

## PARTNERSHIP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM – PHER

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### Chapter 6: Backward Design Video Script

This short video provides an introduction to backward design. Before we talk about “backward design,” let’s examine traditional approaches to designing classes.

In a traditional design, the planning process often looks like this.

1. Select the topic or information to teach (or follow a textbook with selected topics).
2. Plan lessons to help students to learn that topic.
3. Create an assessment to check if students learned the topic.

Does this look similar to what you have seen or done in the past?

Wiggins and McTighe, in their book, *Understanding by Design*, identified two common problems. They called these the “twin sins.”

1. Coverage-focused teaching happens when teachers focus on content, following their plan, even if students haven’t mastered the first topic.

Maybe you can remember a time when you were determined to finish all of your presentation, the activities in the book, or your lesson plan, even though it was clear students weren’t actually learning.

2. Activity-driven teaching happens when teachers fill class time with fun games or tasks without considering what students are learning.

Maybe you have had an experience where students were engaged and enjoying learning, but you realized that you didn’t have enough to include on the exams or your students didn’t do well on their tests.

To avoid these problems, Wiggins and McTighe ask teachers to consider a question. How can we plan our teaching so that we help students to learn better? They answer the question by starting with the end or the goal.

That is why this curriculum framework is named Backward Design. It provides a way for you to organize your units or teaching or an entire course starting with the end goal in mind.

The three stages of backward design are:

1. What do you want your students to learn? Identify the desired outcomes. Start with what you want your students to learn or be able to do by the end of the lesson or unit; these are the desired outcomes.

2. How will you know if students have learned? Plan a way to measure if students have achieved these desired outcomes.

You could use tests or quizzes but also consider projects and activities. The key to backward design is making an assessment plan before planning the day-to-day activities of the course.

3. What activities will help students to achieve the goals? Plan activities and lessons to help students learn and achieve the desired outcomes.

As you plan your lesson for each day, keep your goals in mind. Give the students the information and the opportunities to practice that they need in order to develop their skills and do well on the assessment that you plan to give them.

It's important to remember that we need to be flexible. We may need to change our plans while we are teaching or even change our goals and assessments.

Think about a specific course that you teach. Think about what success would look like by the end of the academic year.

One of the ideas behind backward design is that you should have a clear goal in mind. Knowing what is most important can help you to stay focused throughout the course and lead to success in the end.

Now think about this question: What is your big or ultimate goal for student learning in your class? You might stop the video now and imagine what success would look like.

When you are ready, write down your ultimate goal on the Backward Design template.

Once you have your big or ultimate goal, it's time to set some specific or measurable goals.

Goals should be SMART. This is an acronym which stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

Here is an example: by the end of the academic year, students will research and write a 5-page paper on a significant event in Vietnamese history, utilizing at least 5 primary sources and 3 secondary sources, and achieve a minimum grade of 80% based on the course's grading rubric.

Please pause the video and write your own goals in the Backward Design Template or on your own paper.

Now that you have created your goals, it's time to plan assessments or decide what evidence will show that students have met the goals. It's important that goals and assessments match. If your goal is that students will be able to speak for three minutes, but your assessment is a grammar test, then the assessment isn't valid—it doesn't match the goal.

Good assessments measure the goals and help to guide what we teach and how we teach it.