

Making Finance Personal: Project-Based Learning for the Personal Finance Classroom

Project 1: Expense Tracking

Lesson Author

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Activity Description

It is easy to remember how much money is spent on fixed expenses like rent or car payments. Variable expenses can be more difficult. Using the worksheet provided (Student Handout 1B), students will write down all expenses incurred during a 30-day period. They will then categorize the expenses and total them for the month (Student Handout 1C).

Objectives

The first step in creating a budget is to track expenses. In this assignment, students will:

- Identify personal expenses incurred over the course of one month
- Determine how they should categorize or group their expenses
- Sort and compile expenses into groups

Essential Question

How do I spend my money?

Assignment Materials

For this assignment, students must use the worksheet (Student Handouts 1B and 1C) provided. They may not use phone apps, spreadsheets, or other electronic methods.

Assignment Length

One month

Author's Notes

- It is important to start this project as early as possible in the semester. Because students track expenses for one month, I typically assign this at the first class meeting. This allows for a smooth transition into the budget project later in the semester.
- Remind students each class meeting about the assignment. You may also want to do an expense-tracking assignment check at two weeks to make sure they are on task.
- When I first started using this assignment, I let students use bank statements, websites, spreadsheets, and phone apps to track expenses. I saw a considerable difference in proficiency between those who used pencil and paper and those who used electronic methods. I believe the tactile experience of writing expenses down helps students recall how they are spending their money in a more thoughtful way. I do let them transition to electronic methods for the budget project. My hope is that, by that point, they are more self-aware and have a better sense of their spending habits.



- I grade assignments at the beginning of class and hand them back. Checking assignments at the beginning of class eliminates problems with late work and ensures that students aren't hastily completing work during class. Anything turned in after we have discussed the assignment is considered late, including the reflective writing.
- When grading, I don't check the dollar amounts for mathematical accuracy; my focus is on ensuring that students are comfortable with the process.
- Student feedback is typically very interesting. They are surprised at how much they spend on things such as gas, coffee, and eating out. After identifying students' spending behaviors, talk about what strategies they should put in place when creating their budgets (e.g., packing a lunch, making coffee at home, or carpooling to school).

Project 1 Assessment: Expense Tracking Rubric

This project has a total value of 20 points.

<p>The student did not follow directions. (minus 2)</p>	
<p>The expense tracking worksheet was completed as instructed. (plus 8)</p> <p>The expense tracking worksheet was partially completed. (plus 4)</p> <p>The assignment was not completed. (no points)</p>	
<p>The essay was well written. The essay displays clear facility in the use of grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling. The essay is generally free from errors. (plus 6)</p> <p>The essay contained a few mistakes. The essay displays facility in the use of grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling, though it may contain errors. However, these errors do not overly detract from the overall success of the message. (plus 4)</p> <p>The essay contained many mistakes. The essay displays serious deficiencies in the use of grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling. The essay contains an accumulation of serious errors in any and/or all these areas. (plus 2)</p>	
<p>The essay answered all questions thoughtfully. The essay contains details that support the author's responses. (plus 6)</p> <p>The essay answered most questions but lacked detail. (plus 4)</p> <p>The essay was vague and lacked detail. (plus 2)</p>	
<p>The assignment was late. (loss of one point per day)</p>	
<p>Total</p>	



Project 1 Overview: Expense Tracking

Handout 1A: How Do I Spend My Money?

The first step in creating a budget is to track your daily expenses. In this assignment, you will:

- Identify expenses incurred over the course of one month
- Include the date of the expense, a brief identification, and how much was spent
- Determine how you would like to categorize or group your expenses
- Sort and compile tracked expenses into these groups

It is easy to remember how much money you spend on fixed expenses like rent or car payments. Variable expenses can be more difficult.

