



Design for Learning

21st Century Online Teaching and Learning
Skills for Library Workers

design4learning.info

In Partnership With



Design for Learning 6 - Course Management

Important Parts of Your Online Learning Environment (Week 1 Lesson)



**This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services,
Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant Project #RE-06-14-0014-14.**

This work for the Design for Learning Program is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Welcome to Week 1!

This lesson includes:

- Advance Organizer for Week 1 (video)
- Selected Vocabulary (table)
- Syllabus Creation (video, with challenge question)
- Communications Policy (text, with reflection activity)
- Participation Policy (text, with reflection activity)
- Accommodations (text, with challenge question)
- Assessment/Evaluation/Grading Policies and Practices (text)
- Summing Up Week 1 (text)
- Additional Resources (list)

Advance Organizer for Week 1

Video Transcript:

“D4L Course Management Week 1: Advance Organizer”

<https://youtu.be/4TMdu95NxMs>

Let’s talk a little bit about what we’re going to be doing this week. Week 1 is all about understanding the unique requirements and opportunities that online learning environments, or OLEs, can offer to your projects or classrooms. Crafting an OLE, and it is just that, crafting, is as much an art as it is a meticulous pedagogical practice. In this week, I’m going to talk about some best practices for syllabus creation and policy writing. I’m going to be throwing a lot of different ideas and details at you, but overall there are a few main take-aways that I want you to remember:

1. An online learning environment requires a high level of clarity and consistency in communication practices, particularly from the instructor or facilitator.
2. Crafting your OLE is a practice in analysis, application, and, often, trial and error. Not everything we talk about this week will necessarily need to be applied to your specific project. However, this module is designed to give you options from which you can select and reshape your own plans.
3. Above all else, this week is about creating a comfortable and clear space for learning, something that is often more difficult, or at least more time consuming, to achieve online than face-to-face. With a little bit of extra work, you can be successful.
4. Finally, always keep a learner-centered perspective to everything you do in the OLE. Craft accordingly and with intentionality. This means that you also need to remember that your project and learners may have special requirements or needs. It is up to you to determine what is in the best interests of your learners.

Selected Vocabulary

 Dictionary	DEFINITION
Syllabus	Outline of the curriculum, agenda, and policies of a lesson, course, or class. Think of it as a guidebook to your lessons or class.
Online Learning Environment (OLE)	This is any type of online space that you craft into a place for learning. This can include everything from a communal blog, Google Classroom, to full-scale LMS.
Learning Management System (LMS)	A system that is specifically designed to facilitate learning online. They are often marketed to universities, schools, and other organizations as a one-stop-shop for online learning. Check with your organization to see if they have a LMS and if you have access to it. Examples include Moodle, Blackboard, and Schoology.

Syllabus Creation

Video Transcript:

“D4L Course Management Week 1: Online Syllabus Creation”

<https://youtu.be/l4zz33qFu10>

Hello everyone! This lecture is about creating syllabi, specifically, syllabi for online environments. As I’ve mentioned before, I will be covering as much and as many details as possible. Your specific syllabi will vary, and you’ll need to decide which elements to include. Sometimes a full syllabus isn’t necessary, for example, when you are conducting single sessions. In these cases, I’d recommend simply covering goals and the agenda. Regardless, it will be up to you to decide.

We’ll be covering how to create a summary of your course, lesson, or program, with inclusion of objectives, resources, activities, policies, and accessibility. For shorter units of instruction, like a one time session, this may be just a one page agenda. For longer units, meeting multiple times, this should take the form of a longer syllabus.

First of all, be sure to include a brief summary of your lesson/course. You can keep it as short as you’d like, but a good bet is to keep it under three sentences and to try to highlight the key learning elements you’ll be covering.

For example, this module can be summarized as, “Course management is a two week course in which we learn how to organize, evaluate, and shape our own online learning spaces specific to the needs of our learners. Short, to the point, and clarifying for someone who may be wondering just what “Course Management” means.

