



5 Moments that Matter

to engaging students in your classroom.

Made by the ETP Team & WSU Student Partner Team at Western

5 Moments that Matter



Moment #1
**Start with
Inspiration**



Moment #2
**Support
students to 'Own
their Learning'**



Moment #3
**Bring the
Learning
to Life**



Moment #4
**Demystify
Assessment**



Moment #5
**End with
Reflection**

What is this?

The **5 Moments that Matter** is a quick and easy resource developed by Western students for Subject Coordinators and their teams of tutors. It draws on the experiences of Western students - those represented in the QiLT data, student focus groups, and the WSU Student Partner team - to communicate the key practical actions teachers can take to engage students, and to keep them engaged throughout the Subject.

They're 5 messages Western students want all teachers, across all Schools to know about.


And they're moments that matter to students. Taken together, they're moments that help students see and feel that the team of teachers in a Subject care about them, and take their learning and success seriously.

How should it be used?

Each of the **5 Moments that Matter** provide an explanation - from students' perspectives - and a suite of practical tools, resources and activities a teacher can use so that students see, feel and experience a form of engagement.

Students know that Subjects are different. They have different purposes; they often serve multiple degrees; the learning environment's organised differently; some are accredited with a professional body; others have very large classes with lots of tutors. Students know this because they experience it as they move between subjects - sometimes, in different Schools.

A teacher should be able to look at one of the Moments, diagnose what their students need, and take action using a simple, quick, and effective resource and tool.



“When teachers show up with energy, it really inspires us as students to learn.

It’s your passion and care that inspires us to be the students you know we could be.”

The WSU Student Partners

Moment No 1:

Start with Inspiration

The start of semester is crucial for students.

Starting at University is an exciting time for any student. But at times, it can be overwhelming and leave students feeling like it's all too much. When teachers choose to start with inspiration, it acts as a powerful motivator for students. It sparks curiosity, fuels interest, and creates a positive emotional connection to the subject. When students feel inspired, they are more likely to approach learning with enthusiasm and choose to engage with their studies.

Inspiration elevates student engagement.

Do you remember what inspired you as a student?

An inspirational teacher is a guiding force. They ignite curiosity, foster a love for learning, and empower students to reach their full potential. Starting with inspiration is vital for student engagement as it cultivates a positive mindset. It establishes the foundation for students to be active participants. When teachers make the subject compelling and relatable from the outset, students feel motivated to connect to the subject content. It is a catalyst for sustained engagement, encouraging students to delve into the learning process with a sense of purpose. By being inspirational, you set the tone for an enriching educational experience. Share your passion and enthusiasm. Explain the "why" in your subject.



What staff can do:

- Write an inspirational welcome email to students to introduce yourself and the subject. Include a bit about "why" students should be excited.
- Make a creative introductory video for your subject that also humanises you as a teacher. Express enthusiasm and share your passion for the subject.
- "Walk-through" the Subject Guide, connecting learning outcomes to real-world applications, and to the program students are enrolled in.
- Ensure your vUWS site is coherent and engaging.

Write an Inspirational Welcome Email

- Good Subject Line & Personalised Greeting
- Humanise Yourself
- What's the "Why" of your subject?
- Keep information simple and light.
- Warm and Inviting Tone

[Click to read an Example Email](#)

A Well-Organised VUWS site is a pathway to engagement.

Organisation & Layout of Materials

- Layout of materials is clear and easy to access.

Inspirational Tone

- Tone and expression used on site is uplifting and inspirational.

Purposeful Materials

- Every material and piece of content has intention & purpose.

Purposeful Activities

- Every activity on the VUWS site has purpose articulated.

Make a Creative Welcome Video

Show students your personality.

Teachers: Consider recording a short 1-2 min video (just on your phone) that tells students something about you. You might use the prompts below. Aim to keep it short and relevant to the Subject (where you can)

Example questions:

- Favourite thing about your discipline?
- How long have you been teaching at Western?
- How would you describe your university experience?
- Why should students study it?

Moment 2:

Support students to 'Own their Learning'

Students start at different points.

