USC Center for Excellence in Teaching

# Course alignment grid

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

An explanation of course alignment, how to achieve it using a course alignment grid template, and sample grid of a well-aligned course.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Populate the provided alignment grid template with your course learning objectives and assignments/assessments as indicated in the process described below. Use your completed alignment grid to identify areas of misalignment and correct them. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

### Course alignment

A course needs to have learning objectives and graded assignments (also referred to as assessments). Learning objectives and graded assignments are directly related; the purpose of graded assignments is to measure student mastery of learning objectives. We achieve course alignment when there is at least one major, graded course assignment/assessment for each learning objective. Before moving on to any other planning aspect of a course, we need to ensure the course is aligned.

Note: The remainder of this resource assumes you already have course learning objectives and assignments. If not, it is highly recommended you first review these CET resources.

* [Writing learning objectives](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jKhGWqiwNx6b5LqBTvhexzy89aE53HQs/edit)
* [Learning objectives FAQ](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ozazO3pB_BH4dVSWCW9bAWI2gSikSYQM/edit)
* [Bloom’s Taxonomy](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G9jWTM1TFcHF3I77c20J2OS1_MZPO50c/edit)
* [Types of assessments](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11m_9V4VW9TC7HxPQMmV5RcxzYj-mDzt9/edit)

### Alignment grid template

The grid template below can assist you with ensuring your course is aligned. It provides a side-by-side view of your learning objectives and assignments. To check your course alignment, complete the grid by entering your course learning objectives on the left. Next, on the right, add the assignment you will need to give students in order to determine their level of mastery of each learning objective. Add more rows as needed for the number of learning objectives and assignments in your course. Finally, determine areas where you may need to bring your course into better alignment by adjusting the learning objectives and/or assignments. Your completed alignment grid should inform you of these potential reasons for misalignment: 1) there is a learning objective with either no assignment at all, or an assignment that does not really measure it and/or 2) there is an assignment with no learning objective measured by it, or a learning objective connected to it that it does not actually measure.

Note that a learning objective may be measured by more than one assignment, and an assignment may measure more than one learning objective.

Table 1 Structure of an alignment grid

| **Learning Objective**  By the end of this course, students should be able to: | **Assignment/Assessment**  This learning objective skill is measured by: |
| --- | --- |
| 1. | blank |
| 2. | blank |
| 3. | blank |
| 4. | blank |

### Sample alignment grid

The following alignment grid represents a course based on the CET sample syllabus. This sample alignment grid shows that the course is, in fact, well aligned.

Note: Descriptions of each assignment are included for this sample, but do not need to be included in your own course alignment grid.

Table 2 Sample alignment grid

| **Learning Objective**  By the end of this course, students should be able to: | **Assignment/Assessment**  This learning objective skill is measured by: |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Sketch classic character forms using the fundamental principles of character design | **Sketch Assignments**  There will be weekly sketch assignments based on the character form theme/topic/skill of the week.  Students will start sketch assignments in class with the instructor and finish them for homework due the next class.  Students will both upload digital files of the sketches and bring the actual sketches in a sketchbook to class |
| 2. Pitch designs in a professional format | **In-Class Pitches**  Each class meeting will begin with a quick roundtable of everyone explaining their design decisions from the homework (sketch assignments) to the class in the form of 3-minute pitches.  Students will need to show their work from their sketchbooks during the pitch |
| 3. Complete the animation process including model and expression sheets, turnarounds, and full color story sketches for a live action movie or TV show in a certain genre | **Final Project**  Students will work in small groups to select a Los Angeles-based live action movie or TV show of a certain genre and complete the entire animation process for three characters.  Students will submit model and expression sheets, turnarounds, and full color story sketches. Each group will make a pitch of their project during the final class meeting. |

Notice that other grades like participation, which are not major assignments and may occur throughout the course, are not listed in the grid. CET recommends changing participation to in-class work. For more information on in-class work, see the CET resource In-class work as Participation