

# Encouraging Intrinsic Motivation through Writing Assignments

*FALL 2024 WORKSHOP*



# Workshop outline and objectives –

- Understand the importance of motivation in learning
- Explore strategies for designing writing assignments that encourage intrinsic motivation, including project-based learning and transparent assignment design.
- Brainstorm writing assignments as enticing invitations for students to pose complex and fun questions and investigations related to course goals.

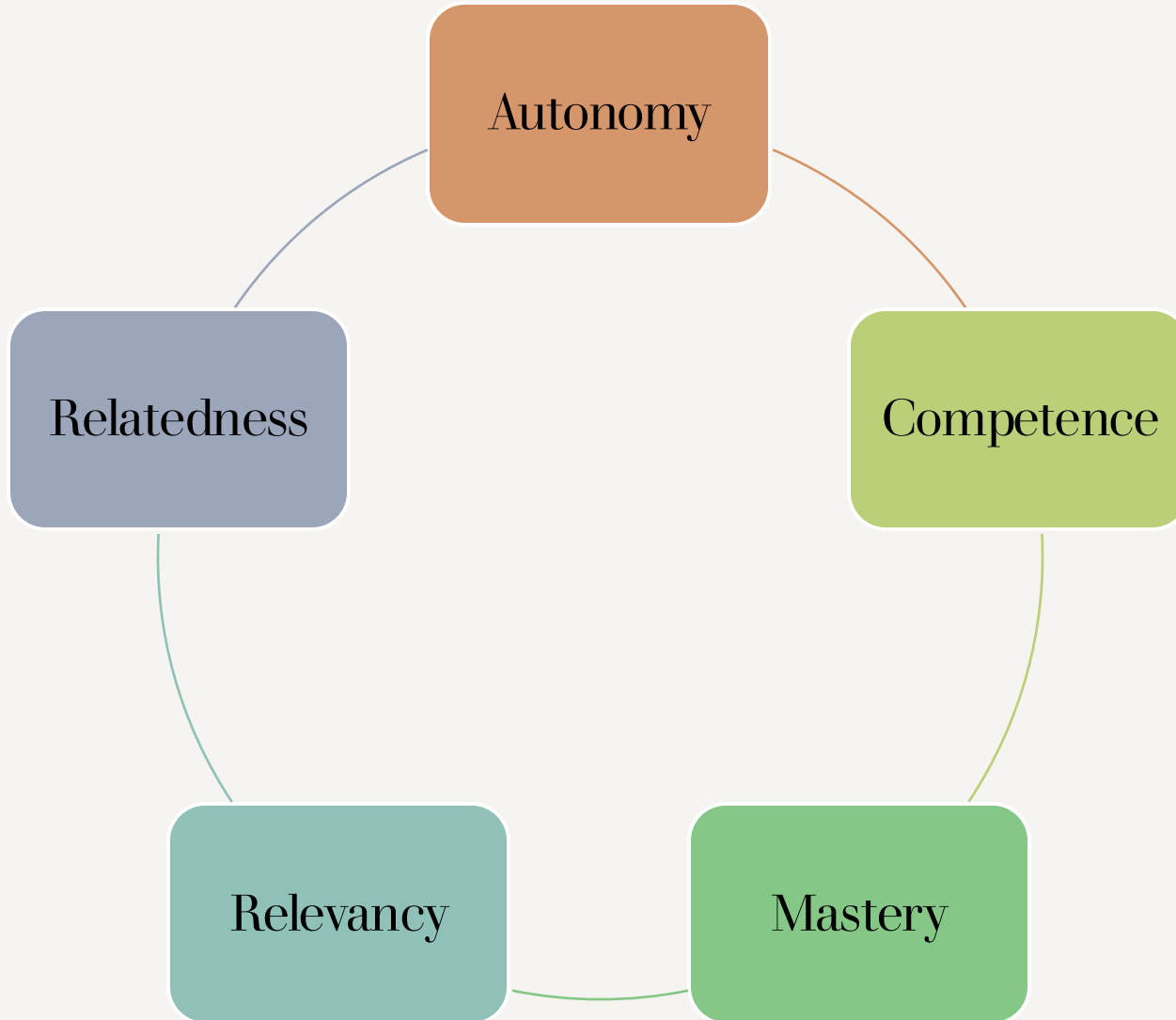
# Welcome

- Introduction and ice-breaker
  - Aloud – everyone share your name and home program/discipline
  - **What words describe an effective/motivating writing assignment?**
    - Put one-word responses here. You can submit more than one word!  
See if everyone can submit 3 words.

# Motivation + Learning

Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Motivation to do something is internally-driven</li><li>- Engage in activities for the inherent fun, challenge, satisfaction, and/or excitement of doing so</li><li>- Often accompanied by feelings of joy, enthusiasm, and interest</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Motivation to do something is externally-driven</li><li>- Engage in activities because of potential reward or punishment</li><li>- Often accompanied by feelings of anxiety, boredom, and alienation</li></ul>

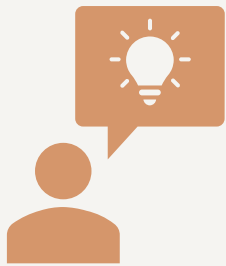
# Factors that encourage intrinsic motivation



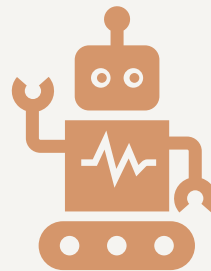
- **Autonomy** – independence/freedom to make choices for oneself
- **Competence** – the ability to do something successfully/effectively
- **Mastery** – acquisition of a goal and understanding of how to work towards the goal
- **Relevancy** – how relevant, closely connected, and/or appropriate a task feels
- **Relatedness** - how connected the person feels to the context/people

Even before AI, a lack of intrinsic motivation was linked to an increase in students copying homework answers from the internet and plagiarism.

And now, with AI on the scene, is intrinsic motivation even more important?



Extrinsic motivators such as detection and punishment do not work well.



AI Detectors have a high level of failure.



AI is "undetectable, ubiquitous, and transformative" (Ethan Mollick)

# What does this mean for our teaching?



Expert knowledge is more important now than ever.



