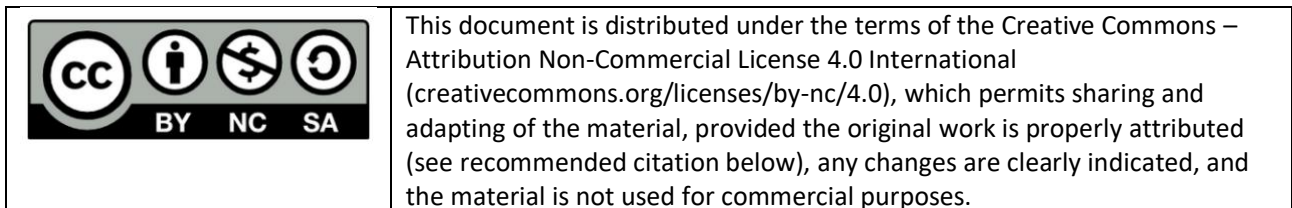


## Guiding Principles of Blended and Online Course Design



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## Guiding Principles of Blended and Online Course Design

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The following principles have been curated from current research and scholarship about effective blended and online course design. This is a working document that is intended to spark conversation about blended and online learning and introduce practical strategies for consideration as educators design quality online learning experiences. It is meant to be shared, adopted, and adapted for utility in diverse contexts and disciplines.

We have organized these principles alphabetically and believe that each principle will hold different weight for each person who reads this document. We invite readers to adapt these principles for use in their context and re-order the principles according to their need or preference. Below, we present each principle with a summary of aspects. In the next section, we present examples of how each aspect may show up in a blended or online learning environment.

**Accessibility:** Choose learning technologies, tools and learning materials that are available to students at no cost or through the institution, wherever possible; conduct regular “technology audits” to ensure accessibility to tools and content; provide multiple pathways for communication between students and the instructional team.

**Alignment:** Intentionally connect learning outcomes, activities, and assessments; select technologies and tools that are suited for the course activities and content; sequence and offer multiple opportunities for learning, application, and skills development.

**Balance:** Develop a course roadmap that shows students how the learning activities and assessments are connected and when they will be completed; use an even distribution of learning activities and assessments throughout the course; incorporate a variety of asynchronous and synchronous learning activities that provide opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate their learning in the course.

**Engagement:** Create collaborative activities that encourage active learning, reflection, interaction, and peer-to-peer learning, support, community-building, and feedback; ensure that members of the instructional team are regularly present and active in the course; engage and involve students in their learning so that they can practice, synthesize, make meaning of and construct knowledge for themselves.

**Equity:** Incorporate multimedia content that creates various modes of engagement, representation, and expression of learning; anticipate and reduce potential barriers for limited access; provide access to technological, learning, and wellness supports and resources; create transparent assessment practices and criteria that promote fairness.

**Flexibility:** Consider course structures that allow for flexible deadlines, extensions or changes as needed; offer students a choice in learning activities and/or assessments; promote learning continuity through the

use of institutionally-supported learning technologies that allow for adaptable course design during times of disruption.

**Inclusivity:** Include intercultural examples and content; identify resources and materials that represent diverse voices; recognize and incorporate diverse ways of knowing and learning into activities and assessments; co-create norms for course participation and engagement that promote a sense of belonging for all members of the learning community.

**Integrity:** In collaboration with students, set clear expectations for engagement and interaction within the learning environment; provide clear guidelines about group and individual activities and assessments; proactively engage students in conversations about academic integrity in the context of the course modality, discipline, and institution.

**Relevance:** Promote student-centered learning by incorporating activities and assessments that are relevant to students' lives and academic development and authentic to the discipline; provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to 'real-world' situations and contexts; build upon pre-requisite knowledge, prior learning experiences, and skills to increase the visibility of student capacity, autonomy, and agency for their learning experience.

### Principles in Practice

Many of these principles transcend learning modalities and can be applied in face-to-face, blended, and online learning contexts. In this document, we have compiled practice examples based upon the various aspects of each principle in blended and online learning environments. These examples are by no means comprehensive or representative of all teaching practices, experiences, or approaches related to blended and online learning. We invite readers to consider other examples of each principle and their associated aspects from their respective teaching practices. The implementation of these principles will vary by modality and discipline and may be broadly used in decision-making related to the design and delivery of high-quality blended and online courses.

## Accessibility

Choose learning technologies, tools and learning materials that are available to students at no cost or through the institution, wherever possible; conduct regular “technology audits” to ensure accessibility to tools and content; provide multiple pathways for communication between students and the instructional team.

### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Selecting technologies and materials	Provide students with tutorials and guides that explain how to use the learning technologies that you have chosen for the course.  Suggest when working in groups that students discuss with peers and select technologies that will work for all members of the group.
Technology audits	Periodically check digital content and resources to ensure that links are active and accessible. Check-in with students to see if additional supports are needed.
Pathways of communication	Have members of the teaching team sign on to Zoom 15 minutes before or after synchronous sessions to answer questions and connect with students. Arrange optional drop-in sessions or virtual office hours.

## Alignment

Intentionally connect learning outcomes, activities, and assessments; select technologies and tools that are suited for the course activities and content; sequence and offer multiple opportunities for learning, application, and skills development.

### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Connect course learning outcomes to activities and assessments	Post module learning outcomes for each module in the course. Share learning outcomes at the start of synchronous sessions.
Suitable technologies and tools	Organize the D2L course logically by breaking into chunks or modules and use LMS-based tools to facilitate ease of navigation and completion of activities and assessments.
Multiple modes of engagement	Use a variety of content delivery methods such as articles, short videos, and graphics that provide multiple options for students to access content online.

