Quality Course Review Rubric

8th Edition, Final Draft Approved January 2025

For all Examples that Meet Expectations, the items listed are not intended to be prescriptive but descriptive. The samples listed are not intended to be exhaustive; they should provide reviewers with ideas of how rubric items can be met.

Pillar 1: Student Experience

This pillar focuses on creating an organized, welcoming course environment in which students can be successful. It emphasizes comprehensive course orientation, clear policies, and consistent structure. Key elements include welcome materials, navigation guidance, academic policies, student support resources, transparent grading, logical organization, and predictable scheduling. The pillar ensures students can easily understand expectations and navigate course content with minimal cognitive load by maintaining consistent naming conventions and establishing predictable patterns in course delivery.

1. The instructor welcomes students and provides instructions on how to get started and navigate the course.

   The instructor provides welcome information that introduces students to the course. The welcome information may include a general course overview or a guide for students to explore the site and get started (including the location of course components like assignments and materials). There should be a clear indication of what students are expected to do first or how to get started on the course, as well as information about the overall structure and modality of the course.

   Special Considerations

   If the Canvas course site utilizes a third-party publisher instructional suite (e.g. publisher platforms like Pearson MyLabs), there should be clear instructions how to log in, links to support should students encounter any issues, and instructions on how to opt out if the materials, where applicable.

   Examples that Meet Expectations:

   Look for evidence of the above elements in the syllabus, a Start Here/Orientation Module, Announcements, or another place that is easy to find and open to students at the start of the course. Examples may include (but are not limited to):

   - An introduction message or welcome video posted on the Home Page, as an Announcement or in the initial Discussion.

- A Home Page or Announcement that directs or links students to where they should start in the course.
- A “scavenger hunt” or “syllabus quiz” that leads students through different parts of the course.
- An initial synchronous Zoom session that reviews the syllabus and/or course structure.

2. The course includes information about academic and course policies.

   This standard ensures that courses provide clear and comprehensive information about all relevant academic and course-specific policies, including at minimum academic integrity, but potentially also covering policies regarding the use of AI in coursework, exam proctoring, right to free expression, and other policies governing student academic activities within the course. This information helps set appropriate expectations for students and ensures they have the necessary guidance to succeed in the course. Providing details on add/drop/withdrawal deadlines, technology requirements, communication protocols, and other course-specific policies reduces common sources of student confusion and anxiety, enabling them to better plan their time, manage their workload, and meet instructor expectations.

   Specific information that must be included:
   - Academic Integrity/Honesty policy, including a link to the institution’s academic policy statement.

   Examples that Meet Expectations:

   Course policies examples:
   - Technology requirements, especially if specialized hardware or software is required for the course, or if completing work on a laptop/desktop is less complicated than on a mobile device.
   - Use of AI for course work and, if applicable, penalties for its use.

3. The course provides information that directs students to the campus-provided student resources.

   Each course must offer students access to information about Student Resources, Technology Support, University Disability/Accessibility Services, and Academic Support services through either the Support & Policies tab in Canvas or information included in the course (for example, in the syllabus, on a page within an introductory Module, or on the Canvas Home Page). Instructors can guide students to the Canvas Help icon in the global navigation menu by including a statement in the syllabus, mentioning it in a welcome or introduction video, or highlighting it within the modules.

See Connecting students with disability accommodations for links to sample syllabus statements for each UM System campus.

Specific information that should be included:

- Link to campus-specific disability/accessibility services website where students can find information and register for accommodations.
- Campus technical support links for example, the campus's Information Technology Services or Technology Support Center, publisher's technical support, and other third-party technical tools used, including Canvas Help links.
- Academic support resources, like the campus writing center, tutoring services, etc.
- Student resources for mental and physical wellness, residential life, bookstore, financial aid, career services, etc.

