

**Texas Woman's University**  
**Online Course Design Best Practices Checklist**

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Kent State Online - <http://www.kent.edu/onlineteaching> -

<https://www.kent.edu/sites/default/files/file/Design%20and%20Development%20checklist.pdf>

## **Texas Woman's University**

### **Online Course Design Best Practices Checklist**

#### **What is it?**

This checklist provides guidelines to assist with creating high-quality online courses. This checklist can be used when **designing and developing** new online courses, reviewing a previously developed online course, or to provide ideas for **revising** an existing online course.

The checklist is divided into two steps: Foundational Best Practices and Advanced Best Practices. Level 1 – “Foundational” contains best practices that are relatively easy to integrate into an online course. Level 2 – “Advanced” contains best practices that are also integral, but may take more time to implement.

The items in the checklist coincide with many of the standards in the Quality Matters (QM) rubric, which is based on research in online learning and instructional design. The checklist is meant to be a self-check guide for online course design and not meant to be prescriptive.

#### **Why use it?**

The checklist provides a convenient way to consider research-based best practices in online learning when designing, reviewing, and revising online courses. This checklist will help in areas such as organization and navigation, online-specific course policies, alignment, presence, accessibility, and technology.

#### **How to use it**

Use the checkboxes to the left of each statement to identify whether your course contains that particular item. If it does not, or if you would like more information on the item or information on how to include it in your course, click the link to go to the [Instructional Design Partners](#) page of Teaching and Learning with Technology; [Center for Faculty Excellence](#) or [Online Educational Resources at TWU](#) website, which will provide added guidance and tutorials.

For items contained in the [TWU Online Syllabus template](#), the template is available when creating or copying your course in Canvas and is fully editable and customizable.

For additional help or information on using the template, please contact the Office of the Executive Vice Provost.

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**Level 1: Foundational Best Practices**

**Instructor Introduction and Contact Information**

| <b>What is it?</b>  | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>A way to establish your teaching presence and preferred methods of contact.</p> <p>Include a photo of yourself, contact information, contact guidelines, and any information you wish to share about your expertise, teaching philosophy, expectations, etc.</p> <p>Ideally, include a short video so students can see and hear you as well.</p> | <p>To introduce yourself to your students and let them know how to contact you.</p> <p>This item also addresses QM Standard 1.8, "The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate and is available online."</p> | <p>Create a text item on the course homepage.</p> <p>Include your TWU email address, phone number, and a preferred communication method in the syllabus and in this item.</p> <p>Consider creating a short webcam video with Panopto or another technology.</p> <p>Resources on how to create videos for online learning are available on the <a href="#">Panopto Lecture Capture in Canvas</a> article.</p> |

**Course Overview/Orientation**

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>A course overview/orientation provides an introduction to the course purpose, learning objectives, goals, structure, student expectations, and major assignments.</p> | <p>To provide students with crucial overview information that helps them understand course structure and expectations.</p> <p>This item also addresses QM Standard 1.2, "Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course."</p> | <p>The course overview can be a screencast navigation walking students through the course, and/or a narrated presentation or text-based narrative. The key aspects to include are clear statements on how to get started, where to find key elements like the course schedule, exploration of the course organization, etc.</p> <p>Resources on how to create videos for online learning are available on the <a href="#">Panopto Lecture Capture in Canvas</a> article.</p> |

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"Start Here" Item or Folder

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| The "Start Here" item or folder gives students sequential steps for what they need to read, watch, or do to begin the course on the first day. | This course component lets students know how to begin their course when they first log in and addresses QM Standard 1.1, "Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components." | You can provide the link to the Knowledge Base article <a href="#">Getting Started With Canvas</a> to minimally meet this best practice. However, consider including this link as just one item in a homepage folder that also includes items such as the syllabus, the course schedule, and the course overview/orientation. |

Syllabus with Information Specific to Online Courses

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| Online courses often have unique policies and expectations that the syllabus should outline including attendance, netiquette, communication, where to go for technology help/support, etc. | Students need to be aware of both course and institutional policies, especially policies specific to online courses. | Refer to the <a href="#">TWU Online Syllabus template</a> for suggested wording and examples of what to include in your online course syllabus. |

