



BASIC BASICS: A FIVE-MINUTE CHECK ON LDC INSTRUCTIONAL LADDER DESIGN

You can do this check for yourself as an author, do it for other authors when you are coaching them on LDC approaches, or do it as an LDC partner checking whether modules are ready for jurying. You will be checking key issues quickly, each showing both an LDC technical issue and a *possibility* of a deeper question about LDC's approach to active student learning. It will work fastest if you start with a paper copy or a PDF file of the whole module.

QUESTION	ACTION	EXPLANATIONS AND EXAMPLES
Are the skills skills?	Touch the words “ability to” in each definition.	If the skill definition does not begin with “ability to,” that is a technical mistake under the LDC Rules of the Road. It may also signal a deeper misunderstanding about the importance of identifying and teaching the lasting skills students need to complete the task. (Actually touching reinforces a fast-paced look at a single feature and discourages thoughtful closer reading, which is usually good but takes a lot longer and can lose sight of the simpler problems this approach is designed to spot.)
Are the products products?	Skim for entries that read like concrete assignments, rather than lasting skills.	LDC skills are abilities students can apply years later in college or career, like “ability to identify credible sources” and “ability to identify and define key terminology.” In contrast, “ability to read Chapter One” and “ability to define three terms assigned by the teacher” are short versions of assignments students will do on specific class days. Look quickly for problems that <i>grab</i> your attention, and then move on.
Are the prompts prompts?	Touch each product entry and make sure it names something students can turn in (or possibly present during the class).	Quick write, list, notes, organizer, and outline are products that can pass from the student’s hand to the teacher’s. An oral report can work as a product if it reaches the teacher during the class: for example, the share step in a “think-pair-share” lets the teacher hear what each twosome has developed. Do probe catchy activity names (like “Riddle Me This” or “Pop and Swap”) to see if they truly culminate in a product the teacher can use to tell whether students are on track or need more support.
Are the scoring guides scoring guides?	Touch each prompt entry and check that it gives directions to students themselves.	A prompt needs to be written as directions to students about developing the product. Good examples might say “take notes” or “fill in the outline” or “create a bibliography,” possibly followed by some further words about how to do that work. Starting with those imperative verbs shows that students themselves are being prompted to do the active learning. If a prompt starts with “students will” or “tell students to” or “the teacher will,” it does not fit the LDC technical rules, and it may also signal that students really will not be expected to engage in active work to build the skills and master the content of the task.
Are instructional strategies all in instructional strategies spaces?	Touch each scoring guide entry and check that it describes features a teacher will see if the product meets expectations.	Scoring guides should identify elements to look for in the student product: things that will provide evidence that students are developing the targeted skill. When teachers check for those features, they can tell if they need to adjust the plan for the whole class and/or give added coaching to a few students who are lagging behind. (A few mini-tasks may have no scoring plan, especially if they are completed quickly and invite students to pull ideas together that they will use in a next learning step that <u>will</u> be scored.)
Are instructional strategies all in instructional strategies spaces?	Check again that all the directions for <u>teachers</u> are in the strategy spaces, <i>not</i> in the skill, product, prompt, or scoring guide spaces.	If a module author lists what the teacher should do in those other spaces, that may be a sign that he or she is not yet designing for students to take on the active role LDC calls for them to have on important tasks. That mistake can keep LDC from changing what students know and can do in reading, writing, thinking, and mastering academic content. If steps for teachers (even great steps for teachers) appear in spaces that should call for student action, coaching and clarification may be needed.