

Redesigning a Course by Working Backwards (1 of 2)

History Cohort, CSU CRT Summer Institute, June 2016

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Step 1. Start with the Big Picture:

What are Your Main Goals and Desired Results?

Answer each of the next questions in the boxes below.

1A. What will be the **central history content questions** that give focus to the class? Limit yourself to just 1, 2, or 3 big questions here. Do not simply write topics like “democracy.” Express the major content themes of the course in the form of questions that students will explore during the term.

1B. What will be the **big assignments or projects** that students do at or near the end of the course? (e.g. take-home final; in-class final essays, short-answer exams, etc.)

1C. Why do some students struggle in your current version of the course? What do these students find most **challenging**?

1D. What will the course provide students to help them succeed? How can your redesign **reduce DFW or repeatable grades** without lowering academic standards?

1D. What **other goals** do you have for the course? (e.g. writing skills, learning to read primary sources by contextualizing and sourcing, learning historiographic concepts)

Step 2. Establish Content and Skills: What History Content and Academic Skills Will Students Need to Meet the Goals in Step 1?

2A. History Content: What are the 8-10 essential historical topics that the students must understand to grasp the core issues in 1A? You can have fewer or more than 8-10 topics, but keep the list manageable and focus on just big, essential content.

Hint: Do not look at your current syllabus, because you might include too much here.

2B. Skills: What skills will students need?

Skills (times in parentheses provide estimates of how much class time is required each time students practice these skills together in class)	How many times will students need to practice this skill during the course to get good at it?
-finding the thesis in readings (10 minutes)	
- annotating readings for key ideas and evidence (10-15 minutes)	
-taking good class notes (5-10 minutes for peer evaluation of lecture notes)	
- weighing conflicting evidence and reaching conclusions (20-25 minutes)	
- explaining the meaning of evidence and providing evidence for generalizations (10-30 minutes)	
- grouping evidence (10 - 20 minutes)	
Writing skills:	
-writing paragraphs with topic sentence arguments (TSAs) (20-30 minutes for peer-editing of one paragraph in small groups)	
- organizing longer papers with subtheses	
- sentence-level editing (grammar, passive voice, etc.)	
Other skills:	

Step 3. Pause and Practice: Plan One Redesigned Class Session

Topic of Class Session:

MAJOR IDEAS	HOW TO TEACH THAT IDEA
<p>List the major ideas that students need to understand by the end of this session. Each idea should support the central history themes you wrote for Step 1A.</p> <p><i>Do not simply list a topic, like "Causes of the Cold War." Write the key idea or argument that students should understand.</i></p>	<p>What active-learning classroom activities do you already have that can help students explore your major ideas for this class session? What readings or online videos could you assign as homework to help students explore the major idea?</p>
1.	
2.	
3.	

Step 4. Take Stock of What You Have for Other Class Topics

4A. Materials and Activities: What great (or good) readings, videos, and active-learning activities do you already have that address the essential topics in 2A? Can any of these materials and activities also provide content for a skills activity listed in 2B?

4B. Missing Pieces: What essential history content (listed in 2A) does not yet have good materials or activities?

Then move to Step 5 (second document)