

# Using the Quality Assignment Routine

*Improving assignment completion in diverse classes*

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**Over time, the routine will enable teachers to compile a portfolio of assignments that students enjoy and are successful at completing.**

One of the newest additions to the Content Enhancement series is the *Quality Assignment Routine*. The *Quality Assignment Routine* helps teachers plan, present, and evaluate assignments in partnership with their students to improve the quality of assignments produced by their students as well as their rate of assignment completion. Although assignments represent a major vehicle for helping students to learn and master course content, many students fail to take advantage of this opportunity for a variety of reasons. Thus, the instructional procedures in this routine are designed to address this problem. Specifically, the *Quality Assignment Routine* is used to do the following:

- Plan assignments that all students can complete and that are motivating
- Present to students what they need to do to complete an assignment to a high level of quality and to ensure students understand the instructions that have been given
- Evaluate assignments with students to ensure they understand how they performed on the assignment and how they might improve their performance in the future
- Incorporate assignment planning, presentation, and evaluation procedures as an overall assignment completion framework to be carried out in partnership with students

The *Quality Assignment Routine* helps students become better learners in four ways. First, students become involved in planning assignments as much as possible, thus increasing their motivation to complete them. Second, students become involved in assignment presentations so they understand fully what to do to earn a satisfactory grade on the assignments. Third, students evaluate their own assignments against a standard set of grading criteria before handing them in to the teacher to be graded. Thus, they learn self-monitoring skills. Finally, students see the connection between developing and practicing effective and efficient assignment completion habits and improved grades and self-esteem.

The *Quality Assignment Routine* can be used any time throughout the school year. However, the routine is best introduced to students at the beginning of the year or semester when classroom expectations are established. The planning phase of the routine is particularly helpful when used to design a major assignment or type of assignment that will be given throughout a course. Over time, the routine will enable a teacher to compile a portfolio of assignments for a course that students enjoy and are successful at completing.

### Components of the Quality Assignment Routine

Three teaching components and a qual-

ity assignment planning form are incorporated into the *Quality Assignment Routine* and contribute to its success with academically diverse groups of students.

### The Assignment Window

The teacher prepares a visual device called the Assignment Window (Figure 1) before class and presents it to students through a co-constructive process. The Assignment Window allows the teacher and students to record information related to an assignment while promoting student understanding of how to complete it. As the teacher presents the assignment during class, students write down the following:

- Course information and critical dates
- Directions, student options, grading criteria, and supplies or resources needed
- An assignment plan whereby they break the assignment down into parts, determine the number of study sessions they might need to complete the assignment, set a grade goal and a quality goal, and then, after the assignment

is finished, circle the actual grade received

- A goal related to the assignment, such as remembering to edit one's work

### The Linking Steps

The teacher uses a set of Linking Steps (Figure 2 on page 3) to involve students in the in-class presentation of the Assignment Window.

- **Announce the assignment and its purpose.**  
During this step, the teacher names the assignment and gives a rationale as to why the assignment is important. Giving a logical reason for doing an assignment, plus explaining the benefits the learner will accrue, increases the likelihood that students will be motivated to do it.
- **State clear directions**  
During this step, students fill in Section I and Section II of the Assignment Window to gather all the information they need to know to complete the assignment successfully. Specifically, students are informed about the due date, the directions (specific steps to

follow), the options they have, the grading criteria, and the necessary supplies or resources.

- **Stop for students to “RE-ACT”**  
In this step, students are asked to use the REACT Strategy (Figure 3 on page 4).
- **Investigate student understanding**  
Here, the teacher checks whether students understand the assignment by asking questions related to the due date, directions, options/choices, grading criteria, and the supplies or resources to be used. Any misunderstandings are clarified.
- **Give start-up time and offer help**  
During this step, the teacher announces time to get started, makes an offer to help as needed, and circulates among the students as they work. Assistance is provided to individual students when necessary.
- **Note expectations**  
During the final Linking Step, the end of the work time is announced, the due date is reiterated, and students are prompted to do a quality job

