Blended Learning Course Quality Rubric

Teaching and Learning Support Service (TLSS)

This rubric has been developed based on best practices in course design and is intended to help guide instructors in the development of quality blended courses. It can therefore be especially useful when envisioning a proposal for blended course creation, and consequently in the development and continuous refinement of a blended course.

It is important to note that the descriptors presented in the *Rubric* represent a relatively comprehensive picture of the best practice for each of the criteria. It is therefore not expected that the first iteration of a blended course would present all of the criteria in a complete manner. The focus instead should be on the continued improvement of the course over time, through the use of this *Rubric*.

Course Design

"Course Design" refers to the fundamentals of course design and includes general information about the course, structure of the course and organization of content, definition of learning outcomes, and the use of teaching/learning strategies aligned with the learning outcomes and the evaluation and feedback components.

Learning Outcomes (LOs)

Learning Outcomes are stated a sufficient number of times, in intuitive locations (e.g. first page of a learning module), are clearly defined, written from the student's perspective, relevant, at an appropriate learning level (see Bloom's Taxonomy), measurable, observable, and consistent with the module/unit goals.

Learning Activities

Learning activities are presented, clearly linked/ aligned with a particular LO and assessment, encourage active and deeper learning, participation, engagement, foster student-student collaboration/interaction, Social and Teacher Presence, and the overall development of a learning community.

Assessment Activities

Alignment between assessment and LO is explicitly and clearly stated using appropriate vocabulary and in an intuitive location (e.g. with the assessment). Assessments are varied (e.g. project, objective test, etc.), carried out on a regular basis, include clear instructions and grading policy information that is easy to locate, contains sufficient detail to ensure student understanding, approximate timelines for feedback, as well as examples of good work and grading rubrics where applicable.

Copyright and Citation

Copyright clearance/Permissions of use for all external material (e.g. videos, images, written material) is evident. Notations/citations regarding attributions and ownership (e.g. OER, Creative Commons, etc.) have been made.

Learner Support and Resources

"Learner Support and Resources" refers to the resources that are available to support the student's learning experience, and can include aspects that address diverse ways of learning and academic accommodations, guidelines/instructions for engagement in the course activities and use of course tools (e.g. links and directions on use); communication tools and protocols, as well as contact and availability information for relevant support personnel (e.g. Registrar's office, Access Services, technical/IT, instructor, and teaching assistants).

Diversity in Learning All course materials follow AODA accessibility standards, show evidence of universal design principles (e.g. video captioning, ALT text etc.), and/or provide information regarding how a student may receive an accommodation when necessary.	
Course Basics Answers to common questions regarding all essential aspects of the course (e.g. expectations, etiquette, netiquette; plagiarism and academic fraud information and support; technical and academic support; contact and availability information of instructor and T.A.s, student support services, IT/LMS) are clearly and fully detailed in an intuitive location (e.g. a course information/FAQ section or page).	
Communication and Interaction Two-way synchronous and asynchronous communication opportunities are provided (e.g. email, online conferencing system, discussion boards etc.). Protocols and expectations for student-student and student-instructor communication are clearly presented (e.g. quantity, frequency, length, netiquette, best place/channel/time to pose certain questions, timeframes for contributing to or responding to others on discussion forums, examples /guidelines of what constitutes an acceptable/good contribution, etc.). It is also important that the instructor follow best practices in online discussions (facilitate, participate actively, break class into smaller groups etc.), and communicate with students on a regular basis (e.g. via updates, announcements, etc.).	
Student Feedback Learners are consistently provided with opportunities to supply feedback on the course content/design and learning (e.g. via email, an anonymous survey, suggestion box, discussion forum, etc.).	
Instructor Feedback Instructor feedback is clear, constructive (i.e. provides student with information on where they currently stand in relation to the objective, and includes guidance on how to close the gap between the two; highlights the positives and negatives), offers opportunities to demonstrate improvement, is provided in a timely manner and on a regular basis.	

Use of Technology

"Use of Technology" refers to the successful integration of technology in a variety of formats to help students achieve the course objectives/learning outcomes. This includes using technology that aligns with and helps meet the course objectives, the provision of guides/instructions to help learners use the technology, as well as pilot testing all technology.

Purposeful integration of technologies

Reliable technologies are used in ways that clearly benefit the learning experience (e.g. promote collaboration, engagement, active learning, etc.) and help the learner effectively reach their goals.

Ease of Use

Learners are provided with clear, detailed step by step instructions that are intuitively located to ensure that they can easily and effectively use any required technology for the course. This includes information on what learners may require (e.g. a mobile app, PDF, etc.), whether the technology is mobile friendly, and who to contact for technical support.