4. The course provides students with a clearly stated grading policy that is consistent throughout the course.

   Courses provide a clear, written statement that explains to students how grades are calculated. The points, percentages, and/or weights for each component of the course grade are clearly stated and consistent throughout the course. The total points listed in the syllabus should match the total points of all assignments and assessments in the Canvas site. If the course uses weighted grades, verify that the weight groups in the assignments area match the syllabus weights. The instructor's policy on late submission should clearly state if grades are reduced because of late submission and the amount of the reduction.

   Examples that Meet Expectations:

   - A grading scale that illustrates the points/percentages and that corresponds to each letter grade, including plus and minus letter grades, if applicable.
   - A breakdown of assessment groups (types/categories) and the corresponding point/percentage value in the overall course grade. For example:
     - Participation – 20% or 200 points total
     - Homework – 20% or 200 points total
     - Discussions – 20% or 200 points total
     - Exams – 40% or 400 points total
   - If applicable, a clear statement of the penalty applied for late submission of assignments.
   - Point/Percentage values in syllabus match the totals in Canvas Assignments/Grades areas.

5. The course is organized in a logical, consistent, and simple manner to facilitate navigation and support cognitive load.

   The course should be organized in a manner that logically guides the student through the course material, avoiding unnecessary steps and distractions. A consistent pattern of some sort should be present in the course organization. This consistent pattern reduces the cognitive load of locating information, allowing students to focus on learning more than navigating.

   Special Consideration:

   Occasionally a course will group all course elements by learning resource type (PowerPoints, articles, assignments, quizzes, etc. and ask students to go find the specific elements required for each week. While this is a consistent pattern, it creates an unnecessary burden on students, especially those with little online course experience. So long as students have a clear curation of requirements for a given week or session, this arrangement is acceptable. If students must locate required course elements scattered throughout the course site to complete the necessary work, this item is unmet.

   Examples that Meet Expectations:

   - A welcoming and informative homepage that clearly leads students to the natural starting point for the course.
   - Course content presented in chronological or topical order (most commonly in the Modules area of Canvas).
   - Modules throughout have similar structures with common elements presented in the same order. For example, each module could begin with an overview page followed by lecture pages/videos, readings, and assessments.
   - The content of the course is sequenced appropriately (e.g. an article that students must read before taking a quiz should appear before that quiz).
   - Consistent naming conventions for repeating activities and pages (e.g. “Chapter 1 Quiz,” “Chapter 2 Quiz,” etc.). Avoid inconsistent naming (e.g. “Chapter 1 Quiz,” “Periodic Table Quiz” (aka Chapter 2 Quiz), etc.).
   - Canvas Navigation Menu includes only items/elements necessary for the course. Items that do not serve a purpose in the course or areas students will not access (areas such as files and pages) should be hidden from the Settings > Navigation menu in Canvas.

6. The course provides a schedule of activities, including due dates for all assignments and start/stop dates for modules/units.

A schedule of activities provides students with a snapshot of how the course is organized over the semester and helps them better prioritize their time to work on the course. This can be achieved using the Canvas due date feature, but it is not mandatory to meet this item. If students have access to due dates from within the course site that are easily located, this item is met.

Consider including an estimate of the number of hours per week students will need to dedicate to meet course expectations. This provides students with a clear understanding of the time commitment required.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Clearly articulated due dates for completion of assessments (Discussions, Quizzes, Assignments, etc.) using the Canvas due date feature and/or interim/staggered deadlines for more involved projects.
- An overview of all course activities and corresponding deadlines in a course calendar or schedule. This may take the form of a table within the syllabus or a separate schedule document.
- Module/unit start/stop dates included in Module titles or in a separate schedule table or document.
- The Syllabus item in the Canvas navigation menu is activated and all assignments appear in the Course Summary.

7. Assignment due dates follow a pattern or rhythm.

The course shows a clear pattern of the course activities and their deadlines. A discernable pattern of times and days when course activities are due reduces the chances of students missing important assignments and helps them plan their time. This item is met if the deadlines used for similar assignments recur at the same time and day each week.

