

# Quality Assignment Routine: Part 2

## Explaining and Evaluating High Quality Assignments

*Joyce Rademaker  
Assistant Professor  
North Texas State  
University*

**"... student motivation to complete assignments will increase if they are given more power and control throughout the assignment-completion process"**

The Quality Assignment Completion Routine is a teaching routine based upon validated characteristics of enjoyable and satisfying classroom assignments. In addition, the routine incorporates validated explanation factors teachers and students should use when verbally presenting assignments to students. The routine contains a Planning Phase, an Explanation Phase, and an Evaluation Phase.

The last issue of *Strategram* contained specific details on how to use the Planning Phase. (See **Volume 6, No 4** for background research, development, and implementation of the planning steps for creating high-quality assignments.)

This article will present overviews of the Explanation Phase and the Evaluation Phase. Each overview will include a description of the steps contained in each phase, guidelines for using each of the steps, and methods and procedures for involving students in assignment explanations and evaluations. Results of preliminary studies will also be discussed.

### Overview of the Explanation Phase

The purpose of the Explanation Phase is twofold: (a) for teachers to explain assignments (created during the Planning Phase) in such a way to encourage positive interactions between the teacher and students; and (b) for teachers to provide students with all of the essential information about the assignment in an understandable way.

Two subroutines were developed for this phase. The first subroutine is to be used by students when recording and responding to

assignment information as it is verbally explained in class. The second subroutine is to be used by teachers when explaining assignments during class.

### Steps for Involving Students in Assignment Explanations

To help students remember the five steps of this routine, the mnemonic device, "REACT" was devised. The five "REACT" Steps represent a routine way for students to actively involve themselves in the Explanation Phase while the teacher delivers important assignment information.

#### Step 1: Record the assignment.

During this step, students are to write down the information as the teacher gives verbal directions. Information for students to record includes resources needed to complete the work, evaluation criteria on how the final product will be graded, at least two action steps for beginning work on the assignment, and the due date.

**Step 2: Examine requirements and choices.** Here, students are to think about the teachers' expectations for the assignment, as well as what choices were offered for students to complete the work. During this step, the students write notes on what is required for satisfactory assignment completion.

**Step 3: Ask questions to better understand.** This step is intended to encourage students to ask questions about any assignment information that is unclear. Students with learning

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

disabilities are more likely to ask questions if all students in the class are also expected to do so.

**Step 4: Create a goal for improving or matching performance.** Before turning in an assignment, students are to write down the times when they plan to begin the assignment, finish it, and evaluate it for quality by using the "PACE 1,2.." Steps. The "PACE 1,2.." Steps are prompts to the students to check their work for quality dimensions. **An example of a quality evaluation is on p. 4, under "Steps for Students and Teachers to Use In Evaluating Assignments."**

#### Steps for Explaining Assignments

The following six "ASSIGN" Steps represent specific actions and statements to be used by teachers when explaining assignments. The explanation factors that form the framework of this subroutine were validated by a survey of 71 middle school teachers, 71 students with LD, and 102 students without LD. Each explanation factor and rationale is included in the steps below.

**Step 1: Announce the assignment and gain student attention.** Teachers make four brief advance-organizer statements that include words for concluding the lesson, alerting students to the assignment and its purpose, summarizing the content on which the assignment is based, and prompting students to use the "REACT" Steps. This step is based on the validated explanation factor for stating the purpose and benefits of completing the assignment so students will understand important learning outcomes associated with completing the assignment.

(continued on page 3)

## The Assignment Explanation Cue Card

**A**nnounce the assignment and gain student attention.

- \*Conclude the previous lesson.
- \*Briefly summarize the content on which the assignment will be based.
- \*Prompt students to listen and respond (REACT) to the assignment information.

**S**tate clear/well-organized directions.

- \*State the assignment's purpose in relation to important student learning outcomes.
- \*Announce opportunities for student choices.
- \*Name the assignment as students record it.
- \*Engage students in helping you name clear directions to write down.

