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Building better writing assignments: TiLTing tasks towards transparency

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Active Learning Connection

Active engagement will include:

- Jam board/round robin/waterfall comments (if on WebEx) soliciting comments from participants identifying common student writing "problems."
- Participating in analysis of "Case Study" of a writing assignment (one TILTed/one not) and "peer review" identifying ways to improve an assignment.
- Workshop together a writing assignment from a participant's course to craft a more problem-centered assignment, noting long-term relevance for students (skills practiced and knowledge-gained).

Abstract

Most courses at OHSU contain some form of written assessment, and most faculty want students to improve their writing skills. We have noticed that many writing assignment instructions emphasize the purpose of the assessment and the grading criteria but not the tasks needed to complete the writing assignment from start to finish. We have also noticed that the writing-related skills and knowledge needed to succeed on the assignment are not necessarily present or adequately emphasized within the course itself.

This is where the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT) model comes in. The TiLT model is a framework that allows instructors to reimagine writing assignments, both in terms of their orientation toward problem-centered learning and in terms of the instruction document's structure (Winkelmes et al, 2016). Formo and Neary (2020) argue that assignment instructions themselves can become a tool for teaching and learning, and we see the TiLT model as one way to achieve this. The TiLT model also improves two important predictors of success (i.e., sense of belonging, confidence) among underserved students, giving it significant implications for educational equity (Winkelmes, 2017). We argue that employing the TiLT model and paying increased attention to the alignment between writing assignments and assessment criteria can help students better understand how professionals approach discipline-related critical thinking in their field.

In this session, we will introduce the TILT model and discuss ways to improve writing assignments to more strongly align with assessment criteria and faculty goals for writing improvement, including scaffolding and integrating opportunities for effective feedback on student work. This workshop will introduce methods with direct classroom applications for anyone who wants their students to be "better" writers.

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the TiLT model, including how it supports equity and anti-racist teaching.
2. Scaffold (backwards plan) writing assignments.
3. Align writing instruction and writing assessment.

References

Formo, D., Robinson Neary, K. (2020). Threshold Concepts and FYC Writing Prompts: Helping Students Discover Composition's Common Knowledge with(in) Assignment Sheets. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 47(4), 335-364.

Winklmes, M., Bernacki, M., Butler, J., Zochowski, M., Golanics, J., Harris Weavil, K. (2016). A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success. *Peer Review*, 18(1/2), 31-36.

Winklmes, M. [MAWinklmes]. 2017, May 8. Transparency and Problem-centered Learning [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqUQhSKmD9U>