The University of Texas at San Antonio
UTSA Academic Innovation

Online Course Design Checklist

The following checklist is based on Quality Matters standards and provides step-by-step instructions and resources to guide you in the development of your online course. Please reach out to academicinnovation@utsa.edu or call 210-458-4520 if you have questions.

WEEK 1: PLAN YOUR COURSE

Outcomes: Course Blueprint, Syllabus, and Schedule

- [ ] **Copy your previous course into the Blackboard shell.**
  When you copy your course, think about which elements you will reuse. For example, you may want to copy over your announcements, or write them from scratch. If you used discussion forums in your previous course iteration, make sure you include only the discussion forum with no starter posts. Additionally, in the new course, you can delete unneeded course menu items.
  - Resource: Course copy instructions (PDF)
  - Resources: How to Copy a Course in Blackboard (video tutorial)

- [ ] **Prepare your course template blueprint.**
  The next step is to map your course and distribute content and assessment based on the course length. This process is quite easy and will help you prepare the rest of the content for your course.
  - Resource: 15-week Course Blueprint (PDF)
  - Resource: How to use the course blueprint template (video tutorial)

☐ **Prepare a plan of action for developing the missing content.**
The course blueprint allows you to identify what you need to build for your course. As you prepare your plan of action be sure to consider these tips:

- ❖ **Less is better with content**: when building an online course, you may be tempted to add as much content as possible. A good online course has a balance of content and assessment. You may add optional resources for your students but have a plan to create balanced and consistent modules. Identify content that allows your students to learn essential skills and competences.
- ❖ **Less is better with technology**: you may think that the more technology you include in the course, the more opportunities students will have to learn. This is not the case. Students can be overwhelmed by new tools. Choose one or two technological tools for your course to help your students get familiar with the online learning environment and focus on the content rather than the technology.

- Resource: How to Balance Content and Tools (video tutorial)

☐ **Based on the course blueprint, update your syllabus and schedule.**
Your syllabus and schedule are the first means of communication with your students. Make sure you communicate the course expectations and the expected interactions. Also, you will need to indicate if there are prerequisites for your course, and what technology your students need to have to participate. For example, do they need headphones? A webcam? Specific software for assignments? Let them know in advance so that they can prepare.

Be sure you include institutional policies in your syllabus. The syllabus template provides a content for each policy. You will also need to repeat this information in a dedicated section of your course.

- Resource: Syllabus Template
- Resource: How to Create an Effective Syllabus and Schedule (video tutorial)

Quality Matters standards: 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

☐ **Plan the assessment strategy and build a clear grading schema.**
One of the most confusing things for online students is keeping up with the course and not missing assignments. You can help your students by providing a clear plan for assessment that considers different means of engagement, representation, action & expression. Additionally, think about how the plan impacts your time. Plan the right balance between automatically graded and manually graded activities. This strategy will help you better manage your course.

- Resource: How to Build the Grading Schema Handout (PDF)
- Resource: Strategies to design assessment based on Universal Design for Learning (video tutorial)

Quality Matters Standards: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4

☐ **Finalize your communication plan with Virtual Office Hours.**
Let your students know how to get in contact with you and when they should expect a reply (usually within 24-48 hours). This information will help reduce anxiety and make students aware they should not wait until the very last minute to contact you for support. This, should, cut down on those midnight emails asking for immediate assistance. While asynchronous content delivery is recommended, we also encourage you to schedule virtual office hours for your students to reach out to you with questions.

Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and Zoom are the preferred tools for virtual office hours.

- Resource: How to Prepare a Communication Plan for Your Online Course (video tutorial)
- Resource: How to Install Zoom and Schedule a Meeting (video tutorial)
  Resource: Breakout Rooms in Zoom (video tutorial)
- Resource: Zoom Security (video tutorial)
- Resource: Save Zoom Sessions in Panopto (video tutorial)
- Resource: Recurring Zoom Meeting in Blackboard (video tutorial)

Quality Matters standard: 5.3

WEEK 2: COURSE ORIENTATION AND MODULE OUTLINE

Outcomes: Welcome message, Orientation module, Module prototype, Learning Objectives

☐ **Create a welcome message.**
Now that you have a clear vision of your course design, it is time to let your students know the course expectations. Create a welcome video to introduce yourself and inform them about the course and what they will need to do to be successful. If you do not feel comfortable in front of a camera, you can narrate an Adobe Spark Video.

