

Transparent Assignment Design

In this session, we'll review findings from recent research on students' learning and apply those to the design of your own course assignments. Insights from research on best teaching/learning practices in higher education will inform our work. Participants will leave with an understanding of the state of research, a draft assignment for one of their courses, and a concise set of strategies for designing assignments and projects promote students' learning.

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The Principles of Excellence



Principle One

★ Aim High—and Make Excellence Inclusive

Make the Essential Learning Outcomes a Framework for the Entire Educational Experience, Connecting School, College, Work, and Life

Principle Two

★ Give Students a Compass

Focus Each Student's Plan of Study on Achieving the Essential Learning Outcomes—and Assess Progress

Principle Three

★ Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation

Immerse All Students in Analysis, Discovery, Problem Solving, and Communication, Beginning in School and Advancing in College

Principle Four

★ Engage the Big Questions

Teach through the Curriculum to Far-Reaching Issues—Contemporary and Enduring—in Science and Society, Cultures and Values, Global Interdependence, the Changing Economy, and Human Dignity and Freedom

Principle Five

★ Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action

Prepare Students for Citizenship and Work through Engaged and Guided Learning on "Real-World" Problems

Principle Six

★ Foster Civic, Intercultural, and Ethical Learning

Emphasize Personal and Social Responsibility, in Every Field of Study

Principle Seven

★ Assess Students' Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems

Use Assessment to Deepen Learning and to Establish a Culture of Shared Purpose and Continuous Improvement.

LEAP

The Essential Learning Outcomes



Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

★ Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

★ Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

★ Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

★ Integrative and Applied Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
- Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems*

Note: This listing was developed through a multi-year dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning, analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community, and analysis of the accreditation standards of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Association of American Universities. It draws on the work of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning in the Twenty-First Century* (2002), *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004), and *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007). For further information, see www.aacu.org/leap.

LEAP

Research on Students' Learning

See EXAMPLES handout for examples of how faculty use these methods.

<u>Research on Learning</u>	<u>Implications for Assignments</u> (numbers refer to sections in the EXAMPLES handout)
Elbow, Jaschik/Davidson	Low stakes for greater creativity / risk
Richard Light	Coaching model, peer instruction (5)
Gregorc, Kolb	Varied format, equitable access, peer ins.
Treisman, (Steele)	Encourage /require peer study groups (5)
Ambrose, Bergstahl	Flexible format (1)
Bloom. Felder	Sequence skill development (2)
Colomb, Bass,	Feedback on Content vs. Format, try again Provide examples with criteria applied (4)
Perry	Target feedback to phase; Don't overwhelm
Doyle, Felder, Winkelmes	Specify content goals, skills goals, criteria to enable self-monitoring (3)
AAC&U Winkelmes Yeager, Walton	Give Students a Compass Explicate purpose, task, criteria (6) Engage students in applying your criteria (6) to develop ability / belonging

Transparency in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Project

Transparent teaching and learning methods help students understand *how* and *why* they are learning course content in particular ways. The Transparency Project offers faculty a means to gather and share data on how these methods affect students' learning, across departments, institutions and countries. Important findings so far include:

- Transparent teaching/learning methods benefit students who are unfamiliar with college success strategies by explicating learning/teaching processes.
- Data from participating students and teachers helps us to identify which transparent methods are most beneficial with respect to discipline, students' level of expertise.
- In introductory level courses across the disciplines where teachers implemented **transparent assignment design** at their own discretion, students' self-ratings were significantly higher in these areas (with even greater benefits for underrepresented and first-generation students):
 - ability to recognize when you need help with your academic work
 - understanding of what constitutes successful work in a particular course
 - confidence in ability to succeed in school
 - confidence in ability to succeed in a particular major

In the study, teachers agreed to: **discuss assignments' learning goals and design rationale before students begin each assignment. Here are some examples of how they said they did it:**

- Chart out the skills students will practice in each assignment
- Begin each assignment by defining the learning benefits to students: skills practiced, content knowledge gained
- Provide criteria for success in advance
- Offer examples of successful work, and annotate them to indicate how criteria apply.

[Winkelmes, AAC&U's Liberal Education 99, 2 \(Spring 2013\)](#)

TRANSPARENT TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES*

Transparent teaching and learning methods help students understand *how* and *why* they are learning course content in particular ways. The Transparency Project offers faculty a means to gather and share data on how these methods affect students' learning, across departments, institutions and countries. **Faculty participants usually employ one option** from the list and students indicate the impact of this small change when they complete an online survey (taking about four to five minutes) at the end of the course.

