

A Self-Reflection Guide for Teaching at Penn State

Background

In 1987, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson published "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," a summary of 50 years of higher education research that addressed good teaching and learning practices. Their findings, and faculty and institutional evaluation instruments based on the findings, have been widely used to guide and improve college teaching.

The Seven Principles conclude that good practice:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty,
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
3. Encourages active learning,
4. Gives prompt feedback,
5. Emphasizes time on task,
6. Communicates high expectations, and
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin* (39) 7.

While course surveys such as the Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTE) focus on students' satisfaction with their experience in a course, the Seven Principles provide a useful framework to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. Therefore, this document adapts the Seven Principles to facilitate the review of undergraduate- and graduate-level courses at Penn State. Each principle is described in detail, including evidence of how a principle may be met. Examples of evidence to look for and resources for additional information are also included.

While, ideally, good practice would suggest that all seven principles would be supported in some way in a course, variations in course format, size, and faculty teaching experience can make reaching that ideal difficult. Like the SRTE, where achieving an overall score of "7" is rare, it is assumed that a self-review of teaching will discover room for improvement when examining a course through the lens of the Seven Principles. This Self-Reflection Guide provides space for instructors to note teaching and learning strengths, as well as areas for improvement.

Recommended Self-Reflection Process

This Guide can be used in multiple ways. It can be used for personal self-reflection at a mid- or post-course point in time, based on one or more of the Seven Principles. It can also be used for your own note-taking and reflection in preparation for writing a self-reflection of teaching for your annual review and/or to inform the scholarship of teaching and learning component of your narrative statement as part of a promotion and tenure dossier.

To help facilitate the self-reflection of teaching, we recommend the following process:

1. Choose one course for review.
2. Read the text associated with the Seven Principles.
3. Select one or more of the principles upon which to focus your self-reflection.
4. Reflect on how instruction in the chosen course addresses the selected principles.
5. Summarize your reflections, noting evidence from the course.
6. As needed, consult appropriate professional development resources, including learning design professionals, to strengthen areas identified for improvement.
7. Note in "Areas for Improvement" any attempts to address growth and any positive changes that may have occurred within the course being reviewed.

If you have questions about how to write a self-reflection (with or without your notes from this form) and/or wish to speak with someone confidentially about your teaching, contact the [Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence](#) or your [local teaching support](#).

As part of the University's [Guidance on the Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness for Calendar Year 2020](#), if you have questions about using this Guide to inform your alternative assessment as part of your description of how you made a "good faith effort" to deliver instruction, contact Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs.

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

PRINCIPLE 1: Good practice encourages contact between students and faculty. Frequent and timely student-faculty contact is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Evidence of faculty concern helps students get through challenging situations and inspires them to persevere. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. Examples of evidence to look for: <u>Inviting students' ideas, generally</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage and foster a healthy exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among students• Hold regular office hours and office hours by appointment, either face-to-face or mediated by technology• Encourage students to share their questions, examples, and experiences• Accept students' responses• Treat students as individuals, e.g., addressing students by name• Incorporate student ideas into the class• Check individual and/or groups of students' understanding of the material/approach <u>In face-to-face environments, specifically</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use gestures, movements, facial expressions and other physical responses to communicate approachability• Pause after asking questions to allow for student responses• Attend respectfully to student comprehension or puzzlement• Explore topics in detail with students <u>In online environments, specifically</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage contact via a "welcome message" and via a posting of office hours at the beginning of the course• Initiate contact with, or respond to, students on a regular basis in order to establish a consistent online presence• Use a prominent announcement area to communicate important up-to-date course information to students, such as reminders of impending assignment due dates, curriculum changes, scheduled absences, etc.• Respond to student inquiries in a timely manner• Provide students with interaction space for study groups, "hall way conversations," etc. Where to look: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course communications (announcements, syllabus, discussion areas, e-mail, chat rooms, social media spaces, etc.)• Mid-semester feedback from students• SRTE feedback from students Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating Community• Managing Your Online Class• Getting to Know Students• Icebreaker Ideas for Remote Learning• 50 Distance Learning Icebreakers• ELI Discovery Tool: Blended Learning Workshop Guide: Building Community and Collaboration	Self-Reflection Evidence Found: Strengths: Areas for Improvement:
---	---

