

PREPARING AND USING STUDENT HANDOUTS

This job aid describes the characteristics of effective handouts and describes some of the most commonly used handouts.

This job aid will help you to:

- select the appropriate type of handout for the planned learning outcomes of your class
- prepare effective handouts

net Includes techniques for online courses.



Effective handouts

Handouts can be an effective teaching tool whether they are professionally produced masterpieces or simple, hand-lettered sheets. They are most effective when they are organized according to the planned learning outcomes for your class. The student can then see clearly where the information fits in the overall picture.

A handout can be of any size, depending on its purpose. Whatever its size, a well-designed handout:

- clarifies the topic being discussed
- provides an alternative to note-taking when focus on the presentation is desired
- saves you the trouble of trying to portray time-consuming detail on a chalkboard or whiteboard to illustrate what you are discussing
- makes errors in note-taking less likely, giving students a reliable reference for learning
- provides material beyond the lecture
- provides more up-to-date material than contained in course readings
- frees up time for other learning activities

Some of the most commonly used handouts are described below, followed by some guidelines for preparing them.

Complete notes

When no suitable textbooks or learning guides are available for student reference it may be necessary to hand out complete notes of your lessons. This ensures the information the students have is accurate and relevant to your learning objectives. Some instructors use handouts of this type to reduce their lecture time and increase time for other student learning activities.

If you are including photocopied material in your notes and learning guides, don't forget to check who owns the copyright and get permission if necessary. Read the BCIT Copyright Compliance Policy to understand BCIT's policy on photocopying.

Note-taking guide

A note-taking guide contains the main topic headings of your class presentation. It is organized to aid the student in following the logical flow of information. For example, many instructors give their students copies of all the overhead transparencies used in their presentations.

If they are printed with plenty of space on the pages between headings and beside the text, the students can take organized notes as they listen to your lecture and participate in other learning activities. This:

- encourages student involvement in the class, by their following along and taking notes
- teaches students how to take effective notes by grouping the subject matter

If you include “think questions” at the end of each section, it will help students learn more effectively.

If you are using a software program such as PowerPoint presentation software to design your visuals, you can automatically print the outline view and print 2, 3, or 6 frames per page. This also makes an excellent note-taking guide.

Illustrations

Graphic illustrations may be photos, sketches, diagrams, charts, graphs, flowcharts, or maps. Handouts of these special items are very useful. A sketch previously drawn by someone who understands the material is far more effective and accurate than something drawn quickly in class by the instructor and copied by the student.

Remember that copyright applies to graphics as well as text.

Many topics and procedures are very difficult to explain only with words. A clear, well-labelled graphic can replace a great deal of text or talk. Also, as you discuss the topic you can direct the students’ attention to important visual elements in the handout.

Case studies

Case studies are examples of lifelike situations that illustrate the lesson topic. They are often used as the basis for discussions and other group exercises. They are very effective for showing the relevance of the topic under discussion.

It is very important that a case study be convincing and timely for the group of learners. Use your own experience and check out the details with other experts in the field. Ask them to look for confusing or incomplete information. Be prepared to add more detail in class in response to questions.

Consider assigning the creation of case studies and appropriate questions to senior-level students with field experience.

In-class exercises

You may use brief written exercises to check whether the students have understood you. These exercises are used in class so that you may review them quickly and fill the gaps in the students' learning immediately or at the next learning session. They also allow students to gauge how much they have understood so that they may want to ask for more information. The exercises may be:

- a blank sheet on which the student will write some type of summary of what you have said (see the job aid *Making Large Lectures Interactive*)
- a set of questions for the student to answer (see the job aids *Classroom Assessment Techniques* and *Developing Written Tests*)

Instructions

Students may need instructions for a lab or shop exercise, a practical procedure, a test, or an exercise in class. In all cases, well-written instructions will ensure that the correct procedures are followed to achieve safe, effective learning.

It is **very important** to place safety cautions **before** any dangerous or difficult step.

Making your handouts effective

While you design your handouts, use the following checklist to ensure they are effective.

Content—I have:

- Checked the learning outcomes to establish what is needed
- Checked that the information is not readily available elsewhere
- Applied for permission to reproduce copyrighted material
- Organized the information in a logical order for learning
- Clearly stated the topic and purpose of each handout
- Made it clear whether students are to put their names on the handouts or if they are to return them
- Included instructions for any test questions or procedures
- Included all necessary steps in procedures and instructions
- Included safety cautions for all dangerous or difficult procedural steps

Style—I have:

- Used simple, clear language throughout
- Explained any trade or technical terms
- Subdivided long handouts with headings to help guide the student
- Left plenty of white space so that the type is not overwhelming to read
- Left plenty of white space where students are to write on the handout
- Included an overview before each set of procedures
- Written procedural steps in the order they will be performed
- Placed safety cautions immediately before the action(s) they refer to
- Divided long, complex procedures into groupings of between five and nine steps

Graphics—I have:

- Chosen graphics that illustrate the topic clearly and add to the text
- Labelled all important parts of each graphic
- Labelled axes and used keys to clarify all charts and graphs
- Used graphics to explain difficult or complicated procedural steps
- Placed graphics close to the written material they illustrate

Overall:

- This handout adds significant value for the student beyond the existing material and is in a concise, useable format.
- Reminder! I have kept a master copy so that future handouts will photocopy clearly.

Online handouts

The addition of materials to online or blended courses has some special considerations.

Copyright considerations

A considerable amount of material allowed to be distributed to students in paper form cannot legally be digitized and put online without the copyright holder's permission, even if you obtained the material electronically.

Again, read the BCIT Copyright Compliance Policy to understand BCIT's policy on obtaining permission to use or reproduce works on the Internet and electronic and other non-print formats, and to convert print to electronic and other non-print formats.

You may need to look for alternate sources of the material or refer students to paper or online sources where the information resides legally. If you provide a link directly to the source, it is important to check periodically that the link still works.

Chunking the text

If you design your own handouts to go online, consider their readability on the screen. "Chunking" refers to breaking the text into bite-sized pieces. It's important for on-screen text because readers can easily get lost in long paragraphs. If the content is especially technical, short paragraphs help ensure comprehension.

Splitting up long paragraphs:

- makes it easier for readers to spot the main points in the discussion
- makes it easier for you to emphasize important ideas
- contributes to the overall accessibility and "readability" of the text
- demonstrates respect for the readers (learners)

Places of transition, where one subject changes to another, are also good places to consider paragraph breaks.

Sometimes you'll find lists in sentence form. In some cases, numbered or bulleted lists might be more effective.

A good rule-of-thumb is to present one main idea in each chunk. Examples or detailed explanations of that main idea can form second and third paragraphs. If the discussion is fairly long, and you end up with several paragraphs, consider whether a heading of some kind would be appropriate.

