

Quick Guide to Online Instructional Methods

What are Instructional Methods?

Instructional methods are the meat and potatoes of any course. The content is the material that the student will “consume” but then what do students do with it? Instructional methods focus on the application of the course material. If students do not DO something with the course material, it is unlikely to make an impact.

Learning Objectives

Learning objectives are at the heart of all courses whether they are stated or not. In online courses it is important to state them as they provide the framework for the activities and assignments. The overarching course objectives or goals are listed in the syllabus (this is required by the [UF Syllabus Policy](#).) Typically, learning objectives are listed in each module. An instructor may wish to provide objectives for individual activities or assignments.

Learning objectives need to be SMART:

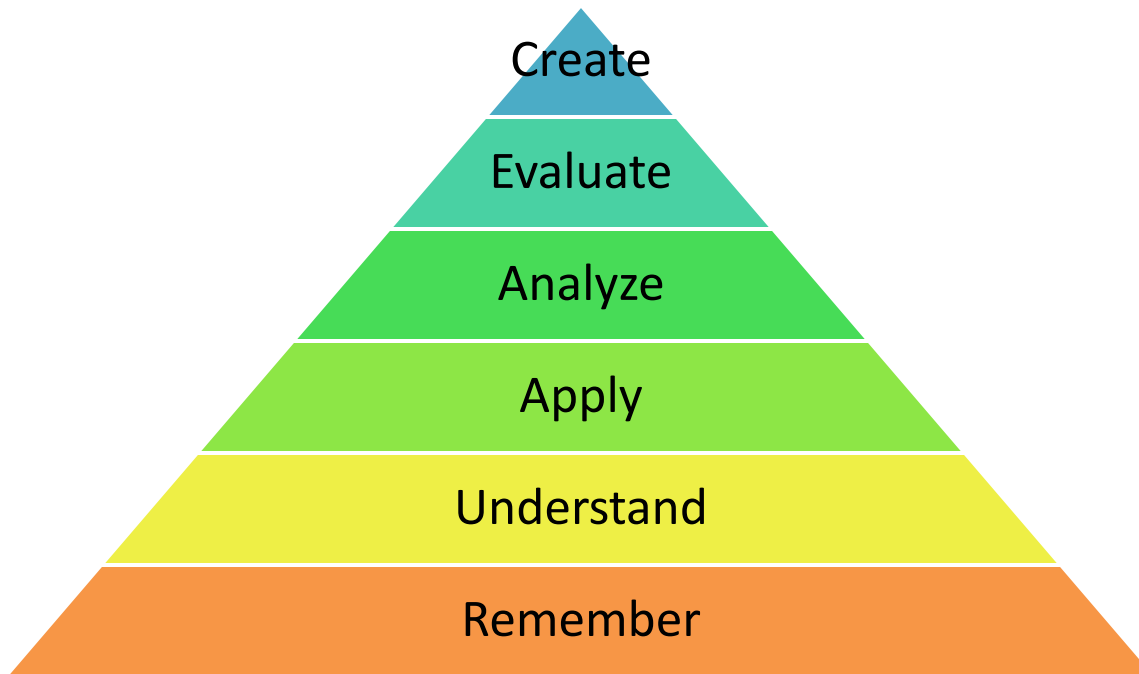
- **Specific** to what you want the student to be able to do upon completion of the module or assignment
- **Measurable** to help you determine if the student has acquired the desired knowledge or skill
- **Achievable** and within the grasp of a student who has completed the work thus far in the course
- **Realistic** so they fit within the scope and flow of the course or module and lead to achieving the overall goal(s)
- **Time sensitive** in order for students to put what they have learned into use within a time frame that maximizes learning

Learning Objective Do's

- Use action verbs that are appropriate to the objective
 - [View these action verbs with examples](#)
- Use [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) to help identify action verbs at the appropriate level for the individual assignment and that fit into the course as a whole
- Scaffold student learning by providing lower level assignments (remembering, understanding and applying) to support higher level assignments (analyzing, evaluating and creating)
- Provide the learning objectives at the start of each module (as appropriate)

Learning Objective Don'ts

- Avoid vague verbs such as “understand” which is neither specific nor measurable

