



Diagnostics and Study Plans Implementation Guide

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About Diagnostics and Study Plans

Achieve combines the ability to assign comprehensive diagnostics on reading and writing skills and generate informed study plans for students that structure opportunities to study, practice, and improve those skills. Four sets of diagnostics are included in every Achieve course: one track for Sentence Grammar; one for Punctuation, Style and Mechanics; one for Reading Skills, and one for Reading Strategies. Instructors can choose to assign one or more of these diagnostic tracks to students. The benefits of using diagnostics and study plans in your course include access to learning analytics, which help instructors better understand students' level of preparedness for college writing, track student progress, and plan interventions to target students' instructional needs.

Each set of Diagnostics and Study Plans in Achieve includes:

1. A **practice test**, a diagnostic pre-test that identifies where students are at the start of the course in skills related to reading and writing.
2. A **study plan**, which automatically generates instructional resources and practice exercises that target each student's areas of growth identified in the practice test.
3. A **final test**, a post-test that measures students' growth and identifies any further areas to work on.

Learn more:

[Introduction to Diagnostics for instructors](#)

[Diagnostics: Tracks and topics](#)

Quick Start Guide for Achieve Diagnostics and Study Plans

1. Decide which areas you want students to study, and assign a Practice Test.

- ✓ For each diagnostic area you want to assign, open the relevant **Practice Test** assignment.
- ✓ Select a [grading type](#).
 - *Performance*: Students will receive the grade they earn on the test.
 - *Completion*: Students will receive full credit for completing the test.
- ✓ Apply [late penalty](#) settings.
 - Determine the % penalty for students who submit their tests after the due date.
 - Determine the length of time after the due date you want students to be able to access the test (you can leave the field blank to leave the assignment open for a maximum of 125 days after the due date; however, *you must set a late penalty in order to leave the test open after the due date.*)
- ✓ Close the test and [assign](#) the Practice Test assignment in Achieve. (Note: Do not assign exceptions for Diagnostic assignments in Achieve. Adjust your late penalty settings to accommodate students who need exceptions.)

2. Do you want to require completion of the study plan for credit?

If **yes**, follow the steps below. (Note: Students cannot access a study plan without taking a Practice Test.)

- ✓ Assign the **study plan** assignment and set the completion target. As students work through the study plan resources, they accumulate credit in the gradebook toward the total point value of the assignment.
- ✓ Once students have begun work on the study plan, you won't be able to change the completion target. By default, the completion target is 100%

If **no**, do not assign the study plan assignments.

- ✓ You **must** leave the Study Plan assignment in the course in order for students to access their study plan.

3. Do you want students to complete a Final Test in order to receive a comparison report of student progress?

- ✓ If **yes**, Repeat the setup steps for the Practice Test.
- ✓ **Recommendation**: Keep the Final Test [hidden](#) from students until you are ready for them to take it to ensure they complete the activities in sequence. If the Final Test is set as visible, students will be able to complete it, regardless of whether they've completed their work on the study plan.

Assigning Diagnostics and Study Plans

The diagnostics and study plans are just some of the tools in Achieve that can help you gather data in order to plan for appropriate pedagogy and more effectively scaffold the learning needs of your students. They are designed to give your students a sense of where they might want to spend more time practicing specific skills related to reading comprehension, reading critically, and writing correctly.

The amount of time you have to devote to diagnostic assessment will to some extent determine the number of diagnostics you require your students to complete. There are four diagnostic tracks in Achieve, corresponding to four main areas of focus in a typical writing course:

- Sentence Grammar
- Style, Punctuation, and Mechanics
- Reading Skills
- Reading Strategies

At a minimum, assigning a single set of diagnostics will give you information about students' level of mastery for a specific set of topics. For instance, if you assign the Practice Test and Final Test for the Diagnostics for Sentence Grammar, you will have information about students' level of mastery on topics such as recognizing run-ons and fragments, and whether they understand how nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs function in a sentence. The Sentence Grammar diagnostics data, perhaps coupled with feedback on a short writing assignment that you administer in the first week of class, also gives your students information that they can use to self-assess their strengths and weaknesses.

When you are browsing the Achieve Content Library, you will see three assignments associated with each particular diagnostic track: a Practice Test (diagnostic pre-test), a Final Test (diagnostic post-test), and a Study Plan assignment. The Practice Test is the single necessary assignment out of the four assignments: it is used to generate and personalize each student's study plan. It is important to assign the Practice Test and make sure each student completes the test within the first few weeks of the semester, since students cannot work on their study plan without first taking the Practice Test.

