

IN BRIEF: CONSIDER WHAT ALIGNMENT IS AND IS NOT



In Brief: Misconceptions about regarding what it means to “align educational programs to industry skill standards” (hereafter, “alignment”). Understanding what they are represent a critical step in determining how to best use “alignment” information in making decisions that rely on or affect educational programs. To that end, this GSX brief provides an overview of what “alignment” is and is not.

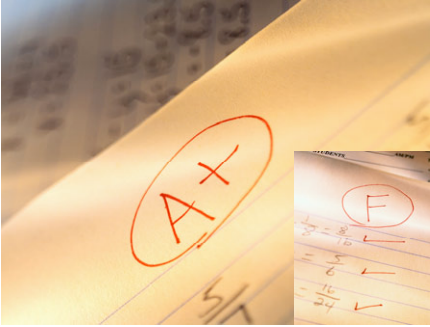
Misconceptions about regarding what it means to align educational programs to industry skill standards (hereafter skill standards). Experience suggests that educators hold three major misconceptions about what alignment is and is not. They are:

- “Source-based misconception” - misunderstanding of what standards are and are not.
- “Process-based misconception” - misunderstanding of what the alignment process is and is not
- “Results-based misconception” - misunderstanding of what the resulting alignment information is and is not

Each of the three is discussed in greater detail in the next page.

Work Standards: An Overview

- Work standards delineates expectations of what individuals will need to know and be able to do to successfully perform concentrations of work relevant to an industry as a whole.
- Work standards provides educators with “industry-wide” information they can use to make decisions about current and future directions of their programs.
- Work standards provides educators and their industry partners with a “common language” for identifying specific organizational and/or regional talent needs and wants.
- Work standards is information - nothing more, nothing less - that educators can choose to leverage either as input to their programs or as input into decisions about their programs.



Source-Based Misconception

Myth: Alignment results in judgments about the “quality” of courses or curricula.

Driver: Based on the erroneous belief that skill standards, not unlike “academic standards,” define *hard requirements* that courses and curricula must meet in order to be deemed “of quality.”

Impact: It fosters a view of alignment as evaluating whether or not courses or curricula are teaching the full scope of the work standards. Hence, educators construe resulting “gaps” in alignment as criticisms of their capability to teach the students what they need to succeed in the world of work. This “myth” fosters “defensiveness” resulting in lack of acceptance of alignment information.

Making it Right: Work standards delineates industry’s *expectations of individuals* interested in a career in the industry; not industry’s requirements of educational institutions. Industry expects individuals to gain these knowledge and skills from a variety of sources including (among others) self-directed learning, education and training, work experience, and company-specific training. Hence, educators should focus less on scope of coverage (there is no way that educators can cover the full scope of the skill standards), and focus more on the efficiency with which they cover the relevant content.



Process-Based Misconception

Myth: Alignment is a generic, goal-neutral “auditing” process and is an “end” in itself.

Driver: Work standards proponents send an overly simplistic message that aligning to skill standards is an “auditing” process that uses a “degree of alignment” metric with a “passing score” that, when met, will result in a “good housekeeping seal of approval.”

Impact: It fosters a view that alignment has a singular purpose. Blind acceptance of this belief results in either outright dismissal of alignment, or failure to identify goals or questions to guide alignment.

Making it Right: View alignment as a process for supporting pursuit of specific goals. It does not end with information describing the “mapping” between courses or curricula and a work standards. It ends when educators achieve the pre-defined alignment goals. Alignment goals drive the process, and not vice versa. In general, educators have two related, but distinct, alignment goals: (1) content-related goals (e.g., content relevance, efficiency of a curricula in covering content), and (2) context-related goals (e.g., content is presented at the appropriate level of proficiency, use of “real-world” scenarios as a backdrop for delivering content). Each requires the application of a different alignment process.



Results-Based Misconception

Myth: Alignment results in prescribed curricula or courses.

Driver: Based on experience with implementation of “academic standards” that typically results in prescribed courses or curricula.

