

FIRST YEAR CORE COURSE LEADERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOOLKIT

FIRST YEAR COURSE LEADERS TOOLKIT ITEM

*Getting started and
setting expectations*

THE USQ
CoPs PROJECT

Faculty of Arts CoP
and
Faculty of Business CoP

<http://www.usq.edu.au/cops>

USQ UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

Getting started and setting expectations: student learning contracts

Teacher: Cassandra Star

Course: POL1000 - Government, business and society

Rationale

A learning contract is designed to get students to think strategically about their learning and make a plan to fulfil stated aims at the start of the course.

Activity

Students are prompted to fill in a learning contract in both the course studybook and in class. The learning contract itself provides both an exemplar and a template for students to use. This activity is followed up by later prompts which ask students to reflect about their performance against the stated aims they listed. Letters of commendation are sent to students who improve by one grade from the first to the second written assessment items.

Sample text

Student learning contract [over page].

LEARNING CONTRACTS

What is a learning contract?

A learning contract is an agreement that you make with yourself about your learning journey. It can be a contract for one subject or for a defined period of time, e.g. a semester.

How can this help me achieve in this subject?

A learning contract helps you to focus on the commitments you need to make to achieve a certain grade level. Reviewing and reflecting on the learning contract during the semester also helps you to see if you are on track to achieve your goal. It also contributes to your overall learning and self-development.

What does a learning contract look like and how do I write one?

Below is one example of a learning contract. It has a main broad objective or aim. Below that it lists some more focussed objectives needed to meet the broad objective, as well as some quite specific required actions.

On the following page is a template of a learning contract to help you create your own learning contract. The template includes a range of different activities on a weekly or semester basis and is modelled on the kind of activities undertaken by students who perform above average. Feel free to add extra elements where you think they are needed.



Course Leader Contract

In the contract below, I have outlined a main objective: *“To provide a challenging learning journey for each student, and to provide the required support and guidance to enable students to meet the challenges provided by the course”* and also included a list of strategy that I think are important to meet that objective. This is similar to what you will do in your own learning contract.



Subject: POL1000 – *Government, Business and Society*

Name: Dr Cassandra Star

Semester/Year: Semester 1, 2007

Teaching Objective: **To provide a challenging learning journey for each student, and to provide the required support and guidance to enable students to meet the challenges provided by the course.**

As part of my strategy to achieve this objective, I will:

1. provide a safe and stimulating learning environment for all my students,
2. work to make learning an enjoyable experience,
3. foster an online learning environment that adds to the learning journey,
4. provide multiple opportunities for interactive learning in the course,
5. provide students with clear and concise expectations about assessment,
6. be available for student consultation at the times, in the ways, stated on the StudyDesk,
7. ensure responses to email or StudyDesk questions in 24-48 hours (not including weekends or holidays),
8. assess student work in line with the course marking guide included in the course materials, and
9. provide feedback that enables students to improve their assessment performance and reach their potential in the course.

Student Learning Contract

Subject: POL1000 – *Government, Business and Society*

Name:

Semester/Year:

Grade to be Achieved (refer to the descriptions over the page first):

Course Time Commitment:

Learning Aims/Objectives:

Strategies and Resources:

Tasks to be Undertaken on a Weekly Basis:

Discussion Board Activity Commitment

Assessment Tasks to be Undertaken:

Mid-Semester Review of Progress Due:

How will you assess your progress in mid-semester?

Criteria for Grade Achievement at USQ

Final Grade Code Description

HD High Distinction	HD Students assigned a "High Distinction" grade will, in addition to the passing requirements have demonstrated achievement of all objectives at an extremely high level, or achievement of most objectives at an outstanding level of performance.
A Distinction	Students assigned a "Distinction" grade will, in addition to the passing requirements have demonstrated either achievement of some objectives at an extremely high level of performance, or achievement of a large number of objectives at a high level of performance. (The code "D" was used in 1973, and "H" from 1967 to 1972.)
B Credit	Students assigned a "Credit" grade shall have met the passing requirements and will have demonstrated achievement of some objectives at a high level of performance.
C Pass	Students assigned a "Pass" grade will have demonstrated satisfactory levels of achievement in all objectives designated as essential for passing the course. (The code "P" was used from 1967 to 1973.)



