Building a Culture of Assessment: Working Together to Enhance Student Success.

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Northern Illinois University
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This morning we will...

- Create a shared understanding of assessment ideas and terms
- Identify common barriers to creating a culture of assessment
- Learn key strategies to create a healthy culture of assessment within your organization.
- Identify ways to enhance learning while also being transparent and achieving accountability.
- Implement tools and tips based on best practices to support the development of a strong culture of assessment on your campus.
The “Nuts and Bolts” of Assessment

Outcomes-based assessment is:

- A systematic and intentional process in which higher education professionals articulate what the program intends to accomplish in regard to its services, research, student learning, and faculty/staff development programs;

- The faculty and/or professionals then purposefully plan the program so that the intended results (outcomes) can be achieved;

- Implement methods to systematically—over time—identify whether end results have been achieved;

- And finally, use the results to plan improvements or make recommendations for policy consideration, recruitment, retention, resources reallocation, or new resources requests;

- This systematic process of evaluation is then repeated at a later date to determine whether the program improvements contribute to intended outcome

What is your definition of assessment?

Importance of Assessing Learning

- Demonstrates contributions to institutional mission and goals
- Contributes to institutional priorities
- Assists in informing prioritization of your time as well as other resources

(Bresciani, Moore Gardner, and Hickmott, 2009)
Assessment provides the following:

- Aggregate information about students as a group
- Information that tells us whether or not what we do is effective
- Information about *how* we contribute to student learning and development

Outcomes-Based Assessment Informs:

- Policy-making
- Creation of programs and services
- Budgeting
- Strategic planning
- Program review
- Accreditation
- Resource allocation
Key Components of an Assessment Plan

1. Institutional/Departmental mission
2. Goals and objectives
3. **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**
4. Methodology
5. Results
6. Use of results

Types of Goals/Outcomes

- Program Goals

- Department Goals (Service)

- **Student Learning Outcomes:** identify what students learn cognitively, behaviorally, or affectively
Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes

The endorsed and approved student learning outcomes based on the three baccalaureate goals (see section 2.2) best articulate what an NIU graduate should know, value, and be able to do, and therefore are fundamental to the PLUS integrative learning approach.

NIU Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes

- Communicate clearly and effectively;
- Demonstrate critical, creative, and independent thought;
- Use and combine appropriate quantitative and qualitative reasoning skills to address questions and solve problems;
- Collaborate with others to achieve specific goals;
- Analyze issues that interconnect human life and the natural world;
- Exhibit intercultural competencies with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives; and
- Integrate knowledge of global interconnections and interdependencies;
- Synthesize learned knowledge and skills and apply them creatively to develop cross-disciplinary and innovative solutions to problems.
The three specific curricular objectives of PLUS are to:

- put the baccalaureate goals and student learning outcomes (SLOs) into practice;

- increase student participation in the high impact practices of intensive writing, collaborative learning, first-year experience, and engaged learning activities; and

- revise the general education program in order to make it more attractive and relevant.

**Outcome Mapping** (MMG, 2014)

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**Significant Learning** (Fink, 2003)

- “Taxonomy of Significant Learning”
- For learning to occur, some kind of change must occur in the learner
- *Significant* learning requires that it be a *lasting* change
- Taxonomy includes six kinds of significant learning
Taxonomy of Significant Learning

**Foundational Knowledge:** ability to understand and remember specific information and ideas

**Application:** occurs when students learn how to engage in some kind of new action

**Integration:** students are able to see and understand the connections between different things

**Human Dimension:** students learn something important about themselves or others

**Caring:** when a learning experience changes the degree of caring about something

**Learning How to Learn:** when students learn something about the learning process itself

### Significant Learning Outcomes Mapping (MMG, 2014)

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Building a Culture of Assessment

What is a Culture of Assessment?
Organizational culture...

“is the set of shared beliefs, values, and norms that influence the way members think, feel, and behave” (Lunenburg, 2011, p.1).

Culture includes...

