Design for Learning 6 - Course Management

Planning Your Online Learning Environment (Week 2 Lesson)

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Welcome to Week 2!

This lesson includes:

- Advance Organizer for Week 2 (video)
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Advance Organizer for Week 2

Video Transcript:
“D4L Course Management Week 2: Advance Organizer”
https://youtu.be/dFRMqtt437w

Hi everyone and welcome to week 2 of Course Management! This week we’ll be spending a lot of time talking about the structures and organizations of OLEs. We’ll also be checking out a few examples of different types of OLEs.

The main takeaways that I want you to keep in mind throughout this week are

1. Organization, good organization, can make or break an online course. You can have the best content in the world, but if students don’t know how or where to access it, it’s useless to them.
2. The upfront work of organizing and intentionally planning you space may seem like it takes way too much time, but without it, you and your learners will probably end up spending far too much time later trying to clear up confusion.
3. As always, everything you learn here needs to be customized to your lesson, classroom and learners’ needs. Keep up that learner-centered perspective!

Reflection

Find the page for this reflection in your workbook.

There's a checklist of different functions that can be found across different online learning environments. Go through and select which you will need for the online instruction you are planning.
This will help you to choose tools and seek out tips moving forward through this week and into the future.

**Visual Organization**

**Video Transcript:**

“4L Course Management Week 2: Visual Organization”
https://youtu.be/y_UZMzQ9y4

Hi everyone! We’re going to be starting off this week by talking about creating a comfortable online environment. Let’s start by talking about how to keep it aesthetically helpful to your users.

Keep it simple. Let’s face it, we’ve all seen those horrible websites with four columns, nonsense graphics, and what seems to be infinite scrolling. We’ve also all been confused at one point or another, even in the best designed online spaces. It’s unlikely, no matter what you do, that your OLE will be foolproof, but there are a few principles to keep in mind as you shape your learning spaces online.

Now, I know that online spaces are full of options to get creative, and as an instructor, it is absolutely your prerogative to get creative, but the basics of website design should still be something to keep in mind.

So,

1. Minimalize clutter. The less clutter on a page, the more clearly your learners will be able to see what they need to do.

2. Keep the themes you choose simple and appropriate to your learners. Themes are pre-coordinated site designs that can cover anything from color palettes, to organization of content boxes, to cover images. These are especially helpful when short of time or skills at coding your own work. That said, if you decide to choose a pre-coordinated theme, choose a simple one, one that makes it most clear to your learners what they need to do. Not all themes are appropriate to classrooms, especially if you are working with a site like Wordpress. Another thing to keep in mind is that your organization may already have a theme or colors that they require to be used in any work of that organization. Remember the section on style guides in the content creation module? This is where you should ask to see a style guide! Like choosing themes, keep your color schemes limited to certain colors so that there is consistency in your OLE. You can get creative, but let’s not lose track of who your students are in the effort!
Keep your OLE easy to navigate.

Navigations panes, menus, or boxes must be visible and the language clear. Its also important to maintain the integrity of the links. Usually this isn’t too much of an issue, but remember to check them with each update to your OLE. Navigation should also be easily accessible. This is especially important the more pages you add to a website. Try to make sure that no matter where a learner is on your site, that they can access navigation, and find their way back to other main pages. Often this is where your choice of appropriate theme comes into play.

Remember in the Content Creation module when you worked on a storyboard or outline for a particular piece of content? You can apply the same methods to planning out each distinct page of a website and how they are ordered and nested. A hierarchical outline can help you to plan how the pages of your OLE will be organized.

Then storyboards can help you to plan out the layout of each page.

Whenever possible, try to create no more than 2 columns on a page. It will mean less eye-strain, and less confusion for your learners. It will also force you to unclutter your OLE.

More importantly, the two columns should be functionally different. Perhaps one column is for content, but the other column is for calendar and contact information. The differentiation in function are what will make your OLE clear and organized.

