

Guidelines for Digital Learning

Introduction

These guidelines apply to topics that have a digital component. In the Flinders University context this includes all topics delivered as part of our award courses and non-award courses. These guidelines will assist in developing topic sites to ensure that a level of consistency and quality is maintained in the learning environment. They will also assist in communicating expectations to staff and students.

Historically the University has had both the Web Presence in Every Topic (WebPET) and the FLO topic baseline which have gone some way to outline minimum expectations for tools, use and layout of the online learning environment. These new guidelines enhance and build upon and ultimately replace both WebPET and the FLO topic baseline.

Learning and teaching principles and effective pedagogic practices must drive topic design. Strategic and rigorous learning design informs topic design and use of digital tools. These guidelines are not intended to replace learning and teaching principles or purposeful curriculum design. Rather they are intended to complement and enhance topic design by providing a baseline of effective practice expectations for the online learning environment.

The university uses the following designations to define the use of digital learning at the topic level:

- **Online** - All topic resources, interaction, assessment and activities are available and conducted online. There is no requirement for in-person attendance on a Flinders campus.
- **Partial on campus** - Most topic resources, interaction, assessment and activities are available online. Some in-person attendance will be required to enhance learning outcomes.
- **On campus** - Requires in-person attendance on a Flinders campus. Some topic resources, interaction, assessment and activities are available online and are of a supplementary nature.

Where appropriate the implementation of guidelines will be embedded in new templates for supporting Flinders Learning Online.

The guidelines provide 9 key areas to address when providing a consistent quality digital experience for students. These guidelines can be used as a mechanism to assist with the development of topic sites, or as an aid to reviewing a topic site as part of a course review

process. These guidelines should also be used in conjunction with institutional guidelines for good practice and where these exist, links have been provided.

Key areas

1. Overall topic design
2. Topic overview, welcome and orientation
3. Learning Outcomes
4. Assessment and Feedback
5. Learning Resources
6. Learning Activities, Engagement and Learner Interaction
7. Technology and Online Tools
8. Support for Learning
9. Accessibility and Useability

1. Overall Topic Design

It is important for students to experience a level of consistency between topics as they progress through their course at the University. Consistency does not require every topic to be taught in the same way, rather that students are not required to adjust to a new navigation, structure or terminology within each online topic site. The guidelines below and the templates that are available in FLO, are designed to assist staff achieve a high level of consistency across topic sites.

| | Guidelines |
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| 1.1 | Students have access to topic sites in FLO that display evidence of alignment with the <u>learning and teaching principles</u> and good practice. |
| 1.2 | Students have access to topic sites in FLO that are consistent in visual and interactive design, language use, adhere to FLO templates and use built-in styling conventions. |
| 1.3 | Students are provided access to topic sites in FLO no later than 7 calendar days before the commencement of the topic, including resources and activities for the first 2 weeks and all assessment information (including Statement of Assessment Methods). |

2. Topic Overview, Welcome and Orientation

Meaningful and purposeful engagement with the online learning environment is key to student success at University. Ensuring each topic site has an appropriate welcome, orientation and induction to the environment is crucial. Students should be provided with information about the skills they will need or develop, the support available to them and how to engage with their topic in the online environment (Kelly, 2013). When students are better prepared for their online experience, this may also flow over into the long-term retention rates, particularly in online study (Jones, 2013).

| | Guidelines |
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| 2.1 | Students are provided with an online welcome by the topic coordinator and/or teaching team that includes a photo, video and/or audio. |
| 2.2 | Students are reminded of traditional owner connection to the land via an acknowledgement of country in every FLO topic site. |
| 2.3 | Students have access to all academic staff details, including role, contact details, communication channels, availability and response times. |
| 2.4 | Students have access to FLO support via the FLO topic. |
| 2.5 | Students have access to a topic overview which introduces the topic description, aims, expected learning outcomes and structure of the topic in FLO, which includes a link to approved, published topic information and Statement of Assessment Methods. |
| 2.6 | Students are provided with an online orientation to the topic, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and explicit participation expectations • a topic syllabus (study schedule / structure / overview / plan) that provides format and focus of sessions and a logical study path |
| 2.7 | Students have access to communication expectations and behaviour for online discussions, including preferred tools and mechanisms for staff to student and student to student communication. |
| 2.8 | Students can participate in synchronous online communication |
| 2.9 | Students have access to an online forum or social space to engage informally with staff and students |
| 2.10 | Students are made aware of any necessary skills, knowledge or resources (eg. academic integrity, scientific integrity, laboratory safety, evacuation, digital information literacy) needed for successful engagement with the topic, and information on what to do if they do not possess these. |
| 2.11 | Students are made aware of any specific software, hardware or connectivity items required to engage with the topic. |