Discuss assignments' learning goals and design rationale before students begin each assignment

- Chart out the skills students will practice in each assignment
- Begin each assignment by defining the learning benefits to students: skills practiced, content knowledge gained
- Provide criteria for success in advance
- Offer examples of successful work, and annotate them to indicate how criteria apply

Invite students to participate in class planning, agenda construction

- Give students an advanced agenda (2 or 3 main topics) 1-2 days before class, and ask them to identify related sub topics, examples or applications they wish to learn about
- Review the agenda at the outset of each class meeting, including students' subtopics
- Explicitly evaluate progress toward fulfilling the agenda at conclusion of each class meeting
- In large courses, a class committee gathers and contributes students' subtopics to agendas
- Inform students about ideas and questions to be discussed in upcoming class meetings

Gauge students' understanding during class via peer work on questions that require students to apply concepts you've taught

- Create scenarios/applications to test understanding of key concepts during class
- Allow discussion in pairs, instructor's feedback, and more discussion
- Provide explicit assessment of students' understanding, with further explanation if needed, before moving on to teach the next concept

Explicitly connect "how people learn" data with course activities when students struggle at difficult transition points

- Offer research-based explanations about concepts or tasks that students often struggle to master in your discipline
(See examples: Bloom's taxonomy, William Perry's Phases of Intellectual Development, and subsequent work, Kathleen Butler / Antony Gregorc's Learning Styles , Richard Light's Assessment Seminars, Research on novice vs. expert thinking, Neuroscience: synapse formation and learning)

Engage students in applying the grading criteria that you'll use on their work

- Share criteria for success and examples of good work (as above in "discuss assignments' learning goals"), then ask students to apply these criteria in written feedback on peers' drafts

Debrief graded tests and assignments in class

- Help students identify patterns in their returned, graded work: what kinds of test questions were missed; what types of weaknesses characterize the assigned work
- Let students review any changes or revisions they made, and whether these resulted in improvements or not
- Ask students to record the process steps they used to prepare for the exam or complete the assignment, and to analyze: which parts of the process were efficient, effective, ineffective

Offer running commentary on class discussions, to indicate what modes of thought or disciplinary methods are in use

- Explicitly identify what types of questioning/thinking and what skills of the discipline your students are using in each class meeting
- Invite students to describe the steps in their thought process for addressing/solving a problem
- Engage students in evaluating which types of thinking are most effective for addressing the issues in each class discussion

* See examples: <http://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning>

Transparent Assignment Template

This template can be used as a guide for developing and explaining in-class activities and out-of-class assignments.

Making these aspects of each course activity or assignment explicitly clear to students has demonstrably enhanced students' learning in a national study.¹

Due date:

Purpose: *Define the learning objectives, in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning.*

Skills: *The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course / in school / in this field / in professional life beyond school:*

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (summarized in this Univ of Victoria chart) can help you explain these skills in language students will understand. Listed from cognitively simple to most complex, these skills are:

*understanding basic disciplinary knowledge and methods/tools
applying basic disciplinary knowledge/tools to problem-solving in a similar but unfamiliar context
analyzing
synthesizing
judging/evaluating and selecting best solutions
creating/inventing a new interpretation, product, theory*

Knowledge: *This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:*

- 1.
- 2.

Task: *Define what activities the student should do/perform. "Question cues" from Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (summarized in this Univ of Victoria chart) might be helpful. List any steps or guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students' efforts.*

Criteria for Success:

Define the characteristics of the finished product. Provide specific examples of what these characteristics look like in practice. With students, collaboratively analyze an example of good work before the students begin working. Offer a critiqued example of excellent work with specific indicators of what makes the work successful. Explain how excellent work differs from adequate work. It is often useful to provide a checklist of characteristics of successful work to help the student know if s/he is doing high quality work while s/he is working on the assignment. This enables students to evaluate the quality of their own efforts while they are working, and to judge the success of their completed work. Students can also use your checklist to provide feedback on peers' coursework. Indicate whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the student's overall grade for the course. Later, asking students to reflect and comment on their completed, graded work empowers them to focus on changes to their learning strategies that might improve their future work.

¹ Winkelmes, Mary-Ann. "Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning." *Liberal Education* [Association of American Colleges and Universities] 99, 2 (Spring 2013).