When setting assignment due dates, reflect on the typical student for the course. For example, consider at least one weekend day before assignment due dates for students to complete work. Online students are often non-traditional students with full-time jobs and children. Activities that open at 9:00 AM on a Monday and are due at 4:00 PM on that Friday can create unnecessary obstacles for some students.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- A discussion board included in each module or in every other module with initial posts due at the same time and on the same day of each given week. Replies to the initial posts are due at the same time and date to follow. For example:
    - Initial posts are due by 11:59 PM CT on Wednesdays
    - Peer reply posts are due by 11:59 PM CT on Sundays.

- Each module has an assignment due at the same time of day on the same day of the corresponding weeks. For example: every week there is a Quiz due on Friday by 11:59 pm.
- Any activities that violate that pattern are clearly signaled to students.

Pillar 2: Interaction and Engagement

This pillar establishes frameworks for meaningful interaction between instructor and students, as well as peer-to-peer engagement. It emphasizes creating community through instructor presence, clear communication protocols, and collaborative opportunities. Key requirements include instructor introduction and contact information, explicit communication expectations, student introductions, and planned engagement strategies. The pillar ensures regular instructor interaction while fostering a collaborative learning environment.

8. The instructor provides contact information and introduces themselves to students.

   Providing contact details, a brief bio, and an introduction helps make the instructor more accessible and approachable. The instructor's introduction should go beyond just listing qualifications to include elements like their teaching philosophy, relevant experiences, and interests. This gives students a well-rounded sense of who the instructor is.

   Instructors should also specify their preferred communication channels. Delivering this information through formats like video, written bio, or welcome message can make it more engaging. Regular check-ins and reintroductions, especially in larger classes, can reinforce the instructor's presence.

   Examples that Meet Expectations:

   - An introductory video where the instructor shares their background, teaching approach, and preferred communication methods.
   - A detailed instructor bio page with contact info, office hours, and personal anecdotes.
   - A welcome message outlining the instructor's role and inviting students to reach out.
   - Creating an “Introduce Yourself” discussion and the instructor participates as students do.

9. The course includes online participation and communication expectations for students.

   Clearly defining participation as well as communication guidelines (otherwise known as “netiquette”) helps set appropriate expectations for both students and the instructor. This includes outlining expectations around response times,

communication channels, discussion etiquette, possible responses to inappropriate conduct, and evaluation considerations.

Establishing these norms upfront allows students to plan their time and approach. If participation or course communication is evaluated as part of the class (e.g., the course contains graded discussion assignments, graded online group work, a “participation” grade, etc.) participation guidelines should explain how online behaviors will be assessed, providing clear criteria for success.

Reinforcing expectations through reminders and modeling desired behaviors helps ensure students remain accountable to the protocols.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- A dedicated course policies (“netiquette”) section that outlines the instructor's expectations for respectful online discussion participation, group collaboration, and emails/messages.
- A participation rubric that details how the quality and frequency of students' online contributions, such as discussion posts and peer feedback, will be evaluated.
- A course overview video where the instructor walks through best practices for effective virtual communication, including tips for leveraging different channels (e.g., email, messaging, video conferencing).
- Periodic announcements or check-in activities that reinforce the participation expectations and provide opportunities for students to reflect on how well they are meeting the standards.

10. The instructor provides a clearly stated plan for providing feedback on assignments and communicating with learners.

    The instructor should outline details on feedback timelines, office hour availability, and communication. This helps set appropriate expectations and lets students know how long to wait before they should follow up with the instructor.

    The feedback communication plan could be communicated through multiple channels, such as the course syllabus, an introductory video or announcement, and potentially a dedicated "How to Succeed" module. By providing this information upfront, students can better understand the instructor's approach and integrate the various touchpoints into their own learning strategies.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - A detailed course syllabus that specifies the instructor's communication policy, feedback turnaround times, and a course calendar highlighting scheduled synchronous sessions and office hours.

- An introductory video where the instructor explains their overall engagement approach, encourages students to reach out with questions or concerns, and provides an overview of the various ways they will interact with the class.
- A dedicated "Instructor Engagement" module or page within the course that compiles all the relevant information about communication protocols, feedback timelines, and opportunities for one-on-one support.

