



LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS

A learning assignment is an important tool or method for the teacher to help the learner learn new things in a meaningful and thoughtful way. Learning assignments are especially central in web-based teaching.

Learning assignments impact studying, working, and learning, and can also be used in guiding. A learning assignment is, as the name implies, an assignment that has a built-in activity to guide and enable learning.

You can plan learning assignments for people of all ages in different learning environments: web-based studies, classroom studies, projects, places of work, and any other environments where learning happens.

Learning assignments structure a planned learning process in the same way as classroom teaching or lectures.

A learning assignment can take the form of an instruction for work that is used to guide the student toward action, information processing and interaction. It can be an instruction for individual or group work. A learning assignment can be an assignment for the students to plan their work or the work of others. At its best, a learning assignment is a multifaceted whole, formed of small assignments, or parts of processes, where the student progresses step by step. It can be built as stages such as: a. first... b. then... c. then...n. at the end... In this way the learning assignment is equally challenging for all, as the students can each progress at their own pace.

You can guide the learner to acquire new skills and knowledge by using learning assignments.

You can guide content: what information is the learner processing?

You can guide information retrieval: where does the learner find the information he needs?

You can guide observation and thought processes: how does the learner process information while working on an assignment?

You can guide the learning process: how do you steer and how do you give feedback?

You can guide working: how do you steer and how do you give feedback?

You can guide working in a group or teamwork: how does a group work in a goal-oriented way?

As a teacher you plan pedagogically relevant and meaningful learning assignments and instructions for your learners. Through the learning assignments and the methods in use you can promote and guide the learners' learning, perception, interpretation and information processing. By making learning assignments with the help of your instructions, your learners can make step-by-step progress and achieve the goals set for learning. They will develop, for example, their competence, ability to learn, and teamwork.

When doing the learning assignments, with the help of your instructions, the learners can progress step by step and achieve the goals of learning. Thus, they will develop their skills in learning and working. In learning assignments, describe the goals of the learning so that the learners will understand why the assignment has been set and where the assignment will be taking them. As a result of the learning process and learning



assignments, the learners may gain new and insightful knowledge, a wider concept than knowledge alone.

Reflect on what the learners may strive for through learning:

Learners will become creators and doers – with the ability to create or do something

Learners will master knowledge and retain information – they will have the ability to learn

Learners will become thinkers – they will have the ability to think

Learners will become experts – they will have the ability to participate in culture

You can plan learning assignments for a single teaching situation or as parts of learning processes. Start planning a learning assignment within a chosen particular context. Reflect on the journey to this point of the learning process: what still needs to be achieved? Where you will head after this point? A learning process may include gradually deepening assignments, which direct towards a deeper understanding. When gradually deepening learning assignments are connected, they promote competence development. In this way, each previous assignment will prepare learners for the next one, and ensure that they will succeed in resolving them.

A learning process is formed of several partial-learning processes. A single partial-learning process may be seen as a learning situation that has its equivalent in a traditional unit of teaching, i.e. a lesson. Partial-learning processes, or learning situations, constitute a learning process entity. The learning process is a whole formed by several learning situations which will help create a longer span for the activity. In the learning process, influence the learning through assignments, materials, methods, instructions and steering.

What are the characteristics of good learning assignments?

- They evoke an interest in the subject;
- They activate and motivate the learner;
- They demonstrate the learner's previous assumptions;
- They are based on problem-solving;
- They direct towards knowledge-building;
- They help develop new skills;
- They develop working methods and practices;
- They are communicative, e.g. dialogue, debate, panels, web discussions;
- They support and develop teamwork skills;
- They are reflective.

Planning the development of skills and knowledge is demanding Use a learning assignment to steer the learners' actions, so that they can learn and develop their competences. Verbs play an important role in assignments; they direct toward learning. They describe the activity one aims for when enabling learning – perceiving, focusing, interpreting, acting, interacting, processing information, or raising to a higher level of cognition.



You should phase the learning assignment so that each assignment prepares learners for the next one. When you cut the assignment into smaller bits you enhance learning. This might take for form of: look ... and think ... then search for... and plan ... then ... create ... and present. Each learner can progress at his own pace. The learning assignments are optimal for most, because individual students can use their time according to their ability, speeding up or pausing for a while, as desired. Verbs usually promote learning-enhancing actions, and should be used when planning learning assignments.

Promoting learning by using verbs:

Promote learning by using verbs associated with:

PERCEPTION: read, look, listen, sense, touch, taste, smell, examine, glance;

INTERPRETATION: answer, interpret, consider, discuss, tell, write, draw, describe, name, locate, choose;

INFORMATION PROCESSING, ACTION, INTERACTION: follow, compare, evaluate, analyze, count, solve, arrange, compose, join, classify, differentiate, infer, conclude, decide, reflect, explain, explicate, search, create, familiarize, retrieve, pose, organize, plan, draw, describe, document, build, use, share, tell, guide, instruct, devise, present, discuss;

In addition to these are verbs related to the subject at hand, i.e. verbs derived from the substance areas of the curriculum.

Creating a learning assignment is communication

In school you should always give learning assignments in written form.

This helps to clarify actions when one is instructing a large group of individuals. However, in workplaces assignments are often given orally. Therefore, it is also good to develop the learner's ability to listen to assignments and take notes about the elements and progress of the assignment. You can give the learning assignment both in written and oral forms. The tools of the web enable this, and the student can read or listen to the learning assignment multiple times.

Good communication skills are part of the teacher's tools. The clearer and more precise your communication is, the better the chances are that your students will understand what is expected of them in a learning assignment. In a web-based environment this is especially important, because each participant must be able to understand the learning assignment independently. Sentences should be clear, simple, and not too long. In web-based communication it is useful to make all instructions super simple. Research shows that students search for information very quickly in a web-based environment. This means that the browsing will often be



superficial. The teacher needs to invest in clear pedagogical communication and react to the student's ways of working in order for the desired communication to be effective.

Intellectually demanding learning assignments can be simplified. The assignment can be described so that it will be possible to manage it even if the student lacks some of the basic skills. You can support the students by structuring the problem-solving process. Guide the students to be able to accomplish the learning assignment at the limits of their skills, considering their individual problem-solving ability combined with their ability to attain the knowledge using external support. Such guiding support is called the 'support structure of thinking', or 'scaffolding'.

This work by Hanne Koli, is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

