A FIELD GUIDE

The Redesign Crosswalk

Higher Education Edition

Reconstituting Traditional Academic Writing Assignments

Turning what we assign into what students can actually do — and evidence that they can do it.

BUILT FOR

Faculty, academic affairs leaders, subject matter experts, instructional designers, assessment professionals, and curriculum development teams.

A NOTE ON USE

Proposed activities should align with approved course SLOs, program outcomes, and disciplinary expectations.

We must stop assuming that the completion of an academic product automatically demonstrates the development of the intellectual capabilities that product was intended to cultivate.

The purpose of reconstituting learning is not to make assignments easier or more technologically sophisticated. It is to make the relationship between learning objectives, intellectual development, assessment, and real-world application more intentional, transparent, and measurable.

INSIDE

How to use this guide — Four ways in, depending on how much time you have
Index and skill finder — Every assignment, and every skill with its card numbers
At a glance — The full crosswalk on one landscape page
The cards — One assignment per card: measure, redesign, skills, why, evidence
Your turn — A blank card you can print and fill in by hand

Naketa Jones, EdD
Director of Academic Innovation and Faculty Development · Ethical AI Solutions, LLC

How to use this guide

Four ways in. Pick the one that matches the time you have.

Two minutes	Twenty minutes	One planning period	A full term
Find your assignment on the index. Read one card. That is enough to start a conversation in a department meeting.	Open the at-a-glance poster and circle every card that describes something you already assign. Most people find four to six.	Take one card, use the three questions below, and write your own version of the redesign column. Bring it to your PLC.	Work through the cards one department at a time. Each card is a design decision, not a rewrite of the course.

The three questions that make a card work

WHAT	WHY	WHERE
What must the student be able to do? Name it as a verb a human performs, not a product a tool produces.	Why does it matter outside this course? Name where it shows up in the discipline, the job, or civic life.	Where will we see the thinking? Name the moment it becomes visible and cannot be faked, borrowed, or generated.

Three distinctions worth keeping straight

1. **Hard skills are teachable, demonstrable technical or disciplinary competencies —** research methods, writing, data analysis, source verification, digital literacy.

2. **Soft skills are the durable, transferable capabilities —** communication, adaptability, collaboration, leadership, critical thinking. They can and should be assessed through observable behaviors, not inferred from a grade.

3. **Learning outcomes specify the performance students must demonstrate —** the skills on these cards are possible outcomes. Each district or institution must translate them into measurable statements aligned to its own curriculum.

The six capabilities this guide keeps pointing at

Communication

Can they explain it to someone who disagrees?

Critical thinking

Can they find the weakness in their own argument?

Collaboration

Does the group change its mind in the room?

Self-advocacy

Can they name what they do not understand and ask early?

Adaptability and grit

Did they come back for revision two?

Ethical judgment

What did they decide when nobody was checking?

A note on the titles: *the proposed terms describe intellectual activities. They are not replacements for every traditional assignment title. A research paper can remain a research paper — its design can deliberately emphasize evidence-based knowledge construction, and its assessment can capture whether students can evaluate sources, synthesize findings, and defend conclusions.*

Index of assignments

Click a title to jump to its card. Card numbers are printed on every card, so the index still works on paper.

#	WHAT WE ASSIGN	WHAT WE COULD BE BUILDING INSTEAD
01	Academic essay	Augmented Cognitive Composition
02	Research paper	Evidence-Based Knowledge Construction
03	Literature review	Scholarly Knowledge Synthesis
04	Annotated bibliography	Evidence Evaluation Portfolio
05	Case study analysis	Decision Intelligence Exercise
06	Discussion board	Critical Knowledge Exchange
07	Reflective essay	Metacognitive Knowledge Development
08	Argumentative paper	Intellectual Position Construction
09	Policy analysis paper	Applied Policy Intelligence
10	Lab or technical report	Applied Evidence Interpretation
11	Business plan	Strategic Knowledge Application
12	Research proposal	Scholarly Inquiry Design
13	Dissertation or thesis	Advanced Scholarly Knowledge Construction
14	Capstone project	Integrated Competency Demonstration
15	Professional presentation	Knowledge Communication and Defense
16	Internship or fieldwork reflection	Experiential Knowledge Transfer

Find it by skill

Every skill named on the cards, with the card numbers that name it. Start where the student is stuck, not where the syllabus starts.

