

## Resource Guide

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### Grounding Assessment in Course Experiences

Lang (2013) describes an approach to “grounded assessment” that emphasizes connecting course experiences and assessments to experiences specific to the students in the course. Using student experience as a reference can increase interest while reducing opportunities for academic dishonesty. Incorporating grounded assessment into your course can also support the foundational elements of your course design: learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment procedures (Fink, 2013). Simple changes to existing course materials and assessments to ground them in the students’ lives can provide a thematic structure through which students may better recognize how learning activities connect to assessments and overall learning goals. To get started, consider these approaches to grounding assessments in course experiences:

- **Time-Specific**
  - Frame course activities around recent events, trends, and/or class-specific conversations. This means the topics of the course will be applied differently each semester without a need for new prompts. Assessments can reference these recent events, allowing students with interest in current events to recognize the connections between those topics and the course material. Additionally, using very recent events avoids alienating students who may not be familiar with examples that are rooted in historical or culture-specific knowledge (e.g., tragedies from 30 years ago; references to major sporting events in the U.S.).
- **Location-Specific**
  - Connect course experiences and assessments to physical spaces in the community. These may include campus, resident halls, or the surrounding community more broadly. You might ask students to consider how concepts in your course could be applied to a location they are familiar with or in which they are personally interested. An assessment may ask for a proposal that suggests changes to that same location, with course topics applied to support the argument. Assessments like these can help students recognize the connection between abstract theory and application.
- **Personal Experience-Specific**
  - Connecting course activities and assessment to personal experiences gives students a chance to identify and reinforce connections between existing knowledge and the learning occurring in the course. For example, you might ask students to connect course concepts to their favorite hobby or form of entertainment. Be careful to allow student autonomy here as specifying the

type of entertainment (e.g., favorite T.V. show) may exclude those without access or interest in the category you select.

### **Resources**

Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. John Wiley and Sons.

Lang, J.M. (2013). *Cheating lessons*. Harvard University Press

*For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).*