11. Students have the opportunity to introduce themselves to one another.

    Student introductions foster a sense of community and help build meaningful connections, especially in online or hybrid courses where interpersonal interactions may be more limited. This gives students a chance to share relevant background information, interests, and goals, humanizing them beyond just being names on a roster.

    Student introductions can take many forms, from asynchronous discussion forums to synchronous virtual sessions. The specific format should be chosen to best suit the size and nature of the course. Regardless of the approach, the introduction activity should encourage students to share not only factual information, but also personal anecdotes, unique perspectives, or insights related to the course content. This helps instructors and peers alike get a well-rounded sense of each individual's experiences and motivations for taking the class.

    Special Considerations
    While student introductions are generally valuable, there may be exceptions, such as in cohort-based courses where students have already established relationships. In these cases, the focus could shift to having students highlight new interests, skills, or experiences relevant to the current course, rather than repeating basic biographical details.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - An icebreaker discussion forum where students post a brief bio, photo, and fun fact about themselves, as well as their goals and expectations for the course.
    - A synchronous virtual session dedicated to student introductions during the first week of the term, where everyone shares a short presentation about their background and interests.
    - A self-introduction assignment that asks students to create a video, written profile, or digital poster to share with the class, highlighting both personal and academic/professional details.

12. The course includes evidence or a plan for regular and substantive instructor interaction.

Consistent instructor presence and interaction are crucial for maintaining student motivation, creating a sense of community, and ensuring that students receive timely support. This could include a mix of both synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for engagement.

Synchronous interactions, such as live video sessions or discussion forums, allow for real-time dialogue and the development of personal connections. These touchpoints give instructors the chance to provide immediate feedback, clarify concepts, and model effective communication and problem-solving.

Asynchronous interactions, including announcements, personalized emails, and feedback on assignments, demonstrate the instructor's ongoing involvement and investment in student success. These interactions can be structured to provide both practical guidance and motivational encouragement.

By outlining a clear plan for regular and meaningful instructor interaction, the course signals to students that the instructor is an active, accessible, and supportive presence. This can address feelings of isolation that are common in online and hybrid learning environments.

The specific frequency and format of these interactions will depend on factors like course size, subject matter, and modality. However, the overall engagement strategy should be intentionally designed to meet the needs of the students and support their progress toward the stated learning objectives.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Weekly live Q&A sessions or discussion forums where the instructor actively participates, responds to student questions, and provides clarification on challenging concepts.
- Personalized email or video announcements from the instructor, delivered at regular intervals, that provide meaningful updates, insights, and encouragement. For example, summaries of key topics, highlights of upcoming assignments, prompt reflections on recent discussions, or offer additional resources to enhance learning.
- Dedicated one-on-one meetings or virtual office hours that students can schedule to receive individualized support and feedback.
- Timely, substantive instructor comments and annotations on student assignments, projects, and other work products. If students lose points, they should see an explanation as to why.

13. Students have the opportunity to interact with one another throughout the course.

Fostering peer-to-peer interaction enhances the learning experience and helps build a sense of community. Providing opportunities for collaboration, discussion, and social connection should be intentionally integrated throughout the course design.

These peer-to-peer interactions can take many forms, from formal group projects to informal social activities. Structured discussions, where students are required to engage with each other's ideas and perspectives, help develop critical thinking and communication skills. Collaborative assignments that involve planning, research, and the synthesis of diverse viewpoints simulate real-world teamwork.

More informal social interactions, such as virtual study halls or affinity group meetups, allow students to build relationships and support networks beyond just the course content. These types of activities can help mitigate feelings of isolation and promote a greater sense of belonging within the learning community.

In many open discussions and forums, students will respond to questions faster than faculty. By providing a space for students to answer each other’s questions, students gain agency over their own learning and can participate more actively with the course, and it reduces the number of emails the instructor needs to field.