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

PRINCIPLE 2: Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students. Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding. Examples of evidence to look for: <u>Encouraging cooperation, generally</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide discussion prompts that help to guide and elicit student participation in class discussion activities• Facilitate class discussions by encouraging, probing, questioning, summarizing, etc.• Assign students to work on problems in teams, being sure to design group assignments so that they follow the basic tenants of cooperative learning (see Resources, below) in order to avoid the common pitfalls of "group work"• Conduct a "meet one another" activity at the beginning of the course so students could begin to make personal connections• Draw non-participating students into activities and discussions• Prevent specific students from dominating activities/discussions• Guide the direction of discussions, mediating conflict or differences of opinion• Provide regular opportunities for students to engage in one or more of the following activities: formal and/or informal discussions of course topics, collaborative course assignments, and study groups <u>In online environments, specifically</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage students to strengthen their online presence in the course by sharing links to their e-portfolio, personal Web site, and/or posting a photo of themselves to the class Web space (e.g., their LMS profile)• Explain the criteria for "good" online discussion participation• Provide Netiquette guidelines to ensure respectful interaction• Model good online discussion participation practices• Provide students with interaction space(s) for study groups, "hall way conversations," etc. Where to look: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Course communications (announcements, syllabus, discussion areas, e-mail, chat rooms, social media spaces, etc.)• Collaborative spaces (wikis, blogs, collaborative meeting spaces, etc.)• Mid-semester feedback from students• SRTE feedback from students Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Overview of Cooperative Learning• Creating Community• How-to Facilitate Robust Online Discussions	Self-Reflection Evidence Found: Strengths: Areas for Improvement:
--	---

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

PRINCIPLE 3: Good practice encourages active learning. Active learning methods engage students in the learning process by encouraging them to discover, process, and apply information. Empirical support for the positive impact of active learning on student achievement is extensive. (See Prince, M. (July 2004). Does active learning work? A review of the research. <i>Journal of Engineering Education</i> , 93, 3, 223-232.) Examples of evidence to look for: <u>Encouraging active learning generally</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenge or engage student assumptions• Demonstrate active listening• Model thinking and problem-solving; that is, work through problems, scenarios, arguments with students• Provide opportunities for students to "customize" assignments to their personal and professional interests and needs• Assign student activities that involve one or more of the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active use of writing, speaking, and other forms of self-expression<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ opportunity for information gathering, synthesis, and analysis in solving problems (including use of library, electronic/computer and other resources, and quantitative reasoning and interpretation, as applicable)◦ engagement in collaborative learning activities◦ application of intercultural and international competence◦ dialogue pertaining to social behavior, community, and scholarly conduct◦ integration of three or more of the above activities into General Education courses offered in the knowledge domains (https://bulletins.psu.edu/undergraduate/general-education/)◦ thinking, talking, or writing about learning◦ reflecting, relating, organizing, applying, synthesizing, or evaluating information◦ performing research, lab or studio work, or physical activities◦ participating in, designing, or developing educational games and simulations Where to look: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Course communications (announcements, syllabus, discussion areas, e-mail, chat rooms, social media spaces, etc.)• Collaborative spaces (wikis, blogs, collaborative meeting spaces, etc.)• Sample student work• Mid-semester feedback from students• SRTE feedback from students Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategies for Creating Engaging Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning Environments• Engagement Activities• Engaging Students• Active Learning• Active Learning Techniques• Engaging Activities• Inquiry-based Learning	Self-Reflection Evidence Found: Strengths: Areas for Improvement:
--	---

