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Courses

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English Language Arts

**Template to Examine Assignments
for Rigor and Relevance**

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Template to Examine Assignments for Rigor and Relevance

This process is intended to critically analyze assignments for rigor and relevance while at the same time fostering collaboration among colleagues.

Definition of Assignments

Tasks (activities and assessments) that require students to demonstrate depth of understanding of content or concepts. Such assignments typically ask students to produce something, are linked to course objectives, include course-level content, and may include a prompt and a rubric.

Responsibilities for Meeting

Facilitator

- Select chair, timekeeper, and recorder
- Review the Facilitator's Guide

Participants

- Complete student assignment(s) in advance
- Review template steps
- Note assignment's strengths and weaknesses as well as potential improvements on the Rigor and Relevance Worksheet (p. 6)

Assignment Writers

- Prepare a brief summary that identifies the place and purpose of the assignment:
 1. How does the assignment fit into the curriculum?
 2. Which course objectives does the assignment address?

Examination Process

Step 1: Evaluate the assignment's place and purpose.

- Discuss at what point the assignment is given within the instructional unit and the course.
- Decide whether the course objectives represent the content and skills necessary to complete the assignment.
- Determine weighting of course objectives (i.e., importance of each objective to overall student performance).
- Revise the Assignment Writer's summary, if necessary, to reflect discussion.

Step 2: Examine the assignment using the definitions of rigorous and relevant assignments in Table 1 on page 5.

- Determine whether the assignment moves beyond the reproduction of information to the construction of knowledge and deep understanding (i.e., students are required to take what they already know and can do to create and/or explore new problems and ideas).
- Determine the relevance of the assignment to students' lives.

Step 3: Decide whether the assignment should be more rigorous and/or relevant.

- If the assignment SHOULD be modified, make the necessary changes in substance and form using Table 1 as a guide; then move on to Step 4.
- If the assignment SHOULD NOT be modified, move on to Step 4.
- If the assignment CANNOT be modified, begin the process again with another assignment.

Step 4: Review and, if necessary, revise the corresponding scoring guide; if one does not exist, create one to meet the demands of the assignment.

- Use Table 1 as a guide.
- Determine students’ level of proficiency (consider situation, such as time of year).
- Make scoring guide task specific.
- Address content, form, and correctness.
- Prepare file of student work to illustrate each score level, if time and circumstance allow.

Step 5: Identify ways to enhance and/or to eliminate barriers to student success.

- Review existing activities and corresponding teaching strategies that support both the content and the processes associated with the assignment.
- Ensure that appropriate supports (scaffolding) are in place.
- Consider interconnections across units.

Table 1. Rigor and Relevance in English Language Arts

Rigorous Assignments	Relevant Assignments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Call for student work that moves beyond the mere reproduction of information to the construction of knowledge. Assignments that emphasize construction of knowledge require students to do more than summarize or paraphrase information they have read, heard, or viewed; these assignments require students to take what they already know and use that knowledge to create or explore new ideas through interpretation, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of information. Some assignments ask students to construct knowledge and then to use this new knowledge to generate additional new understandings. ■ Emphasize elaborated communication, prompting extended writing and asking students to make assertions and support them with evidence. These tasks ask students to make an assertion by stating a claim, drawing a conclusion, and/or suggesting a generalization, and then to support the assertion with evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emphasize real-world connections, prompting students to take on plausible writing roles, go beyond the demonstration of academic competence to achieve real-world purposes, and submit their work to real audiences other than the teacher or other students. ■ Call on students to make choices about what they will study and how they will demonstrate mastery. This criterion examines the extent to which students partner with faculty in crafting tasks that meet students’ instructional goals. Scorers also look for teachers’ guidance on how students make choices about topics and methods. <p>Rigor and relevance criteria from Mitchell, Shkolnik, Song, VeKawa, Murphy, Garet, et al. (2005, pp. 21, 23). <i>Rigor, Relevance, and Results: The Quality of Teacher Assignments and Student Work in New and Conventional High Schools.</i></p>

Rigor and Relevance Worksheet (for use in completing Step 2)

Directions: Using Table 1 (p. 5) as a guide, note the assignment's strengths and weaknesses as well as potential improvements in the chart below.

		Strengths	Weaknesses	Improvements
Rigor	Calls for student work that moves beyond the mere reproduction of information to the construction of knowledge.			
	Emphasizes elaborated communication, prompts extended writing, and asks students to make assertions and support them with evidence.			
Relevance	Emphasizes real-world connections.			
	Calls on students to make choices about what they will study and how they will demonstrate mastery.			

Bibliography

Mitchell, K., Shkolnik, J., Song, M., VeKawa, K., Murphy, R., Garet, M., et al. (2005). *Rigor, Relevance, and Results, The Quality of Teacher Assignments and Student Work in New and Conventional High Schools*. Seattle, WA: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.