



E-Learning Guides

2. Design for E-Learning

Design for E-Learning is aimed at academic staff who are considering e-learning and who would like some guidance on how to plan the development process. After reading through this guide, you should -

- understand how to approach the design of an online or blended module
- have considered how e-learning might best be tailored to suit your students' needs
- be aware of changing roles

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
PLANNING AND DESIGNING E-LEARNING	2
THE SIX STEP PLAN.....	5
CHECKLIST FOR ONLINE TUTORS	9
REFERENCES	10
FURTHER READING	10

Introduction



*"Meaningful learning is **collaborative** and **conversational**. Technology can be an intellectual **partner**, a **tool** and a **context**."*

(Jonassen, 1995)

For a lecturer who is used to developing campus-based programmes, the shift towards a more flexible, e-learning approach presents the opportunity to re-think existing methods and develop innovative activities. Programmes do not have to be entirely online to benefit from the advantages offered by new technologies. Combining lectures and tutorials with e-learning allows the lecturer to blend the best parts of the traditional and the new, and create a more inclusive, highly effective means of teaching.

The BlackBoard learning environment is available for all staff across the University to use and it is an excellent starting point for those who wish to introduce more flexible options for their students, but e-learning also encompasses a whole range of options including video, audio, simulations, computer-based learning tutorials, e-books, and more recently, mobile technologies such as web-enabled phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs). The choice of technologies will be determined by the pedagogical requirements of the programme, the needs of the students and the availability and cost of the preferred technologies. If you need guidance in the decision making process and would like information on what is available in GCU, please contact eLISU (m.cuttle@gcal.ac.uk) for help.

Planning and designing e-learning

Developing e-learning may be a new experience for many lecturers and it is one which demands careful preparation. Schools in GCU are actively encouraging the use of educational technologies, not only for new online programmes, but also as an enhancement to existing campus-based delivery. As modules and programmes are developed or reviewed, decisions should be made at an early stage regarding the integration of e-learning and how the responsibility for module development, online tutoring and learner support can be shared

with colleagues. Module descriptors too should provide a clear indication that e-learning will be an integral part of the learning and teaching experience.

Mason (1998) proposes three simple models based on her extensive experience with the Open University. These are:

Content + support or ‘web-enhanced’ model

This is probably the most common framework where most of the teaching still takes place face-to-face and the course itself is based around a core set of materials and resources. These may be made available in print or online, and students will engage in a limited amount of activity using email or online discussions. E-learning may account for approximately 20% of study time.

Wrap-around or ‘web-enabled’ model

Here, digital resources, including online study guides, activities and discussions, are combined with existing core resources such as books, CD-ROMs and tutorial sessions. The students will be more involved in online activities such as discussions, group work, even video and audio-conferencing, all of which are enabled by the technology and are integral components of their learning experience (50%). As less of the course is predetermined, students will take more responsibility for their own learning and the lecturer’s role shifts towards that of learning designer and facilitator with subject expertise.

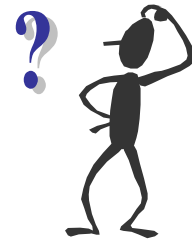
Integrated or ‘web-dependent’ model

In this model, the learning and teaching is mostly, or even entirely, conducted online and the distinction between content and support is less clearly defined. Its success depends on the creation of an effective learning community in which students will work collaboratively on a variety of activities and assignments which will in turn influence the course content. In this context the lecturer’s expertise in moderating discussions and encouraging the formation of the learning community is crucial.

In reality, the requirements of each subject discipline and the level of study will also determine the choice of framework, but the three models described do provide a useful basis for discussion and decision-making.

Before going into detail about the content of a module, there will be a variety of practical issues to be considered. As a lecturer, you may wish to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the intended learning outcomes of the module?
- Which pedagogical model will help the students to achieve these?
- How will the learning outcomes be assessed?
- Which activities and resources will enable the students to achieve the desired learning outcomes?
- What added value can e-learning bring to the learning and teaching process?
- Is it a blended or online course?
- What is the profile of the students likely to be?
- How many students will there be?
- What access do they have to networked computers?
- How many tutors will be required?
- What combination of face-to-face and online elements would best suit the students' needs?
- Who will be expected to provide technical support to students and tutors?
- Will staff development be required?



When the practicalities have been dealt with, it's time to consider in more detail the teaching methods you will choose to employ and the overall design of the learning experience. Rather than simply converting an existing course by uploading materials and using exercises and activities designed for conventional classroom situations, it's important to consider fully the opportunities offered by e-learning. For example, the support for collaboration and discussion which the technology affords can be particularly conducive to **group work** and **debate**. You may decide to experiment with **multimedia**, interactive **simulations**, **videoconferencing** or **role play**, all of which are particularly useful in the problem-based learning context.

