folks in these roles are best positioned to get things done.

Time permitting, travel to your classroom in advance of the start of the semester. CUNY campuses vary drastically in their set-up, and just

because you know how to get to the campus does not mean you'll be easily able to find your classroom. Depending on the school's security measures, you may need a key to access your room and potentially, a campus ID, and you'll want to be familiar with those requirements in advance.

Doing a trial run of getting to your classroom might also reveal possible safety concerns, especially if your class is scheduled early in the morning or late at night. If you do have concerns about safety, you might try to coordinate getting to and from campus with a colleague, or to make sure you are in a position to walk out with your students at the end of class.

### **Accessibility**

All faculty must be mindful of and vigilant about making their courses accessible. While you will be constrained in the types and levels of accessibility you may be able to offer, it is crucial to keep in mind that students may have a variety of needs that require accommodations and that there are a number of ways you can work to support those needs. Consider how you will organize your course (and your classroom space), the tasks you will ask students to undertake, the materials you will offer them, and your overall instructional approach to ensure that your classroom is as inclusive as possible.

Your campus may have an accessibility statement that you can integrate into your syllabus, but chances are it does not fully capture the scope and range of support needed by students and faculty alike. Frequently, access to online course materials is a primary concern of university accessibility offices, and usually there are services available through a disability office that provide students with additional software or hardware to assist visually impaired students. However, accessibility is a broader concern than this. Students may have mobility impairments, hearing and/or visual impairments, cognitive and/or learning

disabilities, emotional and/or psychological disorders, and speech and language disorders that impact their ability to engage in your class and with your assignments between classes. Even students who do not identify or are categorized as having a disability may have other conditions such as chronic illness. Being mindful of the diverse array of needs students may have will enable you to critically think about how you deliver your course.

Creating accessible courses should start when the course is being conceived and be integrated throughout the course development process. Universal Design for Learning (<http://udlforteachers.com/>) principles argue that educators should design courses and assignments with accessibility in mind at every step of the way, avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches and allowing for options and flexibility. Beginning your course planning with accessibility in mind can save you time during the semester and, most importantly, help ensure that all of your students have the support they need to achieve the goals of your course. The remainder of this handbook will offer suggestions on how you can integrate mindfulness to accessibility into your planning at various points in the semester.

## **Educational Technology**

The opportunities to integrate digital tools are quite vast for a college instructor, and can be overwhelming for someone who's just beginning to explore these approaches to teaching. Whether and how you do choose and combine tools depends entirely on the intersection between your course goals, your comfort with technology, the digital access available to your students and on your campus, and the level of uncertainty you're willing to tolerate in an assignment or a class.

As a faculty member, you'll be able to decide if and how you would like to integrate educational technology into your teaching. Before you start planning your course you should think about the ways

you'll want to communicate with your students, and how you might like to deploy digital tools to connect meetings, foster community, or facilitate specific kinds of writing and multimedia work.

Here are some questions that may help you better understand both your comfort level and goals. Ask yourself:

*How comfortable am I with...*

- new tools?
- fielding technical questions from my students?
- organizing digital spaces?

*Do I want to use technology to...*

- push information out to my students?
- facilitate conversations beyond the classroom?
- create a record of what's happened in the course?
- integrate the open web into my teaching?

### ***Using Digital Tools in the Classroom***

There is no “correct” answer to the question of how much digital technology you should use in your classes. Classes with few digital tools can of course be effective, as can those that integrate many tools, and this holds true across the disciplines. The key is to integrate digital tools into your teaching intentionally and purposefully. In order to do this, you need to develop a clear sense of what role you want the tools to play in your course. You then need to match that sense to an understanding of the affordances of different technologies.

Let's consider an introductory history or philosophy course. You'll likely be asking your students to (a) do a significant amount of reading and perhaps some limited research, (b) write short informal papers and longer, higher stakes papers, (c) participate in class discussions, (d)

attend lectures, and (e) take assessments such as quizzes or exams. It's possible to integrate digital technology in each of these instructional moments in ways that can enhance the experience of your course for both you and your students.

Digital tools can help you easily distribute reading materials and other artifacts to your students, while facilitating the storing and organizing of those materials for revisitation and reuse during or across semesters, or across classes. Delivering materials via the web can also facilitate the easy integration of both open access and primary source materials into the reading your students do.

Also, asking students to write in a networked, digital space (such as a blog) can encourage them to imagine a range of audiences. As such, using a digital space for writing promotes multi- and mixed-media compositional strategies, and can build an archive of your class's reflections that proves useful as students are reviewing for exams or constructing longer pieces of writing. It is also a great opportunity to assess what's worked and what hasn't over the course of a semester.

To learn more about how to integrate digital tools into your course, see the TLC's guide on Educational Technology: <https://tlc.common.gc.cuny.edu/educational-technology/>.

*Tip: Networked digital spaces provide students who are reluctant to participate in class discussions a potentially more controlled environment for engaging with their classmates, course materials, and you. Such reticence in the moment can result from a number of cultural, emotional, intellectual, social, and psychological factors. Digital spaces for informal participation can thus foster a more inclusive learning environment.*

## **DIVING IN**

Whether you have a ton of time to prepare your course, or you have received your assignment within a couple of weeks of the start of the semester, preparation is essential. Thinking through elements like textbook procurement, classroom technology and class size can help you with the practical elements of preparation. As you go forward, though, be sure to make use of both formal and informal support structures as early as possible. Remember that your Graduate Center colleagues can be a helpful source of information, whether you're chatting over coffee, or exchanging syllabi and assignment ideas. And the Teaching and Learning Center is always available to help, no matter where you are in your course preparation process!

## SECTION 2:

# Course and Syllabus Design

*This section offers tips and strategies on course design, with particular attention to understanding your students, constructing and using course learning goals, and building a syllabus. We also offer some information and suggestions for approaching online and hybrid courses. Finally, we wrap up the section by addressing gradebook and recordkeeping strategies and some logistical preparation strategies.*

Now that you've gathered answers to many questions about your classroom, you're ready to begin building your course. Just as there's no one right way to teach a course, there's no one right way to design a course or a syllabus. The most rewarding courses to teach strike a generative balance between the interests of the faculty member, the goals of the curriculum, and the needs of the students. Keeping these ideas in mind as you're building out your syllabus is a good idea, but also a persistent challenge.

### **YOUR STUDENTS**

Why are students taking *your* class?

The answer to this question, especially for beginning instructors, rarely (if ever) has anything to do with your identity as a burgeoning scholar. That identity will *certainly* be why they love the class and remember it fondly after the semester is over. But, we're sorry to say, there is little chance that it has anything to do with why you'll find them sitting in your classroom when you arrive for your first day teaching.

For the most part, CUNY students take classes taught by CUNY Graduate Center students for two reasons:

1. The course is a requirement
2. The course fits within their schedule

If you're lucky, you may have the opportunity to teach an elective course or a course intended for majors in your field, but that will most likely come after you've gotten a few semesters under your belt.

It's a challenge to translate the sophisticated and contested ideas you're grappling with in graduate school to an undergraduate classroom where students come in with wildly differing levels of preparation, needs, and interests. Understanding where the course fits within the curriculum and the role the course will play within your students' college experience can help focus your efforts.

You might ask yourself the following questions: if this is the one history or political science course your students have while on the path to becoming an accountant, or a physical therapist, or a physician, how should that impact the design of the course experience? If you are teaching a composition course in a writing program, how should the likely majors and career paths of your students influence the way you design their writing assignments?

By way of context you should know that in 2013, CUNY instituted a common curriculum called "Pathways" (<http://www2.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/undergraduate-studies/pathways/>) which intended to make it easier for students from CUNY's community colleges to transfer to its senior colleges. Pathways significantly reduced but did not eliminate the autonomy that CUNY senior colleges have over the general education curriculum. It is very likely that the course you're assigned to teach in your first year teaching will be a

Pathways course, and it makes sense to review your campus' Pathways requirements to see how that course fits in.

Another other reason that students may find themselves in your class is because of its timing. CUNY students are busy. Many work full-time, and squeeze coursework in between jobs and responsibilities at home. As such, CUNY's classrooms tend to look different at different times of day: if you teach early in the morning or after five, you may have more older students who work full-time in your class. If you teach during the day, your class may have younger students.

When designing your course, then, it's useful to think about why students will be in that particular class at that particular time, and how the experience may fit into their course of study and their lives.

## **LEARNING GOALS**

Many faculty approach course design by first asking, “what do I want my students to know or to be able to do by the end of our time together?” A “learning outcome” is a statement of what students can be reasonably expected to learn while in your class, during a particular class session, or by completing an assignment. Think of learning outcomes as the skills or set of competencies that your students will walk away with.