Resources needed  
Evaluation criteria for final product  
Action steps (2 or more) for beginning the work  
Due date/s

- \*Discuss potential pitfalls and/or provide models/ examples if necessary.

**S**top for students to REACT to assignment information.

(Pause 15-30 seconds for students to use the following steps.)

**R**ecord the assignment information.

**E**xamine requirements and choices.

**A**sk questions to better understand.

**C**reate a goal to match/improve performance.

**T**arget a time to begin, end, and use the PACE 1, 2..Steps.

Investigate student understanding.

- \*Ask students to paraphrase directions.
- \*Ask students to repeat certain directions.
- \*Ask a final check question.

**G**uarantee work time (5 minute minimum) and offer help.

- \*Announce time limit for working on the assignment in class.
- \*Prompt "quality work" expectations.
- \*Offer help.

**N**ote due date, quality work expectations, and offer help.

- \*Announce the end of class work time.
- \*Note time due.
- \*State your expectation for students to perform "quality work."
- \*Offer help.

(continued from page 2)

**Step 2: State clear, well-organized directions.** The teacher explains the assignment according to the complete directions that were arranged during the Planning Phase. The first validated explanation factor included in this step is giving clear directions. As the teacher gives the assignment directions, she includes other validated factors in her presentation such as the following: stating quality work criteria, so students will know how the assignment is to be graded; providing student choices, so students understand their options on how to complete the assignment; and naming available resources, so students will understand the materials and human resources that must be used. In addition, the teacher mentions any pitfalls, and also incorporates models and/or examples, so students will have a clearer understanding of how to do the assignment. Validated explanation factors such as encouraging creative expression and providing social interaction directions for students who might choose to work together might also be included.

**Step 3: Stop for students to "REACT."** At this time, the teacher pauses for 15 to 30 seconds to give students time to apply each step of the "REACT" subroutine, including recording the assignment and asking questions.

**Step 4: Investigate student understanding.** This step requires the teacher to ask students specific questions about the assignment information to ensure their understanding of the assignment and to clarify where necessary. The teacher uses questioning techniques aimed at asking students to paraphrase and/or repeat parts of the assignment information. The

teacher also conducts a final check by giving students an opportunity to ask questions.

**Step 5: Guarantee work time and offer help.** The teacher allows students time to begin the assignment in class and provides them with any needed assistance. This step is intended to incorporate the validated explanation factor of considering time factors. Students are given time to begin the work as the teacher provides the needed help to get students started on the right track. During this step, the teacher also states expectations for

students to perform high-quality work on the assigned task.

**Step 6: Note the due date, quality work expectations, and offer help.** The teacher reminds students when the assignment is due, announces an expectation for quality performance from each student, and offers assistance for any student who needs it outside of class. Teachers can use the Assignment Explanation Cue Card as a useful tool in prompting them to incorporate these explanation factors into their presentation of assignments.

(continued on page 4)

## The Evaluation Phase Cue Card

- V**alidate graded assignment according to PACE 1,2.. Steps.
  - \* Before the discussion, grade the students' assignments according to the PACE 1,2,.. criteria.
  - \* Think about feedback to give the class did according to the PACE 1,2, ..
  - \* Return papers to students before the discussion.
- O**rganize discussion feedback according to feedback. (Teacher)
  - \* Make positive comments related to class performance on PACE (the standards for all completed work).
    - Promptness
    - Arranged neatly
    - Completeness
    - Edited for clarity
  - \* Make positive comments related to class performance on the PACE 1,2..Steps (the special requirements that were designated for a particular assignment).
  - \* Make corrective statements on how the class might improve on PACE.
  - \* Important! Based on the corrective feedback, set a goal and problem solve with students on how they might improve.
- T**ell the correction date (for when students may return corrected work).
- E**xamine personal reactions to the task and its outcomes.
  - \* Conduct discussions related to the PACE 1,2.. criteria and/ or
  - \* Have students complete a written evaluation using the Personal Reaction To Assignment Completion form.