To sustain students' motivation online, it is important to develop a variety of interesting tasks which will encourage them to build on their existing knowledge and construct understanding in a meaningful way. A more learner-centred approach will place demands on the students as they will be expected to take more responsibility for their own learning and knowledge

acquisition. It follows that as a lecturer, you should adopt a **facilitative** rather than didactic role, and **guide** rather than lead the students.

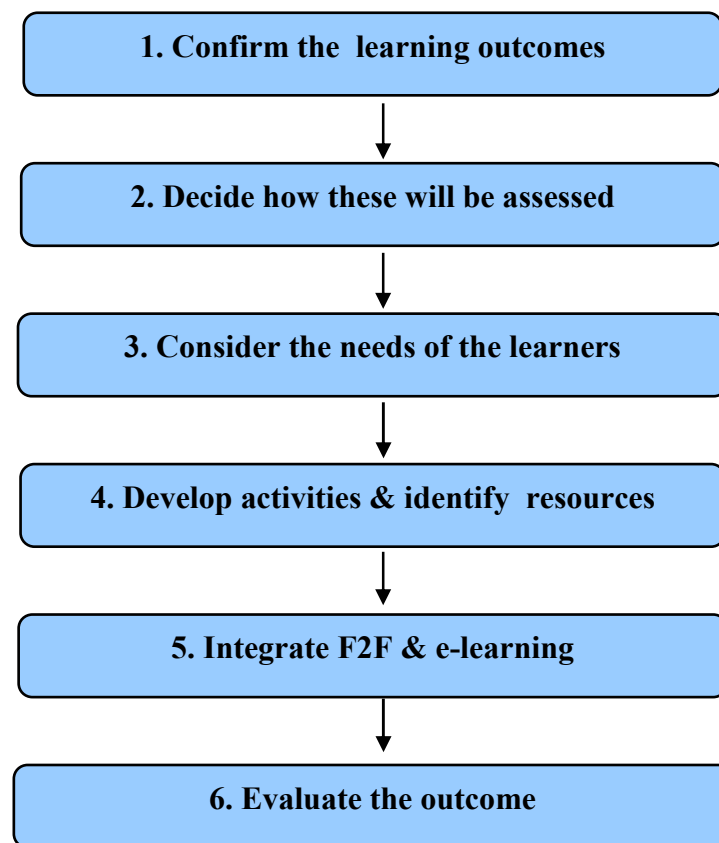


*"Instructional design
should concentrate more on
activities and **processes**
and less on
content & a pre-determined product."
(Collis & Moonen, 2001)*

Taking time to go through the instructional design process and reflecting on outcomes can help to avoid unexpected problems at a later stage in the course, especially if the initial design team includes academic staff, learning technologists, technical support staff and administrators. Individual roles and responsibilities can be clarified and contingency plans put in place to address unexpected technical difficulties, cover during holiday periods and learner support issues. A staged design process which also allows the outcome of each module to be evaluated, documented and made available to other tutors to inform subsequent programmes is an effective model which will benefit future students, lecturers and ultimately, the university. It is essential to allow sufficient time and resources for this process, and to consider carefully possible staff development needs.. The Academic Practice Unit and eLISU will be pleased to work with Departments and Schools to help with any development needs which are identified.

The six step plan

It can be helpful to think of the planning and design process as a series of steps which enable a logical progression through all stages of course preparation. Some will be similar to those required for a conventional course, whilst others will be specific to the e-learning context.



1. Confirm the learning outcomes

- What is the context within which you are working?
- What do you want the students to achieve?
- Can these learning outcomes be successfully assessed?
- How can e-learning help students attain these outcomes?
- What support and training do **you** need to become a confident e-learning practitioner?