Instructors should carefully consider the appropriate frequency, format, and facilitation of these peer interactions based on the course objectives, class size, and modality. Clear guidelines and expectations for participation, as well as instructor monitoring and feedback, can help ensure the interactions are meaningful and productive.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Authentic group projects or activities that require students to work together synchronously or asynchronously to complete a shared task or deliverable.
- Discussion forums structured to encourage active dialogue, with specific prompts that elicit diverse perspectives and encourage students to build on each other's ideas.
- Virtual social events or informal study halls where students can connect with their peers outside of the formal course content.
- Opportunities for students to provide peer feedback on assignments or presentations, either through structured review sessions or open-ended discussions.
- Student-led presentations, panels, or demonstrations that allow students to share their expertise and insights with the class.
- A Q&A or other open discussion that’s always available and anyone can post to.

Pillar 3: Course Alignment

This pillar ensures cohesive alignment between course objectives, module objectives, assessments, and instructional materials. It requires clearly measurable learning objectives at both course and module levels, with assessments and materials purposefully selected to support these objectives. The pillar emphasizes structured progression through course content, combining formative and summative assessments with clear grading criteria. Key elements include varied instructional materials that accommodate different learning styles, scaffolded assessments that build toward larger course goals, and consistent feedback opportunities that support student success.

14. The course-level learning objectives are measurable.

    Measurable course-level objectives serve as the foundation for the entire course (assessment plan, instructional materials and narrative, technology, etc.) and should clearly articulate what students will be able to do after completing the course. Measurable objectives use specific, observable action verbs that allow both instructors and students to determine whether the relevant learning has occurred. This means replacing vague verbs like "understand," "know," or "learn" with more precise actions such as "analyze," "evaluate," "create," "compare," "calculate," or "design."

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - Students will **analyze** the major economic factors contributing to the Great Depression using primary and secondary sources.
    - Students will **design** a marketing campaign using social media platforms to achieve specific audience engagement metrics.
    - Students will **evaluate** statistical methods for their appropriateness in different research scenarios based on data characteristics and research questions.

    Special Consideration
    Some courses have mandated course-level outcomes and can’t change them under any circumstances. If course-level outcomes are not measurable, continue to mark this item as Not Met to draw attention to it.

15. The course contains module-level learning objectives that are measurable and align with the course-level learning objectives.

    Module-level objectives break down course-level objectives into manageable, sequential learning chunks. Each module objective should represent a specific stepping stone toward achieving the broader course objectives. This alignment creates a clear learning pathway where each module builds upon previous learning

while moving students toward mastery of course-level objectives. Module objectives should maintain the same measurability standard as course objectives while being more specific in their focus.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

Course Objective: Evaluate statistical methods for research.

Module 1 Objectives:

- Calculate and interpret measures of central tendency and dispersion from dataset samples.
- Select appropriate descriptive statistics based on data type and research questions.

Module 2 Objectives:

- Determine appropriate hypothesis testing methods based on data characteristics.
- Execute hypothesis tests using statistical software.

Module 3 Objectives:

- Conduct regression analyses using real-world datasets.
- Interpret regression outputs to make evidence-based recommendations.

16. Formative and summative assessments measure the stated learning objectives.

    Each assessment in the course should directly evaluate students' achievement of specific learning objectives. If the objective states students will be able to perform a task, the assessment should be the performance of that task. Formative assessments (ongoing, low-stakes) and summative assessments (final, high-stakes) should work together to provide a complete picture of student achievement. The assessment method should match the complexity level and type of learning described in the objective. Alignment between the assessments and learning objectives can be explicit or implicit in the course design.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    Objective: Design a marketing campaign.

    - Formative Assessments:
        - Weekly blog posts analyzing existing campaigns' strengths and weaknesses.
        - Peer review sessions of campaign components.
        - Draft submissions with instructor feedback.
    - Summative Assessment:

    - Final project creating an original campaign with documented research, strategy, and metrics.

Objective: Analyze economic factors.

- Formative Assessments:
    - Discussion posts examining individual economic indicators.
    - Case study analyses of historical economic events.
    - Practice data analysis exercises.
- Summative Assessment:
    - Research paper analyzing multiple economic factors with data support.

