



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning

Essentials of Online Course Design and Facilitation: A Self Learning Manual



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Authorship

This document was prepared and written by

Kevin Pitts, PhD

Azra Naseem

With contributions from

Abeer Hammadi

Beth Waweru

Caroline Namukwaya

Daniel Raynor

Edward Misava

Khairunnissa Ajani

Khurram Iqbal

Kiran Qasim Ali

Dr. Sana Saeed

Shanaz Cassum

Tasneem Anwar, PhD

Dr. Unab Khan

Veronica Sarungi

Dr. Zehra Jamil

Zohra Kurji

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Provost's Message



I am delighted to announce the launch of the Online Course Design and Facilitation Manual. As a result of COVID-19, we have seen an accelerated use of online teaching throughout AKU. As we move to the next phase of the change, investing in faculty development for teaching and learning will remain AKU's top most priority.

The AKU-wide Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning aims to support excellence in AKU academic programmes to ensure a strong student learning experience.

The network offers a range of services and resources geared towards strengthening teaching and learning experiences at AKU. While regular, structured reviews aim to improve upon and promote the highest quality academic programmes at AKU, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for development of new opportunities, including the accelerated adaptation of online education modes.

I am proud of the strong teaching and learning tradition at AKU. This blended learning initiative leverages digital technologies and yields more options to our faculty and students in terms of access and flexibility by accommodating challenges due to geography, learning preferences, and life stage responsibilities. This manual is a first step to promote an outcome-based approach to our courses, curriculum, and programmes.

The collaborative nature of this effort which draws on best practices identified through research and experience is particularly rewarding. Indeed, this initiative helps position AKU to thrive in the future, build global communities, and contribute locally and globally to the health and economic well-being of these communities.

As you work through the manual, I hope you will find practical guidance and examples, grounded in research, that will enhance your online teaching practice. I will be watching with great interest how students engage in learning through more blended and hybrid approaches online.

Carl Amrhein, Provost and Vice-President, Academic, Aga Khan University

Vice Provost, Quality, Teaching and Learning's Message



This manual on Essentials of Online Course Design and Facilitation is a response to the needs identified from the experience of the rapid transition phase at the outbreak of the pandemic and the experiences of faculty and students at AKU. Surveys conducted in October 2020 identified that the majority of faculty (73%) largely taught their courses online as they would have done in face-to-face classrooms; that is, online teaching synchronously through ZOOM or MS Teams. This was expected and true of faculty around the world grappling with the need to continue teaching programmes whilst also learning how best to use online modalities and pedagogies, which brings to mind the widely used metaphor of 'building the plane while flying it'! Whilst students were grateful for the efforts made by faculty to meet their needs during 'quaranteaching', 64% of students stated they preferred a combination of formats where online teaching incorporated both synchronous access to faculty as well as the ability to learn asynchronously on the Virtual Learning Environment, with more opportunities for independent learning.

For those of us new to teaching online, this brings with it a new vocabulary and terminology that is often confusing. *Is blended learning different to hybrid teaching? Is independent learning the same as asynchronous teaching? How is homework different to working on the VLE?* We know that whilst learning outcomes must always drive our teaching approaches, the way a course is designed will have to be different depending on the mode of delivery.

This manual, and the professional development courses offered by the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning (QTL_net) across AKU, will help faculty navigate the necessary changes as more teaching and programmes are offered online. The development of the manual is guided by an evidence base of what works online and based on good practices in our contexts and internationally.

This manual and faculty reflections over the last year provide an opportunity for positive teaching and curricular transformation across the University. This transformation will be guided by a focus on an outcomes driven, learning centred approach to teaching online. Using blended and flipped approaches enables collaboration between learners themselves to co-produce curricula and

co-create knowledge, where the teacher acts as a facilitator of authentic and deep learning through enhanced student engagement.

My sincere thanks to our CADEX consultant Kevin Pitts and Azra Naseem, Director Blended and Digital Learning within QTL_net, who have led the development of this manual. My thanks also to the many members of the Rapid Online and Remote Teaching Coordinating Group (RORTCG) and faculty champions who have commented and contributed to this manual. The commitment of faculty to ensure quality online teaching has been remarkable. This manual on best practices to online course design will be an important resource for all faculty as we collectively strive to engage our students online and offer the best learning experience to all our learners.

Tashmin Khamis, Vice Provost, Quality, Teaching and Learning, AKU

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Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to help educators design effective online learning experiences for learners, with particular focus on blended online learning. It is a practical, step-by-step guide.

It is built from the philosophy that digital technologies provide numerous possibilities to enhance, enable, and reimagine teaching and learning in a range of pedagogical contexts. Because of the affordances of digital technologies, designing an online or blended course requires faculty to make deliberate decisions about learning outcomes, assessment, and teaching methods. Therefore, this manual is meant to serve as a guide for faculty members who are interested in designing a new, or re-designing an already existing, course as an online or blended course.

The manual is divided into three parts:

- Part A: Preparation
- Part B: Design and Development
- Part C: Implementation

Each part comprises several steps meant to guide you through the process of blended online course design. Each step includes an overview of the step, background information, activities that can be completed independently, a list of resources, and a summary of the step. You can start at any step, depending on the topic you are interested in and your previous experience. However, for those new to online or blended learning it is recommended to work step-by-step.

The steps are extracted from experience, the literature, and from established online learning design principles.

Practical examples and resources are provided to help you visualise options and reduce course design and development time. The manual also includes relevant templates and checklists used at the Aga Khan University (AKU) for online and blended course design and teaching.

After following the steps you will have a quality, flexible course ready to be taught in blended online mode

How to Use this Manual

The following is a brief list of suggestions for how to get the most out of the manual.

- Work step-by-step. Each step builds on the previous one from preparation through to design, development, implementation, and evaluation.
- Complete all the activities. The activities are practical and designed so you will have resources and materials you can use right away in your courses. Further, some of the activities might become artefacts which you can add to your academic portfolio or teaching dossier.
- Keep a reflective journal or blog. As you work through the manual, you should record your thoughts in a journal or blog. Your reflections about your learning journey may ultimately help you make more informed curriculum decisions as you work through the process.
- Be iterative. Rapid developments in online teaching and learning in terms of pedagogy and technology force us to continually revisit our teaching assumptions and practices. As you work through the manual and learn new skills you shouldn't be afraid to return to a previous step to refine your work.
- Seek assistance. One of the great affordances of the Internet is the expansion of communication options. You should seek out local and global communities of practice. Educators love to share ideas. Many institutional teaching and learning centres have tremendous online resources readily available. At AKU, contact members of QTL_net and the Teacher Academy.
- Do not try to do it all at once. Creating a blended or online course from scratch or modifying an existing course for blended online teaching can seem like a daunting task. Give yourself time. Start small and build gradually.
- Involve your learners. We know from experience that our first online course iterations often don't go as planned; that's okay. Ask your learners for feedback: What worked? What needs improvement? Generally, learners are willing to provide feedback (formal or informal) and you can use that feedback to enhance future iterations of your courses.

Part A: Preparation



Step 1: Getting to Know Online Learning

Overview and Outcomes



Welcome to Step 1. So glad you have decided to join in what we hope is a useful and productive learning journey. Let's get started.

To set the context for the manual, we will begin with an overview of online learning, blended learning, and blended online learning at AKU, and where these modalities might be most beneficial for our courses.

By the end of this step, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between online and blended modalities to identify the best option for a given educational purpose
- Identify the support available at AKU to help you become an online educator
- Connect with a support entity at AKU to initiate discussion about preferred ways to get help as needed.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours on this step.

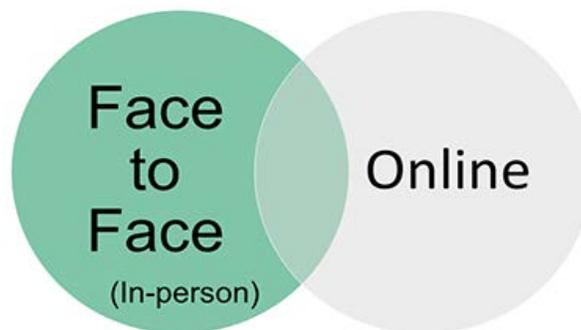
Context



There are many variants of online and blended learning. For example, online learning might be self-paced and asynchronous. In this mode there is no face-to-face, real-time contact with either the instructor or other students. Students work through a course at their own pace at the time and location of their choosing. Online learning might be teacher-led and synchronous. In this mode there is real-time contact between the instructor and other students. Students work through a course following the pace of the teacher.

Initially, Blended Learning (Figure 1) was defined as the integration of face-to-face and asynchronous online activities (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; [Owston, 2018](#)).

Figure 1. *Blended Learning (BL)*



Now, with the advancement of online communication technologies, it is possible to have real-time, synchronous connections with students online. Integrating asynchronous and synchronous modes where all activities take place online is referred to as Blended Online Learning (Figure 2) ([Power, 2008](#)). (Note: the mixture of online synchronous and asynchronous learning may also be referred to as “bichronous online learning” ([Martin, Polly, & Ritzhaupt, 2020](#)).) In this modality the in-person, face-to-face component is replaced by an online synchronous component where learners meet at the same time (for example, via Zoom) but not in the same physical location. The online component remains the same and constitutes asynchronous learning where learners engage with

course content, activities, and each other at different times (within a given window) via the [Virtual Learning Environment](#) (VLE) or similar digital tools.

Figure 2. *Blended Online Learning (BOL)*



There are several noted limitations with completely asynchronous online learning courses, particularly for learners who are less independent and require consistent direction from an instructor. Consequently, by adopting a blended approach the challenges caused by completely eliminating in-person or real-time contact can be somewhat mitigated. Research has also shown that, generally, students prefer and perform better in environments that use some form of blended approach ([Owston & York, 2018](#)).

Models

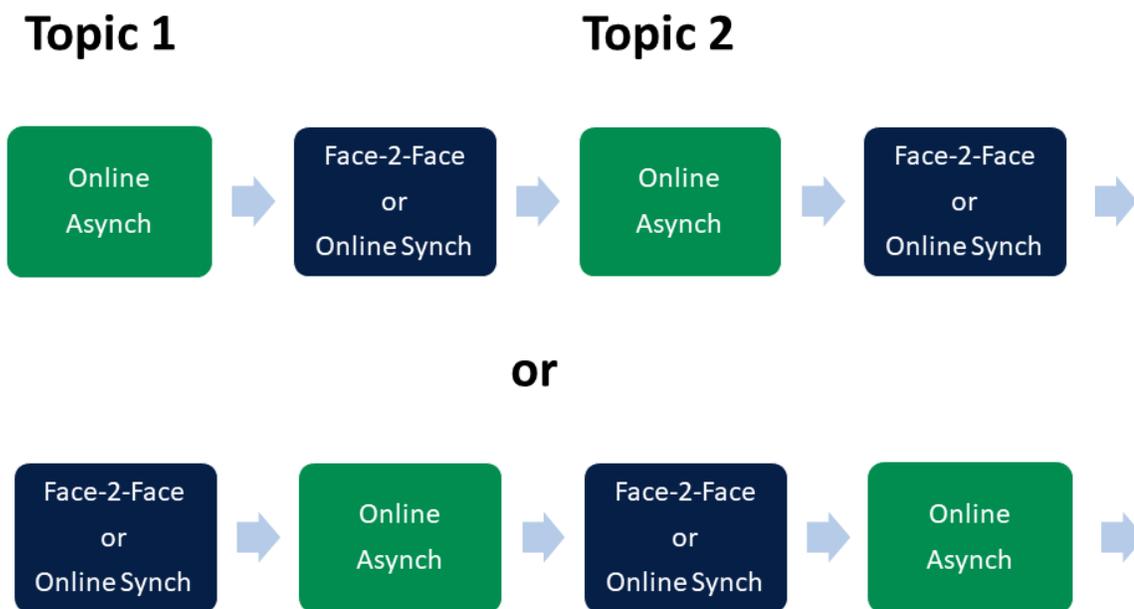
Several models of online and blended learning exist globally and several have been implemented at AKU. Some of the examples include:

- Topic or module level blending (e.g. Flipped learning)
- Course level blending (e.g. Block teaching)

Some examples of these models are as follows:

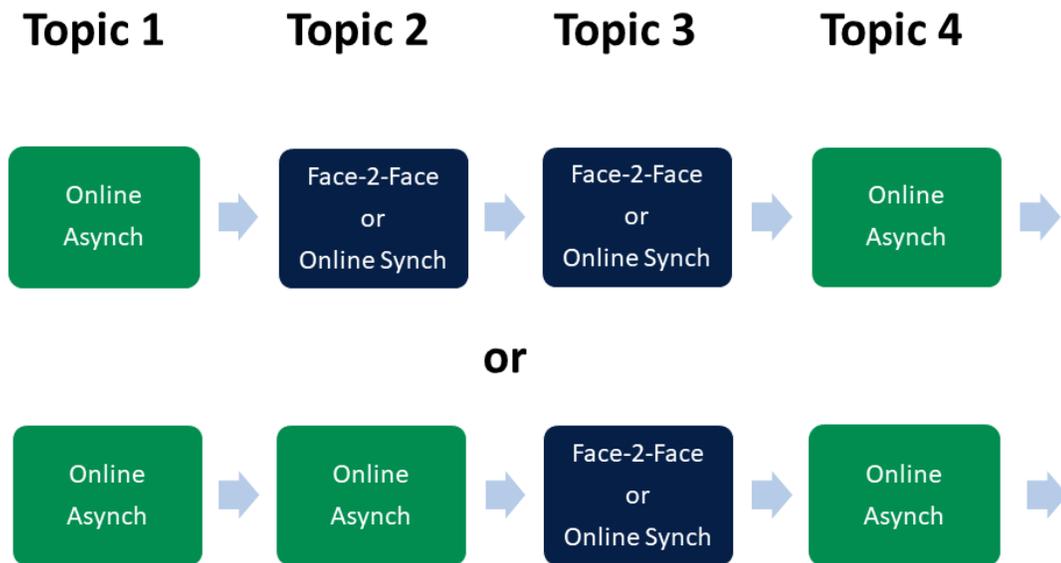
An example of topic level blended includes the flipped classroom model where each week before coming to the face-to-face class students watch a video, read an article, and/or listen to a podcast, and then complete an asynchronous online activity on the VLE (Figure 3). In the class, they work in small groups with other students to review problems or cases. A good example of this type of course design is [Developmental Anatomy offered by Dr Zehra Jamil](#) from the Department of Biological and Biomedical Sciences (BBS) at AKU.

Figure 3. Topic level blending



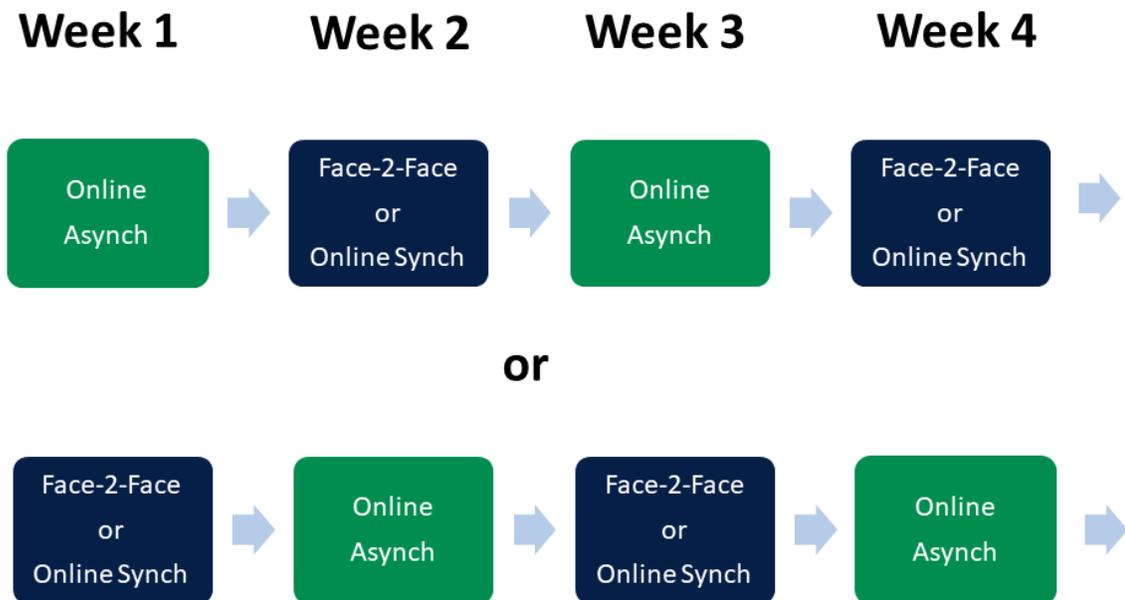
An example of course level blending (irregular timing) might be where students begin working through course content remotely by participating in online discussions, completing online quizzes, and problem-based tasks via the VLE. They may also attend live teaching sessions via Zoom once a month. Towards the end of the course, they meet face-to-face to complete the clinical requirements of the course and sit for the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) (Figure 4). A good example of this type of course design is [FamMed Essentials by Dr Unab Khan](#) from the Department of Family Medicine AKU.

Figure 4. Course level blending - irregular timing.



Other courses may adopt a strategy where face-to face (or online synchronous) teaching and asynchronous online teaching occur in alternate weeks (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Course level blending - alternate weeks.



There are so many possibilities: How do we decide which model is suitable for our course? This is the most frequently asked question. The answer is neither straightforward, nor simple. Each course will have a different answer depending on the factors such as course requirements, and student and faculty readiness. We need to go through a series of steps to determine the most suitable blend (of face-to-face and online; or synchronous online and asynchronous online) for our courses. In the subsequent sections, we will be guided through the various steps to develop the most suitable blend for our course(s).

Blended and Online Learning at AKU

The use of digital media technologies for teaching and learning is not a new concept at AKU. Individuals and academic entities have offered courses using technology for many years. In 2011, a pilot project was initiated to enable faculty members to develop essential knowledge and skills to design, teach, and evaluate courses offered through a blended learning (BL) approach in their areas of expertise. A related objective was to create opportunities for faculty members from different entities to engage in collaborative course design, teaching, and research through the use of existing and emerging technologies (Naseem & Handley 2015). This successful completion of the pilot project led to an influx of pedagogical innovations at AKU in the form of online and blended learning in all the disciplines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when on-campus teaching was suspended, AKU was able to build on the work done earlier to enable a swift and effective transition to online teaching.

Finding Support for Blended and Online Learning at AKU

You may think that becoming an online educator is a lonely and isolating pursuit. Let's dispel that myth right away: the online educator community is growing and thriving - you are not alone. At AKU we invite and welcome all to join our community of practice.

