

# Instructional Methods

## A Guide to Selecting an Instructional Method by Curriculum Topic

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## What Instructional Methods Are Recommended for the Medical School?

At MCW there are dozens of instructional methods used to teach our students throughout their educational journey. The AAMC MedBiquitous Curriculum Inventory Working Group [lists 30 types](#). All courses list these methods under “learning activities” in the course catalog. This guide will help you consider which methods may be best for your curriculum topics and how to best interleave them.

**MedBiquitous** **Instructional methods are strongly connected to assessment methods:** It should come to no surprise that if you look in the OASIS

course catalog, the line after learning activities is evaluation methods. In the second column of the MedBiquitous list is the column of [18 assessment methods](#). Think of the connection between these two and what your course offers. They are explicitly connected in this case. Are they this closely linked in your course?

**Common methods:** In many courses that end with a high-stakes multiple choice exam, it seems natural that *lecture* is the dominant methodology for instruction. If students are to primarily remember and understand facts, ideas, and concepts, then heavy volumes of lecture slides can impart that wisdom. In clerkships, it makes sense that the methods include *clinical experience* – *inpatient* and *ward rounds*, as students are being graded on patient interactions. Prior to that, in early clinical courses, the most commonly deployed methods include *case-based instruction* and *simulation*, as students need to be assessed on if they’re ready for clerkships and real patients.

**Choosing other methods:** None of the common methods take much time in choosing. But what about the *others*? Looking through the inventory of instructional methods piques a lot of curiosity, and sometimes including new methods to introduce variety may seem like a ‘fun’ option to make your course stand out. In small instances this is okay, but keep in mind that it can be disruptive to learners if new methods are mixed in without advance warning. If a course is 75% lecture-based and then in the middle of a term an instructor offers an active learning method such as *games* or *peer teaching*, students can experience a whiplash-effect. This effect is compounded if it’s viewed by students as distracting them from studying for their exams. Therefore, you may really want to think about diversifying your assessments before diving deeper into the instructional methods inventory.

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## What Assessment Methods Could Drive Alternative Instruction?

Assessment methods come in many forms. If a course objective is to increase student empathy and compassion, then *reflection* can be incorporated<sup>i</sup>. To incorporate this method, students ought to be provided with resources describing components of a critical reflection and expectations should be set well in advance. It's true that some assessment methods open a Pandora's Box of possibilities for instruction methods. Peer assessment, for example, could be taught through *role-play/dramatization*, or *games*, or *team building*. Portfolios now can capture so much of a student performance, so if your course aims to contribute to a student's longitudinal portfolio via a *service-learning activity* or *research*, you could do so.



Reach out to OEI at [educational\\_improvement@mcw.edu](mailto:educational_improvement@mcw.edu) for ideas on capturing work in a portfolio.

## Interleaving It All

A course that has a diverse set of goals and assessment methods can incorporate a lot of instructional methods. Interleaving is the key to that. Most educators are familiar with the system of blocking, where lectures and small-stakes assessment are tightly focused on one subject area. A dogged, focused approach to difficult ideas is very popular among students—think about how often cramming for a test happens. In interleaving, however, different concepts are mixed, and some research shows this can help students distinguish them. In other words, staggering your course with a mixture of instruction methods can help learners differentiate topics and increase long-term retention when used strategically<sup>ii</sup>. Any good curriculum will have blocks of topics organized relationally but mixing up assessment methods and instructional methods *can be* beneficial because it breaks up the monotony of traditional learning. Successful implementation of interleaving requires clear, upfront expectations. Using the syllabus and course announcements to spell out a change in these methods well in advance will ensure students avoid any whiplash effects.

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<sup>i</sup> Schwartz, 2020 — Schwartz, Brian D et al. "Fostering Empathy, Implicit Bias Mitigation, and Compassionate Behavior in a Medical Humanities Course." *International journal of environmental research and public health* vol. 17,7 2169. 25 Mar. 2020, doi:10.3390/ijerph17072169

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-use-interleaving-foster-deeper-learning>