Sample Assignments

A

GENERAL EDUCATION 150: LOOKING AT AMERICA

Paper I (5-7 pages) Due: March 12

Photographs for assignment:

1. William Klein. "Severed Head, 5th Avenue." 1955. Found in American Images, ed. Peter Turner, p. 83. (You should mask out with paper the surrounding images on the same page.)
2. E. O. Beaman. "The Heart of Lodore, Green River." Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado. 1871. Found in The History of Photography, ←
Beaumont Newhall, p. 98.

Quotations from reading:

Here [the wilderness along the frontier] was an opportunity for social development continually to begin over again, whenever society gave signs of breaking into classes. Here was a magic fountain of youth in which America continually bathed and was rejuvenated. (Henry Nash Smith quoting Frederick Turner, Virgin Land, p. 254)

The search for identity assumes many forms; one which directly affects the landscape is a growing dependence on other people, a gregariousness. . . . At that time [a hundred and fifty years ago] solitary confinement was not thought of as a punishment, but a speedy and effective type of reform therapy: the individual was confronted with himself and learned what his mistakes had been. He was safe from the contamination of society. Now it is considered the harshest punishment that can be inflicted. (J.B. Jackson, "The Social Landscape," p. 147.)

In writing your papers:

- A) Look at the details and figures of each photograph and how they interact to compose the scenes.
- B) Look at each picture as a dramatic moment and compare and contrast their meanings.
- C) Discuss what you find in consideration of the above quotations and, more generally, American landscape and individualism.
- D) As a foundation for your discussion, your paper should make specific references to the reading and lectures of weeks one through four.

Sample Assignments

B

Psychology 100: Introduction to Psychology

Steve Most and Dave Marx, Teaching Assistants, Harvard University

Due: October 21

Please write 1-2 pages discussing the following topic. Papers should be 12 pt and double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Be sure to support your argument with material from the lecture and/or readings.

Topic 2: The Nervous System

You and your friends, Fred, Daphne, Velma, and Shaggy, drive up to the old LeDoux mansion in order to investigate reports of a scary ghost in the area. You are a little nervous because, during your last investigation, a series of misfortunes befell your friends. Fred sustained damage to his amygdala; anvil fell on Shaggy's head, obliterating his Wernicke's area; Velma's basal ganglia and cerebellum were destroyed in a fire, and, in a late night game of poker, Daphne lost everything but her association cortex.

Fearing for your safety, you elect to stay behind with the van while your friends head off into the mansion. The plan is simple: someone needs to confront the ghost without getting too scared someone needs to try to figure out what the ghost is saying, and someone needs to figure out what the next plan of actions should be.

Since you are staying with the van, you get to decide which of your friends will carry out which tasks. Choose wisely (and explain your choices)!

Sample Assignments

C

Beth Morgan, University of Illinois Plant Biology Department

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Human Nutrition
In this lesson, you will analyze your diet's composition for fat, carbohydrate and proteins and the overall calorie intake. Follow the instructions on the worksheet and determine if your diet includes these compounds in a healthy proportion. The file "Diet Analysis" below is a good summary of what goes into a healthy diet. After you have analyzed your diet, you will compare your diet to a typical diet from another country. For diet information for other countries, download the file "Daily Diets" below. Your choice should be cleared with Beth through posting in a Moodle forum. How does your diet and this one compare? What is the daily caloric intake? From what group of compounds does the majority of the calories come: carbohydrate, fats or proteins? What is the biggest difference you see between the two diets?

Objectives
At the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. list the elements and monomers that make up proteins.
2. explain how the elements that make up proteins are obtained from the environment.
3. list at least five functions of proteins in the bodies of plants and animals.
4. list some of the general functions of vitamins.
5. analyze a daily diet and determine its fat, protein and carbohydrate content.
6. analyze a diet from another country and compare it to yours for energy efficiency.
7. explain what it means to eat lower on the food chain and the implications for efficient energy use.

Assignment:
Keep track of your diet for 24 hours
(Use this worksheet: <http://www.life.illinois.edu/bv/102/disc/Diet%20Worksheet.pdf>).
Analyze your diet and the daily diet from another country using the U of I's Nutrition Analysis Tool 2.0. (<http://nat.illinois.edu/main/nat.html>)

Diet Analysis - download to your computer. (<http://www.life.illinois.edu/bv/102/disc/Nutrition.pdf>)

Daily Diets - download to your computer. (<http://www.life.illinois.edu/bv/102/disc/Daily%20Diets.pdf>)

Group Collaboration:
Your group has been investigating countries from one continent in various ways this semester. Compare the diets from your region and look for patterns or discrepancies. By (date), send an email to me evaluating the work of each in your group. (5 points)

