



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Teaching Technique 33

Frames

ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Application: Critical Thinking
- Group Work

TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Cheating
- Insufficient Class Preparation
- Surface Learning

LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Application: Analysis & Critical Thinking
- Integration & Synthesis
- Learning How to Learn

Frames

A *Frame* is a template of sentence stems that provides the shape (but not the content) of a short essay which students complete, thereby expressing their ideas but within a structured framework.

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- 1** Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the *Frame*
 - 2** Identify what students should examine and the kind of thinking they should do
 - 3** Create a “frame” that provides a skeleton of an essay
 - 4** Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
 - 5** Communicate assignment instructions to students
 - 6** Allow students time to complete the *Frame*
 - 7** Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Frames are writing assignments that instructors give individual students or student teams to complete. The *Frame* is a template of sentence stems that provides the shape of a short essay but not the content. Students complete the sentences, expressing their ideas in their own words, but they do so within a clear and organized framework. Acknowledging that no teaching tool can guarantee that students will engage in hard, rigorous thought, a *Frame's* template can stimulate and shape such thought, guiding learners through the steps that comprise analysis and critical thinking and requiring them to make the key intellectual moves that they may not do on their own.

Frames can be used to support close reading of homework assignments, thus helping ensure students come prepared for class. They can also scaffold different learning levels such as analysis and critical thinking or integration and synthesis, thus helping students move beyond surface learning. *Frames* can help prevent the academic dishonesty sometimes associated with the conventional term paper assignment. The framework makes it impossible to do wholesale copying and discourages the copy-and-paste approach because of the difficulty of matching pre-existing writing to the information required to fill in the blanks. *Frames* can therefore be used for many different purposes, so it is important for you to think through how this technique might work best in your class.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Students complete a skeletal framework of an essay to demonstrate specific kinds of thinking.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

To set the parameters for this activity, consider the following steps:

- Choose a course-related topic or reading assignment that you would like students to examine analytically and critically.
- Decide on the specifics of the kind of thinking you want them to do:
 - › Evaluate conflicting positions and decide which one is best.
 - › Examine the validity of the arguments or conclusions.
 - › Challenge their own assumptions.

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



- Write out a brief essay that addresses your goals and has a clear rhetorical structure, then copy the essay and delete information from the copy so that you have a 'skeleton' of the essay. Make copies of the frame along with directions to use as a handout for students, retaining the original as an assessment tool.
- Determine other parameters such as whether this will be a group or individual assignment, the time allowed for the activity, how students should submit their completed *Frames*, etc.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Choose how you wish to assess or grade the completed *Frames*. For example, a simple plus, check, or minus may be sufficient for a simple *Frame* essay, while you may want to create a rubric for more complex *Frame* essays.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Distribute the *Frames* handout either to individual students or to groups of students, explain directions, and answer any process questions.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

Allow time for students to write their essays using the *Frame* as a guide. Then collect the essays, using your original essay to assess the students' essays.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For *Frames*, we provide examples of different kinds of templates.

EXAMPLES OF FRAMES

A *Frame* may be simple or more complex, and completed individually or in small groups, as indicated by the following examples.

- **Example 1: Simple Frame (Individual Assignment):**

"Theory X proposes that _____ and is very useful because it offers insights into _____. On the other hand, Theory Y, which proposes _____, does a better job at explaining _____."

- **Example 2: Medium Frame (Group Assignment):**

The author's main point in this essay is _____. The evidence she provides to support her view is _____. On the other hand, others argue that _____. To support their views, they point out that _____. The issue, then, seems to be whether _____ or _____. Our view is _____. Although we concede that _____, we maintain that _____ because _____.

