

# Rubric for Online Course Design

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The SHSU Online Course Design Rubric synthesizes best practices for online course design. The rubric can be used to guide and inform the course development process, as well as evaluate the design of any course containing digital elements for teaching and learning. The rubric is applicable to any fully or partially online, flipped, blended, or web-assisted face-to-face course.

Developed on nationally recognized, research-based quality assurance standards related to the essential components of online course design, these rubric highlights best practices and practical recommendations in the following areas:

- General course information
- Presentation of course content
- Collaboration & Communication
- Assessment Strategies
- Course Technology
- Learner Support, and
- Accessibility & ADA Compliance

The SHSU Online Rubric for Course Design has also been vetted by SHSU faculty, members of the Blackboard Exemplary Course Rubric Committee, Instructional Designers, and digital learning practitioners.

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## Course Information- Organization

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*Course information addresses the basic overview and organization of the course, including elements such as the structure and organization of the course, its learning objectives, and its description.*

### **In Progress**

- a. The course design may confuse students. How can design more closely follow the syllabus or course schedule?
- b. Left menu navigation links may not prompt students to best responses; some links appear to be missing for some course items.

### **Established Practice**

- a. Course design clearly deriving and flowing from the course syllabus and schedule.
- b. Terms and names used throughout the course are mostly consistent.

### **Exemplary Practice**

- a. Excellent flow of course design from the course syllabus and schedule
- b. Terms and names are consistent throughout the course and its documents.

## Course Information- SLO's

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### **In Progress**

- a. Students may struggle linking learning objectives to measurable learning outcomes;
- b. Will students clearly understand how projected outcomes result from course level and unit level objectives?
- c. The reviewer had difficulty locating learning objectives within the course.

### **Established Practice**

- a. Students will likely link some or most learning objectives to measurable outcomes;
- b. Students will likely identify learning objectives appropriately as course level and unit level outcomes; but
- c. May report difficulty locating learning objectives within the course (example: learning objectives listed only in the syllabus)

### **Exemplary Practice**

- a. Students will easily link learning objectives to measurable learning;
- b. Students will easily identify learning objectives appropriately as course level and unit level outcomes; and
- c. Learning objectives are readily visible in the course introduction and unit introductions.

# Course Description

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## In Progress

- a. No description of the course is present.

## Established Practice

- a. Course catalogue description appears in the course and syllabus.

## Exemplary Practice

- a. From the basis of the course catalogue description, the instructor has developed a more expansive description of the course (clarified terms, supplied emphasis, etc.) and has utilized it throughout the course as well as in the syllabus.

# Course Presentation- Multimedia

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*Course presentation speaks to the quality and fit of any multimedia content in the course. Qualitative issues include the following: easily accessible instructions and opportunities for students to test out the tools before they are used; the visual consistency throughout the course; observance of established ADA protocols.*

## In Progress

- a. Students may struggle to relate the multimedia content to the course either because of the content itself or because of difficulty finding it in a media server (i.e. Kaltura).
- b. Mobile device experience of the multimedia content likely will not be optimal, perhaps because there is a better storage format than currently chosen.
- c. Students may struggle to find or understand instructions for third party tools used in course.

## Established Practice

- a. Students will reasonably relate multimedia content to the overall course both because of the content itself and because of its accessibility.
- b. Storage format and file sizes are conducive to online delivery.
- c. Mobile device experience of the content will likely include consistent delivery, thanks to good type and format choices.
- d. Students will likely find and implement the helpful instructions for third party tools used in course.

## Exemplary Practice

- a. Instructor employs multimedia content smartly and appropriately, throughout the course. Students will likely characterize the content as enriching.
- b. Instructor has chosen multimedia content that is mobile friendly and stored in the ideal format/s for online delivery.
- c. Students will benefit from clear and easily accessible instructions and/or demonstrations of third party tools used in course.
- d. Students will gain confidence thanks to opportunities for practice and exploration of tools available before their use in the course.

# Course Presentation- Design and Style

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## In Progress

- a. Propose ADA compliance - images should contain alternate text, documents also posted as scanned images.
- b. Font usage – change fonts only for clear thematic reasons, consolidate font types in display areas.
- c. Color usage - color best used as one of multiple methods of emphasis. Colorblind users will rely on specific shade variations. Students will likely cite clashing colors used within a visual area.
- d. Recommend use of typesetting conventions.

## Established Practice

- a. Instructor commended for ADA compliance - all images have an alternate text display, documents are posted in text format, clear consideration of other barriers to access.
- b. Instructor understands and employs modern typesetting conventions.

## Exemplary Practice

- a. Outstanding and innovative adherence to ADA rules;
- b. Instructor understands and employs good color design;
- c. Instructor employs modern typesetting conventions.

# Collaboration and Communication- Instructor to Student

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*The SHSU online rubric emphasizes both instructor-to-student communication and opportunities students have to communicate and collaborate with each other within an online environment.*

## In Progress

- a. Students will likely not anticipate communication or grading response times, because the information is not yet posted or is not readily visible.

## Established Practice

- a. Instructor will utilize the announcement function surrounding major grades and significant course events.
- b. Instructor provides expectations for response times for grading and student inquiries, and allows use of both Virtual Office, email and/or equivalent for student queries.

## Exemplary Practice

- a. Instructor will communicate with students via announcements, grade center feedback, streaming media, discussion board responses, and/or email multiple times a week.
- b. Students will likely have clear expectations for grading and communication response times for both regular email and the Virtual Office. The Instructor has also provided scheduled times of availability for office hours and live communication such a phone conferences.