Judgment 01, 03, 09
Adaptability 07, 16
Collaboration 06, 14
Leadership 05, 14
Methodology 12, 13
Persistence 02, 13
Academic Writing 01
Advanced Research 13
Analysis 14
Analytical Thinking 02
Applied Documentation 16
Argument Design 01
Argumentation 06
Attention To Detail 04
Citation 02
Communication 06
Critical Thinking 01
Data Analysis 10
Data Visualization 15
Database Searching 04
Decision Matrices 05
Decision-making 11
Digital Discourse 06
Discernment 04
Documentation 07
Entrepreneurship 11
Ethical Judgment 05
Ethical Reasoning 12
Evidence Analysis 08
Financial Modeling 11
Impact Analysis 09
Influence 15
Initiative 16
Intellectual Autonomy 13
Intellectual Curiosity 03
Literature Searching 03
Logic 08
Market Research 11
Negotiation 08
Persuasion 08
Policy Research 09
Precision 10
Presentation Design 15
Problem-solving 10
Professional Analysis 16
Project Management 14
Public Speaking 15
Reflective Analysis 07
Research 14
Research Appraisal 03
Research Design 12
Research Methods 02
Rhetoric 08
Scenario Analysis 05
Scholarly Writing 13
Self-awareness 07
Source Evaluation 04
Strategic Thinking 12
Synthesis 02
Systems Thinking 09
Technical Reporting 10

How to read it: *the number is the card. If a skill appears on six cards, that is your argument that it is not a soft extra — it is the spine of the programme.*

AT A GLANCE

Every assignment, every reframing, one page

The full crosswalk. Find yourself here, then go to the card with that number for the redesign, the skills, and what it looks like at work.

