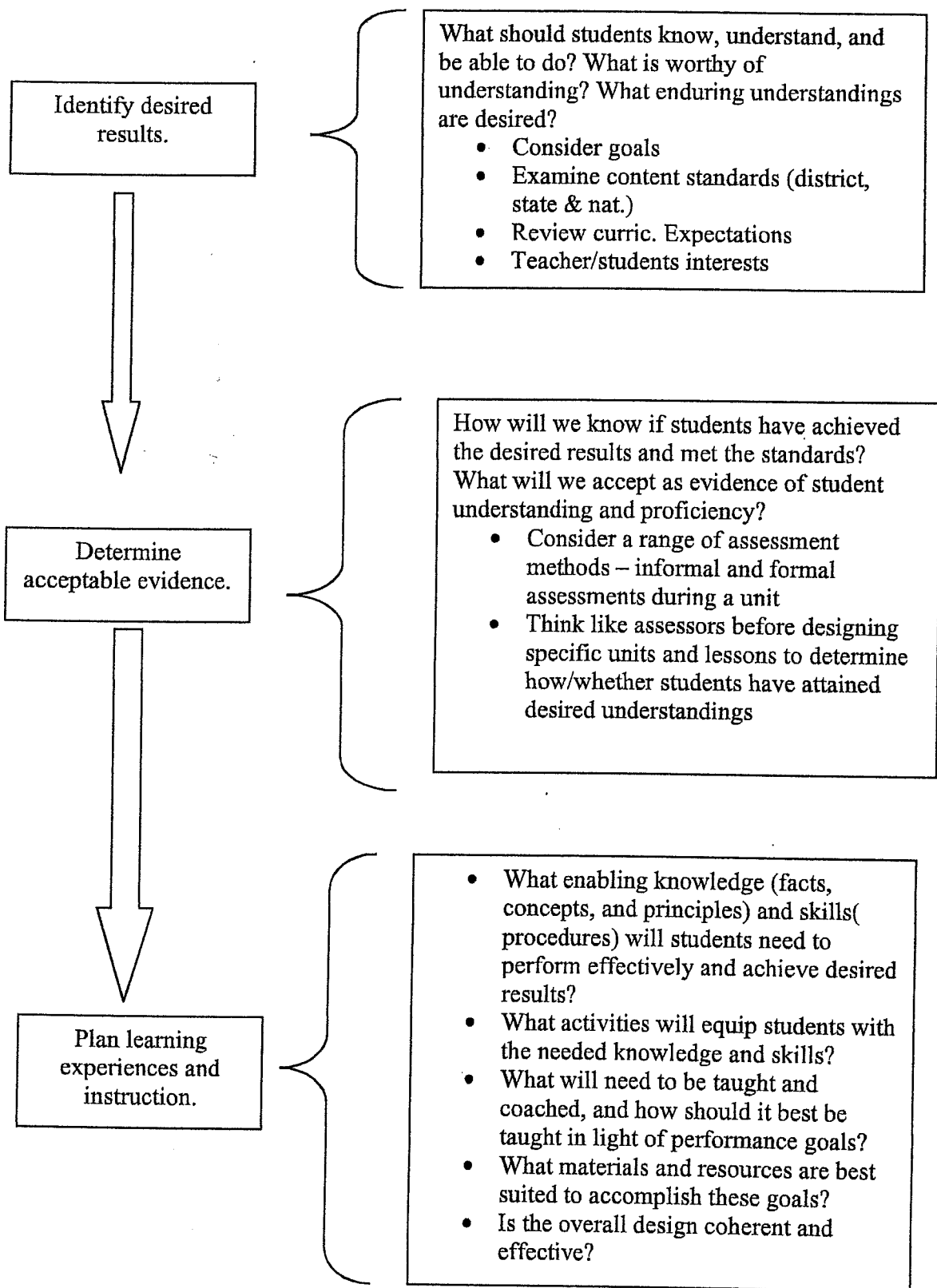


# The Backward Design Process



Adapted/formatted from *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe

## The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

Adapted from the [CLA]ssroom Academy *Introduction to Performance Tasks* Presentation  
by Marc Chun, CLA in the Classroom

