### Teaching Technique 33

**Frames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY TYPE</th>
<th>TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED</th>
<th>LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active/Engaged Learning</td>
<td>• Cheating</td>
<td>• Application: Analysis &amp; Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application:</td>
<td>• Insufficient Class Preparation</td>
<td>• Integration &amp; Synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>• Surface Learning</td>
<td>• Learning How to Learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frames

A Frame is a template of sentence stems that provides the shape (but not the content) of a short essay which students complete, thereby expressing their ideas but within a structured framework.

1. Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the Frame
2. Identify what students should examine and the kind of thinking they should do
3. Create a “frame” that provides a skeleton of an essay
4. Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
5. Communicate assignment instructions to students
6. Allow students time to complete the Frame
7. Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness
Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

*Frames* are writing assignments that instructors give individual students or student teams to complete. The *Frame* is a template of sentence stems that provides the shape of a short essay but not the content. Students complete the sentences, expressing their ideas in their own words, but they do so within a clear and organized framework. Acknowledging that no teaching tool can guarantee that students will engage in hard, rigorous thought, a *Frame*’s template can stimulate and shape such thought, guiding learners through the steps that comprise analysis and critical thinking and requiring them to make the key intellectual moves that they may not do on their own.

*Frames* can be used to support close reading of homework assignments, thus helping ensure students come prepared for class. They can also scaffold different learning levels such as analysis and critical thinking or integration and synthesis, thus helping students move beyond surface learning. *Frames* can help prevent the academic dishonesty sometimes associated with the conventional term paper assignment. The framework makes it impossible to do wholesale copying and discourages the copy-and-paste approach because of the difficulty of matching pre-existing writing to the information required to fill in the blanks. *Frames* can therefore be used for many different purposes, so it is important for you to think through how this technique might work best in your class.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Students complete a skeletal framework of an essay to demonstrate specific kinds of thinking.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

To set the parameters for this activity, consider the following steps:

- Choose a course-related topic or reading assignment that you would like students to examine analytically and critically.

- Decide on the specifics of the kind of thinking you want them to do:
  - Evaluate conflicting positions and decide which one is best.
  - Examine the validity of the arguments or conclusions.
  - Challenge their own assumptions.
• Write out a brief essay that addresses your goals and has a clear rhetorical structure, then copy the essay and delete information from the copy so that you have a ‘skeleton’ of the essay. Make copies of the frame along with directions to use as a handout for students, retaining the original as an assessment tool.

• Determine other parameters such as whether this will be a group or individual assignment, the time allowed for the activity, how students should submit their completed Frames, etc.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Choose how you wish to assess or grade the completed Frames. For example, a simple plus, check, or minus may be sufficient for a simple Frame essay, while you may want to create a rubric for more complex Frame essays.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Distribute the Frames handout either to individual students or to groups of students, explain directions, and answer any process questions.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

Allow time for students to write their essays using the Frame as a guide. Then collect the essays, using your original essay to assess the students’ essays.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

• Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
• Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
• Was it appropriate for the students?
• Did the technique keep the students engaged?
• Did it promote student learning?
• Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.
Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For Frames, we provide examples of different kinds of templates.

EXAMPLES OF FRAMES

A Frame may be simple or more complex, and completed individually or in small groups, as indicated by the following examples.

• **Example 1: Simple Frame (Individual Assignment):**
  “Theory X proposes that __________ and is very useful because it offers insights into ___________.” On the other hand, Theory Y, which proposes ___________, does a better job at explaining ___________.

• **Example 2: Medium Frame (Group Assignment):**
  The author’s main point in this essay is __________. The evidence she provides to support her view is __________. On the other hand, others argue that __________. To support their views, they point out that ___________. The issue, then, seems to be whether __________ or __________. Our view is __________. Although we concede that __________, we maintain that __________ because ___________.

• **Example 3: More Extensive Frame (Individual or Group Assignment):**
  In recent discussions of __________, a controversy has been whether __________. Our own thought is that perhaps __________. To find out, we designed a research project to __________. Our central question was __________. To help us draw conclusions, we relied on the following kinds of data: __________. Our key methods for generating this data were __________. Some of the problems we ran into were __________. But it was also quite exciting when __________ happened. Our findings are important because __________.
Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Elizabeth Barkley adapted *Frames* in her course, *Music of Multicultural America*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.
Technique Template

Sample Frames Completed Technique Template:
Content from Elizabeth Barkley

Music of Multicultural America

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

My course is an on campus, Honors Institute section of a lower division General Education course. The course meets my institution’s United States Cultures & Communities requirement and also the Humanities requirement. It enrolls about 25-30 students. A significant number are international students and we are trying to recruit more first generation students. As Honors students, they typically have good academic skills and are highly motivated.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS
Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

I am looking for a collaborative activity that will help students think through course-related issues in small groups and then report out in a manner that is consistent so that I can more efficiently compare and assess small group discussion.
STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT
What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

I will experiment with this activity by having students clarify their thinking on the issues related to the special benefits and advantages enjoyed by politicians.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS
What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

I will lecture on the topic of Constitutional privileges awarded under the Constitution. Then I will organize students into groups of 3 and have them complete the following frame: When it comes to the topic of the special privileges awarded politicians, members of our group agree that ______. However, we disagreed on the question of ______. Whereas some are convinced that ______, others maintain that ______. We believe that this is an important issue because ____________.
STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

I will use this primarily as a formative assessment strategy and collect the Frames at the end of class, and then grade them with a simple plus, check, or minus that I will record under the participation category of their grade. I can use the results to determine whether or not I need to lecture more on this topic at the next class session.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

I will include instructions and the Frame itself in a handout that I will distribute in class.
STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

I will do a pretty straightforward implementation of this technique, and all I need to do is create the handout and determine how much class time I’ll allow for this activity.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

After I implemented this technique and evaluated the essays, I decided it was a good activity to ensure groups stayed on topic and that they had a product to produce that helped ensure accountability. I am going to try creating frames for other applications, for example, to guide students in how to post comments on specific topics in the online discussion forum.
Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement Frames in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor’s Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS
Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?
STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?
STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?
STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE
How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS
Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?
References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE
Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Student Engagement Technique 9: Frames” in Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty (Barkley, 2010), pp. 191–194. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in courses, see the primary source:


CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING


COPYRIGHT
These materials supplement the “Frames” teaching technique video on the K. Patricia Cross Academy Video Library (https://kpcrossacademy.org). Copyright © 2018 Barkley and Major. Includes material that is adapted and/or reproduced with permission from: Barkley, E.F., Student Engagement Techniques. Copyright © 2010 by Jossey-Bass. Released for use under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial, no derivatives license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/). You are free to use it, copy it, and share it, as long as you don’t sell it, don’t change it, and do give us credit for it.