

Qualities of Good Assignments

Source: Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- **Why are you giving this assignment?**
 - What is the purpose?
 - What do you expect students to learn by completing it?
- **What should the completed assignment look like?**
 - What should be included?
 - Who is the audience for the assignment (e.g, families, children)?
 - How should the completed assignment be formatted?
 - What knowledge, skills, or dispositions should be reflected?
 - Have you explained any terms that may be fuzzy to your students, such as *compare*, *evaluate*, and *discuss*?
- **How are students to complete the assignment? How do you expect them to devote their time and energy?**
 - What readings, reference materials, and technologies are they expected to use?
 - Can they collaborate with others? If so, to what extent?
 - What assistance can you provide while they are working on the assignment? (e.g., are you willing to critique drafts)?

Alternatives to Consider

Abstract or executive summary	Field notes	Portfolio
Advertisement or commercial	Game invention	Poster, display or exhibit
Annotated bibliography	Graph, chart, diagram, flowchart, infographic, or other visual aid	Presentation or demonstration, with or without PowerPoints
Blog	Handbook or instruction manual	Proposal for and justification of a solution to a problem
Briefing paper	Journal or log	
Brochure or pamphlet	Letter to an editor, business, or leader	Reflection on what and how one has learned
Campaign speech		
Case study or analysis	Model, simulation, or illustration	Review and critique of one's own work, that of a peer, a performance, an exhibit, a writer's arguments (e.g., an op ed), or how something could have been done better
Collaborative group activity	Narrative	
Database	Newspaper story or news report on a concept or event	Survey, including an analysis of the results
Debate or discussion (plan, participate, or lead)	Plan to research and solve a problem	
Editing or revising a poorly prepared paper	Plan to conduct a project or provide a service	Teaching a concept to a peer or a child
Evaluation of opposing points of view or the pros and cons of alternate solutions to a problem	Plan to engage new audiences or partners	
		Website

Check Your Assignment Alignment

Course Number/Title _____

Assignment	Alignment with Student Learning Outcomes								What does the assignment measure?		What, if any, are the field experiences related to this assignment?
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Knowledge Acquisition	Knowledge Application	
1.											
2.											
3.											
4.											
5.											
6.											
7.											
8.											

Assignment-Student Learning Outcome-NAEYC Standards/Supportive Skills Alignment

Course Number/Title _____

Assignment	Alignment with Student Learning Outcomes for Course								What does the assignment measure?		NAEYC Standards and Key Elements															Supportive Skills																									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Knowledge Acquisition	Knowledge Application	1			2			3				4				5				6					1	2	3	4	5													
											A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	E																			
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Using Assignment Alignment Results

On a course by course basis

- Do your assignments explicitly and intentionally measure all objectives/outcomes?
- Are there assignments that stress both knowledge acquisition and knowledge application?
- Are field experiences aligned with the outcomes and assignments?

Across a program

Do assignments provide adequate learning opportunities relative to

- State or national professional preparation standards?
- State early learning guidelines/standards?
- Supporting children who are culturally, linguistically, and individually diverse learners and their families?

Assignment Makeovers

Before	After
<p>Early Childhood Quality – List 10 characteristics of a high quality early childhood program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to create a one-page, formatted handout that lists at least five reasons why supporting quality for young children is a good investment. • Require evidence sources for each of the reasons that document the difference each feature makes for children and families. • Make a “pitch” to an older voter about why they should, as a taxpayer, pay to support quality for young children. Provide extra credit if the person is grouchy!
<p>Article Summary- Conduct a search of articles in early childhood journals related to family structure today and/or experiences of parenting. Read and summarize four of the articles that you found. Include the following points in your summary for each article:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • title, author, and publication date • main points of the article • your reaction to the article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with a list of early childhood and early childhood special education/early intervention journals (e.g., <i>Journal of Early Intervention</i>, <i>Young Exceptional Children</i>, <i>Exceptional Parent</i>, <i>Infants and Young Children</i>). Require students to select readings from both lists. • Assign articles that present diverse perspectives on family-professional collaboration, like Nikia Parker’s <i>We Were A Hard-to-Reach Family</i> (http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/we-were-a-hard-to-reach-family). Based on what they read, ask them to identify the family’s concerns, priorities, and resources. Ask each student to think about what else they might like to ask each family in order to be well prepared to support their child. Pair students up to compare their responses. • Familiarize students with the Family Practices section of DEC Recommended Practices (http://ectacenter.org/decrp/). Require students to: 1) identify two or more evidence-based practices that were mentioned in the article and 2) describe how those practices might be effective in a setting with which students are familiar.