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

PRINCIPLE 4: Good practice gives prompt feedback. Instructors help students frequently assess their knowledge and competence and provide them with opportunities to perform, receive meaningful suggestions, and reflect on their learning. Examples of evidence to look for: <u>Providing prompt feedback, generally</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include information about course feedback methods and standards on the course syllabus• Provide an option (or requirement) for students to submit drafts of assignments for instructor feedback• Provide meaningful feedback on student assignments within a publicized and reasonable time frame• Provide feedback that is clear, positive, specific, and focused on observable behavior that can be changed• Clearly communicate course and individual assignment grading criteria• Praise/acknowledge responses from the class• Help students to extend their responses• Ask student teams to read each other's homework and critique• Structure discussions of material based on feedback on students' understanding• Share examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals• Give students access to an up-to-date course gradebook• Survey students to elicit feedback on their own learning and summarize the feedback for further student reflection <u>In face-to-face environments, specifically</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide constructive feedback as individual students worked problems, offered arguments, or otherwise presented work• Actively monitors group activities, e.g., asking questions, offering help <u>In online environments, specifically</u> Did I... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide an open discussion forum where students can ask questions and receive instructor feedback about content• Provide opportunities for practice with feedback such as interactive self-assessments or narrated demonstrations of how to solve problems Where to look: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Course communications (announcements, syllabus, discussion areas, e-mail, chat rooms, social media spaces, etc.)• Collaborative spaces (wikis, blogs, collaborative meeting spaces, etc.)• Sample student work• Course gradebook• Mid-semester feedback from students• SRTE feedback from students Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seven Keys to Effective Feedback• 5 Research-based Tips for Providing Students with Meaningful Feedback• Responding to Student Papers Effectively and Efficiently• Howard E. Aldrich. 2002. "Your Paper's on the Floor, Outside My Door." <i>National Teaching & Learning Forum</i>, 12, 1: 10.• Gathering Student Feedback• Feedback from Students	Self-Reflection Evidence Found: Strengths: Areas for Improvement:
---	---

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

PRINCIPLE 5: Good education emphasizes time on task.

The frequency and duration of study, as well as effective time management skills, are critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning to manage and prioritize their study time.

Examples of evidence to look for:

Emphasizing time on task, generally

Did I...

- Provide a course schedule that outlines topics to be covered and due dates so students can plan their work accordingly
- Provide course-specific study tips that provide students with strategies for utilizing their time well
- Provide assignment feedback that gives students with information on where to focus their studies
- Consider the nature of the student audience when considering assignment due dates and timeframes, e.g., a course targeted to working adult professionals might incorporate a weekend into an assignment timeframe
- Make announcements to the class addressing upcoming assignments and exams
- Provide explicit directions for active learning tasks, e.g., rationale, duration, product
- Allow sufficient time to complete tasks, such as group work

In face-to-face environments, specifically

Did I...

- Arrive to class on time
- Provide an outline or organization for the class session
- Follow the stated structure
- Complete the scheduled topics

In online environments, specifically

Did I...

- Include information on the course syllabus that provides an estimate of the amount of time students should spend on the course, e.g., "On average, most students spend eight hours per week working on course assignments. Your workload may be more or less depending on your prior experience with computing and the Web in general, and with this subject in particular."
- Give time-to-completion information on course assignments, e.g., "This assignment should take you approximately 2 hours to complete."
- Share course statistics that demonstrate that time-to-completion and weekly time-on-task estimates are on target

Where to look:

- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials / Assignment directions
- Sample student work
- Log in and other access data in the LMS

Resources:

- [Adjusting Your Study Habits](#)
- [Virtual Study Group: Guidance for Instructors](#)
- ["Hours of Instructional Activity Equivalents \(HIA\) for Undergraduate Courses"](#)
- [Time Management: Five Essentials for Online Learners](#)
- [Online Course Design: Time on Task](#)
- [iStudy Module \(for students\) on Time Management](#)
- [How Students Develop Online Learning Skills](#)

Self-Reflection

Evidence Found:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

PRINCIPLE 6: Good practice communicates high expectations.

