

Universal Design Checklist for Your Online Course

As you are building or reviewing your online course, consider the following questions rooted in the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Universal design is a framework focused in making learning available to all students, and its core principles are reflected on the Quality Matters™ Review Standards (QMRS) website (<http://bit.ly/QM-Standards>), which provide a faculty-driven peer review process for ensuring and recognizing well-designed online courses.

When you build your course with both UDL and QM in mind, you create a learning experience that provides students with options for **engaging** their affective networks, recognizing information through **representations**, and strategically **acting** upon or expressing their learning. You are designing a course that provides learners with multiple means of moving from novice to expert. For more information about these UDL guidelines, review the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) website (<http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>). These factors apply to anything you include in your online course to help make it more accessible to all learners.

Questions?

If you have questions contact Lesya Hassall, CELT Quality Matters Program Coordinator, via email (lesya@iastate.edu), CELT by email (celt@iastate.edu), or call at [515-294-5357](tel:515-294-5357).

How to use this checklist

Check the box if you can answer “yes” to the following questions. This signifies that your online course is following a best practice for online learning.

Do not check the box if you answer “no” to the following questions. These will be entry points for how to improve your online course and make it even better.

Note: Each practice may include the QMRS (Quality Matters Review Standard) reference associated with it. These standards are detailed on the Quality Matters™ Review Standards (QMRS) website (<http://bit.ly/QM-Standards>).

Scannable

- Does the course navigation make it easy for students to find what they need? *QMRS8*
- Is there a consistent theme (for example, color scheme or page layout)? *QMRS8.1*
- Does the course promote readability (headings, reading level, supplemental content)? *QMRS8*

Legible

- Are the fonts uniform, accessible (color/contrast) and sized appropriately? *QMRS8*
- Is color usage accessible? (i.e. color alone is not used to convey information) *QMRS8.3*
- If the instructor has a teaching assistant, include contact information.

Searchable

- Is alt text provided for all digital images? Is text kept as text (not in images)? *QMRS8*
- Are course documents posted in accessible formats (HTML, PDF, Word)? *QMRS4*

Viewable

- Are media files closed captioned or transcribed and easy to play? *QMRS8*
- Is user-friendly color used sparingly and consistently? *QMRS8.2*
- Have you avoided using underlined text (aside from active links) and misleading phrases like “click here”? Have you included labels (PDF, Word, Excel) in your non-HTML links? *QMRS8*

Effective Implementation Practices

Each section has been sorted into tiers to address ease of implementation so you can more effectively plan your time. As with any categorical system, these are somewhat arbitrary and will vary. In general, tier one items should be easier to adopt, while tiers two and three might take a little more effort.

Remember that creating and maintaining an online course varies by individual, just as teaching styles do. While this list includes important elements of designing an effective online course, it is not a comprehensive review of every possible aspect of quality online learning, nor is it even a complete listing of the QM standards.

Your focus in reviewing this checklist is continual improvement – use it as a guide to consider where there are opportunities to improve and as a mindset for how you view the design of your online learning.

Identify results - your goals for your course

Good instruction always begins with the end in mind. Help your students bridge the gap from where there are now to where they will be when they finish your course and provide them up front with additional resources.

Tier One

- What is the purpose of your course? Where can students find out? *QMRS1*
- Does the syllabus use HTML or an accessible PDF or Word format? *QMRS2*
- Is the ADA statement included in the course materials? *QMRS2*
- Have you included a link to technical support? *QMRS7*
- Are the course policies on accessibility and academic support listed in the course? *QMRS7*

Tier Two

- Are your course competencies stated and measurable? *QMRS2*
- In addition to the course-level competencies, have you included module-level objectives? *QMRS2*
- Will students know which competency an assessment targets? How can they tell? *QMRS2*

Tier Three

- Are the module-level objectives student-friendly and measurable? *QMRS2*
- Can students tell which learning activities support which objectives? *QMRS2*

Determine evidence - your assessment of student learning

Tier One

- Will students know how they are being graded on each assignment? *QMRS3*
- Are students provided with specific and descriptive criteria for their assignment expectations? *QMRS3*

Tier Two

- Is each objective assessed through multiple means? *QMRS3*
- Do you have a variety of assessments available for students to show mastery? *QMRS3*

Design activities - your students' experience

Remember that in an online course, students are mostly operating independently without the direct support of face-to-face meetings. Ensure their first experience and ongoing interaction with you and the course is positive.

Tier One

- When students enter your course, will they know right away how to get started? *QMRS1*
- Do you explain the structure of the course to students before they begin? *QMRS1*
- Are the materials accessible and usable by students (see online design factors)? *QMRS4*

Tier Two

- Are alternate methods available for learning activity and assessment expectations? *QMRS5*
- Will students know what to expect from you in terms of interaction in the course? *QMRS5*
- Do the tools utilized in your course directly support competency attainment? *QMRS6*

Tier Three


- Are there learning activities that encourage students to interact with content/each other? QMRS5
- Have the course competencies been divided into short segments, and are these segments sequenced to support the building of understanding? QMRS5
- Are students expected to use the course tools specifically to engage with the content? QMRS6

UDL Resources

For more information about UDL visit the following resources:

- CELT's Quality Matters at Iowa State University webpage (<http://bit.ly/iowaStateQM>),
- CELT's Ten Tips for Creating Accessible Course Content webpage (<http://bit.ly/CELT10Tips>),
- The University of Minnesota's Accessible U website (<https://accessibility.umn.edu/>), and/or
- The Accessibility University of Montana website (<https://www.umn.edu/accessibility/>).

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