

# COURSE DESIGN ESSENTIALS

A RESOURCE DOCUMENT FOR INSTRUCTORS

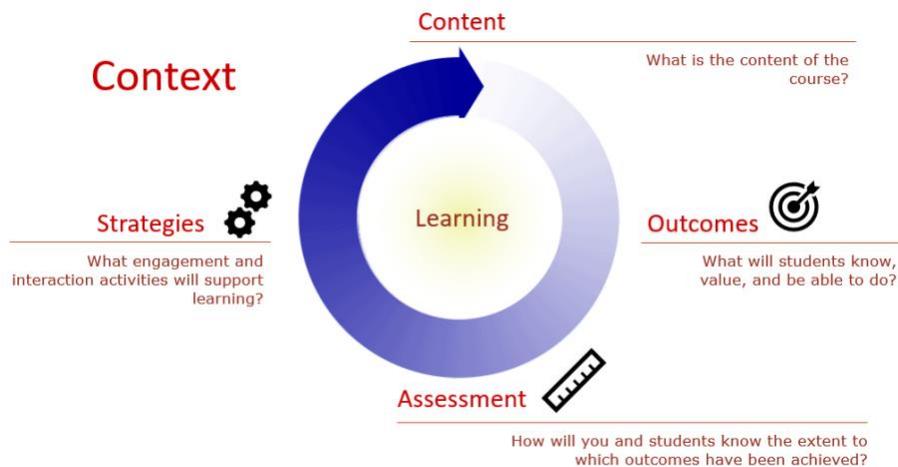
Welcome to *Course Design Essentials (CDE)*, a three-part webinar series designed to fast-track your course planning efforts whether you are teaching on campus or remotely. Upon completion of this webinar series, you will be able to:

- Describe learning-centered course design principles and strategies
- Apply these principles and strategies to the (re)design of your course by developing a course plan with identified learning outcomes, assessments, and instructional strategies (including technology tools)

In addition to morning webinars and individual activities, daily afternoon sessions allow you to connect with other participants and TLS facilitators to pose questions, share ideas, and refine your plans for developing your course.

We appreciate your commitment to teaching and learning, and hope you will learn much that you can apply immediately.

— The CDE Team



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## OUTCOMES

### EXERCISE 1: CONSIDER GUIDELINES FOR WRITING LEARNING OUTCOMES

The goal of this exercise is for you to develop an understanding of how to write learning outcomes.

Imagine a colleague asks you: “What guidelines should I follow when writing learning outcomes?” What would you answer?

Read the learning outcomes listed below, which have been taken from courses in a variety of disciplines. As you read, look for patterns in how the learning outcomes are written. What patterns can you discern? Make note of these. From these patterns, write down guidelines you would suggest your colleague follow.

By the end of the course, you will be able to ...

1. list the rules for correct usage of Spanish accents.
2. define direct and indirect financial markets.
3. describe the impact of globalization on Christian and Buddhist traditions.
4. explain the role of cradle-to-cradle design in the industrial process.
5. put into practice the use of titration in working with patients with diabetes.
6. contrast the response of grassroots community activists with that of federal and provincial politicians.
7. analyze the social constructions of sexed/gendered identities within the context of Queer theory.
8. evaluate the use of genetically-modified crops within the context of regulatory protocols defined by the Environmental Protection Agency.
9. in collaboration with an audiologist, design an intervention related to speech and language for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.
10. compose an electroacoustic recording with the use of audio processing software.

### GUIDELINES

 Remember to save your changes when filling in this PDF



## COGNITIVE DOMAIN: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

| <i>Level</i>         | <i>Definition</i>  | <i>Action Verbs</i>  |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Remembering</b>   | Recalling information  | describe, relate, locate, find, identify, label, recall, define, recognize, match, reproduce, select, draw, recite   |
| <b>Understanding</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying examples of a given term, concept, or principle</li> <li>Interpreting the meaning of a term, concept, or principle</li> </ul> | interpret, outline, distinguish, predict, restate, translate, compare, relate, generalize, convert, classify, extend   |
| <b>Applying</b>      | Using information, rules, and procedures in concrete situations  | solve, use, illustrate, complete, examine, classify, interpret, put together, change, apply, translate, calculate, manipulate, modify, put into practice, arrange, compute, predict, prepare |
| <b>Analyzing</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breaking information into parts to explore patterns and relationships</li> <li>Analyzing charts, data to support conclusions</li> </ul>   | analyze, distinguish, examine, compare, contrast, investigate, categorize, identify, explain, separate, take apart, differentiate, infer, order  |
| <b>Evaluating</b>    | Making judgments based on criteria and standards   | decide, justify, recommend, assess, rate, prioritize, determine, critique, evaluate, weigh, value, compare, contrast, conclude, criticize  |
| <b>Creating</b>      | Generating ideas or products   | invent, hypothesize, construct, develop, design, prepare, produce, rewrite, plan, combine, formulate, design, compile, generalize, integrate, modify, organize                               |

## EXAMPLE LEARNING OUTCOMES (COGNITIVE DOMAIN)

**Remember:** *Recall information (knowledge of specifics, criteria, classification)*

- List the rules for correct use of Spanish accents.
- List the elements contained within the Periodic Table and the respective electronic configurations.
- Define direct and indirect financial markets.