Faculty are subject matter experts (or SMEs). This role is crucial in any course design and development project. In blended and online course design many other roles are also needed, such as instructional designer, graphic designer, videographer, technical developer, and copyright officer. Sometimes faculty take on multiple roles (such as SME and instructional designer), but generally in blended and online course design and development there is a team of individuals that bring specific expertise to a course development project. This means faculty are not alone; support is available.

At AKU support for online and blended courses is coordinated through the Blended and Digital Learning Team within the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning (QTL_net). The [QTL net website](#) contains rich resources that we can review to help us get started. For example:

- The [Guidelines for Designing an Online or Blended Programme at AKU](#) document contains information about the supports available by role (eLearning designer, eLearning developer, VLE assistants) and by entity (Library, IT).
- The [Online Course Design and Development Process at AKU](#) document contains information about the overall process and timelines for blended and online course development.
- The guiding document is the [Strategic Plan 2020-2025: The Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning \(QTL Net\)](#). This document highlights the goals and objectives that speak to creating an institutional culture of teaching and learning with technology.

Academic Computing

The Academic Computing (AC) team is part of the Information Technology (IT) Services department and provides the following services:

- Hardware support
- Software support
- Connectivity support
- Management of the VLE, Zoom, MS Teams
- VLE course shell creation
- VLE technical training and support
- Help desk

Library

The library provides 1) access to the digital resources through a Virtual Private Network (VPN), 2) copyright clearance, and 3) offers information literacy courses for faculty and students.

The Audio Visual (AV) Department is a part of the Library. It provides videographers/editors for the development of educational videos and graphics for courses offered through the blended or online approach.

VLE Champions and Assistants

Each academic entity has a faculty member who serves as the VLE champion. They are supported by one or more VLE assistants.

The digital age has provided an opportunity for us to rethink our teaching. There are so many more options available to us to enhance what we do. And there are many communities to support us, both local and global. We are all encouraged to seek out these communities. As we go down the path to becoming an online educator we will learn new pedagogical and technological skills, and we will be supported along the way.

Activities



1. Browse through the [Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning website](#) at AKU. Find the “Meet Our Team” page under the “About” tab. Identify the people available to support you in Blended and Digital Learning. Next, navigate to the “Frameworks” and “Tools” pages under the “Resources” tab, and then the “Teaching Stories” and “Teaching Tips” pages under the “Reflective Practice” tab. Spend some time perusing the pages and items there. You may wish to bookmark your preferred pages.
2. Start a learning journal or blog. For your first entry list the contact information for key teaching and learning supports and the type of support provided. Answer the questions: where can I get pedagogical help for designing an online or blended course? Where can I get technical help? Connect with a support person from the BDL team or a VLE champion from your entity to initiate discussions about how best to get help and the type of help available.
3. Go to the [AKU YouTube channel](#). Locate the EdTech Lounge playlist. Select one session of interest from the playlist. As you watch, record your reflections (i.e., something which resonated with you) in your journal or blog. You may wish to subscribe to the AKU YouTube channel by clicking on the subscribe link on the YouTube channel page.

Resources



[AKU Network of quality, teaching and learning](#)

[Aga Khan University YouTube Channel](#)

[AKU Strategic plan 2020-2025: The network of quality, teaching and learning \(QTL net\)](#)

Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2008). *Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[Guidelines for Designing an Online or Blended Programme at AKU](#)

Martin, F., Polly, D., & Ritzhaupt, A. (2020). [Bichronous online learning: Blending asynchronous and synchronous online learning](#).

Naseem, A., & Handley, C. (2015). Establishing a blended learning program through situated faculty development: Experiences and reflections. *SITE 2015*. Las Vegas USA

[Online Course Design and Development Process at AKU](#)

Owston, R. (2018). [Empowering learners through blended learning](#).

Owston, R., & York, D. N. (2018). [The nagging question when designing blended courses: Does the proportion of time devoted to online activities matter?](#)

Power, M. (2008). [The emergence of a blended online learning environment](#).

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 1:

I have ...

- Read the Step 1 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Visited the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning website.
- Identified support contacts for Blended and Digital Learning.
- Connected with one of the support entities at AKU.
- Started my learning journal or blog.
- Watched one of the EdTech Lounge sessions of interest to me and recorded my reflections in my journal or blog.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 2.

Step 2: Getting to Know Yourself as an Online Educator

Overview and Outcomes



Many of us have spent years learning or training to become experts in our particular disciplines. However, we may not have spent any significant time learning or training to become educators, let alone online educators.

You might ask yourself: Where to begin? What knowledge, skills, attributes do I need to become an effective online educator?

In this step we will explore some suggested competencies of an online educator and reflect on our strengths and weaknesses to identify areas for improvement related to these competencies.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Describe the competencies required of an online educator.
- Identify your strengths and areas for improvement as an online educator.
- Create a professional development plan to address your online educator competency gaps.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



The increasing demands on educators in the digital world require an ever-evolving skill set. It is difficult to keep pace with change sometimes and online educators may be unaware of some additional requirements and expectations of them.

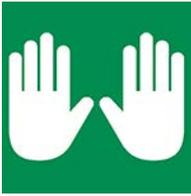
So what are the requirements of an online educator in the current digital world? Simon Bates (2014) provides a useful framework listing six (6) essential competencies of a [21st Century Educator](#); namely, 1) teacher for learning, 2) curator, 3) technologist, 4) collaborator, 5) scholar, and 6) experimenter. [eCampusOntario Extend](#) has adapted this framework to create a self-paced professional learning programme called the “Anatomy of an Empowered Educator”. The focus is to help educators thrive in the digital world and take full advantage of the many affordances of online teaching and learning.

Many other similar frameworks from around the world exist, all with overarching commonalities. AKU’s own [Teaching and Learning Framework](#), for example, guides the process for creating excellent teaching and learning experiences at AKU. What these frameworks provide is a way to become aware of the changing requirements and expectations of online educators, and a way to plan continual professional development accordingly.

The good news is that many institutions, like AKU, have begun to plan for change and have put in place many supports to help faculty. The current AKU [“Strategic Plan 2020-2025 for the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning”](#) has a number of objectives focused on building the capacity of educators to address potential competency gaps.

Given this context, let’s work through a process to identify our online educator strengths and weaknesses, identify if any competency gaps exist, and, if so, put together a professional development plan to address these gaps.

Activities



1. Review the [Online Educator Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist](#) (Appendix A). For each statement (competency) listed reflect on your progress towards achieving that competency and rate yourself in terms of proficiency. You may wish to print the checklist for future reference.
2. Based on the results of your reflection above, identify any professional development you require. Use the [Online Educator Professional Development Plan Template](#) (Appendix B) as a guide. Complete the plan and identify your top three (3) short-term and top three (3) long-term goals (PART I).
3. Your top three goals can be about the shortcomings you may have identified through the Self-Assessment Checklist. Additionally, find a faculty member in your own department, QTL_net or the [Teachers' Academy](#) who has that skill to collaborate with. Complete PART II of the [Online Educator Professional Development Plan Template](#). As we have learnt during COVID-19, peer learning and teamwork are the backbone of online and blended teaching at AKU.
 - a. You may wish to review the “[Strategic Plan 2020-2015 for the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning](#)” to see how well your goals align with the objectives outlined in the strategic plan, and adjust your goals as necessary. Also, you may wish to refer to your department’s or entity’s strategic planning documents, if available.
 - b. You may also wish to revisit AKU’s [Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning website](#) to see what resources and professional development opportunities are available to you.

Resources



[AKU Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning](#)

[AKU Teaching and Learning Framework](#)

[AKU Strategic plan 2020-2025 the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning \(QTL net\)](#)

Bates, S. (2014, June). [The anatomy of a 21st century educator.](#)

eCampusOntario [Welcome to Ontario Extend: Professional learning for educators.](#)

[Online Educator Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist](#) (Appendix A)

[Online Educator Professional Development Plan Template](#) (Appendix B)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 2:

I have ...

- Read the Step 2 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Reviewed the Online Educator Competency Self-Assessment Checklist.
- Rated myself in terms of the competencies listed in the Online Educator Competency Self-Assessment Checklist.
- Identified my strengths and areas for improvement.
- Created a professional development plan using the Online Educator PD Plan Template consisting of at least 3 short-term and 3 long-term goals.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 3.

Step 3: Getting to Know Your Online Learners

Overview and Outcomes



Building relationships with learners is at the heart of quality teaching. Teachers care about their learners, their well-being, and their academic success. But relationships do not happen automatically, they require cultivation. One way to cultivate relationships with learners is to purposefully spend time getting to know them, and reciprocally, allowing them to get to know us. Knowing our learners is also the first step in the process of deciding the most appropriate blend of online and face-to-face, or synchronous and asynchronous online learning.

In this step we will explore some practical ways to get to know our online learners so that we can begin to build a more inclusive, safe, comfortable learning environment, and establish a sense of community in our courses.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Articulate various ways to get to know your learners to enhance your course learning communities.
- Gather learner data to inform curriculum decisions.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



As we saw in the previous step, a key competency of an online educator is that of a scholar (Bates, 2014). This may manifest itself, for example, when we use our own classrooms (whether physical or online) as labs to inquire about student learning, try things out (experiment), and then use our findings and observations to improve our teaching practice. [Duncan-Andrade \(2017\)](#) suggests successful educators are, in fact, ethnographers at heart.

Classrooms, whether physical or online, are social spaces. Learning is heightened when these spaces are perceived as safe, enabling, equitable, and inclusive. Learning is a social and emotional activity. As online educators we want to harness these attributes in a positive way. Darby & Lang (2019) suggest we put emotions to work for us.

So, how do we go about doing this? Well, we can start by learning as much as we can about Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). The [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\) web site](#) has some good resources in this regard. We can recognize the impact of emotion in learning (both positive and negative, and manage emotional presence accordingly. [Cleveland-Inness & Campbell \(2012\)](#) provide some useful insights in this regard. They infer that

- Emotion is ubiquitous in online learning.
- Learners need the skills to manage emotions in online environments.
- Educators have a role in creating safe learning environments, where ideas can be respectfully challenged as long as learners feel safe, confident, and secure in that environment.

We can help our learners on this path by modelling social and emotional expectations in our courses.

Once we recognize the importance of social presence and emotional presence in our classrooms (online or face-to-face) we can use our research skills and our passion for teaching to get to know

our learners better, build relationships with our learners, and create authentic learning communities.

So, what are some practical ways we can go about getting to know our learners? Let's look at a few:

- Review institutional data: All institutions keep data about their past, current, and potential future learners. We can talk to our colleagues who have taught the course before to understand our students' needs. We can write to the University registrar's office or our programme leader to obtain relevant information about the students. We can search the website(s) of the entity(ies) responsible for institutional data (or contact them directly) and research the latest learner information for our programme. For example, check out the following infographic which breaks down [key demographic data by programme for the 2019-2020 academic year at AKU](#), the following poster which outlines the [AKU Graduate Attributes](#), and the following video which provides a [glimpse of a nursing student's journey at AKU](#). All this information will help us paint a picture of our learners' aspirations, needs, and expectations, and better prepare us as we make curriculum decisions in our courses.
- Design spaces for social sharing: For example, we can create a discussion forum in our course website on the VLE for informal conversation. This forum can be called the "Learner Lounge", "Conversation and Queries Corner", or "Chai and Mandazi". This informal forum would be a place for students to ask questions of each other and of us, share information about themselves, and chat about experiences. We do need to set boundaries and expectations up front so the forum becomes a safe place to discuss issues. We can do this by providing a netiquette guide (see AKU's [Netiquette: Guidelines for Participating in Online Discussions on the VLE](#), and Carleton University's [Netiquette: Expectations of Student Behaviour Online](#), for examples) modelling expectations, being present in the forum (especially early on), sharing information about ourselves, and encouraging others to do so as well (making sure we tell learners to only share information they feel comfortable sharing). An informal forum goes a long way to establishing trust. For example, the following screenshot (Figure 6) shows the "Chat, chai, and samosa...anyone?" social forum used in the "Teaching and Learning: Principles and Practices" course at AKU.

Figure 6. *Chat, chai, and samosa... anyone? - Social Forum Example*

Social Area



Chat, chai and samosa ... anyone?

What is new in your life? Leave a message...

- Survey learners: As educators we want to reduce as many barriers as possible for learners. In an online environment barriers such as poor internet connectivity and reduced access to devices can greatly hinder learning. Furthermore, some learners may be coming from different time zones, are at different levels of language proficiency, and have numerous other obligations outside of school. For example, Post RN BScN students are usually working nurses and PGME students are working doctors, who are older, mature, and have job, family and childcare related responsibilities along with their studies. Knowing this information will help us design courses that are much more flexible and adaptable.

In summary, we should review the data/ information about our students in terms of the year of study, language proficiency, accessibility or special learning needs, access to devices and connectivity, digital literacy, prior experiences with online or blended learning, their experiences, motivation for enrolling in our course, and family responsibilities. This review will inform our teaching decisions. For example, first year students might need more teacher-directed courses with more synchronous or face-to-face teaching sessions as compared to final year students. And students with poor internet connectivity might prefer recorded audio lectures and phone based discussions, instead of HD video files or Zoom-based online classes.

Activities



1. Conduct an internet search using your favourite search engine to find out what strategies other post-secondary educators from around the world are using to get to know their learners to create safe, engaging, and comfortable learning communities. Write down in your journal or blog at least five (5) ideas that interest you and which you would be willing to try in your courses.
2. Talk to the programme leader to see what learner data (quantitative and qualitative) are available for your programme, generally, and your courses, specifically. Record as much information as you can gather.
3. Design and create a short online survey for your learners to complete as a course activity. The purpose of the survey would be to gather additional key information about your learners. The data could then be aggregated and analyzed to inform your teaching practice. You may wish to use the [AKU-IED's Student Readiness Survey - 2020](#) or AKU [Student Readiness Survey - 2021](#) as guides. You may wish to refer to the sample "[Online Learning Readiness Survey](#)" as a guide. This sample was created using Google Forms; however, there are many other tools available for you to use, such as SurveyMonkey, or the Feedback and Questionnaire tools in the VLE. Keep in mind the following tips:
 - a. The number of questions should be kept to a minimum. They should be short and specific, and the responses should provide you with the key information you need. Remember learners might be asked to complete a number of online surveys which may ultimately lead to survey fatigue.
 - b. Tell your learners the purpose of the survey and the benefits to them for completing it.
 - c. Make responses anonymous. Try to stay away from gathering identifiable information. Remember it is the aggregate data you are interested in. If you need specific individual information, use another strategy.

- d. Practice ethical data management. Once you have the responses you need, download them to a secure, password protected location. Encrypt the data if possible. Delete responses from the cloud after use.
4. In your journal, record all the characteristics of your students that will affect the design/blend of your online course.

Resources



[AKU 2019-2020 Learner Demographics Infographic](#) [Image]

[AKU Graduate Attributes \(2015\) Poster](#) [Image]

[AKU Chat, chai, and samosa... Social Area Discussion Forum](#) [Image]

[AKU Netiquette: Guidelines for Participating in Online Discussions on the VLE](#)

[AKU My Journey as a Nursing Student](#) [Video]

[AKU Student Readiness Survey - 2020](#)

[AKU Student Readiness Survey - 2021](#)

Bates, S. (2014, June). [The anatomy of a 21st century educator.](#)

Carleton University (n.d.). [Netiquette: Expectations of student behaviour online.](#)

Cleveland-Innes, M., & Campbell, P. (2012). [Emotional presence, learning, and the online learning environment.](#)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2020) CASEL'S SEL FRAMEWORK: [What are the core competence areas and where are they promoted?](#)

Darby, F., & Lang, J. M. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes.* Jossey-Bass.

Duncan-Andrade, J. (2017, March). [Equality or equity: which one will we feed?](#)

[Sample Online Learning Readiness Survey](#)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 3:

I have ...

- Read the Step 3 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Identified at least five (5) strategies that I could use to get to know my learners better.
- Researched institutional sources to obtain some quantitative and qualitative data about my potential learners.
- Created a short online survey to gather key information about my learners.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 4.

Part B: Design and Development



Step 4: Mapping Your Online Course

Overview and Outcomes



Welcome to Part B. Here we'll shift from preparation to design and development. This is an exciting phase as we begin to put our ideas into action. Ready? Let's get started.

There is a tendency for us as educators to focus so much on our own courses -- after all we are passionate about our discipline -- that we sometimes lose sight of the larger programme curriculum and terminal objectives. One of the essential steps in becoming an online educator is determining where a course fits in the overall curriculum.

There is also a tendency for us as educators to replicate online what we have always done in face-to-face classes. After all we are comfortable with face-to-face teaching, having spent years learning and then teaching in that modality. Online learning, however, opens up many more options. Thus, another essential step in becoming an online educator is determining which online teaching modality will work best for a given course.

In this step we will look at where our course fits within a larger programme curriculum context, how to select a viable online teaching modality from the options available, and how to break down our course into manageable "chunks" (or topics/ units/ modules) to help learners achieve intended learning outcomes.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Map your course within the overall programme curriculum in relation to prerequisite, corequisite, and subsequent courses in the curriculum.
- Select a teaching modality for online course delivery.
- Identify the essential course topics required to enable learners to reach intended learning outcomes.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



A map is a visual representation of a landscape, designed to help travellers navigate their way through that landscape. A course map does much the same thing: it helps us visualize the bigger picture so we can help learners navigate their way through the curriculum. When you think about it, we are only with our students for a relatively short period of time on their learning journey. That makes the time we do spend together so valuable; it's a privilege for us to be with our learners. We need to make sure we help them add to the knowledge and skills they have already acquired so they can continue to be successful and achieve their learning goals.

So, how should we go about mapping our course? First, we might consider questions like:

1. In what year of study do learners typically take my course?
2. What courses are prerequisites and/or corequisites for my course, if any?
3. For what other courses in the curriculum is my course a prerequisite, if any?
4. Is my course an undergraduate or graduate course?
5. What is the duration of the course?
6. How many credit hours does my course have?
7. Does my course have a practical component (e.g., lab, practicum, field work, studio, clinical)?

The answers to these questions will inform course design and teaching decisions. For example, if our course is offered in the first year of a programme, then we might want to make particularly sure that we include enough specific information about available learner supports, provide clear expectations, and detailed “how to” instructions. Students in the first year of study are not only trying to learn, but they are also acclimating to a new school and learning environment.

We should spend some time reviewing the outlines of prerequisite and corequisite courses, as well as the courses for which our course is a prerequisite. Review the learning outcomes, teaching modalities, assessment strategies, weekly schedules, etc. of these courses. Talk to colleagues teaching these courses to see how they design their online learning environments in the VLE.