#	WHAT WE ASSIGN	PROPOSED REFRAMING	WHAT WE'RE ACTUALLY MEASURING	HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY	HARD / SOFT SKILLS	REAL-WORLD APPLICATION
01	**Academic essay**	**Augmented Cognitive Composition**	Critical reasoning, argumentation, synthesis	Students develop a defensible position, interrogate evidence, critique AI-generated arguments, and explain intellectual decisions.	H Academic writing, argument design S Critical thinking, judgment	Professional communication, analytical reasoning
02	**Research paper**	**Evidence-Based Knowledge Construction**	Research literacy, synthesis, intellectual independence	Students investigate complex questions, validate sources, develop original conclusions, and defend their evidence.	H Research methods, citation, synthesis S Analytical thinking, persistence	Policy analysis, research, consulting
03	**Literature review**	**Scholarly Knowledge Synthesis**	Scholarly evaluation, gap identification, conceptual understanding	Students compare scholarly findings, assess methodological strengths, identify gaps, and construct a synthesis framework.	H Literature searching, research appraisal S Intellectual curiosity, judgment	Research and development, evidence reviews
04	**Annotated bibliography**	**Evidence Evaluation Portfolio**	Source credibility, relevance, methodological evaluation	Students assess sources against explicit criteria, verify citations, and justify inclusion or exclusion.	H Database searching, source evaluation S Discernment, attention to detail	Due diligence, evidence gathering
05	**Case study analysis**	**Decision Intelligence Exercise**	Applied reasoning, decision-making, problem-solving	Students analyze realistic scenarios, compare AI-assisted alternatives, identify trade-offs, and justify decisions.	H Scenario analysis, decision matrices S Leadership, ethical judgment	Management, healthcare, business decisions
06	**Discussion board**	**Critical Knowledge Exchange**	Intellectual engagement, dialogue, collaborative reasoning	Students challenge interpretations, exchange evidence, refine positions, and construct shared conclusions.	H Digital discourse, argumentation S Collaboration, communication	Cross-functional teams, professional dialogue
07	**Reflective essay**	**Metacognitive Knowledge Development**	Self-assessment, integration of experience, learning transfer	Students analyze their decisions, document intellectual growth, and create improvement strategies.	H Reflective analysis, documentation S Self-awareness, adaptability	Professional development, reflective practice
08	**Argumentative paper**	**Intellectual Position Construction**	Persuasion, evidence, counterargument evaluation	Students develop a position, test counterarguments, assess competing claims, and defend a recommendation.	H Rhetoric, logic, evidence analysis S Persuasion, negotiation	Advocacy, legal reasoning, strategic communication
09	**Policy analysis paper**	**Applied Policy Intelligence**	Policy evaluation, impact analysis, evidence-based recommendations	Students examine stakeholder needs, evaluate policy alternatives, model potential impacts, and recommend action.	H Policy research, impact analysis S Systems thinking, judgment	Government, nonprofit, institutional policy
10	**Lab or technical report**	**Applied Evidence Interpretation**	Technical accuracy, data interpretation, scientific reasoning	Students analyze findings, evaluate alternative explanations, validate AI-supported interpretations, and report limitations.	H Data analysis, technical reporting S Precision, problem-solving	Research labs, engineering, quality assurance
11	**Business plan**	**Strategic Knowledge Application**	Strategic planning, market analysis, financial reasoning	Students assess a real market, evaluate assumptions, test scenarios, and present an evidence-based business strategy.	H Financial modeling, market research S Entrepreneurship, decision-making	Business development, startups, consulting
12	**Research proposal**	**Scholarly Inquiry Design**	Research question development, methodological judgment	Students develop researchable questions, compare methodologies, assess feasibility, and justify research design.	H Research design, methodology S Strategic thinking, ethical reasoning	Grant writing, institutional research

#	WHAT WE ASSIGN	PROPOSED REFRAMING	WHAT WE'RE ACTUALLY MEASURING	HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY	HARD / SOFT SKILLS	REAL-WORLD APPLICATION
13	**Dissertation or thesis**	**Advanced Scholarly Knowledge Construction**	Original contribution, methodological rigor, scholarly independence	Students design and conduct original research, critically evaluate AI assistance where permitted, establish findings, and defend their contribution.	**H** Advanced research, methodology, scholarly writing **S** Persistence, intellectual autonomy	Academic research, applied research, thought leadership
14	**Capstone project**	**Integrated Competency Demonstration**	Synthesis, practical application, transfer of learning	Students address an authentic organizational or community problem, produce a solution, and defend decisions.	**H** Project management, research, analysis **S** Leadership, collaboration	Consulting, organizational improvement
15	**Professional presentation**	**Knowledge Communication and Defense**	Communication, conceptual mastery, professional judgment	Students communicate findings to a defined audience, respond to questions, and defend recommendations.	**H** Presentation design, data visualization **S** Public speaking, influence	Executive briefings, professional presentations
16	**Internship or fieldwork reflection**	**Experiential Knowledge Transfer**	Application of theory, professional growth, situational judgment	Students analyze workplace experiences, connect them to disciplinary concepts, and propose improvements.	**H** Applied documentation, professional analysis **S** Adaptability, initiative	Workplace performance, professional development

THE CARDS

One assignment at a time

Read down the left edge for the argument, across for the design. The last two blocks are the ones people skip — and the ones that matter most.

01 Academic essay

→ ***Augmented Cognitive Composition***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Critical reasoning, argumentation, synthesis

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students develop a defensible position, interrogate evidence, critique AI-generated arguments, and explain intellectual decisions.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Academic writing, argument design S Critical thinking, judgment

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Professional communication, analytical reasoning

— *A policy analyst writes a briefing a director will actually read in four minutes.*

— *A consultant rewrites a client's argument after finding the flaw at its center.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A defensible position plus the intellectual decisions that produced it.