# Collaboration and Communication- Student to Student

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## **In Progress**

- a. Students have no opportunities to communicate with peers.

## **Established Practice**

- a. Students have opportunities to interact with each other within the course.

## **Exemplary Practice**

- a. Students have opportunities to communicate and interact with peers; the instructor encourages them to do so using tools such as discussions threads, blogs, wikis, or similar technologies.

## Assignments and Assessments- Assessment Types

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*Assessment focuses on instructional activities designed to measure progress towards learning outcomes, provide feedback to students and instructor, and/or enable grade assignments. This section addresses both the quality and type of student assessments within the course.*

### In Progress

- a. Only \*high stakes assessments employed.

\*An assessment worth 30% of the grade would count as a high stakes assessment, because the student would have to score 100% on all other assignments to achieve a low C in a course.

### Established Practice

- a. Course contains a quiz or assignment for each lesson and periodic exams or major projects with minimal additional assessment methods.
- b. Some assessments employed match a course or unit level outcomes.

### Exemplary Practice

- a. Instructor employs a variety of assessment methods, including pre-tests, written assignments, student-created multimedia, graded collaborative projects, and exams.
- b. Instructor expects and promotes regular students engagement in collaborative assignments.
- c. Instructor has matched assessments to stated course and unit level outcomes.

## Assignments and Assessments- Academic Integrity

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### In Progress

- a. Plagiarism detection methods are not used for major writing assignments.
- b. Exams and quizzes present identical question sets for every student and/or across multiple terms with no security methods employed.

### Established Practice

- a. Instructor employs plagiarism detection tools such as SafeAssign or Turnitin, for most major writing assignments.
- b. Exams and quizzes use some protection methods such as question randomization, multiple test forms per assignment, reserved question sets for subsequent terms, etc.

### Exemplary Practice

- a. Plagiarism detection tools such as SafeAssign or Turnitin are used, when relevant, for major writing assignments.
- b. Instructor has secured exams and quizzes with video proctoring or usage restricted browsers, as appropriate.
- c. Instructor uses combined security measures including exams and quizzes drawn from large question/data pools and refreshed on a rotating basis.

# Navigation- Unit to Unit

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*This section addresses the efficiency and consistency of the navigation within the course. Navigation includes the logical flow and organization of the information as well as how intuitive, quick and simple it is to find any component of the course. Navigation between course units as well as within units is considered.*

## In Progress

- a. Students will benefit by increased course content chunking<sup>1</sup>.
- b. Students may not discern the logical flow of the content.
- c. Expected navigation may not be clear to student users.

## Established Practice

- a. Instructor has aided students by chunking course content into manageable segments (i.e., presented in distinct learning units or modules). Chunking allows for the grouping of material into modules or units of study that contain within themselves everything the learner needs to progress complete them.
- b. The instructor has provided a course outline dividing the content into topical units, or weekly lessons.
- c. Students will likely easily follow the content flow.
- d. Students will easily discern navigation within a unit and/or from unit to unit.

## Exemplary Practice

- a. Course content is chunked into manageable segments (i.e., presented in distinct learning units or modules). Chunking allows for the grouping of material into modules or units of study that contain everything within the unit the learner needs to progress through to completion. AND,
- b. The instructor has provided a course outline dividing the content into topical units, or weekly lessons, AND
- c. Course organization deploys and designs symmetrical units throughout, AND
- d. Content flows in a logical progression with a scaffolding of concepts as applicable AND
- e. Students will easily discern navigation within a unit and/or from unit to unit.

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<sup>1</sup> Chunking refers to the strategy of breaking down information into bite-sized pieces so the brain can more easily digest new information." [The eLearning Coach Chunking Guide](#)

## Navigation- Intra-Unit

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### In Progress

- a. Students may not easily recognize unit introductory materials;
- b. Students may not easily follow the organization of the content and/or lesson plans; and
- c. Students may lack an opportunity to recap or to rehearse a conclusion for the unit/s.

### Established Practice

- a. Instructor has designed units to include a lesson plan / outline / introduction;
- b. Instructor has organized content sequentially and follows the lesson plan;
- c. Instructor guides students into a recap and/or conclusion of the unit.

### Exemplary Practice

- a. Instructor has created units to include a lesson plan / outline / introduction; the introduction is a video walkthrough of the unit materials;
- b. Instructor has organized the content sequentially (by start date) and follows the lesson plan; AND
- c. Instructor guides students into a recap and/or conclusion of the unit including where students should go next in the course.

## Navigation- Efficiency and Efficacy

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### In Progress

- a. Course navigation techniques may vary from unit to unit or from one section of the course to another.
- b. Excessive clicking and/or scrolling is required to access content.
- c. Presence of empty folders may confuse students.

### Established Practice

- a. Course navigation is efficient and consistent.
- b. Instructor has minimized the amount of clicks and scrolling necessary to access content.

### Exemplary Practice

- a. Course navigation is efficient and consistent.
- b. Instructor has minimized the amount of clicks and scrolling necessary to access content, AND
- c. Instructor has employed a flat navigation when there are fewer than 8 items on a page, AND
- d. Instructor has employed a tiered navigation when there are more than 8 items on a page, AND
- e. Commonly used tools have their own links from the course navigation menu as appropriate.

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