Pilot test

All technology, web links, web pages, embedded media (e.g. videos), and activities in the course have been pilot tested prior to student access.

Course Organization and Content Presentation

"Course Organization and Content Presentation" refers to the overall structure, appearance and navigation experience in the course. This includes the presence of course information and course instructions to guide students as well as a clear and consistent structure in how elements are presented.

Course Orientation

As part of a Welcome page, learners are introduced to the instructor and the course, and are provided with guidance on where to locate key information regarding the course (e.g. expectations, grading policies, syllabus, guidelines, etc.). Students are provided with clear information on how the course will unfold face-to-face and online, and what to expect on a class by class basis.

Course Navigation and Content Presentation

All content (e.g. links, readings, videos, assessments, assignments, etc.) is easily located, presented in a logical and intuitive manner, and is organized into sequenced, manageable chunked segments with clear directives on what is expected to be completed, for when, how, and in what order. The amount and level of material is appropriate for the particular course and learner profile. Navigation is logical, and intuitive. Material is chunked and presented in distinct learning segments that are sequenced and have clear details/directives regarding what is expected to be completed, in what order, for when, and how.

Appearance and Design

All elements of the course are visually and functionally consistent and professional looking. Presentation is clear and uncrowded; font color and size are appropriate; colour scheme, icons and graphics used have a direct connection to the content.

Introduction to the Blended Learning Course Quality Rubric

What is a Rubric and what are the advantages of using one?

An elaborated description of a scoring process that:

1. Identifies the necessary criteria
2. Defines the standards and expectations for achievement
3. Provides clear and unambiguous feedback that helps the individual improve

When should this Rubric be used?

This Rubric was developed based on best practices in course design, and is intended to help guide instructors to develop quality Blended courses. It can therefore be especially useful when envisioning a proposal for blended course development funding, and consequently in the development and continuous refinement of a Blended course. It is important to note that the descriptors presented in the Rubric represent a "relatively" comprehensive picture of the best practice for each of the criteria. It is therefore not expected that a first iteration of a Blended course would present all of the criteria in a complete manner. The focus instead should be on the continued improvement of the course over time.

What else might you consider?

When developing or revamping your Blended course, it can be helpful to consider the following 7 principles in teaching:

A. Principle 1: Good Practice Encourages Student-Faculty Contact

- It is important that instructors provide clear guidelines for interaction between students and the professor.
  - Consider providing information on how and when students can contact you. What channels should they use? What is acceptable, what is not? E.g. can they use the public discussion forum for any type of question?
  - Make sure to establish clear standards for instructors' timelines for responding to messages.

B. Principle 2: Good Practice Encourages Cooperation Among Students

- A well-designed course facilitates meaningful cooperation among students.
  - Consider using assignments and learning activities to encourage this.

C. Principle 3: Good Practice Encourages Active Learning

- Research shows that students learn best when they engage with the material. Employing Active Learning techniques can help ensure that this occurs. For more information, view our Pedagogy video on the topic.

D. Principle 4: Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback

- Both the student and instructor learn a great deal from feedback. For instance, students learn about what they have understood and what they need to learn more about; while professors can learn about how effective their instruction has been.

- Providing feedback, can be as simple as sending an acknowledgment that the student completed something, or more detailed information regarding a student's specific performance. Overall, for feedback to be effective, it must be constructive, precise, and provided in a timely manner.

E. Principle 5: Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task

- The provision of regularly-distributed deadlines, and information regarding the necessary completion time for a task helps keep students on track. For example, "Read the text using the guiding questions, 45 minutes".

F. Principle 6: Good Practice Communicates High Expectations

- It is important that students understand that a Blended course does not simply mean that they have nothing to do half of the time.
  - Make sure to communicate what is expected in a Blended course, and provide challenging tasks, along with models for students to follow.

G. Principle 7: Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

- An online environment provides an opportunity to cater to students in a way that allows them to learn best. Consider providing information in a variety of formats for example, or allow students to choose how to complete a particular requirement. Instructors can provide options along with guidelines and requirements, while still allowing the students to complete the assignment in their own unique way.

Some Important Definitions/Terms

Accessibility

Course materials follow Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) principles. Any software, assistive technology or supportive mechanisms are put in place or made available to ensure that all learners can participate fully in the learning experience. At a minimum, high color contrast and large size of text and graphics are presented, as well as Alt text is provided for images, diagrams, and tables, and closed captioning along with a written transcript is available for video content. For more information on accessibility at the University of Ottawa, check out our Hub.