02 Research paper

→ ***Evidence-Based Knowledge Construction***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Research literacy, synthesis, intellectual independence

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students investigate complex questions, validate sources, develop original conclusions, and defend their evidence.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Research methods, citation, synthesis S Analytical thinking, persistence

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Policy analysis, research, consulting

— *A research associate reproduces a published result before building anything on top of it.*

— *A due-diligence analyst separates what a filing proves from what it merely claims.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

An original conclusion that no single source could have supplied.

03 Literature review

→ ***Scholarly Knowledge Synthesis***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Scholarly evaluation, gap identification, conceptual understanding

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students compare scholarly findings, assess methodological strengths, identify gaps, and construct a synthesis framework.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Literature searching, research appraisal S Intellectual curiosity, judgment

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Research and development, evidence reviews

— *A clinical team summarizes what the evidence does and does not support before adopting a protocol.*

— *A program officer maps a field to find the gap their funding could actually fill.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A gap statement someone could fund or study.

04 Annotated bibliography

→ ***Evidence Evaluation Portfolio***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Source credibility, relevance, methodological evaluation

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students assess sources against explicit criteria, verify citations, and justify inclusion or exclusion.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Database searching, source evaluation S Discernment, attention to detail

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Due diligence, evidence gathering

— *An analyst rejects three of five sources and can say exactly why.*

— *A litigator builds a source file that will survive cross-examination.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A source excluded, with the criterion that excluded it.

05 Case study analysis

→ ***Decision Intelligence Exercise***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Applied reasoning, decision-making, problem-solving

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students analyze realistic scenarios, compare AI-assisted alternatives, identify trade-offs, and justify decisions.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Scenario analysis, decision matrices S Leadership, ethical judgment

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Management, healthcare, business decisions

— *An operations manager chooses between two fixes with incomplete data and states the trade-off out loud.*

— *A clinician explains why the textbook answer is wrong for this particular patient.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A decision matrix with a defended trade-off.

06 Discussion board

→ ***Critical Knowledge Exchange***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Intellectual engagement, dialogue, collaborative reasoning

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students challenge interpretations, exchange evidence, refine positions, and construct shared conclusions.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Digital discourse, argumentation S Collaboration, communication

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Cross-functional teams, professional dialogue

— *A cross-functional team converges on one recommendation instead of three competing decks.*

— *A moderator turns a hostile thread into a shared problem statement.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A position revised because of someone else's evidence.

07 Reflective essay

→ ***Metacognitive Knowledge Development***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Self-assessment, integration of experience, learning transfer

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students analyze their decisions, document intellectual growth, and create improvement strategies.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Reflective analysis, documentation S Self-awareness, adaptability

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Professional development, reflective practice

— *A resident debriefs a complication and names the moment the decision went wrong.*

— *A team lead runs a post-mortem that produces one changed practice, not a document.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

Transfer: the same insight applied later, unprompted.

08 Argumentative paper

→ ***Intellectual Position Construction***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Persuasion, evidence, counterargument evaluation

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students develop a position, test counterarguments, assess competing claims, and defend a recommendation.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Rhetoric, logic, evidence analysis S Persuasion, negotiation

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Advocacy, legal reasoning, strategic communication

— *A lobbyist anticipates the opposing amendment before it is filed.*

— *A negotiator knows which of their own arguments is the weakest one.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

The counterargument stated better than the original claim.

09 Policy analysis paper

→ ***Applied Policy Intelligence***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Policy evaluation, impact analysis, evidence-based recommendations

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students examine stakeholder needs, evaluate policy alternatives, model potential impacts, and recommend action.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Policy research, impact analysis S Systems thinking, judgment

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Government, nonprofit, institutional policy

— *A housing analyst models who is helped and who is displaced by a zoning change.*

— *A university office prices a policy change in staff hours, not just dollars.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A recommendation with stakeholders and costs named.