Intrinsically motivated students take ownership of and feel invested in their own learning and thinking.



"Faculty members need to move from the “what” pedagogy of the industrial era — students passively ingesting a heavily curated body of information for later regurgitation — to a “why” paradigm that turns students into builders of new knowledge through creative problem solving." (By Chad Raymond August 27, 2024, "AI and the Case for Project-Based Teaching.")

# Intrinsic Motivation and AI

- Intrinsic motivation has always been an important aspect of learning; however, what is the role of intrinsic motivation now that AI is a part of our reality?
  - **One perspective:** Purposefully integrating AI in assignments can be a way to increase intrinsic motivation.
    - Ex: [Use AI to personalize learning experiences for students](#)
    - Ex: [Use AI to increase student autonomy and mastery](#)
  - **Another perspective:** When students are intrinsically motivated, they are less likely to pass off their thinking/learning to AI.
    - Ex: [Ask students to create a real product for a discipline-specific audience](#)
    - Ex: [Emphasize learning over grades](#)



# Features of Meaningful Writing Assignments

Meaningful writing occurs when students are invited to

- tap into the power of personal connection;
- see what they are writing as applicable, relevant, real world and connected to their future selves;
- immerse themselves in what they are thinking, writing, and researching; including engagement in processes of writing.

*Humans are more motivated by three internal drives summarized as*

"I care"

"I can"

"I matter"



# Project Based Learning + Motivation

- *PBL is "a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects" (PBL Works).*
- Frequent key components: real-world problems, collaboration, reflection, and iteration.
- Promotes intrinsic motivation through...
  - **Autonomy and Ownership:** Since projects often have more than one possible outcome, students make purposeful choices, fostering a sense of control over their learning.
  - **Relevance:** Real-world problems give students a reason to engage deeply.
  - **Mastery:** PBL emphasizes process and growth rather than just outcomes.
  - **Relatedness:** PBL fosters a supportive and collaborative learning environment.