One of the most important elements of a syllabus are the outcomes or objectives. You should always include at least one of these, even in one time lessons. In the case of shorter learning spans, sometimes you can include them in your summary. However, for anything more extensive, I tend to include somewhere between 3-5 specific objectives in a separate section of the syllabus. By including these objectives, you’ll help your learners to gauge their expectations for the course.

Additionally, you’ll have a place to look back to when you need a reminder of your own teaching goals!

You’ll also be able to check any changes you make to activities against your initial goals to make sure that you are still in line with them. For more on designing objectives and outcomes, I hope you can look to the Foundation (instructional design) module.

You’ll also want to include a list of course resources needed. This can be books, articles, tools, other materials like pen, paper and scissors, and even the technologies needed. If appropriate, it’s important to remember to tell them where they can find these materials, especially technologies and software. Also remember to include information on how to contact you, should the need arise. In online courses its very important that you direct your learners to safe resources and software online.

But while you list your resources, it may be tempting to provide downloadable copies, pdfs, and even sections of photocopied book chapters.

Remember to slow down here. Copyright is still a factor, and while fair use of materials does favor use for educational resources, you don’t get a blank check to use whatever you’d like.

Your best bet is to provide outward facing links, that is, links that direct your learners to legitimate, licensed and reputable sites where they can find those resources. Even more preferably, if you have time, is to pursue explicit permission from the copyright owners to use their materials in your project or course. Just be sure to get it in writing!

Technology resources are certainly a key element of online learning, so when you are listing the sources needed, you need to remember to explicitly state if you require access to certain programs. Additionally, if your course or lesson requires a certain level of technological competence, you'll need to state it as well. Often in online courses you can say that you require familiarity with email, a certain LMS, or anything else that you believe are essential prerequisite skills. It can be uncomfortable to ask for this, but remember that you cannot assume the abilities of your students, and it can be really good to have a baseline of skills that you know your students possess. In some settings, it can also be helpful to point learners to other sources where they can gain the skills they need as a pre-requisite.

After you list resources, it's always good to include course activities: Try to answer questions like "what will they be learning and doing," and "what will be expected as far as assignments, essays, discussion posts, reflections, etc." To do this you can create a list of assignments, or large projects, a list of daily or weekly activities, a schedule of all due dates, a schedule of special events, and, perhaps, actual calendar. In whatever learning environment you have, there may be other places to include calendars or schedules, but still remember to include it in your syllabus if it can help your students. Again, remember that you probably won't need all of these elements in your syllabus, but you can make your choices of what to include based on what you think your students will need.

A syllabus without course policies is likely missing a key element to making your OLE comfortable for your students. Policies set the tone and clarify expectations for your learners from the start. There are fewer questions or moments of doubt when you make things like participation policies as clear as possible. I highly suggest that you include grading and assessment policies, communication and participation policies, and accommodation policies. We'll talk a lot more about each type of policy in the rest of this lesson.

Remember to make your syllabus accessible. Usually making it into a downloadable PDF or Word Document is enough, but as always be sure to evaluate the needs of your students to make sure.

That's all for our lecture on syllabus building for now!

Design 4 Learning has been made possible by a grant from the US Institute of Museum and Library Services along with project partners SCRLC, ESLN, and the iSchool at SU.

Challenge Yourself!

1. Which of these statements is false?

- A. You shouldn't provide information about skills required before starting a course because that might deter some students from taking it.
- B. The elements included in a syllabus will depend on the unit/course.
- C. A list of course outcomes / objectives will help learners to understand expectations.
- D. It's good to include some indication of schedule in a syllabus: either an agenda in minutes or hours for a short activity, or a calendar with events over weeks or months for a longer course.

Communications Policy

You may be asking yourself why a communications policy is necessary, that it just seems like unnecessary work. The truth is that communications policies enable your learners to know what to expect from their instructor or course manager. A communications policy is all about setting yourself up with reasonable and helpful conditions under which you can facilitate learning. This was mentioned briefly in the Community module, but you'll build on it more here.



In an online environment, the importance of a communication policy is amplified. This is not something that you can ignore, especially if you are going to be using your online environment for more than one-time sessions.

A communication policy is about how and how much you will participate actively in the online (or in person) learning environment.