Consistency is key in blended and online learning; students should spend most of their time achieving intended learning outcomes rather than trying to learn how to navigate through a new online layout in each course.

“In SONAM - PK, when blended learning began in 2013, every teacher excitedly started creating a different frontpage for their own course site on the VLE. Then the students shared their difficulties in navigating through 5 - 6 different course templates every semester. So now we have a standardized course template design for all courses on the VLE, in the post RN BScN program, to ensure quality and best practices. And students are comfortable navigating any course on the VLE” - Shanaz Cassum, Faculty member SONAM-PK

The process described above is designed to help us see where our course fits in the larger curriculum (macro view). Once that is mapped out then we can turn our attention to the micro view and map our own course. We should ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What are the core concepts in my course? What are the relationships between the core concepts?
2. What are the core topics within each concept? What are the relationships between them?
3. How much time would be allocated to each core concept and topics within them?

At the end of this exercise, we will have a list of core concepts and topics, and relationships between them.

These topics form the steps students take on their learning journey through our course. Again, consistency is key: where possible, each topic should take a similar amount of time (e.g., a week) and have a similar structure. We'll look into this in much more detail in subsequent steps.

Another important consideration is whether or not there is a practical component in our course, such as a lab, practicum, studio, or clinical requirement. Practical components require learners to demonstrate skills. In online teaching and learning, creativity is required to find alternative ways for students to practice skills, and to find alternative ways to assess their learning. Practical skills can be taught and assessed online through virtual labs, online simulations, “at home” labs (where learners are mailed lab kits and equipment, or instructed to use materials readily available around the house). And if no online option exists, then alternative arrangements can be made through such things as work projects or placements, and “near home” practical skills centres.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SONAM and IED students residing in Gilgit Baltistan and Chitral region of Pakistan were able to access the Internet and offline study pack from the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) sites. For more, check out AKU's strategy for [Offline and Low Bandwidth Teaching](#) (Naseem, Salim, Iqbal, 2020).

Once we have mapped our own course, the next step is to think about what teaching modality we might use. Of course, we may want to revisit this after reviewing the course learning outcomes and reviewing the responses from our student readiness survey.

Primarily, in online teaching and learning the modality options are:

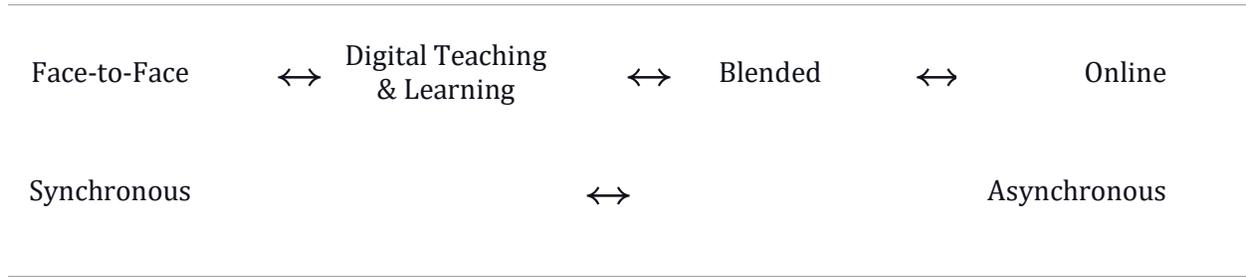
- Completely asynchronous (e.g., taught entirely via VLE)
- Completely synchronous (e.g., taught entirely via Zoom)
- Mainly asynchronous with some synchronous sessions
- Mainly synchronous with some asynchronous components

In completely asynchronous teaching learners interact with content, the teacher, and fellow learners on different days and at different times throughout the week. These interactions do not occur in real time (live). Course materials are available online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and learners choose the days and times to access the materials (e.g., lecture PowerPoints, videos, readings) and complete activities (e.g., self-assessment quizzes, discussion forums). This is the most flexible option.

In completely synchronous teaching learners come together on the same day and at the same time each week (e.g., via web conferencing, Zoom or Microsoft Teams). This is the least flexible option.

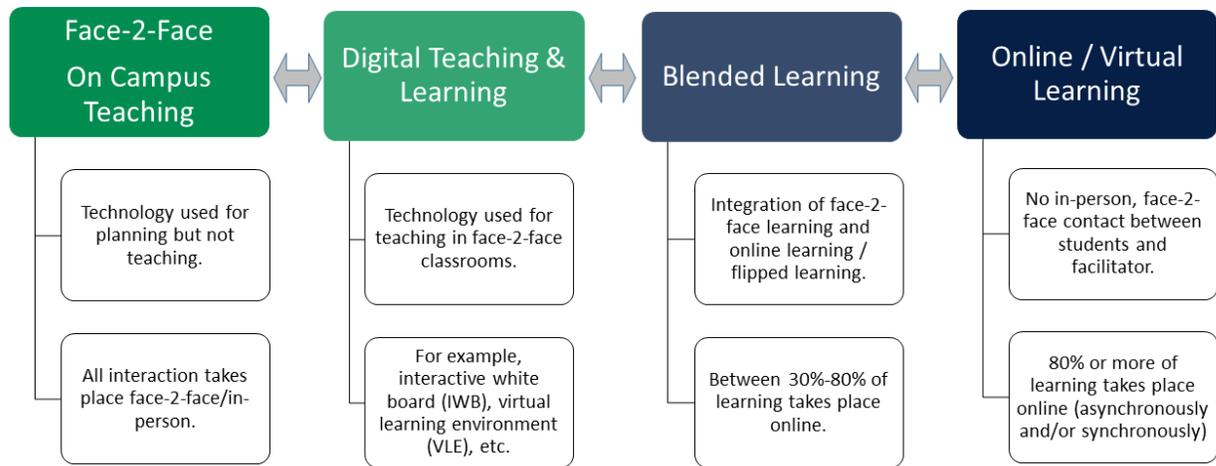
As noted earlier, in blended online learning (BOL) there is a mix of asynchronous and synchronous teaching. The extent to which a course employs asynchronous or synchronous teaching defines the blend along a continuum. This is often referred to in relation to the Learning Design Continuum (Figure 7).

Figure 7. *The Learning Design Continuum*



The continuum places face-to-face teaching (traditional synchronous classroom instruction) on the left, where all learning activities take place on campus, in the physical classroom in real time. From there the continuum moves to digital teaching and learning, where learners still meet for the same amount of time in a traditional classroom, but access digital course materials on the internet, often via a VLE. Blended teaching involves a mix of in-class and out-of-class teaching, where the out-of-class instruction involves the use of VLE tools plus additional digital tools designed to enhance instruction. In blended teaching face-to-face time is reduced. At AKU we consider a course to be online when 80% or more of interactions and course activities happen completely online (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Learning Design Continuum at AKU



As you move from left to right along the continuum the amount of real time (live) teaching is reduced. The learning design continuum has many variants. Bates (2019), for example, uses technology as the defining characteristic of a learning continuum rather than “seat time” (see [“The continuum of technology-based learning”](#)). There are many useful definitions there. And AKU has created a document to define a context-specific learning continuum (see [“Blended and Digital Learning at AKU”](#)). The definition of blended learning has changed over the years to include synchronous class meeting time online via web conferencing along with asynchronous online activities. This is known as Blended Online Learning or Bichronous Online Learning (BOL).

As online educators we are mostly focused on the right side of the continuum. One of the big decisions to make is whether or not to go completely asynchronous or offer some synchronous time in our courses. There are advantages and disadvantages to each teaching modality. We often weigh a number of factors. Table 1 outlines some differences between Synchronous and Asynchronous Teaching options.

Table 1. *Differences between Synchronous and Asynchronous Teaching*

Synchronous	Asynchronous
<p>Students and teacher interact at the same time</p> <p>Feedback is immediate</p>	<p>Interaction takes place at different times providing greater flexibility in the teaching and learning process for those with competing demands</p> <p>Delayed feedback</p>
<p>Teachers need to know the software well to facilitate online classes with breakout groups, chat and other features.</p> <p>Sessions longer than 40 minutes can be tiring and have detrimental effect on the teaching and learning process</p>	<p>Extra effort required on the part of the teacher to ensure learner participation</p> <p>Extra effort required on the part of the students for self-directed learning</p>
<p>Suitable for clarifying learning expectations or for discussion on less complex issues or concepts</p>	<p>More time to reflect on and analyse complex concepts, issues; appropriate for deep learning</p>
<p>Need consistent Internet access for the duration of the class</p>	<p>More appropriate for students who might have limited bandwidth or connectivity issues</p>

For example, the more synchronous time we include in a course, the less flexible the course becomes for learners. At AKU, we recommend asynchronous online teaching approaches wherever possible due to the technological limitations faced by students.

If we plan on including synchronous teaching in our course, we should ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Are synchronous sessions essential? Can they be replaced with asynchronous teaching?
2. How long is the session? Can I shorten it by moving “lecture” or on-way transmission of information to the VLE?
3. Have I included active teaching methods in my synchronous sessions?

4. Have I prepared myself to facilitate the sessions (e.g., attended the Zoom pedagogy workshop offered by the BDL team)?
5. Have I developed a Plan B in case there is a connectivity failure?

Many recent surveys have shown that learners prefer a mix of asynchronous and synchronous teaching (i.e., blended online learning) and value at least some synchronous interaction with professors and fellow learners ([Digital Promise, 2020](#)). AKU's Faculty and Student Satisfaction Survey with Online and Remote Learning during the Rapid Transition period in 2020 also shows that 64% of the students prefer blended online learning. Our choice of teaching modality should first and foremost take into consideration our learners, and the recommendations of our department or entity.

Activities



1. Map your course by determining where it fits in the overall programme curriculum, and identify the prerequisites, and/or corequisites your course requires. Then identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners who successfully complete your course will bring to subsequent courses in the programme. Use the [Online Teaching Programme Map Template](#) (Appendix C) as a guide.
2. Break up your online course into manageable “chunks”, i.e. topics, units, weeks, modules. Identify which topics have a practical component to them (e.g., lab, practicum, studio, clinical), and, if so, identify a strategy to teach and assess that practical component. Use the [Online Teaching Course Topics Template](#) (Appendix D) as a guide.
3. Select an initial teaching modality for your online course. Justify your chosen teaching modality using any available evidence you have. Record your choice and explanation in your learning journal or blog.

Resources



Bates, A. W. (2019). [Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning \(2nd Edition\)](#).

[Blended and Digital Learning Continuum at AKU](#)

Digital Promise (2020). [Suddenly online: A national survey of undergraduates during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Naseem, A., Salim, Z., Iqbal, K. (2020). [Offline and Low Bandwidth Teaching at AKU](#).

[Online Educator Programme Map Template](#) (Appendix C)

[Online Educator Course Topics Template](#) (Appendix D)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 4:

I have ...

- Read the Step 4 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Mapped my course in relation to the other course in my programme using the Online Educator Programme Map Template.
- Listed the topics to be included in my online course and identify if a practical component for any topic is required using the Online Educator Course Topics Template.
- Decided on the modality I will use in my course and included an explanation as to why the specific modality was chosen.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 5.

Step 5: Creating and/or Revising Course Learning Outcomes

Overview and Outcomes



Educators guide learning by showing learners the end goal (the destination of the learning journey) and providing the resources and guidance to help learners reach that end goal. In this sense learners know the outcome (or outcomes) of a successful journey at the very beginning. This forms the basis of “[Backward Design](#)” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998), which is a common process used by educators to design instruction to help students achieve specific learning outcomes.

As online educators we can use the Backward Design framework to identify the knowledge and skills our learners need by the time they successfully reach the end of our course. (See Thackaberry (n.d.) for more on [Understanding by Design](#)). Once we have that information we can then go about the process of writing learning outcomes, or revising existing outcomes, to guide learners in achieving those goals.

Writing clear learning course outcomes is the focus of this step.

By the end of this step you will be able to

- Identify the knowledge and skills required of learners for a given unit of instruction or course in your discipline using the Backward Design framework.
- Write 3-part, SMART learning outcomes to make explicit the learning goals of a specific unit of instruction or course in your discipline.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



Learning outcomes are the foundation of curriculum. Educators use learning outcomes to guide choices they make around what materials, activities, and assessments to include in the curriculum. All the curriculum choices educators make should help learners reach intended learning outcomes.

For this reason it is essential to write clear learning outcomes. Better learning outcomes lead to better teaching and better learning. So how do you write clear learning outcomes? Let's explore some guidelines.

1. Learning outcomes should have learners in mind first and foremost. They should tell learners what they should be able to achieve (know or do) at the end of a unit of instruction, and at what level.
2. Learning outcomes should be SMART. That is, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
3. Learning outcomes should contain three parts: 1) a single action verb (at the appropriate level), 2) the content (what the learner should be able to know or do), and 3) the context or reason for doing so (why or what for).

Let's explore these ideas by way of an example. Consider the following learning outcome from a practical nursing course:

By the end of the course you will be able to understand therapeutic communication techniques.

This outcome needs improvement. The action verb "understand" does not force learners to make their learning explicit (externalized) and thus cannot be easily measured or assessed. Action verbs such as "apply" or "use" would be better choices because they force the learner to show their learning to others. The verbs "apply" or "use" also indicate a level of learning, based on Bloom's taxonomy. Armstrong (n.d.) provides a useful overview of [Bloom's taxonomy](#) (cognitive domain). Review the action verbs associated with each level of the taxonomy in this useful [chart of action](#)

[verbs by Bloom's taxonomy level](#) (Shabatura, 2014). As you do so consider where your learners are in your programme (i.e., first, second, third, fourth year; undergraduates, graduates) and choose appropriate verbs accordingly. Remember, outcomes must be achievable so we need to consider where learners are in their learning, the prerequisites they have acquired, their prior learning, etc.

Changing the action verb gives us the following outcome.

By the end of the course you will be able to use therapeutic communication techniques.

Better, but this outcome needs further improvement. It is too vague and, therefore, difficult to measure. Further, we are not sure what we are measuring and in what context. Applying the SMART criteria, this outcome is not specific enough and cannot be measured appropriately - although it might be achievable, relevant, and time-bound. All elements of the SMART guideline must be met. Applying the 3-part guideline, this outcome does not have a context. We are not sure why this outcome is necessary. This is a very common omission when writing learning outcomes. If, for example, we were teaching in an undergraduate nursing programme, we could make the outcome more specific according to the level expected in the course, and we should add a specific criterion to the outcome of what is important (i.e., provide the context).

Making the outcome more specific and adding the context gives us the following:

By the end of the course you will be able to use practical nursing therapeutic communication techniques to obtain a client history.

This is a much clearer outcome.

Learning outcomes are difficult to write well. They require practice. All of us should be constantly re-examining and reflecting upon our learning outcomes, and revising when appropriate. Having said that, learning outcomes cannot be changed unilaterally. Always involve academic leaders and colleagues in the process to ensure any changes meet institutional, ministerial, and regulatory requirements. Lopes (n.d.) provides a useful guide on writing effective learning outcomes on the [A Focus on Learning Outcomes](#) web site.

Activities



1. Reflect on what you want your learners to be able to do at the end of your online or blended course. Refer to the core concepts/ topics document and your learner characteristics. Identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (if applicable), required of them. Record these in your learning journal or blog.
2. Write 3-part, SMART course learning outcomes for each skill, attitude (if applicable), and piece of content knowledge identified in the previous activity. Or, revise existing course learning outcomes so that they are 3-part, SMART outcomes. Use the [Online Educator Course Learning Outcomes Template](#) (Appendix E) as a guide. Share your revised LOs with a colleague or a member of the BDL team to seek feedback.
3. Find out when the next Rethinking Teaching (RTT) workshop will be offered by QTL_net and enroll in the workshop to learn more about writing good learning outcomes.

Resources



Armstrong, P. (n.d.). [Bloom's taxonomy](#).

Lopes, V. (n.d.). [A focus on learning outcomes](#).

Shabatura, J. (2014, Sept.). [Bloom's taxonomy verb chart](#).

Thackaberry, S. (n.d.). [Understanding by design](#).

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). [What is backward design?](#)

[Online Educator Course Learning Outcomes Template](#) (Appendix E)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 5:

I have ...

- Read the Step 5 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Identified the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of learners by the time they reach the end of my online course.
- Written or revised 3-part, SMART course learning outcomes based on the previously identified knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of learners by the time they reach the end of my course.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 6.

Step 6: Creating and/or Revising Course Assessments

Overview and Outcomes



Once the course learning outcomes are established educators use the outcomes as guides to design appropriate activities and assessments to help learners reach intended learning outcomes. Aligning outcomes, activities, and assessments is the basis of [Constructive Alignment](#) (Biggs, 2003).

There is more to assessment than alignment with intended learning outcomes. As online educators we need to ensure the assessments we use are meaningful and help learners apply newly acquired knowledge and skills. Further, we need to make sure our assessment strategy contains a proper mix of assessment types (formative, summative, traditional, alternative, authentic).

Designing well-balanced assessments aligned with course learning outcomes is the focus of this step.

By the end of this step you will be able to

- Align course assessments with course learning outcomes using the constructive alignment framework
- Create a mix of formative, summative, traditional, and authentic assessments to ensure balanced course assessment
- Write clear assessment instructions and rubrics to guide learners.

You can expect to spend about 5-7 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



Assessment serves a number of purposes in learning. For example, educators use assessment to identify gaps in learners' knowledge and skills (assessment "for" learning), to help learners improve on an ongoing basis (assessment "as" learning), and to evaluate learners' knowledge and skills at a given point in time (assessment "of" learning). Assessment "for" and "as" learning are formative in nature (low-stakes, ongoing), while assessment "of" learning is summative in nature (high-stakes, evaluative).

One advantage of moving to blended online learning is that it provides us an opportunity to rethink how we do what we do. This is especially true with assessment. In face-to-face teaching we tend to keep with tradition and remain with tried and true assessments like tests, exams, or papers. But digital technologies open up new assessment possibilities. Let's explore some.

Alternative assessment, in its simplest form, means any assessment that isn't traditional (i.e., a test, exam, paper). Some examples include having learners create

- e-portfolios or web pages to document their learning journey throughout a programme
- videos or podcasts to build their digital skills and convey meaning in alternative modes
- infographics or posters to summarize key information visually
- collaborative documents to share in the construction and dissemination of knowledge
- online discussion forums to promote information seeking, sharing and critical questioning
- journaling to promote reflective writing
- game / team based competition to increase motivation and promote understanding.

Many other possibilities exist. A number of higher education institutions have published suggested alternative online assessment options for faculty. For example, check out the [Guidelines for Online Assessment](#) document (Hammadi et al., 2021) prepared by AKU faculty and QTL_net. Also, check out the following web sites: 1) [Alternative Online Assessments](#) from the University of Calgary, and 2) [Alternative Assessment Formats for Teaching Online](#) from the University of Guelph.