Your department may already have outcomes or goals for your course. If they do, seek a clear understanding of these objectives while you're doing your planning. If they don't, then producing your own can help guide you through selecting readings, and designing assignments and assessments.

When you clearly communicate learning goals to students, not only do you make assessment and course design easier, but you also give

students a map and a stronger sense of what's expected of them. “Backwards planning”— where you start with your learning goals and move backwards to assignment and activity design and the selection of course materials—can help you devise the structure for the class and identify moments within it where different kinds of activities make sense.

Keep two things in mind when writing your learning objectives. First, how will the student demonstrate their efforts towards the objective? In other words, what kind of assignments or activities will they be asked to accomplish and how will they move them towards the learning objective? Second, how will you evaluate whether or not the student reached the objective? What assessment criteria will you use?

*The following guidelines can help you create strong learning goals:*

- Learning goals should describe actions that students will be able to perform upon completing a course. Therefore, they differ from descriptions of what we intend to teach.
- When composing learning goals we should think not just about what we want to cover in the course but also about how we will know that students have learned the things we want to cover.
- Goals should be formulated to be as specific as possible.
- If you are going to assess student learning goals separately, then list them separately.
- In writing learning goals, consider using active verbs that represent a student's ability to do something related to the course. For a suggested list of verbs see <https://www.baruch.cuny.edu/facultyhandbook/documents/Bloomverbsrevised.pdf> (note that the verbs “understand” and “know” are discouraged).
- The learning goals you define may be informed by the mode of instruction you intend to use. For example, if you are teaching an online or hybrid course, consider including learning goals that address how students navigate the tools of the course.

## THE SYLLABUS

A syllabus is both a pedagogical document and a practical one. It's an artifact that tells the story of your course, but students justifiably also see it as a contract that will govern your relationship with them while you are together. At minimum, then, your syllabus should be clear and comprehensive. It doesn't have to and shouldn't go into exacting detail on every element of the course, but it should let students know what will be expected of them, what policies they need to be aware of, and how they will be evaluated.

A strong syllabus, however, can do more than this. It can present an argument to students that makes explicit the structure that you've set up for the course. It can present both an arc of the semester and establish guideposts to help your students along the way. It can also capture and make explicit what your values are and what makes your course distinct.

Make your syllabus as accessible as possible: hand it out in class, and post it to your course web site or on Blackboard. If you make any changes during the semester, be sure you distribute and upload the revised version.

Create a hierarchy of what you want to include and be mindful of both the size and the aesthetic qualities of the document you're drafting. A syllabus can be overlong and overstuffed with material that might be more effectively delivered another way. Using clearly delineated headings can help break up a long document and make it easier for the reader to digest. Ask yourself what belongs on your syllabus, and what belongs on a separate document (such as assignment instructions, writing guides, bibliographies, etc.)?

The syllabus should give students practical information about the course, including course name and number, where and when it meets, how and when to contact you, where course materials resides, and any course or departmental policies that students should know about.

*In general, your syllabus should include:*

- Course policies (expectations, a grade breakdown, attendance, late assignment submission)
- Campus policies (plagiarism, accommodations, other required information)
- Course Plan/Schedule (a calendar with reading and assignment due date information)
- Be sure to consider your (or your department's) policies:
- Will you accept late assignments? If so, is there a penalty for submitting material late?
- Will you accept assignments digitally? In hard copy only?
- What are your technology rules? Are students encouraged to research, take notes or read on cell phones, tablets or laptops during class, or do you want your classroom to be a technology-free zone?
- What does a student need to do to be marked as 'present' in your class (bring the required materials? Arrive on time?)?
- Do late arrivals after a certain time count as absences? Does leaving early? How does arriving late or leaving early impact a student's standing?
- Do you have specific policies for exam days or paper submission?

Please see the next page for a sample syllabus template that includes additional details on a syllabus's composite parts. This template is also downloadable and editable at <http://cuny.is/syll-templates>.

## ONLINE AND HYBRID COURSES

Successful online and hybrid courses often require more intensive planning than face-to-face classes. This is especially true if it's your first time teaching in this instructional mode. Graduate Center students may find themselves assigned to teach online or hybrid courses for a number of reasons. You may be approached by a department chair and offered the opportunity to teach in these modes, and receive support in developing your course. You may be recruited specifically to teach online/hybrid courses. You may be applying for a position where teaching in such modes is expected of you. Or, you may even be told, right before the semester, "oh, by the way, your course is completely online. And it starts tomorrow!"

The primary challenge of hybrid or online courses is that there are fewer built-in opportunities to gauge student comprehension in-person. Often students are confused about what faculty expect of them, and this is true of classes in every mode of instruction. In face-to-face classes, this confusion often becomes readily apparent to mindful instructors, but it can be harder to detect online. Careful assignment design clarifies the expectations you have of students in your online or hybrid course. Creating an organized and well-structured course is especially crucial in these contexts. Once you have a structure in place, it becomes easier to carve out time and opportunities for you and your students to improvise.

Here are some guidelines for scaffolding assignments in a partly or fully online course that will offer you multiple opportunities to intervene in your students' knowledge-making process:

- Consider workflow: ask yourself what assignments from face-to-face classes might be better accomplished online. For hybrid classes, design online assignments that prepare students to take full advantage of the time the class spends meeting in person.

- Articulate for students the reasons for assignments, the method of assessment, and the grading process.
- Tie low-stakes and high-stakes assignments together to build upon each other in a gradual progression.
- Construct tasks that give students practice before assessment.

## **GRADEBOOK AND RECORDKEEPING**

Before the semester starts, take some time to figure out how you'll organize your gradebook. Will you keep grades by hand? Use an excel sheet? Grade on an online platform such as Blackboard? As you're setting up your gradebook, keep in mind that students will likely ask you how they are doing in the class during the course of the semester. It will be helpful to you if your grades are in an easy-to-manage space so that you can access current grade information for students.

As you determine how you organize your grades,, you'll also need to think through how you'll calculate them You might start by determining what percentage of the course grade you want exams to be (if you'll have exams). How will you balance papers, homework, participation, presentations, attendance? What other categories should have weight in determining the final grade? Do you have a strategy for quantifying and integrating into your grades information related to the course policies you outline in your syllabus, such as attendance and participation and late assignments? Are your course policies in-line with department and school policies? Remember, not all campuses have the same policies (particularly around attendance) so make sure you check!).

Once you have your big category numbers, begin to break them down. So, if papers are 20% of the final course grade and you have four of them, do you want each to be 5%, or will they be weighted differently? See section five in this handbook for additional guidance on grading and assessment.

Think, too, about your assignment return rule. Are you planning on returning papers the next time you meet? If so, does it help if you have the weekend to grade? Or do you want to avoid weekend grading? Do the students need feedback on the assignment before completing the next homework?

This will help you determine due dates. When you design your course calendar, think also about your life, and be savvy in your scheduling. If you know you have an article due or need to write a paper for a conference, it's probably not ideal to collect a bunch of papers the day before. Sometimes scheduling conflicts can't be avoided, and you certainly don't want to interrupt the flow of your course, but be aware of all factors, and stagger due dates when you can.

Staggering due dates is especially important when teaching multiple classes. It *seems* like a good idea to copy and paste that course calendar for all of your classes, but it's definitely not fun to carry around sixty five-page essays. Think about how long it takes to respond to student work (and how heavy it makes your bag), and consider off-setting assignments a day or two.

Think too about the students' schedules: if you introduced the material on a Tuesday, do students have enough time to understand and implement that material for an assignment due on Thursday, or would they benefit from the weekend? (Depending on the material and your objectives, a case can be made for either option.) Think about the requirements of the assignment and how much time you want to offer students to complete it.

Schools vary in terms of how long students have the right to dispute their grades. Be sure that you know your school's grade change policy. In the event a student initiates a grade dispute, it's important that you have the necessary documentation to support the given grade. Students

may come to you a semester, a year, or even a couple of years after you've had them in your class. You'll likely have engaged with dozens or hundreds of students since then, and the records you keep will be helpful in refreshing your memory.

## **LOGISTICS AND PREPARATION**

Organize your material for distribution or for posting to your course blog or to Blackboard as early as possible. Read or re-read your assigned texts, and if you'll be lecturing, begin to develop your lecture notes and lecture materials. You'll still have to make changes and modify as the course runs, but if you can get as much of the work around generating and organizing material out of the way before the semester, it will save prep time during the semester.

Always make sure that you have well-organized backups of your materials on your computer, assuming that you're using one. Consider creating a "teaching" folder, then a folder for the semester in which you're teaching, and then a folder for each course section that you're teaching. Within each course section's folder, you might create additional subfolders for the syllabus, readings, assignments, grades, handouts, and any other category of materials. The semester will go by quickly, as will the years, and having a clear, consistent method of organizing your materials will be invaluable as your teaching career evolves.

