

Course Design Style Guide for Instructors

Introduction

The Course Design Style Guide is to be used when designing or revising courses in the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). It is a set of standards for formatting online, blended/hybrid, and web enhanced course content.

Using this design style guide will help instructors ensure formatting, accessibility, and consistency that align with best practices. The goal is to achieve a consistent appearance across all courses for aesthetics, easy navigation, organization, and branding.

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Using and Locating eLearning Templates

The eLearning Instructional Designers use templates as a base for courses in Canvas to promote consistency in content and navigation among courses. Some schools/college or departments may have their own Canvas course templates. Instructors can request to have all or specific components of the eLearning template to be placed into their Canvas course. Follow [instructions to import or request an eLearning Canvas course template](#).

Working in Modules and Content Pages

Designing Modules

All courses should be organized using a module structure. Each module should contain all instructional materials, activities (including discussion boards), and assessments for that module. Modules may be organized by week or by multiple weeks depending on the instructor's preference and organization of the content.

- Modules should be named by module number followed by title and date.
 - Ex: Week 1: History of Psychology (August 1-7)
 - Dates for most weeks are Monday to Sunday. However, there are some exceptions. The last date of the last numbered module should end on the last day of class for the semester. The date on the final exam module should end on the last day of final exams. If the last week of class is both the last week of class and final exams (i.e. classes end on Wednesday and final exams are Thursday and Friday), the last module should be a numbered week and end on the date of the last day of final exams. The dates on the homepage should correspond to the dates on the modules.
- Content items should be named by module and item name (ex: Week 1: Instructional Materials, Week 1: Discussion)
- Modules may be called units, modules, weeks, etc. at the instructor's discretion.

Module Content Items

- Modules should contain a Week #: Overview page, content items (instructional pages, assignments, discussions, or quizzes), and a Wrap Up unless the instructor requests otherwise.
- Week #: Overview pages should contain a short introduction (about 1 paragraph) to the module topic, the module objectives, and the alignment chart if used by the instructor.
- Week #: Schedule or Instructional Materials pages should contain assigned readings (with differentiation between required and supplemental material), and instructional videos. Content should be sequenced to facilitate learning. Consider number of pages and number of clicks when discussing module layout with instructors. For Schedule pages, if there is more than one video per day, separate the content into pages for each day.
- Activities and Assessments should be included in the module in the order students should complete them. In courses with multiple activities and assessments, separate content in a way that will facilitate learning. Below are some options for organizing content.
 - Provide the instructional materials on one content page (Schedule or Instructional Materials). Add the activities and assessments to the module after the Schedule or Instructional Materials page.
 - Use multiple Instructional Materials pages to chunk content according to content. Add the associated activity or assessment in the appropriate order after the Instructional Materials page for each topic.

- Add one Instructional Materials page with activities and assessments linked in order that students should complete them. Include the activities and assessments in the module as well.
- Wrap Up pages should contain a bulleted list of key takeaways from the module and, if appropriate, a list of items students should have completed before moving to the next module. If providing a list of items to complete, bullet the list and hyperlink the items.

Content Page Styling – Numbering vs. Bulleted Lists

While there is disagreement on when to use numbers versus bullets when making lists, many writing guides adhere to the protocol below. However, whichever you choose, remember to remain consistent within your course.

- Use numbers when the sequence is important. For example, when washing a car, you need to complete the following steps in order.
 1. Gather supplies (sponge, bucket, soap, etc.)
 2. Rinse vehicle
 3. Apply soap
 4. Rinse soap
- Use bullets when the sequence is unimportant

Punctuation

Use a colon after the lead-in sentence if the items in a list complete the sentence. Use a period at the end of each item.

Example:

Any good office should have:

- free drinks.
- free snacks.
- a napping couch.

Capitalization

Capitalize the first letter of each item in a list (but do not use a period after each item) if the item does not complete the sentence.

Example:

Most employees surveyed agreed that any good office has the following elements.

- Free drinks
- Free snacks
- A napping couch

(For more information see these [guidelines on punctuating bulleted lists.](#))

White Space

White space should be used to reduce eyestrain, increase readability, and lessen visual load for learners. White space includes aligning text and adding padding around multimedia elements with associated text. Content placed on the page should support the learner in making meaningful connections and in bridging the relationships among content in the module.

Alt Text

All images that are not decorative in purpose must contain an alternative text tag to describe the image for participants who use screen readers to access content. Follow [best practices for alt text](#).

Functional images (i.e. buttons) should describe what clicking the button will do. For example, the alt text for the home page buttons is "Access Module [x]."

Banners and other decorative images on Canvas pages can be marked as decorative in the image options. The alt text box should be empty with a space added. Do not leave the file name in the alt text box. If you are adding the alt text using HTML code, use alt=""

Hyperlinks

- Hyperlinks should inform learners where the links lead them or what they will download. Do not state, "Click Here." Rather state, "Read more about hyperlinks on the [WebAIM website](#)." Do not start a sentence with a link. Do not show the URL: <https://webaim.org/techniques/hypertext/>
- Linked images should contain alternative text that alerts learners where the link is going.