

Signature Assignment Quick Reference Guide

Adapted from College of the Canyons [Signature Assessment Guide](#) & [Planning Template](#)

What is a Signature Assignment?

- An assignment, task, activity, project purposefully created or modified to collect evidence for specific learning outcomes.
- The 'signature' of the assignment is the defining characteristics that reveal deep thinking and help students think like disciplinary experts.
 - Ideally, other coursework builds toward the signature assignment, meaning that the signature assignment should measure the culmination of what the student learned in the course for a particular outcome.
 - Signature assignments work well when they are course embedded.
- Signature assignments can be designed collaboratively by faculty. They can be generic in task, problem, case or project to allow for contextualization in different disciplines or course contexts.

For example, Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) requires the use of signature assignments to assess their general education outcomes. They allowed faculty freedom creating the signature assignments, but established a few general requirements for the assignments: *address at least two learning outcomes; include student reflection; and demonstrate a real world, not theoretical, application of disciplinary knowledge.*

A mathematics instructor at SLCC created a signature assignment where students acted as potential car buyers and calculated how different interest rates affect the amount of money spent. The assignment had also students reflect on how this activity can be applied in other classes or real world scenarios. The two learning outcomes that students are asked to demonstrate were quantitative reasoning and communication skills (AAC&U News).

Other Examples of Signature Assignments

Any of the following – when accompanied by a few paragraphs of reflective writing – could be signature assignments:

- Essays, response papers, lab reports or research papers that tap discipline-specific knowledge and apply theory or data in their analysis
- Solution to a realistic math problem that asks students to write about the process of solving the problem, the relevance of the problem, and/or the application of the problem solving skill to other issues or areas of life
- Photos, graphics, or three-dimensional artwork created for display and critique
- Service-learning or field study experiences
- Poetry, fiction, pamphlets, posters, and other forms of writing which address discipline knowledge and critical thinking
- Products of group projects that are based in real world applications/scenarios

How to Design Signature Assignments for a Course?

1. Select a Student Learning Outcome for the course.
2. What does the course require students to demonstrate? How does this match to the SLO?
3. What current embedded course work that could be used as a signature assignment?
4. Could a new assignment be developed for use as a signature assignment?
5. Use the AAC&U Value Rubrics to guide discussion and examination of potential signature assignments.
 - a. What are the guidelines for the assignment?
 - b. Are the major components in the assignment matched to the SLOs?
 - c. How are the students demonstrating application of their knowledge? Does the assignment require high ordered critical thinking?
 - d. Is it real world based?
6. Create a common rubric for evaluating.

Signature Assignment Guidelines

- Pratt Institute's [Signature Assignment Quick Reference Guide](#) (process, guidelines, examples, and resources)
- University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, [introduction to signature assignments](#) (presentation)
- National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment [Developing Effective Signature Assignments](#) (presentation)
- Salt Lake Community College [Critical Thinking Using Signature Assignments](#) (guide)
- California State University Long Beach [Signature Assignments and Rubrics](#) (template and guidelines)

Samples & Other Resources

- University of Texas at Austin [sample signature assignments and rubrics](#) (comprehensive list)
- Mercer University, [Sample Signature Assignments](#) (list by topic/discipline)
- [PCC's Institution-Level Assessment Rubrics](#)
- [AAC& U Value Rubrics](#)