(continued from page 3)

### Overview of the Evaluation Phase

The purpose of this phase is to evaluate self-satisfaction with both the assignment itself and with the effort that was expended throughout the assignment-completion process. Two subroutines were developed for this phase. The first is intended for both students and teachers to use when evaluating student products according to the quality-work criteria. The second routine was developed for teachers to use when conducting discussion sessions with students for the purpose of evaluating self-satisfaction with the assignment itself and the assignment-completion outcomes. The framework for this routine is based on implications from the literature that student motivation to complete assignments will increase if they are given more power and control throughout the assignment-completion process.

#### Steps for Students and Teachers to Use in Evaluating Assignments

The mnemonic device, "PACE 1,2,..." was devised to help students and teachers remember the procedures for evaluating assignments according to a set of quality criteria. These standards were chosen based on conversations with social studies teachers on what they considered to be the basic minimum requirements for a completed assignment to be judged as a quality product.

The letters in "PACE" stand for "Prompt," "Arranged Neatly," "Complete," and "Edited for Clarity." These are conventional standards that were chosen for the purpose of the project.

The series of numbers (1,2,...) that follow the "PACE" letters represent specific criteria, identified by the teacher and/or the teacher and class together that are specific to a particular assignment and that must be present on the completed assignment. For example, if a teacher assigns a written report on the battles of the Civil War, the teacher might remind students of the "PACE" standards that the report be prompt, arranged neatly, complete, and edited for clarity. In addition, the teacher might specify as the number "1" criterion that the report include at least three outside references. The teacher might then inform students that the number "2" criterion for quality work on this assignment be an illustration based on the report's content. The teacher and/or students may add more numbers ("3", "4", etc.) to represent additional specified criteria for an assignment to be judged as a quality product. The rationale for teaching this routine is based on findings from the literature that indicate that in order for students to improve their work, they must become involved in the process of evaluating their own work for quality (Glasser, 1990).

After students have a clear understanding of the meaning of "PACE 1,2,..." they are taught how to write the mnemonic device on their papers according to the following steps on page 6.

#### Steps for Involving Students in Assignment Discussions

The mnemonic device "VOTE" is intended to remind teachers of guidelines for giving assignment completion feedback. Assignment completion feedback represents validated dimensions for planning and explaining assignments. Therefore, the guidelines for this subroutine are based upon effective methods and procedures for giving feedback that were identified in the literature. Because completion feedback usually occurs after students have completed the work, these guidelines were developed to be used by the teacher with students after that had completed and evaluated their own assignments based on the "PACE 1,2,..." subroutine.

(continued on page 6)

#### 1994-95 STRATEGRAM RENEWAL FORM

Mail a \$13 check or money order  
and this form to:

Strategram  
University of Kansas Center for  
Research on Learning  
Room 3061 Dole Human  
Development Center  
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

#### Strategram Renewal Form 1994-95

(Send this form in with your check)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

(please place school district orders in the name of one employee)

**Hands On Activities**

by

Shari Schindele & Janet Jones  
Osseo, Minnesota

In the last edition of *Strategram*, Vol 6, No 4, the Osseo public schools presented an overview of their Learning Strategies program. Teachers in these schools use hands-on activities before the Controlled Practice stage to provide effective reviews and cooperative learning opportunities. Multiple word lists (see below) on different colored paper are laminated, cut apart, and stored in envelopes. Students sort the words on the word list according to the headings. (physical action, mental action, helping verb, or linking verb.) Note that the first nine verbs listed are linking verbs. These can be omitted if that sorting task is too difficult for some students. This activity can also be done in relation to sorting subjects or verb tenses. Shari Schindele and Janet Jones developed these simple activities to benefit students who are learning the *Sentence Writing Strategy*.