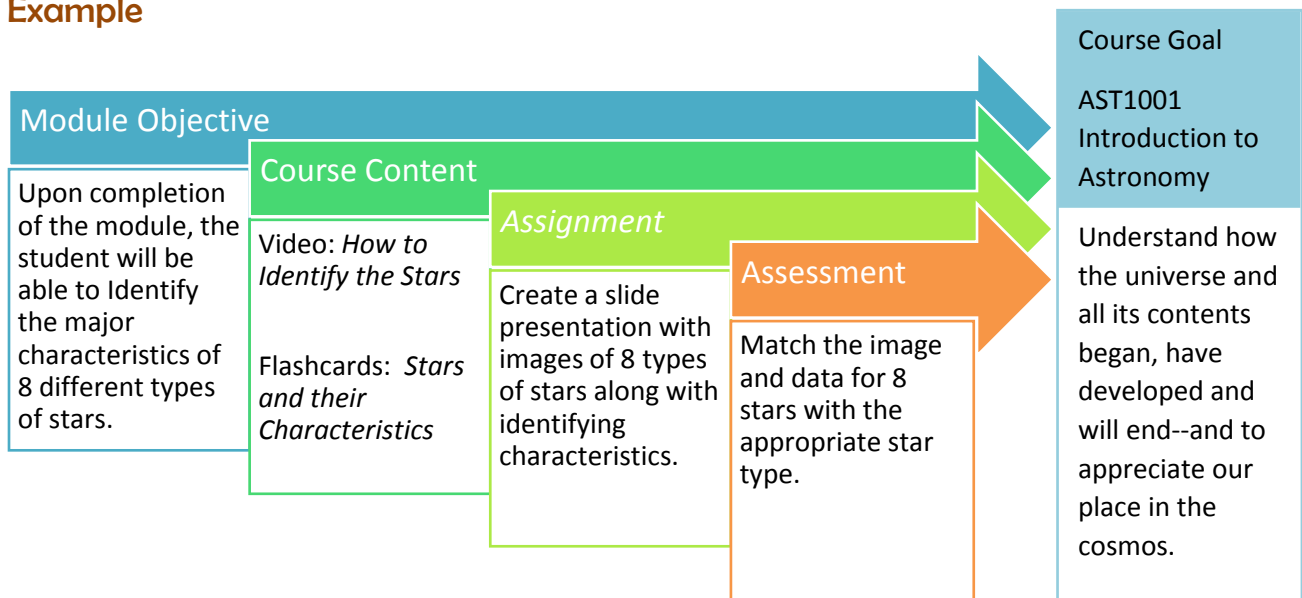


[Bloom's revised taxonomy](#) as suggested by Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl.

Alignment

Design activities and assignments to align with the individual modules which in turn support the overall course objectives.

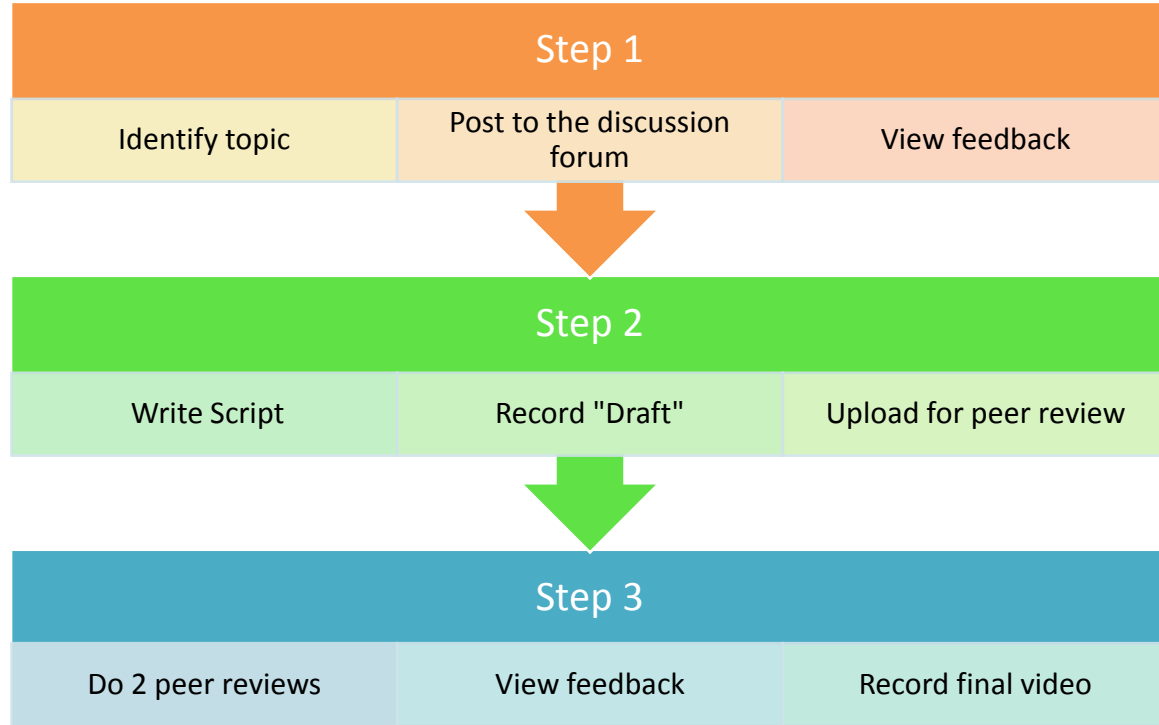
Example



Performance Expectations and Requirements

Students can become frustrated when they do not feel that they understand “what the teacher wants.” And teachers tend to feel that the students do not spend sufficient time reviewing assignment instructions. Clear instructions that are broken down into interim steps can meet the needs of both faculty and students. Consider “scaffolding” large assignments into a progression of smaller assignments.

