Recoding and Decoding Assignments: Using TILT and Reverse TILT for Faculty, Staff and Student Development

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Principles of TILT: Transparency in Learning and Teaching

University of Nevada Las Vegas houses the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) in higher education project, coordinated by Dr. Mary Ann Winkelmes.

The TILT concepts were developed to increase student success, particularly for underserved students. Participating instructors implement small changes in their teaching that increase transparency in their assignments.

TILT Workshops at UNG Assist Faculty to "Recode" their Assignments

Clarify Purpose of the assignment:

What skills are practiced?

What is their long-term relevance to students' lives?

What knowledge is gained in connection to learning outcomes?

Describe the Task:

What students will do

How to do it (steps to follow, avoid)

Clarify your Criteria for Success:

Use a checklist or rubric in advance so students can self-evaluate

Model what excellence looks like (annotated examples where students/faculty apply those criteria)

Purpose

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- Define learning objectives in language and terms to help students recognize how the assignment will benefit their learning.

- Indicate how these are linked to institutional learning outcomes.

- Describe how specific **knowledge** and **skills** in this assignment will be important in their lives beyond this course and institution.

- **Skills**

"The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course/in school/ in this field/ in professional life beyond college:"

- **Knowledge**

"This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:"

Task

Explain the mechanics of the assignment in depth. Be more explicit than you think necessary.

If applicable, identify the audience for the assignment.

Scaffold/stage assignments when possible. Break down the assignment into steps necessary for completion. If appropriate, divide it into smaller assignments.

For process-based (writing to learn assignments) construct low-stakes, short, informal writing assignments.

"Dog-food" the assignment. Do it yourself. This can assist you in identifying necessary sub-tasks the students will have to complete.

Criteria for Success

Define the characteristics of the finished product.

Provide multiple, annotated examples of what these characteristics look like in practice, to encourage students' creativity and reduce their incentive to copy one example too closely.

Collaboratively analyze examples in class before students begin working.

Provide students with a checklist of characteristics of successful work.

Include grading criteria or rubric.

Make clear what is unacceptable work as well.

Example: Psychology Pre-TILT

Your task is to explore a psychological topic in relation to your life, in a 3-4 page paper. Papers should be (a) double-spaced, (b) 12 pt Times New Roman font, (c) include your name in the header, and (d) a title at the top of the first page. Papers will be graded on the following criteria: (a) addressing the question / topic, (b) writing quality, (c) integrating outside sources (at least one quality source; if you are not sure whether something is a good source, ask me), and (d) following instructions.

TOPIC: One of my goals in this course is to introduce students to ideas that can potentially change the way that they view the world. This can relate to any topic in psychology (e.g., how people learn, disorders of the brain, how memory functions, intelligence, what happens when we sleep, personality, how people interact with others, etc.), because psychological research is applicable to so many aspects of human life. Pick something that you have learned in this course that has changed the way you view the world. For example, imagine if on the first day of class I had asked you something like "how does short-term memory work?" and your answer then was very different than what you learned later in the semester from lecture/textbook. Think about the idea more deeply (especially in the context of your life), and apply it to your philosophy of life.

Once you have an idea, describe how you used to think about the topic, discuss the topic itself (i.e., what you learned about it), and then explain how your view has changed going forward. Please be as specific as possible when writing.

Example: Psychology Post-TILT

CHANGING BELIEFS: IN-CLASS ACTIVITY (beginning of term)

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to help you monitor how your beliefs change throughout the semester. To do this, you will do a metacognitive activity (thinking about your own thinking) by answering some questions to document your current beliefs. These questions relate to some of the important topics we will think (do not look them up online or in your textbook). After you answer each question, please note, using astudy in this class. Later in the semester, we will look again at your views on these same questions.

TASK: Your task is to answer the following questions based on what you truly scale from 1 to 5, how confident you are in your answer (1 = not at all confident, 3 = somewhat confident, 5 = extremely confident).

(1) What percent of the brain do people use?

(2) When we look at an object, do we always see that object? If yes, why? If not, why not?

(3) Why do we dream? What is happening in our minds / brains?

(4) Do abilities such as extra-sensory perception (ESP), including reading people's minds or seeing the future, exist?

(5) Briefly, how does memory work?

(6) Is intelligence an easily measured construct that is stable throughout one's life?

(7) Do most people use stereotypes? Do you?

(8) Can humans and animals be trained using similar methods? Why or why not?

(9) Are most people generally good or generally bad?

(10) How can we measure a person's personality? Is it possible?

Your completed assignment should include two or three sentences in response to each question. Bring this write-up with you to the next class and you will pair up with a classmate. When paired up, you will swap papers and read through each other's answers to determine whether you can understand each other's views.

CRITERIA: You will be successful in this activity if you can: (a) Provide an answer to all of the questions with descriptions that are clear to another reader, and (b) Provide feedback to a classmate about how clearly you can understand their answers.

Using TILT to "Decode" Assignments: Student Training for Writing Instruction

UNG Writing Fellows Program:

Embedded tutors who visit assigned courses and work with students on 1 – 2 major assignments through non-directive, globally focused feedback letters and individual or small group meetings.

The Fellows also offer in-class workshops:

- Writing Process Walkthrough
- Group Brainstorming
- Reverse TILT-ing Assignments

Reverse-TILT: Helping students uncover "the other side of the prompt"

Ask the instructor:

- What do you hope students will achieve in this project?

