The 4 S Approach to Team Task Design
(From Larry Michaelsen et. al., *Team-Based Learning)*

1. Significant Problem

What are the kinds of decisions that experts typically have to make in your discipline? Your answer to this question will be a good guide for identifying "significant" problems. Significant problems require students to do real disciplinary work like conducting analyses, rendering a judgment, determining the consequence of new data, etc. Most importantly, significant problems can't just be solved by having the smartest member of a team remember a definition: they require multiple minds to use, not simply recall, of information. Framing the content of your course as information that students use to make decisions helps them see the relevance of what they are asked to read because they will experience immediately its benefits in decision-making.

2. Same Problem

Team tasks are truly effective only if they inspire discussion between as well as within groups, and this will only happen if they have a common frame of reference. When a team hasn't completed the same task as other teams in the room, they don't have a reason to care about what those other teams have to say. However, when all teams have been asked to make the same decision with access to the same information, they will be curious to hear whether other teams decided differently so that they can compare their thinking to that of their peers.

3. Specific Choice

Framing tasks as a choice among limited options will raise the stakes and help ensure that students focus on the factors that you have identified as most relevant to the decision. A specific choice requires comparative analysis, unlike an open-ended response, which can allow students to talk *around* a problem. The specific choice format also ensures that students will get immediate, focused feedback, which is an important motivating force and provides the opportunity for you to make the most of your expertise.

4. Simultaneous Report

Requiring teams to report their choices simultaneously forces them to commit to an answer. It also helps avoid the deadly sequential report where over time the discussion tends to devolve toward many teams simply agreeing with what others already said. There are very simple (no technology required!) mechanisms for having teams visibly and simultaneously share answers. For example, you might have them hold up cards to indicate their answers or ask them to send a team member to the board to write their answers. Now you and the students get all the data at once and can begin processing it as a whole class—rather than just a series of conversations between the instructor and individual teams. A side benefit is that when students can immediately see whose answers differed from their own, they will be ready to engage in cross-team discussions.