3. Learning Outcomes

When designing a topic - creating learning activities and curating resources - it is important that these are aligned with the intended learning outcomes through constructive alignment (Biggs and Collis, 1982). This process ensures that the activities and resources are likely to lead students to achieving the specified learning outcomes.

| | Guidelines |
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| 3.1 | Students have access to topic learning outcomes in FLO (also see 2.5) |
| 3.2 | Students are provided with clear and explicit explanations in FLO of what the learning outcomes mean in practice and how these relate to the intended learning. |
| 3.3 | Students are provided with clear and explicit information in FLO about how all assessment items, learning activities and resources are linked to the learning outcomes (see 4.1 , 5.6 and 6.1) |

4. Assessment and Feedback

As per above it is critical to align topic activities and resources to learning outcomes. It is just as important to align assessment to resources, appropriate learning activities and learning outcomes. Expressing this alignment clearly to students will allow you to provide students with meaningful feedback that they can use to help them meet the objectives of the topic. Feedback is a key part of assessment for ongoing learning, indeed has been described as 'the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement' Hattie (1999). Feedback should be constructive, timely and meaningful.

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| 4.1 | Students are provided with explicit information in FLO on how assessments align to learning outcomes, graduate attributes and where appropriate, professional guidelines (see 3.3, 5.6 and 6.1). |
| 4.2 | Students have access to the <u>Statement of Assessment Methods</u> , plus clearly identified assessment-related activities and resources, information on assessment expectations, due dates, marking criteria and instruction for assignment submissions in FLO prior to submission. |
| 4.3 | All topic assessment decisions must conform with the Flinders University Assessment Policy and the <u>Flinders University Academic Integrity Policy</u> . |
| 4.4 | Students are provided with effective, useful, constructive and timely progression-focused feedback in FLO to allow them to improve the quality of their learning. |
| 4.5 | FLO is used to organise and scaffold activities and assessments so that students are supported to progressively develop their skills and understandings. |
| 4.6 | Students are provided with clear instructions in FLO on how and when text matching software will be used and how to interpret and use reports. |
| 4.7 | Students have explicit direction about expected referencing guidelines for their topics, as well as access to support resources via FLO to help them meet these guidelines |
| 4.8 | Students submit assessment and access grades/marks and feedback via FLO to support high quality and timely feedback. |
| 4.9 | Students have access to timely opportunities to discuss assessment tasks. |
| 4.10 | Assessment tasks will use University supported learning technologies (<u>core and recommended</u>). |

5. Learning Resources

It should be as easy as possible for our students to access the latest information that is aligned with their studies. Learning resources should be current, reflect the level of engagement and enough detail about their use to enable students to meet the learning outcomes. Students should be supported to be independent learners by providing them with carefully curated resources for further learning that encourages investigation beyond content covered by the required resources. Resources that are not required should be indicated by a further learning statement and made clear to students that they are not required for successful topic completion.

| | Guidelines |
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| 5.1 | Students are provided with clear and explicit information on required topic resources. |
| 5.2 | Students are provided with topic resources that meet academic integrity guidelines , cultural inclusivity guidelines and abide to copyright requirements |
| 5.3 | Students are provided with University managed digital resources, open educational resources or teacher-created resources to support relevant key concepts (more info). |
| 5.4 | Students will have access to a variety of types of learning resources. |
| 5.5 | Students can navigate topic resources using a logical progression and sequencing in FLO. |
| 5.6 | Topic resources in FLO align with activities students undertake, assessment and learning outcomes (see 3.3, 4.1 and 6.1) |
| 5.7 | Students have access to up to date, current and relevant topic content, resources and instruction materials in FLO that are appropriate for their level of study. |
| 5.8 | Students can engage with topic resources using a range of learning technologies, ensuring appropriate introduction to new technologies. |
| 5.9 | Students can identify between required resources and 'further learning' (e.g. recommended or supplementary) topic resources in FLO. |
| 5.10 | Lecture recordings should be used in partial on campus and online topics only if they have been specifically designed for an online audience. |
| 5.11 | Students have access to teacher-created and/or other educational videos designed to encourage engagement with topic concepts. |