**Understand:** *Explain, summarize, and interpret information (through demonstration of understanding of ideas)*

- Describe the impact of globalization on Christian and Buddhist traditions.
- Summarize the main function of the four aspects of design thinking: research, criticism, production and discourse.
- Explain the role of cradle-to-cradle design in the industrial process.

**Apply:** *Use acquired information to solve problems in novel ways (theories, rules)*

- Illustrate the correct use of *Mens rea* in criminal case proceedings and apply to current litigation in the Canadian Legal System.
- Employ theories of sustainability to the use of renewable energy resources.
- Put into practice the use of titration in working with patients with diabetes.

**Analyze:** *Break information into parts and identify how parts relate to each other*



- Effectively distil clinical case information and identify initial therapeutic outcomes through direct observation of senior therapists or video.
- Contrast the response of grassroots community activists with that of federal and provincial politicians.
- Analyze the social constructions of sexed/gendered identities within the context of Queer theory.

**Evaluate:** *Make critical judgments based on a sound knowledge base*

- Critically evaluate the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) using antiretroviral (ARV) therapy as a preventative measure to HIV infection.
- Evaluate the use of genetically-modified crops within the context of regulatory protocols defined by the Environmental Protection Agency.

**Create:** *Develop a unique product, plan, or approach*

- In collaboration with an audiologist, design an intervention related to speech and language for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.
- Compose an electroacoustic recording with the use of audio processing software.
- Create a short play depicting one of the major concepts discussed in class.

## TRANSLATING “CRITICAL THINKING” INTO LEARNING OUTCOMES

Critical thinking involves several cognitive processes. It can be helpful for both learning and assessing critical thinking if the learning outcomes express these cognitive processes rather than simply “critical thinking.” Translating critical thinking into learning outcomes may take different forms depending on the discipline, the course, and the course level. The examples below illustrate how students can provide evidence of attaining “critical thinking” learning outcomes.

*In the Basic and Applied Sciences*

evaluate evidence;  
identify both reasonable and inappropriate conclusions

*In the Humanities*

recognize flaws, inconsistencies, and logical fallacies in an argument

*In the Arts*

infer the historical context (time, place, artist, motivation, etc.) of a work of art from its characteristics;  
justify one’s inference

Nilson, L. (2015, November). *Reflections for faculty on teaching critical thinking*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network Conference, San Francisco, CA.

## AFFECTIVE DOMAIN TAXONOMY

| <i>Level</i>            | <i>Refers to</i>   | <i>Examples</i>  |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Receiving</b>        | Willingness to receive information   | Individuals accept the need for a commitment to service; listen to others with respect; and show sensitivity to social problems.   |
| <b>Responding</b>       | Active participation in one's own learning   | Individuals show interest in the subject; are willing to give a presentation; participate in class discussions; and enjoy helping others.  |
| <b>Valuing</b>          | Acceptance of a value  | Individuals demonstrate belief in democratic processes; appreciate the role of science in everyday life; show concern for the welfare of others; and show sensitivity toward individual and cultural differences.          |
| <b>Organization</b>     | A process that individuals go through as they bring together different values, resolve conflicts among them, and start to internalize the values | Individuals recognize the need for balance between freedom and responsibility in a democracy; accept responsibility for their own behaviour; accept professional ethical standards; and adapt behaviour to a value system. |
| <b>Characterization</b> | Possession of a value system including beliefs, ideas, and attitudes that control one's behaviour in a consistent and predictable manner         | Individuals display self-reliance in working independently; display a professional commitment to ethical practice; show good personal, social and emotional adjustment; and maintain appropriate health habits.            |

See the [Appendix](#) (p. 21) for how to assess learning in the affective domain.

Learning outcomes often go through multiple drafts because over time, our thinking about course (re)design evolves, and we become better able to articulate what we want students to know, value, and be able to do. Here's an example of multiple drafts, along with commentary:

| <i>Draft</i>                     |  | <i>Commentary</i>   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
|                                  | <b>1</b> Survey of methodologies for teaching a second language  | This reflects a topic and not what students will be able to do with their learning.   |
| <i>Students will be able to:</i> | <b>2</b> (a) understand methodologies for teaching a second language;<br>(b) develop their ability to implement a given methodology.   | What does it mean to understand? to develop an ability? How readily can understanding and developing an ability be assessed?  |
| <i>You will be able to:</i>      | <b>3</b> (a) explain the different methodologies for teaching a second language;<br>(b) justify the use of a given methodology;<br>(c) design a lesson plan using a given methodology. | Three separate outcomes, each beginning with a verb that corresponds to an action: it will be possible to assess students' ability to explain, justify, and design.<br>"Students will be able to" has been changed to "You will be able to" – in a course outline, students may appreciate it if you speak to them. |

## EXERCISE 2: WRITE LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR YOUR COURSE

The goal of this exercise is for you to develop learning outcomes for your course, keeping in mind your course context. (You might want to revisit your responses to the questions in the Preparation Activity that we sent you by email before the webinar series.)

Add your learning outcomes to your [Course Alignment Plan Worksheet](#) (p. 18), knowing that you can revise them later on. (If you're not sure what to do, take a look at the [Example Course Alignment Plan](#), p. 16.)