17. The purpose and instructions for each assessment are clearly stated.

    Instructions should be specific enough that students can proceed confidently without having to ask basic clarifying questions. This can include addressing format, length, citation requirements, submission procedures, and any specific elements that must be included.

    By explaining the purpose of an activity or assessment and how it feeds into the overall strategy of the course, the work becomes meaningful and not busy work. The more invested students are in the activities, the more interesting the results and the more engaged they become with the course material.

    Special Considerations
    Some courses may include assessments that require students to provide citations. The requirement for preferred citation format may vary from course to course and instructor to instructor. If the course uses these types of assessments, look for the citation format required to be stated in the syllabus, instructions for the paper/assessment, a rubric, or anywhere else in the course site.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    Purpose: This data visualization assignment helps you develop skills in representing statistical information visually while demonstrating your understanding of which charts are most appropriate for different types of data. These skills directly support our course objective of “communicating statistical findings effectively to diverse audiences.”

    Instructions:

    Create a 5-minute video presentation including:
    - At least three different types of graphs representing your dataset
    - Verbal explanation of why each visualization type was chosen
    - Analysis of the patterns shown in each visualization

- Discussion of how these visualizations support your research conclusions

Technical Requirements:

- Submit as MP4 file through the assignment portal
- Include accurate citations for all data sources
- Ensure all text in visualizations is readable
- Maximum file size: 200MB

18. Formative assessments are organized in a way that helps students track their progress throughout the course and prepares them for successful completion of summative assessments.

    Students should be able to encounter the course material on their own terms and test their own understanding of it before they attempt a high-stakes assessment. Formative assessments should create a scaffolded learning experience where each assessment builds upon previous ones while preparing students for upcoming summative assessments. This requires careful sequencing of assessments, with each one introducing or reinforcing specific skills and knowledge needed for success in the course. Formative assessments should include regular feedback opportunities and allow students to practice without severe grade penalties.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - Weekly quizzes that cover incremental content with immediate feedback.
    - Draft submissions with structured peer review before final paper.
    - Progressive project components with instructor feedback at each stage.
    - Practice problems with automated feedback before major exams.
    - Discussion posts that build analytical skills needed for final projects.
    - Self-assessment opportunities with reflection prompts.
    - Submit an artifact, receive feedback, and resubmit it for regrading.

19. Grading criteria for each assessment are clearly explained and provided to students before submission.

    Grading criteria should be comprehensive, specific, and available when assignments are first introduced. This can include detailed rubrics that break down each component of the assessment and describe different levels of performance. Criteria should be written in student-friendly language and include both technical and content-related expectations. When appropriate, examples or models of work at different quality levels could be provided. If students can lose points for any reason, those reasons should be outlined and available prior to submission.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Detailed rubric with specific descriptors for each performance level.
- Point breakdown showing relative importance of different components.
- Annotated examples showing work at different quality levels.
- Clear description of common pitfalls to avoid.
- Specific technical requirements with point values.
- Feedback and opportunities for resubmission.

20. Instructional materials align with the stated learning objectives.

    Each instructional material in the course should have a clear purpose in supporting specific learning objectives. This means carefully selecting materials that not only cover the relevant content but present it at the appropriate level and in a way that supports the type of learning required by the objectives. Materials should be directly applicable to the skills and knowledge students need to develop.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    Objective: Apply appropriate statistical methods to research questions.
    - Textbook chapters covering different statistical concepts, formulas, and procedures.
    - Interactive data analysis software tutorials demonstrating how to correctly run various statistical tests.
    - Case studies presenting real research scenarios and guiding students through the statistical decision-making process.
    - Practice problem sets requiring students to select and execute the right statistical techniques based on data characteristics.

    Objective: Analyze the major factors contributing to the Great Depression.
    - Primary source readings from government reports, newspaper articles, and personal accounts of the time.
    - Documentary videos that examine the economic, social, and political conditions leading up to the Great Depression.
    - Historical case studies tracing the chain of events and decisions that precipitated the economic collapse.
    - Data visualizations (e.g. charts, graphs) showing key economic indicators before, during, and after the Depression.

