

The Unwritten Rules:

Decode Your Assignments and Decipher What's Expected of You

Before you begin working on an assignment or class activity, ask the instructor to help you understand the purposes, tasks, and criteria. Bring this document to frame the conversation.

Purpose

- Skills you'll practice by doing this assignment
- Knowledge you'll gain from doing this assignment
- How you can use these in your life outside the context of this course, and after college?

Task

- What to do. What roadblocks or mistakes should you avoid?
- How to do it. Is there a recommended process? Is the process intentionally unclear? If so, how does that lack of clarity support your learning?

Criteria

- Are you on the right track? How will you know you're doing what's expected? How will you know you're doing high quality work? How will you evaluate and improve your work before submitting it?
- Consider multiple examples of real-world work in this field. Discuss with your instructor what's strong or weak about the examples. Develop a checklist to evaluate the examples.

Did you know?

- In a national study, transparent communication around the purposes, tasks and criteria for academic assignments enhanced college students' success by increasing their confidence, sense of belonging, and awareness of skill development. Gains were even greater for first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students. [Winkelmes et al. 2016]
- College students' academic confidence and sense of belonging are linked with increased persistence, higher grades, and career success up to 11 years later. [Walton & Cohen 2011; Brady et al., 2020]
- College students increased their test scores when supported by a system that advocated the belief that intelligence is not fixed but rather malleable. A year later, these students were 80% less likely to drop out of college [Aronson et al, 2002].
- Only two instances of TILT in an academic term (using the TILT Framework above to guide a conversation about the purposes, tasks, and criteria for an upcoming assignment) improved students' learning by increasing their sense of belonging, persistence, and awareness of their development of skills that postsecondary learning qualifications frameworks from around the world prioritize: applying learning to new situations and problems, communication, collaboration, learning on one's own, and judging the reliability of information. [Winkelmes et al., 2016; Calkins & Winkelmes, 2018].
- For University of Nevada Las Vegas students, benefits of TILT included a significantly higher rate of returning to college the following two years. [Calkins & Winkelmes 2018].

Aronson, J., Fried, C., & Good, C. (2002). Reducing stereotype threat on African American college students.

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38(1), 113-125. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.2001.1491>

Brady, S., Cohen, G., Jarvis, S., & Walton, G. (2020). A brief social-belonging intervention in college improves adult outcomes for Black Americans. *Science Advances*, 6(18), eaay3689. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aay3689>

Calkins, C., & Winkelmes, M. (2018). A teaching method that boosts UNLV student retention. *UNLV Best Teaching Practices Expo*, (3). https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/btp_expo/3

Walton, G., & Cohen, G. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes among minority students. *Science*, 331(6023), 1447-1451. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1198364>

Winkelmes, M., Bernacki, M., Butler, J., Zochowski, M., Golanics, J., & Harriss Weavil, K. (2016). A teaching intervention that increases underserved college students' success. *Peer Review*, 18(1/2).

Winkelmes, M., Boye, A., & Tapp, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Transparent design in higher education teaching and leadership: A guide to implementing the transparency framework institution-wide to improve learning and retention*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003448396>