# Online Course Design Checklist - Version 3 (updated 09-17-2021)

The Santa Fe College Online Course Design checklist aims to create the most consistent experience possible for our online students while providing faculty the freedom to personalize their course. The checklist draws from research-based design practices that contribute to student success. When instructional content is clearly sequenced and contextualized, students are able to focus on their learning rather than how to navigate their courses.

Criteria were added to satisfy new federal guidelines (as of July 2021) concerning academic engagement and interaction.

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| **I. Alignment Criteria** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| a. Instructional *materials* are relevant and aligned with the stated course and module outcomes. | The instructional materials are aligned with the subject matter of the course and support the stated module/course outcomes. | When students understand the purpose of the instructional materials they are engaging with, the content becomes more meaningful.  Clearly stated outcomes direct learners to more purposeful study. |
| b. Instructional *activities* are relevant and aligned with the stated course and module outcomes. | The instructional activities are aligned with the subject matter of the course and support the stated module/course outcomes. | When students understand the purpose of the instructional activities they are engaging with, the content becomes more meaningful. |
| c. Assessments are varied and aligned with the stated course and module outcomes. | Assessments are appropriate for the subject matter of the course and indicate if the stated module/course outcomes have been achieved (e.g., a writing course should require an assessment of a student’s written work). | When students understand the purpose of course assessments, the content becomes more meaningful. |
| d. Any technologies used should be available to students, be up-to-date, promote active learning, and are aligned with the course and module outcomes. | Students should be asked to use technologies that are relevant to their course and module outcomes and allow for active course engagement. | Using up-to-date technologies related to the course can help engage students with the materials while also allowing them to master related technologies which may be useful for their future education and employment. |

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| **II. Course Overview Criteria** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| a. Early in the course students are welcomed and provided an overview of the course, faculty information, and how to begin. | The course should have a landing page or home page that includes instructor contact information, contact guidelines, and an indication of how to get started. Information may be found on the homepage and/or within the first module. | An overview of the course is important for students to understand the purpose of the course and how it is structured.  Providing instructor contact information early in the course helps establish presence and opens the line of communication with your students. |
| b. Course content is sequenced and contextualized within modules. | Course content or access instructions should reside within modules in order to facilitate easy course navigation. Unused menu items on the left-hand navigation bar should be removed from the student view. | When content is sequenced in modules, it creates a seamless flow that is easy to follow. Placing all content in modules and hiding redundant navigation links will alleviate confusion. |
| c. Course syllabus is posted and contains all appropriate information from the syllabus template. | Using the syllabus template ensures all appropriate information is provided including:   * accessibility statement * policies * resources * netiquette * student code of conduct * technical skills needed * pre-requisites * office hours * links for academic support and for relevant student services | Providing this information connects students with important support resources and clarifies course expectations.  Your course syllabus provides the opportunity to make a strong first impression and to set a warm and inviting tone. |
| d. Course includes an instructor introduction. | Faculty should include an introduction on the homepage or in the first module. This can be a video, photo, or other image. | An introduction helps establish and maintain social presence.  Research shows that students are more likely to persist and ultimately succeed when they feel personally connected to the instructor. |
| e. Expectations for engagement and interaction are explicitly stated. | Early in the course, students are informed that the course requires *weekly* ongoing interaction with the content, their peers, and their instructor. | Students can plan and prioritize their work when expectations are clear. |
| f. Students are asked to introduce themselves to each other. | Introductions can be made in a discussion post or in another shared communication tool. Introductions may include photos, interests, or why they are taking your course. Note – this is a good activity for faculty to use to mark “has attended.” | Research shows that students who feel a sense of community in their courses are willing to take greater risks and are able to benefit from a wider support network. |

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| **III. Instructional Material Criteria** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| a. Module and course learning outcomes are provided and stated in measurable terms. | Outcomes should be appropriate to the level of the course and written using student-centered language. Terms such as “*define*,” “*explain*,” and “*describe*” help students gauge their progress in the course. Avoid unmeasurable terms such as “*know*,” “*understand*,” and “*appreciate*.” | Clearly defined outcomes help students focus and make connections between learning goals and instructional activities. |
| b. Both internal content and external links are up-to-date. | Be sure to remove old content and announcements and check all course links each term.  Ensure that any optional content is clearly marked. | Functional links allow students to confidently navigate the course.  The curation of current materials is also a way for instructors to communicate their expertise to students.  Denoting optional materials can reduce confusion and allow students additional resources to explore if they so wish. |
| c. A variety of instructional materials are used throughout the course. | Instructional materials can include text, audio, video, images, or other software as appropriate for the course learning outcomes.  Materials are properly cited. | Universal design research shows that leveraging multiple means of representation increases students’ opportunities to connect with the material and to experience the content from different perspectives.  Citations allow students to find original sources as well as modeling good academic practice. |

