

Homework Assignments

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Learning Objectives

The first step in the assessment of homework assignments is to determine the learning objective(s) associated with the assignments. Three possible objectives are delineated below:

1. **Skill Practice.** For instance, a math student or an accounting student may need some practice with a particular technique or type of problem. An English student may need practice writing a particular type of essay. Students may need some practice of a particular skill prior to being ready to enter their chosen fields. This is very much like practicing driving before actually taking the driving test for a driver's license. We not only have to understand the "theory" of driving, but we must also be able to actually drive. We should determine which skills need to be practiced before a student is ready to take a test. Many of us learn better by "doing" rather than by "thinking" about a topic.
2. **Critical Thinking.** A critical thinking homework assignment may be used to understand how well students can pull together a variety of concepts. In addition, a critical thinking assignment may be used to provide students with a framework for analysis or it may be used to understand how students prioritize and organize concepts.
3. **Problem Solving.** We may ask students to solve problems such as those presented in end-of-chapter cases by using both skills and concepts which have been presented in class. We might also present the class with a problem from current events and ask them to solve the problem with the skills and concepts they have learned from the class. Students are often very interested in how the concepts and skills presented in a class are related to the "real world."

Assessment Techniques

Once the learning objective has been determined, the assessor will then have a better idea about how to assess the homework assignment. Key assessment questions for each learning objective are summarized below:

1. **Skill Practice**
 - a. Are students able to "do" the entire skill/technique?
 - b. Which part(s) of the skill or technique are giving the students problems?
 - c. Which skills do employers want students to practice prior to employment?

- d. If students are practicing several skills/techniques, are they able to choose the appropriate skill/technique for the task at hand?
- e. Are there skills/techniques from prerequisite courses which the students have not mastered, and therefore need remedial work before the present skill can be acquired? For instance, students need to know calculus in order to do problems assigned in managerial economics. If the students are weak in calculus, it may cause students major problems in acquiring skills in managerial economics.

2. Critical Thinking

- a. Clarity--Students answer in understandable English without failing to finish, or confusing their thoughts.
- b. Accuracy--The student's homework assignment contains no factual errors and is based on accurate information.
- c. Appropriateness--The student answers the question that was asked.
- d. Specificity--The student clearly identifies who and what s/he is writing about.
- e. Support--The student gives reasons, facts, or examples to support his/her statement, or s/he explains the criteria or assumptions on which s/he bases his/her opinion.
- f. Complexity--The student's answer shows that s/he is aware that there are many ways of looking at the problem being discussed, and that s/he must consider these before a valid judgment can be reached.
- g. Originality--The student draws upon current knowledge and past experience to create or discover ideas that are new.

3. Problem Solving

- a. If there is a "right" answer, are students able to arrive at the "right" answer? What skills/concepts need to be repeated or presented in a different way in order that students can arrive at the "right" answer?
- b. If there are multiple "right" answers, can a student justify the answer s/he has chosen?
- c. Are students using the appropriate skills/concepts to solve the problem?
- d. Are students solving only part of the problem?
- e. Are students able to come up with realistic solutions?

- f. Are there additional skills/concepts students need in order to come up with better solutions?