

Leveled Learning Contracts

PURPOSE: This variation on the learning contract is a strategy that allows students the chance to choose what learning tasks they will complete during a unit. Students can also determine the grade they will receive for the unit based on the number and level of learning activities they complete. This strategy also moves students through the different levels of rigor so that they are engaging with the material in increasingly more complex ways.

At the beginning of each unit, students are given a copy of the unit objectives and assignments. The assignments are arranged into three levels, A, B, and C. The C level contains those assignments that are required for every student to complete. These core assignments are designed so that every student acquires a basic understanding of the need-to-knows of the unit. Assignments at the B and A level are optional. These assignments are designed so that students move beyond acquisition, and master the need-to-knows at the application, assimilation, and adaptation levels. Each of these levels contain a variety of assignments that range in complexity and move from providing extensive support to minimal support.

Students review the unit assignment sheet and choose (in some cases with teacher assistance) which assignments they will complete beyond the C level. They then complete an individualized learning contract based on their choices and begin to work.

Leveled learning contracts provide a mix of whole-class work, mini-lessons, and independent work. There may be times when the teacher will provide direct instruction to the entire class, work with small groups, or work with individual learners. Throughout the contract period, students turn in assignments and track their progress. At the end of the contract period, students submit their completed learning contracts for their final grade for the unit.

Leveled learning contracts also allow students to choose their own grade but require that every student at least work to earn a C. Students have the choice to earn a grade higher than a C however. If students complete the required number of assignments at the B level, they can earn a B. If they complete the required number of assignments at the B and A level, they can earn an A for the unit.

BENEFITS:

- Allows for student choice.
- Encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Allows students to work at their own pace.
- Provides a customized learning experience without much more work from the teacher.
- Provides students with multiple pathways to acquiring the need-to-knows.
- Moves students through the different levels of rigor.

STEPS:

1. Determine the need-to-knows for a unit of study covering no less than a 2 week period.
2. Decide on the baseline assignments and learning experiences in which you want the entire class to engage. This becomes the C level. Assignments and learning tasks at this level should be designed at the acquisition level where students are learning new knowledge or a new skill. Because the purpose of the C level is to help all students acquire a basic understanding of the need-to-knows of the unit therefore all students are required to complete these assignments to the level of mastery. If a student does not complete an assignment to the level of mastery, the assignment is returned and students are required to do it over and resubmit it. If they complete no more than these assignments, they cannot earn a grade higher than a C on this unit.
3. Next, create a B level that requires students to manipulate or apply the information they learned in the C level. The purpose of the B level is to help students extend their learning by applying what they have learned and using it to solve problems. Again, provide a variety of assignments from which students can choose but determine a specific number of assignments or learning tasks students need to complete in order to earn a B. You will need at least three times as many assignment choices as required. That means that if you are requiring students to complete three learning tasks from the B level in order to earn a B, you will need to provide students with 15 overall choices.

The choices you provide should range in complexity and required support based on the learning needs of your students. Be sure to have choices appropriate for all four types of students (LCLP, LCHP, HCLP, HCHP).

Again, as in the C level, students are required to complete these assignments or tasks to the point of mastery. If they do not perform at mastery, then they cannot earn a B even if they have completed the required number of tasks. Therefore, it is important that you specifically outline what is mastery for each learning task. This can be done by including a checklist, or creating a common rubric or all tasks at this level. Alternately, you can create a grading sheet, checklist, answer key, or rubric for each individual task.

If students successfully complete the assignments at both the C and the B level, they can earn a grade of at least a B for the unit.

4. Finally, create an A level. At this level, provide students with tasks that require them to extend and refine their acquired knowledge, to use that knowledge automatically, to routinely to analyze and solve problems and create solutions, and to use their knowledge to create solutions in unknown or different situations. The A level should be accessible to all of your students so be sure to provide students with a variety of assignments that range in complexity and the amount of support each assignment provides. You should have assignments that can be completed by each of the four types of students.

Because the A level is the most complex, you can provide fewer assignments here than you did at the other level. Often, it is only necessary to require students to complete one assignment or learning task here. As with all the other levels, students cannot simply complete an assignment; they must complete it at the level of mastery. Make the requirements for mastery clear to students at the beginning of the unit.

5. At the beginning of the unit, pass out the unit with all the assignments/ learning tasks listed under each level. Also pass out any rubrics, checklists, or grading requirements for each learning task. Go over each learning task and each level and explain any deadlines or special requirements.
6. Begin with the C level tasks. You may want to supplement these tasks with lectures, demonstrations, films, readings, or other common learning experiences.
7. Students are not allowed to move on to the B level until they have satisfactorily completed the assignments in the C level. They are not allowed to move on to the A level until they have satisfactorily completed the assignments at the B level.
8. Spend some time each day checking students' progress by using a checklist or class calendar to make sure students are staying on track. Or, have students submit a daily report of their progress. As students turn in assignments, check them off the list. Students can also keep their own checklist which you peruse periodically to make sure that they are staying on track.
9. At the end of the unit, assign students a grade based on the highest level they in which they have demonstrated mastery.

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SUGGESTIONS:

- To assist in management of the various activities at one time, set up various learning stations in your room. This will free up your time for evaluation and facilitation.
- Leverage technology. Remember that you do not need to be the sole source of information in the classroom. Use computerized simulations, pre-recorded lectures, videos, and other technology to help students acquire additional or supplementary information and to provide students with the various supports they will need to complete assignments at the B and A levels.
- Require students to keep track of their own progress and report to you every few days rather than trying to keep track of each student yourself.
- Staple a tracking sheet to the front of the unit packet. Use this sheet to record student progress throughout the unit. This may be as simple as initially each assignment listed on the tracking sheet as students complete them and turn them in. At the end of the unit, collect this sheet and record the students' final grade. If you have students who have

difficulty keeping track of such sheets for very long, require that students keep the sheet in a file in the classroom or collect the sheets and record grades more often.

- Have students grade their own work using answer keys or checklists.
- You can also assign a point value to each assignment based on its level of rigor and the amount of time it will take to complete the assignment. Assignments at the B and A level earn more points than those at the C level.
- Group students together by assignment and meet with several small groups during the class period to clarify and explain the assignment.
- Start each class period with a mini lesson designed to help them complete the C level assignments.
- Provide time in class for students to work on assignments.
- Use items from the nice-to-know list for B and A level assignments.
- As an alternative, provide students with one list of assignments. Attach a point value to each assignment and allow students to choose the combination of assignments that will garner them the amount of points they want to earn for that unit.