Once you have your reading and assignment schedule mapped out you can begin to break down the semester and figure out what type of preparation is needed. If you're organizing your class into distinct units, think about what needs to happen in each unit, and, from there, in each week or class period. If you're not working with units, perhaps break down your planning using high-stakes assignments

(such as exams or papers) or the calendar as a guide. Look also for natural breaks in the semester that give you more planning time, or an opportunity to catch up.

Once you've divided the semester into smaller chunks, think about when you'll prep for individual class meetings. How much can you get done before the semester starts? Will you have a day in the week that you've set aside for preparation? Think about scheduling your office hours in a way that maximizes them as prep periods (maybe before class to read the assigned reading or after to get a head start on marking papers). Your prep for each class meeting should include:

- Reading or reviewing assigned course material
- Collecting and organizing background material: do you need to read any secondary sources or compile any background information?
- Developing course materials: do you need to prepare a lecture, generate a list of discussion questions, or build supplementary materials such as slides, images or references?
- Crafting assignments: make sure you distribute assignment guidelines well before the due date. If you use a rubric or distribute any format guidelines, make sure you've prepared those as well.
- Generating (and where necessary, printing and copying) questions, quizzes, or problem sets
- Reading and responding to student work: don't forget that assessing can be time-consuming, especially you've never done it before
- Get down the dates that you will meet over the course of the semester. Make sure you note when you won't meet (holidays, breaks, a CUNY Wednesday schedule that meets on Friday, etc.).

## **GETTING FEEDBACK**

It's always a good idea to let a friend or a trusted colleague review your syllabus and give you feedback on both the sense of the course it conveys and how it reads as a document. The Teaching and Learning Center offers extended opportunities for this feedback in the weeks and days before the semester starts; we strongly encourage you to make use of it. Even the smallest tweak to a syllabus—increase the font size of this heading, clarify your language there, are you aware that that Monday is really a Thursday?—can improve the experience of your students.

## SECTION 3:

# Assignment and Project Ideas

*This section offers assistance for assignment design. In addition to helping faculty assess how effectively students are mastering course material, assignments provide the connective tissue between class meetings and give the instructor formative feedback to help them fine-tune their instruction. Here we offer some insights on choosing writing and reading assignments, and provide twelve sample assignments and project ideas that are adaptable across disciplines. Finally, we wrap up this section with providing a few first day of class activities to help you get started!*

### **CHOOSING ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignments rarely go as planned the first time they're taught. If we understand this, we can work to make sure that students find our assignments useful now matter how they turn out, and we can refine them for the next time.

As you plan your course, think about what role assignments will play. Some questions you might want to consider:

- How will your assignments promote student learning? How will they connect to the learning goals of your course?
- Will you use them to assess your students' comprehension of course material, perhaps in the way an exam or a quiz does, or will they help deliver, problematize, and eventually provide an opportunity for students to synthesize course material?
- Will your assignments provide lower-stakes scaffolding for work that builds towards a higher-stakes culminating artifact?

- Do you prefer to vary the types of assignments you'll require, and if so, how will you decide what to assign and when?
- What kinds of assignments will be necessary to prepare students for the course requirements you've laid out? For example, many courses require students to make in-class presentations. How might preparation for these presentations inform earlier assignments?
- How might secondary course objectives inform your assignment design? If you're interested in students working with technology in the classroom, for instance, could you design an assignment that makes use of the technology you're exploring?
- If you're breaking your course into modules or units, might it be beneficial to think about assignments in terms of micro (unit-specific) goals, and macro ones that ask students to make connections across units?
- How will you represent these assignments on your course syllabus? One option is to include a three-column table that lists, in the first column, the date; in the second column, the reading due; and, in the third column, assignments due. Another option is to include a table or list of key due dates on your syllabus. Since you want your syllabus to be a manageable document, consider passing out or posting assignment-specific instructions in a separate document.

## **SELECTING READING ASSIGNMENTS**

There's no magical number of pages that's perfect for each and every course or class meeting. Steve Volk, director of the Center for Teaching, Innovation and Excellence at Oberlin College, offers some general guiding questions: What do you want the reading to do? Where does the reading come in the course, and will this impact your students' ability to complete it? Can less reading be more impactful? If students are novices in our field, how should that impact our expectations for their reading?

As you consider how many pages of reading to assign, make sure you're clear—both in your planning and when you communicate with your students— about what *kind* of reading you expect students to do. For instance, do you expect them to engage in close reading and to annotate carefully? Skim for the main ideas? Don't assume your students know how you expect them to engage with different kinds of artifacts. During the semester, it could be beneficial to model the reading practices you expect, or to give students guidelines or materials that help encourage those practices. One possibility is to share a text you've annotated, or to annotate a text together using an overhead projector or online annotation tools.

As you're picking texts, consider what you want students to do with the material before reading, while reading, and after they've engaged with it. Do some texts open up options for place-based or problem-based assignments that would allow students to take a more active role in their learning? Do some texts pair nicely with one another for comparative assignments, or provide usefully divergent points of view? What type of assignments do you plan to build out of the readings, and, inversely, how might the assignments for the course help you determine reading options?

When selecting readings, make sure that students have the access and time necessary to fully engage with them, though also be prepared for some of your students not to have completed the readings before class! You should also consider:

- The type of text (theory, novel, textbook chapter, philosophy, poetry, etc.)
- What you want students to do with that text (close-read, skim, pull out central argument, etc.)
- What you want the text to do (provide background context, be the basis for class discussion, supplement the lecture, etc.)

## SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT AND PROJECT IDEAS

The twelve assignment and project ideas below can be scaffolded, aligned with common learning outcomes and skills, and adapted across disciplines. This list is not exhaustive or prescriptive. Rather, these examples represent the various types of activities that you may ask your students to undertake and are intended to generate creative thinking and adaptation.

Each category includes a brief description of the assignment, skills that can be developed and assessed through the assignment, and some tips and notes.

### 1. Review of the Literature

*Description:* A literature review is a scholarly paper focused on synthesizing current knowledge and major contributions to the area of research that students are interested in pursuing. This is a useful method of enabling students to become more familiar with scholarship on a particular topic. If assigned as part of a larger research project, completing a literature review also provides students with the opportunity to contextualize their research interests and ideas, and/or refine their research questions. This assignment works very well across the disciplines, and can function as a precursor to a research project or as a stand-alone assignment.

#### *Learning Outcomes:*

##### Intermediate-to-Advanced Research Skills

- Collect and analyze literature and data to address a research question.
- Identify relevant sources needed and required for the research project

##### Critical Thinking/Analysis Skills

- Evaluate claims and arguments in a text.
- Draw connections between and contextualize a series of texts.

### Persuasive Writing Skills

- Construct a clear and cohesive rationale for research project through writing.
- Integrate elements from secondary sources into your narrative.

## 2. Site Visit Report or Reflection

*Description:* A site visit is a great opportunity for students to connect theory to practice. This is especially powerful in a discipline that is preparing students to become practitioners in their respective fields. You should consider pre-selecting a list of sites where students may visit, and think through ways in which the site can provide opportunity for students to reflect on or develop an awareness of praxis.

The site visit can be conceived as a place-based learning assignment. Guidelines for the report or reflection can function as a means of facilitating how you want the students to engage and interact with the space. It could be beneficial to include a set of questions or prompts for guidance.

### *Learning Outcomes:*

#### Critical/Analytical Thinking Skills

- Connect theory to practice or real-world applications, and make sense of an experience within a larger framework.
- Test, challenge and/or problematize theory by examining how it works in practice.

#### Narrative Writing

- Construct a clear and cohesive narrative.
- Employ writing to reflect on theory and practice.

### *Notes:*

You may consider asking the students to take photographs or record audio if and when it is appropriate and permitted, and integrate visual media into a final report or reflection on a digital platform.

While this assignment can work well as a group visit, be mindful that off site visits can be difficult to schedule with a large group of students. It is important to be mindful of student's schedules and accessibility issues when designing this assignment.

### 3. Case Study Report

*Description:* For the case study report students are invited to identify a relevant site for doing research, and then use appropriate methodology to gather data from that site. Students are then invited to engage with theories presented in class to contextualize their findings. Alternatively, students can be provided with published case studies and asked to analyze them using disciplinary criteria. In this version the focus can be placed on evaluating and critiquing the methodology and/or findings of the case study.