**The CLA consists of 2 types of tasks: *Analytic Writing Tasks* and *Performance Tasks***

**The Analytic Writing Tasks** involve two types of prompts: **Make-An-Argument** and **Critique-An-Argument**.

- **Make-An-Argument Prompt:** *Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than dealing with the criminals after the fact.*
- **Critique-An-Argument Prompt:** *The number of marriages that end in divorce keeps growing. A large percentage of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so popular, couples end up being engaged for a long time just so they can get married in the summer months. The number of divorces gets bigger with each passing year, and the latest news is that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. So, if you want a marriage that lasts forever, it is best to do everything you can to prevent getting divorced. Therefore, it is good advice for young couples to have short engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.*

**CLA Performance Tasks** are designed to have students consider two possible alternatives and choose the one best supported by the information presented in the document library. The steps in creating a CLA tasks are outlined below.

- **Step 1: Identify an issue, outcome variable and two possible responses.**
  - The key outcome variable should be quantitatively measurable
  - Option I – documents will give evidence to suggest this is perhaps the less optimal choice
  - Option II – documents will give evidence to suggest this choice is more optimal
- **Step 2: Create scenario.** To be engaging, scenarios should:
  - Give students a specific role
  - Include a decision to be made
  - Require an authentic product
  - Have appropriate stakes to add urgency to the issue
- **Step 3: Create Documents reflecting the skills you want students to demonstrate.** For example, in the CLA process, a specific document is developed to assess the student's ability to:
  - Consider the reliability and source of information
  - Recognize the need to use appropriate scales to compare data
  - Recognize irrelevant data
  - Recognize methodological flaws or concerns in research study design
  - Compare and contrast program options
  - Recognize possible sources of bias
  - Recognize the difference between correlation and causation
- **Step 4: Develop Questions**
  - Determine the questions you want the students to answer that pertain to your task.

## ANOTHER OPTION: Analytic Writing through Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument

### Make-an-Argument

The Make-an-Argument analytic writing task presents an opinion on an issue and asks students to address this issue from any perspective they wish, so long as they provide relevant reasons and examples to explain and support their views. Students have 45 minutes to complete this essay.

#### **Example**

Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.

#### **Characteristics of a High Quality Make-an-Argument Response:**

- Has a clearly developed and explained thesis
- Includes in-depth treatment of the issues
  - Provides multiple reasons to support your thesis
  - Supports points with helpful examples
  - Considers the consequences of your suggestions
  - Acknowledges and discusses multiple perspectives on the issues
  - Presents counterarguments to opposing perspectives
- Is well-organized and logically developed, with each idea building upon the last
- Shows strong command of writing mechanics and vocabulary

### Critique-an-Argument

A Critique-an-Argument analytic writing task asks students to evaluate an argument by discussing how well reasoned they find it to be (rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with the position presented). Students have 30 minutes to complete this essay.

#### **Example**

The number of marriages that end in separation or divorce is growing steadily. A disproportional number of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so culturally desirable, they are often preceded by long engagements as the couples wait until the summer months. The number of divorces increases with each passing year, and the latest statistics indicate that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. With the deck stacked against "forever more" it is best to take every step possible from joining the pool of divorcees. Therefore, it is sage advice to young couples to shorten their engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.

**Characteristics of a High Quality Critique-an-Argument Response:**

- Identifies numerous flaws (obvious, subtle, and complex)
- Explains critiques clearly, completely, and convincingly for the reader using examples, logical argumentation, and common knowledge
- Is well-organized and logically developed, with each idea building upon the last
- Shows strong command of writing mechanics and vocabulary

From: The City University of New York...Collegiate Learning Assessment

<http://www.cuny.edu/academics/initiatives/cla/sample-tasks.html>

## PERFORMANCE TASK REALITY CHECK

This performance task:

- ✓ Presents a real-life situation that students could likely face at some point in the future
- ✓ Includes an authentic role for the student(s)
- ✓ Includes the creation of an authentic product one would actually create
- ✓ Is appropriately ambiguous – it is not obvious what the solution is
- ✓ Explicitly requires skills in determining the validity & relevance of information
- ✓ Requires that a decision be made based on credible evidence

## Performance Task Scenario

**Boutique Architectural** is an established company that has been in operation for over forty years. It is a 25 person firm comprised of three primary partners: Jackson, Wilhoit, and Brown, and two associate partners. They employ 15 architects, 5 drafting engineers, and 5 clerical/support personnel. Mr. Wilhoit, Sr. is a founding member and his son, Mr. Wilhoit, Jr., also works at the firm.