D Conceded Pass	A grade of "Conceded Pass" may be awarded on the basis of the regulations that follow. (The codes "PT", "T" and "Q" were used in the years prior to 1974.)
F Fail	A grade of "Fail" may be awarded when a student has failed to achieve sufficient objectives of the course to be awarded a passing grade. (The code "N" was used from 1967 to 1972, and "I" without any qualifier was used from 1973 to 1989.)
FNS Fail – Did Not Sit	FNS A grade of "Fail – Did Not Sit" may be awarded when a student does not sit for the final exam in a course. (FNS will take precedence over FNC.)
FNP Fail – Did Not Participate	A grade of "Fail – Did Not Participate" may be awarded when a student does not submit any assessments in a course.
FNC Fail – Did Not Complete	A grade of "Fail – Did Not Complete" may be awarded when a student does not complete all of the compulsory assessments in a unit other than the final examination in the course.

Time Management Tool

Time management is an important skill to master while you are at University, and in preparation for your professional life. Time management makes all the difference between having a well organised study life where assignments receive adequate research time, where revision for exams is organised and less stressful. On the other hand, without adequate time management, assignments are completed in haste at the last minute, exam revision is stressful, and the outcomes are uncertain.



Follow the steps below to plan your study timetable:

1. Fill in sleeping and eating times:
 - a. Be regular about this. For you to be in control you need to train your body to keep efficient eating and sleeping habits. This also helps to reinforce the idea that study is a 'job'.
2. Build in your regular commitments (eg work, travel, family, child care, sport, classes):
 - a. Make a list of these first. Do you attend meetings, play sport, need to clean, shop, cook, pick up/care for children? Don't under-estimate the amount of time you spend on these regular commitments.
3. Build in family and friends' time:
 - a. This way you can ensure minimum disruption to your personal life with maximum time to study.
4. Include relaxation and exercise time:
 - a. You will find it easier to stick to your timetable if it includes time for socialising, sport, leisure, exercise or whatever your favourite form of relaxation is. A balanced lifestyle is important.
5. Now, what blocks of time are left for study?
 - a. Which times you put down for study depends on your own habits to a large extent. You should plan to find at least 10 hours per week, all up, for each unit you study.
 - b. But be realistic and honest with yourself. If you have a favourite music or television programme and know you cannot resist listening to or watching it, include it in your timetable.
6. Do you need to evaluate your priorities?
 - a. Check your study hours - if you do not have enough (within the guide of 10 hours per unit) you will have to find them somewhere, or change your study commitments. You are the one in charge, the one responsible.
7. Keep in mind the time of day you are most alert (are you a morning or evening person?):
 - a. Experiment to see if you are most alert in the mornings or evenings and try to do your study then. If you are tired and have to study, try starting out with an easier task, for example, writing out a bibliography or putting your files in order. You might find that the sense of achievement gained from completing these tasks can build up your motivation to go on to the harder tasks.
8. Work out the demands of assignments:
 - a. On your semester calendar list your assignments, colour coded with their weighting and dates. This will help you plan your weekly timetable for your assignments, even if two or three are due on the same week.
9. Include flexibility:
 - a. You will need some time allocated as spare study time to cater for the unforeseen circumstances which will interrupt your usual routine.
10. Plan each session and set realistic and achievable study goals:
 - a. Plan each session so that specific tasks can be achieved. For example, summarise three pages or code part of a computer programme.
11. Include a weekly planning session:
 - a. Spend some scheduled time on Sunday or Monday planning your timetable for the coming week, taking into account the specific demands of that week, both social and academic.
12. If your timetable is not working, if you are not following it – change it!
 - a. If you find you cannot get up, or go to sleep, or study at the times planned, change the timetable so that it will work. It should, in fact, be regularly revised and updated.
13. Build 'rewards' into your timetable if you have trouble concentrating or 'getting on' with study:
 - a. Rewards are important incentives for increasing motivation, so use them to help you keep to task.