#### *Learning Outcomes:*

##### Intermediate-Advanced Research Skills

- Analyze and evaluate research tools and methodologies.
- Read and interpret scientific measuring instruments and research findings.
- Design a method of collecting data from the site

##### Critical Thinking/Analytical Skills

- Identify connections between theory and practice.
- Evaluate best practices for data collection.
- Examine and critique research findings based on a disciplinary standard or course criteria
- Weigh the validity of claims based on a careful analysis of how evidence is used and claims are supported.

##### Close/Critical Reading:

- Conduct a thoughtful analysis of the text, and evaluate the argumentation and claim presented.

*Notes:*

This assignment is suitable for midterm or final assignment as a vehicle to assess students' comprehension of research methodologies and analytical skills. It is an opportunity for students to practice evaluating how theory fits into real-world applications. Students can also practice using disciplinary language as they engage with doing or analyzing a case study. Alternatively, this assignment can work as a low-stakes in-class group activity if they are using pre-existing case studies. Consider modelling a case study with the students before asking them to undertake this assignment.

#### **4. Scavenger Hunt**

*Description:* For this assignment, students are provided a list of types of sources or artifacts that they are required to locate. You may consider asking students to create a reference page/bibliography of their sources, and even annotating them if appropriate. This is an practical introductory exercise to doing academic research. By encouraging students to intentionally search for relevant materials you provide the conditions for students to use library resources and the opportunity to expand their repertoire of different types of sources and research available. The scavenger hunt also offers up opportunities for collaborative group work.

*Learning Outcomes:*

## Basic Research Skills

- Locate appropriate sources
- Differentiate between primary and secondary sources,
- Cite in proper disciplinary style

## Collaboration skills

- Communicate and coordinate with peers (either in person or virtually) towards a common goal.

*Notes:*

The scavenger hunt is suitable for the early part of semester in courses that might need students to develop academic research skills. It can be used as a primer for research projects later in the semester. It is also a good opportunity for early exposure to materials students might need to know later. Depending on campus or time constraints, some component of the hunt can undertaken during the class session if there is easy access to library and computers. Alternatively, this assignment can be adapted to use at a museum or another site that invites students to find particular artifacts.

**5. Interview**

*Description:* Conducting an interview provides students with opportunities to engage in collecting their own primary source data. Depending on the needs of the course, this assignment can be couched within a larger research project that invites students to contribute primary source data. It can also work as a stand-alone exercise. You may ask the students to then present their interview findings in the form of an edited video, as part of a research project or a short essay.

*Learning Outcomes:*

## Intermediate-Advanced Research Skills

- Design a basic interview protocol
- Conduct an interview using appropriate methodology
- Record and report findings in an appropriate format.

## Descriptive or Narrative Writing Skills

- Construct appropriate interview questions
- Describe the process of gathering data in a written format
- Communicate research findings in a clear and descriptive written narrative

## Oral Communication Skills

- Effectively pose interview questions

*Notes:*

This assignment provides opportunity for students to engage in making original contributions to a research project. By asking them to step outside of the class and draw on resources around them, this assignment empowers students to engage in knowledge construction. Consider coupling this with a site visit or case study if you want to guide the students through a project.

**6. Survey**

*Description:* To engage students in quantitative research methods, designing and implementing a survey is an effective exercise that enables them to grapple with the process of data collection. Students can gather data by using a range of free online tools, and can work individually, in pairs or small groups. Findings can be integrated into a larger research project, or as a stand-alone presentation or report.

*Learning Outcomes:*

## Intermediate-Advanced Research Skills

- Design a basic survey
- Record, report and cite findings in an appropriate format.

## Collaboration skills

- Communicate and coordinate with peers (either in person or virtually) towards a common goal.

## Digital Literacy Skills

- Engage digital technology to collect data.

## Writing Skills

- Construct clear, concise and appropriate questions

*Notes:*

Creating and implementing a survey does not have to be complicated or grand in scope, and students do not have to necessarily become trained survey-makers. Rather, this assignment can function as a rich opportunity for students to make decisions about data collection.

There are a number of easy and free digital survey tools that students can use to create and implement their survey.

## **7. Speakback/Feedback**

*Description:* This reading assignment provides the conditions for students to engage and interact with a texts closely. For the Speakback/Feedback paper, students are asked to respond to a written piece with critical comments, questions and ideas. This can be done on the margins of a text or as a separate document. You may consider integrating an annotation tool if you want students to do the work digitally. This assignment works well for responding to feedback as well. Students can be asked to write a response to instructor feedback, with an emphasis on how they will develop their work by integrating the feedback.

*Learning Outcomes:*

Close/Critical Reading Skills

- Conduct a thoughtful analysis of a text by evaluating the argumentation, claims, and/or use of evidence presented.

Critical/Analytical Thinking

- Formulate responses to an argument.
- Weigh the validity of claims based on a careful analysis of how evidence is used and claims are supported.

*Notes:*

The Speak Back/Feedback Assignment provides an excellent low-stakes opportunity to use an online reading tool and for students to digitally interact with a text together or individually. There are a number of annotation tools that can facilitate this process. It is also an effective way to ask students to engage with your feedback on their work. By asking them to write a short paper on how they might incorporate your suggestions, it enables them to critically consider the feedback and draw up a plan of action for the next draft or phase of their larger assignment.

## 8. Blogs

*Description:* Students are invited to utilize an informal digital platform to express ideas and responses to course material. Instructors can use weekly prompts to enable students to write frequently, or can assign the blog as a supplement to a more formal assignment as a means of documenting the process of learning. Journaling or blogging can function as a good low-stakes and informal platform for ongoing dialogue between student's own ideas and course material.

### *Learning Outcomes:*

#### Narrative Writing/Creative Writing Skills

- Position one's experiences within a larger social, cultural or political context through writing about the self.
- Deploy reflection and storytelling as a space to learn and share ideas.
- Cultivate awareness of different audiences
- Practice writing in a digital, networked environment about a range of media

#### Reflexive/Critical Thinking Skills

- Develop appreciation for subjectivity, and position identity issues (racial/ethnic/class/cultural/gender/sexuality/ability) within a political, social, cultural, psychological or inter-personal context.

#### Digital Literacy Skills

- Engage digital technology to build a presence online.
- Develop aesthetic sensibilities about presentation of work.
- Cultivate and understanding of privacy issues related to sharing work online.

### *Notes:*

Before asking students to engage in journaling or blogging, it is advisable to provide them with a platform to do so, and an overview on how to use available tools. We tend to forget that students have

widely varying degrees of comfort and literacy with digital technology. Getting a lab space with access to computers for a portion of a class session and giving a quick tutorial could be extremely helpful for providing adequate support structures.

## 9. Wiki

*Description:* A Wiki assignment is a rich opportunity for students to engage in producing and contributing to a live body of knowledge. Students are invited to edit or contribute to a Wikipedia page. This work can be undertaken individually or in a small group. Wikis have become increasingly popular and relevant to the college classroom, and CUNY has a number of resources on teaching with/using wikis in the classroom.

### *Learning Outcomes:*

#### Intermediate Research Skills

- Locate relevant and appropriate sources.
- Use appropriate citations.

#### Collaboration Skills

- Communicate and coordinate with peers (either in person or virtually) towards a common goal.

#### Writing Skills

- Summarize and synthesize relevant texts and materials into concise pieces of writing.

#### Digital Literacy Skills

- Engage digital technology to build a presence online.
- Cultivate and understanding of privacy issues related to sharing work online.

### *Notes:*

Wiki assignments can be scoped down to a classroom activity, or scoped up to a final project. Students can engage with larger socio-political issues about knowledge construction by collaborating on and

negotiating the process of adding content, and essentially contributing to knowledge beyond the scope of the class. It is advisable to conduct a workshop or demonstration somewhere with computer and internet access. Consider reaching out to your college librarian for support and resources.

## **10. Autobiography/Autoethnography**

*Description:* A reflexive personal essay can hold great potential for students to position themselves within a social, cultural or political context. Both the autobiography (a narrative about oneself within a focused context) and the auto-ethnography (a research methodology that uses self-reflection to position one's experiences within a larger social context) can be effective tools for empowering student voice and positionality.

### *Learning Outcomes:*

#### Narrative Writing Skills

- Utilize writing to examine positionality and engage with a larger social, cultural or political context.

#### Critical Thinking Skills

- Develop appreciation for subjectivity, and position identity issues (racial/ethnic/class/cultural/gender/sexuality/ability) within a political, social, cultural, psychological or inter-personal context.

### *Notes:*

Writing an autoethnography or autobiography has been used across the disciplines. Whether you are teaching in the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Humanities, Arts, or in a STEM discipline, inviting students to critically reflect on their positionality within a specific context is a rich opportunity to engage them in the material, and for you to better understand your students. It would be helpful to hand out a few texts that model the assignment. You could also consider asking students to

integrate visual media, whether on paper or on a digital platform. Be aware that this assignment is personal in nature so it is important to keep that in mind as you facilitate the assignment, and consider how you ask students to share their work.