Instructors can preview the topics covered in each test and preview the questions by clicking into either the Practice Test or the Final Test. On this page, you will also find the [grading settings](#) for the tests. Here, you can change the default grading setting from performance to completion.

Considerations for Grading Diagnostic Tests

There are several customizable settings that allow you to control how students receive credit for completing work on the diagnostics and study plans. Understanding these settings will allow you to adapt these assignments for use in your course in a way that aligns with your own teaching practice.

Performance or Completion?

When you assign a Practice Test or Final Test, you will need to decide how you want the grades to be recorded in the Achieve Gradebook. You have the option to have the grade recorded in one of two ways: based on the student's performance (% score) or based on the assignment being completed (100% or 0%). The default grading setting for the pre- and post-tests is **Performance**, which means that the student's grade will equal their score on the test. If you want students to receive credit simply for completing the test, you can edit the grading settings so that they are based on **Completion** rather than performance. You can change the grading setting by viewing the "[Grading Settings](#)" box in the diagnostic test.

No matter what settings you choose, it's a good idea to inform students of the grading policy (performance or completion) before they take the test because the test itself does not indicate the grading policy. Take a moment in class to explain the grading policy or include it in your syllabus.

Adding a Late Penalty to a Practice or Final Test

You can add a late penalty to a Practice or Final Test. Late penalties allow students to complete these assignments once the due date has passed, for reduced credit.

It is important to consider adding a late penalty to Practice Tests in particular; without a late penalty, students will not be able to complete Practice Test assignments once the due date has passed. This means that students will subsequently be unable to receive and complete a study plan.

Note that if the Practice or Final Test is set to grade for completion, students will still receive full credit for completing the test, regardless of the penalty. You can always [manually adjust student scores](#) in the gradebook if you want to penalize students for completing tests late.

Assign or Recommend the Study Plan?

The study plan does not need to be assigned in order for students to access it. Once students have taken their Practice Test, they will have access to their study plans for the duration of the course. If you have a class full of very self-motivated students, simply recommending the study plan might be enough; some general advice about assignment spacing and working within their natural concentration span might be all that is needed for your students to stay on target and work through the activities at their own pace, prioritizing the topics that they are having issues with in their writing.

However, in most courses students will need some help deciding how to prioritize work on their study plans. Students tend to be much more invested in the work they are doing in their study plans if they can see that their instructor is also invested in their progress, and if they can see how the work applies to the rest of the work they are doing in class. To foster an atmosphere of continual practice and sustained progress, we strongly encourage you to assign the study plan and set a completion target. Doing so holds students accountable for completing a percentage of their study plan by a certain date and increases the likelihood that their practice on these topics will allow them

to transfer these skills to their writing assignments. You can explain that you are assigning the study plans to help students space out their work throughout the semester; the idea is for students to practice their reading and writing skills alongside the other assignments in your course. By completing study plan activities throughout the semester, students will see that the work they complete in their study plans is complementary to the work of drafting, revising, and editing their writing.

Learn more:

[Diagnostics: Grading settings](#)

[Diagnostics: Tracks and topics](#)

Introducing Diagnostics and Study Plans to Students

One key to successfully helping students work through a self-paced study plan is foregrounding the purpose of the assignment and your expectations for how much time and effort students should dedicate to practicing discrete skill-building. Because students who may benefit most from making time to practice reading and writing skills may be the same students who—due to a number of factors—may struggle to complete the amount of work required by a study plan, taking time to introduce the diagnostics and study plans to students and to address how practice may translate to greater success on their writing assignments will situate these assignments for students within the overall goals for the course.

- **Explain the purpose of the diagnostic to your students.** Students will be accustomed to high stakes testing and may bring a pass/fail mindset to the diagnostic. However, if you explain to them that a diagnostic is intended to help surface some areas they can focus on as they write and revise, you can create a more constructive attitude and reduce student test anxiety.
- **Preview the ways in which you intend to use the diagnostic results to help personalize your teaching.** Students will be more likely to approach the diagnostics and study plans with open minds if the activities are positioned as an instrument that helps you help them.
- **Inform students how and whether they will receive credit for completing the diagnostic tests and the study plan.** Achieve’s diagnostics and study plans have several options for grading that may or may not be clear to students. Take some time to explain to them how work on these assignments will affect their grade in the course.