21. A variety of types of instructional materials are used throughout the course (e.g., textbook, websites, articles, videos, interactives, simulations, etc.).

    Courses should incorporate multiple types of learning materials that work together to create a comprehensive learning experience. This variety should be purposeful, with each type of material chosen for its effectiveness in supporting specific learning

objectives. Materials should accommodate different learning preferences while maintaining consistency in content and quality. The mix should include both passive (reading, watching) and active (doing, creating) learning opportunities.

Special Considerations
When providing academic articles and other learning materials that are found using library services, provide students with a permalink (a link to a resource that routes through institutional nodes) to the materials instead of providing them a PDF or file download. Doing so makes more accessible versions of the material available to the student and helps university departments and libraries determine which databases and services are regularly used and should be retained.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Combination of text-based and multimedia content.
- Mix of theoretical readings and practical applications.
- Interactive simulations and static content.
- Both individual and collaborative learning activities.
- Multiple formats for similar content (text + video + audio).
- Integration of real-world examples through various media.
- Combination of instructor-created and curated materials.

22. The course technology supports the stated learning objectives.

Course technology should be strategically selected and implemented to directly support the achievement of learning objectives. This means that any technological tools, platforms, or resources used in the course should have a clear, intentional purpose that aligns with the specific skills and knowledge students are expected to develop.

Technology selection should consider both the pedagogical goals and the practical usability for students. Instructors should carefully evaluate whether the chosen technologies truly enhance learning, provide meaningful interactions, or help students demonstrate their understanding of course content.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Using data visualization software in a statistics course to help students practice analyzing and interpreting complex datasets.
- Implementing virtual lab simulations in a science course to provide hands-on experience when physical labs are not possible.
- Utilizing collaborative writing platforms that support peer review and group project development.
- Selecting learning management system tools that align with specific course assessment and interaction requirements.

- Requiring an industry-specific tool for an activity.

Pillar 4: Accessibility & Technology Support

This pillar ensures courses are technically sound and accessible to all students. It requires universal accessibility through proper formatting and design. Key elements include multimedia transcripts/captions, image alternative text, proper heading structure, accessible tables, high contrast colors, and meaningful hyperlinks. The pillar also requires transparency regarding third-party tools, including documentation about purpose, privacy, and support features.

23. Audio recordings and videos have transcripts and/or captions available for students.

    Providing transcripts and captions for all audio and video content ensures accessibility for all students, including those with hearing impairments, learning differences, or those who prefer reading to listening. Transcripts and captions serve multiple purposes beyond accessibility. They can help students with comprehension, allow for easy review of content, and support learning in environments where audio cannot be played. The transcripts should be accurate, well-formatted, and include relevant audio descriptions.

    Accessibility skills: Captions and transcripts explains how captions and transcripts support student learning and provides instructions for adding and/or editing them in Panopto, VoiceThread, and YouTube.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - Fully accurate transcripts for all lecture videos that capture spoken content and important audio cues.
    - Closed captions that sync precisely with video content.
    - Transcripts that include speaker identification and description of significant audio elements.
    - Providing both transcript and caption options to accommodate different user preferences.

24. Images used in any course materials contain alternative text.

    Alternative text (alt text) provides a textual description of images, making visual content accessible to students using screen readers or experiencing technical issues that prevent image loading.

    Alt text should be concise yet descriptive, conveying the essential information or purpose of the image. Images that do not contribute to understanding can be marked as decorative, but this must not be done just for the sake of passing an accessibility check.

See Accessibility Skills: Images and Alternative Text to learn more about what alternative text is, how it supports visually impaired students, and how to provide alternative text in Word, PowerPoint, PDF, and Canvas.

Special Considerations
For courses that include equations, see Accessibility skills: Equations to learn how to ensure that equations are accessible to anyone using assistive technology.

Note not all PDFs are formatted the same way. Some are scans of documents, and these are not readable by screen reading software and are in no way accessible. Be on the lookout for those.