Assignment Instructions

Using the 30-Day Expense Tracking Worksheet (Student Handout 1B), write down all expenses you incur during a 30-day period. At the end of the month, total your expenses on the Expense Totals Worksheet (Student Handout 1C)

- Only write down transactions for goods or services.
- Do not write down ATM cash withdrawals. As you spend the cash you withdrew, record each transaction in your worksheet.
- If you have difficulty remembering how much you have spent, use an envelope to keep track of receipts.
- If you make a purchase that does not provide a receipt, use a scrap of paper to write it down and put it inside the envelope.
- On days that you do not incur expenses, write “none” and put a 0 (zero) in the amount column.
- If you are on a meal plan, divide the cost of your plan by the number of days in your billing cycle. (For instance, if you pay monthly for your meal plan, you’d divide the monthly cost by 30 to find your daily expense.)
- Use the categories listed at the top of your worksheet to label your expenses. If you do not see one that adequately describes the purchase, feel free to use your own. Make sure you add it to the bottom of the list under “other.” This will be an important element when we start building your budget.
- Remember that this exercise is setting a baseline for your future budget. Spend as you would normally spend so that you can get an accurate picture of your spending behavior.



Project 1 Activity: Expense Tracking

Handout 1B: 30-Day Expense Tracking Worksheet

Possible Expense Categories

Groceries • Dining Out • Gas • Entertainment • Car Payment • Car Repair • Car Insurance • Gifts • Rent • Renters Insurance • Health Insurance • Utilities • School • Clothing • Credit Cards • Loans • Pet Expenses • Savings • Hair/Nails • Fees or Dues • Other

Day 1

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 2

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 3

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 4

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 5

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 6

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Making Finance Personal: Project 1: Expense Tracking (Updated 2020)

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Project 1 Activity: Expense Tracking

Handout 1B: 30-Day Expense Tracking Worksheet (Continued)

Day 7

Expense Name Amount

Day 8

Expense Name Amount

Day 9

Expense Name Amount

Day 10

Expense Name Amount

Day 11

Expense Name Amount

Day 12

Expense Name Amount

Day 13

Expense Name Amount

Day 14

Expense Name Amount

Day 15

Expense Name Amount

Project 1 Activity Expense Tracking

Handout 1B: 30-Day Expense Tracking Worksheet (Continued)

Day 16

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 17

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 18

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 19

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 20

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 21

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 22

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 23

Expense Name _____ Amount _____

Day 24

Expense Name _____ Amount _____



Project 1 Activity Expense Tracking

Handout 1B: 30-Day Expense Tracking Worksheet (Continued)

Day 25

Expense Name Amount

Day 26

Expense Name Amount

Day 27

Expense Name Amount

Day 28

Expense Name Amount

Day 29

Expense Name Amount

Day 30

Expense Name Amount



Project 1 Activity: Expense Tracking

Handout 1C: 30-Day Expense Totals Worksheet

Groceries	\$ _____	Cell phone	\$ _____
Dining out	\$ _____	Credit cards	\$ _____
Gas	\$ _____	Loans	\$ _____
Entertainment	\$ _____	Pet expenses	\$ _____
Car payment	\$ _____	Savings	\$ _____
Car repair	\$ _____	Hair/Nails	\$ _____
Car insurance	\$ _____	Fees or dues	\$ _____
Gifts	\$ _____	Other	\$ _____
Rent	\$ _____		\$ _____
Renters insurance	\$ _____		\$ _____
Health insurance	\$ _____		\$ _____
Utilities	\$ _____		\$ _____
School	\$ _____		
Clothing	\$ _____	Total	\$ _____

Project 1 Activity Expense Tracking

Handout 1D: 30-Day Expense Tracking Essay

In a one- to two-page reflective essay, typed and double-spaced, answer the following questions. Make sure you proof the essay for grammar and word usage mistakes.

- What challenges did you encounter with the assignment?
- How frequently did you record your transactions?
- Were you surprised by any of your spending habits?
- How would you summarize how you spend your money?
- Will you change your spending behavior? If so, how?