- **Example 3: More Extensive Frame (Individual or Group Assignment):**

In recent discussions of _____, a controversy has been whether _____. Our own thought is that perhaps _____. To find out, we designed a research project to _____. Our central question was _____. To help us draw conclusions, we relied on the following kinds of data: _____. Our key methods for generating this data were _____. Some of the problems we ran into were _____. But it was also quite exciting when _____ happened. Our findings are important because _____.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Elizabeth Barkley adapted *Frames* in her course, *Music of Multicultural America*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *Frames* Completed Technique Template:

Content from Elizabeth Barkley

Music of Multicultural America

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

My course is an on campus, Honors Institute section of a lower division General Education course. The course meets my institution's United States Cultures & Communities requirement and also the Humanities requirement. It enrolls about 25-30 students. A significant number are international students and we are trying to recruit more first generation students. As Honors students, they typically have good academic skills and are highly motivated.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

I am looking for a collaborative activity that will help students think through course-related issues in small groups and then report out in a manner that is consistent so that I can more efficiently compare and assess small group discussion.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

I will experiment with this activity by having students clarify their thinking on the issues related to the special benefits and advantages enjoyed by politicians.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

I will lecture on the topic of Constitutional privileges awarded under the Constitution. Then I will organize students into groups of 3 and have them complete the following frame: When it comes to the topic of the special privileges awarded politicians, members of our group agree that _____. However, we disagreed on the question of _____. Whereas some are convinced that _____, others maintain that _____. We believe that this is an important issue because _____.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

I will use this primarily as a formative assessment strategy and collect the Frames at the end of class, and then grade them with a simple plus, check, or minus that I will record under the participation category of their grade. I can use the results to determine whether or not I need to lecture more on this topic at the next class session.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

I will include instructions and the Frame itself in a handout that I will distribute in class.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

I will do a pretty straightforward implementation of this technique, and all I need to do is create the handout and determine how much class time I'll allow for this activity.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

After I implemented this technique and evaluated the essays, I decided it was a good activity to ensure groups stayed on topic and that they had a product to produce that helped ensure accountability. I am going to try creating frames for other applications, for example, to guide students in how to post comments on specific topics in the online discussion forum.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Frames** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor’s Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

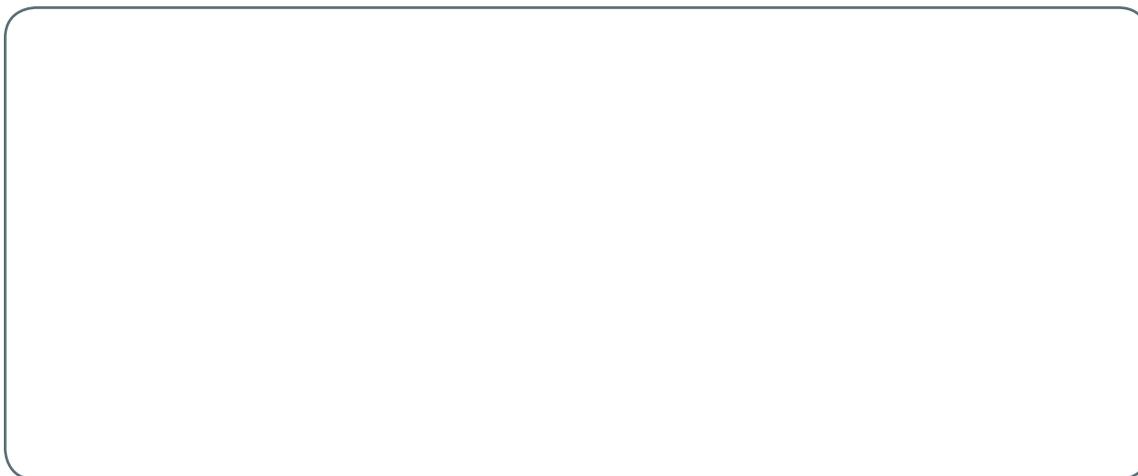
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