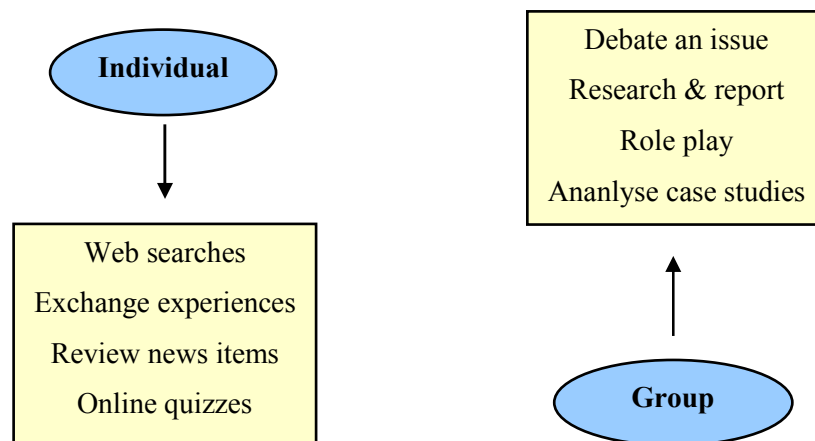
2. Decide how these will be assessed

- Are the assessment methods fully aligned with the intended learning outcomes and the e-learning context?
- How will coursework and group work be assessed?
- Will you use assessment tools to create quizzes and tests?
- How will you manage feedback to students ?
- How quickly and often will you be able to respond to questions and comments online?
- Will you provide feedback to individuals or groups?

3. Consider the needs of the learners

- Do all the students have easy access to networked computers?
- Are there teachability issues relating to e-learning which will need to be addressed?
- How much time can they realistically devote to online learning?
- Will they need help with technical and study skills, induction and orientation?
- What balance of face-to-face and online learning will be most appropriate for them?
- How will they be supported within the virtual learning community?
- How will you encourage them to become more independent learners?

4. Develop activities and identify resources



- What kind of individual and group activities will encourage knowledge building and collaboration?
- Which e-learning tools will support these?
- How much time is needed for each activity – for the student? for the lecturer?
- What resources will be required to support the activities?
- Can you re-use or adapt existing resources?
- Will you need to create new ones?
- What technical skills will this require?

5. Integrate face-to-face and e-learning

- Which activities are best done face-to-face, and which can be supported by technology?

- What will encourage students to log on regularly to the online conference?
- Which resources will you make available in digital format?
- How will e-learning activities be integrated with lectures, tutorials and seminars?
- If more than one tutor is involved, will you work together as a team or will each take responsibility for different topics?

6. Evaluate the outcome

- Do you need to develop an evaluation plan?
- Will it be a formal or informal process?
- Will you encourage reflection and ask for formative feedback during the module?
- How will you gather summative evaluation data at the end of the module/programme?
- Which evaluation instruments will you use?
- Will they be delivered online, at face-to-face sessions, or both?
- Will you make this data available to those responsible for developing future courses?

Planning in such detail may seem time-consuming, but timely consideration of all the options can help to prevent problems during the course and enable a certain amount of flexibility if things don't go as planned. Technical issues can easily become intrusive for the lecturer, especially when individual students demand assistance at various times throughout the module. It makes sense to allocate technical support to an expert, thus allowing you to devote time to your main role of moderating the online discussions, managing groups and activities, and supporting the online learning community.

Checklist for online tutors

- Plan all aspects of the module/programme thoroughly
- Assign responsibility for technical support before a module begins
- Fully integrate face-to-face and e-learning activities
- Aim for engagement by creating meaningful and relevant activities
- Make everything explicit to avoid misunderstandings
- Provide clear instructions for all e-learning activities
- Adopt a facilitative rather than didactic role
- Be prepared to be flexible
- Encourage sharing and collaboration among students
- Allow time for the online group identity to become established
- Be inclusive and value all participants
- Post weaving comments and regular summaries of online discussions
- Guide the tone and style of online communication
- Agree with the students rules and standards for 'netiquette'
- Inform students if you are likely to be offline for any length of time
- Manage online resources and shared information for easy access
- Contact non-participants directly to resolve any difficulties they may have
- Be aware of linguistic and cultural differences, and welcome diversity
- Build in evaluation and reflection on the experience
- Ensure your innovative work is **visible and acknowledged** within your Division/School



And above all -

- Maintain a positive and encouraging attitude throughout**

References

Collis B. & Moonen J. (2001), *Flexible Learning in a Digital World*, Kogan Page, London.

Jonassen, D. (1995), *Supporting Communities of Students with Technology*, Educational Technology, 35(4), pp60-63

Mason R. (1998) *Models of Online Courses*, ALN Magazine, vol 2, no 2. Available online at: <http://www.aln.org/publications/magazine/v2n2/mason.asp>

Further Reading

Harasim, L, Hiltz S.R., Teles L., Turoff M (1995) *Learning Networks: a field guide to teaching and learning online*, MIT Press, London

Maier P., Warren A. (2000), *Integrating Technology in learning & Teaching*, Kogan Page, London

The full series of GCU E-Learning Guides is available to download from apu.gcal.ac.uk/pages/resources.htm

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