

## DESIGN QUALITIES OF STUDENT WORK

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**Content and Substance.** Learning to read and to write complete sentences, for example, is not the same as learning to write persuasively and to read critically, thoughtfully, and well. Educators should commit themselves to designing work that engages all students and helps them attain rich and profound knowledge. If such profound mastery is limited to students who are more socially or economically advantaged—or otherwise already capable of high-quality intellectual work without as much teacher effort—then the dream of democracy cannot truly be realized.

**Product Focus.** Work that engages students almost always focuses on a product or performance of significance to students.

**Organization of Knowledge.** Students are more likely to be engaged when information and knowledge are arranged in clear, accessible ways, and in ways that let students use the knowledge and information to address tasks that are important to them. This doesn't mean that all content must be inherently interesting or relevant to students: They will learn many important things in school that they may not care about at the time. Content should be organized so access to the material is clear and relatively easy, and the students' work should have enough attractive qualities to keep them engaged.

**Clear and Compelling Product Standards.** Students prefer knowing exactly what is expected of them and how those expectations relate to something they care about. Standards are only relevant when those to whom they apply care about them.

**Protection from Adverse Consequences for Initial Failures.** Students are more engaged when they can try tasks without fear of embarrassment, punishment, or implications that they're inadequate. (Unfortunately, current school structures and grading practices often make this difficult to achieve.)

**Affiliation.** Students are more likely to be engaged by work that permits, encourages, and supports opportunities for them to work interdependently with others. Those who advocate cooperative learning

understand this well and also recognize the critical difference between students' working together and students' working independently on a common task, which may look like group work but isn't.

**Affirmation.** Students are more highly motivated when their parents, teachers, fellow students, and other "significant others" make it known that they think students' work is important. Portfolio assessments, which collect student work for scrutiny by people other than the teacher, can play a significant role in making student work "more visible."

**Choice.** When students have some degree of control over what they are doing, they are more likely to feel committed to doing it. This doesn't mean students should dictate school curriculum, however. Schools must distinguish between giving students choices in what they do and letting them choose what they will learn.

**Novelty and Variety.** Students are more likely to engage in the work asked of them if they are continually exposed to new and different ways of doing things. The introduction of computers in writing classes, for example, might motivate students who otherwise would not write. New technology and techniques, however, shouldn't be used to create new ways to do the same old work; new forms of work and new products to produce are equally important.

**Authenticity.** This term is bandied about quite a bit by educators, so much so that the power of the concept is sometimes lost. Clearly, however, when students are given tasks that are meaningless, contrived, and inconsequential, they are less likely to take them seriously and be engaged by them. But if the task carries real consequences, it's likely that engagement will increase. What teacher, for example, hasn't noticed that students prepare more diligently for a performance they know their parents will attend? Likewise, students who produce a documentary video on the Civil War are likely to be engaged in a more authentic learning experience than those who listen to a series of lectures on the war, with the sole goal of passing a test.

# Side 1: Using the Design Qualities to FOCUS ON THE “WHO”

Use the following questions to guide your thinking about your students.