Students start their university journey at different points. It's likely they will bring diverse life circumstances to their study and this can sometimes be a challenge to the independence they need to be self-driven learners. It doesn't matter whether they arrive at university from school, another university, or they are returning to further study alongside their job as a working professional, there is always a significant period of adjustment. No matter the subject, teachers are in a better position to support students to become active learners when they recognise that these differences matter.

Engagement is built on active learning.

Empowering students to "Own Your Learning" is a call for students to take responsibility for their learning. It's a move from regurgitation, memorisation and "gaming the system" to being students who are capable of approaching their learning with curiosity, purpose and responsibility. The first step is that students learn to set expectations for themselves. The second step is that students are supported by teachers and the learning environment to set those expectations. When students are oriented towards being independent learners, they develop a course for themselves. They become active learners - a skill students can practise that will benefit them across their entire program.



What staff can do:

- Negotiate Expectations
- Invite students to set their own learning goals
- Ensure Support Systems are in place
- Enable Discussion & Collaboration (Online & F2F)

Ways you can support students

The following are potential activities that help teachers support students to "Own their Learning".

Negotiate Expectations

- What do you need from your students? (Be explicit about what you need).
 - Their attention and attitude in class
 - Timeliness
 - Communication when help is needed
 - Level of Commitment

Expectations are helpful to students. When teachers articulate their expectations, it shows students that their teachers care enough to explain the conditions for student success.

- Ask your students: "What do you need from us as teaching staff?"

Ensure Support Systems are in place

When students make the initial shift to self-driven learning, they need to be supported. We recommend having the following in place.

- Weekly Check-In Email (Remind)
- vUWS tile that points to Support Services
- Link to Library Resources (Time Management, Assessment Prep)



Enable Discussion and Collaboration in the classroom and online

Create opportunities for students to express their curiosity. This is best done alongside others.

What staff could try:

- Hold a space in lectures/tutorials for questions. When students ask a question, positive reinforcement encourages them to do more of it.
- Create a Discussion Board for students to ask questions and interact with each other.
- If students have learned theory in a lecture, find ways to get them to apply that theory and talk about it in tutorials or practicals.



Invite students to set their own Learning Goals

The following are activities help students see the purpose of your subject.

- Activity:** "Express the Learning Outcomes in your own words".
- Activity:** "What grade do you want? Is it reasonable? What do you need to do to achieve it?"
- Activity:** "What practices do I need to implement in order to achieve this goal across the semester (time management, participation)?"

Moment No 3:

Bring the learning to life

Why does the classroom feel dead?

The classroom can be a place of endless possibility but for many students, it can feel boring. Where learning activities are misaligned, or lack clear purpose or direction, students will forfeit going to class in favour of independent study time. Classrooms that invite students to engage with enthusiastic teachers who can bring relevant and innovative content to life, with inquiry at the heart, set the tone for students to continually invest in the subject. Suddenly, the classroom is no longer dull, but comes alive. Students want to be there because it is unmissable!

Resuscitate learning through design.

As the teaching and learning landscape continuously shifts, it's likely teachers will need to shift along with it. Well-designed learning activities are crucial in this process, and that involves knowing who your learners are. For students, an engaged learning experience means that the teacher, the teaching, and the materials are relevant, intentional, and organised. When the environment is organised, students feel confident navigating the subject knowing they can succeed. Creating opportunities for greater autonomy in the classroom, and through the assessment, also allows students to interact with subjects more actively. Students want to be taught by enthusiastic teachers who help them better connect with their subject. Personifying yourself as a teacher can make the learning more meaningful and relevant for students and it helps them shift into an empowered learner who 'shows up'.



What staff can do:

- Design contemporary and up-to-date learning activities that help students see relevance.
- "Who's in the Room?" - find out who are your students and where they are at
- Consider opportunities for autonomy in assessment/ learning activities - e.g., choice of topic, question, format - because 'choice' helps students own their learning.
- Aim to regularly check-in with students about how the learning environment is supporting their learning.

Activities to Bring Life into the Classroom

Who's in the Room?