1. Artifacts
   - Physical environment
   - Social environment
   - Technological output of group
   - Written and spoken language
   - Overt behavior of members
   - Symbols

2. Values

3. Beliefs/Assumptions

Schein (1992)
Dimensions of Organizational Culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982)

1. Values
   - Beliefs that lie at heart of organizational culture
2. Heroes
   - People who embody values
3. Rites and Rituals
   - Routines that have strong symbolic qualities
4. Cultural Network
   - Informal communication system or hidden hierarch power in the organization

What is a culture of **ASSESSMENT**?

- An organization’s shared understanding of, expectations for, and actual engagement in assessment.
- The strength of that culture is based on:
  - Overall understanding of assessment
  - Shared definitions and expectations
  - Level of collaboration
  - Resource allocation
For example:

- What is your definition of a student learning goal?
- Are their common artifacts used/created for assessment purposes on campus?
- Are there particular assessment rituals in which the campus engages that demonstrate a culture of assessment (or lack there of) on campus?
- What resources are available to assist with assessment practice?

“Building a House”
(Gavin Henning, Campus Labs Blog)
What is YOUR culture of assessment? (What does your “house” look like?)

Building a culture of assessment, requires that we establish and foster a set of shared beliefs, organizational values, and integrated assessment practices that influence the way members think, feel, and behave.

But first ....
Common Barriers

1. Lack of time and/or resources
2. Lack of understanding of assessment
3. Lack of coordination of the process
4. Lack of a practical and applicable conceptual framework
5. Shelves and cabinets of data
6. Collaboration
7. Varying levels of trust (questions of intent, academic freedom, etc.)
8. Managing expectations

(Bresciani, Moore Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009)

Additional Barriers?
Strategies to Overcome Barriers and Create a Culture of Assessment

1. Link with what you are already doing

• Connect assessment to current core documents, activities and organizational priorities and demonstrate impact

• Ask questions to which all members of the organization can relate to increase relevance and make establishing shared outcomes much simpler and sustainable.

• Involve all stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and leadership.
Questions to highlight existing practices and resources

1. What assessment is currently taking place?

2. What tools are we currently using?

3. What tools have we forgotten about?

2. Enhance perceived value

- How much value is placed upon assessment departmentally, college-wide, and institutionally?
- Is it a part of the rewards system?
- Is it promoted and supported by institutional leaders?
- Is it for institutional improvement or accountability?
- Does it actually matter?
- Is it a trend?
- Rewards?
3. Educate

A lack of understanding about what assessment is as well as how it benefits of the organization and its members impedes success.

Tools for Educating

- Utilize “nucleators” within your organization to help educate others
- Create an assessment committee or office to spearhead educational efforts
- Utilize “in house” experts, webinars, conferences, books, etc. to assist in increasing understanding
- Start at the beginning and build on knowledge base
4. Communicate

- Communicating with and among all stakeholders involved in the process can increase motivation and improve understanding.

- Transparency through communication can lesson the fear of hidden agendas and suspicion of negative accountability measures.

- Communication can increase a sense of community as opposed to top-down directives.

Questions to enhance communication efforts.

1. How are we communicating?
2. Why are we communicating?
3. Does it make sense?
5. Collaborate

Build relationships, share resources, and connect to a larger process of assessing throughout the institution

Building Trusting Relationships

• Supportive leadership
• Mutual trust
• Positive relationships
• Transparent communication
Create and utilize professional learning communities

- Positive interactions with other professionals that resulted from participation in assessment projects
- Sharing best practices helps establish a type of learning community with peers
- More training in assessment design
- Include more assessment seasoned professionals in the process/make them visible

Appoint Assessment Liaisons

- Provide leadership and mentoring to create a culture of evidence and meet assessment goals.
- Proactively disseminate information to stakeholders to increase transparency and buy-in
- Collaborate and network with stakeholders to implement strategies for building a culture of evidence
6. Assess the “whole student”

We cannot get a complete and holistic picture of overall student growth and development during the post-secondary experience without including experiences that occur both inside and outside the classroom.

