



Workbook  
**Identification of your Course  
Learning Essentials**

## Identifying Learning Essentials for the Course you Wish to Design

Before you begin the design process itself, which is based on the creation of learning outcomes, the choice of assessment strategies, the development of learning activities, etc., it is important to consider the learning essentials. What is a “learning essential”? We have chosen to use this term to encompass, under a single label, a variety of ideas represented in the literature that attempts to define what students learn in the context of a specific course (key concepts, big ideas, essentials, pillars, etc.). Depending on the discipline or the particularities of the course you wish to design, a learning essential can take different forms. In some cases, it may be a key concept, an important theory, a technique that is essential to grasp, a professional skill that must be developed, etc.

The use of the term “learning essential” is our way of respecting disciplinary differences while adopting a common terminology. Identifying learning essentials can highlight important aspects of a course and serve as a benchmark for the eventual creation of learning outcomes.

To help you identify the learning essentials of your course, we offer different strategies in the following pages. Choose the one that suits you best!

Some parts of the following PDF allow you to answer questions by simply adding text in the designated areas. *Do not forget to save your work before you close the document.*

Good luck!



# 1. A Visual Strategy

Some professors identify learning essentials through the use of a visual/graphical approach. It is through the creation of a graphic organizer (a concept map, a mind map, a word web, etc.), that they manage to bring out the most important aspects of a course and to illustrate how these are the starting points for all the other ideas that will be discussed. Moreover, the graphic that is produced can be used to explain to students the course and the rationale for all the choices that were made. We would like to remind you that the thinking behind the identification of the learning essentials must be done with students in mind and the fundamental question: What will they learn in your course? If this strategy inspires you, you can use the space on this page to write ideas.

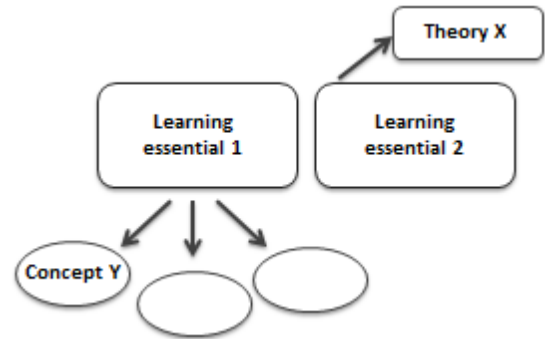


Figure 1 – A simplified example of a diagram

*Note - The space created by the PDF form does not allow the use of drawing functions. You have a few different options: Print this sheet to draw freehand, use software that enables the creation of such graphic organizers (e.g. Inspiration – [www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com)), use functions that allow you to insert shapes in Word by creating a new document, or if you work from your tablet you can use an application that can produce graphic organizers or simply draw.*



## 2. A Strategy Based on an Organized List

Other professors identify learning essentials through the development of an organized list (or a plan including subcategories). Just like the visual approach, an organized list highlights the most important aspects of a course and demonstrates how these are the starting points for all the other ideas that will be discussed. Unlike the visual approach often based on a more holistic and organic model, an organized list focuses more on the hierarchy and structure. Again, the rationale behind this identification of learning

essentials must be done while thinking of the students and the fundamental question: What will they learn in your course? If this strategy inspires you, you can use the space on this page to write ideas.

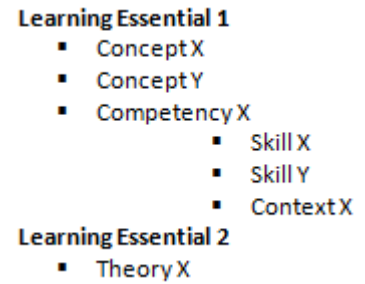


Figure 2 – A simplified example of an organized list



### 3. A Strategy Based on a List of Questions

Finally, the last strategy that we propose is inspired by the work of Fink (2003). It is a set of questions grouped into six broad categories. The questions are designed to help you focus more on the learning that you want your students to achieve in your course, rather than which content you wish to discuss. Note that the same type of questioning could be used to identify the elements of a graphic organizer (the first visual strategy proposed) or an organized list (the second strategy proposed).

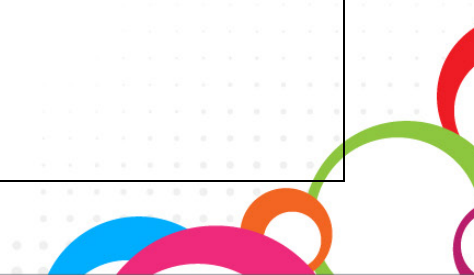
For each question, you must try to envision yourself in the future through the following statement: “A year (or more) after this course is over, I want and hope that students will...”

#### **Foundational Knowledge**

- What key information (e.g., facts, terms, formulae, concepts, principles, relationships, etc.) is/are important for students to understand and remember in the future?
- What key ideas (or perspectives) are important for students to understand in this course?

#### **Application Goals**

- What kinds of thinking are important for students to learn?
  - Critical thinking, in which students analyze and evaluate
  - Creative thinking, in which students imagine and create
  - Practical thinking, in which students solve problems and make decisions
- What important skills do students need to gain?
- Do students need to learn how to manage complex projects?



### **Integration Goals**

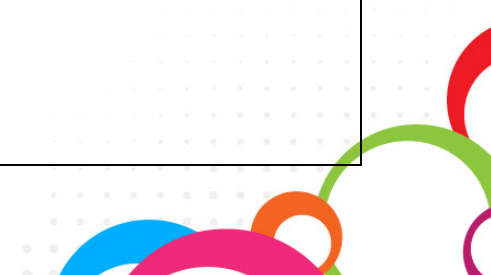
- What connections (similarities and interactions) should students recognize and make...
  - Among ideas *within* this course?
  - Among the information, ideas, and perspectives in this course and those in other courses or areas?
  - Among material in this course and the students' own personal, social, and/or work life?

### **Human Dimensions Goals**

- What could or should students learn about themselves?
- What could or should students learn about understanding others and/or interacting with them?

### **Caring Goals**

- What changes/values do you hope students will adopt? Feelings? Interests? Ideas?



### **Metacognitive Goals**

- What would you like your students to learn about:
  - How to be good students in a course like your own?
  - How to learn about this particular subject?
  - How to become a self-directed learner within this subject (i.e., having a learning agenda of what they need/want to learn, and a plan for learning it)?

The original work of Fink (2003) – *A self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning* can be found at the following address: <http://www.deefinkandassociates.com/GuidetoCourseDesignAug05.pdf>