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| **IV. Engagement and Interaction Criteria** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| a. Expectations for interactions between faculty and students are clearly stated and students are informed where notifications can be found. | Methods may include email, discussions, phone conversations, chat, homework feedback, or videoconferencing. | Learning is relational. Cultivating a positive relationship with your students will increase trust and engagement. |
| b. Expectations for interactions between students are clearly stated. | Methods may include email, discussions, phone conversations, chat, homework feedback, or videoconferencing. | In order to be successful, students need to develop strong collaborative skills. The online environment is no exception to this. |
| c. Course promotes active learning. | Instructional activities promote engagement and reflection. Students are expected to interact with the instructor, the content, technologies (where appropriate), and other students in a variety of ways. | Research in universal design suggests that students learn best when they are provided with a variety of opportunities to engage with the course. |
| d. The course provides *weekly* opportunities for engagement and interaction between students and instructor. | Methods may include email, discussion replies, phone, videoconferencing conversations, assignment feedback, surveys, and journals. | Students benefit from ongoing feedback and opportunities to reflect upon their learning. Instructor interaction motivates students to further engage with the course, and can help identify obstacles to learning. |
| e. Expectations for reasonable response times (based on common standards) to student inquiries have been provided. | Information should be included in a clear location such as the syllabus, and students should not need to search for this information. Common standards are 24 to 48 hours. | Students become anxious when it is not clear how long instructor queries will be addressed. |

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| **V. Assessment Criteria** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| a. A clear and detailed grading policy is presented. | Criteria for achieving course and module outcomes are provided (i.e., rubrics, checklists, descriptions). | Students know exactly what they need to earn in order to achieve a specific grade. |
| b. A variety of assessments gives students opportunities to receive feedback and track progress. | Examples include tests, quizzes, discussions, written assignments, papers, projects, and labs. Students should have numerous opportunities to receive grades, gauge their learning, and make adjustments. | Different types of assessment can allow students to demonstrate different ways they have learned. A variety of assessments can engage students and foster better performance. |

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| **VI. Technology** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| Technology Requirements and Skills | Early in the course minimum requirements for hardware, software, and access are clearly stated in addition to the minimum technology skills needed to effectively use them. | When students understand what they need to have and be able to do in order to be successful, they can make a more informed decision about their readiness for the course. |
| Digital Literacy | Information on protecting student data and privacy is provided. | Students need to understand the importance of their personal data. As they learn of its value, privacy concerns become relevant and meaningful. |
| Technology Accessibility and Support | Links to technological support are supplied along with accessibility statements from the vendors of all technology products used. | When students know where they can go for help and are confident in the support they will receive, they are able to devote more time and energy to learning. |

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| **VII. Accessibility** | **Comments** | **How Does this Help Students?** |
| a. Provide content in the most accessible file formats. | Whenever possible, enter content directly into Canvas pages. Use Microsoft Word documents and PowerPoint presentations instead of PDFs as they are more accessible. Use a legible font size of 12 points or larger. | Using more accessible file formats not only assists students with disabilities but ensures your content can be viewed across a wide variety of devices to benefit all students.  Use of headings in Canvas is recommended to allow for quicker and clearer navigation. |
| b. Ensure documents are screen-reader friendly. | Scanned documents saved as PDFs cannot be read by assistive technology. Use headings in documents to allow for faster navigation. | Text that appears as an image is problematic for screen readers, and also makes viewing content on mobile devices more challenging. |
| c. Provide alternative text for all essential multimedia (images, audio, video). | Describe multimedia in detail either through alternative text, captions, or within the body of content. | Descriptive text assists students with impairments, processing disorders, and language difficulties. It also helps to identify key aspects of the shared image. |
| d. Include descriptive names within all web links. | Use meaningful link names. Avoid “click here” within link names. | The flow of screen-reading software is interrupted when it encounters a full URL. Using descriptive names improves clarity. |
| e. Use accessible text colors and formatting. | Use high contrast colors. Use **bold** or *italics* to convey meaning (not color). Avoid blinking, flashing, and underlined text (students assume this is a web link). | Approximately 5% of the population has a form of color blindness. All learners benefit from improved readability of text. |