- Resource: How to Record a Welcome Video (video tutorial)
- Resource: Five Tips for Creating Effective Welcome Videos (video tutorial)
- Resource: Creating Presentations with Adobe Spark video (video tutorial)

Quality Matters standard: 1.8

☐ **Draft a welcome announcement for your course.**
In addition to creating a welcome video, you will also want to create a brief welcome announcement. By creating a welcome announcement, you can direct your students on how to get started with the course. This will also get them used to checking the announcements area inside of Blackboard.

- Resources: Creating Blackboard Announcements (video tutorial)

☐ **Create an orientation module with an ice-breaker activity.**
Create a discussion forum and invite your students to post their expectations for the course, share a picture of their workstation at home, or share a picture of their "coworkers." This activity will help to smooth the transition to the online learning environment, build a sense of community, and help students feel less isolated.

- Resources: Ideas for Online Icebreakers (video tutorial)

Quality Matters standard: 1.8

☐ **Work on your module prototype.**
Building a module prototype will give you a template that you can use to build all your course modules. Include essential elements such as: course learning objectives/ competencies, institutionally mandated program outcomes/objectives, and module/unit learning objectives.

When you write your course outcomes, follow the SMART rule: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Focused, Time-Focused. For your learning objectives, use action verbs, and write them from a student perspective. Remember that an outcome is a general statement, while the learning objective is more specific and describes how the instruction will affect the learners. For example, the outcome for a health class could be: "Students will recognize and value the behaviors of a healthy lifestyle." One of the learning objectives could be "Students will be able to produce a schedule that includes sufficient time for rest and recreation." Make connections between competencies, learning outcomes, and learning objectives. Align them to the level of knowledge required to be successful in the course and include this information in your syllabus as well.

- Resources: How to Organize Modules in Blackboard (video tutorial)
- Resources: Bloom's Taxonomy for Action Verbs, Learning Objectives Generator (SharePoint)

Quality Matters standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5

☐ **Customize the navigation of your Blackboard course.**
The default Blackboard shell has been designed with students in mind, and with sections that will help both you and your students get familiar with the online environment. The default Blackboard shell provides general information, but you will need to add support information for publisher content and resources. Additionally, you may also create a folder for your modules.

- Resources: How to Organize Modules in Blackboard (video tutorial)
- Resources: Best Practices for Course Navigation (video tutorial)
- Resources: Blackboard Fall Template Overview (video tutorial)

Quality Matter standard: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 8.6

WEEK 3: ASSESSMENT DESIGN. DO'S AND DON'TS FOR AN INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Outcomes: Assignments, Grade Center Organization

- [ ] **Review and incorporate the Universal Design for Learning Practices.**
While creating your assignments, be sure to incorporate Universal Design for Learning. Address different learning styles and create inclusive content that will help your students be successful in your course. Consider that your students may perform differently if they must submit a test or work on a group project. Their learning style will have an impact on how they learn. A good strategy is to balance between formative and summative assignments and automatically graded or manually graded assignments. This will help your students to demonstrate their knowledge through different means, and you will not be overwhelmed with grading.

  - Resources: Strategies to Design Assessment Based on Universal Design for Learning (video tutorial)
  - Resources: Best Practices for Backward Design (video tutorial)

  Quality Matters standards: 3.5, 8.4

- [ ] **Think About Accessibility. Make auditory content visible and visible content auditory**.
When you created your syllabus and schedule, you may have used a template and did not have to worry about accessibility. Now that you are working on your assessment strategy, you must be sure all your students will have access to content. Follow the Digital Learning Accessibility Guidelines to create accessible content.