Example: Video Presentation



Instruction/Guidelines Do's

- Break instructions down into step-by-step lists or charts
- Keep directions simple and as short as possible
- Provide a good example
- Provide a bad example
 - Students can critique a bad example as one of the preliminary assignments
- If appropriate, have students peer review each other's work
 - This provides a double benefit of honing evaluation skills as well as letting students see what others are doing while there is still time to upgrade their own assignment
 - Peer review takes practice!
 - Be sure to provide a clear rubric or review guidelines
- Ask a student, graduate student or someone else who is not an expert in the subject to read your instructions for clarity
- Use images or video where appropriate

- Provide specific information on what to do with each of the things that could go wrong
 - Tell students how you want them to communicate their questions to you
 - Consider a discussion forum for that assignment
 - Use the questions posted on the discussion forum to revise your guidelines for the next offering of the course
 - If students repeatedly get something wrong, ask what could be done to make the directions more clear
- A rubric can be a good way to communicate what is important about the assignment
 - A good rubric can help speed the grading along

Instruction/Guidelines Don'ts

- Avoid large paragraphs of text
- Don't "assume" anything
 - Provide links to remedial materials for any students who might need it

Variety is the Spice of Life *and Learning!*

Provide students with a variety of learning activities throughout the course. People tend to remember things that are out of the ordinary. Things that we discover for ourselves generally stick with us. Involve students as active participants in their own learning to keep them engaged with the course.

Examples: Introduction to Astronomy

- Gather and analyze data collected by the Hubble telescope
- Join a local astronomy club for a stargazing night
- Keep a journal about the sky events that occur during the semester
- Attend a live talk through [Hubble Hangouts](#)
- Debate a controversial topic
- Evaluate a journal article
- Design an experiment

It is ideal for students do work in a manner that is consistent with their field of study. So any time you can bring the "real world" into the classroom helps to engage students as well as preparing them to enter the workforce.

Learning Activity Do's

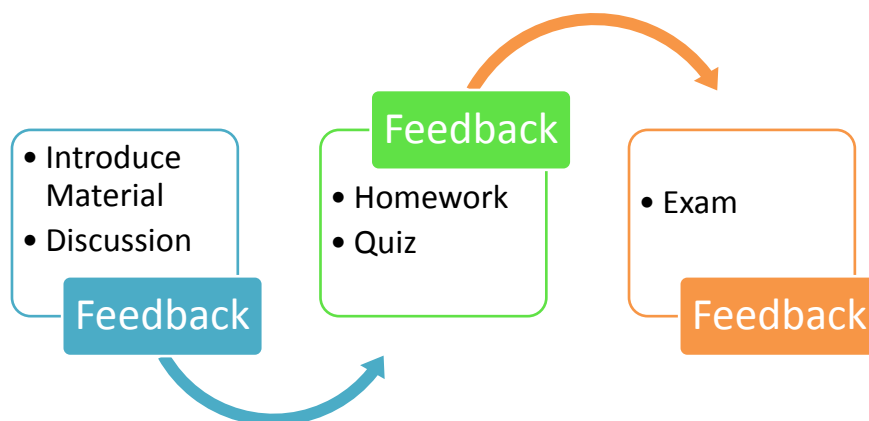
- Teamwork (where appropriate) with interim assignments
 - Good team work requires preparation
 - Accountability and peer evaluation
- Provide students with an opportunity to share personal experience
- Provide opportunities to practice what they have learned

Learning Activity Don'ts

- Team work without interim assignments
- Move quickly through assignments without providing feedback

Assessments

Course assessments need to be consistent with course materials and objectives. Keep in mind that sometimes the “assessment” can also be a learning activity. Research suggests that students learn better when they make mistakes. (Roediger) So give your students opportunities to make mistakes and improve.



The timing for assessment can be a challenge. But it’s important to give students time to assimilate what they have learned and incorporate the feedback they have received into their thinking. Ideally, students will have multiple opportunities to show what they have learned in different ways.

Assessment Do’s

- Provide students with practice opportunities that mimic the assessment
- Use more than one assessment tool
- Give feedback as soon after the assessment as possible
- Use security measures such as proctoring or Turnitin for high-stakes assessment (if one assessment comprises 15% or more of the course grade)

Assessment Don’ts

- No need to confine yourself to a multiple choice exam—anything can be an assessment!

Expectations and Requirements

Students should be provided with clear, consistent expectations and requirements for behavior, participation and classwork. Students who are new to online work, may not be aware of online “netiquette.” Both the [UF Syllabus policy](#) and this sample [Netiquette document](#) provide suggestions that can be incorporated into your course.

These expectations and requirements should be stated at the beginning of the course and restated in the context of particular assignments.

A Note about Academic Integrity

In today’s sharing environment, students may not understand that using work created by another without appropriate attribution is a breach of academic honesty. It is important for you to spend a bit

of time at the start of the semester talking about what academic honesty means in your discipline and how it relates to your course. Consider providing a link to this video on [Academic Honesty](#) created by the Student Honor Code Administration in collaboration with the Office of Faculty Development and Teaching Excellence.

References

Roediger, Henry L., and Bridgid Finn. "Getting It Wrong: Surprising Tips on How to Learn." *Scientific American* 20 October 2009. Web.