The firm's average annual income is \$1.5 million. However, in the last 5 years, the company lost 2 major bids to new firms with young leadership and staff. Therefore, two years ago a concerted effort was made by the Boutique partners to hire several new "up-and-coming" architects. Three architects were hired who were young, renowned, and making a splash in the architectural world early in their careers. These new hires were recruited heavily and told that they would have considerable "creative freedom" but that they were also expected to meet demanding schedules and be able to "multi-task" effectively.

Shortly after bringing on this young talent, Boutique landed a very lucrative contract with the city and a private enterprise, collaborating on an urban outdoor "market place" that the mayor believes will be the "ticket" to revitalizing the downtown area.

Last week, Mr. Wilhoit, Sr. received a call from the mayor and the market place client that they are quite concerned because the project is running considerably behind schedule. Wilhoit is furious and "lays down the law" to the employees, including increasing his monitoring of their progress. He becomes aware, after doing regular "walk-throughs" that many of the architects and drafters are spending time on the internet involved in personal business (including social media) and do not have what he deems "appropriate work ethic for my company".

Mr. Wilhoit has informed his son that he plans to implement a policy that will either ban or severely limit the use of the internet and social media for non-work purposes at the office. He believes these distractions are preventing employees from meeting critical deadlines.

Mr. Wilhoit, Jr. is deeply disturbed by this and tells his father that they will immediately lose a number of employees, in particular their new "stars" if the company places limits on the use of the internet and social media at work. He suggests they hire a consultant to review the research on distractions at work and investigate how other companies handle the situation of too much distraction, particularly related to the internet and social media.

You have been hired as the consultant. Your charge is to review the literature on employee distractions and productivity and make a recommendation regarding the pros and cons of adopting a policy on the use of the internet and social media at Boutique Architectural.

### Your Questions to Consider:

- What are your learning objectives/outcomes for the task?
- What questions do you want students to identify?
- What types and sources of "evidence" will you provide?
- What format do you want for the final product (report, letter, company policy)?
- Do you want students to reach one "correct" finding, or can students demonstrate an understanding from multiple perspectives?

**Ideas for Performance Tasks**  
**CLA in the Classroom Performance Task Library**  
[http://claintheclassroom.org/task\\_library](http://claintheclassroom.org/task_library)

**Air Pollution**

**Topic:** EPA regulators are threatening to fine the city of Valley Town and impose regulations that would cost an average family \$2500/year.

**Art Scene Investigations**

**Topic:** Creation of an art exhibition catalogue involving a jurying process and prestigious award.

**Drunk Driving Reduction**

**Topic:** A college must evaluate the severity of alcohol-related behaviors among students, and the likelihood that a particular program would be cost-effective.

**Employment Discrimination**

**Topic:** A class-action sex discrimination lawsuit is being pursued by a group of former female employees of a major retailer.

**Hybrid vs Biodiesel**

**Topic:** The city council is charged with voting on and approving the upcoming lease agreement for the municipal vehicle fleet. With the recent increases in the cost of fuel and the assumption that fuel costs will begin to rise, the city council wants to adopt a more economical and environmental option over the traditional-gasoline vehicles that make up the current fleet.

**Marketing and Search Advertising**

**Topic:** Intern is hired to manage search advertising at a small- to medium-sized business. The firm has not used search advertising and is relying on your knowledge, analysis, and decision-making skills to successfully launch a campaign on their behalf.

**Psychology Performance Task**

**Topic:** Students are in the role of a parent deciding whether to enroll their autistic son in an autism-specific camp or a mainstream camp.

**David and Goliath**

**Topic:** WalMart would like to build a SuperCenter in a rural community and the issue has come before the local zoning board.

**Creationism vs Evolution**

**Topic:** A parent who is a biology professor and Sunday school teacher is asked to respond to a child's inquiry on the difference between creationism and evolution.