  - Resources: Course Design Accessibility Resources

  Quality Matters standards: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.5

- [ ] **Create opportunities for student engagement and student to student interaction.**
Let your students know that they will need to interact with each other during your course. This will help them develop the communication and collaboration soft skills that they will need in the workforce. To get started, use discussion forums or blogs in Blackboard to increase student engagement. Additionally, the Adobe Creative Cloud suite, and Adobe Spark, can be used for portfolios, final projects and provide a space for collaborative work.

  - Resources: How to Create Opportunities for Student Engagement (video tutorial)

  Quality Matters standards: 5.2, 5.4

☐ **Create sequential assignments in the course and the Grade Center.**
One of the major issues that students have with online courses is that they cannot find where their assignments and grades are located. If you have set availability dates, make sure you inform your students about them to avoid frustration. A good practice is to add a Blackboard announcement to inform your students when the test or assignment will be available. In the Grade Center be sure to organize your grading columns so they are sequential order. This will make it easier for students to understand how they are doing in your course.

- Resource: How to Organize Columns in Blackboard (video tutorial)
- Resource: How to Color Code your Grade Center (video tutorial)

Quality Matters standard: 8.1

WEEK 4: CREATE YOUR CONTENT WITH ACTIVE LEARNING IN MIND

Outcomes: Multimodal content with readings, videos, and self-assessment activities for student-student, and student-content interaction

☐ **Create your module content.**
Now that you have identified the learning objectives and assignments for each module, start working on the content. You may be tempted to add as much material as possible to cover the selected topics. Be sure to think about the workload for each module and what will be expected of the student. You may want to leave additional resources as optional opportunities for personalized learning. Remember to follow essential Quality Matters standards: the instructional materials you select needs to contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies, the relationship between the use of instructional materials in the course and completing learning activities is clearly explained.

Quality Matters standards: 4.1, 4.2, 4.5

☐ **Apply UDL guidelines to your content.**
Follow the same rules for accessibility and inclusiveness aligned to the Universal Design for Learning principles discussed in week 3. Provide your students with opportunities to actively engage with the content through self-assessment activities and use the available tools to enhance engagement.

- Resources: Link to Digital Learning Tools

Quality Matters standard: 5.2

☐ **Add a Resource List.**
Create a resource list or content area, with the instructional materials used in the course. Be sure to include information on the textbook and ensure all rights/ permissions are current.

- Resources: UTSA Libraries
- Resources: Preparing Students for New Software (video tutorial)
- Resources: How to Give Your Students Video Feedback (video tutorial)

Quality Matters standards: 4.3, 4.4, 4.5

WEEK 5: COURSE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Outcomes: Student Engagement and Support Plan

☐ **Create a walkthrough and mock assignments.**
Now that your course design is finalized, and you have identified the tools, content, and assignments you will use, it is time to walk your students through your new creation. A Student Guide to Online Learning course is available to all UTSA students, but you may want to add more information specific to your course. Additionally, you may want to create a simple test and assignment to be sure that students understand how to use the tools in Blackboard.

Quality Matters standard: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4

☐ **Create your MyQM Account and perform a course Self-Review.**
Access the Quality Matters website and sign-in with your UTSA email address.

If you would like to begin a **Self-Review** of your course:

- ❖ Review the Self-Review instructions page
- ❖ Locate the **CRMS** button at the top of the page and select it
- ❖ It will land on the **Welcome to the CRMS** page
- ❖ Select **Start a Self-Review**
- ❖ Enter the **Rubric** information (**The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric, Sixth Edition**).
- ❖ Enter a **Review Title** (i.e., Course ID)
- ❖ **Save** the Self-Review

Once you have completed these steps, you will be able to access the Rubric and the Specific Review Standards (SRS) for the Eight General Standards.

Note: To move from one SRS to the next, you must select either the **Met** or **Not Met** buttons, and enter information into both the **Evidence** and **Suggestions for Improvement** sections.

