Learning Contracts

What is a learning contract?
A learning contract, also called a goals contract, can help you set transparent expectations for your students. Learning contracts specify behaviors and habits for success and can promote student reflection on how they learn. They are shared at the beginning of the semester to clarify expectations for the course.

What does a learning contract include?
Most learning contracts include statements regarding behavior that students are asked to agree to. After these statements, students are usually asked to sign to indicate their agreement. Below are some example statements that a learning contract may include:
- I have read and understood the course syllabus.
- I have reviewed the course schedule and noted appropriate deadlines.
- I will attend office hours if I am struggling to understand course concepts.
- I will contact the instructor's graduate teaching assistant about questions regarding exams.
- I will regularly login and check Canvas.
- I understand that all course announcements will be posted in Canvas.

Additionally, students may be asked to initial each statement and/or sign at the bottom of the learning contract that they have read and agree to the expectations.

In addition to setting expectations, Flower Darby (see *Small Teaching Online*) suggests including a second component in which students set two goals, note one thing student can commit to doing to achieve those goals, explain one challenge that may interfere with achieving those goals, and specifying one strategy to overcome said challenge.

What are some suggestions for using a learning contract?
Learning contracts can help you communicate expectations to students. If you plan on using a learning contract, here are some suggestions to help you get started:
1. Consider what struggling students in your course often have issues with when forming your statements.
2. Present the learning contract to students as early in the semester as possible, preferably with the course syllabus.
3. Have a mechanism for students to keep a copy of their learning contract. You can utilize Canvas to create an electronic learning contract or have students print, take a picture, and upload their contract.
4. If you utilize the goals and strategy portion as Darby suggests, consider implementing reflection check-ins throughout the semester. Ask students to review their learning contracts, reflect on their goals and strategies, and ask them to evaluate their learning and progress towards those goals. This reflection can promote metacognition and self-regulation skills for your students by modeling a process in which they regularly take time to evaluate their goals and actions.
5. Consider creating a teaching contract for yourself with your students' input. What would they like from you for the semester? How can you achieve that? Then, regularly reflect on your goals with your students to model the process.