Ways you can do this now

- NIU Plus Program
- E-portfolios
- AAC&U VALUE Rubrics
7. Close the Loop

“An outcomes-based approach cannot be pursued merely by documenting that the conditions necessary for quality educational experiences to take place are present. Today, institutions must demonstrate the impact of instruction on student learning and that faculty members are actually using the results of these assessments to improve instruction.”

(Welsh and Metcalf, 2003, p. 450)

How have you used assessment data to inform and provide direction for your own work?
8. Rediscover Existing Practices and Resources

- Current practices:
  - What assessment is currently taking place?
  - What tools are we currently using?
  - What tools have we forgotten about?
- Communication:
  - How are we communicating?
  - Why are we communicating?
  - Does it make sense?

9. Resources

1. **Financial**: necessary to sustain a long-term assessment process and implement change

2. **Time**: to train, create, implement, enhance/change

3. **Human**: top-down support and engagement to create and sustain a culture of assessment
Assessment Consortia

- Taking the lead in the movement to increase the use of student learning measures
- Designed to increase awareness and buy-in and provide resources and tools to key stakeholders
- Focused on elevating the role of student learning outcomes in student retention and graduation efforts

Pathways to College Network Brief

Examples

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

The New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability
Online Survey Tools

- **Qualtrics**
  [http://doit.niu.edu/doit/fac_staff/qualtrics/index.shtml](http://doit.niu.edu/doit/fac_staff/qualtrics/index.shtml)
- **Survey Monkey**
- **Zoomerang**
- **Surveygizmo**

*NIU institution-wide license

Rubrics

Establish measurable criteria for assessing outcomes at various skill and accomplishment levels
Examples


AAC&U VALUE Rubrics

• 16 Rubrics
  ▫ Intellectual and Practical Skills
    • Critical thinking, oral communication, problem solving
  ▫ Personal and Social Responsibility
    • Civic knowledge and engagement, ethical reasoning
  ▫ Integrative and Applied Learning
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### 10. Make Assessment Cumulative

- Assessment should not be sporadic, happenstance, or done in a panicked state spurred by an accreditation visit
- Assessment should start small and build on itself.
- It should be informed by past assessments and grow as a result of past successes and failures
Assessment Cycle (Moore Gardner, 2006)

- Must be committed from start to finish—“own it” and have an end goal
- Sometimes we must repeat or tweak to get intended results
- Must re-evaluate based on lessons learned, resources, organization environment, student demographics, etc.
- We must embrace and learn from failure
11. Celebrate

Key Things to Remember

- Student learning must be intentionally designed
- Activities to support intentional student learning must be planned and made systematic
- Learning must be facilitated first; then evaluate how well it transferred
- In order to systematically improve learning, we must systematically design and evaluate the opportunities to improve student learning
- Authentic assessment must be rooted in “your story”

(King, 2003; Komives & Assoc., 2003; Mentkowski & Assoc, 2000, Kuh et al., 2005; Astin, 1996; Bresciani et. al., 2010)
Reflection Questions

• How are you directly or indirectly contributing to and supporting significant student learning experiences?

• How are you directly or indirectly interfering with significant student learning?

• How does “your story” (department, college, and university) inform your assessment efforts?

Assessment Resources

• NASPA/ACPA Learning Reconsidered and Learning Reconsidered II

• CAS Standards

• Professional Association Websites

• AACU Essential Outcomes

• Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) (http://www.aacu.org/value/)

• Departmental/Divisional Outcomes

• National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

• The New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability

• ACPA ASK Standards
Questions?

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WHAT IS "SIGNIFICANT LEARNING"?

Dr. L. Dee Fink
Director, Instructional Development Program
University of Oklahoma
Author of Creating Significant Learning Experiences (Jossey-Bass, 2003)

One of the first tasks teachers face when designing a course is deciding what they want students to learn or get out of their course. Students will always learn something, but good teachers want their students to learn something important or significant, rather than something relatively insignificant. This leads to a question that is key to the whole teaching enterprise: What are the ways in which learning can be significant? If we have or can develop a language and a conceptual framework for identifying the multiple ways in which learning can be significant, then teachers can decide which of various kinds of significant learning they want to support and promote in a given course or learning experience.