☐ **Check your course with the Student Preview.**
Congratulations! Your course is ready. Check your course with the Student Preview to identify content that might no longer be available, for example, links to external resources such as a YouTube video.

- Resource: Blackboard Overview for Students (video tutorial)
- Resource: Instructor Presence in Online Classes (video tutorial)

You are ready to teach your course!

Take a deep breath, pat yourself on the back and pick out something nice for yourself from the store. If you are still feeling lost or if you get stuck, do not hesitate to reach out to Academic Innovation for further assistance!

Appendix A: Quality Matters Standards

General Standard 1: Course Overview and Introduction

The overall design of the course is made clear to the learner at the beginning of the course.

Standard 1.1 **Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.**

Standard 1.2 **Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.**

Standard 1.3 **Communication expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of interaction are clearly stated.**

Standard 1.4 **Course and institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated within the course, or a link to current policies is provided.**

Standard 1.5 **Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.**

Standard 1.6 **Computer skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.**

Standard 1.7 **Expectations for prerequisite knowledge in the discipline and/or any required competencies are clearly stated.**

Standard 1.8 **The self-introduction by the instructor is professional and is available online.**

Standard 1.9 **Learners are asked to introduce themselves to the class.**

General Standard 2: Learning Objectives (Competencies)

Learning objectives or competencies describe what learners will be able to do upon completion of the course.

Standard 2.1 **The course learning objectives, or course/program competencies, describe outcomes that are measurable.**

Standard 2.2 **The module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives or competencies.**

Standard 2.3 **Learning objectives or competencies are stated clearly, are written from the learner's perspective, and are prominently located in the course.**

Standard 2.4 **The relationship between learning objectives or competencies and learning activities is clearly stated.**

Standard 2.5 **The learning objectives or competencies are suited to the level of the course.**

General Standard 3: Assessment and Measurement

Assessments are integral to the learning process and are designed to evaluate learner progress in achieving the stated learning objectives or mastering the competencies.

Standard 3.1 **The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.**

Standard 3.2 **The course grading policy is stated clearly at the beginning of the course.**

Standard 3.3 **Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work, and their connection to the course grading policy is clearly explained.**

Standard 3.4 **The assessments used are sequenced, varied, and suited to the level of the course.**

Standard 3.5 **The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback.**

General Standard 4: Instructional Materials

Instructional materials enable learners to achieve stated learning objectives or competencies.

Standard 4.1 **The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.**

Standard 4.2 **The relationship between the use of instructional materials in the course and completing learning activities is clearly explained.**

Standard 4.3 **The course models the academic integrity expected of learners by providing both source references and permissions for use of instructional materials.**

Standard 4.4 **The instructional materials represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline.**

Standard 4.5 **A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.**

General Standard 5: Learning Activities and Learner Interaction

Learning activities facilitate and support learner interaction and engagement.

Standard 5.1 **The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.**

Standard 5.2 **Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.**

Standard 5.3 **The instructor's plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated.**

Standard 5.4 **The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.**

General Standard 6: Course Technology

Course technologies support learners' achievement of course objectives or competencies.

Standard 6.1 **The tools used in the course support the learning objectives or competencies.**

Standard 6.2 **Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning.**

Standard 6.3 **A variety of technology is used in the course.**

Standard 6.4 **The course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.**

General Standard 7: Learner Support

The course facilitates learner access to institutional support services essential to learner success.

Standard 7.1 **The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.**

Standard 7.2 **Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and services.**

Standard 7.3 **Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's academic support services and resources that can help learners succeed in the course.**

Standard 7.4 **Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's student services and resources that can help learners succeed.**

General Standard 8: Accessibility and Usability

The course design reflects a commitment to accessibility and usability for all learners.

Standard 8.1 **Course navigation facilitates ease of use.**

Standard 8.2 **The course design facilitates readability.**

Standard 8.3 **The course provides accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, and web pages to meet the needs of diverse learners.**

Standard 8.4 **The course provides alternative means of access to multimedia content in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners.**

Standard 8.5 **Course multimedia facilitate ease of use.**

Standard 8.6 **Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.**