Once students have completed a Practice Test for one of the Diagnostic tracks, it might be beneficial to reserve some class time to help them become familiar with the activity types available in their study plans. The resources in the study plans are meant to be formative; students receive credit for doing them rather than for getting the correct answer on the first try. Study plans contain three types of activities:

1. **LearningCurve adaptive quizzing activities.** LearningCurve is game-like adaptive quizzing that is designed to help students zero in on exactly where they are struggling with skills mastery. Each LearningCurve question is connected with instructional content that encourages students to seek answers rather than make guesses. (LearningCurve activities are also available within the Achieve course itself if you want to assign these activities separately to all students.) Because LearningCurve activities break skills down further (e.g., a pronouns activity will show students whether they are struggling more with understanding pronoun-antecedent agreement or clear pronoun reference), students who complete these activities can use this information to further direct their study.
2. **E-book pages.** The e-book pages within the study plans are designed to briefly introduce the subtopics to students and provide examples of correct and incorrect usage. E-book content within the study plans is typically light in order to encourage students to learn through practice.

3. **Exercises.** Brief exercise sets help students narrow their focus and move quickly through a series of questions designed to raise their awareness of patterns of error. The exercises allow students to make multiple attempts in order to encourage them to take time to work toward and understand the correct answer. Exercises contain answer-specific feedback that explain tricky concepts for students and steer them toward understanding why their answers are correct or incorrect.

Learn more:

[Introduction to Diagnostics for students](#)

[Introduction to LearningCurve for instructors](#)

[Introduction to LearningCurve for students](#)

Helping Students Prioritize Skills Practice

Some students might become overwhelmed by the prospect of working through a lengthy study plan. The potential benefits to students of regular practice may not be evident to them, and therefore students may cram, with an end goal of reaching a completion target or finishing an assignment rather than practicing with clear intention. If students don't understand how to prioritize skills practice in coordination with their writing assignments, it would be all too easy for them to perceive skills practice as busywork unrelated to the larger goals of the course. Here are some strategies instructors can consider to help students understand the benefits of skills practice.

Help students connect their practice to their writing

Students will see more value in their study plans if they are working on the activities at the point of use—that is, while they are also drafting, revising, and editing their writing. The skills-based practice exercises are also more impactful when they are completed in the context of students' actual writing. Whenever possible, make the connection between skills practice and application explicit for your students. For example, while commenting on student writing, if you notice a student struggling with sentence boundary issues, you might note in a comment that she can review this topic in her study plan before submitting the next draft or assignment. An instructor might also suggest that students add completing study plan topics to their revision plans.

Model effective digital engagement

Student conferences are an opportune time to make sure that students know how to access resources in Achieve. Consider asking students to show you how they would go about finding resources on the topics that are giving them trouble. For example, you might ask a student to show you how she would go about finding resources on a topic using the search function in Achieve, and tell you how many resources appear as results.

Tracking Student Progress

Viewing the results of a diagnostic test provides you with immediate insight into the areas where your students are doing well, as well as the areas where they could benefit from additional practice.

Practice Test and Final Test Results

The Practice and Final Test results are available within each diagnostic test. To access the results, click into the test, then click on "Go to Results" in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. On the results screen, you'll see the percentage correct for each topic, along with options for sorting by weakest or strongest topic. Toggling over from "Topics" to "Students" shows you each student's performance. Once students have begun their study plans, this screen will also include information about how students are progressing through their study plans for each topic.

What can I do based on the diagnostic test results?

Incorporate review of the student's results into a conference

Students may need help interpreting the results of their diagnostics and deciding how to approach the study plan resources that have been recommended to them. From the Gradebook tab, you can access students' test results and see the study plan that has been generated for them. Some students may prefer to start with their weakest topics, while others might like to sample a few topics before deciding where to dig in. Achieve does not prescribe a specific path for students to work through their study plans.

Make learning a group effort

The diagnostics give you insight into which students have mastered particular topics. Using this information, an instructor could create groups of students with mixed abilities, or choose a few students who have performed particularly well on a topic to teach the topic to the class on a future date.

Plan support around difficult topics and make progress with these topics a class effort

The diagnostics results indicate which topics your class as a whole would benefit from reviewing. Consider the skills that are necessary to complete the different assignments in your course, then choose two or three skills to focus on as a class in conjunction with that assignment. For example, a topic like "Verbs (Multilingual)" could be one that an instructor chooses to build a lesson around, especially if the instructor has many multilingual writers in her classroom.

Help students plan for further improvement

The Final Test measures students' growth and identifies any further areas to work on. If you review the results of the Final Test with students, first emphasize the topics that show some improvement or significant improvement and ask them what activities or assignments they believe contributed to this improvement. Helping students to think about their learning and make plans for improvement is an effective way to conclude the semester's work.

Learn more:

[Diagnostics: View learning analytics](#)