It was with this thought in mind that I worked on and eventually put together a new taxonomy of learning, one that is called a "Taxonomy of Significant Learning" (and which is described in more detail in Chapter 2 of Creating Significant Learning Experiences).

My own view is that this new taxonomy can be seen as a successor to the classic taxonomy, the well-known taxonomy of educational objectives formulated by Benjamin Bloom and his associates in the 1950’s. Although this group in fact generated three taxonomies (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor), teachers have most frequently referred to the one in the cognitive domain (Bloom, 1956). The cognitive taxonomy consists of six kinds of learning that are arranged in a hierarchical sequence. These are, from the highest to the lowest:
• Evaluation
• Synthesis
• Analysis
• Application
• Comprehension
• Knowledge (meaning "recall" knowledge)

Teachers have used this taxonomy both as a framework for formulating course objectives and as a basis for evaluating student learning.

There is no question about the value of what Bloom and his associates accomplished by creating this taxonomy. Any model that commands this kind of respect half a century later is extraordinary. However, individuals and organizations involved in higher education are expressing a need for important kinds of learning that do not emerge easily from the Bloom taxonomy, for example: learning how to learn, leadership and interpersonal skills, ethics, communication skills, character, tolerance, the ability to adapt to change, etc. My interpretation of these statements is that they are expressing a need for new kinds of learning, kinds that go well beyond the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy and even beyond cognitive learning itself. This suggests that the time may have arrived when we need a new and broader taxonomy of significant learning.

With an awareness of this need in mind, I have reviewed descriptions of high quality teaching and learning and have attempted the task of creating a new taxonomy, one that describes new kinds of significant learning. This taxonomy will describe several ways in which learning can be significant and represents my effort to synthesize several decades of conversations with students and teachers on this topic.
In the process of constructing this taxonomy, I was guided by a particular perspective on learning: I defined learning in terms of change. For learning to occur, there has to be some kind of change in the learner. No change, no learning. And significant learning requires that there be some kind of *lasting* change that is *important* in terms of the learner's life. With this perspective in mind, I created a taxonomy that includes six kinds of significant learning (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1**

THE TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING
Each category of significant learning contains a number of more specific kinds of learning that are related in some way and has a distinct value for the learner. At this time I will give a quick overview of the six categories. This will be followed by comments on the general nature of the taxonomy.

**Major Categories in the Taxonomy of Significant Learning**

**Foundational Knowledge.** At the base of most other kinds of learning is the need for students to "know" something. Knowing, as used here, refers to students' ability to understand and remember specific information and ideas. It is important for people today to have some valid basic knowledge, for example, about science, history, literature, geography, etc. They also need to understand major ideas or perspectives, for example, what evolution is (and what it is not), what capitalism is (and is not), and so forth. **Special Value:** Foundational Knowledge provides the *basic understanding* that is necessary for other kinds of learning.

**Application.** This familiar kind of learning occurs when students learn how to engage in some new kind of action, which may be intellectual, physical, social, etc. Learning how to engage in various kinds of thinking (critical, creative, practical) is an important form of application learning. But this category of significant learning also includes developing certain skills (e.g., communication, playing the piano) or learning how to manage complex projects. **Special Value:** Application learning allows other kinds of learning to become *useful.*

**Integration.** When students are able to see and understand the connections between different things, an important kind of learning has occurred. Sometimes they make connections between specific ideas, between whole realms of ideas, between
people, and/or between different realms of life (e.g., between school and work or between school and leisure life). **Special Value:** The act of making new connections gives learners a new form of power, especially intellectual power.

**Human Dimension.** When students learn something important about their own Self and/or about Others, it enables them to interact more effectively with themselves or with others. They discover the personal and/or social implications of what they have learned. What they learn or the way in which they learn sometimes gives students a new understanding of themselves (self-image) or a new vision of what they want to become (self-ideal). At other times, they acquire a better understanding of others: how and why others act the way they do, or how the learner can interact more effectively with others. **Special Value:** This kind of learning informs students about the human significance of what they are learning.