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### STEPS

1. Decide on what you would like students to know, value, and be able to do.
2. Determine which of your outcomes draw on the cognitive domain and which draw on the affective domain. When phrasing outcomes that draw on the cognitive domain, use verbs that allow students to demonstrate their learning in an observable way. When phrasing outcomes that draw on the affective domain, pay particular attention to the different levels of the affective domain taxonomy.

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### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What will students learn as a result of participating in the course?
2. What knowledge, values, and skill will students develop?
3. What should students be able to do or how should their thinking change?

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### RESOURCES

- [Backward Design and Alignment](#) (~3 minute video)
- [Bloom's Taxonomy](#)
- [Writing Effective Learning Outcomes](#)



## ASSESSMENT

### EXERCISE 3: BEGIN DEVELOPING YOUR ASSESSMENT PLAN

The goal of this exercise is for you to put together an assessment plan for your course, taking into consideration:

- The **alignment** between the selected assessments and the learning outcomes
- The **assessment methods** that will best measure student learning in the remote environment
- The **workload implications** of the overall plan for you and your students

Add your assessments to your [Course Alignment Plan Worksheet](#) (p. 18), knowing that you can revise them later on. (If you're not sure what to do, take a look at the [Example Course Alignment Plan](#), p. 16.)

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### STEPS

- Review your learning outcomes and make sure that they reflect what you want students to learn by the end of the course.



- Consider assessment methods that can best measure the kind of learning specified in your learning outcomes. (Keep in mind the [cognitive domain \(Bloom's Taxonomy, p. 3\)](#) and the [affective domain, p. 5](#)). **If you are looking for ideas, see these [Resources](#) (p. 7).**
- As you think about possible assessments, consider whether you need to revise existing learning outcomes, or delete and add new ones.
- Evaluate the overall plan in terms of workload for you and your students.

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## GUIDING QUESTIONS

### Alignment

- What learning outcome(s) will each assessment measure?
- Is every assessment method connected to at least one learning outcome? Does each assessment require students to demonstrate the kind of learning (cognitive or affective) described in the outcome(s)?

### Assessment methods

- Have you considered a range of effective and engaging assessment options for the course?
- Have you considered low stakes assignments designed to provide students with opportunities for practice and feedback?
- Which [tools](#) will support the implementation of the assessments in the remote environment?

### Workload

- Is the number of assessments reasonable in terms of workload for you and your students?
- Could you reduce the number of assessments and still be able to assess the learning outcomes in your course? Could some assessments be optional? Non-graded?
- Is the weighting of the assessments appropriate for the time students will spend on them? This [Course Workload Estimator](#) might help you with gauging the amount of time students will need to complete different assessment tasks.

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## RESOURCES

- [Adapting your assessment strategies for remote teaching](#): guidelines to help you embed assessment strategies that promote learning in your remote course
- [Assessment strategies from McGill instructors](#): examples designed to enhance students' learning and motivation to learn; many of these strategies transfer easily to a remote learning environment
- [Assessment strategies](#): examples of strategies that can work well for remote teaching and learning (University of Saskatchewan)
- [Assessment tools](#): a table where assessment strategies are matched with McGill-supported tools for online implementation
- [Example evaluation schemes](#): inspiration for planning assessments for your course
- [Keeping Students Engaged: How to Rethink Your Assessments Amidst the Shift to Online Learning](#): an article that presents ideas for creating outcome-focused assessments to engage students
- [McGill University Student Assessment Policy](#)



## STRATEGIES

### 7 KEY IDEAS WHEN EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

These seven key ideas can help students (1) achieve the learning outcomes you have developed and (2) succeed on assignments and exams. Each key idea is described with suggestions for how it can be implemented using different instructional strategies. These ideas are starting points to consider and are not intended to be comprehensive.

1. Make the implicit explicit by sharing your expectations with students.
2. Promote engagement in remote coursework by fostering a sense of belonging and opportunities to exchange ideas.
3. Reimagine time in and out of class, exploring fixed and flexible interaction strategies.
4. Consider how students can practice and get feedback to help them prepare for major assignments or exams.
5. Imagine how debriefing major assignments and exams can be a learning opportunity for students
6. Consider where feedback comes from, and explore different ways that students can get feedback on their work.
7. Consider when assignments and exams are due over the course of the semester (revisit your draft Course Alignment Plan).

#### 1. MAKE THE IMPLICIT EXPLICIT BY SHARING YOUR EXPECTATIONS WITH STUDENTS

Students are more likely to achieve course learning outcomes and successfully complete assignments if they understand what is expected of them. Here are some ways you can make your expectations clear to students.

- Use the course outline as a tool to guide students' expectations for the course. For example, you can include key ideas for each week or class to help students focus their thinking in preparation for class. You can also add sections to the course outline that directly address current remote learning circumstances. Areas that may be impacted by current circumstances include communications policies, how the course will happen (e.g., a mix of lectures at regularly scheduled class times and activities in myCourses), whether lectures will be recorded, and what students need to do to engage fully in learning, among others.
- During the first day of class, conduct an activity that requires students to pay attention to important aspects of the course outline. For example, you can pose [guiding questions](#) to focus students' attention on key sections.
- Establish norms for what class participation means, and communicate these clearly. For example, if you are using Zoom, decide if students should speak up or if they should use the "raise hand" feature or another signal. You may also ask students to co-create these norms. How does students' participation in class contribute to their ability to successfully complete major assignments and exams? Make the benefits of class participation clear to students.
- In the course outline or as a separate document, give guidelines for what you expect students to do for each major assignment. These guidelines could include a description of the assignment's purpose, subject, genre, audience, and format. Discuss these guidelines in class.
- Explain the value of an assignment/exam in terms of student learning: Why is it part of the course? How does it relate to course learning outcomes? Where might students use this knowledge or skill after the course?



