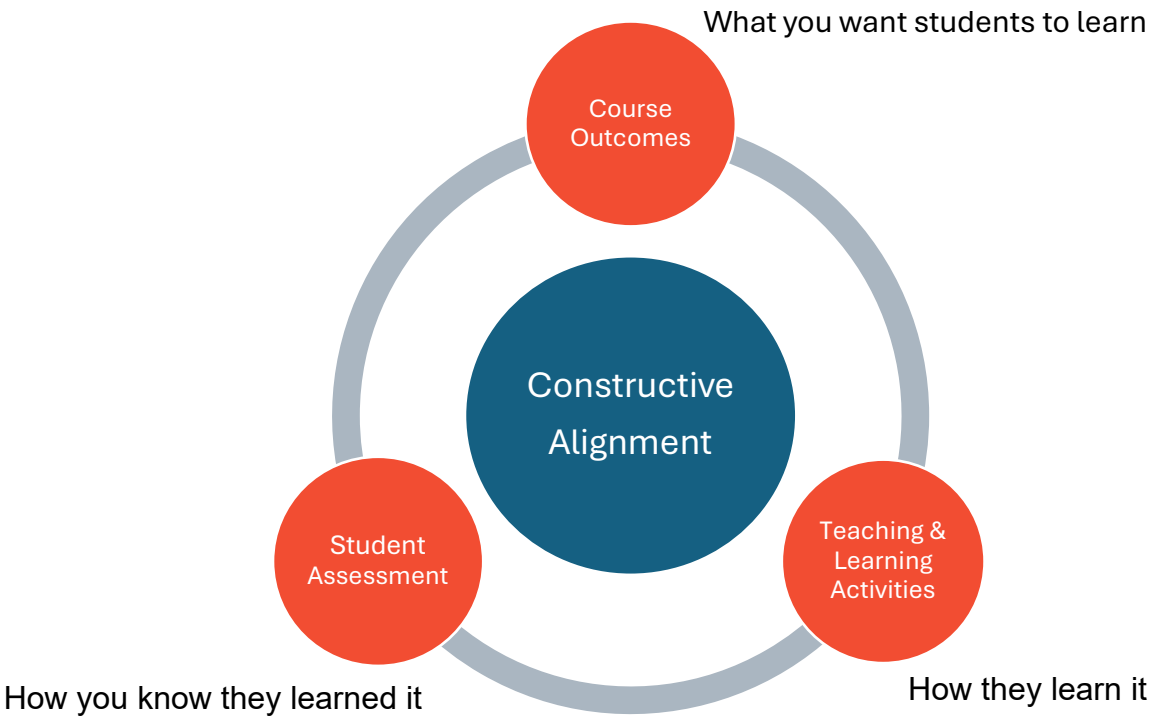
CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

FOUNDATIONS OF COURSE DESIGN

AUTHORED BY:
Lorelei Anselmo, MEd., Lin Yu, MEd., Patrick Kelly, MSc.

Constructive Alignment

Constructive alignment is the intentional connection of course elements to ensure that instruction and assessment match the learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996; Loughlin et al, 2020). Alignment spans an entire course design, including learning outcomes, assessments, content selection and activities throughout the course (Blaženka et a., 2023).



Key Concepts

Course Learning Outcomes: Statements that describe the intended learning of the students.

Student Assessments: Methods to measure the students' ability to perform the course learning outcomes

Teaching and learning activities: The instruction and activities the instructor and students engage in throughout the course. These activities include lecturing, reading, discussions, feedback, and more.

Bloom's Taxonomy: A hierarchical learning theory to structure the level and type of learning to define the course learning outcomes, assessments and learning activities.

Constructive Alignment in Action

1. To help connect course components create an alignment chart to plan the alignment between the course learning outcomes, activities and assessments.
2. Make note of due dates to establish a realistic flow to the course timelines, finding a balance between time expectations to achieve outcomes and the amount of course content. (link to selecting content section)

Figure 1: Before and after example to enhance alignment

Course learning outcome:	**Teaching and learning activities:**	**Ways of assessing this learning:**
By the end of the course, students will be expected to write an essay, analyzing complex issues using multiple sources of evidence to support their argument.	Lecture, readings, tutorials, critiques	Quiz (short answer questions), Critique assignment

Course learning outcome:	**Teaching and learning activities:**	**Ways of assessing this learning**
By the end of the course, students will be expected to **analyze** complex issues using multiple sources of evidence to support their argument.	Lecture, readings, tutorials, critiques, **peer feedback**	Critique assignment, **Essay with reflective component**

Try this

Reflect on the desired student learning experience and consider what course elements can be connected through constructive alignment. Course elements may include course content, fostering relationships, a student-centred course outline, activities that encourage connection, and feedback that supports growth. By aligning these factors to assessments and course learning outcomes, you can design a positive student learning experience.

Further Reading

Anselmo, L., Bari, H. Kelly, P. & Yu, Lin. *Innovative Approaches to Course Design*. Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/innovative-approaches-to-course-design

Artificial intelligence resources:

Pereira, E., Nsair, S., Pereira, L. R., & Grant, K. (2024). Constructive alignment in a graduate-level project management course: an innovative framework using large language models. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 21*(25), 1-21, https://doi?org/10.1186/s41239-024-00457-2

References

Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher education*, *32*(3), 347-364. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00138871

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview. *Theory Into Practice*, *41*(4), 212–218. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4104_2

Divjak, B., & Svetec, B., & Horvat, D,. & Kadoić, N. (2023). Assessment validity and learning analytics as prerequisites for ensuring student-centred learning design. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 54*(1). 10.1111/bjet.13290.

Loughlin, C., Lygo-Baker, S., & Lindberg-Sand, Å. (2020). Reclaiming constructive alignment. *European Journal of Higher Education*, *11*(2), 119–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2020.1816197

Hailikari, T., Virtanen, V., Vesalainen, M., & Postareff, L. (2022). Student perspectives on how different elements of constructive alignment support active learning. Active Learning in Higher Education, 23(3), 217-231. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787421989160