**Caring.** Sometimes a learning experience changes' the degree to which students care about something. This may be reflected in the form of new feelings, interests, and/or values. Any of these changes means students now care about something to a greater degree or in a way than they did before. **Special Value:** When students care about something, they then have the energy they need for learning more about it and making it a part of their lives. Without the energy for learning, nothing significant happens.

**Learning How to Learn.** This occurs when students learn something about the process of learning itself. They may be learning how to be a better student, how to engage in a particular kind of inquiry (e.g., the scientific method), or how to become self-directing learners. All of these constitute important forms of learning how to learn.
Special Value: This kind of learning enables students to continue learning in the future and to do so with greater effectiveness.

Interactive Nature of Significant Learning

One important feature of this taxonomy is that it is not hierarchical but rather relational and even interactive. The diagram shown in Figure 2.2 illustrates the interactive character of this taxonomy. This more dynamic diagram is intended to show (a) that each kind of learning is related to the other kinds of learning and (b) that achieving anyone kind of learning simultaneously enhances the possibility of the other kinds of learning being achieved. Why is this so important?

Figure 2.2

THE INTERACTIVE NATURE OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING
This interactive characteristic is important for teachers because it means the various kinds of learning are synergistic. And this in turn means that teaching is no longer a "zero sum" game. That is, teachers don't automatically have to give up one kind of learning in order to achieve another. Instead, when a teacher finds a way to help students achieve one kind of learning, this can in fact enhance, not decrease, student achievement in the other kinds of learning. For example, if a teacher finds a way to help students learn how to effectively use the information and concepts in a course to solve certain kinds of problems (Application learning), this makes it easier for them to get excited about the value of the subject (Caring). Or, when students learn how to effectively relate this subject to other ideas and subjects (Integration), this makes it easier for students to see the significance of the course material for themselves and for others (Human dimension). When a course or learning experience is able to promote all six kinds of learning, one has had a learning experience that can truly be deemed "significant."

Concluding Comments

To return to the original question, "What is significant learning?" the answer being offered here is: Any learning that consists of one or more of the following kinds of learning:

- Foundational knowledge
- Application learning
- Integration
- The Human dimension of learning · Caring
- Learning how to learn
And, the more that these kinds of learning occur, the more significant the learning experience is. In fact, the most significant kind of learning experience is one in which students achieve all six kinds of significant learning. And that is possible - if teachers learn how to design their courses properly with these goals in mind. That is the special capability of "integrated course design."
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The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

Definition

Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

Framing Language

This writing rubric is designed for use in a wide variety of educational institutions. The most clear finding to emerge from decades of research on writing assessment is that the best writing assessments are locally determined and sensitive to local context and mission. Users of this rubric should, in the end, consider making adaptations and additions that clearly link the language of the rubric to individual campus contexts.

This rubric focuses assessment on how specific written work samples or collections of work respond to specific contexts. The central question guiding the rubric is “How well does writing respond to the needs of audience(s) for the work?” In focusing on this question the rubric does not attend to other aspects of writing that are equally important: issues of writing process, writing strategies, writers’ fluency with different modes of textual production or publication, or writer’s growing engagement with writing and disciplinarity through the process of writing.

Evaluators using this rubric must have information about the assignments or purposes for writing guiding writers’ work. Also recommended is including reflective work samples of collections of work that address such questions as: What decisions did the writer make about audience, purpose, and genre as s/he compiled the work in the portfolio? How are those choices evident in the writing – in the content, organization and structure, reasoning, evidence, mechanical and surface conventions, and citational systems used in the writing? This will enable evaluators to have a clear sense of how writers understand the assignments and take it into consideration as they evaluate.

The first section of this rubric addresses the context and purpose for writing. A work sample or collections of work can convey the context and purpose for the writing tasks it showcases by including the writing assignments associated with work samples. But writers may also convey the context and purpose for their writing within the texts. It is important for faculty and institutions to include directions for students about how they should represent their writing contexts and purposes.

