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Courses

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Social Studies

**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 Social Studies

Rigorous Assignments	Relevant Assignments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Call for student work that focuses on the underlying concepts and skills of the social sciences and 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. ■ Require students to form hypotheses, present solutions, and argue about the validity of claims; to reveal misconceptions; to explore old understandings in new ways; and to generalize and transfer their learning to new problems or to more robust understandings. Such assignments ask students to pose effective questions, access reliable information, interpret and use quantitative and qualitative data. ■ Emphasize effective communication using the language of the discipline. 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 drawn from primary and secondary sources. These tasks also ask students to respond appropriately to critique or questions about their assertions. Such assignments encourage investigative questions and may include essays, presentations, debates, simulations, and graphic representations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask students to address societal questions, issues, or problems; in other words, the assignments have a relevant context and real-world connections. Such assignments prompt students to make informed and reasoned decisions which allow them to go beyond the demonstration of academic competence and achieve real-world purposes. In addition, some assignments require students to present or submit their work to authentic audiences (e.g., landowners, historical societies, special interest groups, elected officials, business owners, chambers of commerce). ■ Allow student involvement in deciding which topics they will investigate, which problems they will study, and how they will address these topics and problems. <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">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 focuses on the underlying concepts and skills of the social sciences and moves beyond the mere reproduction of information to the construction of knowledge.			
	Requires students to form hypotheses, present solutions, and argue about the validity of claims.			
	Emphasizes effective communication using the language of the discipline..			
Relevance	Asks students to address societal questions, issues, or problems; in other words, the assignments have a relevant context and real-world connections.			
	Allows student involvement in deciding which topics they will investigate, which problems they will study, and how they will address these topics and problems.			

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.