Active Learning

Active learning focuses on implementing teaching methods that allow a student to mentally and/or physically engage with the material. This engagement which promotes that students be more implicated in their learning, results in better processing of information, thus creating a longer-lasting memory trace, and an improvement in content knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Anderson, Mitchell, & Osgood, 2005). To learn more, check out our video resource on the topic.

Assessment Activities

Assessment activities are carried out to evaluate a particular LO, and are consistent with a course's learning activities and resources. Assessment activities are best held on a regular basis (e.g. formative), shortly following learning of the associated material, are informative in terms of student progress and course instruction, and offer opportunities to demonstrate improvement/learning. In order to be effective and efficient, assessments should include clear and sufficiently detailed instructions on how to complete and submit the particular assessment, along with grading policy/criteria information, approximate timelines to obtain feedback, examples of good work and Rubrics where applicable. In addition, to ensure that the diversity of learners is supported, choice and a varied selection of assessment types/formats should be offered.

Communication & Interaction

Two-Way synchronous and asynchronous communication opportunities are provided (e.g. email, online conferencing system, discussion boards etc.). Protocols and expectations for student-student and student-instructor communication are clearly presented (e.g. quantity, frequency, length, timelines, netiquette, best place/time to pose certain questions, timeframes for contributing to or responding to others on discussion forums, examples /guidelines of what constitutes an acceptable/good contribution, etc.). It is also important that the instructor follow best practices in online discussions (facilitate, participate actively, break class into smaller groups etc.), and communicate on a regular basis (e.g. updates, announcements, etc.).

Community of Learning

A community of learning is built when learning activities are designed to promote/support student-student and student-instructor interaction, and collaboration and cooperation. Let students know what you expect from them and what they can expect from you in terms of interaction, engagement and collaboration.

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Course Basics

Answers to common questions regarding all essential aspects of a course (e.g. expectations regarding guidelines for required levels of participation, etiquette, netiquette; deadlines, requirements; plagiarism and academic fraud information and support; technical and academic support; contact and availability information of instructor and T.A.'s, student support services, IT/LMS) are clearly and fully detailed in an intuitive location (e.g. a Course information/FAQ section/page).

Feedback

Providing students with consistent and varied opportunities to provide feedback regarding the course and instruction (e.g. anonymous, email, online survey/poll, suggestion box, etc.) will help make improvements that will positively impact the teaching and learning experience. Similarly, providing students with feedback will help them understand where they stand in relation to the learning objectives. In order for feedback to be effective, it is best provided in a timely manner (shortly after the event to which it refers), on a consistent basis, and is constructive, which means that it provides clear guidance on how to close the gap from where the learner is presently to where they need to be. Providing information regarding when and how students can expect feedback is also extremely helpful to students.

Learning activities

Learning activities are carried out to promote achievement of a specified LO. It is important that they are aligned not only with an LO, but also with evaluations, and that they encourage critical thinking, problem solving, participation, active engagement, and foster different types of collaboration and interaction (e.g. Student-student; instructor-student; content-student), and the overall development of a community of learning (please see definition earlier on). In an online learning environment, it is also key that learning activities support self-directed learning, as well as promote teacher and social presence. This is most often achieved by employing the use of multiple formats (e.g. audio, video, interactive elements) to meet the variety of learning preferences and enhance the content, thus motivating learners to take part. Overall, for learning activities to be successful, it should be clear mentioned how they meet a particular LO, and instructions/directions of how to engage in the learning activity.

Learning Outcomes (LO's)

LO's are student–centered statements that define in clear and measurable terms what a student is expected to be able to do by the end of the course/class. For more information, check out the following resource.

Teacher and social Presence

For the most part, the instructor and peers are invisible within an online environment, which if not addressed properly, can eliminate the social aspects that help create a learning community and that sense of security students seem to experience in face-to-face environments. Accordingly, it is very important that Teachers maintain a strong presence and promote social presence in an online environment. Some ways of promoting teacher presence include sending out welcome letters, posting announcements on a regular basis, participating in online discussions and activities, providing consistent and ongoing feedback to students. Some ways of promoting social presence include providing an online space where students can communicate about aspects outside of class material (e.g. a virtual breakroom), or having students post a mini introduction and Bio, along with a picture of themselves. Please also consider consulting the provided checklist.

Online Welcome Orientation

In-class or online orientation session to describe the purpose and structure of the course as well as how to navigate and use functions in the online environment is presented and easy to find. This should include Tutorials and guidance on where to find course basic information (see Course Basics definition). An ice-breaker activity is also extremely important at the start.

References | Resources

The Blended Learning Course Quality Rubric was developed after a careful review of research, literature, and existing assessment tools (i.e. rubrics, frameworks, checklists) in the area. The following are some of the resources that were consulted.

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