# Ideas from Project-Based Learning

"In my psychology class, which focuses on conditioning and behavior change, I introduced a six-week project. Students choose a behavior they want to change and create a plan to achieve this change. One particular student's experience stands out in my memory-she'd been trying to quit smoking for many years without success. However, with the structure of this project, the ability to select the behavior to change, and the regular opportunities for reflection, she successfully quit smoking. To my delight, she reached out to me in a later semester to share that she remained smoke-free. While other students have also shared meaningful stories, this one has stayed with me due to its profound and lasting impact on her health."

(Jessi Hill, Associate Professor, Utah Valley University)

# Examples, continued

**Engineering for Humanities Course** (Olin College of Engineering): The Engineering for Humanity class had four main components: (1) Observations, (2) Principles, (3) Ideas, and (4) Experiments. These components acted as a roadmap to guide us through a process of creating a product of choice. Our product was a special chair to help enhance elderly people's mobility.

(By Trang Quach, student)

**Comparative Politics Course:** Ask students to assume the role of political-risk consultants and identify which of four African states is the most suitable location for a German company's new manufacturing plant (Chad Raymond "AI and the Case for Project-based Teaching")



# Political Science Assignment: Designing and Executing a Policy Advocacy Campaign

**Why are we doing this?:** This project allows you to actively engage in the political process by simulating a real-world policy advocacy campaign. By designing and executing this campaign, you will explore how political actors influence policy, communicate with stakeholders, and engage the public. This will help you develop a deeper understanding of policy-making, political communication, and the role of advocacy in democracy.

**Skills you'll practice:** Strategic thinking, research, public speaking, persuasive writing, collaboration, and media literacy. **Knowledge you'll gain:** Insights into policy issues, political dynamics, stakeholder analysis, and advocacy strategies.

**Task:** Working in groups, you will select a current policy issue that is relevant to your community or of national importance. You will design a comprehensive advocacy campaign aimed at influencing public opinion and persuading key stakeholders. Your campaign should include background research on the issue, identification of key stakeholders, development of persuasive messages, and the creation of campaign materials (e.g., infographics, videos, press releases).

## Writing Assignments as Invitations to...



- Pose questions that are "important, intriguing, beautiful, and fun" (Ken Bain, Super Courses)
- Conduct investigations that are "important, fascinating, beautiful, and fun" (Bain)
- Explore real-world problems (related to your course) and come up with novel but practical solutions

**ALL BY YOUR DESIGN!**

# Importance of Assignment Design

In 2008, the Council of Writing Program Administrators surveyed 23,000 students in 82 randomly selected four-year institutions about writing practices and assignments. They found that the design of writing assignments themselves, more than the amount of writing assigned, was the most important factor for promoting deep learning (Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, and Paine, 2009).

## *Assignment design in the age of AI:*

- If a bot can make a strong response to our task, perhaps we might want to rethink the task.
- If a bot can be easily prompted by a novice prompter to make a strong response to our task, we might want to rethink the task design.
- By designing assignments that demand higher-order thinking, creativity, and real-world problem-solving, educators can challenge students in ways AI tools cannot replicate.

# Another strategy for promoting intrinsic motivation: Transparent assignment design

- Transparent assignment design is the process of designing assignments so that expectations, goals, and processes are explicitly stated in student-friendly language
  - **Purpose:** knowledge and skills will students learn; how assignment fits in course; benefit to students beyond this assignment and this class
  - **Task:** audience and genre; specific steps/actions the students should take
  - **Criteria for success:** what students will submit and how; formatting expectations; evaluation criteria; examples/models

[Transparent Assignment Design template](#) (explains the above components in more detail)

[Transparent Assignment Design checklist](#) (helpful checklist for assignment design)



