Prep Resources: How to Improve Prep in this Area
Standard 19: Rigor of Coursework
All Programs

> **Follow these steps to anchor your assignments and improve your preparation program:**
>
> ☐ Limit the scope of course assignments. For example, an anchored assignment to write a lesson plan may provide a short menu of topics, a single grade level, and specific student needs.
>
> ☐ Focus most assignments to objectively evaluate mastery of content and skills, rather than evaluating subjective reflections.
>
> ☐ Anchor most assignments in nearly all courses, particularly those that occur earlier in the teacher prep program.

What is the value of anchoring assignments?

"Anchored" course assignments are essential to rigorous preparation because (1) they evaluate whether candidates have mastered specific, targeted knowledge and skills and (2) they enable instructors to provide constructive, comparative feedback to help candidates become more effective teachers. In contrast, "unanchored" assignments have a broad scope or emphasize candidates' feelings or opinions, impeding measures of mastery, constructive feedback and comparative evaluation.

Because anchored assignments increase the likelihood that candidates will learn and practice defined knowledge and skills, and enable a fuller evaluation of candidates' mastery of such knowledge and skills, they should dominate preparation.

What coursework does this standard examine?

- **Elementary Programs:** Literacy courses relevant to the Early Reading Standard

- **Secondary Programs:** Secondary mathematics and English language arts methods courses

- **Special Education Programs:** Special education instructional design courses

Teacher prep programs base course grades on anchored assignments much less often than other academic disciplines

- 29% — Teacher preparation
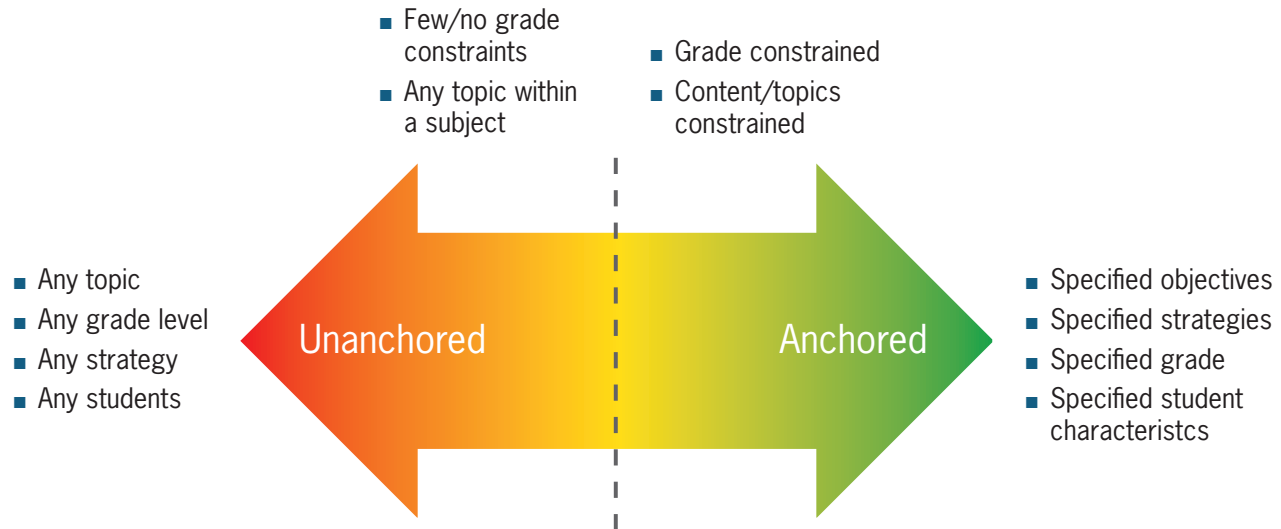- 66% — Other academic disciplines
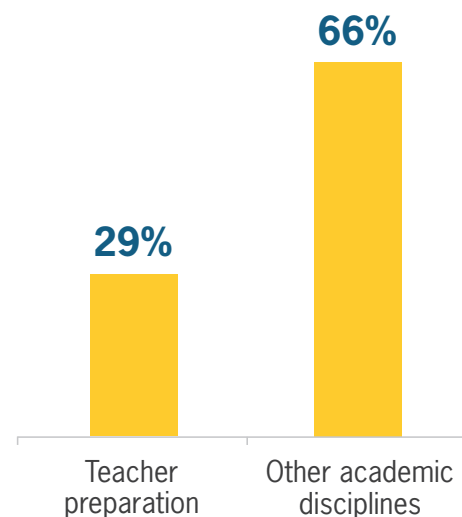
Follow the links below to learn more

Training our Future Teachers: Easy A's and What's Behind Them

Easy A's Appendix D: Converting criterion-deficient assignments to criterion-referenced assignments*

Methodology & Rationale

* Note: We have revised the terminology used in the *Easy A's* report, replacing the term *criterion-referenced* with *anchored* and the term *criterion-deficient* with *unanchored*.

Moving assignments along the Anchoring Spectrum

- Few/no grade constraints
- Any topic within a subject

- Grade constrained
- Content/topics constrained

- Any topic
- Any grade level
- Any strategy
- Any students

Unanchored

Anchored

- Specified objectives
- Specified strategies
- Specified grade
- Specified student characteristcs

Assignments can fall anywhere along a spectrum of less to more anchored. When too many assignments are unanchored, teacher candidates may only practice the skills and content they find easiest or most interesting, never receiving feedback on the core skills and knowledge they'll need as a teacher.

How to anchor an assignment

	Unanchored assignment	Steps to anchor	Why the anchored assignment is more effective
Example 1	Develop a lesson plan: (1) a history lesson plan, (2) an economics lesson plan or (3) a government lesson plan. Include modifications for one of the special student groups: English language learners, dyslexia, gifted or attention deficit.	Rather than allowing the teacher candidate to choose any subject area and the type of modification, the instructor should: - Specify the standards and content area that the lesson plan should address. - Specify the type of special student groups for which modifications should be made. - Provide videos, sample work, and/or written descriptions of the students in the special student group to narrow down the students' specific needs.	Limiting the scope of the content lets the instructor efficiently compare the work across teacher candidates to determine who has a strong grasp of the material and who may need additional training in teaching the standards and making appropriate accommodations. Providing greater detail about students and their work ensures that candidates practice making accommodates that are appropriately suited to the students' needs.
Example 2	Using an assessment you designed for your field placement, explain two modifications you would make to adapt to special student groups.	The assignment asks every candidate to revise a different assessment for different student needs. The instructor would be able to better evaluate candidates' mastery of assessment modifications if the assignment: - Asked every candidate to modify the same assessment. - Identified a few specific student groups that candidates are more likely to encounter.	Asking every candidate to revise the same assessment lets the instructor compare across assignments and look for specific modification techniques. Specifying the type of student needs ensures that candidates grapple with how to accommodate common student needs, rather than focusing on more obscure needs.