Designing Your Online Course

An online course promotes optimal student cognitive engagement if it:

1. integrates active learning environments with authentic learning tasks;
2. fosters a personal connection with the class (teacher-student as well as student-student); and
3. facilitates the process of learning in an online environment.

While teachers know how to design a course for the face-to-face environment, they don’t always have the knowledge required to design an online one. Designing an online course can be more challenging than most expect. Here are some tips to get you started.

1. Spend time outlining the flow of the course before starting to develop it. It is important to design a well, thought-out course. This will not only provide a cohesive approach to the course, but will save time in the end because you won’t need to rework your course structure later.

2. Update the course syllabus for the online user. You’ll want to consider adding information such as expectations for participation and logging into the system.

3. Create a Strong Homepage/Landing Page

A successful course begins with orienting the students to your course, sets course expectations and provides a detailed syllabus. In general, we recommend the following elements for a course home page:

- Course welcome with basic information including overview, course dates, instructor contact, etc.
- Syllabus
- Course expectations
- Brief orientation of the platform which offers links to the “Online Classes Tutorial for Students” in the Campus Community section of Moodle to get help as they familiarize themselves with the system. In Moodle, Class Announcements (News Forums) are a default on the course landing page. Consider prominently displaying an announcement that orients students to the course.

4. Include a variety of activities into your course design. By using a mix of activities, you'll provide students with new experiences that offer a range of collaborative approaches. Create and use different types of content that meet a variety of learning styles. Employ multimedia and interactive content where appropriate. Along with assigned readings, include quick screencasts or embed external video/audio content to help clarify topics.

5. Don’t use your online course as a file repository. Avoid simply taking your lectures and other face-to-face materials and uploading them as resources into your course. Instead, take advantage of the online environment and create a truly interactive learning experience. You do not need to recreate everything either. Be a content curator and search the web for existing great content. Save yourself some time and avoid recreating the wheel when possible.

6. Structure Content

Organize your content visually in a way that makes it clear to students what they’ll be learning and when. In Moodle, creating a folder structure is recommended. Some things to consider while structuring and organizing your content:

- Organize content by course schedule and include dates and days for assignments and assessments in the activity title and description areas.
- Organize content by topic
- Create chunks of content that follow consistent patterns for each chunk (for example, Chapter 1: Reading, Video, Assignment, Practice Quiz, Test. Chapter 2: Reading, Video, Assignment, Practice Quiz, Test)

7. Create opportunities for students to interact

Create interactions between students and with instructors online via

- Discussions
- Online office hours (set up weekly chat times or a Q and A Forum)
- Announcements
- Feedback on assignments via comments/annotations/audio
8. **Consider a flipped classroom approach.** If you are facilitating a hybrid classroom, this approach can engage students outside the classroom and provide more time in class for hands-on activities.

9. **Design engaging online learning.** Remember, your students have the world in front of them. You'll need to maintain their engagement. If not, they could quickly become disengaged and interact with other tools and media on their computers. Mix up your delivery methods, ask questions or conduct polls when delivering synchronous components, and create materials to reach various learning styles.

10. **Provide students with detailed instructions.** In the online world, you cannot provide immediate help to your students, so make sure that you have included enough detail within your instructions to aid your students through activities.

11. **Create a calendar**
   We recommend adding important dates to your Moodle Calendar or a list of assignments and assessment due dates that is easily accessible by students via your course homepage or course resources.

12. **Be careful with the use of animated graphics, bold color choices, and varying font styles.** Your graphical choices can be distracting to students if you are not careful with your decisions. Be sure to select relevant images and be consistent in style. Make sure the course utilizes images, color and typography as a form of visual communication.

**Find more tips on transitioning to your online course by logging into our Moodle tutorial titled, “Creating Your Online Course”**

The online modality achieves equivalent interaction and learning through asynchronous discussions and group work, and a number of online courses also incorporate some face-to-face meetings. In addition, the expectation exists for online courses to include the same content and learning outcomes as traditionally taught courses.

A 3 credit course requires 45 hours of class time. For every credit hour, students are expected to spend 2 – 3 hours per week working outside of class. For example, for a 3 credit hour class, students should expect to put in 6 – 9 hours per week outside of class, studying or doing assignments.

A 15-week class requires students to be in class (logged into the Moodle LMS online) approximately 3 hours each week and spend 6 hours per week outside of class working on assignments.

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**Weekly Activity Requirements:**

- Weekly Overview
- Weekly Learning Objectives
- Weekly Reading Assignments
- Weekly Multimedia Presentations or Lectures via PowerPoint, Audio recording, Video recording, Screen capture tutorials, text documents
- Weekly Learning Activities (Chats, Blogs, Wikis, Current events, Guest Speakers (live or recorded), Workshops, meet-ups, Student collaborated projects, live discussions (live meetings on web)
- Weekly Discussion Board Topics
- Weekly Assignments
- Assessments such as tests, quizzes, essays
- Supplemental Course materials such as links, videos, articles, etc.