10 Lab or technical report

→ ***Applied Evidence Interpretation***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Technical accuracy, data interpretation, scientific reasoning

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students analyze findings, evaluate alternative explanations, validate AI-supported interpretations, and report limitations.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Data analysis, technical reporting S Precision, problem-solving

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Research labs, engineering, quality assurance

— *An engineer reports the limitation that makes the result provisional.*

— *A QA lead distinguishes a measurement error from a real defect.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

Alternative explanations considered and ruled out.

11 Business plan

→ ***Strategic Knowledge Application***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Strategic planning, market analysis, financial reasoning

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students assess a real market, evaluate assumptions, test scenarios, and present an evidence-based business strategy.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Financial modeling, market research S Entrepreneurship, decision-making

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Business development, startups, consulting

— *A founder tests the one assumption the whole plan rests on before raising money.*

— *A manager kills a project because the market test failed.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

An assumption tested, and the plan changed by the result.

12 Research proposal

→ ***Scholarly Inquiry Design***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Research question development, methodological judgment

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students develop researchable questions, compare methodologies, assess feasibility, and justify research design.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Research design, methodology S Strategic thinking, ethical reasoning

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Grant writing, institutional research

— *A grant writer scopes a study that can actually be finished inside the budget.*

— *An IRB reviewer spots the feasibility problem in a protocol before it is funded.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A design choice defended against a cheaper alternative.

13 Dissertation or thesis

→ ***Advanced Scholarly Knowledge Construction***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Original contribution, methodological rigor, scholarly independence

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students design and conduct original research, critically evaluate AI assistance where permitted, establish findings, and defend their contribution.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Advanced research, methodology, scholarly writing S Persistence, intellectual autonomy

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Academic research, applied research, thought leadership

— *A researcher defends a finding to a room that wants it to be wrong.*

— *A thought leader states the limits of their own claim in public.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

An original contribution with its boundaries stated.

14 Capstone project

→ ***Integrated Competency Demonstration***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Synthesis, practical application, transfer of learning

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students address an authentic organizational or community problem, produce a solution, and defend decisions.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Project management, research, analysis S Leadership, collaboration

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Consulting, organizational improvement

— *A consultant hands over a solution the client's own staff can run without them.*

— *A project lead defends scope cuts to an executive sponsor.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A solution that survives contact with the real organization.

15 Professional presentation

→ ***Knowledge Communication and Defense***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Communication, conceptual mastery, professional judgment

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students communicate findings to a defined audience, respond to questions, and defend recommendations.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Presentation design, data visualization S Public speaking, influence

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Executive briefings, professional presentations

— *A director presents three options and recommends one in twelve minutes.*

— *An analyst answers the question the board actually asked, not the one on the slide.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

A recommendation defended under unscripted questions.

16 Internship or fieldwork reflection

→ ***Experiential Knowledge Transfer***

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY MEASURING

Application of theory, professional growth, situational judgment

HOW WE REDESIGN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Students analyze workplace experiences, connect them to disciplinary concepts, and propose improvements.

HARD SKILLS / SOFT SKILLS

H Applied documentation, professional analysis S Adaptability, initiative

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS IT

Workplace performance, professional development

— *A new hire connects a classroom framework to why the team actually does it differently.*

— *An intern proposes one improvement and pilots it before the placement ends.*

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

Theory named, practice observed, and the gap between them explained.

YOUR TURN

The blank card

Print this page. Fill it in by hand for one assignment you are teaching this term. Bring it to your next PLC or department meeting — not the plan, the card.

What I assign now	
What the student is actually being asked to build	
Hard skills	
Soft skills	
Where the shortcut lives	
How I will redesign the activity	
Why the world needs it — two places this shows up at work	
Evidence I will look for	

A sentence to keep: *if the assignment can be completed without the capability, it was never measuring the capability.*

We work with institutions to redesign and reimagine learning content.
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