# Some benefits of transparent assignment design

- Promotes students' confidence and sense of self-efficacy
- Enhances student motivation
- Increases equity
- Clarifies assignment and minimizes student confusion
- Helps faculty reflect on assignment

*Put in chat: Why do you think transparent assignment design is positively linked to intrinsic motivation?*

**Remember the factors that encourage intrinsic motivation:**

**Autonomy**

**Competence**

**Mastery**

**Relevancy**

**Relatedness**

# Faculty reflections on impact of transparent design to student motivation:

- “Computer Science can be a daunting discipline for beginning students; not fully comprehending the purpose and expectations for difficult assignments can be demotivating for many of them.”
- "...students are driven and engaged when they find meaning in their coursework; considering why and how they are learning the content can help them discover a meaning that resonates."
- "Resistance from students who viewed assignments as pointless has virtually disappeared. The quality of students' work submitted in response to the redesigned assignments has improved."

[National Teaching & Learning Forum](#)

# Tenets of transparent assignment design can help us design clear and effective AI assignments

Questions to ask yourself related to situation and purpose:

1. What is your rationale for integrating AI into your course/assignment in this way?
2. What are the learning goals of this assignment? How does using AI help students achieve these goals?
3. In what ways will the assignment further students' understanding and experience around generative AI tools, and why does that matter?
4. Do you want students to understand the limitations of AI or to experience its applications in the field?
5. Do you want students to reflect on the ethical implications of AI use?

Questions adapted from

"AI Teaching Strategies: Transparent Assignment Design"

# Questions to ask yourself related to process, genre, and audience:

1. **Are you designing this assignment as a single, one-time task or as a task that builds over time?** If over time, will the role of AI shift throughout the varying aspects of the assignment?
2. **Through the process, will students be writing for one audience or multiple audiences?** Can AI act as one or more of these audiences to offer feedback, provide input, and/or help refine the student writing?
3. **What resources and tools are permitted or required for students to complete the tasks involved with the assignment, and which steps should/should not involve AI?**
4. **How will you offer students flexibility and choice?** Can students choose when/if/how to use AI in the assignment? Can a student opt out of the AI use? If so, what alternative options will you provide? For example, could you provide AI output you've generated for students to work with or allow use of another tool that enables students to meet the same learning outcomes?
5. **What is the genre for the assignment?** Can AI provide examples of this genre or otherwise help students learn the genre?

Questions adapted from

"AI Teaching Strategies: Transparent Assignment Design"

# Questions to ask yourself related to submission and evaluation:

1. **What questions or barriers do you anticipate students might encounter when using AI for this assignment?**
2. **What will students submit as the final product?** Will they need to submit anything related to their interactions with AI?
3. **How will you grade this assignment? What key criteria will you assess?** Will you have higher standards for student work since they have AI as a tool?
4. **Will you grade students on the product only or on aspects of the process as well?** For example, if you have included a reflection on AI use as part of the assignment, will that factor into the final grade?
5. **Will you provide examples of successful (and even unsuccessful) submissions?** Will you share examples of effective AI prompts and reflections tasks?

Questions adapted from

"AI Teaching Strategies: Transparent Assignment Design"

# From transparency to scaffolding

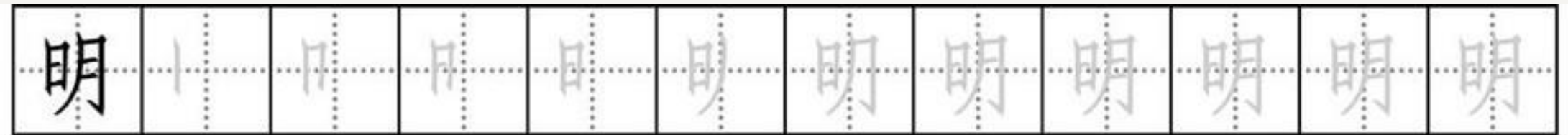
- When paired with transparent assignment design, scaffolding reduces ambiguity and ensures students have the tools and guidance they need to meet learning outcomes.
- Scaffolding provides structured support by:
  - Breaking larger assignments into smaller, manageable tasks.
  - Allowing for gradual skill development and deeper engagement with content.
  - Encouraging students to build confidence and competence through progressive milestones.