Alternative assessments tend to be more authentic. That is, they encourage learners to apply their knowledge and skills in a meaningful way. By definition, authentic assessment is “a set of methods or techniques for assessing the academic achievement of a student that includes activities requiring the application of acquired knowledge and skills to real-world situations and that is often seen as an alternative to standardized testing” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). For more on why and how to create authentic assessments, check out the [Authentic Assessment Toolbox](#) (Mueller, 2018).

This is not to say that we should move all traditional assessment to alternative, authentic assessment. Traditional assessment still has a place in our courses. What is important is that we use a balanced mix of assessments in our courses. In blended and online learning the trend has been to move to more formative, alternative, authentic assessments.

Let’s explore these ideas by way of an example. Consider the following traditional, summative assessment from a math course:

Mid-term test worth 40% of the final grade.

So, how might this assessment be revised to make it more meaningful, more authentic? The good news is that there are a number of options. For example, we might replace the mid-term with a group assignment. Learners would be placed in groups and be given a relevant task (one that helps them reach the intended learning outcomes). Perhaps each group is directed to create an “ultimate final exam question” that incorporates as many of the concepts covered in the course as possible. Each group would then publish the question (along with the solution and explanation) to a course wiki. Then each group would be asked to review another group’s question and solution and provide constructive comments for improvement. The collective output of the assignment would be a study guide that all learners could use.

We could also extend the assignment. Perhaps each group could use the feedback they received in the comments to improve their question and solution and then make a video explaining the full solution. The videos could be published and shared with the class, again to be used by all for study purposes (and even by future cohorts). The result is a learner-created educational resource. This is a much more meaningful task for learners to participate in.

During COVID-19 many AKU programmes needed to revise assessments. The following example shows pre-COVID-19 assessments used in the skills-based Health Assessment undergraduate nursing course from SONAM-Pakistan and the changes that were implemented amid-COVID-19: [Assessment alterations in the undergraduate Health Assessment nursing course from SONAM](#).

Designing effective assessments takes practice. Just like with learning outcomes, we should be constantly re-examining and reflecting upon our assessments, and revising when appropriate. Each assessment must come with clear instructions (after all you want to make sure that your learners spend time on the task and not on trying to figure out what is the task), and should include a rubric (or checklist) to let learners know how they will be evaluated. St. Petersburg College (n.d.) provides some useful tips on [writing effective rubrics](#). The Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary (n.d.) provides some useful tips on [Communication Expectations](#) for assessments including a [template for writing clear assessment instructions/guidelines](#).

Well-designed authentic assessments tend to be more learner-centric and individualized. For this reason learners tend to spend more time on the task rather than finding ways to get around the task. This often results in less academic integrity violations. (For more on the relationship of authentic assessment and academic integrity see [Online Education and Authentic Assessment](#) (Harrison, 2020, April).)

Finally, there are a couple of practical tips that may help as we reimagine online course assessments.

1. Try not to expand our assessments. Too often we tend to hang on to our traditional assessments and then add new alternative ones, which overburdens our learners (and ourselves). We should be thinking about “replacing” assessments rather than adding on assessments, where appropriate. Note: replacing a high-stakes summative assessment with a few low-stake formative assessments is fine. Although the number of assessments has increased, the total weighting has not.
2. Try the assessments ourselves first. Before releasing an assessment to our learners we should make sure we have done it ourselves first. That way we know the time it will take

and the skills it will require, and therefore we will know what help resources we need to find or create for learners so they can complete the assessment successfully.

Activities



1. Review your current course assessment mix and revise as necessary. Use the [Online Educator Course Assessments Revision Template](#) (Appendix F) as a guide.
2. Select one of the revised assessments you identified in the previous activity and create a set of instructions and a rubric for the new alternative, authentic assessment. You may wish to use the following example as a guide: [Online Educator Alternative Assessment Sample](#).

Resources



- Biggs, J. (2003). [Aligning teaching for constructing learning](#).
- Hammadi, A., Ali, K. Q., Jamil, Z., Sarungi, V. & Petrucka, P. (2021). [Guidelines for online assessment](#). Aga Khan University.
- Harrison, D. (2020, April). [Online education and authentic assessment](#).
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). [Authentic assessment](#).
- Mueller, J. (2018). [Authentic assessment toolbox](#).
- St. Petersburg College. (n.d.). [Writing effective rubrics](#).
- University of Calgary (n.d.). [Alternative online assessments](#).
- University of Calgary (2020, June). [Assignment guidelines template](#).
- University of Calgary (n.d.). [Learning module: Designing online assessments](#).

University of Guelph (n.d.). [Alternative assessment formats for teaching online](#).

[Online Educator Course Assessments Revision Template](#) (Appendix F)

[Online Educator Alternative Assessment Sample](#)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 6:

I have ...

- Read the Step 6 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Aligned my online course assessments with the intended learning outcomes.
- Reviewed my online course assessment strategy and revised assessments as necessary using the Online Educator Course Assessments Revision Template.
- Written a set of instructions and a rubric for one of my revised assessments.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 7.

Step 7: Creating an Online Course Communication Plan

Overview and Outcomes



Communication is vital in online courses. A well thought out communication strategy will enhance teacher-student and student-student interaction, and help foster a collaborative learning community in our courses.

In this step we will explore a variety of ways to communicate with learners online, create a communication plan, and look at some practical tips for integrating communication tools and strategies in our online course(s).

By the end of this step you will be able to

- Select available online communication tools to meet your online course communication needs.
- Create a communication plan that describes how and why selected communication tools will be used in your online course.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



Regular communication in an online course serves a couple of essential purposes. From a practical perspective, online learners always want to know “what do you want me to do?”, “when do you want me to do it?”, and “how do you want me to do it?” As online educators we need to be explicit and constantly answer these questions to remind learners of course requirements. From an inclusion perspective, online learners want to feel part of a learning community, build relationships with fellow learners (and ourselves), and share in the learning journey. As online educators we can set up spaces within our online courses using available communication tools for learners to interact and share experiences safely, comfortably, and constructively.

So, let’s look at a way to build a communication plan for our online course to meet our needs and our learners’ needs. Mitchell-Holder (2016) offers some useful advice in this regard in [“Let’s Talk: Effectively Communicating with your Online Students”](#).

To start, consider the following key questions:

- How will we communicate with learners?
- When will we communicate with learners? How often?
- Will we communicate asynchronously (not at the same time), or synchronously (at the same time)? Or a mixture of both?

Once we have the answer to these questions, we can begin to select available tools that will enable what we want to do. For example, tools such as email, announcements and discussion forums in the VLE, social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Signal), and collaboration tools (e.g., Google docs, Slack, Trello, Miro, Wikis) can be part of an asynchronous communication strategy. Tools such as web conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), the chat/ messaging feature in Moodle, and a telephone call can be used as part of a synchronous communication strategy. We don’t need to select all these tools, and we may prefer other tools. What is important is the mix of tools we choose, our comfort level with them, and the pedagogical purpose each provides. Note:

AKU makes available and supports certain communication tools; some are integrated in the VLE and some aren't. Table 2 includes the digital tools recommended by AKU for teaching and learning.

Table 2. *AKU Recommended Digital Tools by Purpose*

Purpose	Tool
VLE	Moodle
Synchronous teaching	Zoom
Live Collaborative meeting	MS Teams
Collaboration	Google Docs, Google slides, Padlet Discussion forum, Wiki activities in Moodle
Quizzes	Kahoot, Quizizz Quiz activity in Moodle
Survey	Google forms, SurveyMonkey Feedback, Questionnaire activities in Moodle
Interactive presentations	Mentimeter, H5P
Mindmap	Coggle
Brainstorming	Padlet, Mural
Screencasting	Panopto, Loom, Screencast-O-Matic
Journalling, Blogging	Edublogs Blog, Journal activities in Moodle
Infographics, posters	Canva

As an example consider the following simplified communication plan:

1. **Weekly Announcements:** At the beginning of each week I will send out a weekly announcement using the “Announcements” tool in Moodle. The weekly announcement will remind learners what’s coming up each week, what to work on, what’s due, etc. I will write the announcement using invitational language and provide a visual for context.
2. **Faculty Contact Information:** I will provide my contact information, specifically my institutional email address. I will encourage students to contact me via email should they have any questions. I will strive to answer student emails within 24 hours.

3. Discussion Forums: I will set up a “Welcome and Introductions” forum at the beginning of the semester for students to introduce themselves and share any information they feel comfortable sharing. I will set up a “Q&A” forum for students to ask course-specific questions and encourage students to reply to other students’ questions if they know the answer to build shared responsibility. I will set up content-specific discussion forums at appropriate times throughout the semester containing guided questions for students to reflect upon and contribute answers to using higher order thinking. The content forums will be graded activities and students will be expected to not only post responses but reply to others (i.e., to build a learning community). I will always post the first message to the forums and be a regular contributor throughout to model expectations and build teaching presence. I will not be providing responses to each and every post but will post when necessary. I expect students to use the forum for discussion amongst themselves.
4. Online Office Hours: Each week I will have a regular time slot allocated for students to contact me synchronously via Zoom. This time will be used for mini-lectures, additional help, clarification, etc.

Your communication plan may be similar or more robust. That’s okay. What it should do, though, is reflect how you will communicate with learners on an ongoing basis.

Activities



1. Reach out to experienced online educator colleagues in your entity or a member of the BDL team and ask them what communication tools they use in their online courses. Ask them about their experiences: why they use these tools, which ones work best and for what purposes. Write your findings in your learning journal or blog and use the findings to inform your communication plan.
2. Create a communication plan for one of your online courses. Use the [Online Educator Course Communication Plan Template](#) (Appendix G) as a guide.

Resources



Mitchell-Holder S. (2016). [Let's talk: Effectively communicating with your online students.](#)

[Online Educator Course Communication Plan Template](#) (Appendix G)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 7:

I have ...

- Read the Step 7 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Researched the available online communication tools available at AKU.
- Interviewed experienced online educators to find out what tools they use and why.
- Created an online course communication plan based on my own experience and the findings from my research and interviews.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 8.

Step 8: Building Online Course Learning Modules

Overview and Outcomes



So far we have done a lot of designing, planning, and revising, all of which are essential.

Let's now move more into the development phase and turn our attention to content, specifically building learning modules, or "blocks" of instruction. The keys here are organization and consistency. In blended and online learning, content is always designed and developed well ahead of time and organized using a format that flows from one topic to the next (or one week to the next) in a consistent manner.

In this step we'll look at a suggested framework for building online learning modules. And we'll spend quite a bit of time on this step. Development is time consuming.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Curate learning materials for inclusion in your online learning modules.
- Develop content for inclusion in your online learning modules.
- Create an online learning module using a framework based on established instructional design principles.

You can expect to spend about 10-15 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



The [Community of Inquiry \(CoI\) framework](#) outlines the essential components for deep and meaningful learning; namely, 1) teaching presence, 2) social presence, and 3) cognitive presence. Earlier, we touched on social presence when we explored getting to know our learners, and we touched on teaching presence when we developed a communication plan. We will revisit these “presences” again, but for now let’s bring in cognitive presence as we create our first online learning module.

Learners construct meaning by engaging with content, activities, and the like. In doing so they expend a great deal of mental effort. Our goal as online educators is to help learners stay engaged with the content to facilitate deep and meaningful learning, i.e., stay cognitively present. We can do so through well-designed instructional units (blocks or learning modules) that follow well-established instructional design principles.

For example, an online learning module might contain the following elements: 1) Overview and Outcomes, 2) Content, 3) Activities, 4) Assessments, 5) Resources, and 6) Summary. Let’s explore each of these elements in a little more detail.

1. **Overview and Outcomes:** At the beginning of the learning module we want to provide the big picture and explain why this particular module or unit is important (the overview), and we want to set the outcomes so learners know what knowledge they will acquire and what skills they will develop by the end of the module or unit. We also want to give learners a sense of the time commitment required of them to complete the learning module.
2. **Content:** We want to select appropriate learning materials at the right level to help learners reach the intended learning outcomes. One approach is to ask ourselves what we want our learners to watch, listen to, and/or read? One of the great benefits of digital technologies is the ability to incorporate multi-modal content (video, audio, text, images) into our teaching.

Providing multiple means of representation of content is a hallmark of [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#). Note: we'll explore UDL in more detail in the next step.

Content can either be curated or created. The good news is that there are a number of educational resources readily available in a variety of disciplines. Some of these are proprietary (i.e., via publishers), but many are open educational resources (OER) which are free to use and adapt for educational purposes. These include open textbooks, open lesson plans, open activities, open repositories, and the like. [The Learning Portal OER Toolkit](#) provides very useful information about how to find, create, and use OER. And George Mason University has a very useful [Open Educational Resources](#) site to help us find OER and further our understanding about OER.

Some courses are highly specialized and, therefore, open content might not be readily available. Sometimes we may want to supplement our chosen OER with more specific content. In this case we will need to create our own online learning materials. (And perhaps consider sharing them via an open license, e.g., [Creative Commons](#) license.) The good news is that there are many tools freely available for us to do so. Many have become easier and easier to use. For example, we might want to create a short video using [Loom](#), [Screencast-O-Matic](#), or the video creation tools readily available in the VLE, such as Panopto.

Tip: Teaching videos should be kept under 10 minutes. In fact, [Guo \(2013\)](#) suggests the optimal time is 6 minutes or less.

We may want to create a learning activity using [H5P](#) (also integrated in the VLE). We may want to create a website to organize our materials for your learners using [Edublogs](#), [Wix](#), [Weebly](#), [Adobe Spark](#) or [Google Sites](#). We may want to enhance our lecture slides by adding narration (i.e., [recording our presentation](#)). Spending some time learning how to use these tools is well worth the investment and may become part of our ongoing PD plan.

Tip: Spend some time carefully curating or creating the content you need. Too much content can be just as bad as too little content. Remember we want our learners to stay engaged.

3. **Activities:** We want to give learners the opportunity to practice what they have learned. We can do so by designing and creating hands-on activities. These activities might be individual or collaborative activities, using tools such as discussion forums, wikis, blogs, Padlet, Google docs, etc. The key is that they should incorporate active learning principles. For ideas, read more about [Active Learning](#), including [Examples of Active Learning Activities](#) from Queen's University, and [Active Learning while Physical Distancing 2.0](#) (Salim, 2020).
4. **Assessments:** Once learners have engaged with some content, and practiced what they have learned, we want to assess where they are in their learning journey (i.e. whether they have acquired the knowledge and skills described in the learning outcomes). Generally, we include at least some formative assessment. This could be a post to a discussion forum, or a post to a reflective journal, or even a short quiz (remember, traditional assessment still has a place in blended and online learning. Tip: self-assessment quizzes -- knowledge checks -- are a great way to give learners more responsibility for their own learning and have them evaluate themselves). At this stage we could also refer back to our assessment strategy and see if now would be a good time to introduce learners to one of the graded assessments in our course. There are a number of assessment tools available in the VLE (discussion forums, journals, blogs, wikis, tests, quizzes, H5P, etc.), but you can also embed assessments created via third-party tools such as [Quizziz](#), [Mentimeter](#), [Padlet](#), [Kahoot](#), [VoiceThread](#) and the like.
5. **Resources:** We want to give learners a curated list of additional resources for them to refer to for more information related to the instructional unit. The key is to not give too many resources to learners. It is best to curate carefully, that is, evaluate the available resources and select the best ones for the given purpose.
6. **Summary:** We want to remind learners of all the things they should have done in the learning module. This usually takes the form of a summary checklist. Remember online learners are always asking what they have to do? When they have to do it? And how? Remind them by way of an itemized checklist.

Creating online learning modules does take time. We will likely spend most of our time in this step, especially building our first learning module as we create and learn the process concurrently. The good news is that once our first learning module is done, the rest tend to come together much

quicker. And once we have a set of learning modules for our course they are there for us to use in subsequent semesters, and may only require a few tweaks here and there as new digital technologies, new pedagogies, and new information come to the fore.

A good resource to help up stay on top of educational technology trends is Hart's [Top 200 Tools for Learning](#). The site lists the results from an annual survey displaying the top tools used for personal, educational, and workplace learning.

Calculating Student Learning Hours

Once we've planned out a learning module we should review what we are asking learners to do to make sure we stay within the course credit hour requirements. There is a tendency for faculty new to blended online learning to include too much content and too many activities, in essence creating more than a course (Kelly, 2012), which overburdens learners and faculty.

In traditional face-to-face courses, academic credits are calculated based on classroom contact hours. At AKU, one credit requires 50 hours of student learning time which includes classroom time plus homework (independent learning).

Calculating student learning time in a Blended Online Learning course can pose a challenge when there is no classroom teaching and/or synchronous online teaching is replaced by asynchronous learning tasks. To address this challenge, we propose using "time on task" as a measure for calculating student learning hours.

Time-on-task is the time that students spend on learning tasks, such as discussions, reading, watching a video, and completing quizzes. It is one of the seven principles of good practice by Chickering and Gamson (1987) and is likely to increase learner engagement.

At AKU, in a three-credit BOL course spread over 16 weeks, students are expected to spend 7.5 hours a week on learning tasks. Professors can divide time for learning tasks between synchronous and asynchronous modes in multiple ways. For example,

- Professor A might opt for a one-hour synchronous class each week with two hours of asynchronous learning tasks and 4.5 hours of independent study time.
- Professor B might decide to have four, two-hour synchronous sessions (~8 hours) spread throughout the semester and assign a mix of asynchronous and independent study tasks.

As discussed earlier, the decision about synchronous and asynchronous online tasks will depend on the learning outcomes, needs of our students, and our teaching style. Table 3 provides examples of learning tasks and the suggested times required to complete them for a three-credit course at AKU.

Table 3. *Common Weekly Online Learning Tasks with Suggested Time Allocations (Turner 2005)*

Tasks	Time
Watch one 10-minute lecture video followed by an activity	1 hour
Critiquing two articles of ~6000 words each [on average, most adults read at a rate of about 200 - 250 wpm (McNair, 2009, May)]	2 ½ hours
Completing a 10-item online quiz	½ hour
Participating in a discussion forum (original post, responses to three classmates' posts, responses to responses)	1 hours
Self-study	1 hour
Attend a synchronous session	1½ hours
Total	7½ hours

Activities



1. Select one unit or module in your online course (e.g., a topic or a week). Storyboard that unit of instruction. Use the [AKU Online Learning Design Template](#) (Appendix H) as a guide. You may also wish to refer to the [Online Educator Learning Module Template](#) (also in Appendix H) as a guide.
2. Review the current content you have for your online course. Identify any content gaps. Find appropriate OER to help fill the identified gaps. Use the [OER Toolkit](#) as a guide.
3. Build the learning module using your chosen tools. If you have access to a course shell in your VLE, build the learning module there. You may wish to use the tools in the VLE, or a

combination of VLE tools and 3rd party tools. As an example, the following screenshot shows the [learning modules in AKU's Developmental Anatomy course](#) by Dr. Zehra Jamil from AKU-BBS.