being	is	thought	hunt
can	am	squeak	pace
could	are	reason	laugh
do	was	moved	listen
does	were	arranged	blinked
did	be	saluted	consider
shall	been	stood	trembled
should	become	admired	bulged
will	seem	dream	peeked
would	is	imagine	moved
may	am	study	ponder
might	are	shook	worry
must	sing	think	jog
has	crash	scratch	replied
have	question	quiver	hope
had	panicked	accepted	fussed
run	perked	spilled	paint
was	were	be	been

(continued from page 4)

**Step 1: Validate student scores.** This means that teachers are to grade the assignment and score it according to the "PACE 1,2,..." criteria. Then they are to compare their own ratings with the student ratings before returning the graded assignment to the student during class. Knowledge of these results become part of the feedback that is provided during the discussion that takes place between teacher and students.

**Step 2: Organize the verbal feedback.** Teachers are expected to give two types of feedback: (a) positive comments on how well the class has performed on the assignment according to the conventional standards ("PACE") and the specific criteria (1,2,...); and (b) comments that indicate where the student could make corrections. This feedback is delivered in class after the assignment have been turned back to the students. After the positive and corrective feedback have been delivered, the teacher is to involve the class in setting a goal to improve their future performance.

**Step 3: Tell the correction date.** Here, teachers are to announce that students will have an opportunity to improve their grade by making appropriate new responses and turning the product back in to the teacher by a certain time. Again, the rationale behind this step is taken from the literature that implies students will learn how to improve their work when given opportunities to do so (Glasser, 1990).

**Step 4: Examine personal reactions to the task.** During this step, teachers and students make written rankings and comments according to their satisfaction with the assignment itself, student effort during completion, and specific

(continued on page 7)

## PACE 1, 2, ... Steps

**Step 1:** Write PACE, 1, 2, ... in small letters on the back of your completed assignment and draw two lines under each letter. On the first line, students place a "√" mark according to whether or not they believe the criterion is met. On the second line teachers record their ratings.

	P	A	C	E
Student Rating	—	—	—	—
Teacher Rating	—	—	—	—

**Step 2:** Write the numbers "1", "2", (and "3", "4", etc. ) according to the number of special requirements that have been established by the teacher and/or class. Draw two lines under these numbers. Beside each number, write a word or two that describes the special requirement.

Example	P	A	C	E	1 (3 references)	2 (picture)
Student Rating	—	—	—	—	—	—
Teacher Rating	—	—	—	—	—	—

**Step 3:** Rate yourself on the first line according to how well you met each criteria for quality work on this assignment. Place a "√" on the first line if you believe you met the criterion. Place a "0" on the line if you believe you did not meet criterion. Leave the second line blank for your teacher to rate your work.

Example	P	A	C	E	1 (3 references)	2 (picture)
Student Rating	√	0	√	√	√	0
Teacher Rating	√	√	√	√	√	√

**PERSONAL REACTION TO ASSIGNMENT  
COMPLETION FORM**

Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Compare your student score (S) with the teacher's score (T) on PACE 1,2..

Standards (PACE): (S) \_\_\_\_\_ (T) \_\_\_\_\_

Special requirements (1,2,3...): (S) \_\_\_\_\_ (T) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Evaluate your performance results (✓):

How satisfied am I with my work on this assignment?

1            2            3            4            5

In what area do I need to improve next time to create a quality product?

3. Complete a satisfaction check on this assignment.

How satisfied am I with this assignment?

1            2            3            4            5

What did I like or not like about the assignment?

What did I enjoy or not enjoy doing on this assignment?

How satisfied am I with how the teacher explained this assignment?

1            2            3            4            5

4. Consider the knowledge you gained by finishing this assignment.

What did I learn by doing this assignment?

How will this knowledge help me in the future?