A communication policy needs to reflect the following:

- How students can contact you directly, including preferred contact information.
 - Email?
 - Twitter for quick responses?

- How and how frequently you will communicate with students. For example, you can state things like:
 - “I will post materials weekly on Sunday evenings.”
 - “I will respond to emails as soon as possible and check my email at 9AM, Noon, and 5PM each day.”
 - “I will participate and respond to each of your posts each week.”
 - “Please allow 48 hours for response to email.”
 - “I check Moodle once a day M-F.”
- What types of things will warrant involvement from the instructor:
 - Will you participate in the forums?
 - Will you facilitate from a distance most times unless there seems to be confusion?

When telling learners about how frequently and where you will be accessing the class, be honest. Students are very quick to notice an absent instructor. Tell them what days you check into the course and respond to messages. Tell your students that you will not be able to always reply immediately, but that you will reply. Set a schedule for updating content, or loading new information (only on Monday afternoons, perhaps?).

Remember that you probably don’t need to be in your course every day, all day. Nor do you need to comment on everything. Your job is as facilitator of learning, and over-involvement from the instructor often stagnates conversation, raises stress in learners, and hinders authentic reflection. Too little interaction from the facilitator runs the risk of neglecting your class, permitting confusion, and allowing the conversations to run amok, thus hindering learning. It’s all about balance, and as you’ve learned before, a little bit of trial and error.

You must customize what your communications policy to fit your exact intentions and types of lessons and learning. Everyone has a different style.

*image from Pixabay user markito at <https://pixabay.com/en/phone-communication-connection-210972/>

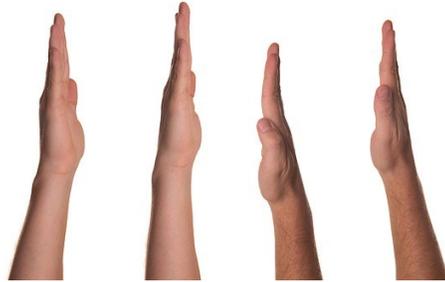
Reflection

Find the page for this reflection in your workbook.

Write a communication policy either for your overall project or just one that you’d like to use when working with distance patrons or students in an online course or lesson. Explain your reasoning in making your choices. If you do not think a communication policy is necessary, please explain why this is so.

Participation Policy

Let's talk about participation policies in an online learning environment. We need to create participation policies because there are likely to be many different sets of expectations as to how much or how little learners are expected to participate. Once a week? Checking the site every day? Certain numbers of posts and responses? Only as a supplement to other activities? Nothing is clear unless you make it explicit to your learners.



When creating this policy:

- Detail how much and how frequently students are expected to participate:
 - "I expect one new blog post each week, due on Tuesdays"
 - "I expect you to comment on three separate posts"

OR

- Don't detail it and allow the class to set the tone. Create the space and the right open-ended questions. This way you can shape conversation as you go.

OR

- Find a happy medium that works for you and your students.

A common expectation for a full 4-6 month course may be that the learner check into the OLE 3-5 times a week. You might ask that they generate one original post and response in conversation with 3 other posts.

Course activities can (and should) vary and this may change what you do week to week, and thus your participation policy will also vary week-to-week or assignment-to-assignment. If this is the case, you can and should integrate your participation expectations into descriptions of assignments. This doesn't always work for all types of classrooms, but outlining details like this definitely helps to put your students at ease. Some instructors feel that setting up minimums and guidelines stifle learning as well. If you feel this way, you should of course feel free to craft a participation policy a little more loosely. Just be sure to actually craft the policy itself, so learners know that you feel this way.

All classes and learning spaces are different, so remember that you need to make your decisions with your students in mind.

*image from Pixabay user niekverlaan at <https://pixabay.com/en/hands-learn-greetings-guide-help-423825/>

Reflection

Find the page for this reflection in your workbook.

Write a participation policy either for your overall project or just one that you'd like to use generally when working with distance patrons or students in an online course or lesson. Explain your reasoning in making your choices. If you do not think a participation policy is necessary, please explain why this is so.