6. Learning Activities, Engagement and Learner Interaction

Active learning can assist students develop higher order thinking and link knowledge to meaning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Gibbs, 1992; Hanson & Moser, 2003; Scheyvens et al, 2008). Evidence indicates that active learning approaches in online learning lead to successful outcomes for students (Zhan et al, 2011); impactful, purposeful, active online activities keep learners engaged, motivated, and participating (Salmon, 2013) and effective use of online tools can promote active learning (Cook & Babon, 2017).

| | Guidelines |
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| 6.1 | Students are provided with explicit advice in FLO on how all learning activities are genuinely connected to learning outcomes (see 3.3, 4.1 and 5.6). |
| 6.2 | Students are provided with authentic learning activities that provide interaction that support active learning approaches. |
| 6.3 | Students are provided with opportunities to engage in formative learning activities designed to scaffold learning towards assessment. |
| 6.4 | Students are provided with detailed learning activity instruction in FLO, including expectations of communication and participation between staff and students and among students, to guide and support successful activity completion. |
| 6.5 | Students are provided with online activities that are suitable to the mode of delivery. |
| 6.6 | Students are provided with opportunities in addition to SETs to provide feedback on topic design, teaching quality and student experience (more info). |
| 6.7 | Embed teaching notes (tutor guides, marking guides, tutorial guides) within FLO (hidden from students) are used to provide a consistent approach across a teaching team. |

7. Technology and Online Tools

Effective use of technology can play a valuable role in higher education by supporting and enhancing curriculum design and implementation. Supported tools available at present, and others to be included on FLO sites, will offer our students different learning experiences, (e.g. diverse modes of content delivery, multiple means of expression, engagement and representation). The use of learning technology supported by Flinders' will also achieve a higher level of consistency in the user experience and help staff to accommodate different student learning needs; enable student active and equal participation and break down common barriers to learning (Reisreis 2014). Using supported tools also makes it easier to track student activity; important as we evolve our use of learning analytics to inform how we improve learning experiences.

| | Guidelines |
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| 7.1 | The technology and tools used in the topic support the learning objectives and promote active learning. |
| 7.2 | All technology and tools used should promote and support the digital literacy of students. |
| 7.3 | The technology and tools used are up-to-date, readily available and accessible for all users. |
| 7.4 | Institutionally approved/supported technologies are used in the delivery of topics. Where it is appropriate that student work occurs using external non-supported platforms (eg. industry based technology), attention should be paid to legal and security issues and use may need to be made optional. |
| 7.5 | Use of external technology, tools and content provision systems will not require additional funding/purchase by students . |

8. Support for learning

Given the increasing diversity within our student cohorts, there is often a need to identify and indicate the institutional learning supports available to students to help them succeed. There is no need for teaching staff re-create this support where it already exists. Student support involves many areas, including professional teams, library teams, academic staff and in some cases student peer mentors.

| | Guidelines |
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| 8.1 | Students are provided with a location in FLO for posing topic related questions where teaching staff are actively participating and answering questions in a timely manner. |
| 8.2 | Students should be provided with a set of topic-related FAQs in FLO that are maintained and monitored by teaching staff. |
| 8.3 | Students are provided with a single location in FLO (preferably announcements) for important topic-related notices, updates and reminders for students. |
| 8.4 | Students are provided with links in FLO to technical support services for the learning technologies used in the topic. |
| 8.5 | Students are provided with a link in FLO to student-related policies. |
| 8.6 | Students are provided with links in FLO to student learning support services and all applicable student support services as listed on student services . |
| 8.7 | Students are directed to topic specific support resources (e.g. support for specific software, lab induction, placement requirements) in FLO in a consistent manner. |
| 8.8 | Students studying online are provided with information on how to access support services remotely. |

9. Accessibility and useability

Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others (Hockings, 2010). Providing accessible and useable resources benefits all students and takes account of personal and technological circumstances that diverse learners encounter on their learning journey.

| | Guidelines |
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| 9.1 | The online learning environment, learning resources and any additional learning technologies used, comply with accessibility legislation and guidelines . |
| 9.2 | Students have access to a range of formats in which materials are presented i.e. text, video, audio, multimedia. |
| 9.3 | Students are provided with multimedia-based materials that are accessible regardless of location, device or modality. |
| 9.4 | Students are provided with information on how to obtain course materials in alternative formats. |
| 9.5 | Students are provided with information to support participation in different time zones and geographical locations. |

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