DECODING YOUR ASSIGNMENTS
THE ONE ABOUT PURPOSE

"Why am I doing this assignment?"

Purpose

- What skills will I be learning or practicing?
- What skills from this assignment could I potentially use in my future career?
- In what ways could this assignment help me feel more prepared for the next exam?
- What is the connection between this assignment and what we are learning in class?

Sometimes it might not seem clear

- "I struggle with assignments when the course isn't within my major. One assignment involved making flash cards for terms that I will never use again. Thinking back on it, it did help me prepare for the exam and feel comfortable with the material. And I was able to learn a new study strategy for my other courses."
- "I had a project that tested our knowledge on diagnosing individuals, but we didn't realize it at first. It seemed unclear what we were doing, but in the end we actively applied our understanding of the material."

But there is a purpose

Tips from fellow students

- Look at the whole semester to see if there are multiple assignments that are similar and how they all fit in
- Evaluate previous assignment purposes and check if they are similar
- Look back at the syllabus and read the course outcomes to see how the assignment connects

Drop-In Hours

Visiting drop-in hours, also known as office hours, will allow you to talk through the assignment with your instructor to discuss the purpose. Here are some resources:

- Tutor Iowa Worksheet: (will insert smaller link)
  - How to navigate Drop-In Hours
- Linked-In Learning Role Play: (will insert smaller link)
  - Practice the conversation before you go

DECODING YOUR ASSIGNMENTS
THE ONE ABOUT TASK

"How should I complete this assignment?"

Task

- What do I need to do?
- What roadblocks might exist that I need to avoid?
- Why might the instructions be unclear?
- In what order do I need to complete the assignment?
- What is the best way to approach this assignment?

WHEN THE TASK ISN'T CLEAR

Tips from fellow students

- Check with a classmate to see if they understand the assignment or if there was something you misunderstood.
- Email or meet with your instructor ahead of time to gain clarity on assignment content and instructions. This involves planning for deadlines ahead of time.
- Sometimes the task isn't clear on purpose because there are multiple ways to complete an assignment or figuring out the right way to complete the assignment is what you have been learning in the class.
- Make sure to attend class. If it seems confusing, others might ask in class and you will get your answers there!

WHEN THE TASK SEEMS TOO BIG

Breaking it down

A large assignment can seem daunting. If the overall task seems daunting, coming up with an action plan to help break it down will help you manage the individual steps. This will help you focus on smaller tasks one at a time.

1. Read the assignment and note all of the deadlines and key details.
2. Break the assignment into individual components
   a. For papers this can be choosing a topic, thesis, research, draft, proofreading, etc.
   b. For reading assignments, you can break them down into smaller chunks
3. Working backward from the due date, estimate a time for each part and schedule them on a timeline.
4. Add the individual timeline dates to your calendar so if you have multiple assignments you can realistically plan out your time.

You don't have to do this alone!

You can work with an Academic Coach, Advisor, or even a friend to help.
Visit Tutor Iowa to find Academic Tips Worksheets with planning resources.

DECODING YOUR ASSIGNMENTS
THE ONE ABOUT CRITERIA

"What are the expectations?"

Criteria
- How will I know if I am on the right track?
- What opportunities are there for me to evaluate my work before I turn it in so I can revise it before I submit?
- Where could I find real world examples (career related possibly) that I could use as an example for this assignment?

BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT IS TURNED IN

Tips from fellow students
- Check to see if the criteria is listed on ICON or in the syllabus somewhere other than on the actual assignment.
- If you can't locate the criteria within the assignment, look back on previous criteria from similar assignments: try to apply similar guidelines to this one since you have a sense of your professor's grading

AFTER YOU RECEIVE YOUR GRADE

Don't just set the assignment aside, take time to review and reflect!

Course Material
- Are there gaps in knowledge? If you missed points for concepts that you are learning in the course, work to learn them so you have a better understanding. This is a good way to know where to start studying for the next exam.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand the material for future assignments, or in case they build into other concepts in class.

Assignment Expectations
- Review expectations and visit drop-in hours, also known as office hours, to ask for clarification so that you are on the same page for the rest of the course.
- Use this as a way to know how you are doing on assignments moving forward.

Benefit of Reflection: Metacognition
- Taking time to reflect on how you learn and thinking about what worked and what you would change will help you prepare for future assignments and exams.
- Learn more about metacognition and find reflection resources here: learning.uiowa.edu/sites/learning.uiowa.edu/files/2023-09/Questions%20to%20Prompt%20Metacognition.pdf