Technology: Skills, Access, and Help for Students

| <b>What is it?</b>  | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| Online students need to know what technology they will need to know/use, how they can access/download any required technology for the course, and how they can get help or support when they have a technology problem. | Making sure that students know what technology skills they must have, what software/hardware they need, and who to go to for help will set them up for success and greatly reduce or eliminate their turning to the instructor for technical support. This item also addresses QM Standards 1.5, 1.7, 6.3, and 7.1. | Refer to the <a href="#">TWU Online Syllabus template</a> for suggested wording and examples of what to include. Technology help links are also part of the information is listed the Knowledge Base article <a href="#">Getting Started in Canvas</a> . |

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Turnaround Time

| <b>What is it?</b>  | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| A way to let students know when they can receive a reply to a question and when they will receive grades/feedback from an assignment. | Letting students know when they can expect a response to questions will help them plan better and reduce their anxiety. Also, timely assignment feedback ensures that students can use your feedback when working on the next assignment. This item also addresses QM Standard 5.3, "The instructor's plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated." | Decide when students will receive a reply to a question (for example 24 hours during the week; 48 hours on the weekend), and when they can expect grades/feedback on assignments (consider the duration of the course and when they will need your feedback so they can implement it on the next assignment and/or gauge how they are doing in the course). |

Communication Policy/Netiquette

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| Information to let students know your expectations for communicating professionally in an online environment (commonly referred to as "netiquette"). | Online students need guidance on how to interact with each other in a virtual classroom, including but not limited to what is considered an appropriate, substantive contribution to an online discussion.<br><br>Netiquette is addressed in QM Standard 1.3, "Etiquette expectations for online discussion, email, and other forms of communication are clearly stated." | Include a link to the Knowledge Base article <a href="#">Netiquette</a> and provide additional guidance on how students should contribute quality posts in online discussions, group work, etc. |

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**Course Schedule with Due Dates and Times**

| <b>What is it?</b>  | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| A document or checklist showing due dates (and times!) for activities and assignments. Consider following a consistent pattern of activities and due dates from week to week throughout the course span to help students better plan and manage their time. | Having a concise list of due dates is essential for online students, who have to self-manage their time more than face-to-face students. As you develop your course schedule, consider that having nights and weekends available to complete schoolwork benefits students with professional and family commitments. This item also addresses QM Standard 1.2, "Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course." | A course schedule template is available on the <a href="#">TWU Online Syllabus template</a> . |

**Consistent Course Structure and Good Navigation**

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| Course structure refers to the organization of the course content and assessments. Consider creating weekly learning modules and having a consistent structure within the modules. Navigation refers to how your course is laid out and whether it is user-friendly for your students. | Good course structure and navigation can reduce frustration and allow students to focus more on learning rather than finding course materials. This item also helps to address QM Standard 8.1: "Course navigation facilitates ease of use." | For good navigation and layout, begin with the <a href="#">TWU Online Syllabus template</a> . Within your course, the structure needs to be logical, consistent, and organized rather than just listing items on your course homepage. |

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**Measurable Learning Objectives/Outcomes**

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| Learning objectives/outcomes are measurable, performance-based statements describing what students are expected to be able to do by the end of the course. | To let students know from the beginning what they will be able to do by the end of the course. This item also addresses QM Standard 2.1, "The course learning objectives, or course/program competencies, describe outcomes that are measurable." | Each TWU course has approved outcomes that must be addressed (contact your academic unit for more information), but you may add to the approved outcomes if you choose. See the <a href="#">Guidelines for Well-Written SLOs</a> or contact the <a href="#">Office of Academic Assessment</a> . |

**Assignments: Knowledge checks, Assessments, and Alignment**

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| Assignments are comprised of assessments (larger projects showing evidence that students have achieved course objectives) and practice learning activities such as knowledge checks. | Assignments provide evidence of student learning in a course and should be sequenced. Assignments should include different types of activities to promote learning and increase engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy. This item also helps to meet QM Standards 3.1 ("The assessments measure the stated learning objectives or competencies") and Standard 3.5 ("The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress."). | Ensure your online assignments are aligned with course objectives/outcomes, and that students have low-stakes ways to check their knowledge with quizzes, short essays, reflective journals, etc. For help in developing online assignments, visit the <a href="#">Instructional Design</a> webpage. |

