



Elements of Effective Teaching & Examples*

Penn State's Faculty Assessment of Teaching Framework assesses teaching using evidence from three sources, peer review, self-assessment, and student feedback. The framework also identifies four Elements of Effective Teaching, which provide a foundation of understanding, advance a shared language for communication, and serve as standards against which the combined sources of evidence are judged. Academic units may also use the elements as an invitation to discuss other important aspects of effective teaching. This document includes examples by element.

1. Effective Design

Well-designed courses (lessons/modules) provide a variety of student-centered learning and assessment tasks that align with course objectives. Scaffolded and transparent design of learning and assessment tasks as well as clearly structured, accessible, and relevant materials provide appropriate challenge and support for student development and learning.

Examples of effective design:

- Student characteristics (e.g., prior knowledge, background, class standing) and, if available, data on student learning are considered in design and modifications of instruction.
- Learning objectives are clear, challenging, and attainable.
- Varied student-centered learning and assessment tasks support the learning objectives.
- Learning and assessments tasks are scaffolded and sequenced to support development of skills and knowledge.
- Readily available, coherently organized, and relevant course materials (including syllabi) that establish student workload, learning objectives, performance criteria, grading/feedback procedures, and class policies are provided.

2. Effective Instruction

Effective instruction provides a clear structure to students that supports the process of learning. It takes cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning into consideration and creates positive learning environments.

Examples of effective instruction:

- Learning activities in and out of class are well-structured and managed.
- A climate of high expectations, with appropriate challenges and high levels of trust and support, is established to encourage learners to take risks and demonstrate their learning and current challenges.
- Critical, analytical, and creative thinking are modeled. Examples are utilized appropriately to help learners deepen their understanding and build connections. New skills or procedures are modeled or demonstrated with appropriate scaffolding and challenges.
- Content, instructions, and expectations are communicated clearly.
- Timely, actionable, and fair feedback on activities and assignments is tied to performance criteria and learning objectives.
- Instructor's content knowledge is evident, and the instructor is able to connect concepts of the discipline to learners' prior knowledge, experiences, and ambitions.

- A supportive environment that communicates respect, trust, and care is created by promoting positive interactions and relationships with and among all students.
- An understanding of the fundamentals of human learning and findings from cognitive science guides instructional choices.
- The mindset that growth is possible, and ability is not fixed is cultivated throughout the learning experience.

3. Inclusive and Ethical Pedagogy

Inclusive and ethical pedagogy is the explicit inclusion of all learners, the attention to accessibility, and the removal of barriers to learning. The instructor's ability to understand their own assumptions, critically reflect on their knowledge and practices, and cultivate a sense of belonging lays the foundation for full participation by all students.

Examples of inclusive and ethical pedagogy.

- Diverse practitioners, authorities, and applications in the field are presented.
- Attention is given to accessibility and removal of barriers to ensure that all students can fully participate in learning. For example, access to content (e.g., use of alt text, accessible documents) is ensured; affordable course materials are utilized, reasonable accommodations for all students are considered and required accommodations are provided.
- Instructor examines their own assumptions and values and takes an asset/strengths-based approach to diversity.
- Instructor fosters an environment in which students understand the difference between civic life, which is the public life of the citizen concerned with the affairs of the community and nation, and private or personal life, which is devoted to the pursuit of private and personal interests.
- Integrity and respect for all students is demonstrated. Rapport with students has been built and a sense of belonging for all students is actively cultivated.
- A regular review of course policies for equity and learning-centered approach takes place.

4. Reflective and Evolving Practice

Reflective and evolving practice involves examining one's beliefs about teaching and learning (and mentoring and advising, if appropriate) and considering changes based on our experiences and our own learning. Reflective practice and an understanding of research-informed pedagogical techniques guide modifications to course design and instruction. The evolution of instructional practices is informed by feedback from students and enhanced through our interaction with peers and professional development opportunities.

Examples of reflective and evolving practice:

- Content and pedagogical techniques that are current, research-informed, and relevant are regularly revisited and implemented.
- Participation in teaching development activities and the utilization of peer and student feedback to inform design and teaching practice are apparent.
- A learning environment that invites constructive feedback for the instructor has been established.
- Instructor identity, including how it influences their own learning and professional growth environment and how their beliefs intersect with broader cultural, social, and political contexts, is continuously explored.

*Appendix B, Elements of Effective Teaching, in the University Faculty Senate Report, Implementation of Structural Elements within the Faculty Teaching Assessment Framework, [Implementation of Structural Elements within the Faculty Teaching Assessment Framework](#), March 28, 2023.