Designing Pre-Work
A Guide to Priming Active Learning Sessions

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF WISCONSIN

OFFICE OF
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What is the Purpose of Pre-Work?

Pre-work is work assigned prior to a scheduled learning session. It is designed to provide core information to learners so they can actively participate in the session. Pre-work provides focus and engagement in the learning material, preparing learners for a quicker transition into active application of concepts.

Pre-work increases efficiency, as foundational learning takes place before your time with the learners. Allowing learners to learn and even respond to information prior to your time together helps ensure they arrive prepared and connected to the content. Pre-work also helps to ensure your learners report to the session with the same level of background understanding of the material.
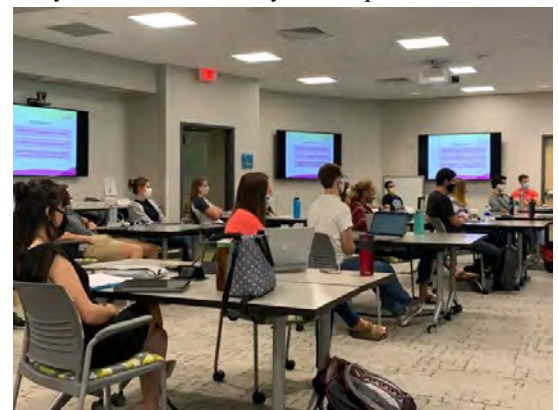
Key Elements in Designing Pre-Work

Purpose: Connect pre-work to your learning objectives, keeping in mind what learners need to know and be able to do by the end of your time together.

Clear Instructions: Make it explicit what learners are responsible for prior to your session and why it is important for them to complete the assigned tasks.

Engaging Content: Consider assigning a variety of ways for learners to engage with the content for your session. Readings, videos, games, and other activities can be used to teach the content.

Timeliness: Be mindful of the amount of time required to complete the pre-work. Again, use your learning objectives to identify key foundational information the learners need to participate in your session.

Deadlines: Assign a deadline for the pre-work, keeping in mind any time you will need to process any assignments before your scheduled teaching session. Pre-work submissions can provide valuable information to you as the facilitator to focus your time with the students on key concepts and points of confusion.

Messaging and Reminders: Communicate your expectations to the learners in a timely manner and provide gentle reminders of upcoming deadlines to support learner participation.

Accountability: Hold learners accountable for completion of the pre-work, such as through scoring assignments or incorporating quizzing.

What Are Different Types of Pre-work?

There are numerous forms pre-work can take.

- Readings
- Videos
- Recorded Presentations
- Quizzes
- Games
- Puzzles
- Stories
- Podcasts

How Do I Design Pre-Work?

Define Your Purpose: Review your learning objectives for the session and reflect on what you need the learners to know and do at the end of your time together. Use the objectives to determine what learners need to know ahead of time to allow for greater interaction and application during the scheduled session. Assign that information as pre-work.

Determine Accountability Measures: Consider how you will hold your learners accountable for completing the pre-work. Will you assign a reflection exercise, quiz, or other type of submission prior to the live session? Will you ask questions about the pre-work material at the start of your session? Be sure to have a plan for how to hold students accountable, including how you will address students who do not meet expectations.

Identify or Create Materials: As shown above, there are numerous forms pre-work can take. However, that doesn't mean the instructor is responsible for creating all the materials themselves. Review the literature for key articles, videos, and other resources you can provide to learners that have been created by experts on the content. If none are available or you need to supplement them to cover your learning objectives, you can create your own presentations or other materials to use.

Post Materials to Learning Management System: Once your materials are prepared, post them to Brightspace for students to access. Your course coordinator can assist with this process.

Communicate Expectations and Reasoning: Use a Brightspace Announcement to message learners that the pre-work is available to review. Provide a deadline for completion of the pre-work and include your rationale for the assignment(s). We also recommend including approximate time to complete the pre-work to help learners plan their time.

Announcements ∨

Pre-Work for January 23 ∨   ✕

Kerrie Quirk posted on Dec 15, 2022 12:25 PM • ↻ Edited

The pre-work for your January 23rd session on Bloom's Taxonomy is now available. Please complete the pre-work before the session begins at 10:00am that morning. There will be a quiz on this content at the start of the session, worth 10 points of your grade.

Bloom's Taxonomy (5 minutes)

Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Learning Objectives (10 minutes)

Collect Feedback: During or after the session, collect feedback about the pre-work to ensure it meets your needs and expectations. Ask students about the amount of time spent on pre-work, points of confusion, and applicability to the session itself. Use this feedback to refine your pre-work approach for your next session.

For assistance in designing pre-work for your session, contact us at educational_improvement@mcw.edu.