Impact: It fosters a view that alignment will result in prescriptions for “standardized” course or curricula in the form of a detailed content outlines. This myth fosters the perception that alignment will strip or constrain educators’ “academic freedom.”

Making it Right: Alignment is **NOT** instructional or curriculum design. It is more akin to a front-end needs analysis that precedes instructional or curriculum design. Supporting content-related goals, alignment results in: (1) a general listing of baseline topic areas that should be considered when developing courses or curricula, or (2) a map of where specific instances of general topic areas resides within courses or curricula. Determining how to cover the general topic areas, in terms of the details of what will actually be taught and the sequence with which they will be taught, requires educators’ content and pedagogy expertise. Alignment does not result in prescriptions, it results in “building block” recommendations that educators must “flesh-out” and shape for alignment to succeed.

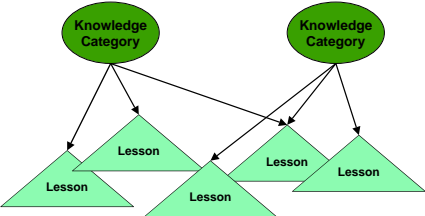
Work Standards Alignment

Content-Based Alignment Goals

- Identify where work standards-defined knowledge and skills are covered in the target curricula

Alignment Process

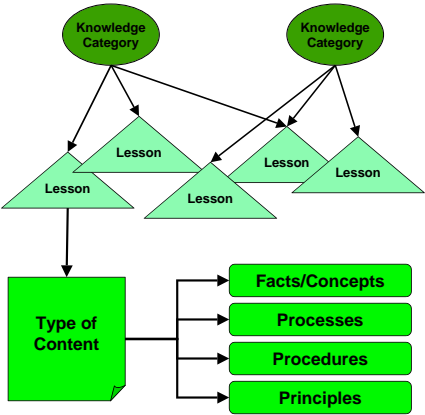
STEP 1: Characterize individual "lessons" in terms of work standards knowledge categories.



Step 1 facilitates identification of where work standards-defined knowledge and skills are covered in the target curricula.

Steps 2, 3, and 4 facilitate the task of comparing and contrasting different manifestations of the target curricula.

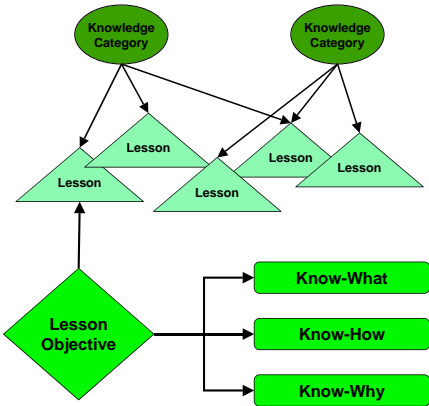
STEP 2: Characterize content of individual lessons.



- Facts - basic terminologies, lists, definitions, etc.
- Processes - flow of events that describe how things work (but not how to do things)

- Procedures - Series of steps, actions, or decisions that result in the achievement of a task
- Principles - guidelines, rules, and parameters that govern processes or procedures

STEP 3: Characterize learning objectives associated with individual "lessons" in terms of "know-what," "know-how," or "know-why."



- "Know-What" - understanding or basic awareness of facts, processes, procedures, or principles
- "Know-How" - apply facts, processes, procedures, or principles
- "Know-Why" - Analyze and evaluate facts, processes, procedures, or principles

STEP 4: Characterize individual courses based on results on Steps 2 and 3. This step results in an "index" that allows for an efficient way for comparing and contrasting the different manifestations of the target curricula. The algorithm for determining the index is provided below.

	Know-What	Know-How	Know-Why
Facts	1	1	2
Processes	1	2	3
Procedures	2	3	4
Principles	3	4	5

Caveats:

The accuracy of the results of the alignment process hinges on how accurately the course summaries depict what is actually taught in the classroom.

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