

The Five Basic Pillars Of Online Course Design

1. Course Overview and Introduction

A student's first impression of an online course and its teacher occur with a welcome message. In addition to posting the welcome message in Canvas, some teachers email the message directly to students prior to the course start date.

An Effective Introductory Message:

- Sets the tone, pace, and expectations for the course
- Provides instructions and materials students need to get started
- Facilitates the use of learning management systems like Canvas

2. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

By defining essential and measurable skills, abilities, knowledge, or values, learning outcomes describe what students will be able to do when they finish the course. Assignment-level outcomes describe what learners will be able to do at the end of a major project. These objectives should support elements of the course-level objectives.

All Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) should be:

- Measurable and clearly assessable
- Written from the learner's perspective
- Suited to the level of the course

Most Importantly:

At every available opportunity, explicitly connect all **assignments, activities, and instructional materials** to course-level SLOs. This helps students see the connection between what they're *doing* and what they're *learning*.

3. Course Activities and Learner Interaction

The online learning experience can be lonely and isolating. Community-building activities and regular interaction with the teacher and other students aids in retention, completion, and performance. Regular communication from the teacher helps students understand expectations and focus on course outcomes.

Learning Activities Should:

- Promote the achievement of the stated student learning outcomes
- Provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning

4. Assessment and Measurement

Assessment activities (quizzes, writing prompts, projects, etc) determine whether students are learning the material they need to know according to stated SLOs. Assessments also help students evaluate their own performance and make adjustments to their learning habits or seek help from the teacher or other support services.

Assessments Should:

- Measure the stated learning objectives or competencies.
- Align with a clearly stated course grading policy.
- Offer feedback in a clearly communicated approximate response time
- Evaluate the student's work in relation to SLOs and grading policy

Important Note About Assessments:

The purpose of assessment and feedback is to make clear the connections between instructional materials, course-level objectives, and student performance so learners might improve their practice. Take any opportunity to make these connections.

5. Accessibility, Usability, and Technology

Online courses must meet the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles. **Usability** is the ability of a student to navigate through the online course, find the information they need, and perform the tasks that are required for successful learning. The principles of **Universal Design for Learning** can help instructors select or design course materials that help all students have a good learning experience.

Accessible and Usable Online Courses Include:

- Organization and consistency in terms, deadlines, locations, and materials
- Technological tools that promote course SLOs and student engagement
- Information about the accessibility of all required technologies
- Technical support for various tools and/or clear steps to obtain more
- Links to or descriptions of accessibility policies and services.

For More Information About Accessibility:

Visit <http://writeprofessionally.org/accessibility/>