## 11. Anthology

*Description:* Students are invited to demonstrate their knowledge of a body of literature, and formulate an understanding of key theories and debates within a field by bringing into conversation a collection of texts. By curating book chapters, articles, poems, songs, letters and other relevant items. Students must contextualize the collection by writing an introduction and conclusion that frames the themes and ideas they have presented.

### *Learning Outcomes:*

#### Intermediate Research Skills

- Select and curate a collection of relevant literature for a project.

#### Critical/Analytical Thinking Skills

- Construct a claim or argument based on a careful analysis of a body of literature.

#### Digital Literacy Skills

- Engage digital technology to build a presence online.
- Develop aesthetic sensibilities about presentation of work.

#### Persuasive Writing Skills

- Present a compelling and cohesive rationale for the literature selected.

### *Notes:*

This assignment works very well for courses that require a deep understanding of a body of literature. The Anthology can function as an effective final project that asks students to engage with key themes, debates and/or discourses in a body of literature.

You may scaffold the project by asking students to complete components of the assignment over the course of the semester (like annotating one text at a time and creating a project proposal with a rationale for their collection). Consider bringing in one or two anthologies that can function as a model for the students. You may also consider asking students to use digital technology to curate the collection online.

## **12. Portfolio**

*Description:* Asking students to produce a portfolio of their work can be an effective way to facilitate their understanding of the connections between assignments and course materials throughout the semester, and to encourage students' metacognitive awareness about their own learning. This project invites students to construct, edit and curate their work throughout the semester into a print or digital portfolio that can be shared or presented at the end of the semester.

### *Learning Outcomes:*

#### Information Literacy Skills

- Select and curate a set of artifacts.

#### Digital Literacy Skills

- Engage digital technology to build a presence online.
- Develop aesthetic sensibilities about presentation of work.
- Cultivate an understanding of privacy issues related to sharing work online.

### *Notes:*

If you decide to use the portfolio project, be sure to introduce it relatively early in the semester. This can be a great method to encourage students' taking ownership of their voice and reflecting on their own intellectual development. This is also a wonderful option for summative assessment.

## FIRST DAY OF CLASS ACTIVITIES

On the first day of class faculty too often merely distribute the syllabus and release students early. This approach misses an opportunity to set a tone for the semester, to begin to establish rapport with your students, and to help them understand the kinds of work you'll all be doing together. The suggestions below offer creative alternatives to the bland "syllabus day" approach, and have been drawn from Graduate Center faculty and students. These originally appeared as part of the Teach@CUNY series on *Visible Pedagogy* (<http://cuny.is/vp>).

### Writing a Recipe of Yourself: By Anke Geertsma

This semester I'm trying out a new first day of class activity. Rather than just asking for students to briefly introduce themselves, I want to ask them to write a recipe for themselves. I'm thinking of titles such as "Recipe for Sweet Steven" or "How to Make a Delicious Helen." I'll encourage students to be creative: tell what has gone into making them, such as personal or ethnic backgrounds, languages and experiences, but also what they care about and what motivates them. They can include a photo of what the recipe looks like when it's ready (a selfie or something that stands for who they are).

I'll explain the activity and ask them to write down some thoughts in our first class. During this first class I also plan to have them share some thoughts in small groups so that they can get to know each other already. I'm teaching a hybrid class with a course site, so I'll ask them to publish their recipes online, but this type of activity would of course also work in a regular class by asking students to bring their recipes the second class and sharing them (in small groups or with the whole class).

Besides introducing themselves, I also hope to direct my students' focus to different genres of writing, for, while most students won't

immediately think of the recipe in these terms, it's a genre just like the essay or an epic poem. I'll ask them to consider the genre's components (list of ingredients, directions, cooking time) and mimic these features in their recipes for themselves. Let's see how it goes!

*Anke Geertsma is a TLC Fellow and a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature*

### **First-Day Free-Writing: By Luke Waltzer**

My hope for the first day of class is to help students see how we'll move as a learning community towards the goals of the course. After we all briefly introduce ourselves, we review the syllabus. Students should see the arc of the semester, the logic of selected readings, the intentionality and connection of assignments, and the space that's available for modification. They should see a structure, but also how we might improvise.

A syllabus review is not enough, however. It's crucial that students begin the course with an understanding of their roles and responsibilities. I ask them to do some free-writing about their points of entry into and goals for the course, and then they share what they've come up with. This exercise makes clear that they will be expected to be active participants in the classroom space, engaging, contributing their thoughts, bolstering the structure. There can be no hiding. This sometimes makes students uncomfortable, which is not necessarily a bad thing; good things can happen in a classroom when one grows comfortable with one's own discomfort.

The prompt I give takes different shapes depending on the nature of the class. For instance, in the DH Praxis course, students are expected to produce a working prototype of a digital project by the end of the

semester, and the process requires significant attention to the rhetorical choices that come with project development and advocacy. On the first day students composed a tweet about their proposed project, and the enabling constraint of 140 characters emphasized the need for and challenges of precision, clarity, and simplicity when discussing complex projects. Returning to this exercise throughout the semester helped students recenter their understandings of their work, which is important when things are moving quickly. Courses that are less pressure-packed than DH Praxis, such as survey-based courses, have had prompts oriented to helping students situate themselves and their histories within the context of the course. By the end of the exercise, they should feel some ownership over and investment in the space we will all build together, and a readiness to work.

*Luke Waltzer is the Director of the Teaching and Learning Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY, and a member of the doctoral faculty in the Interactive Technology and Pedagogy Certificate Program.*

### **Imagining Artworks: By Joy Connolly**

On the first day, I like to ask students the following questions. Imagine a non-verbal artwork — a musical composition, a painting, a sculpture, a digital image — that captures what you think an ideal class should be and feel like. Is it a jazz band or choral performance, where instruments or voices resonate with one another? Or the glorious chaos of a painting by Jackson Pollock? What kind of intellectual dialogic experience does your artwork convey?

The students describe their pieces and explain their reasoning. It's a creative, encouraging way to explore and open up students' ideas of what a classroom experience should be. For myself, I offer the picture of a sculpture by Anthony Caro.

For me, it embodies three important ideals: ideas and arguments burst forth from a level floor, conveying the dynamism and equity I value in the classroom, and it is slightly awkward, the L shape in front dominating the smaller planks in the background — like so many classes, with some voices louder or more frequent than others, but still maintaining an essential balance.

To imagine the classroom in aesthetic terms also allows the students to think of their contributions as artistic gestures made in collective space, which both challenges and frees them to think creatively and contribute more frequently. When this exercise works well, the classroom becomes an artwork that it is up to them to create — a memory whose effect can ripple through the entire semester. I occasionally end class meetings with the question of which artwork that particular class recalled — which allows for a peculiarly reflective and insightful self-criticism on all our parts.

*Dr. Joy Connolly is the Provost and Senior Vice President of the Graduate Center and a Professor of Classics.*

## **Exploding the Text: By Wendy Tronrud**

On the first day of class, I like to end with the “Explode the Text” exercise detailed below. As a strategy, “Explode the Text” requires all students to participate aloud and to collaborate in the meaning making process with a complex and challenging text; it opens up interpretive possibilities, rather than directing students to answers, and it builds in differentiation and student-choice. Thus as a first-day exercise it models so much of what we want students to do for the semester as a community and as individuals, and it is perfect for a class that does not know each other yet.

**Step 1:** For the “explode the text” exercise, I begin with a poem that is complex but relatively brief (I’ve used Hayan Charara’s “Elegy with Apples...” or Seamus Heaney’s “Digging”). It is helpful to have a poem around 20 lines or so. The teacher reads the poem aloud in this exercise, while students have their own specific tasks.

**Step 2:** Once all students have a copy of the poem before them, I introduce the activity, explaining to students that as I read aloud, they should underline any line(s) that stand out or speak to them in some way. This ensures that students have a choice as to their entry point into the poem and allows them to appreciate and respond to a smaller section of language without the pressure of having to immediately grasp the poem as a whole. For a class of students with varying skill levels, this choice of entry point is essential; each student can choose a line whose language s/he feels more comfortable working with given my expectation of whole class participation.

**Step 3:** After I’ve read the poem aloud for the first time, students are given 3-4 minutes in which to freewrite using their choice of line as a starting point. I explain that the freewrite should and can take them wherever it needs to as the “explode the text” exercise is about opening up the complex language and connotations of a given poem through the images, associations and personal responses students bring to it. I encourage students to freewrite directly on the poem handout.