SUBJECT <u>English</u> DATE: GIVEN <u>5/4</u> DUE <u>5/5</u> TURNED IN _____				
<i>Read</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Write</i>	<i>Other</i>	
<i>D: Define 5 vocab. wds., p. 67. Write meaningful sentence/ea.</i>				
<i>O: Choose which 5 words</i>				
<i>G: 1. spell vocab wds correctly, 2. underline wds. Worth: 20 pts</i>				
<i>S/R: Text, glossary</i>				
<i>Parts: 1. Pick wds</i>	<i>5 min</i>	<i># of study sessions</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Actual Grade Received:</i>
<i>2. Defins/exp</i>	<i>45 min</i>	<i>Grade Goal:</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C _____	<i>A B C D F</i>
<i>3. Check</i>	<i>10 min</i>	<i>Quality Goal:</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C _____	<i>Other: _____</i>
<i>Goal: Use COPS.</i>				

Figure 1

## Quality Assignment Routine Linking Steps

- **Announce the assignment and its purpose**
- **State clear directions**
- **Stop for students to “REACT”**
- **Investigate student understanding**
- **Give start-up time and offer help**
- **Note expectations**

To remember the Linking Steps, you can use the acronym created by the first letters of the steps, “ASSIGN.”

on their assignments. They also are reminded to use the “PACE 1,2,...” Self-Checking Process to evaluate their final products.

### **Cue-Do-Review Sequence**

A Cue-Do-Review Sequence provides an overall structure for how the *Quality Assignment Routine* is to be carried out in partnership with students. During the “Cue” phase, the teacher cues students that the routine will be used and prompts them to participate in constructing the Assignment Window. In the “Do” phase, the Linking Steps are

used to promote interaction between the teacher and students to ensure students understand the assignment. In the “Review” phase, the teacher reviews with students how they performed on the completed assignment and provides information about how to improve future performance.

### **Introductory lessons**

Two student lessons are used to introduce students to the *Quality Assignment Routine*. The first lesson is designed to teach students about the concept of “quality work” and how

to use the “PACE 1,2,...” Self-Checking Process on completed assignments. “PACE” stands for **P**rompt, **A**rranged neatly, **C**omplete, and **E**ditied for clarity—the standard requirements for all finished products. The numbers “1,2,...” stand for any additional requirements teachers may specify for a particular assignment.

The second lesson is used to teach students the “REACT” Strategy, which is designed to help students think about the assignment as it is being presented during class and devise a plan for completing it. The REACT Steps prompt students to

- **R**evue the directions
- **E**valuate whether the directions are complete
- **A**sk questions to better understand the assignment
- **C**reate a plan to complete the assignment
- **T**arget some goals in terms of producing quality work

### **The Quality Assignment Planning Worksheet**

The planning form contained in the *Quality Assignment Routine* is called the Quality Assignment Planning Worksheet (Figure 4 on page 7). This planning tool will guide teacher thinking toward the development of a quality assignment, an assignment that students find meaningful and motivating and, as a result, that students are more likely to complete. The emphasis is on creating an assignment that *all* students in the class can complete because it contains a number of options to choose from that address the specific learning needs and interests of each individual.

The planning process entails thinking about the interests and

Figure 2

skills of students in the class, considering the problems they face when they have to complete an assignment, and making adjustments accordingly. The letters HALO on the worksheet remind teachers to consider high-, average-, and low-achieving performers in the class as well as other students who may require some kind of special education support. By using the four sections of the Quality Assignment Planning Worksheet labeled with the letters “P,” “L,” “A,” and “N,” teachers can ensure the development of a high-quality assignment that includes a number of research-based assignment characteristics known to be important when differentiating assignments for diverse learners. Specifically, as teachers fill in each section of the worksheet, they do the following:

- Plan the purpose of the assignment to clarify its link to critical content to be learned and its benefit to the learner
- Link the assignment to students’ needs and interests by considering personal relevance, student choices for doing the work, and the pitfalls to assignment completion students may encounter and how to solve them
- Arrange clear student directions that include a few of the action steps needed to get started, the needed supplies and resources, and the grading criteria
- Note the evaluation date and results by writing down a date to review assignment completion outcomes and afterward recording the results to improve the assignment in the future

## Conclusion

## Steps of the REACT Strategy

- Review the directions
- Evaluate whether the directions are complete
- Ask questions
- Create a plan
- Target some goals

Figure 3

In summary, the *Quality Assignment Routine* contains a number of components that, when used over time, can improve teaching and learning in classrooms where many students fail to achieve because they lack the motivation and strategies to perform quality work. Planning, presenting, and evaluating in partnership with students increase the likelihood that students will not only improve their grades but also acquire work habits that are beneficial for life outside of school. Inasmuch as the “information explosion” is resulting in rapidly changing knowledge bases, students must “learn how to learn” to become independent learners and productive citizens.

Teachers who make the biggest difference in education are those who try new ways of teaching and reaching students. Implementing the *Quality Assignment Routine* should result in two big wins. First, students win when they do authentic work as

they are learning, gain personal satisfaction from their learning, and see that their learning is reflected in the grades they receive. Second, teachers win because improved learning for students is professionally and personally rewarding.

# Hands-on Visual Imagery

**Carla Frasor** of Summit School in Dundee, Illinois, has developed a hands-on activity for use with the Visual Imagery Strategy. The strategy, which requires students to make pictures in their minds as they read each sentence in a passage, is designed to be used by students to improve their understanding and recall of the content of the passage. Carla's activity features a "picture frame" plus laminated scene and detail pieces that students use to construct pictures while reading sentences.

To make picture frames and scene and detail pieces for your students to use, you will need the following for each set:

- a manila folder
- three different colors of paper (Carla used orange for her picture frame, blue for the scene pieces, and yellow for the detail pieces)
- overhead markers
- double-sided tape

You also will need to laminate the folder and scene and detail pieces.

## Making the pieces

1. Copy the "picture frame" (labeled 1 on page 6) onto colored paper. Cut out the frame and attach it to the front of the manila folder. Laminate the entire folder.
2. Using a second color of paper, copy the two "scene pieces" (labeled 2 and 3 on page 6). Cut out and laminate these pieces.
3. Using a third color of paper, copy the three "detail" pieces (labeled 4 and 5 on this page and 6 on page 8). Cut out and laminate these pieces.

Use double-sided tape or some other means to enable students to affix the scene and detail pieces to the laminated folder. Store the scene and detail pieces inside the folder when not in use.

## The procedure

Students use these materials in conjunction with the steps of the Visual Imagery Strategy. Have students do the following as they read a sample sentence:

**Step 1: Search for picture words**

Using an overhead marker, write picture words from a sample sentence on the "picture frame."

