

How to Create and Use Learning Contracts

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Definition of Learning Contracts

Learning Contracts are agreements between students and teachers that grant the student certain freedoms and choices about completing tasks yet require the student to meet certain specifications.

Purposes of Learning Contracts

- Enrich or extend the essential curriculum
- Challenge the abilities of highly able students
- Provide alternative activities that address the differing abilities, interests, or learning styles of students

Advantages of Learning Contracts

- Can be written for any curriculum area
- Provide rigorous and challenging learning activities for highly able students
- Can be used to target specific learning activities for individuals or groups
- Promote flexible grouping in the classroom
- Accommodate students’ needs by blending skill-based and content-based learning
- Promote creative and critical thinking for students
- Develop students’ time-management, planning, and decision-making skills
- Allow students to work at an appropriate pace
- Recognize students’ prior knowledge
- Eliminate boredom by minimizing repetition for students
- Increase students’ independence, motivation and class participation

Varied Uses of Learning Contracts

- Long range independent learning activity or unit based on pre-assessment
- Alternate independent learning activity for part of a unit

“Think Abouts” for Creating Learning Contracts

- Essential curriculum standard(s) upon which the learning contract will be based
- Ways to incorporate student choice in the portions of the contract related to process or product

- Clear and challenging criteria for success (time lines, quality of work, etc.)
- Skills and content based on student readiness as well as interest and/or learning profile
- Criteria to be used in assessing and evaluating student work
- Expectations of positive work behaviors
- Clear directions and expectations

Creating Learning Contracts

- Identify the essential curriculum standards and indicators for the unit of study
- Determine how students will be assessed (pre- and post-) and mastery expectations
- Collect or create enrichment resources/materials that will extend the curricular concepts
- Identify when specific student(s) will be required to participate in whole group instruction
- Identify opportunities to differentiate based on student readiness as well as interest and/or learning profile
- Determine timeline for introducing skills/concepts
- Create schedule of due dates and conferences
- Determine working conditions
- Use samples of template available at the gifted and talented curriculum link at www.fcpsteach.org to design a contract that includes:
 - Relevant text page numbers or concepts
 - Enrichment options which allow student choice
 - Log to document due dates and progress
 - Expectations of final product and working conditions

Introducing Students to Learning Contracts

- Meet with student(s) or group(s) of students to explain contract procedures
- Discuss timeline and when student will be required to participate in whole class instruction
- Explain that student may choose from the alternate enrichment activities during instruction of skills he/she has previously mastered
- Demonstrate any new enrichment activities for the unit
- Share due dates with students and model how to keep track of completed work using the log
- Explain the working conditions and expectations of final product
- Explain how and when students should seek teacher assistance

Management Tips for Learning Contracts

- Notify parents of learning contract implementation and expectations
- Require parent, student, and teacher signature on contract
- Set dates to meet with individual(s) or group(s) of students to monitor and discuss progress
- Allow time to accommodate student questions and/or concerns

Options for Assessing and Evaluating Student Work on Learning Contracts

- Select specific tasks to be evaluated; it is not necessary to evaluate every task
- Provide a combination of teacher-selected tasks and student-selected tasks; see the “Product Idea” web available at the gifted and talented curriculum link at www.fcpsteach.org
- Use rubrics created by the teacher or the student that incorporate neatness, thoughtfulness, accuracy of information, originality (if appropriate)

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