

BEST PRACTICES

Designing Online Courses

BEST PRACTICE 1: BEGIN WITH A DETAILED COURSE SYLLABUS

A well-designed online course begins with a detailed course syllabus. Think of the syllabus as the formal contract between the instructor and the students, e.g., a blueprint that outlines the course goals, objectives, and expectations, that clearly delineate what students will learn, and what requirements they will need to meet in order to demonstrate what they have learned. By having a detailed syllabus, the students will have a greater understanding of what the course is about before they even begin the course. In addition, by having explicit step-by-step instructions on how to satisfy the course requirements, students will be able to “hit the ground” running when working on their assignments with minimal inquiries going to the instructor.

Tips on How to Develop a Well-Designed Online Course Syllabus:

- Complete the online course syllabus, which contains all the key components
- Use an online course weekly outline to provide a snapshot of your course plan
- Provide detailed information for all expectations and course requirements, including the purpose and the steps necessary to complete the requirements

BEST PRACTICE 2: IDENTIFY KEY STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning objectives are statements of what students should be able to do by the end of the course. Learning objectives are important as they help students determine what is important to learn in the course, and how their learning will be assessed/measured. Additionally, clear and measurable learning objectives will help instructors design, develop, or select instructional materials for the course.

Tips on Writing Clear, Specific, and Measurable Learning Outcome / objective:

- Utilize learning objectives as a basis for course preparation. Learning objectives should match instructional strategies and assessment requirements. To ensure the connection between various course activities, it is useful to construct a table highlighting the relationship
- Learning objectives should be SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable to the instructor, realistic to achieve, and time-bound with a deadline)
- Utilize Bloom's Taxonomy List of Verbs to construct objectives

Learning objectives clearly address the four distinct components: Audience, Behavior, Condition and Degree.

- **AUDIENCE:** Learning objectives should be student-focused and target the expected student outcome. To assist in maintaining a student-centered emphasis, start learning objective statements begin with the phrase "The learner/student will be able to. . ."
- **BEHAVIOR:** When writing learning objectives, it is best advised to utilize the action verb to specify the desired student performance, followed by a specific description of the course-specific content target.
- **CONDITION.** Keep statements short and focused on a single outcome. This allows instructors to determine whether or not an objective has been met without having to distinguish between partial completion or success.
- **DEGREE.** Include complex or higher-order learning objectives when they are appropriate. Most instructors expect students to go beyond memorization of facts and terminology; learning objectives should reflect instructors' expectations for student performance. To ensure that learning objectives are effective and

measurable, avoid using verbs that are vague or cannot be objectively assessed. Use active verbs that describe what a student will be able to do once learning has occurred.

BEST PRACTICE 3: ALIGN INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND ASSIGNMENTS TO LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Instructional materials are used to bridge the gap between what the students know and don't know to enable them to be able to achieve the learning objectives set forth in the course. Examples of instructional materials include textbooks, readings, articles, websites, lectures, videos, interactive media, simulations, etc. Create or select instructional materials that are aligned to the learning objectives and that support instruction (Why support instruction? Support student learning success?) and individual learning styles.

Strategies:

- Make sure that instructional materials are aligned to the learning objectives
- Select a variety of instructional materials that account for the different learning styles
- Make sure that instructional materials are accessible to students with disabilities
- Make sure that instructional materials are in compliance with copyright laws
- Use an outline to list the topics that you will cover in the course. (what is this OUTLINE and where is this housed?)
- When developing your own instructional materials, e.g., lectures and videos, Present information in short, bite-sized chunks

BEST PRACTICE 4: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTIONS

Learning activities are the actions that students take, either through observation or active participation, to help them achieve the learning objectives set forth in the course. Examples of learning activities include research project, case studies, group presentations, discussions, etc. Create learning activities that are aligned to the learning objectives and provide opportunities for varied interaction opportunities, e.g., content, txt, peers, and faculty.

Tips:

- Make sure that learning activities are aligned to the learning objectives
- Select a variety of learning activities that provide opportunities for the various types of interaction (i.e., learner to content, learner to instructor, and learner to learner)
- If learning activities will be graded, make sure to provide rubrics grading

BEST PRACTICE 5: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT ASSESSMENT METHODS

Assessments are the means to determine whether or not the students were able to achieve the learning objectives set forth in the course. Use the results from the assessments to make adjustments to the instructional materials and learning activities as needed to further promote learning.

Tips:

- Make sure that assessments are aligned to the learning objectives
- Develop and use both formative and summative assessments
- Implement ongoing assessment (graded or ungraded)