Another aspect of good web design is that you avoid excessive scrolling. The attention span in the online classroom is a difficult thing to deal with, but by keeping the eye moving to new pages, you can help to keep interest going. Work with short online attention spans, not against them. One way to do this is to keep one “activity” per page. For example, there may be an agenda page, a blog post page, or a resources page. If you do this, the learner has less to sift through while scrolling to get to what they want. Rather, they can directly navigate to the page that fits their need. This will make the site feel easy to use and customized to them. Of course this is all about balance and it may not always be possible to customize a site in this way.

As far as content, just like you learned in the content creation module, a balance of multimedia can only help to keep the interest and attention of your learners. This time it is about the presentation of the site it self. By balancing the site’s text with images, you create visual interest that works with short online attention spans and with the variability of delivery of content that you learned about in content creation.
Here is a basic example of a website I created as a gathering place for Millennial Managers to share their stories and insight. I like to think I’ve kept it simple.

The navigation is clear in the main menu, and in a side column to other locations on the site.

I’ve kept it to two columns that are functionally different, with 1 creating the bulk of the content and 2 lending itself toward navigation and other administrative information.

I’ve also attempted to keep a balance of media with a large banner at the top as well as limiting the number of blog posts visible to five (thought at the moment this sample only contains one post). At the end of the day, the objective is to customize it for learners, to make it easy for them. Hopefully a few of the tips and strategies here help you to make some good choices for your classrooms.

Challenge Yourself!

1. Which of these is better for visual organization of your online instruction?

   A. Organize all your course content on a single page, so students can scroll through lots of content in one place.

   B. Use several columns and many images to keep your students eyes moving all over the page.

   C. Organize your course content into multiple pages that can be easily found in a menu / navigation, so that no single page includes much scrolling.

Organizing Assignments

Video Transcript:
“D4L Course Management Week 2: Organizing Assignments"
https://youtu.be/SfuS7kVG8A

Now we’re going to talk about how to handle assignments.

When it comes to assignments, I’ve found that a good policy is to keep them in both
the syllabus as well as in place in the OLE, which is particularly easy if you use a full LMS. On a website, assignments can be a bit trickier to handle. In any event, remember to outline your assignments well.

Use a rubric whenever possible or preferred, and keep a progress check if you’d like. Sometimes you can set up your LMS to use badges or progress bars on different types of assignments. Create and keep a private grade and feedback section (or email chain) between you and each learner.

Remember that frequent and prompt feedback can make or break student learning and their perceptions of a course’s value to them!

When it comes to assignments it is especially important for you to explore all the capabilities of your OLE of choice.

For assignments, consider how you can take advantage of automated assessment tools to help with quantitative analysis or grading.

Most Learning Management Systems, like Moodle, include their own quiz tools, making it easier to integrate quizzes into your course and your grading.

Also, some content creation tools, like Captivate or Camtasia, include the ability to add quiz questions with interactive responses.

But even if you don’t have access to any of those, there are also a variety of free online standalone quiz or survey tools that you can link to from your other content. We’ve provided an annotated list of a few tools we’ve tried in the Resources at the end of this lesson.

Then, if you look into it, you may find that your OLE, especially if it is a LMS, may offer data analytics that can help you to track participation, and assignment submission and badge completion. This may give you a better overall picture of the progress of the individual and the class as a whole.

**Challenge Yourself!**

2. Which of these is NOT a good approach to online assignments?

   A. Don't provide information about assignments or activities until right before students will work on them.
B. Take advantage of automated tools in online systems for grading or tracking learner interaction.

C. Provide clear instructions for assignments well in advance, including rubrics whenever possible.

What To Include

Video Transcript:
“D4L Course Management Week 2: What To Include"
https://youtu.be/xLwhuSiT_yk

Continuing our conversation about Learning environments, let's talk a little bit more about what to include, beyond visual structures.

There are lots of things that you can miss if you aren’t careful, all of which your students may need, depending of course on how you design your learning plan. For example: try to include a water cooler type of space. Of course you don’t need to call it a water cooler! All you might want to do is include a space, say a forum or discussion space or blog comment area where your learners can converse freely, be it about coursework, or something only vaguely related. Remember: this is about creating a comfortable space for learning. Including flexible conversation spaces is helpful! Be sure to let your students know if it will or will not be monitored by you and whether or not you’ll be participating.