As a rule, active links to library resources are preferred to scans or copies of articles. Libraries use the view counts on articles to determine which databases to subscribe to, so any view counts based on resources used in a course are crucial to those services.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- A chart showing economic trends with alt text like "Line graph displaying GDP growth from 2010 to 2020, showing a steady increase with a sharp decline in 2020."
- A diagram of a biological process with detailed, step-by-step long description.
- Null alt text for purely decorative images that don't contribute to course content.
- A PDF that can find specific words using the Find Text tool.

25. Headings and lists are used to format content where appropriate and are structured correctly.

    Proper heading and list structure is crucial for both visual organization and accessibility. Headings should create a logical document outline, with levels used sequentially and hierarchically. Skipping heading levels (e.g., jumping from H1 to H3) can create confusion for screen reader users and disrupt the content's logical flow.

    Lists should be used to group related items and improve readability. Both ordered and unordered lists should be used appropriately to help students quickly understand grouped information.

    See Accessibility skills: Headings to learn how correctly structured and nested headings support accessibility and see Accessibility skills: Lists to learn how to create accessible lists.

Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Using H1 for main page title (this is the default in Canvas), H2 for major sections, H3 for subsections.
- Avoiding skipped heading levels (e.g., H1 → H3 is incorrect).
- Creating nested lists that show clear relationships between items.
- Using lists to break down complex instructions or summarize key points.
- *Not* just using numbers or asterisks to designate lists but instead using the list features in Word, PowerPoint, Canvas, etc.

26. Tables contain defined header cells and do not contain split or merged cells.

    Tables must be designed with screen readers and keyboard navigation in mind. This includes defining the header cells in the table and avoiding the use of merged or split cells. The structure should make sense both visually and when navigated sequentially.

    See Accessibility skills: Tables to learn more and how to make accessible tables in Microsoft Office applications and Canvas.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - Data tables with clear, descriptive columns and/or row headers.
    - Tables that can be understood when navigating cell by cell with a keyboard.
    - Avoiding complex table layouts that require merged or split cells.
    - Using table summaries or captions to provide additional context.

27. The course uses high contrast color combinations and avoids using color alone for emphasis.

    Color choices should ensure readability and accessibility for all users, including those with visual impairments or color blindness. This means using color combinations with sufficient contrast and not relying on color alone to convey important information.

    Color schemes that are both aesthetically pleasing and functionally accessible are ideal. Additional visual cues should supplement color-based information.

    See Accessibility skills: Color to learn how to use color in ways that do not present barriers for students with visual impairments.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

- Color schemes that meet WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) contrast ratios.
- Using patterns or text labels in addition to color to distinguish information.
- Avoiding color combinations that may be difficult for color-blind users to distinguish.

28. Hyperlinks are descriptive and meaningful, avoiding the use of plain URLs or vague text such as “click here.”

    Hyperlink text should clearly indicate the destination or purpose of the link, rather than using generic phrases like "click here" or displaying raw URLs. Descriptive links help all users, especially those using screen readers, understand where a link will take them.

    Links should be meaningful when read out of context and provide clear information about their destination or purpose.

    See Accessibility skills: Descriptive links to learn how to create descriptive link text.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - Instead of "Click here to view the assignment,” use "View Week 3 Writing Assignment Guidelines."
    - Avoiding generic link texts like "link" or full URL displays.
    - Ensuring links provide clear context about their destination; for example, linking the title of a journal article within a citation.

29. The course provides the purpose, privacy policy, support and accessibility documentation for any third-party tool for which students must create a separate account.

    When courses require students to use external tools that necessitate creating separate accounts, comprehensive documentation should be provided. This includes clear information about the tool's purpose, privacy policy, and how it relates to course learning objectives.

    Students should have all necessary information to make informed decisions about using the tool and understand how it supports their learning.

    Examples that Meet Expectations:

    - Detailed guide explaining why a specific third-party tool is required.
    - Clear links to the tool's privacy policy.
    - Student-facing instructions for account creation and tool usage.

- Information about data collection and student privacy protections.