- Explain to students how each assignment will be assessed. Consider sharing with students a tool you use to grade their work, such as a list of questions, a checklist or a rubric. You can even show sample assignments (with permission) that received different grades and ask students to discern differences in the quality of the work.
- Explain how you expect the students to use course materials, and walk the students through your own process for reading, completing exercises, etc. For instance, you can draw students' attention to the fact that some readings are required and others are supplemental, and then explain how you go about reading an article: Do you read an article through completely from beginning to end? (Why/why not?) What sections do you pay particular attention to and why? How do you decide what to take notes on, and how do you take those notes?

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## 2. PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT IN REMOTE COURSEWORK BY FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EXCHANGE IDEAS

Whether teaching remotely or on campus, it can be helpful to consider different strategies for fostering a sense of belonging and promoting the exchange of ideas among students.

- Foster a sense of belonging
  - Explore methods for gathering and responding to student feedback (office hours, one-minute papers, mid-semester feedback, etc.)
  - Offer options. Consider that students now may be in different time zones, have limited data plans, and no Wi-Fi, or may not have a quiet space to work, so provide more than one way to participate in classroom activities and complete assignments.
  - Pay attention to students who experience barriers to being part of the class community (access, disability, living situation due to COVID-19). For example, check that you are using technology that is accessible for students with disabilities.
  - Engage student mentors and/or TAs to provide small-group and individualized support to students.
- Promote the exchange of ideas
  - Ask students to co-create course content by having them create short videos explaining key concepts or writing multiple choice questions for quizzes.
  - Help students to engage online in meaningful dialogue—simply telling students to talk to one another is not sufficient. For example, provide instructions that require students to [reply directly](#) to the comment of another, and/or to synthesize the comments of several students and then add something new.
  - Create opportunities for students to process the moment by linking course content to current events.

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## 3. REIMAGINE TIME IN AND OUT OF CLASS, EXPLORING FIXED AND FLEXIBLE INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Instructors know that class time is a precious resource – there rarely seems to be enough of it for all that we want students to experience and come to understand. It can be worthwhile to revisit our assumptions about what students do in class and out of class. What if class time were viewed more as an opportunity for practice and problem-solving, and less for preparation and communicating information? Given the challenge of “Zoom fatigue,” consider whether you might shorten long class periods and complement them with other means of learning. For remote learning, [one credit](#) equals about 45 hours of work, which can include time spent learning in various ways (e.g., lecture, lab, tutorial, conferences, individual study).

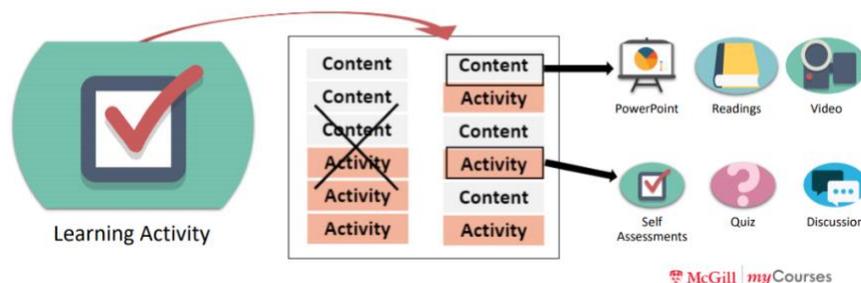
Whether teaching remotely or on campus, it is possible to engage students during class time and beyond. Think about the types of tasks on which students would benefit from peers' and your expertise – *these can occur in class* ("fixed interactions"), and the types of tasks that students can do on their own – *these can occur out of class* ("flexible interactions").

- In class, students can engage deeply with course content and grapple with difficult concepts through various strategies – for instance, via discussion, problem-solving, group work, or teamwork.
- Fixed interactions/strategies are when students participate together (online) at the same time and can include:

| <i>Instructor–students</i> | <i>Student–student</i> | <i>Student–content</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Live class                 | Breakout Rooms         | Polling                |
| Zoom                       | Zoom                   | Zoom<br>Turning Point  |

- Out of class, students can read materials and write marginal notes or summaries of course readings, instead of highlighting text. They can watch short videos to help familiarize themselves with new content. In advance of class, students might respond to short discussion or comprehension questions on myCourses, such as "What struck you about the reading?" "What is your main take-away from the reading?" "What is your experience with [topic]?"
- Flexible interactions/strategies are when students participate online at any time of their choosing. Rather than having a great deal of content followed by several activities, it is recommended to alternate between short sections of content and activities so that students have an opportunity to apply the content.

### Flexible activities: *Student-content* interaction



Some tasks can occur in *or* out of class. For example, students can:

- Write a short summary or respond to a question about a key point posed by the instructor (one sentence to 250 words). *Note: Ensure accountability by having students submit their work or bring it to class for discussion.*
- Create a concept map (or flowchart, sketch, or diagram) to show how assigned course materials relate to or interact with each other.

You can maintain students' attention by breaking online lectures into segments of approximately 12 minutes or less. If you are lecturing in a remote class setting, separate these segments with individual or small group activities.