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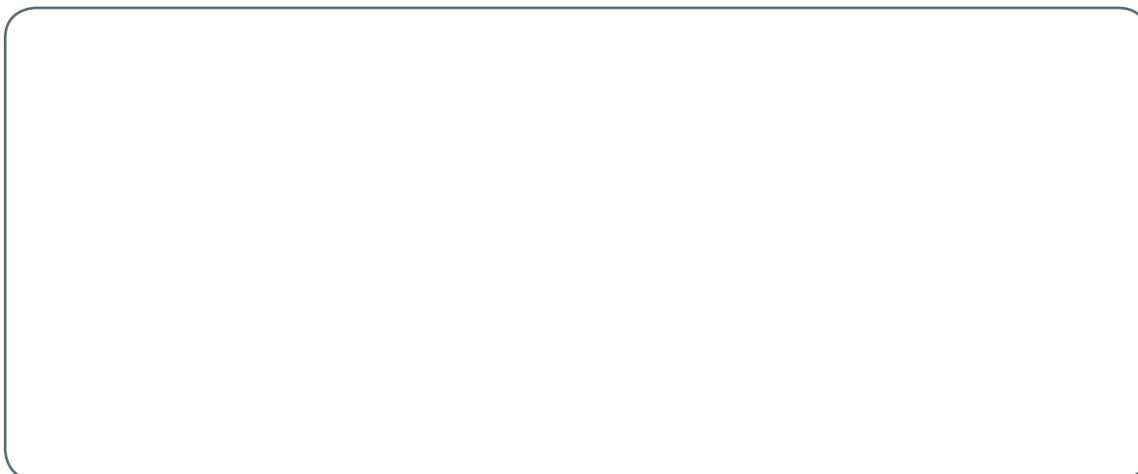
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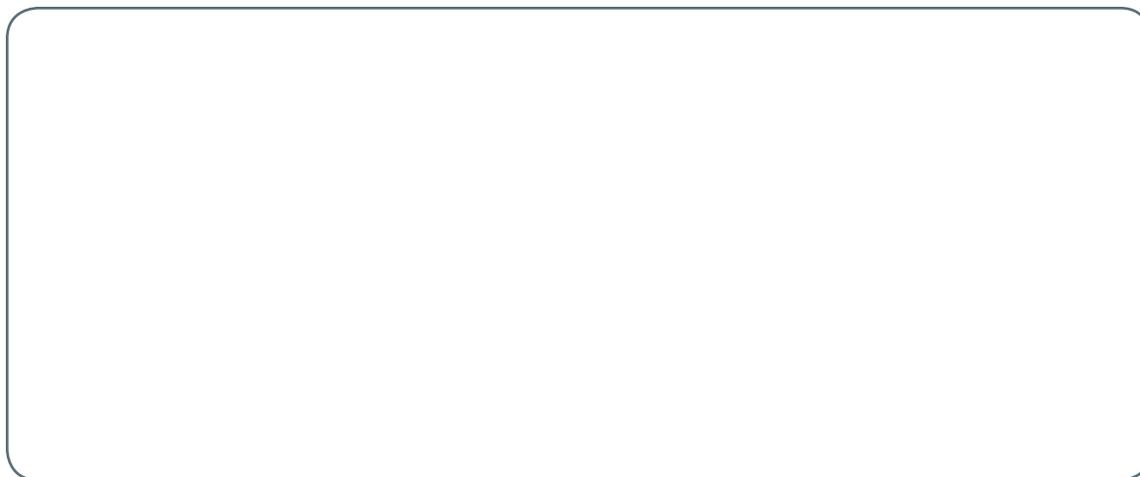
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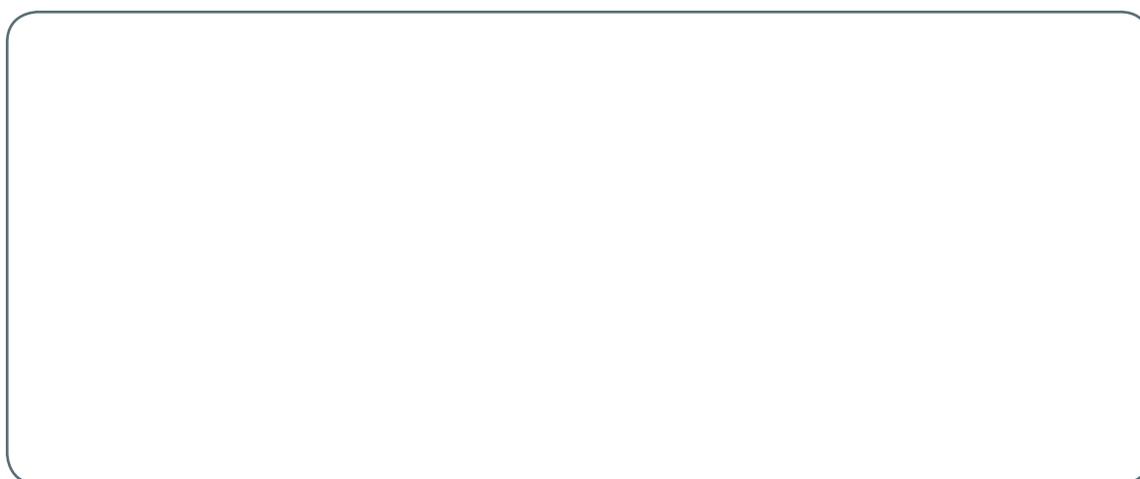
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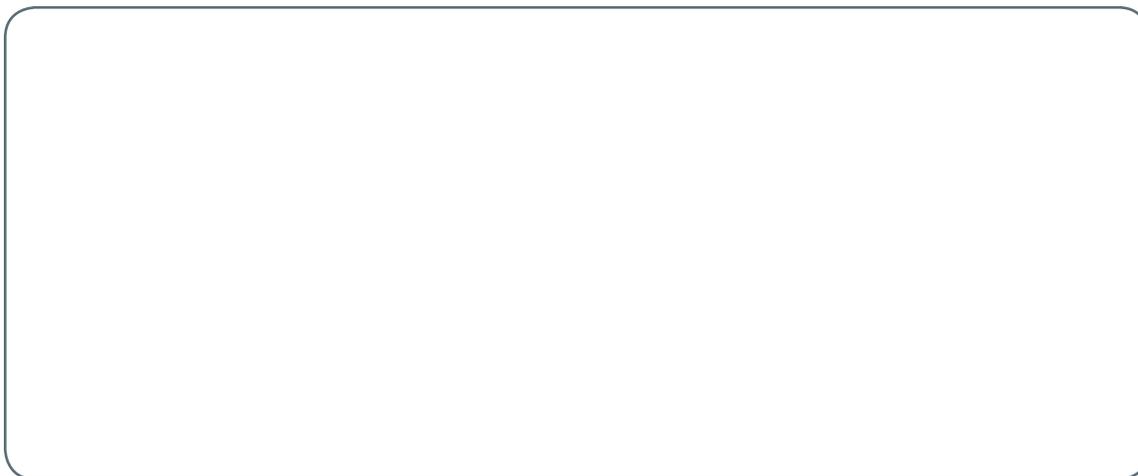
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STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