**Step 4:** I then read the poem a second time, and this is where the text is “exploded.” As I get to the line a given student chose, the student interjects his/her free-write aloud to the class. When I get to the end of the poem, every student in the class has “exploded the text” with his/her associations, ideas, images, etc.

**Step 5:** After this collective experiment, I open whole class conversation around any observations or reflections students have about the process, experience or poem. For instance, a number of students may choose the same line to freewrite from or a number of students may bring similar or conflicting connotations to various lines and all of this makes for great discussion. This part can take a more directed exploration of the text (perhaps you have questions you want students to consider), but I think what's important is to first ask students to reflect aloud or in writing about the process of this strategy and what they noticed and learned from it.

*Wendy Tronrud is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the Graduate Center and an instructor at Queens College and a Writing Associate at The Cooper Union.*

## SECTION 4:

# Grading and Assessment

*Grading and assessment will take a significant amount of your time and labor as a college instructor. There are of course a wide range of approaches that can be deployed. What's below is intended to help you develop strategies for responding to student work that are efficient, purposeful, and productive. We offer tips on grading and giving feedback to student writing, and guidance grading rubrics. This section concludes with some information on understanding FERPA, and accreditation.*

### **ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

The first steps in developing a strategy for assessing student work is to figure out what you're looking for from your students, and how you want them to interact with your feedback. Examine your learning goals and think about what kinds of skills you want your students to practice and how you ultimately want them demonstrate what they've learned.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of approaches to assessment: formative and summative.

- Formative assessments allow the instructor to modify their teaching to better match the needs of the students. Formative assessments can be high-stakes (i.e. represent a significant portion of the grade), but they are usually low-stakes.
- Summative assessments tend to be higher stakes, and measure student performance against a standard set by the instructor. They generally come at the end of an instructional moment or unit.

Pick your assessment strategy for a specific reason. If, for example, you assign a set of math problems, you might choose to spot check five out of twenty, or you might check all of them and simply mark them as correct or incorrect, or you might highlight the line in the work where the solution goes astray, etc. Each option has an increasing time commitment on your end, and it's important to know why you're doing what you're doing. If you want to mark where the problem goes astray, are you planning on asking the student to rework the problem? If you spot check five, will students compare their other answers before you move on to the next set or will you post the solutions? Are you spot checking because you want to indicate quickly to the student where she stands with the material?

Think, too, about where the assignment falls in the sequence of assignments for the course. Is it a stand-alone assignment or one of a number assigned throughout a unit? Or perhaps it's part of a scaffolded project? If the type of assignment will be repeated, then you might want to give the students a few comments about how she needs to adjust her response in order to meet what you hope to see next time. If several of students have made the same wrong turn, then rather than writing comments to each of them (time!), you might take a few minutes in the next class and explain the misstep, perhaps with an example, or post a model response online so that students have a template for the next assignment. If the assignment will lead directly into another one, you might offer comments to help the student bridge the two: what does she need to do in order to strengthen her next benchmark in the sequence?

Finally, consider the stakes of the assignment. If it's a low-stakes task, then your assessment method should also be relatively brief and "low-stakes." In order to manage your time, think about what you want to see the student accomplish through the assignment, and mark accordingly.

Ultimately, the prompts for your assignments should indicate to your students what your expectations are for the tasks you are asking them to complete. You might use that prompt as an informal or formal guide (rubric) for how you'll respond to the work.

*Accessibility Tip: Be aware of the needs of your students when you are designing an activity and a mode of assessment. For example, if you are going to administer an in-class quiz, be mindful of students who may need extra time. Similarly, if you require students to orally present their projects, be sure to think about how you will support students with speech impediments.*

## GRADING AND FEEDBACK

One of the biggest frustrations for instructors is spending hours marking papers with amazingly helpful and detailed comments, only to see students immediately to drop them, unexamined, into the depths of an overstuffed backpack. If you want students to examine and implement the feedback you're giving them, it might be helpful to build either an assignment or a step of an assignment that asks students to engage with previous feedback. (You could also check out the "Speak Back/Feedback" assignment in Section 3.) If it is important for students to utilize your feedback, you can ask them to write a response paper or cover letter for a subsequent draft addressing how they will incorporate suggestions.

## GRADING RUBRICS

Rubrics break down the assignment expectations into categories and enable students to complete an assignment with those specific categories in mind. They offer instructors the opportunity to check how well students have mastered targeted skill areas. Rubrics can save instructors grading time since they offer a way to communicate outside of marginal comments or line edits. Further, rubrics take subjects or assignments such as oral presentations and essays that are frequently seen as “overly subjective” and demonstrate a the rationale behind the grade. While rubrics are commonly thought of as a tool for instructors, they can also be useful for students as they complete an assignment, and can provide clarity on criteria for peer review and group projects.

It’s often helpful to distribute the rubric alongside the assignment.

For you, the process of generating a rubric will ensure you have clear expectations and targets for the assignment, and it will also give you a way to ‘proof’ the assignment directions. For students, it not only supplements the expectations and requirements of the assignment, but also frames those expectations in a different format. You can refer to the rubric during class when you’re working on a particular skill that relates directly to what students will be asked to do in the assignment.

If you’ll use a single rubric or one that is extremely similar throughout the course of the semester, consider passing it out outside the context of an assignment and spending some time as a class or in small groups annotating the various categories. Ask students to return to their annotated rubric throughout the semester and revise or add to it as necessary.

Rubrics often resemble a grid or chart with the skill listed in one column and the success level of that skill indicated in rows (or vice versa). Some rubrics include detailed descriptions of expectations for each category while others indicate level of mastery. There are many existing rubrics that you can take in full or modify for your classes.

- Carnegie Mellon University's Eberly Center has collected rubrics for a range of assignments including papers, projects and oral presentations. Check them out at <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/rubrics.html>.
- UC Berkeley's Graduate Division's Teaching and Resource Center has a list of examples for a range of disciplines as well: <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/grading-intro/grading-rubrics/rubrics-examples/>.
- DePaul's Teaching Commons gives examples and breaks down the advantages and disadvantages of different rubrics at <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching-guides/feedback-grading/rubrics/Pages/types-of-rubrics.aspx#analytic>.
- This rubric was shared by Jade Davis of LaGuardia Community College: <http://cuny.is/essayrubric>.

To generate your own rubric, think about what your assignment is designed to measure and what its objectives are. Make a list of components you want to see in the assignment and arrange the list in categories.

Be sure to consider the following when designing your rubric:

- List the skill categories on your grid in order of most to least important (heavily weighed to least heavily weighted in terms of grading)
- Be mindful of how many categories can fit on a page.
- Return to your learning goals and incorporate that language into your rubric

- Write out a description of what each evaluative category means both in terms of grade range and in terms of specific criteria. So, for example, a “proficient” thesis statement puts a student in x grade range and requires that the statement has a, b, and c elements.
- Test your rubric against the assignment instructions. Do they mesh? Does the assignment indicate the categories that appear on the rubric?

## RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

Responding to students’ writing effectively and efficiently takes practice. Ideally, you want to find an approach that is both useful and generative for students *and* mindful of your own labor as the instructor. It is likely that you will at least occasionally find yourself needing to read and respond to a lot of student writing quickly, so it is useful to develop strategies for commenting on student work that aren’t overly time-consuming.

The good news is that when it comes to providing your students with feedback, more is not necessarily more! Research suggests that students often benefit from an approach called “minimal making,” in which instructors refrain from correcting students’ superficial errors, and direct them instead to find and correct those errors themselves. Instead, instructors focus on crafting a global comment that identifies what the paper is doing, and doing well, and then notes a few specific areas for revision. In addition, there are a number of other strategies you might keep in mind when commenting on students’ written work—many drawn from Chapter 16 of John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas* (an invaluable resource for instructors teaching writing across the curriculum):

- Allow students to revise the papers they submit, so that you can design your comments with an eye to prompting revision. That way, students see your feedback a step in a writing *process*—rather

- than a “postmortem” on a final product.
- Focus on “higher order” concerns—like a paper’s ideas and organization—before turning to “lower order” ones, like sentence errors.
  - Instead of marking students’ sentence-level errors, make check marks next to the sentences that include them—then direct students to find and fix the errors themselves. (Additionally, or alternatively, you could edit a single paragraph in the paper, as a model for the kinds of editing you are expecting students to do.)
  - Make the marginal comments you provide “readerly”—that is, use them to note where you, as a reader, get confused, or need additional examples or clarity.
  - Construct your final comment using this 3-step template: (1) strengths, (2) summary of a limited number of problems, and (3) recommendations for revision
  - Remember that you don’t have to comment on (or even collect) all the writing students do. You could respond to low-stakes assignments using checks, check minuses, or check-plususes; in-class writing and freewrites might be used in class, and not collected, or included as a scaffolded step in a higher-stakes writing project.