4. Calculate the student learning hours for the learning module you built above. Use the [Online Educator Learning Hours Template](#) (Appendix I) as a guide. Based on the calculation, revise the learning module as necessary.
5. Reflect on the time it takes you to plan and design your learning module for online teaching compared to the time it takes to plan and design a lesson for in-class Face-2-Face teaching. Post your reflection in your learning journal or blog.
6. Attend the Digital Boot Camps offered by the BDL team to learn new online teaching tools.

Resources



Athabasca University (n.d.). [CoI framework](#).

CAST (n.d.). [About universal design for learning](#).

Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). [Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education](#).

College Libraries Ontario (n.d.). [OER toolkit](#).

Creative Commons (n.d.). [Share your work](#).

George Mason University (n.d.). [Open Educational Resources](#).

Guo, P. (2013). [Optimal video length for student engagement](#).

Hart, J. (n.d.). [Top 200 tools for learning](#).

Kelly, R. (2012, August). [Blended learning course design mistakes to avoid](#).

McNair, J. (2009, May). [What is the average reading speed and the best rate of reading](#).

Salim, Z. (2020). Active Learning while Physically Distancing 2.0. *The Aga Khan University*. Licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA. This work is a derivative of Baumgartner, J. et. al. (2020). Active Learning while Physical Distancing. Louisiana State University. Also licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA. Available at:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16PpcXB5Z9e8WiFwYcIMfFLv2BQidY-GzC22VXttzonk/edit>

Queen's University (n.d.) [Examples of active learning activities.](#)

Queen's University (n.d.). [Active learning](#)

Turner, T. (2005). Student workload in the online course: Balancing on a rule-of-thumb. *Educator's Voice*, 6(3).

AKU (2013). [Online Learning design template](#). Aga Khan University (Appendix H)

[Online Educator Learning Module Template](#) (Appendix H)

[How to Use Google Sites - Google Help Center](#)

[How to Narrate a Powerpoint Presentation - Microsoft Support Site](#)

Tools:

[Adobe Spark](#): Graphics, Web Pages, and Short Videos Creation Tool

[Loom](#): Video and Screencasting Tool

Panopto: Video and Screencasting Tool

[Camtasia](#): Screencasting Tool

[Screencast-O-Matic](#): Screencast Creation Tool

[H5P \(HTML5 Package\)](#): Interactive Content Creation Tool

[Quizizz](#): Quiz and Interactive Lesson Creation Tool

[Mentimeter](#): Interactive Content Creation Tool

[Kahoot](#): Interactive Learning Games Tool

[Padlet](#): Collaborative Content Creation Tool

[Wix](#): Website Creation Tool

[Weebly](#): Website Creation Tool

[Edublogs](#): Blog and Website Creation Tool

[VoiceThread](#): Online audio discussions

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 8:

I have ...

- Read the Step 8 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Storyboarded one unit of instruction for my online course using the Online Educator Learning Module Template.
- Curated some appropriate OER for my online course.
- Created a learning module for my online course representing one unit of instruction.
- Calculated the student learning hours for a learning module.
- Reflected on the time it takes to develop a learning module.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 9.

Step 9: Adding Essential Online Course Elements

Overview and Outcomes



We put a great deal of time and effort into curating and creating engaging content for our courses, for good reason. Equally important, though, are the linkages between the content items. As facilitators, we want to provide a clear path through the course to help learners reach the intended learning outcomes.

In this step we'll look at adding essential course elements (“wrappings”) to our online course(s) to better guide learners.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Develop a digital course orientation to help learners meet course requirements and expectations.
- Apply universal design for learning (UDL) principles in your course.
- Edit digital content to comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

You can expect to spend about 4-6 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



Content cannot stand alone in an online course. Learners need to be provided with clear direction. Remember, learners always want (and need) to know what they have to do, when they have to do it, and how. (We'll assume they already know why, but there is no harm in emphasising that as well.) The sooner we provide this information and the more detail we provide, the better. It is essential to help learners navigate through our online courses.

One strategy we can use to guide our learners is to create a digital orientation for our course. This might take the form of a “Getting Started” module, a “Course Orientation” module, a course flowchart or infographic, or a descriptive digital syllabus ([liquid syllabus](#) (Pacansky-Brock, 2014, August)). Some of the essential elements to include are:

- A welcome message or video. Learners want to get to know their professor. An invitational welcome, especially if done in video format so learners can see and hear their professor, goes a long way to establishing social and teacher presence. As an example, review the [Introduction to Teaching for Critical Thinking](#) video (7.52 mins) from SONAM (Cassum & Gul, 2015).
- A brief description. Learners want a quick summary of what the course is all about and its purpose.
- The learning outcomes. Learners want to know what they will be able to do after completing the course.
- A weekly schedule. Learners want an itemized breakdown of the topics covered (usually by week), what they have to do each week, and what is due each week.

- The assessment strategy. Learners want a summary of how they will be evaluated, how often, and the weighting for each assessment.
- The expectations and requirements. Learners want to know what our expectations of them are, and what they can expect from us. They also want to know if there are any specific requirements for our course (technical equipment, skills, netiquette, etc.).
- The communication plan. Learners want to know how we will communicate with them, how often, how they can ask questions, etc.
- The available help supports. Learners want to know what additional help is available to them (such as counselling help, technical help, tutorial help, etc.) and how to contact that help.
- Tips for success. Learners appreciate any advice we can give them from our experience that will help them be successful in our course.

Some of this information may be available at other places within the course, or at other sites at the institution. We may also want to include additional information not listed above. What is important is that we collate the essential information in summary form for easy access. Learners will be referring to it often and the more visible and easy to find it is, the better.

The way we go about presenting this information will depend on our preferences and comfort level with certain technologies. That's okay. It doesn't matter how we do it, what matters is that the information is there for our learners.

Let's look at an example and some technologies we can use to create a digital orientation. Take a look at the ["liquid syllabus" created by Kim Carter \(n.d.\) for her Health Care Terminology](#) course. Note the essential elements Kim chose to include. A liquid syllabus is a more visual and accessible version of the formal institutional syllabus and is usually presented as a website. The site was created using Google Sites. Visuals such as the icons were sourced from the [Noun Project](#), which is one of several sites where we can get free images (including icons) for our courses. (Note: other popular royalty-free, searchable image sites include [Pixabay](#) and [Unsplash](#).)

The digital orientation could just as easily be built using the tools in the VLE. One advantage of placing orientation content outside the VLE (at least initially), however, is it provides an opportunity for learners to get a “sneak peek” of our course while they are waiting for access to it via the VLE.

The digital orientation can also be created in other formats, such as a roadmap or infographic. Free, third-party tools such as [Piktochart](#), [Canva](#), and [Adobe Spark](#), or even PowerPoint, can be used to create syllabus infographics. Many of these tools have templates we can use to speed up the development process.

Video content is becoming easier and easier to create on our own, using freely available tools. We can create a welcome video for our course using our webcam in conjunction with tools such as Panopto (integrated in the VLE), or screen-casting tools such as [Loom](#) and [Screencast-O-Matic](#). Once our video is created we can share it with our learners (and the public if we so desire) using 1) the publish and share options available in Loom, or Screencast-O-Matic, 2) streaming services such as YouTube or MS Stream, or 3) direct embedding in the VLE, such as when using Panopto.

Tip: although video content is becoming easier and easier to create, doing it well requires some practice. There are many guides available to help us create engaging video content, such as the [Creating Educational Videos](#) website from the Seneca Sandbox (n.d.).

Once we have built the essential elements of our course, the next step is to make sure they, along with our content, are accessible. Accessibility is an underlying component of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The main tenet of UDL is that all learners benefit when the principles are incorporated into course design and learning. Although Accessibility and UDL are linked, they are not the same. Accessibility is about making sure learners with sensory, physical, or cognitive challenges can access content and learning opportunities, UDL is about making sure all learners can access content and learning opportunities in flexible ways (see [Ableser & Moore](#) (2018, September) for more on the similarities and differences between UDL and accessibility).

What this means is that we must review our course from both UDL and accessibility perspectives. First, let’s consider UDL.

In an earlier step, we briefly introduced UDL; let's expand a bit more here. UDL is about reducing barriers to learning for all. The guiding principles are:

1. Provide multiple means of representation: We can do this by using multiple media and modes, providing alternatives for textual, visual, and auditory information, guiding learning (for example, via our descriptive syllabus), and the like.
2. Provide multiple means of action and expression: We can do this by scaffolding and supporting learning, providing access to digital learning tools, helping learners build traditional, oral, and digital literacy, and the like.
3. Provide multiple means of engagement: We can do this by building a sense of community in our courses, setting relevant goals and expectations, providing opportunities for self-reflection, providing some choice for learners in terms of assessments, and the like.

At this stage we might want to look back at all the components we have built for our course (e.g., communication plan, learning modules, assessments, digital orientation) to see how well the pieces contained within reflect the principles of UDL and, if necessary, make some adjustments, edits, or additions. For more ideas on integrating UDL in courses, see the Center for Applied Special Technology [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#) website (CAST, 2018).

Second, let's consider accessibility. From a practical standpoint we need to make sure that our course materials are accessible for learners who may have either permanent or temporary sensory, physical, or cognitive challenges. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has published a set of recommendations for us to follow to make our content more accessible. They are known as the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#) (W3C, 2008). The recommendations are comprehensive and may seem overwhelming at first. Luckily, many content accessibility tools have been developed over the years to help us apply the guidelines. Let's look at a few.

- Recent versions of Microsoft Office products (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) now come with a built-in accessibility checker. Check out how to [Make Your Content Accessible to Everyone Using the Accessibility Checker](#) (Microsoft, n.d.). The checker will identify common

accessibility issues in documents, and explain how and why to fix them. Tip: we should get in the habit of running the accessibility checker in our Microsoft Office documents regularly, in the same way we are in the habit of saving our documents regularly.

- Adobe Acrobat Pro DC also comes with a built-in accessibility checker for PDF documents. The accessibility checker will identify common issues, and explain how to fix them. Check out how to use the Adobe Accessibility Checker on the [Using the Adobe Acrobat Pro DC Accessibility Checker](#) support site (Adobe, n.d.). Tip: if you have a licensed version of Adobe Acrobat Pro DC, you can double-check an Office document's accessibility by running it through the Microsoft (MS) accessibility checker first, saving as a PDF in MS Office, opening the PDF in Acrobat Pro DC, and then running the accessibility checker there.
- Web Accessibility In Mind (WebAIM) has created a free online web accessibility evaluation tool called [WAVE](#). Simply type the URL (web address) of a web page into WAVE and it will provide a comprehensive and thorough summary of that page's accessibility issues, if any.

Many new accessibility tools are being developed that will make our task easier to identify and fix accessibility issues in our online courses. For example, [Blackboard Ally](#) and [Brickfield](#) are two relatively new tools that can be integrated into VLEs to automatically check uploaded documents for any accessibility issues and provide tips on how to fix the issues.

The tools described above have greatly helped raise awareness of accessibility issues in courses. In the past, web content accessibility issues have tended to go unnoticed, and may only have come to our attention if one of our learners needed special accommodation to access our content. If we apply the principles of UDL and design up front with accessibility in mind, our courses will become much more inclusive. And, there are some simple steps we can take. Two of the most common accessibility issues are:

1. No alternative text provided for images, and
2. No transcript or closed captioning provided for videos.

If we get in the habit of always adding alternative text to the images we include in documents (Word, PowerPoint) and/or upload to web pages, we will greatly reduce the "fixing" time required

after the fact. Harvard University provides some useful information on how to [Write good Alt Text to describe images](#) (n.d.).

If we verify that any videos we curate or create for use in our courses have closed captioning options available (e.g., have the CC link enabled), or have a readily available link to a text transcript of the video, we will greatly benefit all learners. Note: YouTube and Microsoft Stream provide automatic closed captioning and transcription. If we use either of these services our videos will be more accessible. If we record a Zoom session with live captioning enabled, the video generated will be more accessible. Automatic captioning/transcription has come a long way over the years with much better accuracy, but captions and transcripts may still require some editing after the fact.

There are, of course, many other accessibility issues that we encounter in our courses. No accessibility tool is perfect, and in some cases some accessibility issues can't be fixed with available technology or by ourselves manually. Providing alternatives for learners, then, becomes the best option. Ultimately, it is incumbent on us to cultivate an accessibility mindset.

Similar to creating online learning modules, creating essential course elements takes time. The good news is that the tools designed to help us create these essential elements are getting easier and easier to use, and much more efficient. And the ability to check and fix accessibility issues is a core competency of an online educator. Yes, it will take some time to check and recheck our materials, but the benefits to our learners far outweigh that cost in time.

Activities



1. Create a digital orientation for your course. Use any format you prefer (liquid syllabus webpage, infographic, “Getting Started” section in the VLE). Include as many of the elements as you deem necessary (welcome message and/or video, description, learning outcomes, weekly schedule, assessment strategy, expectations and requirements, communication plan, help supports, tips).

2. Check the accessibility of all the elements you created in Activity 1 above using available accessibility evaluation tools and/or via a manual check. Fix any accessibility issues.
3. Review the course materials you have developed so far for your course (communication plan, learning module, assessment strategy, digital orientation). Reflect on how you might alter and/or add to these elements to make them more inclusive using the principles of UDL as a guide. Write your reflections in your learning journal / blog.
4. Speak with a member of the BDL team to discuss UDL and accessibility requirements of your course.

Resources



Ableser, J. & Moore, C. (2018, September). [Universal design for learning and digital accessibility: Compatible partners or a conflicted marriage?](#)

Blackboard (n.d.). [Ally for LMS help for instructors.](#)

Brickfield Education Labs (n.d.). [Effective and inclusive teaching and learning.](#)

Carter, K. (2020). [Welcome to ADMN 1045 Health Care Terminology.](#)

Carter, K., Koster, L., & Rutherford, M. (2020, October). [Liquid syllabus: The first step to making connections and reducing student anxiety.](#)

CAST (n.d.). [About universal design for learning.](#)

CAST (2018). [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2.](#)

Cassum, S., Gul, R. (2015). [Introduction to Teaching for Critical Thinking](#) [Video File]

Harvard University (n.d.). [Write good alt text to describe images.](#)

Pacansky-Brock, M. (2014, August). [The Liquid Syllabus: Are you ready?](#) [Blog Post].

Seneca Sandbox (n.d.). [Creating educational videos.](#)

W3C (2008). [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0.](#)

WebAIM (n.d.). [WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool](#).

Accessibility Checkers

[Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#) [for documents]

[Adobe Acrobat Pro DC Accessibility Checker](#) [for documents]

[WAVE](#) [for websites]

Accessibility Evaluation Tools

[Blackboard Ally](#)

[Brickfield](#)

Infographic Creation Tools

[Adobe Spark](#)

[Piktochart](#)

[Canva](#)

Royalty-Free Image Sites

[Pixabay](#)

[Unsplash](#)

[Noun Project](#)

Video Creation Tools

[Adobe Spark](#)

[Loom](#)

[Screencast-O-Matic](#)

[Panopto](#)

Website Creation Tools

[Adobe Spark](#)

[Google Sites](#)

[Wix](#)

[Weebly](#)

[Edublogs](#)

[Wordpress](#)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 9:

I have ...

- Read the Step 9 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources
- Created a digital course orientation for my learners.
- Checked the accessibility of the elements included in my digital orientation and fixed any accessibility issues.
- Reflected on how well the components of my course follow UDL guidelines and added some ideas for improvement to my learning journal.
- If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 10.

Step 10: Evaluating the Quality of Your Online Course

Overview and Outcomes



We have done a lot of work designing and developing our online course so far: we have mapped out our course, created and/or revised the learning outcomes, created and/or revised the assessments, built a communication plan, developed a learning module or two, and created a digital syllabus. Let's take a couple of minutes to savour our hard work.

Given all the components we have designed and developed so far, now is a good time to determine how well these components measure up against established quality standards. After all, we may need to revise some components and/or rethink how we develop future components based on the quality review.

In this step we will look at how to assess the quality of our online course using established standards.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Apply online course quality standards to determine the readiness of your online course for implementation.
- Refine your online course to ensure compliance with online course quality standards.

You can expect to spend about 2-3 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



When online learning was in its infancy institutions spent much of their time building technology infrastructure and capacity; much less time was spent on online course design and pedagogy. Quality review tended to be more of an *ad hoc* process, if done at all, and often tended to be more perceived than benchmarked.

That has all changed. As online learning has become more mainstream, and with the recognition of the need for more pedagogically sound courses enabled by technology, quality assurance processes have become much more prevalent and standardized. As online educators we can choose from a number of well-established quality frameworks to benchmark our courses. Further, many institutions have either adopted a specific quality framework, or created their own based on an established quality framework.

At AKU, Blended and Digital Learning (BDL) has created the [Blended Learning Course Website Review Checklist](#) (Appendix J). The intent of this checklist is to have a second set of eyes review online courses and identify any areas for improvement and any items which may have been missed. This might be done by an e-learning designer, for example. We can (and should) review our own courses, but it is always a good idea to have someone else review them as well.

Online course design and development frameworks are usually presented as checklists or rubrics. The former provides for a quicker and more streamlined review; the latter provides a more nuanced review.

The following is a list of some online course quality checklists and rubrics:

Checklists:

1. [Blended and Digital Learning Blended Learning Course Website Review Checklist](#) (AKU) (Appendix J)

2. [Centre for Teaching Excellence Online Course Quality Checklist](#) (Capilano University)
3. [Online Course Quality Checklist \(OCQC\)](#) (RIT)
4. [Online/Blended Learning Course Quality Checklist](#) (UBC)

Rubrics:

1. [Rubric for Online Instruction](#) (CSU)
2. [Quality Assurance Rubric for Blended Learning](#) (COL)
3. [Course Design Rubric Standards](#) (Quality Matters)
4. [Quality Online Course Initiative \(QOCI\) rubric](#) (University of Illinois)

It's a good idea to spend some time perusing these quality checklists and rubrics. They all have a great deal of similarity, but there are some definite subtle differences as well. Much of the difference stems from the pedagogical frameworks the institutions ground their course design in. The more specific standards we become aware of, the more we can adopt in our online courses, as appropriate.

A quality review serves a couple of purposes. First, it guides us in terms of the components to include in our online courses and what they should look like and/or contain. Second, it allows the institution to establish a consistent, base standard for institution-wide online course offerings. Learners, then, will have a clear idea of what to expect when taking an online course from a particular institution.

Online courses have had quite a bit of scrutiny applied to them, perhaps more so than face-to-face courses. This is a good thing because we now have a robust set of standards to benchmark our courses against. In fact, many of these quality frameworks would apply just as readily to face-to-face, in-class courses as well, and it would be an interesting exercise to do so.

Post-COVID-19, online learning will be much more prevalent than during pre-COVID-19 times. To be sustainable, online learning will require a continued shift in how teaching and learning is done ([Perris & Mohee, 2020, June](#)). To do it well takes time. To make it sustainable requires institutional vision and a team of professionals with responsibility for quality residing with each member of the team. And quality should be an iterative process, constantly revisited throughout the design, development, and facilitation phases of online course creation/offering.

Activities



1. Evaluate your online course using the [Blended Learning Course Website Review Checklist](#) (Appendix J). Identify any missing components and any components scoring below at “5” (quality gaps). List them in your learning journal.
2. Evaluate your online course using any other quality rubric or checklist cited in this step. Identify any additional missing components (quality gaps) and add those to your list in your learning journal.
3. Reflect on how you plan to address the quality gaps identified above. Write your reflections and ideas for improvement in your learning journal or blog.

Resources



California State University, Chico (n.d.). [Rubric for online instruction](#).

Capilano University (n.d.). [Centre for Teaching Excellence online course quality checklist](#).

Chauhan, S., Naseem, A., Rashwan, E. (2016). [Developing a Quality Checklist for Designing Blended Learning Course Content](#). *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 6(3) 224-227

Perris, K, & Mohee, R. (2020). [Quality assurance rubric for blended learning](#).

Perris, K, & Mohee, R. (2020, June). [Where is the quality assurance? Sustaining online and blended learning in the post-COVID-19 context in Africa - and beyond](#).

Quality Matters (2018). [Course design rubric standards \(Accessible version\)](#).

Rochester Institute of Technology (2019). [Online course quality checklist \(OCQC\)](#).

Sharif, A. (n.d.). [Online/blended learning course quality checklist](#).

University of Illinois (2018). [Quality online course initiative \(QOCI\) rubric](#).

AKU (n.d.). [Blended learning course website review checklist](#) (Appendix J)

Summary



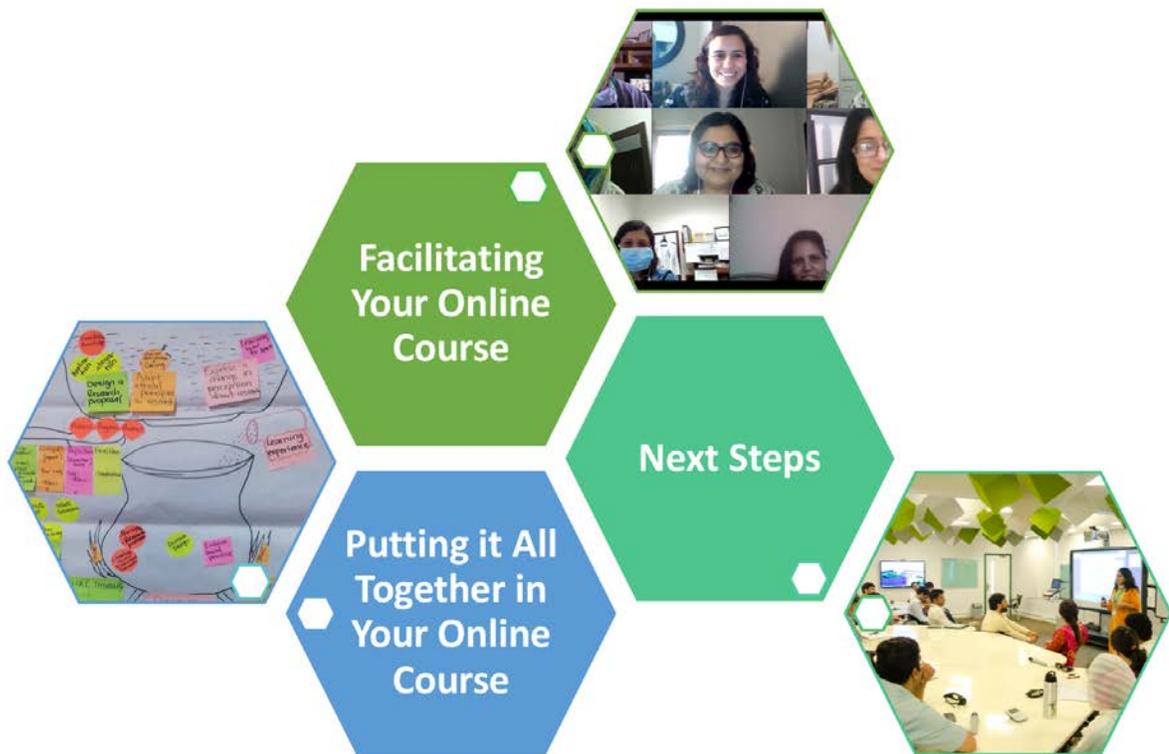
Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 10:

I have ...

- Read the Step 10 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Reviewed various quality measure rubrics and checklists designed for blended and online courses.
- Evaluated my online course against the Blended Learning Course Website Review Checklist.
- Evaluated my online course against one other online course quality rubric or checklist.
- Reflected on how well the components of my online course meet quality standards and posted some ideas for improvement to my learning journal.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 11.

Part C: Implementation



Step 11: Putting it All Together in Your Online Course

Overview and Outcomes



Welcome to Part C. This is a very exciting time because we are getting close to implementing our online course and seeing all the hard, rewarding work put into practice. But there are still a couple of things to do before launch.

In this step we are going to take all the components of our online course that we have designed, developed, and reviewed and add and organise them within our institution's VLE.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Add course components to the institutional VLE to ready the online course for implementation
- Organize course components within the institutional VLE to ready the online course for implementation
- Conduct a final quality assurance review in preparation for course launch.

You can expect to spend about 6-10 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



AKU manages course offerings through a [VLE](#) -- sometimes referred to as a learning management system (LMS). The VLE provides a comprehensive set of tools to help us manage and facilitate online teaching. AKU uses the VLE for all types of courses (blended, online, and web-enhanced face-to-face courses).

Learning how to use an institution's VLE is a core competency of an online educator. Luckily, lots of support is available. We may wish to:

- Contact our entity's VLE assistant to learn how to access and use the VLE
- Join an "Introduction to the Virtual Learning Environment" workshop offered by the BDL team as a part of the Faculty Orientation to Teaching and Learning (FOTL) programme (see schedule on the QTL_net website).

Typically, the VLE administrator will provide us with an online course shell where we can start to populate course information, content, assessments, and the like. In fact, some content may even be pre-populated, such as the course outline and support links for learners. At AKU, each academic entity also provides a framework to follow in terms of the "look and feel" of the courses offered by the academic entity. Our entity's VLE assistant will help us navigate through all the requirements. When ready, we can request a course by filling out the online [Course Request Form](#) located in the "Online Forms" course in the VLE.

So, how do we go about putting all the pieces of our online course together? Let's look at a strategy. Also, check out the article [Experiences of Adopting Blended Pedagogies in Health Assessment Course in Post RN Baccalaureate Program of Nursing in Karachi, Pakistan](#) (Cassum, Allana & Dias, 2015) for an AKU-specific experience.

The first thing would be to learn all we can about the features of our institution's VLE (which is Moodle at AKU) and how to use them. Now would be a good time to reconnect with the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning ([QTL.net](#)) and our VLE assistant for support.

Once we feel confident using the VLE we can start to set up our course. A good approach to use is to consider the 3 Cs: Communication, Course Information, and Content. Let's look at each in turn.

1. Communication

As we saw in an earlier step, good communication is vital in an online course. Students are constantly wanting to know what they have to do, when, and how. To this end, we need to establish mechanisms for teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, and student-to-student interaction. These might include:

- a. Announcements: set up the "announcements" forum in the VLE. Add a welcome announcement. Use invitational language. Briefly explain how the course works, where to get started, and invite learners to join in the learning journey. (Note: once the course starts we will be adding weekly announcements to this section reminding learners of what's coming up, what to work on, what's due, etc.) As an example, Figure 9 shows the welcome message from the Faculty Orientation on Teaching and Learning programme at AKU.

Figure 9. Welcome message example

Welcome to the Faculty Orientation on Teaching and Learning



Welcome to the Faculty Orientation on Teaching and Learning (FOTL) programme. We are excited to have you as part of the AKU family.

The Faculty Orientation on Teaching and Learning will provide you with an opportunity to develop a shared understanding of your roles and responsibilities as a faculty member, especially with regard to teaching and learning, research and language support at AKU.

If you have any questions about the programme, please don't hesitate to get in touch by clicking on "Contact Us".

You can start this programme by clicking on "Programme Orientation" below. Thank you for your interest and participation in this course. We wish you a successful experience.

- b. Discussion forums: set up any planned discussion forums in the VLE using the "forum" tool, and always post the first message to each forum. Some common

forums include a “Welcome and Introductions” forum, a “Q&A” forum, a weekly “To Do List” forum, a “Social” forum, and topic-specific forums. (Note: we should try not to have too many forums. We should be selective and include only as many forums as necessary to help learners stay on track, interact with each other, and reach intended learning outcomes.)

- c. Email: set up email contact links and add email guidelines in the VLE. We need to make sure learners know how to contact us should they have any questions, and we need to establish the rules for doing so. For example, we can encourage learners to post common questions to the Q&A forum as opposed to emailing us directly. That way all learners benefit from the questions and answers. Generally, private communication is handled via email, whereas class communication is handled through announcements and discussion forums. (Note: some VLEs include an email tool, which can be enabled to make emailing select learners, groups of learners, or the whole class easier.)
 - d. Synchronous sessions: set up planned synchronous sessions in the VLE. If we have decided to include some synchronous time in our course (e.g., via Zoom or MS Teams) we should create the sessions, provide the links to join the sessions in the course calendar, provide a “how to” guide to show learners how to access the sessions, and include information about requirements for the sessions (such as recommended devices and headsets). We should also inform learners whether the sessions will be recorded, and, if so, let them know how to access recordings and their rights and options in terms of participation in recorded sessions.
2. Course Information

As we saw in an earlier step, a good course orientation is essential in helping learners navigate through our course to find what they need when they need it. To this end, we need to select a prominent place within our course to house our digital course orientation. This should be one of the first items learners come across (usually titled “Getting Started” or “Course Orientation”) and would include all the elements we created in Step 9.

3. Content

As we saw in an earlier step, course content should flow from week to week and be displayed in a consistent manner. Learners will be spending a great deal of time interacting with the content. The more engaging the content is and the easier it is to navigate through, the better. Our eLearning designer and VLE assistant can help us package our content for inclusion in the VLE. At this time we should also add in our assessments and set up our grade book. (Note: one of the most common reasons for learners to login to the VLE is to check grades.)

Once all the communication, course information, and content components have been added to our course, the next step is to run through a final quality assurance check. A typical process might include the following:

1. A read through: We should spend some time reading through all the textual materials added to our course to catch any typos, spelling and grammar errors, and to make sure our writing style reflects what we want to say. Vai and Sosulski (2015) provide some useful tips on [Language & Writing Style](#).
2. A visual check: We should look for opportunities to enhance our materials with visuals. For example, adding icons and images, where appropriate, helps learners navigate through the course and helps with cognition (see Mayer (2014) [Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning](#)). Sites such as the [Noun Project](#) and [Pixabay](#) can help us source royalty-free icons and images. Refer to Step 9 for a more complete list of useful resources.
3. A navigation and links check: We should spend some time making sure all links, buttons, etc., work as intended and that there are no navigational “dead ends”. Learners should be able to easily and intuitively navigate throughout the course.
4. An accessibility check: We should check to make sure our course meets current accessibility standards. This should be done manually. (Note: new accessibility tools are becoming more readily available, and will greatly help us in this regard.) Now would be a good time to double-check our uploaded documents as well (e.g., using the Microsoft accessibility checker), that all images have appropriate alternative text added, and that all videos have closed captions available.

5. A final quality review: We should have our course run through the [Course-specific Checklist for Online and Remote Teaching Readiness at AKU](#) (Appendix K). This is done by the Course Coordinator and Programme Director.

Putting all the components of your online course in the VLE does take time. The good news is that once your course is “ready” you can export it using the tools in the VLE to create and save a master copy. This master copy can then be imported each time the course is run in subsequent semesters, and may only require a few tweaks here and there as new discipline-specific information becomes available, and as we try new technologies and pedagogies in our teaching. And, of course, specific dates will need to be changed.

Activities



1. Set up your online course in the VLE. Add and organize all the components (communication, course information, and content). Organize the components within the VLE to make navigation intuitive. You may want to arrange a time to meet with your VLE assistant, at least initially, to start the process.
2. Complete a final quality assurance check following the steps listed above (read through, visual check, navigation and links check, accessibility check, quality review) via the [Course-specific Checklist for Online and Remote Teaching Readiness at AKU](#) (Appendix K). Fix any identified quality issues which you and the second reviewer found.
3. Save the current version of your online course as a master copy. Download and store the master copy in a secure, safe location. Your VLE assistant will be able to help in this regard.

Resources



[AKU Welcome message example](#) [Image]

Cassum, S. H., Allana, S., & Dias, J. (2015). [Experiences of Adopting Blended Pedagogies in Health Assessment Course in Post RN Baccalaureate Program of Nursing in Karachi, Pakistan](#)

Mayer, R. (2014). [Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning](#).

Vai, M., & Sosulski, K. (2015). [Language and writing style](#).

Accessibility Checkers

[Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#) [for documents]

[Adobe Acrobat Pro DC Accessibility Checker](#) [for documents]

[WAVE](#) [for websites]

Accessibility Evaluation Tools

[Blackboard Ally](#)

[Brickfield](#)

Royalty-Free Image Sites:

[Pixabay](#)

[Unsplash](#)

[Noun Project](#)

[Course-specific Checklist for Online and Remote Teaching Readiness at AKU](#) (Appendix K)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 11:

I have ...

- Read the Step 11 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources
- Added all my course components to the VLE
- Organized all my course components within the VLE
- Conducted a final quality assurance review of my course
- Saved a master copy of my course.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to move on to Step 12.

Step 12: Facilitating Your Online Course

Overview and Outcomes



There is an adage that goes something like this: Great content can't save poor facilitation. Despite all the efforts we may put into designing and creating the best possible course content, if we don't develop our online facilitation skills and plan an appropriate facilitation strategy, any blended online course we teach will likely not meet the expectations of learners or the institution.

Teaching cannot be emphasised enough. In fact, there is another adage that states that great facilitation can save poorly designed content. Of course, our goal is to have both great course design and great facilitation.

The focus in this step, then, will be on developing our online facilitation skills and on planning a robust, flexible facilitation strategy for our blended online courses.

By the end of this step you will be able to:

- Describe various asynchronous and synchronous ways to facilitate instruction in blended online learning.
- Design a blended teaching strategy to engage learners in blended online learning.

You can expect to spend about 3-5 hours working through the content and activities in this step.

Context



In traditional face-to-face, in-person teaching and learning the focal point of instruction is the class. In blended online learning the focus shifts away from the available day and time of the “class” and moves towards the available “week” of instruction. One of the great advantages of blended online learning is that courses are open 24/7 allowing learners to engage with the course on the days and times of their choosing (mostly). This offers more flexibility to learners, but can also seem daunting to us as facilitators. To this end, we need to plan instruction throughout the week (and on a week-to-week basis) using a purposeful mix of asynchronous and synchronous teaching methods. Let’s explore some options in more detail.

Asynchronous Facilitation

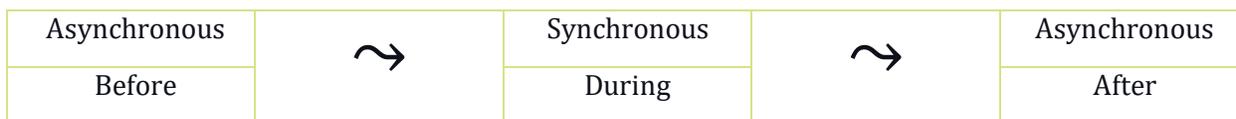
Our first interaction with learners will most likely be asynchronous. It’s vital, then, to craft clear messaging to establish teacher-student communication and start the process of building a learning community. Referring back to our communication plan, this might include sending a welcome announcement (often accompanied by a follow up email) inviting learners to participate and providing practical details about how to access the course and start the learning journey. Weekly announcements would then follow (at the beginning of each week) reminding learners of what they have to do, when, and how. A good strategy is to create a weekly “To Do” list to itemize the activities required of learners each week. This can be included in the announcement or email, or even via a discussion forum. It is also good practice to provide details about how learners can contact us, our preferred ways for them to do so (e.g., via email), and our available days/times. Our facilitation strategy must include some form of regular, ongoing interaction, both teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher.

Once we have decided on a student/teacher interaction strategy, we can then think about ways to establish student-to-content and student-to-student interaction, asynchronously. [Anderson \(2003\)](#) suggests that as long as one form of interaction (teacher-student, student-student, student-content) is at a high level, then deep and meaningful learning will result. But, we can do better.

Purposefully integrating all forms of interaction into our facilitation strategy should result in an even better learning experience (Anderson, 2003).

For asynchronous student-to-content interaction we can refer back to our learning module design. There we identified what we want learners to do, watch, read and/or listen to throughout the week. We may want to reinforce what we want our learners to do “before” our scheduled synchronous meeting, and what we want them to do “after” the meeting. The “before” part mimics the flipped classroom model where we ask students to engage with content before meeting so we can spend the valuable synchronous time exploring the content more purposefully. But we should also provide guidance about what we want our learners to do “after” the synchronous meeting so they can reflect on their learning. Remember, we are planning a week of instruction and not just a single lesson. To that end we want to establish a connection between the asynchronous and synchronous components of our course (see Figure 10 below).

Figure 10. *Blended Online Learning Weekly Flow*



At this stage it is important to distinguish independent learning (“homework”) from asynchronous learning. The asynchronous activities we choose, where possible, should provide an equivalent experience for learners that they might normally expect from attending an in-person class and not just be substitutions for homework.

For asynchronous student-to-student interaction we should think of ways to foster collaboration. A prime example of this is the use of discussion forums. Again, we can refer back to our communication plan and implement the social and content-specific discussion forums mentioned there, such as the “Learner Lounge”, “Q & A”, “Welcome & Introductions” and weekly content discussion forums. To be effective though, discussion forums need to be purposefully designed and managed. As facilitators we need to be constantly present in these forums (at least initially) setting expectations and guiding learning. That means always posting the first message to each discussion forum and responding regularly to other posts. Discussion forums also work best when they are relevant, provide added value for learners to help them reach intended learning outcomes, and have grades attached. Much has been written about the advantages and

disadvantages of discussion forums. There are many resources worth checking out to help us facilitate effective online discussions, such as [Online Discussions: Tips for Instructors](#) from the Centre of Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo (n.d.). We should make time to seek out these resources and compile a curated list. As we gain experience we can determine the best way to integrate discussion forums into our facilitation strategy.

Discussion forums are not the only way to establish asynchronous student-to-student interaction and collaboration. Another option is to include activities for learners to create shared documents/resources. One example would be to create a wiki or Google doc where all learners (either individually or in groups) contribute something course-related for the benefit of all course participants. Some ideas include:

- Asking students to find a useful resource (article, video, website) and post to a “Resources” wiki. Then have students comment or vote on the most useful resources. The end result would be a curated list of resources for all.
- Asking a group of students to summarize a course-related topic (one topic per group) and post to a “Class Notes” shared Google doc. Then assign each group to edit another group’s summary. The end result would be a set of edited summary notes that could be used for study purposes.
- Asking students to create content for a class open “textbook”. Students could be asked to plan out, create, and publish the content collectively. The end result would be a study guide for all.

There are many other possibilities, and those we integrate should heighten collaboration between learners (one-on-one, small group, and whole group interaction). Again, the asynchronous activities we choose should provide an equivalent learning experience to in-person instruction. And we need to be “present” in those activities providing ongoing feedback and guidance.

For more ideas, check out:

- [Actively Engaging Students in Asynchronous Online Classes](#) (Riggs & Linder, 2016, December).
- [8 Ways to Improve Group Work Online](#) (Davidson & Katopodis, 2020, October)

Synchronous Facilitation

In blended online learning, synchronous time with learners is at a premium. The amount of time we have available depends on a number of factors, but it is invariably less time than we may be used to when teaching a traditional in-person class. For this reason it is essential that we plan the time carefully and wisely. This includes choosing activities that couldn't otherwise be done asynchronously.

Synchronous time with learners serves a number of purposes. For example, it provides an opportunity to

- “check-in” with learners to gauge progress
- build community to enhance social presence and motivation
- provide immediate feedback to guide learning
- answer questions in real-time to clarify expectations
- explore core concepts more thoroughly to enhance learning

A common synchronous method is to have all class participants join a weekly online class via a web conferencing tool such as Zoom. We should think of these sessions more as consultations or seminars rather than classes. [Owston \(2020, October\)](#) suggests a number of interactive learning models for online synchronous seminars. One example for a one-hour online seminar is as follows (Table 4).

Table 4. *Balanced Interactive Model for a One-hour Online Seminar*

Activity	Time
Ice-breaker for students	5 min
Mini-lecture	10 min
Check understanding	5 min
Student breakout rooms	15 min
Debrief breakouts	10 min
Student questions	5 min
Sum up	10 min

(Owston, 2020, October)

Tip: prior to the synchronous session we should send our learners an agenda based on the model we choose. The agenda would also be displayed on screen as learners join the session to remind them how the session will be conducted.

Let's break down the model shown above.

Ice-breaker: We should always start a synchronous session with an ice-breaker activity (or energizer). This could be something as simple as creating a poll using the polling feature in the web conferencing tool asking participants how they are doing, or perhaps a warm-up question. This could act as a check-in and helps build social presence. Note: a simple internet search will provide a number of excellent ice-breaker examples we could use.

Mini-lecture: Mini-lectures should expand upon key course concepts, perhaps via a demonstration, or walking learners through an example or scenario. Learners would have engaged with content before the session (hopefully) so we want to dive more deeply into the concepts and help learners make connections between ideas. But we need to keep this short and to the point. One of the biggest mistakes facilitators make is spending all available synchronous time lecturing. Given that synchronous time is so limited and valuable, our sessions should be active, not passive.

Check understanding: Immediacy is a great advantage of synchronous learning. Here we should spend time gauging understanding and providing clarity. We can do this by asking questions,

presenting further examples/scenarios, and having learners explain their understanding to each other. We can then provide immediate feedback based on the responses to further guide learning.

Student breakout rooms: Student-to-student interaction is an essential part of learning. We should provide opportunities for learners to engage with one another in relation to core content. A good strategy is to break participants into small groups and have each group discuss a scenario/example/idea or tackle a specific question. We need to provide initial guidance and assign a specific task to each group. After a specified amount of time (enough to have learners discuss the task appropriately), the groups rejoin the class and present their ideas/solutions, and also share what they struggled with, and what they found affirming.

Debrief breakouts: Immediate feedback is a great advantage of synchronous learning. Here we can clarify, perhaps correct, the ideas and solutions presented by each group. This process is similar to case-based or scenario-based learning, where students initially engage with content individually, then in small groups, and then in a large group.

Student questions: Of course, there will always be more questions that arise out of any successful learning session. These questions can be about anything course-related. It is essential to set aside some time to answer questions, provide clarity, and guide learning.

Sum up: We should always end a synchronous session with a summary. The summary should reinforce key concepts, and the connections between the concepts and learning outcomes. The summary should also guide learners on what to do after the session. Remember, in blended online learning we want to flow from asynchronous to synchronous learning and then back to asynchronous learning, and integrate independent learning as well in a way that optimizes learning.

There is no one way to plan a synchronous lesson. The model described above is but one example of many. The model we choose will depend on our discipline, teaching style and philosophy, our learners, and many other factors. Regardless, any model we choose should take advantage of the affordances of synchronous meeting time and contain a variety of teaching strategies.

There are other synchronous facilitation methods we can employ in our courses. For example, we should schedule some online office hours. This will provide an opportunity for some one-on-one time with learners. There is a tremendous amount of individual difference among learners. Meeting one-on-one with learners enhances the teacher-student relationship and helps to address individual differences. Another synchronous facilitation strategy would be to schedule some seminar time for smaller groups. These need not be facilitated by us, but perhaps by teaching assistants, or even by learners themselves. Our role would be to provide the framework for the seminars. For example, we could create a sign-up sheet for learners to select and join a study group at a time convenient for them, and provide an agenda for each group when they meet.

For more ideas, check out:

- [Synchronous online classes: 10 tips for engaging students](#). (Norman, 2017, June)

Evaluation of Teaching

One way to gauge how well we are facilitating our blended online courses is through learner feedback. All institutions employ some form of end-of-term student evaluation process. For example, AKU uses the [Student Evaluation of Teaching \(SET\) form](#). As online educators we can take advantage of this feedback to identify what we are doing well and continue to do, and what we need to change or refine in future course offerings.

Another good strategy is to use the student evaluation of teaching form as a secondary quality review: a facilitation quality checklist of sorts. Reviewing the questions can help us determine if we have included all the necessary elements in our facilitation strategy.

Of course, we don't have to wait until the end of the term to solicit learner feedback. There is no harm in asking students (formally or informally) throughout the course at regular intervals what they think about a certain activity or a certain facilitation method. This can be done asynchronously via online questionnaires or synchronously through polling, and can be a great help should mid-semester facilitation tweaks need to be made. We should be careful of survey fatigue though. The feedback we ask for should be relevant, to the point, and not take too much of our learners' time.

A good resource to check out in this regard is the [Course Evaluations Question Bank](#) from the The Centre for Teaching & Learning at UC Berkeley (n.d.). The question bank has a number of questions broken down by category that we could use to solicit feedback from learners.

Moving Forward

As mentioned earlier, the importance of facilitation cannot be stressed enough in teacher-led blended online learning. Building our online facilitation skills takes time and practice. We may not get it right the first time, but that's okay. If we commit to continual improvement by learning as much as we can about the latest asynchronous and synchronous facilitation methods, and not being afraid to try new ideas out, we will be just fine. Our learners will also appreciate and benefit from our efforts.

In closing, there are a number of freely available resources that can help us become better online educators. The References section contains many. Two additional e-guides that are very helpful resources are:

- [Teaching in a Digital Age - 2nd Edition](#) (Bates, 2019)
- [Guide to Blended Learning](#) (Cleveland-Innis & Wilton, 2018).

And, if teaching an online course for the first time, check out [Take My Advice](#) (Dimeo, 2017, November).

Activities



1. Plan the asynchronous and synchronous online teaching methods and activities you will use for any given week of your blended online course. Use the [Online Educator Weekly Facilitation Plan Template](#) (Appendix L) as a guide. Then pick one outcome/objective for the week and plan the activities learners will undertake independently, asynchronously, and synchronously. Use the [Online Educator Learning Flow Template](#) (Appendix M) as a guide.
2. Create a synchronous online class lesson plan for any given week of your online blended course. Use the [Online Educator Synchronous Class Lesson Plan Template](#) (Appendix N) as a guide.

3. Participate in the workshop “Synchronous Online Teaching” offered by the BDL team.
4. Reflect on your learning and progress towards becoming an online facilitator. Write your reflections in your learning journal or blog.

Resources



[AKU Student evaluation of teaching \(SET\) form.](#)

Anderson, T. (2003). [Getting the Mix Right Again: An Updated and Theoretical Rationale for Interaction.](#)

Bates, A. W. (2019). [Teaching in a digital age - 2nd edition.](#)

Cleveland-Innes, M., & Wilton, D. (2018). [Guide to blended learning.](#)

Davidson, C. N. & Katopodis, C. (2020, October). [8 ways to improve group work online.](#)

Dimeo, J. (2017, November). [Take my advice.](#)

Owston, R. (2020, October). [How to teach online effectively using Zoom](#)

Norman, M. (2017, June). [Synchronous online classes: 10 tips for engaging students.](#)

Riggs, S. A. & Linder, K. E. (2016, December). [Actively engaging students in asynchronous online classes.](#)

University of California Berkeley (n.d.). [Course evaluations question bank.](#)

University of Waterloo (n.d.). [Online discussions: Tips for instructors.](#)

[Online Educator Weekly Facilitation Plan Template](#) (Appendix L)

[Online Educator Learning Flow Template](#) (Appendix M)

[Live Online Session Plan Template](#) (Appendix N)

[Online Educator Synchronous Class Lesson Plan Template](#) (Appendix N)

Summary



Check the following list to determine if you have completed all the activities in Step 12:

I have ...

- Read the Step 12 Overview and Outcomes, Context, Activities, and Resources.
- Planned the asynchronous and synchronous teaching methods and activities I will employ.
- Planned the activities learners will undertake independently, asynchronously, and synchronously for one outcome/objective.
- Created a synchronous class lesson plan.
- Reflected on my learning and progress towards becoming an online facilitator.

If you have, congratulations, you are now ready to implement your blended online course.

Congratulations!

Next Steps

Having completed all the steps in the manual we are well on your way to becoming online educators.

Teaching is an exciting, rewarding career, and a privilege. To that end, we want to be the best possible online educators we can be, and so we should consider the completion of this manual as only the beginning of our learning journey.

Blended online learning will become much more commonplace in the coming years. It will also continually evolve and, therefore, so should our practice. So what are some next steps we can take to become better online educators? A few suggestions:

- commit to ongoing professional development to continue to develop our pedagogical and technical skills. For example, at AKU talk to the department chair or a member of the QTL_net to discuss our PD needs related to online course design and teaching;
- seek out and join relevant communities of practice (local and global) to stay informed about current trends and share ideas about what works;
- think of our online courses as continual “works in process”: they are never done. We should adopt a constant revision mindset. During and after each iteration of a course, we should gather feedback from learners, reflect on what’s working and what needs improvement, and adjust as necessary.

Our learners will certainly appreciate and benefit from our efforts.

Glossary

Assessment

Alternative: assessment used to determine what a learner can do as opposed to what a learner knows. Also refers to an assessment other than a traditional test or written assignment.

Authentic: assessment designed to have learners apply acquired knowledge and skills to a realistic, relevant, and meaningful situation.

Formative: regular, ongoing assessment designed to monitor learner progress and have learners identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Summative: assessment designed to evaluate to what extent learners have reached intended learning outcomes at the end of a given unit of instruction.

Asynchronous online Learning

Instruction that does not occur at the same time and is usually facilitated through digital tools.

Backwards Design

Instructional design process where learning outcomes or goals are determined first followed by instructional methods, assessments, and content.

Blended Digital Learning (BDL)

Learning that involves some mix of online teaching and face-to-face teaching that is facilitated by digital tools.

Blended Learning (BL)

Learning that includes some mix of online instruction, and face-to-face instruction. May also be referred to as hybrid learning.

Blended Online Learning (BOL)

Learning that takes place fully online and includes some mix of asynchronous and synchronous instruction. May also be referred to as Bichronous Online Learning.

Bichronous Online Learning (BOL)

Learning that takes place fully online and includes some mix of asynchronous and synchronous instruction. May also be referred to as Blended Online Learning.

Community of Inquiry

A process of creating deep and meaningful learning through social, cognitive, and teaching presences.

Community of Practice

A group of individuals who share a common interest or goal, interact regularly, and develop shared resources for the purpose of overall improvement of practice.

Constructive Alignment

A process in which teaching, assessment, and outcomes are aligned for the purpose of helping students achieve intended learning outcomes.

Digital Literacy

Possessing the communication skills required to live, learn, and work in the digital world.

Face-to-Face Learning (F2F)

Instruction that occurs in the classroom at the same time and place.

Flipped Classroom

A teaching methodology in which content dissemination occurs prior to synchronous instructional time. Learners engage with the content individually.

Hybrid Learning

Learning that includes some mix of asynchronous, online instruction, and synchronous, face-to-face instruction. May also be referred to as blended learning.

Instructional Design

An evidence-based process of defining learners' needs and then creating learning materials and experiences to help learners meet those needs.

Learning Management System (LMS)

A web-based software application designed to administer and manage teaching and learning programmes. Also known as a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Liquid Syllabus

An open, freely available web site or document containing all the essential course information in multimedia form normally found in a syllabus.

Multimedia Learning

Learning that occurs through multiple media forms such as text, images, audio, and video.

Multimodal Learning

Learning that occurs through some combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modes (primarily).

Technology Enabled/Enhanced Learning (TEL)

Learning that is facilitated in whole or in part through the use and application of computer-based, digital technologies (primarily).

Social and Emotional Learning

A process through which learners acquire and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills to manage relationships and participate in safe, positive learning environments.

Synchronous Learning

Instruction that occurs at the same time. In face-to-face instruction synchronous learning also occurs at the same place. In blended online instruction synchronous learning does not occur at the same place and is facilitated through digital tools.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

An educational framework for designing flexible, equitable learning environments to accommodate individual learning differences.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

A web-based software application designed to administer and manage teaching and learning programmes. Also known as a Learning Management System (LMS).

Web Enhanced Learning

Instruction that includes some online content, activities, and interactions to complement in-class instruction.

Credits

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Appendices

Appendix A: Online Educator Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist

Reflect on each of the statements below in each of the three categories A) Pedagogical Competencies, B) Technological Competencies, and C) Attitudinal Competencies, then rate yourself in terms of proficiency, i.e., whether you are 1) unsure or don't know, 2) aware, but need improvement, or 3) proficient.

A) Pedagogical Competencies

1 = Unsure, or don't know 2 = Aware, but need improvement 3 = Proficient	1	2	3
I know how to write SMART learning outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to create assessments (formative, summative, authentic, for/of/as learning) that are aligned with the learning outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to plan a lesson that uses active learning strategies and follows established instructional design principles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am familiar with the learning design continuum, and multiple teaching modalities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am familiar with my institution's/entity's preferred curriculum/instructional design standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I follow a comprehensive communication plan when teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in my courses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I incorporate open educational resources (OER) into my courses, where appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use a variety of facilitation strategies and methodologies in my teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I adhere to copyright standards when designing curriculum.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I apply my institution's academic integrity policy in my courses, and purposely find ways to mitigate potential academic integrity issues through innovative curriculum design.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B) Technological Competencies

1 = Unsure, or don't know 2 = Aware, but need improvement 3 = Proficient	1	2	3
I use a variety of devices (laptop, tablet, phone) and know how to use the features of their respective operating systems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use an efficient file management system and know how to store, copy, move, backup, zip/unzip files locally and in the cloud.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use document creation tools, such as Microsoft Office and/or LibreOffice and/or Google (e.g., word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, forms, etc.) to create and share documents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I fully utilize my institution's virtual learning environment (VLE) to share digital materials/content with students, communicate with students, assess students, and manage student progress.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I curate appropriate digital learning materials for my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to create multi-modal content (video, audio, text, images) using a variety of tools such as Loom, Screencast-O-matic, Adobe Spark, Adobe Photoshop, GIMP, Audacity, Google Applications, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to create online activities using a variety of tools such as H5P, Padlet, Mentimeter, Quizizz, Kahoot, Google Applications, Moodle, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I utilize a variety of communication tools when teaching, such as email, announcements, discussion forums, chat, web conferencing, social media, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I fully utilize my institution's web conferencing features when teaching synchronously, including file sharing, collaborative whiteboard sharing, screen sharing, polling, breakout rooms, recording, chatting, setting security and privacy options, managing participants, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I utilize a variety of web browsers and am familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of each, the add-ins/extensions available in each, the privacy and security settings in each, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C) Attitudinal Competencies

1 = Unsure, or don't know 2 = Aware, but need improvement 3 = Proficient	1	2	3
I am passionate about teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I care about my students, their well-being and their academic success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I embrace diversity and purposefully find ways to make my courses and my teaching more inclusive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I embrace new approaches to teaching and learning in any modality (face-to-face, web enhanced, blended, online).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am committed to continual professional development to help improve my teaching craft.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use research-based evidence to inform my teaching practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a proponent of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I embrace teaching challenges and enjoy finding solutions to these challenges, either independently and/or collaboratively with colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I seek out available teaching and learning support when (and if) needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am committed to completing the steps and activities in this manual to the best of my ability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am committed to implementing the deliverables created by me through the steps in this manual and evaluating the results of my efforts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B: Online Educator Professional Development Plan Template

PART I: Begin by answering the following questions:

1) What are my strengths as an online educator?

2) What areas do I need improvement in to become a better online educator?

3) What are my professional development goals?

a) Short-term:

b) Long-term:

4) How will I know I have achieved my professional development goals?

PART II: Then complete the chart below:

Name:	Entity:	Date:
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Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (i.e., SMART).

Goal (What)	Reason (Why)	Actions (How)	Timeline (When)	Evidence of Achievement

Appendix C: Online Teaching Programme Map Template

Faculty Member’s Name:	Course:	Date:
------------------------	---------	-------

Start by placing your course in the table below. Then fill in as much of the table as you can based on your programme (courses/modules by year). Feel free to add more rows and/or columns as necessary.

Year	Programme Courses/Modules				

Then identify the following:

1. Courses/modules that are prerequisites for your course. List them.
2. Courses/modules that are corequisites for your course. List them.
3. Courses/modules that your course is a prerequisite or corequisite for. List them.

Then answer the following:

1. By the time learners successfully complete my course/module, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes will they need to be successful in subsequent courses/modules?

2. In what year of study do learners typically take my course?
3. Is my course an undergraduate or graduate course?
4. What is the duration of the course?
5. How many credit hours does my course have?
6. Does my course have a practical component (e.g., lab, practicum, field work, studio, clinical)?
7. What are the core concepts in my course? What are the relationships between the core concepts?
8. What are the core topics within each concept? What are the relationships between them?
9. How much time would be allocated to each core concept and topics within them?

Appendix E: Online Educator Course Learning Outcomes Template

Write or revise learning outcomes for each skill, attitude, or piece of content knowledge required of learners by the time they reach the end of your online course. The outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (i.e., SMART) and contain 3 parts (i.e., Action Verb, Content, Context). An example is provided in the first row. Feel free to add more rows as needed. (Adapted from Lopes, V. (2015). [A short primer for writing course learning outcomes.](#))

Name:	Course:	Date:
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Action Verb (Include level of learning)	Content/Process/Focus (The what)	Context (Why or What for)
<i>Write (Bloom’s Cognitive Domain: Create level)</i>	<i>3-Step, SMART course learning outcomes</i>	<i>to make explicit the learning goals of a specific unit of instruction or course.</i>

Appendix F: Online Educator Course Assessments Revision Template

List all the assessments you currently use in your course. Beside each assessment, identify its weighting, which learning outcome(s) it aligns with, whether it is traditional or not, and whether it is formative or summative. If there is an assessment that does not align with a course learning outcome, remove that assessment and replace it with an alternative, authentic assessment that does. If there are too many traditional or summative assessments or highly weighted assignments (over 30%) consider revising with alternative, authentic assessments. An example is provided in the first row. Add more rows as needed.

Name:	Course:	Date:
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Assessment	Weight	LO(s)	Traditional	Type	Alternative Authentic Assessment
<i>Mid-term Test</i>	<i>40%</i>	<i>#2, 4, 6</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Summative</i>	<i>Replace with a group assignment. In groups students collaborate on writing class notes for each topic covered (one group per topic) and placing in a wiki for all to use as a study guide. Reduce weighting to 20%. Distribute remaining 20% elsewhere.</i>

Appendix G: Online Educator Course Communication Plan Template

List the asynchronous and synchronous communication tools you will integrate into your online course. Identify how and when they will be used and why, i.e., for what pedagogical purpose. An example is provided in the first row. Add more rows as needed.

Name:	Course:	Date:
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Communication Tool	Use A= Asynchronous S= Synchronous	How and when will the tool be used?	Why will the tool be used?
<i>Announcements (Moodle Activity)</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Weekly announcements to inform learners of what's coming up in the course, what's due, etc.</i>	<i>To communicate key course information on a regular, ongoing basis. To help keep learners on track.</i>

Appendix H: AKU Online Learning Design Template (Course Map Template)

Programme Name	
Course Name	
Duration	

Course Learning Outcomes	Bloom's Levels	Summative Assessments	Topics/ Modules

Module Design Template

Important: Please include all worksheets for Google Docs/Wiki, Forum questions, quizzes, and storyboards for media as appendices.

Course Name:	
Module/ Unit title:	
Week(s)/Placement:	
Dates when the module will be offered:	
Total time to be spend by students:	
How much time will be F2F?	
How much time will be online? Synchronous Asynchronous	
Name of the author:	
Date of revisions:	

Module Learning Outcomes <i>Different levels of Bloom</i>	By the end of the module, you should be able to: • •
Overview/ Purpose of the Module	Here you will write a couple of paragraphs to introduce the module. This section is meant to draw students' attention to the module and motivate them to read further. Also, explain how the module is organized and what you expect from the students.
Sub-Topic 1	Title of the first sub-topic

Presentation	Overview of the topic
Activity 1 Title: Modality: <i>Synchronous or Asynchronous</i> Duration: <i>time in hours</i> Bloom's level:	<p>Provide detailed instructions for students to complete the activity.</p> <p>Description of all the media and other resources (including Library)</p>
Activity 2 Title: Modality: <i>Synchronous or Asynchronous</i> Duration: <i>time in hours</i> Bloom's level:	<p>Provide detailed instructions for students to complete the activity.</p> <p>Description of all the media and other resources (including Library)</p>
Sub-Topic 1 Conclusion	Conclusion paragraph for the sub-topic description of all the media and other resources (including Library) and what's coming next.
Sub-Topic 2	Title of the second sub-topic
Presentation	Overview of the topic
Activity 3 Title: Modality: <i>Synchronous or Asynchronous</i> Duration: <i>time in hours</i> Bloom's level:	<p>Provide detailed instructions for students to complete the activity.</p> <p>Description of all the media and other resources (including Library).</p>
Activity 4 Title: Modality: <i>Synchronous or Asynchronous</i>	<p>Provide detailed instructions for students to complete the activity.</p> <p>Description of all the media and other resources (including Library)</p>

Duration: <i>time in hours</i>	
Bloom's level:	
Sub-Topic 2 Conclusion	
Conclusion/ Summary of the module	Conclusion of the module/ unit
Feedback Strategies	Assessment rubrics and other key moderation tasks (e.g., check students posts twice a week)
References	
Additional Resources	

Appendices

(IMPORTANT: Please include all worksheets, quizzes, storyboard for media etc. here)

Appendix H: Online Educator Learning Module - Alternate Template

Name:	Course:	Date:
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Start by brainstorming ideas under each column heading in the table for one instructional unit (week or topic). Use bullet points.

Topic or Week	Overview & Outcomes	Content (text, video, audio, images)	Activities (active learning strategies)	Assessments (formative, self-assessment, etc.)	Resources (web sites, readings, etc.)

Then flesh out your ideas in more detail below. Expand the available space as needed.

1. Overview and Outcomes:
2. Content:
3. Activities:
4. Assessments:
5. Resources:
6. Summary:

Appendix J: AKU Blended Learning Course Website Review Checklist

The checklist has been developed based on the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education by Chickering and Gamson (1991). These are:

1. encourages contact between students and faculty,
2. develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
3. encourages active learning,
4. gives prompt feedback,
5. emphasizes time on task,
6. communicates high expectations, and
7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Process: The review will take place before the course starts. The results will be discussed with the eLearning designer of the course, and the report will be shared with the Dean or the programme leader.

Name of the reviewer	
Name of the course	
Date of review	

Kindly rate the course website using the following scale:

1. Not at all
2. Minimally
3. Fairly
4. Mostly
5. Completely

Statements	5	4	3	2	1
Contact information					
Faculty’s contact information (name, e-mail, phone/Skype, office hours, etc.) is written clearly on the course web site.					
Steps have been mentioned on the course website for students to seek help/advice from faculty both in and outside of class (e.g., online).					
The faculty’s online/ F2F office hours are clearly stated on the course website.					
Faculty’s response time to student e-mail messages is mentioned (between 1 to 3 working days) on the course website.					
The timeline for receiving feedback on assignments is clearly mentioned on the course website (e.g. within 2 weeks of submission).					
Information about seeking help from the IT and Student support team is clearly stated on the course website.					
The course website provides links to the Online study skills module.					
Students are required to post their contact information online so they may communicate with each other early on in the course.					
Copyrights, Privacy and Security of Information					
Steps have been taken to protect students' educational records/privacy rights (e.g., it is a password protected site)					
Course materials contain statements clarifying ownership and usage rights where appropriate.					
Data protection policies are clearly stated where required – e.g. if course requires user identification.					
All quoted materials are cited correctly by adhering to one of the standard citation format.					

Nature of interactive online content					
Icebreakers and online socialization activities are introduced early in the course (e.g., during the first week) if the students are not on-campus.					
The design of the modules prompts the faculty to be active and engaged with the students (e.g., at least one out of three online discussions are moderated by the faculty).					
Online activities promote student-student interaction and collaboration (e.g., use of discussion forum, wikis, google docs etc. for group projects, cooperative learning).					
A forum is created for students to post comments/ questions about the course.					
Online discussion forum is used to encourage students to discuss difficult ideas associated with the course content with their peers in the course.					
Expectations regarding student participation in the online discussion forum are clearly mentioned (e.g., students are expected to respond to comments/questions/ critique that are posted by other students at least once).					
For online collaborative assignments, rubrics include collaboration and use of technology as one of the assessment criterion.					
Students' initial knowledge about the use of relevant ICTs is assessed within the first week of starting the course and/or module.					
The faculty's role in reminding/ encouraging students when they do not complete the tasks on time is clearly articulated.					
The importance of scheduling/using time wisely is emphasized during the orientation week/module.					
A schedule of timelines is provided to clearly guide students by when events and learning activities should be accomplished.					

The orientation week plan covers information on support to prepare students for blended learning experience (e.g. ICT literacy, online learning).					
Assessment values analytical responses to activities on the website (e.g. forum, wikis etc.)					
Usability					
The purpose of each online activity is clearly stated.					
The instructions for completion of online activities are clearly mentioned.					
All web links and embedded media elements work well.					
The online quizzes work well.					
The amount of time it would take to complete the online learning activities is clearly stated.					
Indicators and detailed descriptors on how assignments would be graded (a rubric) are provided.					
Instructions on how to submit assessment tasks are clearly written.					
Guidelines on how to use the online tools are clearly provided					
Prerequisite technology skills are explicitly stated.					
Multimedia and interface design					
The online activities comprise a variety of activity types (e.g., podcasts, online discussions, virtual labs, webquests, digital stories, etc.) to cater to the different learning needs, interests, or backgrounds of the students.					
The course content comprises a variety of media types (audio, video, texts etc.) to cater to the different needs, interests, or backgrounds of the students.					
The media used in the course is relevant.					
The online interface design has a clear and logical layout of content.					

The design elements (colour, font type/size, placement of icons, etc.) demonstrate sensitivity to readability and accessibility issues.					
Course architecture permits tutors to add content, activities and assessments to extend learning opportunities.					
The course website is constructed with technical standards allowing sharing of content and assessments among different learning management systems / virtual learning environments.					
User interface design is consistent throughout the course site, and follows best practices of accessibility and user experience.					
Technical Specifications					
The digital media content has been designed to be accessed on multiple types of devices (portability).					
The content on the VLE is SCORM 1.2 compliant.					
Hardware, web browser and software requirements for activities are specified.					

If I were to change something about this course website, it would be:

Other Comments:

Appendix K: AKU Course Specific Checklist

Course-specific Checklist for Online and Remote Teaching Readiness at AKU

This online and remote teaching readiness self-assessment checklist will assist academic entities in assessing their readiness to conduct teaching online or remotely. The checklist is divided into 2 sections. Following are the instructions to complete the checklist:

- I. The first section is to be filled out by each Course Coordinator separately.
- II. The second section is to be filled out by the Programme Director.
- III. The status of each indicator is to be provided as either Y = Yes/Completed, N = Not completed, IP = In progress, NA = Not applicable
- IV. For each indicator, please provide one or two examples to support the status in the 'Comment: Evidence' section.
- V. Each indicator is marked as either Essential or Desirable. **GREEN=An Essential Element that must be in place for course approval. YELLOW = Desirable but not necessary for course approval during the rapid phase.**
- VI. Learning outcomes related to placement/clinical learning experiences/skills should not be replaced or substituted for theoretical learning inappropriately. Where 'practice' outcomes ought to be achieved in an online course, but are deferred, clear accounting of where and when these will be achieved in the programme needs to be provided, with any implications for progression identified.
- VII. In course templates/outlines, clearly show synchronous and asynchronous teaching sessions. Provide a link to the VLE
- VIII. In responding to the checklist, provide evidence from the previous semester regarding student needs and assessments.

Section 1: To be filled out by Course Coordinators

Rapid Online and Remote Teaching Readiness Self-Assessment Checklist			
Readiness Indicators		Status (Y/N/IP/NA)	Comment: Evidence
1.1	The course is available on the VLE and the course template has been duly completed.		
1.2	Faculty members teaching the course have updated their profiles on the VLE.		
1.3	The course learning outcomes have been selected or altered to be achievable online or remotely, and online or remote teaching does not increase level of difficulty or present barriers to achieving learning outcomes.		
1.4	The online and remote teaching and assessment strategies and course content are aligned with the course learning outcomes.		
1.5	Any challenges regarding clinical/ lab work or practical/practicum components of the course that cannot be taught online or remotely have been dealt with. [Ref: guidance # VI above]		
1.6	Faculty teaching the course are aware of students' needs (e.g. access, personal circumstances) and all teaching and assessment approaches are humane and flexible.		
1.7	Information on assessment requirements is provided on the VLE and has been communicated to the students. <i>Consideration should be made for formative assessment to ensure assessment promotes learning.</i>		
1.8	Faculty members teaching the course have access to appropriate hardware, software and connectivity to conduct online and remote teaching.		

1.9	The Library has been made aware of the needs of the course (e.g. availability of online articles and readings, VPN access for students & faculty).		
1.10	The copyright clearance for readings and other materials used in the course (e.g. images, eBooks) have been sought with the help of the copyright officer.		

Section 2: To be filled out by Programme Director

Rapid Online and Remote Teaching Readiness Self-Assessment Checklist		
Readiness Indicators	Status (Y/N/IP/NA)	Comment: Evidence
2.1	The entity has conducted an audit to collect information on student demographics, location, ability to study remotely, and access to hardware, software and connectivity. The entity has identified key issues from the audit and developed plans to address these.	
2.2.	Data has been collected from faculty and students on the challenges and successes of the previous semester.	
2.3	Based on the faculty and students’ experiences from the previous semester, necessary changes have been made in the plan for the current semester.	
2.4	Students have been informed about the requirements concerning devices and Internet access (e.g. cluster approach). Where students do not have access to appropriate technology, alternate methods of teaching and learning have been included.	
2.5	An orientation programme has been planned for students, which includes an overview of the courses (e.g. information on assessments, humane teaching approaches, expectations, time commitments, plagiarism, online/remote learning) and information literacy skills. This orientation is to be offered before the courses start to guide students in becoming self-directed learners.	
2.6	A feedback mechanism has been set up to receive and respond to student concerns around online and remote teaching and learning in a timely manner.	
2.7	All students have updated their profile on the VLE.	
2.8	Students have the required digital and information literacies to study in an online or remote environment (e.g.,	

	Keyboarding, computer operations, use of productivity software, email use, use of multimedia such as videos, basic to advanced internet knowledge and use of online tools)		
2.9	Special needs (including COVID-19 related illness, learning disabilities and mental health) pertaining to students have been identified and strategies have been developed to address those for online and remote teaching.		
2.10	Faculty members teaching the course are aware of how to access necessary support (e.g. VLE assistants, faculty champions) and resources (e.g. hardware, software and VPN to access the library) to design and teach online and remote courses.		
2.11	The faculty members involved in teaching have been trained on online and remote approaches, or have prior experience of doing so; are confident in the use of online tools for teaching, learning and assessment (e.g. through QTL or entity based training) and are considered online ready. <i>The university commissions require names of the faculty members and the trainings received.</i>		
2.12	Those faculty members teaching for the first time are being mentored by an experienced faculty member.		
2.13	If a faculty member is teaching an online/remote course for the first time, a dry run is planned to iron out any unforeseen issues.		
2.14	Library has been informed about the needs and it has developed and shared the required information and obtained copyright clearances.		
2.15	IT Helpdesk has been informed of the specific needs for each course, and IT has provided a plan to provide timely and relevant technical support to faculty and students for online and remote teaching.		

Name of the course		Course Template Attached: <i>Yes / No</i>
Name of the course coordinator:		
Name of the co-facilitators/ faculty:		
Entity:		Name of the programme:
Programme Director Signature and Date: Department Chair/Associate Dean Signature and Date:		Dean Signature and Date:
RWG Chair Signature: and Date		RWG Comments:

AKU Course Template

Course title:

Course number:

Semester/Term offered:

Course status¹:

Credit points:

Pre-requisite:

Co-requisite:

Mode of study²:

Faculty:

Course Description:

Aim of the Course:

Learning Outcomes:

Course Themes:

Weekly Course Schedule:

Course Structure (including details of synchronous and asynchronous learning):

¹ Core/Elective/Specialisation

² Face-to-face/Blended/Online

Course Assessment Tasks:

Assessment Rubrics:

Essential Readings:

Suggested Readings:

Appendix L: Online Educator Weekly Facilitation Plan Template

Refer back to Online Educator Course Elements UDL Review Template. Expand on that template by listing the asynchronous and synchronous methods/activities you will facilitate over a given week. Examples are provided in italics. Feel free to add more rows and columns as needed.

Name:	Course:	Date:
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Expectations/ Responsibilities	Asynchronous	Synchronous
Facilitator(s)	<i>Weekly Announcement and "To Do" List Weekly Discussion Forum Weekly Learning Module</i>	<i>Weekly Online Class Learning Partner Groups</i>
Learner(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read weekly announcement and "To Do" list before synch class</i> • <i>Participate in weekly discussion forum</i> • <i>Complete weekly learning module before synch class</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Attend synch class and/or watch recording of synch class</i> • <i>Participate in study seminar with learning partners (after synch class)</i>

Appendix M: Online Educator Learning Flow Template

Outcome/Objective/Task:

Brainstorm ideas under each column heading in the table to help learners reach/complete the outcome/objective/task above. Use bullet points. In each case identify your role as an educator in the activity.

Independent Learning <i>What do you want learners to read/watch/listen to? (Student-Content Interaction)</i>	Asynchronous Learning <i>What collaboration/communication activities do you want learners to engage in outside of scheduled meeting time? (Student-Student-Teacher Interaction)</i>	Synchronous Learning <i>What collaboration/communication activities do you want learners to engage in during scheduled meeting time? (Student-Student-Teacher Interaction)</i>

Then briefly describe how each task/activity in one column connects with and/or relates to each task/activity in the other columns, i.e., how does one task/activity flow to enable/enhance the next to help learners reach intended learning outcomes?

Appendix N: Online Educator Synchronous Class Lesson Plan

- 1) List the outcomes and/or objectives for the given synchronous class.
- 2) Describe what the learners should have done before the synchronous class and what they will be expected to do after the synchronous class.
- 3) Itemize the activities you will facilitate during the synchronous class and allocate a specific time for each activity e.g., icebreaker (5 min.), mini-lecture (10 min.), breakout groups (15 min.), etc.

Feel free to add more rows as needed.

Name:	Course:	Date & Time:
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Outcomes and Objectives:

Before Class:	After Class:
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Time	Activities
