

Online Course Design for Humans

A WORKBOOK





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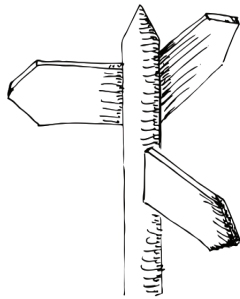


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So you are embarking on the development of an online course. Begin by remembering that just because your course will be online, that doesn't mean that the human element of teaching and learning will be lost.

This workbook will help to guide your course planning in a way that keeps the humans front and centre.

Start Here:



For the purpose of this workbook, and to shape your thinking and reflection, the context of teaching and learning for consideration will be loosely understood to be "a course".

To Teach: to instruct by precept, example, or **experience**

To Learn: to gain knowledge or understanding of, or skill-in by study, instruction, or **experience**

(Merriam-Webster)

A course is, if nothing else, an **experience** for all involved. How will you, your learners, and those with whom your learners interact actually experience your course?

Guiding Assumptions and Principles for this Workbook:

1. The goal of a course is to promote learning.

2. A course involves humans in numerous roles: The group of humans in a course is **not** a **homogeneous** one. **Each member** of the group **can be and will ideally be both teachers and learners at various points** in the course. Taking into account the **interests, safety and dignity of all**, as part of the course design, will yield the best possible learning outcomes.

3. The learning in a course can take place across a range of spaces both physical and virtual: Contemplating **all of the possible places** in which learning will occur for a course, as part of the design for that course, will yield the best possible learning outcomes for the humans involved.

4. A course involves tools and resources of various types and forms: The tools and resources employed in a course **should not prejudice the rights, aspirations, or potential for success** of any of the humans in the course.

5. All courses involve a range of constraints of various origins and import: The constraints present in a course **should be openly tabled, discussed and understood by all** in order to promote the best possible learning outcomes.

6. A course will generate work products: The work products generated in a course **should have meaning for both those who create them and those who consume or evaluate them**, including – when desired and/or appropriate – those beyond the immediate course community.

7. A course involves some form of assessment: Assessment in a course **should serve and be understood chiefly as a form of support for and constructive appraisal of genuine learning**.

Over to You:

How do you feel about these assumptions and principles? Write down or illustrate your first thoughts and reactions.

i. Which assumptions and/or principles are in keeping with your own?

ii. Which assumptions and/or principles differ from your own?

iii. Questions or objections with respect to those assumptions and/or principles that differ from your own.



Based on your thoughts and reactions, draft a version of the guiding assumptions and principles here in a way that you feel best represents your vision for your course. Next to each assumption/principle draft a brief note capturing the nature and rationale for why you retained or departed from the suggested list above.

The assumptions and/or principles that will guide the design of your online course:



Onward! A Trip Through the Course as you Imagine it:

Now that you have confirmed your guiding assumptions and principles let's take a tour through the possible elements of your course, and begin to note some ideas that will help to drive your plans forward.

Here are some questions to guide the planning of your course experience or journey.

Access and Entry Points to the Course:

What are the requirements to gain access, enter, and enjoy freedom of movement throughout all aspects of your course? (Think administrative, academic, technological, temporal, financial, others)

Note the requirements here:

How might you account for these requirements as you design the entry points to your course (i.e. the first lesson, the first materials with which learners will interact, the first things that learners will hear from you, the first things that you would like to hear from learners?) How might you plan/design the entry points of your course to support the interests, safety and dignity of those (including yourself) who are accessing and entering your course (format, tone, look, feel)? Are they invitational or prescribed?

What role will you play when learners are accessing/entering your course for the first time and how will your voice be included? What role will learners have when accessing/entering and how will their voices be included?

Wayfinding Throughout the Course:

Is there just one or might there be many paths along which learners will find their way through your course? How will you and/or your learners recognize and navigate these paths? What kind and form of information (i.e. documents, activities, tools) will help learners to recognize signposts (i.e. paths that are ending, changing, intersecting, diverging) as they make their way through your course? How might you plan/design the paths through your course to support the interests, safety and dignity of those (including yourself) who are progressing through them?

How might you identify learners who are struggling to find their way through your course? What, when, and how might you communicate with these learners (what can you do before or during the course to guide them?)

At what points and in what forms will assessment and feedback contribute to wayfinding for learners, and for you, throughout the course?

