

Quality Guidelines for Online Courses

The quality of an online course is determined by several factors, some of which can only be assessed while the course is in progress. These Quality Guidelines are intended to make course designers and instructors aware of such factors and consider their improvement or implementation. These guidelines are based on the *Rubric for Online Instruction* (ROI) created by Chico State University and on an adaptation of Joan Van Duzer's instructional design tips by Iowa State University. The ROI is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License. A copy of this license is available at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/us/>.

The quality guidelines are grouped into six broad categories. Each guideline is followed by a list of indicators for basic implementation.

Category 1: Learner Support and Resources

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- A. Course contains information for online learner support and links to campus resources.**
To meet this guideline, the course should contain a learner information page or module including the following:

Essential indicators

- Tutorial(s) to use the LMS tools commonly used in the course (Blackboard or Moodle)
- Tips for being a successful online student
- Minimum computer hardware and software requirements
- General tips to take the course
- Links to campus student service units (e.g., Student Success Center, Disability Office, etc.)
- Information/tutorials on how to use software used in the course
- Sources for any required plug-ins (and links)
- Contact information for technical support

Necessary indicators (depending on course content or evaluation)

- Link to e-Library and instructions to access library resources online from both on- and off-campus locations
- Links to resources or instructions on how to conduct online research
- Basic guidelines to format papers and/or citations (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.)
- Link to the testing center and instructions for proctored exams
- List of alternative open-source software

B. Course provides course-specific resources, some contact information for instructor, department, and program.

To comply with this guideline, the course should minimally contain:

- Contact information for the instructor
- Contact information for academic department or advisor
- Information on additional related courses or program
- Link(s) to Bookstore(s) to order textbooks or other instructional materials

C. Course offers access to resources supporting course content and different learning abilities.

- Estimated amount of time needed for completing course requirements
- Link(s) to web sites with supporting information relevant to course content
- Link(s) to web sites of organizations or associations related to course content
- Glossary of terms or links to definitions of key vocabulary
- Link(s) to external multimedia resources

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Category 2: Online Organization and Design

A. Course is organized and navigable

- Course navigation is made explicit (e.g., a content map is available, navigation is explained in a tutorial or video, etc.)
- Key components and structure of the course are made explicit
- The course syllabus, schedule, resources, and interaction tools (e.g., discussion board) can always be reached with no more than two clicks from any course page
- Instructional materials are easily located
- If course content is structured in chronological format, there is an alternative thematic navigation option to access the course content

B. Syllabus identifies and delineates the role the online environment will play in the course.

To meet this guideline, the course syllabus should minimally contain:

- Course description from the university catalog
- Course goals and learning objectives
- Narrative or table that makes explicit the alignment of course goals and objectives with program or departmental learning outcomes
- A list of all required assignments, the weights given to each, due dates, and penalties for late submissions
- Course materials (e.g., textbook information, including e-book options and supplementary websites, subscription to streaming content, etc.)
- Policy statements regarding academic integrity, copyright, and accessibility

- Communication policies, including participation, netiquette, ways to reach the instructor, and expectations of availability of and turnaround time for contact with instructor
 - A course schedule (what happens when)
 - A timeline for student participation
- C. Aesthetic design presents and communicates course information clearly.**
- Typeface is easy to read
 - Sufficient contrast between text and background
 - Appropriate images supporting course content add visual interest
 - Course pages are kept to a comfortable length
- D. Consistency in course**
- Layout of course is visually and functionally consistent
 - Navigability is clear, simple and user friendly
 - Spelling and grammar are consistent and accurate
- E. Universal accessibility**
- To meet with this guideline, the course design should demonstrate a conscious effort to minimally comply with Level 1 of Accessibility Standards:*
- A text equivalent for every non-text element is provided (e.g. alternative text tags are used in all images, transcripts or close captioning for video, etc.)
 - Captioning is available for audio portions of multimedia presentations.
 - When a page requires that an applet, plug-in, or other application be present on the client system, the page provides a link to the needed plug-in or applet
 - Row and column headers are identified in data tables
 - Use of color does not disadvantage those with color blindness

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Category 3: Instructional Design and Delivery

- A. Course design promotes interaction and collaboration**
- Students are encouraged to introduce themselves and/or create a profile in Blackboard or Moodle
 - Students are encouraged to respond to classmate interactions
 - Instructor introduces himself/herself
 - Expectations for synchronous and asynchronous activities are clearly stated
- B. Activities enhance student learning**
- Course activities clearly target learning objectives
 - Activities address multiple learning preferences
 - Reading and writing requirements are consistent with student abilities and course
 - Activities lead to learning desired concepts
 - Summaries are provided frequently, particularly at the end of topics or modules

- Activities develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills

Category 4: Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning

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- A. Course has activities to assess student readiness for course content and mode of delivery**
- All assessment criteria are available to students
 - Acceptable methods for completing assignments are identified (group work, open book, etc.)
- B. Assessment activities are aligned with learning objectives**
- Learning objectives are listed or referenced in main assessments
 - Criteria to evaluate participation in online discussion are made available
 - Study questions or sample questions are provided for main evaluations
 - Samples of assignments are provided
- C. Multiple assessment strategies are used to measure content knowledge, attitudes, and skills**
- When possible, options among assignments are provided to allow for different interests, backgrounds, and learning preferences
 - Students are not assessed solely on tests/quizzes but are provided ample opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in different ways (e.g., projects, problem sets, contributions and responses to online discussions, completion of online assignments, portfolio submissions, special projects and/or presentations, creation of authentic products, etc.)
- D. Opportunities for students to receive feedback about their own performance are provided**
- Self-grading assignments are released immediately
 - A general feedback mechanism is implemented (e.g., through an announcement tool)
 - All assignments have due dates
 - Rubrics for all assignments identify assessment guidelines
- E. Self-assessments and peer feedback**
- Self-tests are similar to the final evaluation instruments
 - Course includes a tool /section to allow students pose discussion questions and respond to others' discussion topics
 - Formal (graded) or informal peer-review opportunities are provided

Category 5: Appropriate and Effective Use of Technology

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A. Appropriate tools to facilitate communication and interaction

- Course uses technology tools to facilitate spontaneous synchronous communication (e.g., chat, videoconferencing, instant messaging, etc.)
- Course uses technology tools to facilitate asynchronous interactions (e.g., discussion boards, e-mail, wikis, etc.)

B. Multimedia elements and/or learning objects are used to enhance learning.

- Tutorials include screen captures and voice over
- Multimedia elements (e.g., audio, video, etc.) are distributed in multiple ways (e.g., embedded in course page, through a subscription, etc.)
- Slide presentations are narrated and transcribed
- Multimedia elements clearly help students achieve course goals or objectives
- Multimedia elements are compatible with multiple operating systems and require only standard, free plug-ins

Category 6: Student Feedback

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A. Course content

- Students are given opportunities to give feedback on course content

B. Technology

- Course contains a mechanism to solicit student feedback regarding technology issues they may encounter (e.g., through a Discussion Topic for Feedback)

References

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