**Assignments Matter**

*by Eleanor Dougherty*

**An ASCD 2012 Study Guide for Assignments Matter: Making the Connections That Help Students Meet Standards**

This ASCD Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding and application of the information contained in *Assignments Matter: Making the Connections That Help Students Meet Standards*, an ASCD book written by Eleanor Dougherty and published in September 2012.

You can use the study guide before or after you have read the book, or as you finish each chapter. The study questions provided are not meant to cover all aspects of the book, but, rather, to address specific ideas that might warrant further reflection.

Most of the questions contained in this study guide are ones you can think about on your own, but you might consider pairing with a colleague or forming a study group with others who have read (or are reading) *Assignments Matter: Making the Connections That Help Students Meet Standards*.

**Chapter 1. Why Assignments Matter**

1. Do you agree with Mitchell's statement that "students can do no better than the assignments they are given"?
2. How does your understanding of "challenging" coursework compare with Marzano's statement on p. 8?
3. In what ways do "tasks predict performance"?
4. What are the consequences if students don't receive effective instruction year to year?
5. How might you contrast "college ready" with "assessment ready"?
6. What are the main features in the Common Core Standards and how do they differ from previous standards?
7. What does "complex" mean when referring to a task or a text?
8. Can you think of any other principles of effective education not listed in this chapter?
9. Do assignments matter in your classroom and school?

**Chapter 2. The Basics**

1. What is an assignment and how does it differ from an activity and an assessment?
2. Where might you find good topics, texts, and concepts for assignments?
3. How do assignments, assessments, and activities differ in an instructional cycle?
4. What supports and resources might you need to make assignments doable?
5. What are "demands" and "qualities" and how do they function in an assignment?
6. In what ways can you use a rubric as feedback?
7. What might you learn if you do your own assignment?

**Chapter 3. Crafting an Assignment**

1. What are some guiding design principles you should keep in mind when crafting an assignment?
2. In Step One, you begin by thinking about content and skills you will be teaching. What might be a short list of key concepts, issues, and skills you will be teaching in the next term?
3. What is a "focus standard" and how does it inform choices you make in crafting an assignment?
4. How might different products create different levels of challenge? For example, is a slideshow presentation more or less challenging than an essay, or do they only differ in their processes?
5. What are some ways you can create "demands" in your assignments?
6. What are some ways you can prescribe "qualities"?
7. What are the necessary features of a good prompt?
8. What resources mentioned in this chapter and in other places might serve as "fodder for prompts"?
9. How can rubrics be used instructionally as feedback?
10. Is there only one way to write a rubric? What are deciding factors when constructing a rubric?
11. In what ways do rubrics and prompts work together to communicate demands and qualities to students?
12. Why is doing your own assignment important? What can you learn about your assignment?

**Chapter 4. Instruction**

1. How might instruction serve as the "great equalizer" or serve as a "theory of action"?
2. What instructional touchstones might you and your colleagues use to challenge and coach students through an assignment?
3. How can you include some discussion-based techniques in your instructional plan to promote oral fluency and vocabulary development?
4. What is the "ultimate product" of an assignment?
5. What is "obedient purposelessness" and how does it affect student learning?
6. Would you employ lectures as a viable instructional activity?
7. What are some pros and cons of using technology as an integral part of your instructional plan? How might technology support, or not support, instruction of assignments?
8. What are some "dos" and "don'ts" when planning and implementing an instructional plan?

**Chapter 5. Sequencing Assignments to Design Units and Courses**

1. How might you sequence two assignments so that they build on the content and skills embedded in each?
2. How can you sequence assignments so that they increase demands?
3. How can a "master text" help you design a unit?
4. What are some techniques you can use to make larger projects, such as a school garden project involving multiple activities, manageable?
5. What are techniques for "ratcheting up" demands from assignment to assignment, unit to unit?
6. Why is it important to have a strategy when designing a sequence of assignments or units?
7. What is the purpose of the "adopt a standard" strategy and what challenges might you expect in implementing it? What solutions might you offer?

**Chapter 6. Anchor Assignments**

1. What is an "Anchor assignment" and how can you use it to build coherence in the larger curriculum?
2. In what ways do Anchor assignments help develop collaboration?
3. How do students acquire practice in skills when they engage in Anchor assignments over time?
4. What might be some of the challenges in implementing Anchor assignments in your school or district? What can you do to overcome them?
5. How might you plan to develop and deliver Anchor assignments?
6. What kinds of data might anchor assignments present to help you gauge student progress?
7. How might you apply "adopt-a-standard" to develop Anchor assignments?

**Chapter 7. Environments That Made Assignments Matter**

1. Why do classroom and school environments matter when implementing assignments?
2. How do "time" and "space" affect your classroom and school environments?
3. What environmental features best support teaching assignments?
4. What environmental features inhibit or discourage teaching assignments?
5. What changes would you make to your classroom environment, given a magic wand?
6. What changes would you make to your school environment, given a magic wand?
7. Are there changes you can make in the present environment to create opportunities for teaching project-based assignments or extending assignments into environments outside of the school building?
8. What changes might you make to your current schedule to create possibilities for collaboration or coteaching?

**Chapter 8. Assignments as Data**

1. What kinds of data can you derive from assignments about classroom instruction?
2. In what ways do assignments serve as "classroom artifacts"?
3. How might you design a calibration exercise to collect data about assignments in your classroom and school?
4. What does student work tell you about student progress and instructional choices and delivery?
5. What are some common problems revealed by classroom artifacts? What solutions might you apply to address these problems?
6. In what ways might you build re-teaching into your instructional plans?

*Assignments Matter: Making the Connections That Help Students Meet Standards* was written by Eleanor Dougherty. This 200-page, 7" x 9" book (Stock #112048; ISBN-13: 978-1-4166-1440-1) is available from ASCD for $19.95 (ASCD member) or $26.95 (nonmember). Copyright © 2012 by ASCD. To order a copy, call ASCD at 1-800-933-2723 (in Virginia 1-703-578-9600) and press 2 for the Service Center. Or buy the book from ASCD's Online Store.