# Scaffolding

Scaffolding is the support given to students before students can handle a learning task independently. As competence and experience grows, the “scaffolding” can be gradually removed.

(Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976)

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# Benefits of Scaffolding

“Breaking up a writing assignment into a series of steps or stages can dramatically improve student performance. At a minimum, intervening during writing prevents students from turning in last-minute, poorly considered papers and gives students feedback—whether from you or from other students—at useful points in the development of their papers.”

Benson, Beth Kemp. “Scaffolding (Coming to Terms.)”

“Scaffolding makes writing assignments more friendly to multilingual students, and also more accessible for monolingual students.”


Hall, Jonathan. *“What faculty need to know about MLL”*

"Scaffolding supports students' internal drive of 'I can'". Ming :)



# Pedagogical choices can encourage intrinsic motivation

Assignment design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give students "a voice and choice in those academic activities in which they are engaged" (Niemi &amp; Ryan 139). <b>AUTONOMY</b></li> <li>2. Allow for multiple drafts; emphasis on learning/progress <b>COMPETENCE</b></li> <li>3. Invite students to write for public audiences <b>RELEVANCY</b></li> <li>4. Create assignments that relate to students' communities, career goals, and/or major <b>RELEVANCY</b></li> <li>5. Offer models of what mastery looks like in a specific learning task <b>MASTERY</b></li> </ol>
Feedback	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offer individualized feedback to students (in writing or in person) <b>RELATEDNESS</b></li> <li>2. Recognize what students are doing well <b>COMPETENCE</b> and also specific areas for improvement <b>MASTERY</b></li> </ol>
Course/Unit design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Design course/unit to build on prior knowledge <b>RELEVANCY</b></li> <li>2. Scaffold assignments so they appropriately challenge student <b>COMPETENCE</b></li> <li>3. Provide clear learning objectives and opportunities for students "to self-assess if they are getting close to mastery" (<a href="#">Beachboard</a>) <b>MASTERY</b></li> <li>4. Poll/Survey students on interests/goals and tailor activities to their feedback <b>AUTONOMY</b></li> </ol>
Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "What if we reframed assessment so that the focus was strictly on learning?" (<a href="#">Pink</a>) <b>COMPETENCE</b></li> <li>2. Explicitly link assessment tool to learning objectives <b>MASTERY</b></li> <li>3. Ask students to collaborate or offer feedback on an assignment rubric <b>AUTONOMY</b></li> </ol>
Low-stakes writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask for student ideas and perspectives on a topic, the course, etc. <b>RELATEDNESS</b></li> <li>2. Ask students to explain what they have learned/are learning <b>MASTERY</b></li> <li>3. Ask students to make connections between assignment/course and their goals/major <b>RELEVANCY</b></li> </ol>



# Brainstorming Meaningful Invitations for Students to Write

What might be some important, intriguing, beautiful, and fun questions related to your course goals that students might investigate? What are some real-world problems related to your course that students might work to offer solutions?

Individual Writing and Small-group share? Discuss with peers how these questions/problems might translate into a writing assignment in your course.

# Discussion and Recap

*Questions, Comments, Connections?*

# Resources

- FIU Writing Across the Curriculum faculty
  - Dr. Kimberly Harrison ([harrisok@fiu.edu](mailto:harrisok@fiu.edu))
  - Dr. Ming Fang ([mifang@fiu.edu](mailto:mifang@fiu.edu))
  - Dr. Christine Martorana ([cmartora@fiu.edu](mailto:cmartora@fiu.edu))
- [FIU WAC website](#)
- Subscribe to our listserv by emailing [wac@fiu.edu](mailto:wac@fiu.edu) and letting us know you'd like to receive updates about WAC events and resources

