



Provide Early Opportunities for Students to Demonstrate Mastery of Foundational Concepts

Foundational concepts are those concepts or skills in a discipline from which everything else builds (Nilson, 2016). Usually, a foundational concept is one that students will need to refer to throughout the course. For example, a foundational concept in a history course may be the ability to identify a primary source document. Early opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of foundational concepts ensures that they have a strong foundation of knowledge from which to build upon throughout the course.

Identifying Foundational Concepts

Begin by identifying the foundational concepts or skills aligned to course outcomes and learning objectives. Students will refer to foundational concepts and apply foundational skills throughout the remainder of your course and, most likely, in future courses in the field as well. You may find it helpful to analyze course assignments to see what concepts or skills students are expected to know or apply. For example, a foundational concept in a research course might be writing citations and a foundational concept in a basic mathematics class might be an approach to solving word problems.

Providing Opportunities for Students to Demonstrate Mastery

Once you have identified the foundational concepts, the next step is to consider how you will provide opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate their mastery of these concepts. See the chart below for examples.

Course	Outcome or objective	Core concept	Assignment and assessment opportunities
Child Development	Describe the typical developmental characteristics of children from birth to six years of age.	Define the milestones that indicate different stages in child development.	Online quiz Timeline project Oral presentation
Biology 101	Evaluate a scientific study and determine if its design is sound.	Describe the elements of research design.	Discussion post Module 1 Assessment: Questions 5–10
US History	Compose an effective narrative that describes and analyzes the history of the United States in response to an analytical question.	Define the four rhetorical strategies used to support claims and respond to arguments.	Rhetorical strategy jigsaw Unit 1 Assessment Part B

Source

Nilson, L. B. (2016). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.