**Step 2: Create or change the scene**

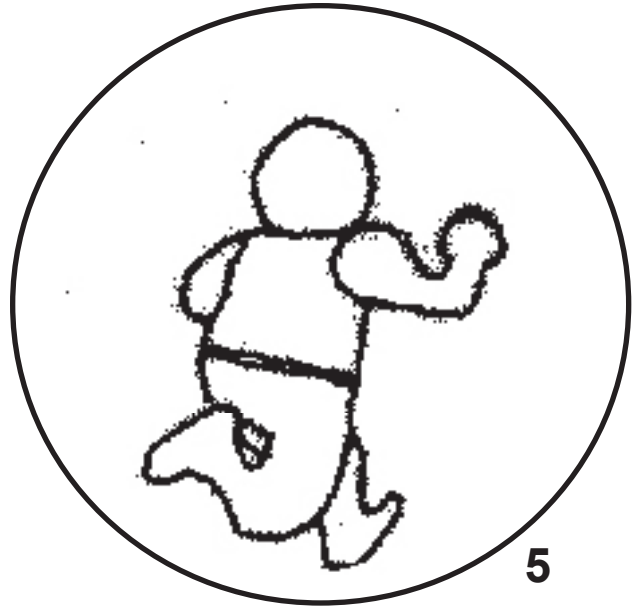
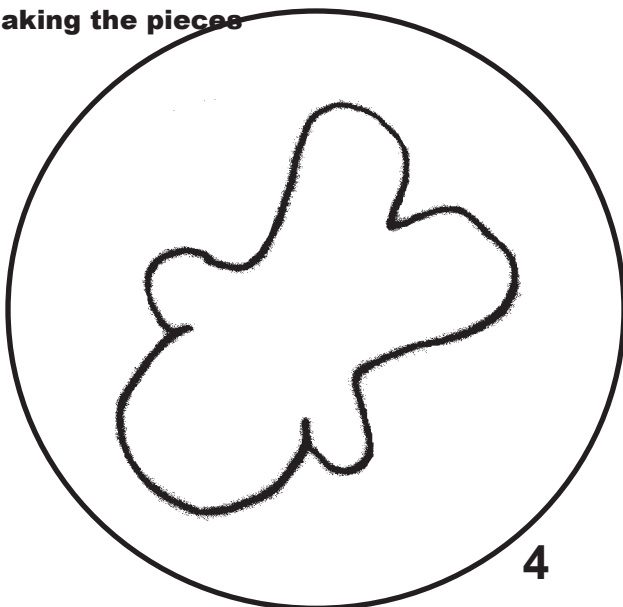
Identify two scene words and write one word on each of the "scene" pieces. Place the scene pieces within the picture frame, using double-sided tape or some other means to hold the pieces in place.

**Step 3: Enter lots of details**

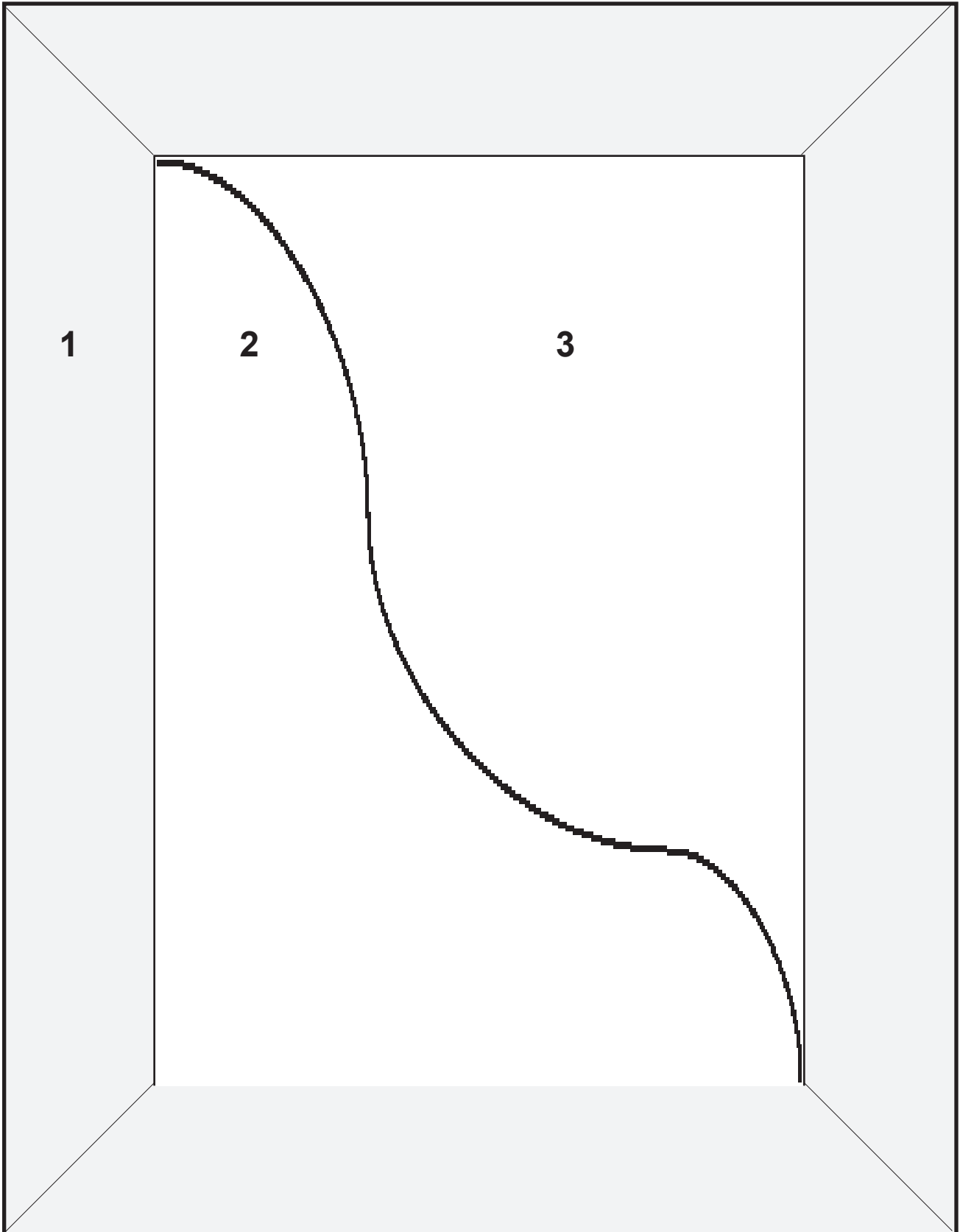
Identify three details—a person, an action, and one other detail—corresponding with the three "detail" pieces. Place the detail pieces on top of the scene pieces in the picture frame, again using double-sided tape or some other means to hold the pieces in place.