You will also probably see certain structural and grammatical errors that happen in multiple papers in your class. Consider devoting some time in class to discussing these issues as a group, which will save you time in your marking and potentially benefit all of your students.

## **STUDENT PEER AND SELF-EVALUATION**

You do not need to be your students’ only source of formal and informal feedback on assignments. Having students evaluate their own work or their peers’ is both a time saving strategy and extremely beneficial, but you need to install clear expectations and guidelines.

## **Peer Review**

If you choose to make use of peer review, you can ask students to exchange papers, projects or problem sets with each other and share feedback, either during class or as a homework assignment. Peer review is typically most effective when students have specific instructions and clear expectations. For example, you might ban all evaluative language (such as “good” or “bad”) and ask them to describe what’s happening or where they get confused, etc. (See the notion of using “readerly” language, above.) You might tell students to treat the text or assignment they’re reviewing as they would treat any other text they encounter in your course. You might give them specific strategies, ideas, structures, or other elements to focus on in their feedback.

Some instructors incentivize the reviewer’s job by assigning a grade to the work, but often students are enthusiastic about helping their classmates strengthen their ideas and thinking. Consider pairing your assignment rubric with peer review. Incorporating the rubric into peer review reinforces the target or focus areas for the assignment and offers students an opportunity to identify and evaluate the presence of those target success of those skills on the rubric in a peer’s writing before they return to their own. Or, you might have several students work on the same paper and compare notes so that a student can test his mastery of identifying the rubric elements and ask any questions about them and revise his own writing as necessary.

## **Student Self-Assessment**

Self-Assessment can encompass anything from students filling in the assignment rubric as part of their drafting or revision process, to writing a letter detailing their experience doing the assignment, to asking them to collect, revise and arrange past assignments in a portfolio. If you’re asking a student to do a self-assessment of a particular assignment, it’s imperative that you know why you’re asking them to do it and what the objective of the assignment is.

One option is to ask students to generate or complete a self-assessment sheet to accompany an assignment (see <http://cuny.is/assignmentassess> for one you might adapt). You might ask students to write out the three or four points that they want feedback from you on, or, conversely, you might highlight a few points or objectives and ask students to evaluate how successfully they accomplished the task (making sure you define what would qualify as “successful”). You might ask students to think through the assignment in relation to the course objectives and identify what skills or knowledge they gained in relation to the expectations of the course.

Alternatively, you might ask students to develop a mini-rubric that works in conjunction with the one you’ve developed for the class. This rubric should be tailored to their own interests and goals for the assignment. You might prompt them by asking them to articulate what they hope to get out of the assignment, or, in addition to the stated requirements, what they hope to accomplish? These mini-rubrics can help students make additional connections between assignments and their previous learning, and encourage them to articulate their own learning goals.

## **FERPA**

The 1974 FERPA Act or Buckley Amendment is designed to give students some control over how their information is shared and amended. Universities have slightly varying policies about how to disseminate student information such as grades in compliance with FERPA. Some schools interpret the Act to mean that no grade information may be shared over email, while others allow grade information sharing through the internal school email system, and others still allow comments and scores on individual assignments but not midterm or final grades. FERPA also impacts how campuses and

instructors approach the use of educational technology. The act has not been updated to account for web-connected communication, and the rules and restrictions can be quite confusing. If you're unsure of the policy on your campus, ask your department or the campus registrar, but a rule of thumb is to try to avoid exposing student data, and to allow students who are concerned about doing work on the open web to opt out or complete requires assignments via other avenues.

## **ACCREDITATION**

Working in a university setting, it is helpful to be aware of what accreditation entails and its implications for your classroom. Post-secondary institutions periodically undergo a process of peer-review by an independent and external non-governmental body that evaluates whether the educational standards and goals of the institution and individual programs are met. Universities undergo accreditation processes that take two-to five years and, when successfully completed, ensure the university is able to continue granting degrees and certificates that are recognized by other institutions. In New York, post-secondary institutions are responsive to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, a regional accreditation body that has established standards and requirements that function as a guide for the review process.

To comply with accreditation requirements, programs and departments gather artifacts of student learning to assess the effectiveness of their curriculum. Departments and programs will designate particular classes as points in the curriculum to gather data for assessment. If your course is designated as an assessment course, your students' work may be used in programmatic assessment. As such, you might be asked to have students complete or submit a particular assignment designed by the department.

## SECTION 5:

# Teaching Observations, Portfolios, and Philosophies

*This section offers strategies for refining and developing your pedagogy and preparing for the job market. We begin with information on teaching observations and student evaluations, with tips on how to handle formal and informal feedback on your teaching. We also explore how preparing for future course revisions, archiving your course, retaining sample student work, and keeping a reflective journal can help you improve as a teacher and ease the creation of a teaching portfolio.*

### **TEACHING OBSERVATIONS**

Teaching Observations are intended to give you feedback on your teaching practice. Typically once a semester, a member of your department's faculty will observe a class session. They may look at your teaching materials such as a syllabus or graded assignments (not the case at every institution), and then the observer will schedule a follow-up conversation to talk about your teaching practice. These conversations can be a great opportunity to ask questions about pedagogy and course materials. The observer will write up a report on the observation and conversation that will be submitted to the chair and then put in your file. You have the opportunity to respond in written form to the observation, if you find a response is necessary.

The full set of rules and guidelines for course observations are available in Article 18 of the PSC-CUNY contract: <http://www.psc-cuny.org/contract/article-18-professional-evaluation/>.

### Rules and Guidelines for Course Observations:

- You should be observed once per semester until you reach ten observations from one institution.
- You should be given at least 24 hours notice prior to the observation.
- The department is responsible for assigning someone to observe your course.
- Within two weeks from the date of the course observation, you and the observer meet to discuss the class and the observation, sometimes with the department chair.
- The observer prepares a document (often a form from the department) which includes his/her observations from your course as well as from the discussion that followed the observation.
- You have the option of responding to the observation in written form and attaching the response to the document the observer signed.
- Your signature is required on the course observation.
- The observation report is reviewed by your chair and then put in your personnel file.

Please note that some schools have slight variations or additions to these rules, so it is best to check with your department ahead of time for more information about their expectations and your rights.

### **Tips on Being Observed**

#### *Let your students know.*

It's a good idea to give your students a heads-up that you'll be observed. There's going to be a stranger in your class, and students might be hesitant to participate if they don't know what's going on. Explain what the observation is, and make sure that you stress it's about you and not them.

***Plan a class session that highlights your strengths.***

Often observers will give you a few dates to pick from when scheduling your observation. Think about where you are in the semester and what each class would demonstrate. Within the options, is there certain material you're more comfortable with than others? Or do you have a lesson plan or activity that you think will work particularly well for the observation? Once you pick a day, think about what skills or pedagogical practices you want to demonstrate during the observation.

***Contextualize your class for the observer.***

It can be frustrating to get a comment like, "The class was great, but I wish the instructor covered x" when you plan on covering x in the next class. Make sure you contextualize your lesson plan in a larger context for your observer. If your syllabus is designed in units, let the observer know that the particular lesson he'll observe is part of a larger unit; if you're spending three days on a topic or text, tell your observer, and let him know on which day he's joining you.

***Prepare a copy of any readings or handouts for the observer.***

It's a nice gesture to prepare a copy of the lesson's materials—any readings or worksheets, etc—for the observer.

***Personalities and what people want to see.***

Not each observer thinks the same qualities make a great class. Instructors frequently have strong feelings about what is and is not a good pedagogical practice, and this position might conflict with feedback you've received in the past or your own beliefs about best classroom practices. Don't try to please your observer. Be yourself. Your best self, but yourself.

***Don't flip the script.***

The day of your observation is probably not the best day to try out a totally new tactic, unless you're extremely comfortable and confident

following an assignment down an uncertain path. It could work and be amazing, but it also might confuse your students or disrupt the flow of your class.

***Incorporating observation feedback into your classroom.***

The observation is a great opportunity to get feedback from someone who has been teaching—potentially even the same class you’re teaching—for many years. Look through the comments: pay attention both to what the observer said you did well and what she recommends for improvement. Think about how you can incorporate her suggestions into your teaching practice. Make notes about how you’ll use this feedback the next time you teach the course or what you might adjust this semester to fit the comments you’ve received.

***Observations and professional development.***

Many job applications ask that you include a course observation or two from a faculty member. You should photocopy the signed observation reports and keep them in a file or scan them for a digital teaching portfolio.