Spaces/Times and Their Purposes in the Context of the Course:

In what spaces (virtual or physical) and at or across what times will you, in your role as educator, communicate, connect and/or gather with the learners in your course? How might you plan/design for these times and spaces in a way that supports the interests, safety and dignity of those (including yourself) who occupy them?

In what spaces (virtual or physical) and at or across what times will your learners communicate, connect and/or gather with one another? How might you plan/design for these times and spaces in a way that supports the interests, safety and dignity of those (including yourself) who occupy them? How might these times and spaces differ from those when/where you are part of the gathering?

In what spaces (virtual or physical) and at or across what times might your learners reflect independently on the materials and requirements of the course? How might you plan/design for these times and spaces in a way that supports the interests, safety and dignity of those (including yourself) who occupy them?



Materials and Tools Employed in the Course:

What materials and tools will you share and/or employ to support learners in successfully completing their work and ‘travels’ through your course? How might you ensure that these materials and tools do not prejudice the rights, aspirations, or potential for success of any of those (including yourself) in the course?

What materials and tools might learners share and/or employ while completing their work and ‘travels’ through your course? How, and with whom will learners share these items? How might you ensure that these materials and tools do not prejudice the rights, aspirations, or potential for success of any of those (including yourself) in the course?

Emergency Planning:

What contingencies might you pro-actively consider and propose to ensure that all those (including yourself) in the course are effectively supported in the event of unexpected circumstances, events or crises? How might you communicate these contingencies?

Exit and Departure from the Course:

Where and how do you wish learners to exit your course? How will you communicate this vision to the learners?

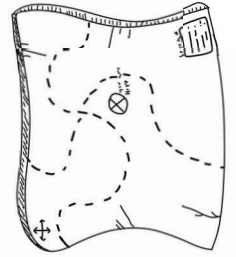
What do you wish learners to take with them as they depart -- whenever and wherever in the course that might be? How might the takeaways differ depending upon the point of exit and how might this impact your course design?

How might you plan the exit from your course in a way that assists your learners to see where they might go next?

Sketching a Map for your Course:

Your reflections above on a journey through the course will assist you as you now begin to sketch the more concrete shape of your course, piece by piece. There are many ways that you might capture your ideas, such as concept maps and flow charts. Consider what format works best for you. Here is a simple, linear graphic organizer that might help you move forward with your planning. Think about how the notes you captured above will inform each component in your plan.

(This Template has been adapted from the eLearning Course Planning and Alignment Chart Worksheet developed by the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Western University.)



Component of the Course (e.g. module, lesson, “week”, unit, etc.)	Learning Goals or Objectives for this Component	Learning Strategies / Learning Events	Learning Resources and Materials	Learning Tools	Assessment Methods
Example – Module 1.	What might learners hope or expect to have practiced, mastered or achieved after engaging with this component of the course? Consider how to articulate the origin and landscape of possible goals for this component of the course e.g those set outside the course context such as degree level expectations, those recommended by you as the facilitator and subject matter expert, and those that might be set by learners themselves.	What learning events will learners actively undertake (either individually or collaboratively) to support progress toward the stated learning objective/goals? Which of these strategies or events might occasion feedback from you the instructor? In cases where this is not the case, how might learners gauge their development or progress? Will all events be “required”? How might you incorporate learner agency or choice into these learning strategies?	In order to facilitate the learning strategies and events in this course component, what resources (e.g. readings, media artifacts, etc.) might you curate, develop or adapt?	What tools (digital or analog) will support learners in undertaking the identified learning strategies? What guidance or documentation will support users in the confident use of these tools?	What assessment and feedback methods will help to inform and improve learner progress toward the relevant learning objectives for this component? What assessment methods will provide evidence that learners have met the relevant learning objectives for this component?

Component of the course (e.g. module, lesson, "week", unit, etc)	Learning Goals or Objectives for this Component	Learning Strategies / Learning Events	Learning Resources and Materials	Learning Tools	Assessment Methods

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From Plan to Reality:

The reflection and planning you have undertaken above represents a significant amount of the work required to design and create your online course.

Now is the time to turn your plan into reality. Use the map that you have created, to actively build the components of your course. When doing so, remember your role as a guide for students through these components. If you do this, you will instinctively include in your course the key direction, contextual, and connective pieces that, while not necessarily specific to your discipline or subject matter, will make all the difference to the course experience for both you and your students.

Good luck to you and the other humans in your online course!!

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