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#### 4. CONSIDER HOW STUDENTS CAN PRACTICE AND GET FEEDBACK TO HELP THEM PREPARE FOR MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS OR EXAMS

You might consider integrating opportunities for students to practice the skills and become more familiar with the knowledge they will need to succeed on assignments and exams.

To help students prepare for major assignments:

- Ask students to develop a rough draft for peer feedback.
- Break down an assignment into multiple parts that are due at different times of the semester to see how students are progressing and help them to stay on track in moving forward with the assignment.
- Have students do a similar type of assignment twice: for the first assignment they have more support, while for the second assignment they complete it more autonomously. The second assignment can be more conceptually challenging as well.

To help students prepare for exams:

- In class, you can have students:
  - review their notes from previous classes, select three things they think they will need to know for the exam, and share those things with another student.
  - use [Polling @ McGill](#) (also known as the Student Response System or SRS) or [Zoom polling](#) to assess students' knowledge of material to be tested. Consider adding a survey to myCourses with the same questions so you can reach students who cannot attend the class at the regularly scheduled time.
  - do sample problems or start doing homework in [Zoom breakout rooms](#) while you and the TAs circulate and answer questions.
  - complete practice exams (individually or in small groups) and discuss results together.
  - describe the study skills or techniques they are using to prepare for exams so that students develop their metacognitive awareness while learning what study strategies their classmates are using that they might like to try.
- Out of class, you can have students:
  - complete pre-class online quizzes.
  - review course materials and submit potential exam questions (with answers). For practice, students may answer the exam questions developed by their classmates.

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#### 5. IMAGINE HOW DEBRIEFING MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS CAN BE A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

Once an assignment has been handed in, or an exam has been taken, it's "over". However, debriefing both assignments and exams can be a learning opportunity for students as they move forward in their university experience. Here are a few ideas to help students keep learning, even after the assignment or exam has been completed.



#### Debriefing assignments:

- Feedback does not have to be 1:1. You can give feedback to the entire class by writing a memo, audio recording comments to post to myCourses, or leading a discussion in which you share common strengths and weaknesses you saw in students' work. The students and you can then discuss how the weaknesses could be addressed.
- After reviewing the feedback received on their assignment, have students write themselves a memo that addresses this prompt: "Things I learned completing this assignment (or from the instructor's feedback) that I want to remember for future assignments."

#### Debriefing exams:

- Hold debriefing sessions where students work individually or in groups to correct their exam answers and submit the corrected answers (possibly for grades).
- After an assignment/exam, you can describe links that you see between student actions and student success with support from data. This can help students to see how their actions can directly affect their success on a given exam. For example:
  - Class attendance: Take the five highest exams scores and the five lowest exam scores and share attendance records of the students (no names!) with those scores.
  - Note-taking: Pick a question that was widely missed. Identify the date when this content was addressed and have everyone look at their notes. Do their notes include the information they need to answer the question? Are they missing information because they were absent that day? Do they understand the notes they took?
- End this type of session with students writing themselves a memo that addresses this prompt: "Things I learned taking this exam that I want to remember for the next one." Collect these memos and return them shortly before the next exam or collate them into a study guide for the class.

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## 6. CONSIDER WHERE FEEDBACK COMES FROM, AND EXPLORE DIFFERENT WAYS THAT STUDENTS CAN GET FEEDBACK ON THEIR WORK

Feedback can be given at different points in an assignment and can take different forms. It does not always have to come from the instructor. With clear criteria and guidance, feedback can come from other students (peer assessment) or students can reflect on their own understanding and progress (self-assessment). Feedback can be specific or general. That said, for feedback to be useful, it should be actionable: students should be able to *do* something with it.

#### Peer assessment:

- Peer assessment refers to students providing feedback on other students' assignments to help them improve their work. It can occur in short exercises during class: For example, in small groups, have students read the first couple of pages of a peer's paper; have the students state what they think the thesis/main point of the student's paper is. Or for a poster session, have students share draft versions of their posters in small groups a week before the assignment is due; students can ask questions about the content, reflect on how clearly the ideas are shared in text or graphic form, and provide suggestions for improvement.
- Students can practice their peer assessment skills on sample assignments before providing feedback to one another: Have students practice phrasing feedback in response to sample assignments that you



provide. Show examples of both constructive and unconstructive feedback. Have students practice rephrasing unconstructive feedback as constructive feedback.

Self-assessment:

- Students can reflect on the strengths of their own assignment prior to submitting it. This can take the form of annotations (e.g., “Underline your thesis statement”; “Note what you think your strongest argument is”), or you can ask students to fill out a rubric as a self-reflective exercise and include it when submitting an assignment.
- An option for moving smoothly from self-assessment to an instructor’s assessment of students’ assignments is to engage in a feedback dialogue: after students reflect on the strengths of their own assignments, they can submit an interactive cover sheet with the assignment where they put questions to the instructor about specific facets of their work they would like feedback on. Instructor comments then respond directly to those questions. This strategy shows that feedback is a dialogue rather than a one-way flow of information.

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## 7. CONSIDER WHEN ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS ARE DUE OVER THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER (REVISIT YOUR DRAFT COURSE ALIGNMENT PLAN)

It is rare for an assignment to be due on the first day of class. It is common for an assignment or exam to occur in the final weeks of class. Aside from that, there is a great variety in assignment due dates. Here are some things to consider when it comes to scheduling due dates.