**Step 4: Name the parts**

**Step 5: Evaluate the picture**



**FOR THE CLASSROOM**



Course World History  
Unit Ancient Greece

**The Quality Assignment  
Planning Worksheet**

**P**  
*Plan the purpose of the assignment*

1. What will students accomplish?  
Analyze why the Ancient Greek culture was destroyed.  
2. How will they do this?  
By creating a journal from the perspective of someone who lived in Ancient Greece

3. Why is this important? (Benefits)  
So we can understand why such a highly developed civilization fell apart, and prevent the same thing from happening to our own civilization.

**L**  
*Link assignment to student needs & interests (HALO)*

1. How can the assignment be made personally relevant for students?  
Choose 1 aspect of Greek life that interests you (e.g., sports, art, politics, religion)

2. Options/Choices?  
With partner or by self  
Diary or audio-tape  
Athens/Sparta

3. Pitfalls to successful completion of work?  
1. Diary format  
2. Find/use tape recorders

4. Solutions to these pitfalls?  
1. Show sample diary  
2. Tell where to get/how to use tape recorders

**A**  
*Arrange clear student directions*

Action Steps  
1. Plan 7 days  
2. Write each day  
3. Draw picture

Supplies/Resources  
Class notes  
Textbooks  
Library books  
Magazine articles  
Movies  
Imagination

Grading Criteria (PACE, 1, 2, ...)  
1. 7 entries--put date  
2. 3 statements/entry  
3. choose 1 good & 1 bad thing @your interest  
Due Date      Points  
May 18      100

**N**  
*Note due date & results*

Date to review assignment outcomes  
May 22  
Results  
Volume on tapes was too soft.  
Next year, give more instructions on volume control.

Results  
Students had difficulty completing on time. Next year, set an intermediate deadline of 7 days for handing in outline.

Figure 4

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If you have a classroom activity associated with learning strategy instruction or the use of Content Enhancement Routines and you would like to share it with other teachers, please send a detailed description to Julie Tollefson, *Strat-egram* editor, at KU-Center for Research on Learning, 3061 Dole, Lawrence, KS 66045. You also may e-mail a description of your activity to Julie at [jtollefson@ukans.edu](mailto:jtollefson@ukans.edu).

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