Before	After
<p>Parent-Teacher Conference Plan - Develop an outline for an effective and productive parent-teacher conference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share and discuss examples of effective family-professional interactions. Some to consider are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finley’s Parent Teacher Conference http://www2.cde.state.co.us/media/resultsmatter/RMSeries/FinleysParent-TeacherConference_SA.asp ○ Starting a Relationship (home-based) from CONNECT Module 4 http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/resources/videos/video-4-4 ○ CONNECT Module 4 Videos 4.5 – 4.10 http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/learners/module-4 ● Share and discuss the Families are Full Team Members checklist (http://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/decrp/TC-1_Families_Are_Full_Team_Members.pdf) or other list of recommended practices ● Develop an outline that reflects the recommended practices. ● Extra credit: Share a draft with the family of a young child for input. Describe edits that were incorporated as a result of the family’s advice.
<p>Parent Involvement Policy- Develop a policy that addresses parent involvement in an early childhood program. Address parent parent visits, volunteering, and advisory roles of parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share and discuss evidence-based practices for family engagement, using resources like the DEC recommended family practices (http://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-family.asp) or the NAEYC review of the literature on engaging diverse families (https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/research/FamEngage.pdf). The Harvard Family Research Project also has some excellent resources (http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources). ● Use the assignment directions and rubric to be specific about components of the assignment that students might otherwise miss. This can include a summary of the evidence for the difference family engagement can make in student achievement and outcomes, specific strategies for supporting families who may be culturally, linguistically, or socio-economically diverse, or considerations for supporting families whose children are differently abled.
<p>Community Resource Assignment – Complete an inventory of community resources to support families (e.g., health clinics, WIC offices, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review components of the assignment to ensure that it will help students discover resources for supporting families who are diverse in terms of culture, language, socio-economic status and the needs of their child. ● Add a knowledge application component by requiring students to identify a family who has a child or children in the birth – 8 age range. Require them, through face-to-face interactions or phone calls if necessary, to gather information about family goals, values, and priorities for the learning and development of their child. At the end of the interaction, require students to ask each family to identify something they would like to know. It may be a question about a service (“<i>Can you get the food stamps folks to return my call?</i>”), a skill (“<i>My child really likes to draw. What are some effective ways to build on that talent?</i>”), or a challenge (“<i>How can I get my child to play outside instead of sitting at the computer?</i>”). An additional benefit to making this shift is that it focuses the student’s creativity and evidence-based resources on what the family wants instead of what the student thinks the family needs.

