

## A Guide to Developing Worksheets

### What is it?

A worksheet is a document given to students, with questions or prompts, and space to fill in their responses. The purpose of a worksheet is to help scaffold students' understanding of a topic by having them engage critically with the material in a structured, step-by-step fashion, guided by the worksheet.

There are many different types of worksheets. They might have a slightly different structure depending on your learning goals and how you will have students engage with the worksheet. Below are some forms a worksheet can take:

**Worksheet:** A basic worksheet will include prompts or questions and blank spaces for student responses. They are usually designed to work with specific course readings or materials and aim to guide students through a critical understanding of that material.

**Learning Guides:** A learning guide is a type of worksheet that includes information about the course content and concepts. It is designed to be more of a stand alone document that guides a student through learning certain concepts.

**Information Organizer:** An information organizer is a type of worksheet that focuses on having students identify information from a reading or other source. The prompts on the organizer are then designed to help students identify key information and represent it in a structured and organized way.

### When to use it

A worksheet can be used at any time to scaffold your students' learning of a specific concept or content. The purpose of a worksheet is to break the concept into smaller components and then help guide students from one component of the concept to the next.

A worksheet can be used to:

- Analyze the argument within a text
- Organize key information from a text or other course material
- Work through concepts in a problem-solving approach
- Help students review and connect key concepts
- Prompt reflective or metacognitive thinking

A worksheet functions best when you include information that students can use to help them respond to the questions. This can be materials they have read for the course, concepts they need to learn and understand, the information you provide (course lectures or additional material in class), or information they need to find for themselves. Students will want to know what information they should focus on as they work through the prompts and questions. This helps them do a more focused analysis.

## How to build a worksheet

Building a worksheet is a backwards design process. You should start by asking yourself what you want students to be able to do by the end of this lesson. Ideally, this should also be matched to any tests or assignments associated with this material. The worksheets and related activities should be a chance for students to practice what they need to do on their assignments.

Once you have an idea of what they should be able to do at the end, you will need to walk yourself through the process of how *you* would achieve that end. As a professional in this field, how would you do this? This will help you identify the steps the students need to take to get there as well. As you do this, you should take note of the following:

### Identify steps

- Identify key steps in the process
- Identify what tasks, skills, or knowledge are needed to master that step
- Identify what tasks, skills, or knowledge are needed to move from one step to the next step.

As you go through the task yourself, try to identify the different steps you are taking and group them as distinct tasks. Sections of your worksheet should focus on each of these steps.

### Points where students might struggle

- Links between sets of concepts that might not be clear
- Points where specific information is needed to make connections, understand concepts, or complete tasks
- Steps that involve common misconceptions

Try to identify points where students might struggle, especially with difficult concepts, and pay special attention to the prompts in these sections. You might not be able to identify all of these the first time you make your worksheet, but you can make adjustments as you try it out with students.

### Needed information

- Does it require an understanding of material covered in the readings?
- Is it based on a review of the material already covered in class?
- Does it require new information that you will present? Either as a lecture in class, or as additional documents they will need to read?
- Will they need information that they must look up for themselves?

A worksheet is heavily based on students working through concepts and information. You need to be clear with your students what information they should be working with for their worksheet.

### Order of your prompts

The order that you present the prompts in your worksheet should match the order of steps and thinking process you went through when you tried to do it for yourself. The goal of the worksheet is to guide students through the same thinking process that an expert would follow.

### **Format of the Worksheet**

Once you have worked through the different steps and tasks needed to achieve the end result or solution, you should think about how to visually represent those tasks in your worksheet. How you set up each prompt, and the space given for responses, can function as a visual cue to help your students organize their thoughts.

- Leaving blank lines can indicate a response written out in full sentences, and how long the response should be (a few short words or a full paragraph)
- A table with columns and rows can indicate a need to organize the information into certain categories or groups
- Images could indicate important visual elements they need to remember

### **Using a worksheet in class**

Worksheets work best if they are used as a classroom activity as the teacher can provide additional support. Ideally, you should have students work on the worksheets, individually and in groups, while you circulate correcting misconceptions, directing them to the appropriate resources, answering questions, and verifying that they are on the right track.

There are some important components to doing the worksheets in class that can help make them more successful:

**Use often:** Students aren't always certain how to approach or make the most of worksheets when they are first introduced. Using them regularly in your class helps them to learn how to use them and how to incorporate them into their note taking.

**Have an activation activity:** Worksheets work best when students are working from certain information. It helps to have some kind of activation activity, either as homework before the class, or at the start of class, that gives students the context and some information that they will use in the worksheets.

**Give them time:** Doing a worksheet, and going through the thinking process of responding to the prompts, takes time. The students need to be able to explore the ideas, and potentially make errors and then correct them. Give them enough time in class to go through this process fully

**Consolidation of confirmation activity:** The process of thinking through the concepts on their own needs to be supported with confirmation that they have used the right approach, or have come to the right conclusions. Make sure to have either a final discussion with students or access to the correct responses so they can compare and verify their own.

## **Making improvements**

Making good worksheets is an iterative process. You will likely have to go through it with students a number of times, adding tweaks as you go, to get it just right. Each time you run the worksheet activity with your class keep an eye out for where you find the students are struggling. You should consider the following:

- Are the questions or prompts unclear?
- Do the questions or prompts need more scaffolding?
- Are there important steps or questions missing?
- Are they missing important information?
- Are the questions or tasks unnecessary and distracting or taking too much time for aspects that aren't as important?
- Do they not have enough time in class to finish, or are they finishing too quickly?
- Is the consolidation activity allowing them to properly review and verify their own answers?