Faculty interested in the research on writing assessment that has guided our work here can consult the National Council of Teachers of English/Council of Writing Program Administrators’ White Paper on Writing Assessment (2008; www.ncte.org/CWPA/Whitepaper) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s Writing Assessment: A Position Statement (2008; www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/125784.htm)

Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- **Content Development**: The ways in which the text explores and represents its topic in relation to its audience and purpose.
- **Context of and purpose for writing**: The content of writing is the situation surrounding a text: who is writing it? who is writing to? Under what circumstances will the text be shared or circulated? What social or political factors might affect how the text is composed or interpreted? The purpose for writing is the writer’s intended effect on an audience. Writers might want to persuade or inform; they might want to report or summarize information; they might want to work through complexity or confusion; they might want to argue with other writers, or they might want to convey urgency or amuse; they might write for themselves or for an assignment or to remember.
- **Disciplinary conventions**: Formal and informal rules that constitute what is seen generally as appropriate within different academic fields, e.g. introductory strategies, use of passive voice or first person point of view, expectations for thesis or hypothesis, expectations for kinds of evidence and support that are appropriate to the task at hand, use of primary and secondary sources to provide evidence and support arguments and to provide critical perspectives on the topic. Writers will incorporate sources according to disciplinary and genre conventions, according to the writer’s purpose for the text. Through increasingly sophisticated use of sources, writers develop an ability to differentiate between their own ideas and the ideas of others, credit and build upon work already accomplished in the field or issue they are addressing, and provide meaningful examples to readers.
- **Evidence**: Source material that is used to extend, in purposeful ways, writers’ ideas in a text.
- **Genre conventions**: Formal and informal rules for particular kinds of texts and/or media that guide formatting, organization, and stylistic choices, e.g. lab reports, academic papers, poetry, webpages, or personal essays.
- **Sources**: Texts (written, oral, behavioral, visual, or other) that writers draw on as they work for a variety of purposes -- to extend, argue with, develop, define, or shape their ideas, for example.
**Definition**
Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

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<tr>
<th>Capstone</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Context of and Purpose for Writing</strong>&lt;br&gt;Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).</td>
<td>Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.</td>
<td>Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content Development</strong></td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer’s understanding, and shaping the whole work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</strong>&lt;br&gt;Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).</td>
<td>Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sources and Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.</td>
<td>Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.</td>
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The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

**Definition**

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

**Framing Language**

This rubric is designed to be transdisciplinary, reflecting the recognition that success in all disciplines requires habits of inquiry and analysis that share common attributes. Further, research suggests that successful critical thinkers from all disciplines increasingly need to be able to apply those habits in various and changing situations encountered in all walks of life.

This rubric is designed for use with many different types of assignments and the suggestions here are not an exhaustive list of possibilities. Critical thinking can be demonstrated in assignments that require students to complete analyses of text, data, or issues. Assignments that cut across presentation mode might be especially useful in some fields. If insight into the process components of critical thinking (e.g., how information sources were evaluated regardless of whether they were included in the product) is important, assignments focused on student reflection might be especially illuminating.

**Glossary**

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- **Ambiguity**: Information that may be interpreted in more than one way.
- **Assumptions**: Ideas, conditions, or beliefs (often implicit or unstated) that are "taken for granted or accepted as true without proof." (quoted from www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/assumptions)
- **Context**: The historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or circumstantial settings or conditions that influence and complicate the consideration of any issues, ideas, artifacts, and events.
- **Literal meaning**: Interpretation of information exactly as stated. For example, "she was green with envy" would be interpreted to mean that her skin was green.
- **Metaphor**: Information that is (intended to be) interpreted in a non-literal way. For example, "she was green with envy" is intended to convey an intensity of emotion, not a skin color.
# Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric

For more information, please contact value@aacu.org

**Definition**

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation of issues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.</td>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.</td>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion</strong></td>
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<td>Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.</td>
<td>Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.</td>
<td>Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of context and assumptions</strong></td>
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<td>Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)</strong></td>
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<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).</td>
<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).</td>
<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions and related outcomes</strong>&lt;br&gt;(implications and consequences)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order.</td>
<td>Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints, related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.</td>
<td>Conclusion is inconsistently tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.</td>
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<td>Foundational Knowledge</td>
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<td>Outcome 2</td>
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