Before	After
<p>Caregiver Handout - Create a simple handout that you could post in an infant, toddler, or two-year-old classroom listing at least ten suggestions the teachers or caregivers could use to increase appropriate interactions and/or support the development of very young children</p>	<p>Incorporate more specific requirements in the assignment, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • documentation of the evidence base for each suggestion • suggestions that would support children who are dual language learners • suggestions that would support children who have a very brief attention span • suggestions that would support children who may have some developmental delays • adaptations for each suggestion that would support different kinds of learners
<p>Infant-Toddler Classroom Design Assignment - Design a high-quality, developmentally appropriate indoor learning environment for an assigned group of infants or toddlers. You will create the floor plan, a materials list, and a PowerPoint that explains your vision of a high quality DAP environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in the semester, ask students to submit an initial design for a classroom. • Later mention that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • several of the infants/toddlers/twos have home languages other than English • Several come from families with very few financial resources • One has an IFSP and is receiving speech therapy for significantly delayed speech and language. • Ask students to revise their original design (e.g., space for both small group and whole group work; images, labels, music that reflect the language/cultures of the families) to support these children. • OR mention that the program will be adopting a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to all classrooms. Ask students to revise their original design to support a UDL approach. • OR consider asking teachers or caregivers about topics that they would like more information about (e.g., something that is an ongoing challenge in their classroom OR an area that they would like to learn more about). Require to students to identify evidence-based approaches to addressing the challenge that has been identified, and then ask students to present their ideas to the teachers/caregivers for feedback on the approaches identified.
<p>Children’s Book Assignment – Select a domain of development from the state early learning guidelines/standards. Find three children’s books (one for toddlers, one for 3-4 year olds, one for 5-6 year olds) that could be used to support development in that domain of development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the audience is (who are the children with whom you will be sharing these books). Consider using a resource like <i>Friends at School</i> to provide an audience that is diverse in terms of culture, language, and ability. • Share and discuss parameters for selecting books for children. • Consider asking students to develop a Book Nook (http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html) that would support addressing that domain of development throughout the daily schedule

Original	Makeover
<p>Scavenger Hunt – Either shadow a family new to early intervention (EI), use the experience of a family you have worked with in the past, or create a family’s situation to use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the family experienced the diagnosis • Provide a detailed description of how the family found out about EI services in the community where they live • Describe the experience the family went through to receive/obtain services. • Go to two different locations a family with a disability might attend (e.g., a hospital, a play/support group for children with disabilities, a park, a therapy appointment, library story time, etc. • Interview the family to find out what they like about the services they are receiving/what they would change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate the option of making up a child/family. If working with a family is not possible, use videos like <i>Team Lydia Rose</i> (https://vimeo.com/118072510), which includes a family’s responses to several of the questions posed in the assignment • The information being sought through this assignment is very tender and involves posing questions that many families might consider intimate or painful. An alternative would be to recruit a cadre of families for a family practicum experience. These families would be prepared to share their experiences and to respond to student inquiries each semester/quarter. Partnering with early intervention programs in the community might yield information about families whose children have “aged out” of early intervention. Often these families are willing to help early childhood students to develop their skills at partnering effectively with other families. • Rather than going to a location that may be specific to children with disabilities, go to community locations with the family to see what the challenges of inclusion are.
<p>Environment Observations – Watch videos of four different childcare settings (preschool, 3-year old child care, infant classroom, Reggio-inspired preschool) and evaluate the extent to which each environment does/does not reflect the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging elements • Colors used to set the tone/impact emotions • Activity/interest centers – clearly defined; quiet areas separate from louder areas; spaces designated for specific activities • Physical layout – how does it make you feel? Are there long, open run-ways that may encourage running? • Goals evident within the environment – how are goals for each domain of development portrayed? • Appropriate equipment, furnishings and materials • Aesthetics – natural light? Displays engage children’s curiosity and wonder? Displays at children’s eye level? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about the aspects of environment students are to tune in to. Physical environment exclusively? What about social environment? • If the focus is physical environments, be clear about the components that students can reasonably be expected to observe from a video clip and stick to those (e.g., space, equipment, materials). • The activity is identified as supporting students to List the major criteria that are used in creating developmentally appropriate learning environments. <i>If that truly is an objective, the assignment should incorporate an emphasis on culturally/linguistically appropriate and individually appropriate practices. How does the environment reflect the principles of universal design for learning and support accessibility for children with disabilities? How could the environment be modified to support physical and sensory access for children of diverse abilities?</i> • Incorporate checklists of recommended practices to look at learning opportunities and environmental modifications (http://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-environment.asp) • Incorporate How Can You Create a Learning Environment that Respects Diversity? http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-You-Create-a-Learning-Environment-That-Respects-Diversity.pdf to bring an emphasis on diversity • Incorporate knowledge application by asking students to identify enhancements to the environment based on what they observe