It's much easier to be an engaging teacher when you know something about your students. The questions below help you discover something relevant about them. Use the information to help you teach better, and help them learn better.

What's your program?

What helps you learn?

Have you studied anything like this before? If so, what?

Think-Pair-Share

An Activity to encourage discussion in the classroom:

Pose a question or problem to the class: answerable but complex. Give students 1-3 minutes to think about it individually, then divide them into pairs. Have students discuss their answers with each other for two to three minutes. Invite students to share responses with entire class. Those whose ideas have been challenged, reinforced, or refined will probably volunteer. Use the conversation with students to lead into a lecture or discussion of class material. Quick. Simple. Easy.

Do a pulse check.

A regular check-in with students helps you understand how they are responding to the learning environment. It provides you with data about what is and isn't working, and to adjust accordingly.

There's lots of ways to do a pulse check. Here's a simple one below that takes 10mins. You can run it as a quick class discussion or ask students to write on a post it note, or online in the Chat. It's up to you. The important part is that you communicate what you've learned, will do, won't do, or can't do, from the feedback students give you. It's one of the simplest ways to build a culture of trust.

Keep What are the things that I am already doing as a teacher that you want me to **KEEP** doing?

Stop What are the things that I am already doing as a teacher that you want me to **STOP** doing?

Start What are the things that I am already doing as a teacher that you want me to **START** doing?