As the saying goes, "if you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?" Effective instructors have high, but reasonable, expectations for their students. They clearly communicate those expectations and provide support to their students in their efforts to meet those expectations.

Examples of evidence to look for:

Communicating high expectations, generally

Did I...

- Explicitly communicate the skills and knowledge every student needs to have in order to be successful in the course.
- Explain course learning goals and how assignments are designed to help students achieve those goals.
- Provide frequent feedback to students through written explanations and detailed feedback on assignments.
- Motivates and encourages students to inspire them to move past the easy answers to more complex solutions.
- Routinely use critical and probing questions when communicating with students about course assignments and activities.
- Provide examples and non-examples of high quality work, along with a discussion of the differences between these.
- Provide examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals.
- Correct misguided responses or redirects obvious or easy questions.
- Relate this and previous class(es), or provides students with an opportunity to do so.
- Convey the purpose of each class activity or assignment.
- Elaborate or repeats complex information.
- Note new terms or concepts.
- Communicates the reasoning process behind operations and/or concepts.

In face-to-face environments, specifically

Did I...

- Provide class goals or objectives for the class session.
- Pause during explanations to ask and answer questions.

Where to look:

- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials / Assignment directions
- Sample student work

Resources:

- [Maximizing the Student Learning Experience \(see section on "Working with Learning Objectives"\)](#)
- [Resources related to writing clear learning objectives](#)
- [Authentic Assessment in Online Education](#)
- [Designing Scoring Rubrics for your Classroom](#)
- [Using Rubrics](#)
- [Writing Great Assignment Instructions: Tips for Success](#)
- [VALUE Rubric Development Project](#)

Self-Reflection

Evidence Found:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

A Self-Reflection Guide for Courses at Penn State

<p>PRINCIPLE 7: Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.</p> <p>People bring different talents and styles of learning to the learning environment. Some bring a wealth of relevant experience to a course, while others may new to the topic at hand. Likewise, students who are strong in a discussion situation may be less adept at lab or studio work. Students need the opportunity to demonstrate their talents and to "personalize" their learning so that it is relevant to them. It is also important to give students opportunities to learn in ways that may be less comfortable in order to improve their learning skills.</p> <p>Examples of evidence to look for:</p> <p><u>Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning, generally</u></p> <p>Did I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of a variety of assessment tools that gauge student progress.• Provide alternative assignment options that allow students to demonstrate their progress in a manner that is best conducive to their talents, e.g., a podcast might be allowed as learning evidence instead of a written paper.• Provide timely, corrective feedback for learning activities.• Include a policy for accommodations on the course syllabus.• Proactively offer accommodations for students with disabilities.• Use more than one form of instruction.• Provide opportunities and time for students to practice.• Provide a variety of examples and contexts to evoke interest in students with a diversity of identity characteristics.• Encourage comments and questions from students with a diversity of identity characteristics.• Identify diverse sources, perspectives, and authorities of the field <p><u>In face-to-face environments, specifically</u></p> <p>Did I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use various instructional technologies to bring multiple sensory dimensions to the classroom. <p><u>In online environments, specifically</u></p> <p>Did I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide supplemental online materials for students who lack prerequisite knowledge or who would benefit from having content presented in an alternative manner.• Create a positive online climate where students are encouraged to seek assistance with course content and learning activities if needed. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course syllabus• Instructional materials / Assignment directions• Sample student work• Discussion forums <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classroom Assessment Techniques• Accessibility and Usability at Penn State• Office of Disability Services Faculty Handbook• Thinking about One's Thinking• Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching	<p>Self-Reflection</p> <p>Evidence Found:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <p>Areas for Improvement:</p>
--	---