- Think about the preparation that students need to do to succeed on the assignments and factor this prep time into the schedule.
- Break down assignments into their component parts. You can consider spacing out due dates over the course of the term. For example, for a paper, students might have different deadlines for submitting a topic, brainstorming ideas for papers with their peers and drafting an outline, writing a draft, and submitting a final paper. (See pp. 17-20 of the [Feedback Strategies document](#) for examples of multi-stage assignments, i.e., assignments broken down into component parts.)
- When scheduling assignments and exams, consult the [McGill University Student Assessment Policy](#) for guidance.

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## RESOURCES

- [Feedback strategies: Engaging students in dialogue](#)
- [McGill University Student Assessment Policy](#)
- [Peer Assessment](#)

## EXERCISE 4: PREPARE STUDENTS FOR MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

The goal of this exercise is for you to decide on instructional strategies that will prepare students for their major assignments and exams so that they can achieve the learning outcomes.

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### STEPS

Think of one assignment or exam you plan to give in your course. For this assignment or exam, consider these questions:

1. What types of knowledge and skills do students need in order to do well?
2. How can you best help students develop the knowledge and skills required to do well?
3. Specifically, keeping both in-class and out-of-class strategies in mind, how will students:
  - Practice using the knowledge and skills they need to succeed?
  - Get feedback from you, TA(s), and/or peers?

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### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How might you ...

1. share your expectations with students?
2. reimagine time in and out of class?
3. prepare students for major assignments or exams?
4. debrief major assignments or exams?
5. provide different types of feedback on student work?
6. ensure that assignments and exams are appropriately scheduled over the course of the semester?

Add your instructional strategies to your [Course Alignment Plan Worksheet](#) (p. 18), knowing that you can revise them later on. (If you are not sure what to do, take a look at the [Example Course Alignment Plan](#), p. 16).

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### RESOURCES

- [Strategies to engage your students in learning](#)
- [Strategies for exam preparation and debriefing](#)
- [Guidelines for promoting engagement in remote coursework](#)
- [Tools for teaching and assessing remotely](#)



## COURSE ALIGNMENT PLAN

A Course Alignment Plan provides an overview of the course learning outcomes, assessments, and strategies to prepare students for major graded assessments. See an [Example Course Alignment Plan](#) (p. 16).

### PREPARING A COURSE ALIGNMENT PLAN

1. Develop / review your learning outcomes. Make sure that they reflect in a clear way what you want students to have learned by the end of the course.
2. Select methods (exams and assignments) that can assess the kind of learning specified in your learning outcomes.
3. Decide on the teaching strategies that you will use to help students develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. Consider strategies for both flexible and fixed learning opportunities.
4. Identify possible [learning technologies \(McGill-supported\)](#) to implement the assessments and strategies.
5. Fill in your Course Alignment Plan.

### SELF-ASSESSING YOUR COURSE ALIGNMENT PLAN

- ✓ Is there a good fit between the learning that you want for your students and the assessment methods that you have chosen?
- ✓ Do the assignments and exam(s) require students to think at the same level as the learning outcomes?
- ✓ Is the number of major assessments reasonable in terms of workload for you and your students?
- ✓ Are the assignments interesting to you and will they be to your students?
- ✓ Are there any major assessments that can be broken down into smaller pieces to better support learning?
- ✓ Does the Course Alignment Plan include strategies that allow students to apply the knowledge and practice the skills they need to succeed on major assessments and get feedback from you, TA(s), and/or peers?
- ✓ Will the learning technologies you have selected support students with successfully completing their assignments and exams?



## EXAMPLE COURSE ALIGNMENT PLAN

This example illustrates a Course Alignment Plan for *Montreal Urban Sustainability Analysis (ENVR 422)*, an intensive course taught by professors Julia Freeman and Kevin Manaugh.

### Learning outcomes (LOs)

What is most important for students to have learned upon completion of your course? What do you want students to know, value, and be able to do?

1. **Define and explain** key socio-economic and environmental concepts in order to have an adaptive conceptualization of urban sustainability.
2. **Use** indicators to critically assess a sustainability project's success, as part of identifying barriers and better understanding successful initiatives.
3. **Apply** course concepts and identify sustainability challenges at McGill and in Montreal, using written and verbal modes of expression.
4. **Evaluate** sustainable initiatives in Montreal across a range of topics (e.g., waste management, transportation) and using different themes in order to recognize their complexity.

