
*DUST FROM
THE CHALKBOARD*



Contracting

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Faculty are often confronted with unique scenarios which seem not to lend themselves to the teaching methodologies upon which we normally depend. For example, essay assignments and examinations are quite cumbersome for large classes. Ironically, very small groups of students can also pose difficulties. Faculty may even find themselves involved in a course with only one or two students. From a cost/benefit perspective it may not be practical to conduct a course in the same way that a larger group of students would be handled.

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A concept that grew out of the Mastery Learning Movement offers much potential for teaching situations in which only one or a few students are involved (*e.g.*, contemporary topics, directed research, directed readings, etc.).

Basically, contracting involves a written agreement which outlines what the student is expected to accomplish and the criteria by which evaluation will be made. Usually, the student is involved in the negotiation of the contract. It should provide a time frame, as well as other important information.

Outline 1 shows an example of a contract utilized by one of the authors and a graduate student at the University of Wyoming. This particular student was working on a Master's Degree in Health, Physical Education, and Recreation and wanted to take a course in Public Health during a semester when it was not normally offered. It was agreed that the student would enroll in a directed readings course with his major advisor, since he needed credit for that program. He would complete the course in accordance with the terms of the contract. At the end of the semester, his major advisor was provided with a brief report of his activities and progress and a recommended grade.

Contracting can work quite well by providing all concerns with the written terms by which the requirements of a given course may be met. Contracts can be quite simple, or they can be more complex, depending upon the criteria of the course and the learning objectives to be mastered.

In addition to use with small groups of students, contracts may also be useful for courses which change in content from semester to semester, or for courses in which students are allowed some independence in their activities (*e.g.*, research projects).

Contracts can be creative and useful tools. They offer psychological advantages as well. Negotiations regarding the terms of the contract allow students to invest something of themselves in the course. This encourages students to take "ownership" of the project involved.

OUTLINE 1: Sample Contract

STUDENT: John Doe

COURSE: PUBLIC HEALTH (Phar 4520)

PROFESSORS: Gary A. Holt, M.Ed., Ph.D., R.Ph. (Pharmacy),
Ward Gates, M.A., Ph.D. (HPER)

I _____ (student) agree to abide by the terms of this contract regarding completion of requirements for the course, PUBLIC HEALTH (Phar 4520).

The following will be required for successful completion of the course:

1. Participation in scheduled discussion meetings.
2. Reading/discussions of required reading assignments.
3. Completion of 5 discussion papers. These are take-home assignments regarding topics that will be provided to the student by Dr. Holt. The papers will be graded in accordance to guidelines provided to the student.

Determination of Grade:

Participation/Discussions	40%
Papers (@ 12% each)	60%

We, the undersigned, agree to the terms of this contract.

John Doe (Student)

Date

Gary A. Holt (Faculty)

Date

Ward Gates (Faculty Advisor)

Date