Moment No: 4

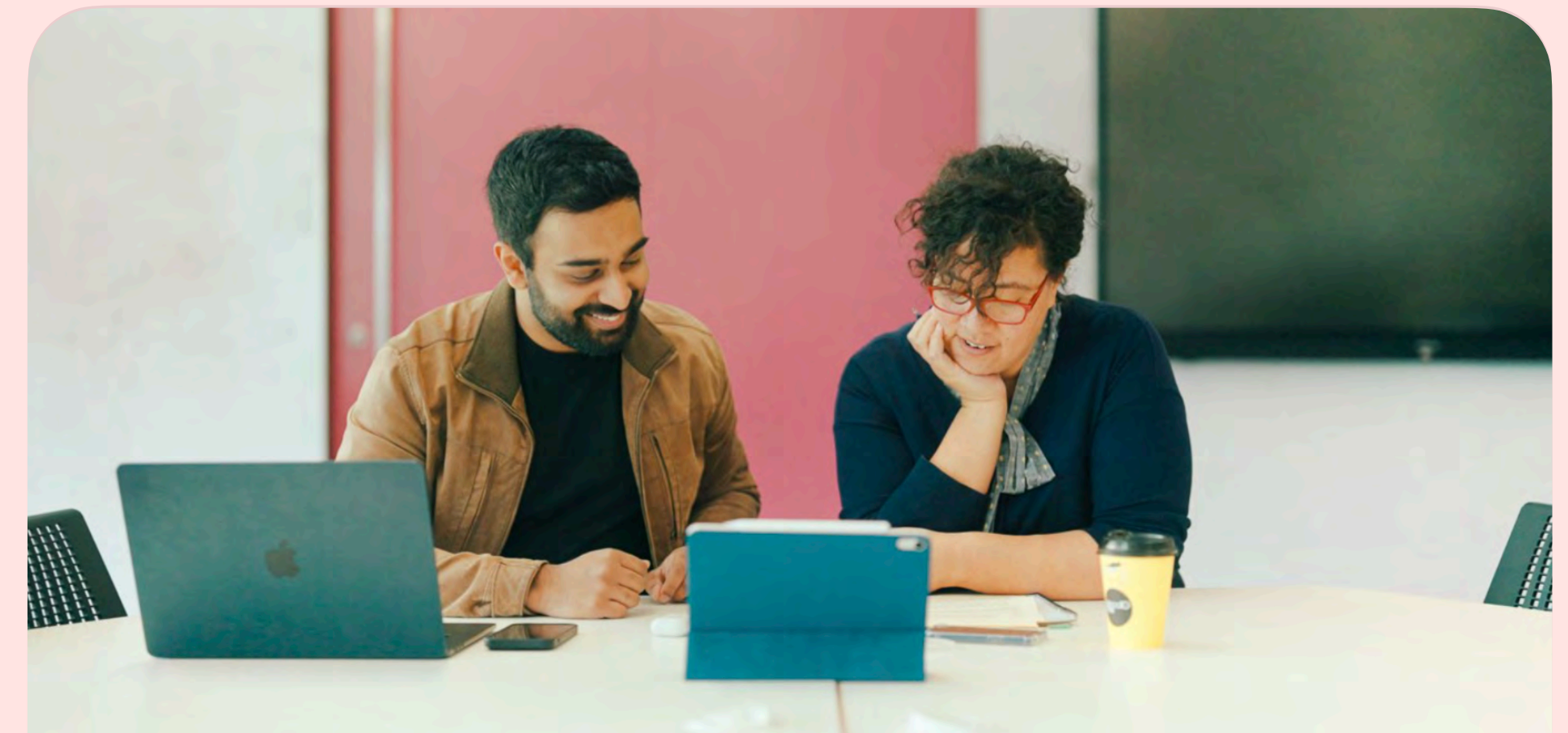
Demystify Assessment

Assessments can feel meaningless.

While we know from the research that assessment drives learning for students, there is a persistent feeling among many students that they don't always know what assessment is for. Students can't always see its relevance; they find the criteria and standards to be ambiguous; the marking inconsistent; and the feedback often arrives too late, is not specific enough or doesn't indicate improvement. Despite teachers' best intentions, the feeling among students is that assessments tends to feel like a tick box activity, rather than the learning opportunity that teachers would like it to be. How can teachers make the conversations about assessment more alive and compelling so that students can better engage?

Support students to see purpose: the "Why".

Even though teachers sometimes lament that students are assessment-driven, it is incredibly consequential for both teachers and students. Let's be honest: it's the assessment and feedback that gets students' attention, and because of that, teachers have an opportunity to orient students to seeing the bigger picture. By demystifying assessment, teachers get a better sense of the effort students aim to put in. It also helps them see what students want from the task. And it can help connect the task to other parts of the subject, and where possible, to the students' broader program. When students are about to start their assessments, remind them of purpose. Be interested in the purpose they might bring too.



What staff can do:

- ❑ Ensure your assessment design is focused on student success: aligned, supportive, guided, authentic, has criteria and standards, and is quality assured.
- ❑ Aim to reinforce the 'why' of each assessment task, and how they relate to each other.
- ❑ Have a conversation to learn how students interpret the marking rubric for each assessment task.
- ❑ Ensure that students have opportunities to ask their teachers questions about assessment.

4

Conversation Starters

- Aim to reinforce the 'why' of each assessment task, and how they relate to each other.

1.

Behind each assessment task, there is usually a compelling reason for students to take that task seriously. Communicate that reason to students.

2.

Some assessment tasks can feel boring to students. Not every assessment task carries an answer to the 'Why' question. Be honest about the tasks that are consequential.

3.

Be curious about what students take away from doing assessments. What do they get out of it (beyond passing the subject)? Use their experiences in ways that improve how your assessment design can be more engaging.

4.

When the assessment tasks are related, there is greater opportunity for students to hook onto a story about what's in it for them. It helps them to integrate and own their learning. Take advantage of the power of sequencing.

Moment No 5:

End with Reflection

Most subjects fizzle out.

Subjects end in different ways for students: for some, it ends in exam preparation, a final presentation, or in some cases, with no one in the class at all. Yet, the end of a subject is also a time when the content is fresh in students' minds. Endings can also be opportunities for reflection - an occasion for students to reflect on their learning and to search for integration and relevance in, and beyond, the subject. It's also a moment for teachers to reflect on what happened and how things went. It's a space to ask: in what ways did my students engage with their learning and how can their experiences be improved? What's to be done next? Hindsight is a powerful educator. It invites staff and students to engage together in the work of connecting the subject to the degree, and to broader learning goals students have for themselves. And it's a chance for students to be honest: in what ways did I own my learning?