| Learning outcomes                                | Major assessments  | Strategies, including low-stakes assessments, to prepare students for major assessments   | Learning technologies (McGill-supported)   |
|--|--|---|--|
| LOs can be associated with multiples assessments | What types of formal assessment methods (assignments and exams) will allow you and students to see whether the learning outcomes have been achieved? | What learning activities will students engage in as they work toward achieving the learning outcomes?   | Which <u>tools</u> will support the implementation of the assessments and learning activities?   |
| 3  |  | Journaling: Students write free-form thoughts about the class 3-4 times a week and receive weekly feedback from the instructors to encourage ongoing reflection. Assessment largely addresses the extent to which students are making insightful connections. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• myCourses <a href="#">Discussions for student journals</a></li> <li>or</li> <li>• myCourses <a href="#">Assignments</a></li> </ul> (Both tools allow for multiple attachment types, e.g., docx, PDF, jpeg, mp3, mp4.) |

|            |   |  |  |
|------------|---|--|--|
| 1, 2, 3, 4 |   | Project outline and annotated bibliography: Team assignment to prepare for final project by getting students working together, thinking about their final project, and familiarizing themselves with relevant research documents. Assessment is based on how well students complete the outline, how well the annotated bibliography addresses the research topic, and how successfully the sources are annotated. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>myCourses <a href="#">Assignments</a> (The tool allows for multiple attachment types, e.g., docx, PDF, jpeg, mp3, mp4.)</li> </ul>  |
| 2, 3       |   | Active course participation: Students contribute to class discussions and engage in activities.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Zoom, type in <a href="#">chat</a> or <a href="#">raise hand</a> to speak</li> <li><a href="#">myCourses Discussions</a></li> </ul>  |
| 1, 2, 3, 4 |   | Final project presentation: Teams share research results through 20-minute presentations and get feedback from instructors and peers to help them prepare for the final project. An assessment rubric is posted to myCourses.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentations: Zoom, or video recordings uploaded to <a href="#">myCourses Discussions</a></li> <li><a href="#">myCourses rubric</a></li> <li>Peer feedback: <a href="#">Microsoft Office Forms</a> or <a href="#">myCourses Discussions</a></li> </ul> |
| 1, 2, 3, 4 | Final project: The team project is an analysis of the topic under study written up as a report (12-15 pages long), with each group member focusing on a specific aspect of the analysis; includes a one-page executive summary outlining key findings from the research. Portions of the reports may be shared with community collaborators, depending on the nature of the research focus in a given year. |  | myCourses <a href="#">Assignments</a>  |



## COURSE ALIGNMENT PLAN WORKSHEET

⚠ Remember to save your changes when filling in this PDF

Course name and code:

### Learning outcomes (LOs)

What is most important for students to have learned upon completion of your course? What do you want students to know, value, and be able to do?

| Learning outcomes                                | Major assessments  | Strategies, including low-stakes assessments, to prepare students for major assessments               | Learning technologies (McGill-supported)   |
|--|--|---|--|
| LOs can be associated with multiples assessments | What types of formal assessment methods (assignments and exams) will allow you and students to see whether the learning outcomes have been achieved? | What learning activities will students engage in as they work toward achieving the learning outcomes? | Which <u>tools</u> will support the implementation of the assessments and learning activities? |
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## NEXT STEPS

### START WRITING YOUR COURSE OUTLINE

Consider using your Course Alignment Plan to begin writing your Course Outline. You can download the English or French version of the McGill Course Outline Guide for remote delivery from [this page](#) (scroll to Communication with Students).

A well-designed Course Outline provides a rationale for the course, clarifies expectations, organizes information, sets the tone for class interactions, and guides student learning. It clearly communicates to students the course learning outcomes, content, strategies, and methods of assessment.

Questions to consider as you review your draft Course Outline:

- ✓ Does the Course Outline provide a clear explanation of the overall purpose of this course? (Why does this course exist? How does it fit into the larger curriculum? For whom is it designed?)
- ✓ Does the Course Outline clearly communicate topics to be addressed in the course? (Are the topics sequenced? Is there a rationale for the sequence when appropriate?)
- ✓ Are the learning outcomes (i.e., the knowledge, skills, and values that students will learn as a result of participating in the course) clearly articulated? Are they appropriate to the students' level?
- ✓ How do the teaching strategies (e.g., lectures, discussions, guest lecturers, group activities) help stimulate student engagement and help students achieve the learning outcomes? How do the strategies prepare students for the major assignments and exams?
- ✓ Are there multiple opportunities, both un-graded and graded, for students to receive timely feedback on their learning?
- ✓ Does the Course Outline clearly communicate how students' work will be assessed? How will grades be assigned? How do the selected methods for assessing student learning relate to the learning outcomes of the course? Is a range of assessment methods used to support different approaches to learning?
- ✓ Is the workload reasonable, well-timed, and sustainable for you and your students?
- ✓ How well do the content, teaching strategies, and assessment methods seem to support students' learning?
- ✓ Are course policies and expectations clearly defined?

### GET FEEDBACK

Once you have a draft of your Course Outline, consider getting feedback on it from colleagues. You might also ask students in your unit to provide feedback. To ensure you get feedback on what you really want to know, pose specific questions to the people willing to review your Course Outline. If you like, draw on the questions in the section above.

TLS is also available to give you feedback on your Course Outline and, more broadly, on your course (re)design. Contact TLS for a [consultation](#).



## APPENDIX: ASSESSING LEARNING IN THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

“Affective learning relates to values, attitudes and behaviours and involves the learner emotionally” (Shephard, 2008, p. 88). It is more complex than whether or not a student enjoyed course content or instructors’ teaching strategies.

Assessing affective learning can be challenging. Instructors might find it difficult or feel hesitant to assess affective learning because of the emphasis that is typically placed on assessing cognitive learning in higher education (Gano-Phillips, 2009). Instructors might also believe that it is possible for students to achieve the cognitive learning outcomes for their course without changing their attitudes, values, or beliefs, or that affective outcomes may take longer to assess (Shephard, 2008). They might choose not to be explicit about affective learning outcomes for fear of being accused of ‘indoctrinating’ students (Shephard, 2008). However, assessing affective learning can be particularly important in disciplines where attaining a certain set of values and beliefs is integral to the field, such as healthcare (Jagger, 2013).