Moodle Posting: Post a 200-400 word analysis and comparison of the two diets and regional dietary comparison by (date) and a response to a classmate's from another group posting by (date). (40 points)

Daily Diets

Africa

Chad

Food	Amount (grams)
Beans	21
Cassava	94
Groundnut	57
Lemons	27
Milk, whole	71
Miller	102
Rice	26
Sorghum	141
Vegetables, mixed	24
Yams	60

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Bear	53
Cassava	816
Corn	59
F-ruit, mixed	25
Plantains	23
Wheat	24

Ivory Coast

Beans	32
Cassava	236
Corn	91
Palm oil	27
Plantain	184

Sample Assignments

D

COLA 100E Major/Career Interview Assignment

1. Select a professional in your prospective academic discipline and/or career field that is considered an expert in an area in which you are interested.
2. Secure an interview with the professional for a date and time that is convenient for both of you.
3. Prepare 8-10 questions to ask the professional about their knowledge of a particular academic discipline/career field.
4. Conduct a 20 – 30 minute, face-to-face interview to gather knowledge that will help you make an informed decision about the major/career you are considering. You will want to audio/video record the interview with the interviewee's permission.
5. Prepare a typed transcript of the questions and answers using the audio/video recording
6. Write a 400 – 500 word reflection paper in which you address the following items:
 1. Who you selected and why?
 2. What you learned from them that is most interesting?
 3. What this assignment helped you learn about your major/career decision?
 4. What questions you still have?
7. Submit the typed transcript and reflection paper to your instructor.

Teaching UNLV Students: Research-based Strategies for Success (Part 2)

In this session, we'll review research on students' learning that informs **how the sequence of class activities and assignments can enhance students' learning**. We'll highlight learning goals from your courses. Then you'll draft a sequence of activities and assignments for a course you are teaching. Participants will leave with an understanding of the state of research, and a draft plan for a sequence of activities and assignments that will promote UNLV students' learning in one of their courses.

Exercise #1

In pairs or 3s at tables:

Discuss and define (pairs, 5 mins):

Three years after taking your course,

- what essential **knowledge** should students retain?
- what **skills** should students be able to perform?

List in sequence (simplest to most complex)

Two documents may help as you complete this task:

1. Bloom's Taxonomy Chart [below]
2. University of Nevada, Las Vegas Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs) [p.9]

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Competence	Skills	Assignment Cues
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation and recall of information • knowledge of dates, events, places • knowledge of major ideas • mastery of subject matter 	list, define, tell, describe, identify, show, label, collect, examine, tabulate, quote, name, who, when, where, etc.
Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding information • grasp meaning • translate knowledge into new context • interpret facts, compare, contrast • order, group, infer causes • predict consequences 	summarize, describe, interpret, contrast, predict, associate, distinguish, estimate, differentiate, discuss, extend
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use information • use methods, concepts, theories in new situations • solve problems using required skills or knowledge 	apply, demonstrate, calculate, complete, illustrate, show, solve, examine, modify, relate, change, classify, experiment, discover
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing patterns • organization of parts • recognition of hidden meanings • identification of components 	analyze, separate, order, explain, connect, classify, arrange, divide, compare, select, explain, infer
Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use old ideas to create new ones • generalize from given facts • relate knowledge from several areas • predict, draw conclusions 	combine, integrate, modify, rearrange, substitute, plan, create, design, invent, what if?, compose, formulate, prepare, generalize, rewrite
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare and discriminate between ideas • assess value of theories, presentations • make choices based on reasoned argument • based on reasoned argument • verify value of evidence • recognize subjectivity 	assess, decide, rank, grade, test, measure, recommend, convince, select, judge, explain, discriminate, support, conclude, compare, summarize

Chart Copyright © 2005, Counselling Services, University of Victoria, <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/bloom.html> Adapted by permission of the publisher from Benjamin S. Bloom *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984. Copyright (c) 1984 by Pearson Education.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs)

Intellectual Breadth and Lifelong Learning

Graduates are able to understand and integrate basic principles of the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, fine arts, and health sciences, and develop skills and a desire for lifelong learning. Specific outcomes for all students include:

1. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge and skills in at least one major area.
2. Identify the fundamental principles of the natural and health sciences, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts.
3. Apply the research methods and theoretical models of the natural and health sciences, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts to define, solve, and evaluate problems.
4. Transfer knowledge and skills gained from general and specialized studies to new settings and complex problems.
5. Demonstrate lifelong learning skills, including the ability to place problems in personally meaningful contexts; reflect on one's own understanding; demonstrate awareness of what needs to be learned; articulate a learning plan; and act independently on the plan, using appropriate resources.
6. Achieve success in one's chosen field or discipline, including applying persistence, motivation, interpersonal communications, leadership, goal setting, and career skills.