*(continued from page 6)*

learning outcomes as a result of having completed the work. Teachers can use the Evaluation Phase Cue Card and the Personal Reaction to Assignment-Completion form as guidelines for implementing the steps of this phase. (See page 3&7)

**Results of Preliminary Studies**

Both the Explanation Phase and the Evaluation Phase were implemented by six middle-school social studies teachers who taught grades 6, 7, and 8. Teachers were observed as they implemented each step. A checklist was used to determine which behaviors were exhibited by these teachers. In addition, satisfaction measures were gathered from teachers and students.

**Explanation Phase Results.** Prior to training, the Experimental Teachers' mean percentage score related to using the explanation steps was 45.6% prior to training and 99.4% after training. Mean scores for a comparison group of teachers were 46.9% before the study and 41.3% after the study. Results based on the Experimental Teachers' performance indicated that teachers can learn to explain assignments according to a set of validated explanation factors.

A satisfaction survey administered to the teachers indicated they were generally more pleased with their assignment explanations after the

*(continued on page 8)*

**Strategram**

Vol. 6: Issue number 5. Published six times per year by The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, Dole Human Development Center-Room 3061, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-2342. Subscription rate: \$13 per year. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher, unless otherwise stated.

©1994 by The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045. All rights reserved.

**Editor**

*Mary Lee*

**Consulting Editors**

*Keith Lenz*

*Don Deshler*

*Jean Schumaker*

(continued from page 7)

study than before training. Positive teacher comments on the Explanation Phase indicated that they felt students had a much clearer understanding of assignments. On the negative side, however, they felt that some of the more capable students became impatient with the routine. They also said that some students expressed dissatisfaction with having to record assignment information in more detail rather than the use the assignment sheet to which they were accustomed.

Student satisfaction measures also suggest that students were more satisfied with their teachers' method of explaining assignments after the intervention than before the teachers received training in the explanation steps. Student comments implied that teachers took more time to give explicit directions, allowed students to get started in class, and checked for understanding by asking more questions related to the assignment explanation. The students also mentioned the "REACT" Steps as beneficial because they improved assignment-completion and organization, improved assignment-completion quality, and improved assignment-completion understanding. Students also implied that teachers should have given clearer directions on how to use the "REACT" Steps, and that students would benefit from memorizing and generalizing these steps. As with the teachers, students felt that the format they used for writing down assignment information could be simplified.

**Evaluation Phase Results.** The Experimental Teachers' mean percentage scores on this phase were 11.1% before the study and 92.8% after the study. In comparison, the mean scores for Comparison Teachers were 8.3% during baseline and 3.3% at the end of the study.

Satisfaction survey results indicated that teachers were more pleased with their methods and procedures for involving students in assignment completion discussions. When asked to list comments on student outcomes for the Evaluation Phase, one teacher remarked that students had acknowledged they were aware of downfalls and placed they could improve. In addition, some students were beginning to take advantage of the chance to resubmit their work. Three comments from teachers were placed in the negative category when the statements implied that: students exert little effort in evaluating their work; students often neglect to do something for which there is no reward; and that some students had difficulty completing the steps of the evaluation process.

In conclusion, the research data on the Explanation and Evaluation Phases of the routine indicate that teachers can learn to verbally present assignments based on a set of validated criteria. In addition, they can successfully involve students in assignment discussions that hold promise for increasing student motivation to perform satisfactorily on the assignments they are expected to complete in content classes. Though comments by both teachers and students were generally favorable, the research on these two phases of the routine, as in with Planning Phase, points to the importance of listening to students as we develop methods and procedures for teaching students how to learn and perform across a variety of school and community settings. In particular, when we teach students how to become active participants in the planning, explanation, and self-evaluation of assignments, we provide them with the necessary tools for improving their learning and performance in classes where assignments represent a major vehicle for learning the content.

---

The University of Kansas  
Center for Research on Learning  
Rm. 3061 Robert Dole Bldg.  
Lawrence, Kansas 66045-2342  
1-913-864-4780

Address change requested

Non Profit Org. U.S. Postage <b>PAID</b> Lawrence, Kansas Permit No. 65
---