

Understanding by Design, 2d

By Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe (2005). 370 pages, ISBN: 9781416600350. \$26

Subject: How to be a better teacher

Useful for: Teachers and anyone interested in learning processes.

Format: Chapters with charts, an appendix with worksheet templates, a glossary, and an index.

Reviewer's Comments:

Flip open the pages of this book and you can immediately see this is not just another text by someone churning it out simply for the sake of churning out another title; the authors are committed to improving instruction. Though much of the research is drawn from work with K-12, the emphasis here is on understanding, not learning—on truly grasping a subject and not just being able to recite key phrases or concepts, a concept that is applicable to all students no matter what age.

This book is not a step-by-step program, but instead a framework for rethinking how we teach, with tools to help apply these ideas to any curriculum, and any audience. The overall focus is on providing an opportunity for us to evaluate and rethink how we design our classes or instructional sessions—the goal is for us to think first about our goals for our students, and then to think about how to achieve them, an idea the authors call backward design. This approach is useful not only for academic instruction (which also has to consider the AALL Principles and Standards for Legal Research Competency), but also for instruction in other settings with diverse audiences and needs.

The text progresses by introducing these new ideas, explaining them thoroughly, providing tools to apply them, discussing criteria for assessment, and reviewing the framework as a whole, all the while providing an example (our friend Bob James) for us to follow as he learns to apply these concepts. The authors include well-placed call out boxes to discuss common misconceptions, and provide figures for examples such as what a teaching unit might look like before applying backward design, and then how it appears after.

I suggest this work is an essential read for anyone doing any sort of instruction. As a highly visual learner, I really appreciated how the authors break up the text with sample worksheets, explanatory boxes, and call outs to emphasize important points and provide the chance to pause and reflect on concepts as the reader works through the material. Everything about the content is geared towards helping me help my students, and I can say with certainty that backward design has made a difference for me.

Reviewed by: Heather Joy, Chapman University, in 2018.