Preparing and Using Student Handouts

This job aid is designed to help you prepare and use student handouts. It:

- describes various effective handouts
- provides a checklist to make your handouts more effective.

BCIT LEARNING AND TEACHING CENTRE
3700 Willingdon Avenue, Burnaby, BC, V5G 3H2

Telephone: (604) 432-8927
Fax: (604) 431-7267
Web site: http://www.bcit.ca/ltc

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
- prevents student distractions from what you are saying by trying to make elaborate or detailed notes as you speak
- saves you the trouble of trying to portray time-consuming detail on a chalk board or white board to illustrate what you are discussing
- makes errors in note-taking less likely, giving students a reliable reference for learning
- frees up time for other learning activities.

Some of the most commonly used handouts are listed 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 they have is accurate and relevant to your learning objectives. Some instructors use handouts of this type to reduce their lecture time and increase 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. Check with the BCIT Library to get the latest version of copyright regulations.

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 student can take organized notes as they listen to your lecture and participate in other learning activities. This:

- encourages student involvement in the class, 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™ to design your overheads, you can automatically print the outline view and print 2, 3, or 6 frames per page. Both methods make excellent note-taking guides.

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 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.

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 immediately and fill the gaps in the students' learning at the next learning session. They also allow students to gauge how much they have understood so that they may 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 also the job aid *Developing Written Tests*.)

Instructions

Students may need instructions for a lab 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.

Use the checklist on the following page while you design your handouts.➔

Making your handouts more effective

To ensure your handouts are effective, use the following checklist:

Content—*I have:*

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

Style—*I have:*

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

Graphics—*I have*:

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

Reminder!

I have kept a master copy so that future handouts will photocopy clearly ..... ❑