

Rutgers Business School Online Course Development Guidelines

For courses that are typically on campus

These guidelines are developed to provide instructors with a roadmap of issues to consider when developing an online course. These guidelines were adapted from the Quality Matters Rubric, which can be found here:

<https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/StandardsfromtheQMHigherEducationRubric.pdf>

Introduction

Online Courses are defined as courses that are predominantly conducted via the learning management system and that do not require any on-campus face-to-face interaction. What sets apart a good online course from a not so good online course is often subjective, just like in a face-to-face course. The following suggestions are meant to provide objective suggestions that may help instructors improve their online courses. You will notice that a lot of the suggestions are about communicating the instructor's goals and expectations. It is fair to say that an instructor should be proactive and over-communicate with their students. The goal is to focus on those questions that advance learning, rather than getting bogged down with administrative questions.

There is no one correct way to structure an online course, whether it is predominantly live virtual (synchronous) or prerecorded (asynchronous), either approach can be successful. Regardless, in most cases the best solution is to provide students a mix of the two. It depends on the course material and the instructor preferences which combination works best.

Course Features

Below are collection of course features instructors should consider when developing their online course.

Course Introduction

As the beginning of the course sets the tone for the rest of the semester, instructors should be very explicit in stating what the expectations, rules and conduct in the class should be. The more explicit instructors are the less likely it is that they are overwhelmed with questions during the semester.

Sufficient	Better	Best
1) Provide the students with instructions regarding how to get started and	You should be more explicit and detailed than what you are used to from your regular courses.	Provide links and reminders where applicable. You email your students on a regular

where to find various course components.		basis to let them know what they should be working on.
2) The learning goals are stated.	Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.	The instructor explicitly outlines the specific goals for the course in a manner that is easy to understand and is focused on tangible outcomes.
3) Provide students with one or more ways to contact the instructor.	Communication expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of interaction are clearly stated.	Instructor spends considerable time making sure students have examples of what proper behavior and communication looks like in the class.
4) Provide a bio and introduction to the student.	The self-introduction by the instructor is via video, professional, and is available online.	The instructor participates in an ice-breaker type exercise with the students.
5) Students are asked to introduce themselves to the class in written format.	Students are asked to introduce themselves to the class in an interactive format. Possibly, while exploring a class topic.	Students are asked to create a short video of themselves completing an 'ice breaker' assignment.

Learning Goals (Competencies)

Learning objectives are important for online students because it provides them with a clear understanding of what they need to focus on. It is more difficult to ascertain this in an online environment. As a lot of online courses shift some of the responsibility for learning to the students, instructors should be more explicit than what they are typically used to.

6) Instructor provides the students with learning objectives in the syllabus.	The learning goals describe outcomes that are measurable.	The learning goals are written from the perspective of the student and make it clear what they will be able to do after the course.
7) No learning goals for the course modules (weeks).	The module (week) learning goals describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives.	The learning goals are linked to <u>each assignment</u> and the instructor clearly states what learning goal they are assessing.

Assessment and Measurement

Assessments are an important part of assuring learning for each student. Creative ways to integrate assessments and learning will enhance the student outcomes. It is important to highlight that even assessments can become opportunities to enhance learning.

8) Instructor has assessments in the course.	The assessments include a reference to the learning goals.	There is a clear connection and measurement between the learning goals and each assessment.
9) The course grading policy is stated at the beginning of the course.	The instructor discusses what the grading expectations are after each major assessment (midterm and final).	Explicit expectations of what the various grades require (rubrics). Students should be able to know what exactly it takes to earn a certain grade and they receive feedback after each assignment.
10) The course has some major and minor assignments which are graded.	The course provides students with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback.	The course includes assignments that are varied in nature, build on each other, and provide opportunities to enhance learning.

Instructional Materials

A very common question is how long should lectures be in an online course. While there are no easy answers to this question, instructors should certainly cover the same material they would in their regular face-to-face class. But one minute of instruction in class does not necessarily translate into one minute of online instruction. Comparing time does not necessarily ensure equivalency. Instructors should strive for roughly 6 hours of average engagement time per week for the students. When counting up those times, remember to allow for multiple views of lectures, readings, research time. It may also be beneficial to share those estimates with the students.

Types of Teaching Materials

It is best to use a mix of teaching materials to break up the monotony of a course. This not only leads to higher student satisfaction, but also to better learning outcomes because students are more likely to stay engaged.

- Video Lectures (instructor and/or slides on the screen)
- Screencapture tutorials (instructor explains a calculation step by step, software or programming technique while showing their screen)
- Interviews or Guest Speakers (either ones you conducted or openly available ones)
- Readings (book, article or instructor-written text)

- Research Assignments (rather than teaching a concept, ask the students to research a topic and find the answer themselves).
- Others

Live versus pre-recorded lectures

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher engagement opportunities with students • Enables the instructor to repeat and reinforce key points in the lecture • Allows real-time Q&A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In large sessions it is very difficult to interact with an individual student • Students may not be able to attend the live session • Watching the recording afterwards is usually associated with low engagement
Pre-recorded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time-efficient for the students because they can watch it on their own schedule • More concise and effective at conveying the required information • Breaks up content into smaller chunks which can increase retention because students can be asked to show they understand before moving to the next topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good pre-recorded lectures require more preparation • Students may not watch the lecture or pay attention • Potentially more technology required to obtain good quality videos

In most courses, there is an opportunity to use both styles of lectures. Not every piece of content is going to work well in just one type of format. For example, some lectures work great in a pre-recorded manner, but a discussion would work well in small live breakout groups.

Self-produced video lecture best practices

- Shorter videos are much more engaging, and ideally keep each segment to less than ten minutes but be sure to discuss one idea fully and if you have to go over, do so only when necessary.
- You have the option to show yourself and/or the slides (or other graphics). It is best if you switch in full screen between the two. The picture in picture only works well in a studio shoot. It helps with engagement if the students see you talking at least once per module.
- If you shoot at home, try and create a personal and informal feel for the lectures. The students want to feel like they know you.
- Videos where instructors speak fairly fast with high enthusiasm are more engaging.
- Consider how you look and sound (camera, lighting, and microphone are important and don't have to be expensive)

Sufficient	Better	Best
11) Instructor has lectures and other materials in the course	The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning goals	The students have a variety of learning materials that cover the most common learning styles
12) The syllabus contains an academic integrity section	Academic integrity is properly enforced through use of plagiarism detection and proctored exams	The course models the academic integrity expected of learners by providing both source references and permissions for use of instructional materials
13) The course contains only pre-recorded lectures or only live virtual lectures	The course combines live virtual and pre-recorded content	A variety of instructional materials is used in the course

Student Activities and Interaction

An online course without opportunities for interaction can be a very lonely place for the students. Conversely, an online course with numerous opportunities for interaction provides for a rich and fulfilling learning experience. While not all interaction opportunities will be used by students, more opportunities usually ensure that students do not feel left behind.

14) Communication is largely one-way from the instructor to the students	Interaction between the instructor and the students is common	Interaction between instructor and students as well as among students is common in the course
15) The instructor's plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated	The instructor provides opportunities and examples for multiple types of interaction and communicates those to students clearly and frequently	The instructor adapts to the needs of the students as the course progresses
16) The instructor has a participation component as part of the student's grade	Interaction is frequently asked for by the instructor	The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated and frequently encouraged

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