Original	Makeover
<p>Child-Centered Curriculum Project - Plan, develop, implement, and evaluate child-centered curriculum specific to the developmental needs of a child for a content area of your choice.</p> <p>First, choose a child upon whom to focus your curriculum. Second, identify a developmental need or a developmental "theme" for this child. Third, choose a curriculum content area (dramatic play, art, blocks, manipulatives, science, math, sensory table, language and literacy, music and movement, social-emotional development, gross motor development) that seems especially suited to this child's interests and development. Fourth, research best practice regarding this curriculum content area using reliable sources (textbooks, accreditation standards, ECERS-R--not Pinterest :-0). Fifth, decide which strategy(ies) will be best suited for the curriculum content area you have chosen and the child. When you are confident that you know the best practice standards for this content area and you have selected an appropriate strategy, begin planning your curriculum project.</p> <p>Plan a child-centered curriculum activity in the curriculum content area you chose above, based on the interests and developmental needs/theme of the child upon whom you are focusing. Write the plan into your lesson plan, including the strategies and prepare/gather needed materials. Implement the plan and take some photos and/or collect artifacts to document how the child responds to your activity.</p> <p>Create 1) a written report to turn in and 2) a Power Point-type presentation to share in class with your classmates. Both the report and the presentation should answer the following questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the developmental need or theme for the child? How do you know? 2. What was the curriculum content area you chose? What are the best practice standards for this curriculum content area? Cite your source and include a reference page. 3. What activity did you plan? How did you intend for this plan to address the developmental need/theme of the child? 4. What strategy(ies) did you choose for this activity and the child? Why did you choose this strategy? 5. What happened in the classroom? How did the child respond to your plan? 6. What is your evaluation of this project? What went well? What might you do differently if you could do it over? 7. How will you use what you learned from this project in your future work with children? 8. Include photos or other documentation to support your written/oral report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider starting with observations of the child to learn about interests, preferences, learning style and challenges, and possible peer supports. One checklist that could support this is the Identifying Child's Strengths Checklist from the <i>DEC Recommended Practices</i> (http://www.ectacenter.org/~pdfs/decrp/ASM-4_Identifying_Child_Strengths.pdf) • Observe the child in different areas, inside and out, to see what the child can do. Start with the strengths, then take a hard look at the challenges (e.g., areas the child may be avoiding, does not participate in) • Use state early learning guidelines/standards as the basis for identifying an aspect of development to support • Consider requiring the student to identify several strategies for supporting the aspect of development. For example, how could you incorporate an emphasis on social-emotional development in language and literacy, music and movement, etc. • Consider identifying one goal for the child, then developing ways to address that goal in all aspects of the daily schedule (e.g., large group, small group, free play. A helpful resource is a child activity matrix (e.g., http://community.fpg.unc.edu/sites/community.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/Handout/CONNECT-Handout-1-12.pdf) • Consider the role that the other children might play in supporting the success of these strategies. • Consider how you might scaffold up or down based on how successful the child is at the activity.