Hold a space for connecting the dots.

Supporting students to see the relevance of their learning beyond their immediate subject context drives engagement. Inviting students to intentionally reflect on their experience can be very powerful. However, not all students understand the value of reflection, and sometimes it can feel like a struggle for them when there is no direction nor any promise of improvement. Helping students see that teachers are interested and curious about what they've learned and where they want to go next is key.



What staff can do:

- ❑ Remind students of the role the subject has in their degree, and what it is they have achieved.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for focused reflective discussion that support students to take the next step.
- ❑ Link students into opportunities across the university, e.g., support services or careers that support students to take the next step.

Reflect with Students

For some teachers, the process of inviting students to reflect on their learning is a natural everyday habit. For others, it requires more structure and deliberation.

The suggestions below offer teachers three approaches (or sets of questions) for engaging students in reflection. Choose the one the best reflects your subject and where you're at. And, if you're able to, add your questions to the mix.

Ask questions that encourage students to think about *what* they've learned.

- What are three things you now know that you *didn't* at the beginning of the subject?
- Thinking about what you've learned, how much of it was new, and how much of it have you seen before?

Ask questions that encourage students to reflect on how their learning has *affected* them.

- How has this subject changed your perspective?
- What are you now curious about as a result of being engaged in this subject?

Ask questions that encourage students to *articulate how the learning is relevant*.

- Why do you think this subject is in your program?
- What connection can you see between this subject and your program?
- How would you apply your learning from this subject in future?

Go to Moment 1

An Example of an Inspirational Welcome Email

Subject: Introducing 304865 - Biology & Life

Hi Jen,

I'm **Professor Anaya Menon**, the coordinator for Biology & Life in Autumn 2024 and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you into the academic community here at Western. I'm really excited to begin this journey with you and hope you are too.

A Bit About Me

14 years ago I finished school and decided to and I didn't really know what I was getting into - but I did have a little passion and curiosity for understanding the world. That's sparked quite the last decade - I've been a vet, a botanist, I've gotten a PHD and most recently become a mother. It's been quite the experience and I hope it's makes me a better teacher.

What is this Subject about?

Have you ever wondered how your body digests food? Have you marvelled at how your body heals itself after you get cut? These are the questions that Biology and Life seeks to unpack. Biology is about life and the incredible systems that are constantly running to keep it going - and in this course we want to give you a foundation in what makes life possible and give you practical lab skills so you can be a scientific problem solver wherever you go in life.

But first - here's how to be best prepared for this subject.

Next week is week 1 of the semester and time to hit the ground running. To get off to a good start, use this link to log on to vUWS (the Uni's Learning Management System):

<https://vuws.westernsydney.edu.au/>

Here you will find all the content you need to complete your work for week 1. Click on the subject link and you find the subject welcome page. On the left, there is a navigation menu to help you move around the subject site. Go to Learning Modules to access the content that is released to you each week. For week 1, you will need to:

1. Download copy of the [Subject Guide](#) to bring to your first tutorial
2. Engage with the lecture prior to attending your first tutorial
3. Access the weekly reading to supplement the lecture content
4. Check your personal timetable for class location and time (Allocate +)

How Learning at University is Different to School

Learning at university is more self-directed. This means you choose how you approach your learning. It is expected that you will spend 10 hours per week studying this subject so it is up to you how you spend those hours. Always keep in mind that around assessment time, your workload will increase so it is crucial to manage your time accordingly.

This subject is delivered by a teaching team. You will get to meet some of them as you attend your classes. All our contact details are in the Subject Guide if you need to reach out to us. If you do have a question, consult the Subject Guide first, often the answer can be found there. The discussion board on vUWS is another great place to get answers to questions and it is monitored by the teaching team regularly. If your enquiry is of a more personal nature, contact your teacher's email.

Finally, I'd like us all to have fun while we work hard this semester, and I hope that you find the subject both informative and engaging. We are looking forward to meeting you all.

Regards,

Anaya

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Line &
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Greeting

Humanise
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Go to Moment 1