	Plan synchronous sessions that promote dialogue and interaction among the instructor, peers, and invited guests.
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## Balance

Develop a course roadmap that shows students how the learning activities and assessments are connected and when they will be completed; use an even distribution of learning activities and assessments throughout the course; incorporate a variety of asynchronous and synchronous learning activities that provide opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate their learning in the course.

### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Roadmap	Use the checklist feature in D2L to let students know what learning activities and assessments need to be completed each week in the course. Organize course content or discussion forums in D2L by weekly topics.
Even distribution	If there are larger assignments in the course, consider splitting them into stages so students keep up with the course (cumulative or layered assignments).
Practice	Put practice quizzes in D2L for students to practice questions and develop skills before the exam-based assessments. During a synchronous session divide students into break out rooms to discuss/critique examples. Post examples in D2L content (with permission from previous students).

## Engagement

Create collaborative activities that encourage active learning, reflection, interaction, and peer-to-peer learning, support, community-building, and feedback; ensure that members of the instructional team are regularly present and active in the course; engage and involve students in their learning so that they can practice, synthesize, make meaning of and construct knowledge for themselves.

### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Collaborative learning	Leverage online discussions for asynchronous group work and use break-out rooms during synchronous sessions to provide students with time to work in small groups. Check-in with small groups to provide support.
Be present	Be active and present in the course by participating in asynchronous online discussions, synchronous sessions, sending out weekly updates and reminders, posting video messages in the News Tool in D2L, and providing timely feedback on assessments and activities.
Provide feedback	Create D2L rubrics and post assignment instructions early in the semester. Create a FAQ discussion in D2L to answer common questions. During Zoom sessions, use break-out rooms for students to provide each other peer feedback on their draft work. Offer students regular feedback on their work using audio and/or text (track changes, comments).

## Equity

Incorporate multimedia content that creates various modes of engagement, representation, and expression of learning; anticipate and reduce potential barriers for limited access; provide access to technological,

learning, and wellness supports and resources; create transparent assessment practices and criteria that promote fairness.

#### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Use of media	Post media requirements in the course outline to ensure students have access to course material and can engage in online sessions.
Reducing barriers	Remind students about assistive tools that can reduce barriers (e.g., text-to-speech, audio versions of articles).  Ensure that students are prepared to use learning technologies by allowing them to practice with learning activities.
Transparency	In the online course shell, provide exemplars from previous terms or templates that students can use to prepare for assessments. During a synchronous session, invite students to add comments, questions and make annotations on a copy of the course outline.

## Flexibility

Consider course structures that allow for flexible deadlines, extensions or changes as needed; offer students a choice in learning activities and/or assessments; promote learning continuity through the use of institutionally-supported learning technologies that allow for adaptable course delivery during times of disruption.

#### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Changes and adaptability	Communicate changes to deadlines or assessment details via multiple channels, such as the News tool in D2L and class-wide emails.
Student choice in activities and assessments	Provide students with the choice of format for an assignment or activity, such as writing a short paper, creating a website, or giving an oral or visual presentation.  Give students a choice of readings to complete based on their interests
Learning continuity	Plan for alternative modes of completing exams or submitting assignments should the need to pivot arise, such as using LMS submission features or identifying alternative pathways for accessing content in your course.

## Inclusivity

Include intercultural examples and content; identify resources and materials that represent diverse voices; recognize and incorporate diverse ways of knowing and learning into activities and assessments; co-create norms for course participation and engagement that promote a sense of belonging for all members of the learning community.

#### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Intercultural perspectives	At the beginning of the term, share where you are physically located and invite students to do the same so that content and discussions can be tailored and relevant to students' localized environments.

Diverse representation	Leverage Zoom and D2L to support guest presenters from other parts of the world to connect via Zoom, recorded video interview or in the D2L discussion to answer questions and engage with the students.
Co-creation of norms	Co-create a list of shared values and guidelines during the first synchronous session, review institutional zero-tolerance policies, and post the list where students will see regularly, such as the home page of D2L.

## Integrity

In collaboration with students, set clear expectations for engagement and interaction within the learning environment; provide clear guidelines about group and individual activities and assessments; proactively engage students in conversations about academic integrity in the context of the course modality, discipline, and institution.

### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Communicate expectations	Provide students with examples of academic integrity within your disciplinary context or exemplars from similar assessments in previous terms.
Guidelines for group and independent work	Create channels for peer-to-peer engagement that include members of the teaching team, such as a MS Teams chat where GATs can answer questions as they arise.
Discuss academic integrity	Post academic integrity statement in D2L and create a discussion topic where students can ask questions and the teaching team can provide answers.

## Relevance

Promote student-centered learning by incorporating activities and assessments that are relevant to students' lives and academic development and authentic to the discipline; provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to 'real-world' situations and contexts; build upon pre-requisite knowledge, prior learning experiences, and skills to increase the visibility of student capacity, autonomy, and agency for their learning experience.

### Principle in Practice

Aspect	Example
Student-centered learning	Have students map their learning goals to the outcomes of the course and facilitate an online discussion about shared learning goals within the class.
Practical application	Pair asynchronous learning with synchronous labs or sessions with peers and the teaching team to provide support and guidance. Provide students with agency to select appropriate media format to demonstrate learning and meet criteria for assignments.
Build upon existing knowledge	Create online peer-study groups where students facilitate discussions and/or lead in learning activities and share their expertise or background experiences.

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