- Which course objectives do the assignment focus on?

- What should the final document look like?

- Should students use specific research?

- Think back to students who did well on this assignment. What stood out?

- What should students avoid? (especially with tiered assignments & group projects)

Reverse-TILT: Passing Gained Clarity and Agency Along to Students

When students feel the prompt asks for two or more assignments in one…
The instructions blend more than one format or genre…
A second assignment sheet is needed to decipher the first…
The assignment seems vague, open-ended, or out of the ordinary…

Many students panic.

Reverse TILT gives them back a sense of control.

Higher control beliefs→more motivation→better performance (Pintrich).

Reverse TILT also promotes reverse transfer, "sometimes called *backward transfer*…when existing (prior) knowledge is modified and re-viewed in terms of its similarities to the new information (Haskell).

# Reverse-TILT: Fostering Trust Between Student and Instructor

- Instructors aren't trying to trick their students.

- Tutors know this. Sometimes students aren't so sure.

- TILT inspires students to re-envision from the instructor's perspective.

- Bonus perk: Opening a stronger dialog between student and instructor

Success might sound like this:

"Oh, so I'm not just writing what my partner said in the interview... I'm writing from her perspective *and* supporting her argument with evidence as well as I can. I should go talk to her more so I can get a better understanding of why she feels this way!"

-Brea, student of Spring 2018 Philosophy/Ethics course

Quoted after Writing Fellows in-class workshop, January 2018
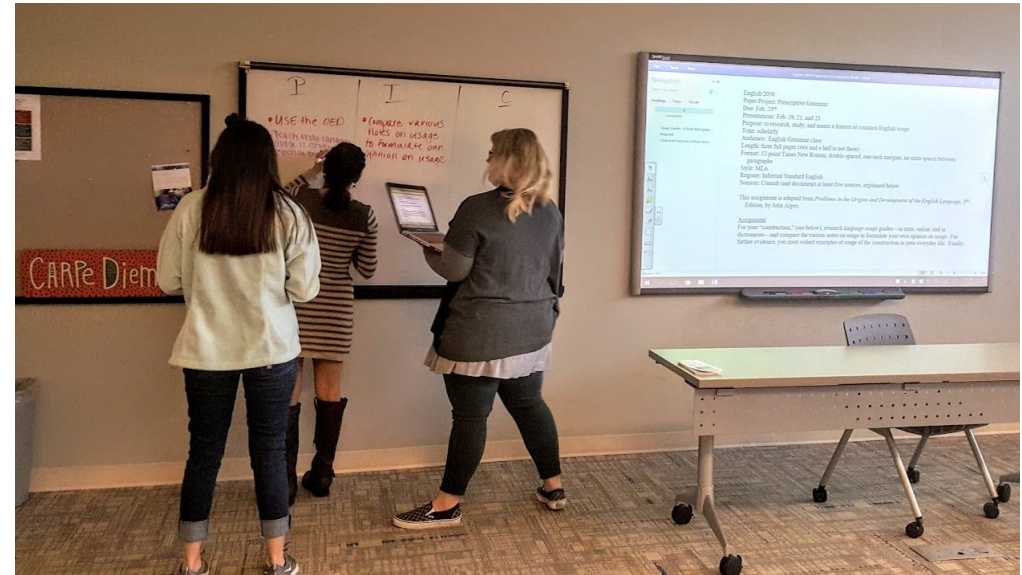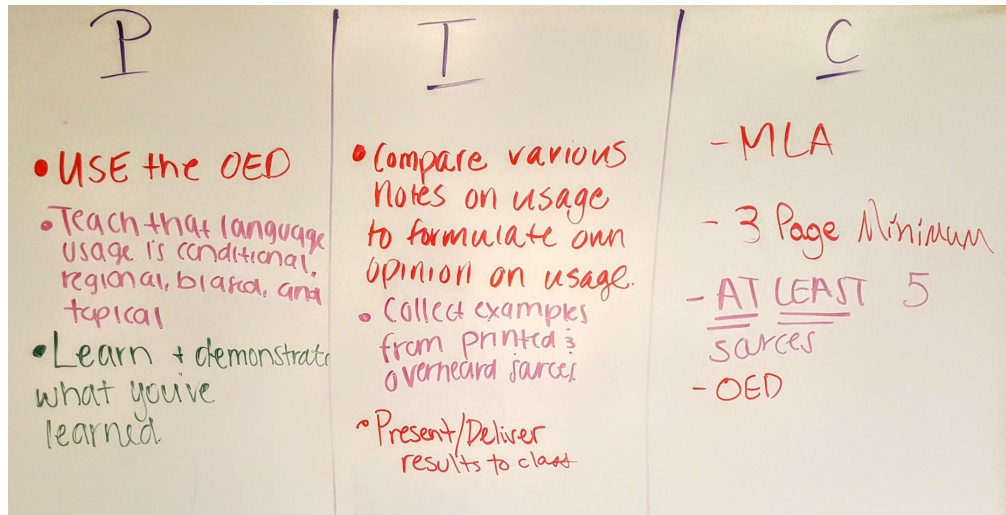
Reverse-TILT workshop in action:

Purpose: Skills to practice and knowledge to gain

Task: What to do and how to do it: Generate a list of steps to follow

Criteria: What excellence looks like: Checklist or rubric for self-evaluation

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