Backwards Design

The major idea behind "backward design" is to start the design of your teaching with the design of your assessment (homeworks, exams, projects, etc.). **First**, decide first what you want them to "know". **Second**, decide what you will accept as evidence that they do or don't "know" what you want them to. **Third**, you're ready to design the assessment that will give you the evidence. **Finally**, you're ready to design your teaching (write the lecture, pick the reading, film, etc.).

This approach is in contrast to the more common order of events of selecting materials, writing lectures, etc. and then at some point deciding it is time to see what they've learned. Veteran teachers who keep modifying and improving their teaching and assessment over time approximate the result of backwards design. But it can be done, with a little planning the very first time you teach a topic/course.

Backwards design can be done "very locally" – planning questions they'll answer when having a group discussion at the end of a class – or "very globally" – planning the final exam or course project.

Three things I want you to think about as you read the article and incorporate this approach into your teaching:

1. Think broadly about what you want your students to "**know**" and the "**evidence**" you accept that they do…
   - Remember the breadth & depth of Bloom's Taxonomy and its quasi-hierarchical structure
   - Remember the arguments for a "performance definition" of knowledge
   - Remember the arguments to augment a "performance definition" with an "articulation definition" of knowledge

2. Think broadly about how you are going to **assess** – not just exams and papers, but projects, posters, homeworks, in-class assignment, etc. The table of p. 18 gives some examples of thinking beyond the obvious assessments. The handouts about Bloom's Taxonomy give more such examples.

3. Think broadly about how you are going to **teach** – not just readings and lectures, but discussions, out-of-class experiences, etc.

Article to read for next week: http://www-class.unl.edu/psycrs/974/backwarddesign.pdf