Inquiry and Critical Thinking

Graduates are able to identify problems, articulate questions, and use various forms of research and reasoning to guide the collection, analysis, and use of information related to those problems. Specific outcomes for all students include:

1. Identify problems, articulate questions or hypotheses, and determine the need for information.
2. Access and collect the needed information from appropriate primary and secondary sources.
3. Use quantitative and qualitative methods, including the ability to recognize assumptions, draw inferences, make deductions, and interpret information to analyze problems in context, and then draw conclusions.
4. Recognize the complexity of problems, and identify different perspectives from which problems and questions can be viewed.
5. Evaluate and report on conclusions, including discussing the basis for and strength of findings, and identify areas where further inquiry is needed.
6. Identify, analyze, and evaluate reasoning, and construct and defend reasonable arguments and explanations.

Communication

Graduates are able to write and speak effectively to both general and specialized audiences, create effective visuals that support written or spoken communication, and use electronic media common to one's field or profession. Specific outcomes for all students include:

1. Demonstrate general academic literacy, including how to respond to the needs of audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations, analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence, and construct research-based arguments using Standard Written English.
2. Effectively use the common genres and conventions for writing within a particular discipline or profession.
3. Prepare and deliver effective oral presentations.
4. Collaborate effectively with others to share information, solve problems, or complete tasks.
5. Produce effective visuals using different media.
6. Apply the up-to-date technologies commonly used to research and communicate within one's field.

Global/Multicultural Knowledge and Awareness

Graduates will have developed knowledge of global and multicultural societies, and an awareness of their place in and effect on them. Specific outcomes for all students include:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the history, philosophy, arts, and geography of world cultures.
2. Respond to diverse perspectives linked to identity, including age, ability, religion, politics, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality; both in American and international contexts.
3. Apply the concept of social justice.
4. Demonstrate familiarity with a non-native language, or experience living in a different culture.
5. Function effectively in diverse groups.
6. Demonstrate awareness of one's own place in and effect on the world.

Citizenship and Ethics

Graduates are able to participate knowledgeably and actively in the public life of our communities and make informed, responsible, and ethical decisions in their personal and professional lives. Specific outcomes for all students include:

1. Acquire knowledge of political, economic, and social institutions.
2. Identify the various rights and obligations that citizens have in their communities.
3. Apply various forms of citizenship skills such as media analysis, letter writing, community service, and lobbying.
4. Explain the concept of sustainability as it impacts economic, environmental, and social concerns.
5. Examine various concepts and theories of ethics, and how to deliberate and assess claims about ethical issues.
6. Apply ethical concepts and theories to specific ethical dilemmas students will experience in their personal and professional lives.

Sequencing Worksheet for Course Activities and Assignments

Sequencing Worksheet for Course Activities and Assignments

LEARNING GOAL 3 years out (Bloom)	LEARNING GOAL 3 years out (ULLCs)	ACTIVITY	CLUES (Bloom/Felder)	ASSESSMENT FROM Peer(s) / Teacher	STAKES % High/Low	TIME-SAVERS
Knowledge of: - basic tools/methods - content						
Application Analysis interpret (primary source, history)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transferrable skills • recognize assumptions • draw inferences • ID perspectives • interpret information • analyze problem in context 	in class: 1) small groups consider conflicting descriptions of same event 2) discuss context, identify evidence ----- out of class: individuals do the same as above for a different event	summarize compare explain list examples ----- same	peers (use checklist) ----- teacher (use checklist)	low: 2% ----- medium: 20%	varied format (first oral, then written) students apply teacher's provided criteria peer feedback low stakes for practice, creativity, risk ----- try, get feedback, try again
Evaluation						
Creative Contribution						

Sequencing Worksheet for Course Activities and Assignments (Blank)

	LEARNING GOAL 3 years out (Bloom)	LEARNING GOAL 3 years out (UULO)	ACTIVITY: Do it to learn it (In-class exercise, out-of- class assignment, online, on- site)	CUES (Bloom, Felder)	ASSESSMT FROM Peers/Teacher	STAKES % High/Low	TIME SAVERS
Knowledge - basic tools/methods - content							
Application Analysis							
Evaluation							
Creative Contribution							

Transparent Assignment Template (BLANK)

Due Date:

Purpose:

Skills:

Knowledge:

Task:

Criteria for Success: