VANDERBILT
Office of Digital Education

Online Course Design Guide

Summary: As you develop your online course, you will want to make sure that your materials are engaging, accessible, inclusive, and robust. Use this best practice guide to help you make the preparations and decisions necessary for creating high-quality online courses.

In this guide you will find information for:
- Planning your objectives
- Building your modules
- Engaging your students
- Assessing learning
- Delivering your course
- Finding additional resources

For one-on-one support and consultations, contact us.
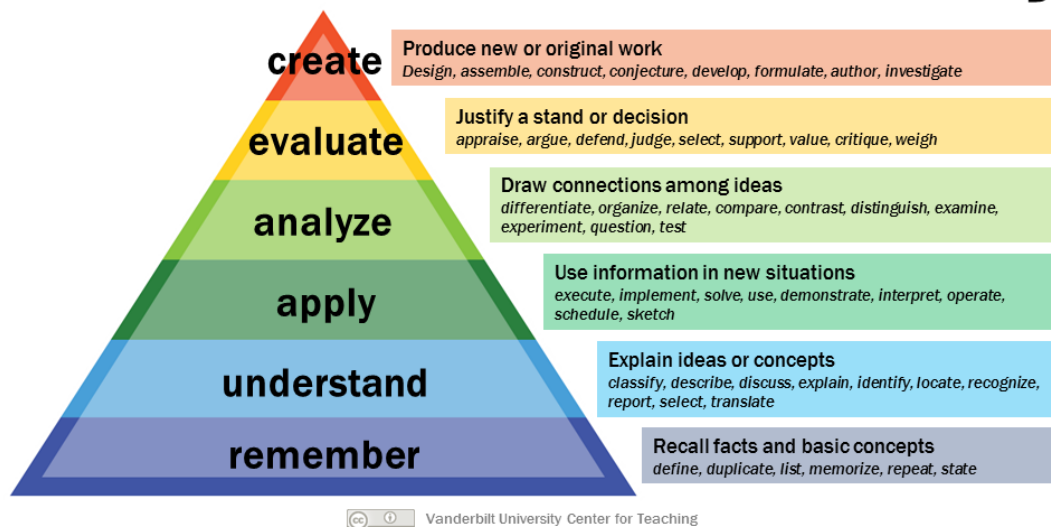
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Planning

Planning your online course begins with planning the learning outcomes for your course. The Office of Digital Education will guide you through our 12-week planning and design process. The first phase of design is defining your learning outcomes. You should have from 3 to 8 learning outcomes that encapsulate what skills or knowledge you want students to gain in your course.

To write your learning objectives:

1. Begin with one of the following phrases:
   a. By the end of this class, you will be able to…
   b. Upon completing this course, you should be able to…

2. Choose an action verb from Bloom's Taxonomy for your objective

Bloom's Taxonomy

create	**Produce new or original work** — Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate
evaluate	**Justify a stand or decision** — appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh
analyze	**Draw connections among ideas** — differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test
apply	**Use information in new situations** — execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch
understand	**Explain ideas or concepts** — classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate
remember	**Recall facts and basic concepts** — define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state

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3. Complete your objective statement with a specific skill or area of knowledge. **Example**: By the end of this guide, you will be able to identify your course objectives.

4. **Evaluate your objectives:** Once you have your objectives drafted, evaluate them to make sure they are SMART:

S-   Specific in how they state skills

M- Measurable by assessments

A- Attainable by students

R- Realistic for students to achieve

T- Timely for the length of course

Building

Once you have defined your learning objectives, you should use backward design to plan out lessons that will support those objectives. The first step is outlining the modules that you will include in your course.

Module Outline:

Module 0- Introduction to course and professor

Module 1

Module 2

Module 3

Module 4

Module 5

Module 6

Module 7

Module 8

Module Content:

Once you know the topics of your modules, you should start planning out your modules' content. Below you will find information on what to include in your introduction module and your content modules.

Introduction Module:

Your first module in your course should be an introduction module to present yourself as the instructor, explain course goals, and show students how to navigate your course.

Suggested elements for your introduction module:

- Intro video
  - introduce yourself
  - provide course overview
  - communication policy
- How to navigate Brightspace
- Contact info
- Syllabus/calendar
- Learner introduction activity
- Student support info
- Backup plan for tech failures
- Minimum tech requirements for course
- Brightspace contact info

Content Modules:

C- Capture the learner's attention

L- Lead learners through learning objectives

A- Assess the students' prior knowledge

A- Activate new knowledge

S- Solidify understanding with assessment

S- Summarize what they've learned

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While content varies from discipline to discipline and from course to course, online learning experiences can benefit from following the common lesson planning process called CLAASS:

Use this chart to plan the content of your modules. Provide a working title, topic summary, learning outcomes, assessment strategy, and notes about materials needed for each unit or week of the course. For content materials, consider physical texts, e-texts, articles, video materials, blog posts/websites, and finally if necessary, consider video materials you would create. Also consider software/tool needs, other supplies needed.

Module 1: Title			
Topics	Learning Outcomes	Assignments/activities	Materials needed

Structuring your modules:

Modules allow the student to easily locate materials as they progress through your class.

Organizational tips:
- Organize modules by either week or thematic unit
- Provide a clear title for your modules such as Week 1 or Chapter 1
  - Optional: Set release dates for making materials available to the learner
- Use consistent font size, type and color throughout module

Example Module Organized by Theme:

Example Module Organized by Week:

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Engaging

An important component of online learning is student engagement. As you plan your modules, consider what types of activities and materials will communicate and practice your learning objectives.

Lecture videos under 9 minutes	Readings	Polls
Websites	Podcasts	YouTube videos
Video discussions	Crowdsource activities	Activites that connect to Vanderbilt

Need ideas?
Review the integrated tools for Brightspace and our glossary of activities for tools, platforms, and activities that support learning and engagement.

As you are gathering and developing materials, be sure to consider:
- How are the learners interacting with each other?
- How are the learners interacting with the instructor?
- How much time on task do these activities entail?
- How do these materials align with the course objectives?
- What instructions do I need to include with these materials?
- Are these materials for a grade?
- Is there a rubric for the activities?
- How will students submit any associated work?
- Are the materials accessible and inclusive?

Assessing

Assessments are essential for providing students with opportunities to practice their skills, receive feedback on their learning, and demonstrate their comprehension. Your assessments may be low-stakes, formative activities that provide practice or summative assessments that allow students to demonstrate mastery. Both your formative and summative assessments should align with course learning objectives.

Examples of assessments:

Discussion board posts	Projects	Presentations
Capstones	Quizzes	Tests
	Interviews	
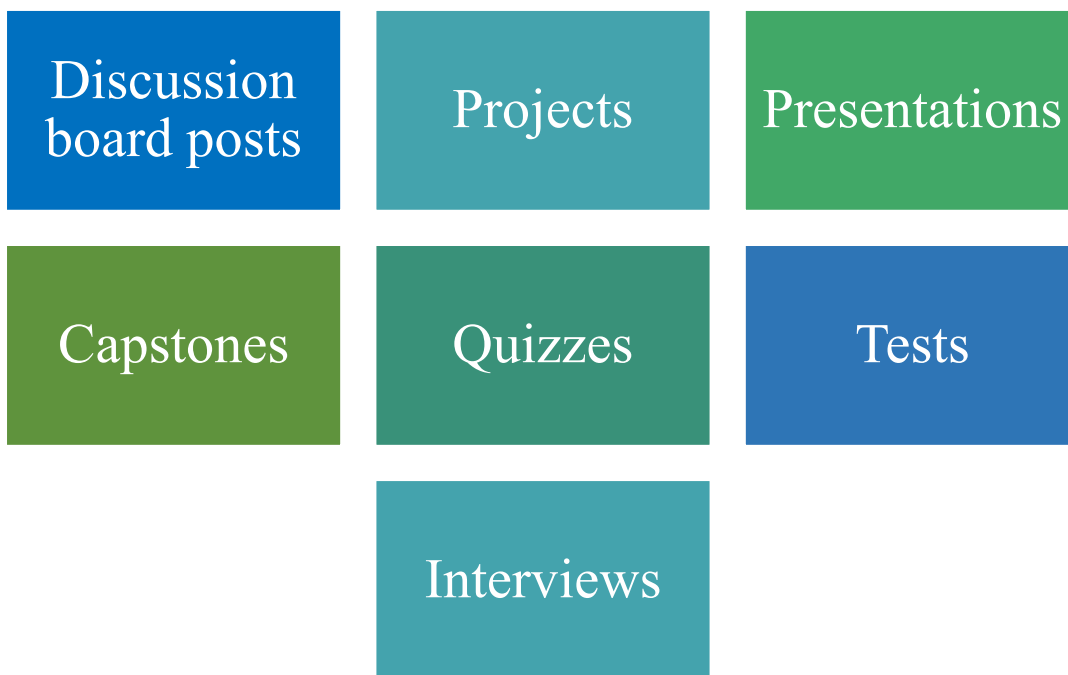
Note: Students are still bound by the honor code in online courses. Be sure to communicate Vanderbilt's honor code with your students. To proctor exams and ensure academic integrity, check out Brightspace's integrated academic integrity tools Respondus Lockdown Browser and Turnitin.

Delivering

In collaboration with the [Digital Media Lab](#), ODE can assist you with recording high-quality course content videos. The Digital Media Lab provides help and guidance around a variety of pedagogical applications of digital media.

Digital Media Lab Services:

Video Production	Audio Production
Graphic Design	**Web Design**
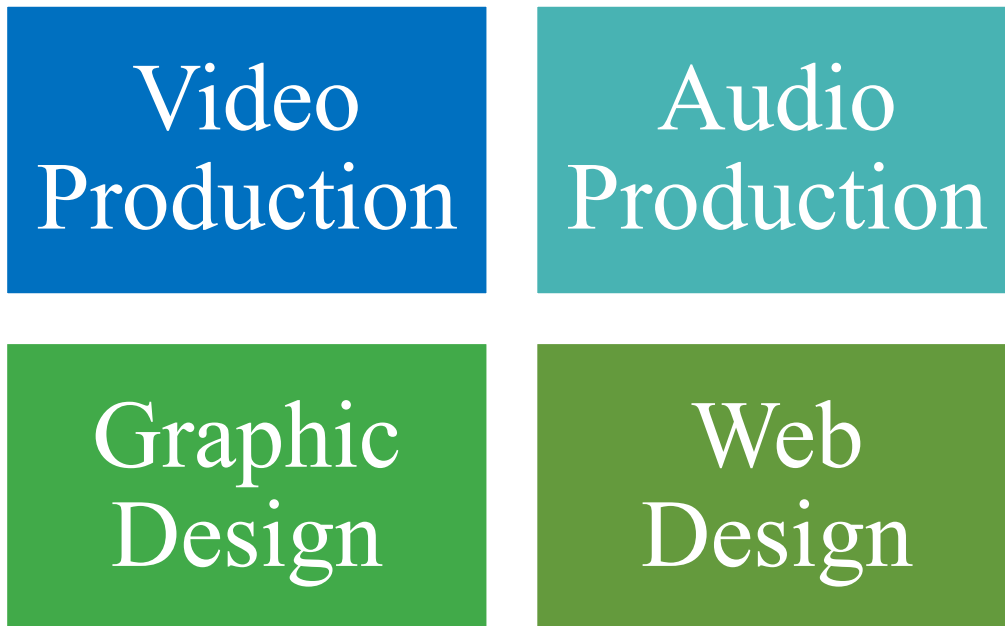
Lastly, before making your course visible to students on Brightspace, do a quality review of your course. [Use this checklist](#) to conduct a final evaluation of your objectives, materials, due dates, and technology

Resource Guide

Documents to help you plan your course:

[Course design planner- 12 week plan](#)

[What should be in a learning module](#)

[What is Instructional Design](#)

[Best Practices for Teaching Online and Online Course Design](#)

[Designating Responsibilities During the Design Process](#)

[Course Development Overview](#)

[Course launch checklist](#)

Additional Resources:

[Writing Measurable Course Objectives (UNC Charlotte)](#)

[Bloom's Taxonomy for Learning Objectives (Vanderbilt CFT)](#)

[Course and Program Evaluation Scorecard (Online Learning Consortium)](#)

[Technology Usage Checklist (Vanderbilt CFT)](#)

Information about how to format your course materials for accessibility:

[Accessibility Laws and Guidelines (UNC Greensboro)](#)

[Why Accessibility is Important (UNC Greensboro)](#)

[Accessibility checklist (UNC Wilmington)](#)

[How to Use the Brightspace Accessibility Checker](#)

[How to Use the Microsoft Office Accessibility Checker](#)

[Making Documents Accessible Overview (UNC Greensboro)](#)

[Making Word Docs and Google Docs Accessible (UNC Greensboro)](#)

Making PDFs Accessible (UNC Greensboro)

Making Slideshows Accessible (UNC Greensboro)

Making Spreadsheets and Google Sheets Accessible (UNC Greensboro)

Making Media Accessible with Transcripts and Captions (UNC Greensboro)

Making Fonts, Colors, and Photos Accessible (UNC Greensboro)

Universal Design of Instruction: Definitions, Principles, Guidelines and Examples (University of Washington)

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (Cast)

Materials for creating inclusive learning environments:
Inclusive Discussions (University of Chicago)

Inclusive Teaching Suggestions (University of Calgary)

Documents and tools to help you design assessments:
Aligning Assessments, Objectives, and Instructional Strategies (Carnegie Mellon)

Index of Assessment Activities and Tools

Writing Good Multiple-Choice Questions (Vanderbilt CFT)

Discussion Board Applications (Vanderbilt CFT)

Branching Scenarios (Vanderbilt CFT)

Discussion Board Rubric Example

Rubric Creator (Rubistar)

Information about the media development process:
Best Practices for Recording Lecture Videos