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**Narrated Presentations/Lectures**

| <b>What is it?</b>  | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| A narrated PowerPoint or another type of visual presentation that presents course information and concepts and is created as a video file that is ten minutes or less. Text-heavy presentations and "talking head" videos without visuals should be avoided, and larger topics can be "chunked" for ease of viewing and cognitive processing. | Narrated presentations are a primary way to add your expertise and guidance. They are the "lectures" of an online course. | Resources regarding how to create illustrated, narrated presentations for online learning are available on the <a href="#">Instructional Design</a> webpage. |

**Student Interaction**

| <b>What is it?</b>  | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| In an online class, students have a variety of ways to interact, such as discussions, blog comments, wikis and other group/collaborative work, and peer feedback. | Student-student interaction can serve to increase social presence, promote engagement, reduce transactional distance, and contribute to the formation of an online learning community. | Interaction opportunities must be designed and built into your online course.<br><br>Provide opportunities for students to engage with each other through collaborative assignments including group/class discussions, small-group projects, problem-solving assignments, and/or peer critiques. |

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**Level 2: Advanced Best Practices**

Alignment

| What is it?   | Why should I do it?   | How do I do it?   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Alignment refers to all course components working together to ensure students meet the desired outcomes. Stated simply, the materials in your online course should directly support students in completing your assignments, which should provide evidence that they have achieved your course learning outcomes/objectives.</p> | <p>Alignment ensures that there are no gaps or redundancies in your course, that students are only doing the work connected to your course objectives, and that only the most relevant content is included.</p> | <p>For step-by-step help with alignment, please visit the <a href="#">Instructional Design</a> webpage.</p> <p>For guided help on designing an aligned course, contact the Office of Teaching &amp; Learning with Technology.</p> |

Accessibility

| What is it?   | Why should I do it?  | How do I do it?   |
|---|--|---|
| <p>In online learning specifically, accessibility refers to the extent to which an online course, including all materials and the Learning Management System (LMS), is accessible for learners with disabilities.</p> | <p>University policy requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. An important consideration of accessibility is that it must be provided to students with a documented need. Legal liability and financial penalties can be applied if accessibility is not provided.</p> | <p>Examples of reasonable accommodation and accessibility of course learning materials include text transcripts for audio files and narrated presentations, closed-captioned videos, ALT tag descriptions for images, and tables and use of styles in MS Word documents. For questions or support, please contact <a href="#">Disability Services for Students</a> for assistance. You can also find more information on accessibility by reading through the Accessibility Considerations document listed under <a href="#">Faculty Resources</a>.</p> |

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**Provide Context for Content/Materials**

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>  | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>All items within your course should have a short description to provide students with an explanation of why the item is included and how it supports the outcomes/objectives.</p> | <p>To help your students know what to read/listen for when interacting with course content, and also help them focus on how they will use this information on course assignments. This item also meets QM Standard 4.2, "Both the purpose of instructional materials and how the materials are to be used for learning activities are clearly explained."</p> | <p>Add a 1-3 sentence description for each content item that identifies: what it is, how students will access it, and how students should use it (e.g., "This is a scholarly article on [topic], and is a downloadable pdf that will open in a new tab.</p> <p>When you read it, pay particular attention to [these topics]. You will use information from this article to complete [name of assignment].)</p> |

**Copyright**

| <b>What is it?</b>   | <b>Why should I do it?</b>   | <b>How do I do it?</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Quotes, videos, articles, images, and any other content you include in your course should be available for use, be properly cited, and/or you should have clearance to include it in your course.</p> | <p>Copyrighted materials may require a Fair Use/Copyright assessment to meet the university's legal obligations.</p> | <p>Consider using Creative Commons, Wikimedia Commons, or other websites for Public Domain content to be certain that you are not infringing on anyone else's intellectual property.</p> <p>For more information, visit <a href="#">Copyright Services through TWU Library</a>. The university allocates up to \$500 per course for copyright clearance.</p> |