Additionally, always include instructor contact information in a visible place, ideally in multiple places or accessible from multiple places in your OLE. Be sure to be consistent that you are providing the same contact information and contact preferences to your learners.

Now as far as course availability and settings in a LMS or OLE, there can be a lot to cover, and most of the types of settings can vary widely depending on the system of your choice. What I can say is that you should always keep an eye out for enrollments settings and ensure that your students are all properly enrolled and receiving information. Often this can be done with a test run! Try creating a discussion post and asking for everyone to reply if they received it.

Be sure to check privacy settings of the course. Some OLEs offer the option to keep their site private, only open to enrollees, to create passcodes for access, or perhaps be publicly available. Think about what would be best for your students, if they would want their conversations public or private, and make your choices accordingly.
Try to err on the side of caution when in doubt.

Be sure to also include a calendar if appropriate to your lessons. This can also be a simple agenda or a meeting reminder for one-time sessions, or it can be a highly detailed full schedule for longer courses. Again, as with everything in course management, this is a decision that you, as educator, must make for your students.

Specifically, working online has its own perks when it comes to schedule: You can usually easily send out announcements to every learner, set ranges or due dates on assignments to automatically kick in, and automate other notifications. Of course, there are a lot more perks for automating your classrooms and making the OLE work for you, truly too many to count, so remember to explore and research the capabilities of your OLE of choice.

Keep track of the resources you use, need, and share. Include a place for resources in your OLE, too! You can make it created and editable only by you, or you can make it accessible and editable by your students so that they can add relevant information as well. You can create a single place for these resources or you can create them for different sections or assignments in a course.

Keep in mind that this can include links out to technologies and software downloads that they may need. Just remember to check your links and check copyright!

When it comes to those place for conversation, navigating the online space can be difficult. If you have established communication and participation policies, like we discussed in week 1, this will be easier to work with. However, controlling your conversation spaces can be very time-consuming. However, remember that as a facilitator of learning you have the ability to craft policies that require certain participation quantities and qualities, and you have the ability to control how much you interact. Remember that by asking open-ended questions and probing questions further into conversation you can direct the conversation toward the learning you wish to see. Or, if you prefer to see where a conversation goes, you have the ability to let loose a little bit. As with all things course management, make it your own and make it work for your learners.

**Summing up Week 2**

You're almost to the end of this lesson - all that's left is to take a look at the Additional Resources on the next page, and get to the end of lesson page.
But, there's more helpful content for you this week, in the form of a "Book" module: a Guide to Tools and Examples of Online Learning Environments. You can find this on the main course page, under Week 2. Based on your reflections over these 2 weeks, go through that guide and find options for tools that fit with the needs of your specific instruction for your library.

Using those resources, you'll be ready to complete Assignment 2. For this assignment, if you're working on a project for your library, you'll start crafting your own online learning environment. If you have access to an LMS, you'll plan exactly how to use it, or you'll plan how to put together individual tools to create your own OLE. If you're not working on a specific project right now, you can still apply your learning by critiquing an existing OLE that you think is not particularly effective, and imagining how you could improve it. Either way, please share your thoughts in this week's forum.

Then you'll be done with this module! If you've been doing the other modules in order, all that's left is the Capstone module, for you to apply all that you've learned across the entire series into piloting a unit of instruction for your library. You're ready!

**Additional Resources**

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

**Readings**


**Videos**

- All of this week's videos are available on a playlist at YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw6HBD7UyT3nIfCsMQ4nxpt228WVAnE4A](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw6HBD7UyT3nIfCsMQ4nxpt228WVAnE4A)
Answer Key:

1. C - If you put too much content on one page and expect students to scroll to find it, they may get frustrated.

2. A - This is the statement that is NOT a good approach. Clarity is important to learners, and automation can help you as an instructor to better assess your learners' progress and engagement.