***What to do if you disagree with an observation report.***

Whether you disagree with a portion of the report, disagree in whole or want to offer more context or explanation, you have the option of responding to your observation in written form. You can write a letter addressing any of your concerns or any of the comments you’ve received. The letter will be attached to the observation report and be reviewed by the chair as part of the total report.

***What if you get an unsatisfactory report?***

Typically at the end of the observation report, the observer checks either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” (sometimes there are more detailed options, and sometimes these options are checked for each evaluated category). If you receive an unsatisfactory report, start by

looking at the comments. Do you agree with them? If not, respond to them in written form and attach your letter to the observation report. You might consider meeting with the chair and/or requesting another formal observation. If you feel you are being treated unfairly, consult with your advisor or the Teaching and Learning Center at the Graduate Center about what steps you might take.

## **STUDENT EVALUATIONS**

### **Formal Evaluations**

Students are always asked to complete an Official Course Evaluation; this is administered at the end of the semester and covers questions ranging from the competence and preparedness of the instructor to the way in which the course met its objectives. Each school has its own set of evaluations. These evaluations go to the department first but are made available to instructors after the end of the semester.

While the evaluation results may give you valuable information, they have many limitations, such as not being discipline-specific or course-specific enough to help you assess the success of your course. However, taking a few moments to review the evaluations and allowing them to guide your future work can be useful. If the data on the observation reveals that students were unanimous or close to unanimous in their response to a particular question, be sure to consider it. For example, students indicating that they did not understand how the assigned reading related to the course does not necessarily mean that you need to toss all of your readings; rather, you might choose to do further contextualize the texts and how they relate to the course and its learning goals when you distribute the material next time.

In addition to the quantifiable answers, there is typically space for students to make a few notes or give more general qualitative feedback. Do not be surprised to find overly effusive or downright vicious student

comments. Remember that these students are often rushing through the evaluation and may not think through the comments they choose to make, so be mindful to measure their feedback against your own good judgment.

The institutional student evaluations are something you should consider including in your teaching portfolio, so it is to your benefit to preserve them. Some systems allow you to export the evaluation to a PDF or digital file; for others, you may have to take screen shots. In any case, make sure to save the file with other teaching documents, and to label it with all relevant course information.

### **Informal Evaluations**

Remember that the formal evaluation is just one tool you can use to measure the effectiveness of your course, and that it may not be the most useful one. You can ask your students to evaluate your course throughout the semester with evaluations that you create. While the questions in the official evaluations required by your campus are determined by the administration, in an unofficial evaluation you can ask questions you feel would be the most helpful to you. You might consider creating a form or simply bringing in some index cards and asking students to respond to questions or prompts. You might even consider going over responses in class to discuss any concerns or challenges students reported. These formative assessments can help you shift gears, affirm that you are on the right track, or provide necessary support and guidance in areas where students might need it. If you tried out something different this course, like a new technology, in-class activity, or discussion structure, this is a great opportunity to solicit feedback on the student experience. As with the formal evaluations, these informal evaluations have a place in your Teaching Portfolio, so keep a copy of useful ones for future use.

*Questions that could help you assess the success of your readings and assignments could be:*

- What reading resonated the most and why? Or: if they had to recommend one reading to a friend, which would they recommend and why?
- What reading did they care for the least and why? Or: if they could assign one reading to an enemy, which would they assign?
- What assignment was most effective and why?
- What assignment was least effective and why?
- What additional support would have helped them to complete their assignments successfully?
- What aspects of the course are most challenging?

## **COURSE REVISION**

It's quite probable that you will teach the course you've just completed teaching again, or that you'll teach one in which you'll use similar activities or assignments. Even if you don't think you'll teach this course in the next semester it is important to think about what you want to keep, what you want to revise, and what you want to toss when you do teach the course (or one like it) in the future.

Devoting a small pocket of time to revision at the end of the semester can help you get ahead for the next semester. Think about what can you do now that will save you time the next time you teach the course, or keep you from forgetting great ideas later. If your next course is already on CUNYFirst, add your textbooks. Write out a draft calendar for your syllabus. If you'll use the same assignments, begin to update the date information.

- If you annotated your syllabus throughout the semester, then read through those notes and make a ‘to do’ list or a quick summary of them so that, when you return to planning, you have some guidelines for how to jump back in.
- If you didn’t annotate your syllabus, take a few minutes to jot down notes about what readings, assignments, and so forth you absolutely want to keep, or what new ideas you have that you want to try next time.
- Think about the feedback you received from students through both formal and informal evaluations. How can you incorporate this feedback into your next class?
- Review any slides or visual materials and decide which you’d like to reuse

## ARCHIVING YOUR COURSE

If you used a course blog or another platform such as Blackboard, you might want to move some or all of your information to a new space. This will clear out the space for the new semester, but also ensure that you do not lose work from the previous semester. Note how long the information will be available on your previous platform, and make sure you migrate any resources, posts, or any other data you want to preserve before then.

If you used Blackboard you can ‘archive’ your course and move the material to a new semester. For more information, check out the tutorial at <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/it/blackboard/repository/files/blackboard-9.1-documents/exportingyourblackboardcourse.pdf>

If you used a WordPress blog for your course and want to do so again, you have a couple of options. You can export your old course’s site by using the export and import tools in WordPress. You will be able to choose what content from your old site to export (posts, pages, media,

etc.) You can also just reuse your original course blog, adding new students to the existing site. However, if you have had your students adding content to that site and don't want your new students to see the previous semester's work, you'll need to hide that old student work by reverting their posts to "draft" in the Dashboard. This has the disadvantage of making it harder for former students to access their work in your class, so you might encourage them to migrate their work to a personal storage space before the semester's end. One of the advantages of using a course blog instead of Blackboard is the relative permanence of student work. Unlike Blackboard, where students lose access to their coursework as soon as the semester ends, a blog allows your students to access their work after the course is over.

## **SAMPLE STUDENT WORK**

You might want to retain some of your students' work as examples to share with a class or as models that you can work through, critique, or peer review with future students. Make sure you get each student's permission and preference for name/no name on the assignment. You might consider sending out an announcement or including on your syllabus that all work that is submitted can be used anonymously for "future educational purposes," and asking that students who wish to be excluded from this policy email you. Additionally, if there are standout examples that illustrate students' progress in your course or your approach to providing feedback you might want to keep them for your teaching portfolio.

## **BUILDING A TEACHING PORTFOLIO**

As teachers, we know the value of being reflective practitioners, but the hectic pace of the semester can make it difficult to build in sufficient time for such reflection. Assembling a teaching portfolio provides a good opportunity to reflect on and improve your teaching, and can also help you begin to prepare for the job market in ways that will pay dividends down the line.

Even if you are not yet applying for jobs, selecting materials for a teaching portfolio is a worthwhile exercise that can prompt meaningful changes in your pedagogy. In particular, the process can help you clarify your own intentions and practices—the “how” and “why” of what you do in the classroom—and identify what changes you’d like to integrate in subsequent semesters. It can also help you view your classroom holistically, which is often difficult to do during semester, when it can be hard to see forest for trees. Among the items you might want to include in a teaching portfolio: copies of syllabi and sample course assignments; a statement of teaching philosophy; evaluations from students and faculty observers; and examples of student work that reflect your students’ progress and/or your approach to providing feedback (as always, you should secure permission before using).

A teaching portfolio can also provide the first steps towards discovering and articulating your teaching philosophy, which will have a practical benefit as you approach the job market. Even if jobs in your field don’t typically ask for a portfolio, many will ask for a statement of teaching philosophy in some form or another. Waiting until you’re actually applying for jobs to begin work on this document can cause a lot of anxiety, and getting in the habit of documenting your teaching can make it easier to recognize and articulate your philosophy. You may begin inductively “extracting” a philosophy from your documented methods, which is likely preferable to generating one on the fly, in

response to a deadline. Identifying and then refining this philosophy as you develop more experience will help you even if you're applying for non-teaching jobs. Embedded in a statement of teaching philosophy are one's sense of the role of their discipline in higher education, and its epistemological value. Being comfortable stating, defending, and applying these ideas across contexts is an important part of the work of becoming a scholar.

The TLC offers workshops and office-hour support for students seeking to build a digital teaching portfolio. Don't hesitate to reach out to us for more information.

## **FINALLY: BE SATISFIED**

Teaching is hard work, and you'll be exhausted at the end of the semester. Take some time after your class has ended to reflect on and take some joy from the impact you've had. Be proud, and look forward to the opportunities you'll have to meet more incredible students and to improve as a teacher in subsequent semesters!!!

# Additional Resources: A Selected Bibliography

The Graduate Center  
Teaching and Learning Center:  
<http://cuny.is/teaching>

For an annotatable version  
of this handbook:  
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