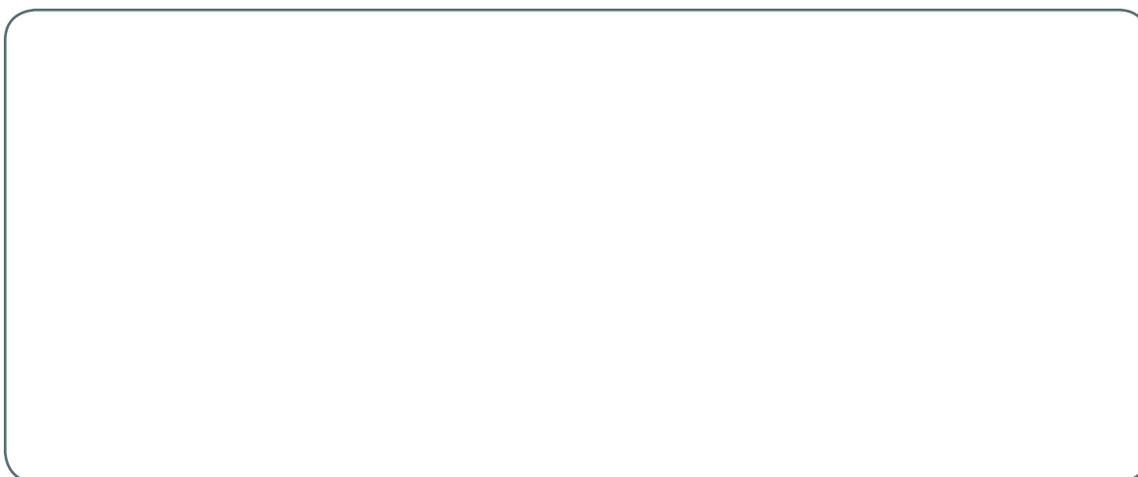
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STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?



References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Student Engagement Technique 9: Frames” in *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, 2010), pp. 191–194. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F. (2010). *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2006) *“They say/I say”*: The moves that matter in academic writing. New York: Norton.

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