Assessing affective learning can be facilitated if one is explicit about what the learning outcomes should be. To help with crafting learning outcomes, instructors can refer to Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia’s (1984) taxonomy of affective domains. The taxonomy is ordered based on the extent to which a person’s perception or sense of something moves from general awareness to a point where it “consistently guides or controls the person’s behavior” – a process known as ‘internalization’ (Seels & Glasgow, 1990, p. 28).

### ASSESSING AFFECTIVE LEARNING: EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Discussions and debates** on topics related to the affective learning outcomes can provide a way to assess student learning. Discussions can be in-class or online (e.g., in a discussion forum).
- **Role-plays and simulations** can prompt students to make decisions. These decisions can then “reflect the value stance of each student” (Buissink-Smith, Mann, & Shephard, 2011, p. 107).
- **Portfolios, reflective journals and reflective essays** allow students to record their attitudes, values, and beliefs over time and reflect on them, thereby providing a record of growth.
- **Student response methods** can include questionnaires, surveys, checklists, polling, and rating scales that address students’ attitudes, values, and beliefs.
- **Pre- and post-tests**, which may include the previously mentioned student response methods, can illustrate changes in attitudes, behaviours, and values over the span of a course (Buissink-Smith, Mann, & Shephard, 2011).

### IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

The two examples below describe how different strategies for assessing affective learning have been put into practice.

#### 1. TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY TO MBA STUDENTS AT MONASH UNIVERSITY (STUBBS & COCKLIN, 2008)

**Learning outcome:** Students reflect on and critique underlying approaches to sustainability at the organizational and personal level.

**Assessment strategies:** Group assignment, personal essay

**How it works:** Students learned a specific method to analyze two case studies: one from the banking industry and one from the automotive industry. In groups, “the students work through a process to analyze: how an organization from each industry typically makes its money; the major sustainability issues and risk (environmental, social and economic); the implications of these issues and risk – how they impact the business (attaching a likelihood and consequence rating to each issue/risk); and responses (solutions) to these sustainability issues and risk – how the business should resolve the issues” (p. 216). Students then had to complete a group assignment using these same analysis strategies. The group assignment included producing a report and presenting an interim report to the class (10-15 minute presentation) one week before the assignment was due. Students also had to write a personal essay discussing how they “will – or will not – ‘personalize’ sustainability in their careers and/or lives” (p. 216).

Group assignment: “The students choose an organisation [...] and prepare a 5,000 word report using the same process used in class to analyze the two case studies” (p. 216).

Personal essay: Students are asked to discuss “their intended career path for the next five years [and] how sustainability will influence, or be integrated into, the role(s) they envisage; and what they need to do to realize this plan” (p. 217).

**Why it works:** “The in-class case studies [ ... ] and the group assignment allow the students to critically engage with the sustainability framework at a practical level which broadens their perspective on sustainability. The [...] personal essay results in high levels of engagement with the sustainability perspectives at a personal level, providing an opportunity for students to turn the lens on themselves [...] The aim is not to convert them to any particular viewpoint but rather to help them understand and articulate all the sides of the sustainability debate” (p. 217).

**Application:** Personal essays are a useful way to assess affective learning and provide flexibility in terms of format. They can be take-home or written in class. One can choose to have students reflect on or respond to a specific topic, case study, or the subject matter of the course.

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## 2. TEACHING, ASSESSING AND REMEDIATING PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOURS WITH STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI DIVISION OF PHYSICAL THERAPY (MASIN, 2002)

**Learning outcome:** Students are made aware of and then improve on the professional behaviours required for success in the physical therapy profession.

**Assessment strategy:** Student self-assessment

**How it works:** There are 10 generic abilities (i.e., professional behaviours) considered “to be essential to success in the profession but not necessarily related to technical skills” (p. 38). These abilities include: commitment to learning, interpersonal skills, communication skills, effective use of time and resources, use of constructive feedback, problem solving, professionalism, responsibility, critical thinking, and stress management. Students are introduced to these abilities in a two-credit course in their first semester.

For each generic ability, students develop one personal objective and two strategies to help them achieve their objective by the end of the course. Students are given a printed template for recording their objectives and strategies to achieve them, and are provided with written examples of personal objectives and strategies developed by students in previous classes. The objectives “must be measurable, have specific criteria for accomplishment, and have a time frame for completion” (p. 38). Students receive feedback from peers in small



groups, and from the instructor. The students then complete the strategies in support of their objectives over the course of the semester. To reinforce its importance, the self-assessment assignment is worth 20% of students' final grade.

**Why it works:** "Teaching the generic abilities in introductory course work helps physical therapist students recognize and value the professional behaviors early in their studies. The use of the generic abilities for ongoing self-assessment in the classroom and in preclinical and clinical advisory sessions continually develops students' awareness of their professional behaviors and the impact of these behaviors on their patients and colleagues" (p. 44).

**Application:** Self-assessment strategies encourage students to reflect on their learning and measure their own progress. Instructors should prepare students for self-assessment assignments and support them with the task. For instance, instructors can provide examples of previous self-assessments or provide feedback on a draft before it is graded.



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