

Blended Learning: Curriculum Design

Practice Guide



Your face-to-face teaching has more of an impact if you have designed your curriculum to make the most of what technology can offer.

Blended learning requires you to be purposeful in determining the learning experiences, **what should be attempted online by students without support, what should be attempted online with support, and what is best suited to face-to-face** (either on campus or through video conferencing).

This Practice Guide is based on a webinar run by the LTO, watch it [here](#). It focuses on the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, 2017), and empirically derived principles.

Definitions

It is helpful to be familiar with Technology Enhanced Learning Definitions, which you can find in the table of terms in the [Learning and Teaching Resources Catalogue](#). In addition, the term “**synchronous**” refers to a teaching session in which educators and students participate at the same time, either face-to-face or online. “**Asynchronous**” are experiences that happen when the educator and students are not in contact at the same time.

Planning your Curriculum

The steps you take in designing a blended learning curriculum for the first time are very similar to those for face-to-face learning. There are however a few important differences outlined in the table below.

FACE-TO-FACE	BLENDED/ONLINE
Constructive alignment	Constructive alignment
Timeline of topics (at its most basic)	Timeline of topics (at its most basic)
Classroom activities	Correct Blend
Student support often ad hoc, relying on happenstance	Student guidance and support must be explicitly planned
Assessments	Assessments

Although planning your assessments is a large part of curriculum planning, it is not addressed here.

It is also purposeful that the guide does not include constructive alignment. Suffice to say that your course should have a set of Intended Learning Outcomes, and the content, activities and assessments should all align to achieve these by the end of the course.

Course Timeline

At its most basic, your course will cover a series of topics that will help students achieve the learning outcomes.

Textbooks are designed this way, so to engage students it is important to think about offering students a lot more than what they can get from a textbook. Here are some reflective questions to guide your planning:

- How do topics relate to local conditions and circumstances in the field?
- How do topics relate to and build on each other?
- How can topics be applied in a workplace?

Blending Learning Activities

The blended approach really comes into its own when designing delivery of content. All content should be online, accessible, available in a variety of formats, described, and mapped to an activity or a number of activities.

Content

Even if you are planning to reinforce some content in synchronous sessions, it *all needs to be online* so that students can grapple with the content early, revisit it in class, and come back to it when revising.

Because the content is online, and students will access it when you are not there to guide them, you need to produce a guide to the content. It needs to let students know:

- Where to find the content
- What to do with the content, for instance: skim read it, watch it, then answer a quiz
- How much time to spend on it
- Where to find additional information if they want to know more
- What to do if they do not understand it
- How the content will be applied:
 - In synchronous sessions
 - In the assessment/s
 - In their professional life

Your content should be accessible, engaging, and broken into manageable chunks. Formats you could consider are:

- Video
- Narrated PowerPoint (basic how to video [here](#), text format [here](#) and more advanced video [here](#))
- Podcast (how to [here](#))
 - Consider interviewing colleagues, former students, and industry professionals for powerful podcasts
- Readings
 - Introduce each reading with a sentence or two on why students should read it and what you want them to know as a result
- External content. The Library has a section on Open Educational Resources that you can find [here](#).

Activities

All content should be associated with activities. This is done by:

- Including a description of the activity
- What the educator will do with it, for instance you will: read and reply to posts; use it for formative or diagnostic assessment; summarise discussions to introduce a class
- What the student should do with the activity when they encounter it online
- What the student will be doing with it in a synchronous session with peers (if anything, it will not always relate to the synchronous session), for instance
 - they will pool their knowledge,
 - the results of a quiz they take after reading/watching content will direct the choice of a problem to solve in class

Examples of activities include:

- Quizzes (information on Blackboard quizzes can be found in the Tests & Quizzes section of the LTO's [Assessment Resources web page](#))
- Games (such as [Kahoot](#), Family Feud)
- Discussions (such as responses to provocations)
- Reflections about their learning

- Assessment drafts
- Jigsaw peer teaching (where groups of students learn a small section of content, and teach it to other groups)
- Collaborative problem solving
- Case based analysis

Activities can take place individually outside of synchronous class, or collaboratively in class.