<b>Content and Substance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ How do students feel about this subject/skill? Do they find it intrinsically valuable, or are they disinterested, or maybe even hostile, toward the topics to be considered?</li> <li>➔ How much experience have students had with the subject of this standard, and how successful have they been?</li> </ul>
<b>Product Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What kinds of products, performances, or exhibitions that students experienced in the past seem to be of interest to them?</li> </ul>
<b>Organization of Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What types of instructional approaches do these students most value?</li> <li>➔ How do these students like to learn?</li> <li>➔ What are the interests of these students I may take into account if they find the content uninteresting?</li> <li>➔ What technologies appeal to these students?</li> </ul>
<b>Clear and Compelling Product Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ To what degree do these students find it important to assess their own work in terms of the standards set?</li> <li>➔ Do they enjoy participating in group assessment processes?</li> <li>➔ How do these students prefer that the standards by which their work will be assessed be made clear?</li> </ul>
<b>Protection from Adverse Consequences for Initial Failures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Do students accept failure as a normal part of the learning process?</li> <li>➔ Do students have access to the resources needed to do their work (people, time, technologies)?</li> <li>➔ Do students feel safe in taking risks?</li> </ul>
<b>Affiliation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What has been the prior experience of students with work that required collaboration, and how do they feel about this experience?</li> <li>➔ Do students have the team skills and group skills that might be required to work with others?</li> <li>➔ Do students know enough about group processes to analyze and evaluate the operation of their own groups?</li> </ul>
<b>Affirmation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What opportunities to make their schoolwork public appeal to this group?</li> <li>➔ How important is it to these students that others view, use, or respond to the work they are doing in school? Whom would they prefer see their work?</li> </ul>
<b>Choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ In what areas do students want choice in the classroom or school?</li> <li>➔ To what extent do these students like to be part of making decisions regarding the processes used in assessing their performance and determining the standards by which their performance will be evaluated?</li> </ul>
<b>Novelty and Variety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Are these students able to maintain intellectual work for sustained periods of time?</li> <li>➔ Do they generally get excited about the pursuit of ideas, or do they need to be attracted by unique or novel packaging of the ideas (i.e., skits, video games, plays, etc.)?</li> </ul>
<b>Authenticity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What is meaningful and significant in the students’ lives, and what results do they find important? For example, what topics, activities, hobbies, extracurricular activities are appealing? What makes such things interesting to them? What results do they realize from these activities?</li> </ul>

## Side 1: Using the Design Qualities to FOCUS ON THE “WHO”

Use the following questions to guide your thinking about your participants or adult learners.

<b>Content and Substance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ How do members of my audience feel about the topic or content? Do they find it intrinsically valuable, or are they disinterested, or maybe even hostile, toward the topics to be considered?</li> <li>➔ How much experience have the participants had with the subject of this standard, and how successful have they been?</li> </ul>
<b>Product Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What kinds of products, performances, or exhibitions that participants experienced in the past seem to be of interest to them?</li> </ul>
<b>Organization of Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What types of instructional approaches do these participants most value?</li> <li>➔ How do they like to learn?</li> <li>➔ What are the interests of these participants I may take into account if they find the content uninteresting?</li> <li>➔ What technologies appeal to this group?</li> </ul>
<b>Clear and Compelling Product Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ To what degree do these participants find it important to assess their own work in terms of the standards set?</li> <li>➔ Do they enjoy participating in group assessment processes?</li> <li>➔ How do they prefer that the standards by which their work will be assessed be made clear?</li> </ul>
<b>Protection from Adverse Consequences for Initial Failures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Do these participants accept failure as a normal part of the learning process?</li> <li>➔ Do they have access to the resources they need to do their work (people, time, technologies)?</li> <li>➔ Does this group feel safe in taking risks?</li> </ul>
<b>Affiliation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What has been the prior experience of participants with work that required collaboration, and how do they feel about this experience?</li> <li>➔ Do these people have the team skills and group skills that might be required to work with others?</li> <li>➔ Do participants know enough about group processes to analyze and evaluate the operation of their own groups?</li> </ul>
<b>Affirmation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What opportunities to make their work public appeal to this group?</li> <li>➔ How important is it to these participants that others view, use, or respond to the work they are doing? Who would they prefer see their work?</li> </ul>
<b>Choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ In what areas do participants want choice?</li> <li>➔ To what extent do these participants like to be part of making decisions regarding the processes used in assessing their performance and determining the standards by which their performance will be evaluated?</li> </ul>
<b>Novelty and Variety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Are these participants able to maintain intellectual work for sustained periods of time?</li> <li>➔ Do they generally get excited about the pursuit of ideas, or do they need to be attracted by unique or novel packaging of the ideas (i.e., skits, video games, plays, etc.)?</li> </ul>
<b>Authenticity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What is meaningful and significant in the participants' lives, and what results do they find important? For example, what topics, activities, hobbies, extracurricular activities are appealing? What makes such things interesting to them? What results do they realize from these activities?</li> </ul>