Instructional Alignment

What is it?

Instructional alignment is ensuring your learning objectives, the assessments of those learning objectives, and the instructional strategies are aligned.

Why is it important?

This foundational principle can increase student learning outcomes by 1 to 2 standard deviations. It has been concluded that lack of excellence in classrooms is caused by a misalignment between what instructors intended to teach, what they actually taught and what they tested.

How do I do it?

**Step 1. Develop Learning Objectives:** Learning objectives outline the behavior, skill or knowledge you want students to become competent and at what level (knowledge, application, evaluation, etc).

**Step 2. Design or Identify Assessments:** Decide what assessment methods will measure the learning objectives. Paper and pen assessments can measure all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy but probably are poor choices to assess communication skills or other non-cognitive objectives.

**Step 3. Design or Select Instructional Strategies:** Select instructional strategies that achieve the objectives. If your goal is knowledge or comprehension, lecture or self-directed learning can be effective and efficient. If you desire critical thinking skills, use more discussion based techniques. Want to teach teamwork or communication skills, utilize cooperative learning strategies.
Example: Cognitive Outcome

**Outcome**  
(Bloom’s: Evaluate)  
"Predict the effects of ..."

**Assessment**  
(multiple choice question)  
"Given the following change, predict what happens to..."

**Instructional Approach**  
Case studies focused on predicting effect given changes in...

Example: Non-cognitive Outcome

**Outcome**  
(Non-cognitive)  
“Work effectively in a team...”

**Assessment**  
(peer evaluation)  
“Individual serves as a role model in keeping team focused..."

**Instructional Approach**  
Cooperative Learning (e.g., team-based learning)

Quick Tips

- **Tip 1**: Develop your assessments before you teach. This helps ensure your assessments are based on your objectives and that your goal over the class time is helping students achieve those goals.
- **Tip 2**: Utilize SMART objectives or the ABCD model for objectives.
- **Tip 3**: Use higher order learning outcomes. Remember that these encompass the lower levels. So if a student can evaluate a piece of evidence, they have the appropriate foundational knowledge and comprehension and can apply those concepts.
- **Tip 4**: Use a variety of instructional techniques. Variety helps maintain interest and appeal. Remember, students are diverse, so should be your instructional methods!
- **Tip 5**: Ask a colleague to compare your lesson plan and assessments to ensure they can see the connections.

More Information

Websites
- [http://wayne.edu/hr/leads/phase1/smart-objectives.php](http://wayne.edu/hr/leads/phase1/smart-objectives.php)

Articles

Books
- McKeachie et al. (1998), Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom.