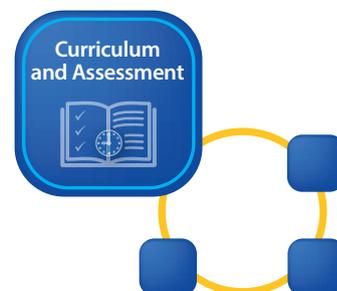


To have a powerful design, the curriculum and its assessments need to provide the means for students to move from where they are at now to a higher level of understanding and performance.

Why

Extensive research has shown that setting challenging but achievable goals for students is highly motivating (Hattie, 2009; Martin & Dowson, 2009). It requires a belief in the students and their abilities, and a pathway for them to achieve these goals within the time period available.

First students need to understand where the goal posts are set. Knowing what they are aiming for helps students to determine what they need to do. Providing them with a means to determine if they are successful in meeting these aims allow students to gauge their progress along the way and make adjustments as needed (Hattie, 2011). This requires teachers to be explicit.



How

Being explicit about your expectations can sometimes be easier said than done. No matter how much you explain what you want the students to aim for, it may take some time for them to 'get it'. Often this understanding comes gradually, developing over the course of the session as students gain a deeper understanding of your subject and what it's all about.

The key is to be explicit and consistent throughout, and to provide multiple and varied opportunities for making these high expectations clear.

Learning outcomes

Start with your learning outcomes. Use these as the first point in your curriculum to excite and engage your students about where they need to be headed. Set your expectations high but be reasonable.

Show students that they will need to think deeply by using words such as: Problem solve, critically evaluate, and reason. Express how they will use these thinking skills in complex endeavours relevant to your field of study by using words such as: Design, plan, report on, and investigate. See how learning outcomes are written at Southern Cross University in the [Unit Details Guide \(UCMS\)](#).

The learning outcomes only broadly lay out your expectations. Wherever possible, design in opportunities to clarify learning goals, such as those related to a weekly topic or learning activity. This can include providing students with opportunities to check their current understanding, such as using a quiz. These strategies will make your expectations clearer to the students, and provide them with a means of determining how well, or to what degree, they are meeting these expectations.

Assessment tasks

Assessment tasks provide an excellent opportunity to clarify expectations in greater detail. Make sure that your assessment tasks reflect the expectations that you set in your learning outcomes. Show the students what they are actually aiming for.

1. Be explicit in your wording of the assessment question/s

In a clear and concise way, make your expectations clear. If you want them to analyse then say so in the question prompt. Don't bury your expectations in words such as discuss or describe if you want students to do more than this. If you want them to compare and contrast positions and then rationalise an approach for a particular context – then tell them that. However don't over explain the point as this can actually be more confusing. There are other ways to make expectations clear.

2. Provide a rubric showing marking criteria and standards for complex assessment tasks

Complex assessment tasks such as projects, research papers, feasibility studies, and case plans, can benefit from a rubric which shows the levels of performance for each grade. This provides another opportunity for students to obtain more detailed information about what you are looking for in the assignment.

For guidance on what a rubric looks like and how to write a rubric, see the Southern Cross University [Rubrics and eMarking](#) page.

3. Provide models or sample answers

No matter how well you explain things it can be hard for students to understand what you mean without seeing it in action. Provide models or sample answers for similar, yet different tasks or exercises that show your expectations in action. Make sure that you show exemplary models in action.

4. Build in time to explain how the models or sample answers meet expectations

When planning your curriculum, make sure you build in time for teaching staff to go through the models or sample answers in some detail to explain how they meet expectations. Plan for teachers to relate the model or sample answer to your marking guide and/or rubric.

5. Build assessments into the curriculum and allow time for feedback

It is only once students have a go at the assessments that they really start coming to grips with your expectations. Your grade or mark, coupled with feedback, lets students know to what degree they have met expectations, and what they need to do next time.

For this process to work, build your assessments into the curriculum in a way that allows staff time to give feedback, and also allows students an opportunity to use this feedback. Allow time for students to act on that feedback before they have another go.

Learning activities

Assessment tasks are not the only way to show expectations in action. Also use your learning activities.

1. Incorporate success criteria for learning activities

Where appropriate, include checklists or criteria that make it clear whether the students are practising or undertaking activities correctly. These provide more specific detail of expectations and give students a clear means of working out if they are on the right track.

2. Incorporate worked examples

Learning activities also benefit from worked examples or exercises. Build a time into your curriculum for teaching staff to go through these with students before students have a go. You might also consider having some worked examples for students to compare their efforts against after they have tried the examples on their own.

In summary

Whatever your design, make sure that you plan your entire curriculum, assessments, and learning activities in a way that reflects and demonstrates your high expectations. Ensure that you also include criteria to demonstrate to students their success at each step of their learning.

Find out more

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York: Routledge.

Hattie, J. (2011). Which strategies best enhance teaching and learning in higher education? In D. Mashek & E. Hammer (Eds.), *Empirical research in teaching and learning: Contributions from social psychology* (pp. 130–142). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Martin, A. J., & Dowson, M. (2009). Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 327–365. doi:10.3102/0034654308325583