Make the most of synchronous learning by devoting time to collaborative activities, and activities which allow you as the educator to use formative assessment to make sure everyone is on track. You could consider more formally structuring the relationship between content and activity using the [Flipped Classroom approach](#).

Developing Community

This may seem like a strange thing to include in a guide to curriculum design, but if you embed it in your design, then it will be stronger and more authentic than if it is approached as an add-on.

Your students need to trust you and feel validated by you, so you need to build into your curriculum many opportunities for both formal and informal communication. Here are some techniques for doing that:

- Arrive early and stay late at synchronous sessions, if possible, and let students know that this is what you will be doing
- Set aside the first few minutes to check in with students about how they are doing
- Set aside half an hour in a synchronous session early in semester for team building and feedback practice
- Ask students what means of communication they will use with each other. This might be Facebook messenger, a WhatsApp group, or any of a range of social media. Some might even form their own face-to-face study groups.
 - You do not have to be a part of it, but make sure it is happening and that every student is included
- Use Microsoft Teams for document sharing and chat functions
- Make clear how students can communicate with you and in what timeframes you will respond.

Feedback Cycles

Embedding feedback cycles in your curriculum gives a wealth of benefits, including developing evaluative judgement in students (Boud et al., 2018) to showing you how to improve your course. You already know about giving feedback in assessments, but there should be many more opportunities built into your course (a webinar on a range of approaches can be found [here](#)).

Feedback cycles mean that not only do you give feedback to students, but they give feedback to each other, and they also give you feedback on your feedback and on their course experience. You then act on, or otherwise respond to that feedback, closing the loop.

Formative Assessment

In the face-to-face environment you are engaged in formative assessment a lot of the time without even realising it – watching students interact, listening to their conversations, answering questions, observing them performing tasks. You can still do all of that online, but you have to be deliberate about it. Here are some techniques for you to consider:

- Breakout rooms
 - Visit breakout rooms in an online session while students are working on a task is the closest opportunity for reproducing the informal formative assessment experience of a classroom
- Reflective journals (a short video on journals in Blackboard can be found [here](#)). Encourage students to record their learning journey by:
 - Asking them a question to be answered in their Blackboard Journal once or twice a week
 - Asking them to record the easiest and hardest points of the week
 - Awarding a small mark to a reflection that builds on their journal entries
- Encourage students to show you or each other plans for their assessment tasks.

Some other ideas can be found in the [Early Formative Assessment Practice Guide](#).

Student Feedback Literacy

Your students may not know how to seek, give and receive feedback in a professional manner, but it is an important characteristic of any professional. Early in the teaching period, check their feedback literacy and if it is low, plan to teach it explicitly. Allow them to practice it by giving them opportunities to give each other feedback on their work.

Pulse Checks

Between a third and halfway through your course, plan to give your students a quick survey, asking them what they like best about the course and what they think can be improved. You should make public the results of the feedback and, if practicable, apply it to your course so the students can benefit from their feedback.

Universal Design for Learning

Building your curriculum using the principles of Universal Design for Learning ensures a richer experience for all students. The LTO has developed a Practice Guide on this, you can find it [here](#).

Evaluating and Redeveloping

Once you have delivered your course and finished marking, you should evaluate it while it is still fresh in your mind so that improvements can be made for the next delivery.

Sources of information that will help you evaluate your course include:

- Student feedback
- Your own reflection
- Peer review
- Self-assessment templates (if you would like to use the ones below, please contact the [Learning and Teaching Office](#))
 - Teaching template
 - LMS Course Site review template

References

Boud, D., Ajjawi, R., Dawson, P., Tai, J. (2018). *Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education*. Routledge.

Garrison, D. R. (2017). *E-learning in the 21st century: a community of inquiry framework for research and practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.