

Constructive Alignment

Category: Assessment, Feedback and Learning

Constructive alignment is an approach to curriculum design in which intended learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment are deliberately coordinated. ‘Constructive’ reflects the view that learners construct meaning through relevant activity; ‘alignment’ means that teaching and assessment consistently invite the performances expressed in the outcomes.

The process begins by stating what learners should be able to do and the standard expected, then designing environments that make those actions necessary. Assessment provides credible evidence of the intended learning rather than testing convenient but different accomplishments ([Biggs, 1996](#)).

Alignment Process

1. **Define outcomes:** Express significant disciplinary performances, content and expected level clearly.
2. **Specify evidence:** Decide what observable work would demonstrate each outcome and standard.
3. **Design activities:** Engage learners in practising the reasoning and performance to be assessed.
4. **Align assessment:** Use tasks and criteria that sample the intended outcomes validly and fairly.
5. **Review the system:** Compare intentions, learner activity and results, then correct gaps or overload.

Examples in Practice

If an outcome requires students to evaluate policy evidence, lectures alone are insufficient. Seminars model evaluation, students practise with contrasting sources, and the assessment requires a reasoned policy judgement using explicit evidential criteria.

Why It Matters

Constructive alignment promotes coherence and communicates what meaningful participation requires. It should not become a mechanical matching exercise: quality depends on worthwhile outcomes, challenging learner activity, valid evidence and institutional conditions that support the design. Backward design can support alignment, but constructive alignment particularly stresses the quality of the learner activity that produces the intended change in understanding or genuine capability ([Biggs, 2014](#)).

Further Reading

6. Biggs, J. (1996). [Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment](#). Higher Education, 32, 347–364.
7. Biggs, J. (2014). [Constructive alignment in university teaching](#). HERDSA Review of Higher Education, 1, 5–22.
8. Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). [Teaching for quality learning at university](#) (4th ed.). Open University Press.

Related Terms: Learning Outcomes | Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy | Curriculum Design | Assessment Validity