Original	Makeover
<p>Child Case Study Portfolio Assignment</p> <p>Choose ONE child age 3-4 years old to observe all semester. Child MUST be in a group setting, preferably a licensed child care center, Pre-K, or Head Start program during the observations. Must observe a minimum of 5 different times throughout the semester to develop a portfolio of that child. The portfolio must include observation notes (running records, anecdotal notes, choice record), photos of the child with notes, and samples of the child's work with notes.</p> <p>All developmental domains MUST be addressed in documentation and summary, and linked to the [state] Early Learning Standards Framework. The summary report compiling all the information in the child's portfolio must be written (typed) to share successes, challenges and goals with the child's family. Be sure to use family friendly language.</p> <p>Using the terminology discussed in class, you will develop a minimum of 4 unrelated (well-written, measurable) goals for the child. Provide at least one activity you will do to address each of these goals in the classroom setting.</p> <p>Portfolio needs to be presented in a logical & professional manner. Include handwritten notes, forms and checklists used to develop the summary, in the back of the notebook.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe the child in different areas, inside and out, to see what the child can do. Start with the strengths, then take a hard look at the challenges (e.g., areas the child may be avoiding, does not participate in) • Use state early learning guidelines/standards as the basis for identifying an aspect of development to support • Consider requiring students to observe the same thing each time and to speak to how the child's development has progressed over time • Consider asking students to also observe from a different point of view on each visit. Some examples might include: evidence of play in the curriculum, social emotional development, physical, experiential and interactional components of the environments, etc. • Consider using this assignment as an opportunity to help students try out different observation techniques. Using a resource like Common Observation Strategies from the Heartland Equity and Inclusion Project (http://www.heartland.edu/documents/heip/faculty2/CHLD101/Handouts/CommonObservationStrategies.pdf) introduce students to methodologies from time sampling to running records. • Incorporate an emphasis on scaffolding and individualizing by asking students to address the following aspects of the goals for each child: how would you adjust the activity if it was too easy for the child? How would you adjust the activity if it was too hard for the child? How will you determine when a child has achieved the goal? And what would come next?

Original	Makeover
<p>Individual Child Planning Guide/Observational Narrative</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observe a child over time. 2. Enter specific domain-based observations in the planning guide provided (sample below), providing <i>as many as you can (minimum of three per block)</i>. 3. Interpret your observations based on what you know of development, using articles, texts, handouts, and web resources to support your interpretation. 4. Plan a learning strategy to support the child’s strengths or areas of need. (<u>Also cite supports here</u>). 5. Summarize your notes into an observational <i>narrative</i>. You may write as much as you like. Tell what you observed about this child during the observations and interactions. <u>Staple your observational notes to the final hard copy.</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a support to this assignment, develop a toolkit of resources to help students connect evidence-based practice to what they are observing. This resource will help them in the interpretation component of this assignment. Include resources that address considerations for children who are culturally, linguistically, racially, ethnically, socio-economically, and individually diverse so they will be able to consider the unique aspects of developmentally appropriate practice for any child they observe. • As preparation for this assignment, consider the use of tools that will support an understanding of how one aspect of development (e.g., social emotional) may be seen in the classroom environment and interactions. An example is the <i>Inventory of Practices for Promoting Children’s Social Emotional Competence</i> (http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module1/handout4.pdf), which will help students to understand how knowledge of social-emotional development influence curricular choices. • Consider providing some more specific parameters for the observational narrative instead of “write as much as you like”. Consult local forms for guidance (e.g., does a commonly used intake form require a 1-2 page summary?) • As part of the narrative portion of the assignment, consider who the audience for the summary might be. How might a summary for a family differ from a summary for an early childhood program? Or a physician or therapist? • Provide students with a revised Planning Guide (see next page) that supports them in observing across domains and activities/settings (e.g., circle time, snack). NOTE: The original planning guide was set up for observation of one domain at a time and did not include guidance on the activities/settings.

Planning Guide

Activity (Examples below)	Domain Area	2. What Was Observed	Date	3. Interpretation: Is this developmentally appropriate? Cite	4. How will I support this child's learning? Cite
Circle Time	Social				
	Emotional				
	Fine Motor				
	Gross Motor				
	Language				
	Cognitive				
Snack	Social				
	Emotional				
	Fine Motor				
	Gross Motor				
	Language				
	Cognitive				
Outdoor Play	Social				
	Emotional				
	Fine Motor				
	Gross Motor				
	Language				
	Cognitive				
Small Group Activities	Social				
	Emotional				
	Fine Motor				
	Gross Motor				
	Language				
	Cognitive				
Free choice	Social				
	Emotional				
	Fine Motor				
	Gross Motor				
	Language				
	Cognitive				

Overall Analysis of Child's Strengths and Areas of Need