Accommodations Policy

Accommodations policies are a key element of online learning environments, or any learning environment for that matter. Accommodations policies are often written for you by the organization or institution you are a part of. As you know, there are lots of complex elements and even legal issues that play into writing an accommodations policy, and it is with good reason that experts tend to write them. Because of the expertise needed, writing your own accommodations policy is not recommended.

If you can't write your own accommodations policy and there is already one that your institution has, what can you do?

1. Read it.
2. Understand it.
3. Apply it.
4. Make sure that it is visible to your learners.

What if my organization doesn't have an accommodations policy or the accommodations policy is outdated or inadequate?

1. Ask around your institution to make sure that you haven't missed anything
2. Seek ways to help your organization to craft or reshape their own policy
3. In the meantime, try to engage in the practices of Universal Design, which you'll remember from many of our other modules, including Foundation and Diversity. See <http://enact.sonoma.edu/content.php?pid=218878&sid=2032318> for a sample UDL syllabus statement that you may want to include or adapt (in the right sidebar).

Challenge Yourself!

2. Which of these is the best approach to sharing your policy for accommodations?
- A. During a synchronous class session, ask if any students have special needs.
 - B. When you see a student having difficulty with certain materials, offer to provide them in an alternative format.
 - C. Find the official accommodations policy statement from your institution (if there is one), include it on your syllabus, and be prepared to provide accommodations for learners as needed. Research and work with others at your institution to develop an accommodations policy if you don't already have one.
 - D. Find the official accommodations policy statement from your institution (if there is one) and take out any parts that you think don't apply to your instruction.

Assessment/Evaluation/Grading Policies and Practices

It is always a good idea to think ahead when it comes to assessment policies and practices as well. There are two different levels of assessment that we're talking about. On one hand, we are talking about outlining the expectations for assignments, grades, which include the following (and more):

- Letter grades or percentage ranges for overall grades or individual assignment grades
- Weighted grades
- Types of Feedback (rubrics, reflections, etc.)
- Speed of Feedback (2 weeks after submission, immediate, etc.)
- Where they can locate feedback or grading in the OLE
- Progress reporting or badges



On the other hand, we can also talk about assessment that the instructor can do to ensure that the course is working as intended. We've talked about this before in the foundation module, but it is worth revisiting as a course management tool, particularly when it comes to the technologies that can make your life easier when it comes to assessment.

Often a LMS, or various other OLEs have data gathering capabilities that you can take advantage of to keep tabs on your students, that can help alert you, or even your students, when they may be falling behind others on assignments. These can look like automated emails

or just a quick look at the recent traffic you've had on your websites. Whenever you do, choose an online environment, be it Google Classroom, Blackboard, or even a website, remember to explore the analytics that it offers to you.

*image from Pixabay user geralt at <https://pixabay.com/en/group-team-feedback-confirming-1825512/>

Summing up Week 1

You've made it through the content for this week! All that's left in this lesson is to take a look at the Additional Resources on the next page, and get to the end of lesson page.

After that, review your responses to the Reflection activities this week, in your workbook, and use those to complete Assignment 1, sharing them to a forum.

Then you'll be ready to move on to Week 2.

Additional Resources

For this week's instruction, you may find the following resources helpful.

Readings

- Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: simple and practical pedagogical tips* (Second edition). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- EnACT~PTD. (n.d.). About: Universal design for learning and your syllabus. *UDL-Universe: A Comprehensive Universal Design for Learning Faculty Development Guide*. Retrieved October 30, 2016, from <http://enact.sonoma.edu/content.php?pid=218878&sid=2032318>
- Ko, S. S., & Rossen, S. (2010). *Teaching online : A practical guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Pfannenstiel, A. N. (2013). *Building syllabi for online classes: A case study of course management tool use in online composition courses* (Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University). Retrieved from https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/125787/content/Pfannenstiel_asu_0010E_13315.pdf.

Videos

- All of this week's videos are available on a playlist at YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw6HBD7UyT3nIfCsMQ4nxpt228WVAnE4A>

Answer Key:

1. A - This is the statement that is false. It's important to provide information about prerequisite skills, but if you're worried about deterring students from joining, you can provide information about how or where they can gain those skills so they can still join you in a future session.

2. C