Course (Re)Design

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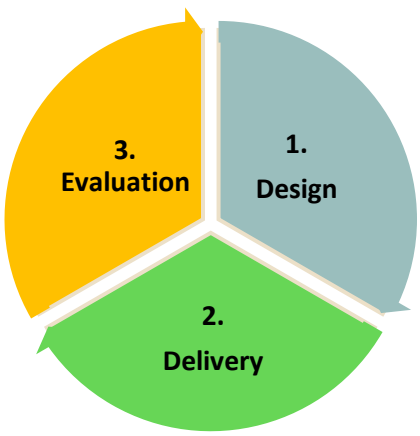
1. Course in context
2. Backward design
3. Blended courses

Course design is the process by which you plan the most appropriate instruction, activities and learning experiences to support students in achieving the learning outcomes.

Among other things, designing a course involves specifying learning outcomes, deciding learning activities, choosing assessment methods, and considering feedback opportunities.

Designing a course is an iterative process. The cycle of designing, delivering and evaluating should take place every time a course is taught. Each iteration provides information about specific aspects that can be adjusted.



1. The course in context

Analysing the context in which the course is taught can help you make better decisions during the design process. You can consider for example:

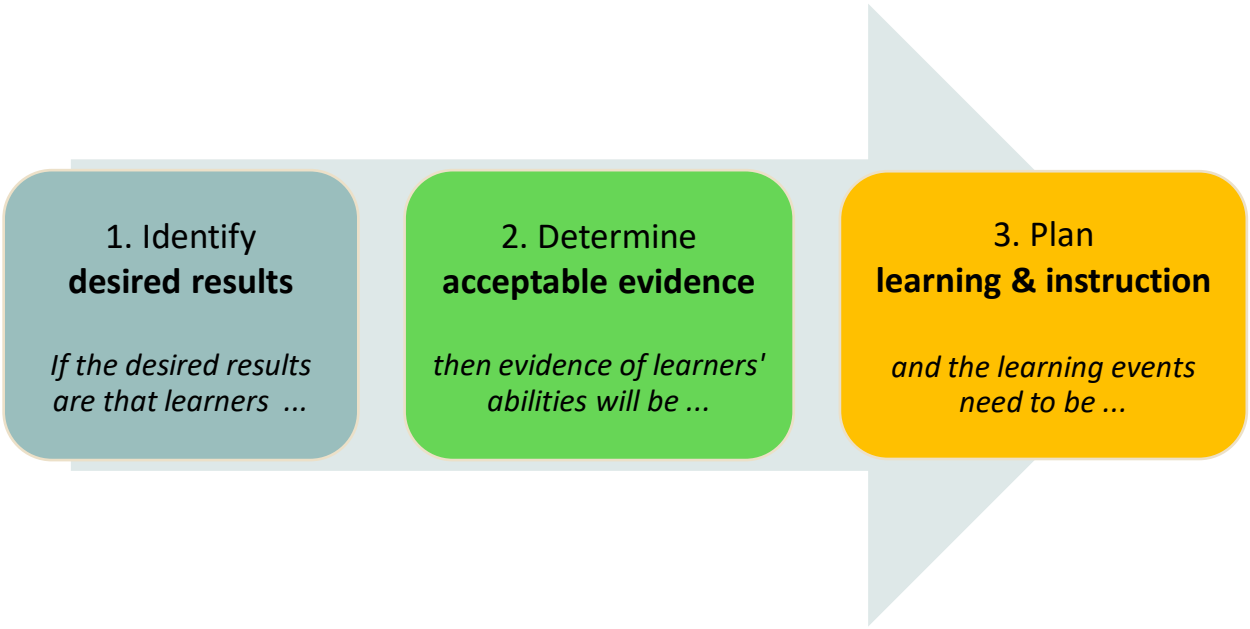
- course level (e.g. bachelor's or master's programme)
- course within the programme (e.g. how the course connects with other courses)
- course type (e.g. elective?), length and number of students
- existence of a prescribed delivery mode (e.g. fully online?, blended?)
- characteristics of the students (e.g. prior knowledge/skills, educational/cultural background, interest and motivation)
- if the course is not new, elements to keep and elements to be reviewed
- if the course is new, what prompted its introduction in the programme

2. Backward design

Backward design is an approach to course design that starts by establishing learning outcomes for the students, and then proceeds "backward" to create activities, select content and resources and plan assessment to support the achievement of those learning outcomes.

By focusing on the desired results of learning in the first place (as opposed to focusing on content to be covered or activities to be included), Backward design supports a student-centred and learning-focused approach to course design.

Backward design is a three-stage process:



Wiggins, G. and McTigue, J., Second Ed. (2005) *Understanding by Design*, ASCD, Virginia

1. IDENTIFY DESIRED RESULTS

Desired results are what we commonly refer to as learning outcomes (LOs) or intended learning outcomes (ILOs).

LOs can be identified by answering these questions:

- *What should students know, understand, and be able to do upon successful completion of the course?*
- *What enduring understandings will there be as a result of the course?*
  "Enduring understandings": big ideas or concepts we want students to retain in the long term, even after they might have forgotten specific content and skills.
- *What long-term transfer goals are targeted?*
  "Transfer": ability to apply learnings in settings different from those experienced during the course.

When writing LOs, make sure that they are consistent with the general LOs of the level of study (e.g. bachelor), specific, observable and measurable (as they will be assessed). Avoid using general terms such as *understand*, *learn*, *become familiar with*, and use instead a verb from a taxonomy to be more precise. You can use the following format:

On completion of this course, you/students will be able to
+ verb from a taxonomy (e.g. Bloom's)
+ measurable and observable knowledge/skill
+ qualifying phrase (context)

Examples:

On completion of this course, you/students will be able to apply basic research methods in psychology, including data analysis and interpretation.

On completion of this course, you/students will be able to describe key emerging technological and societal trends that impact consumer behaviour.

On completion of this course, you/students will be able to identify and argue the appropriateness of strategic alternatives, domestic and international, at corporate and business-unit levels.

2. DETERMINE ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE

Once the desired results/LOs have been identified, the next step is to determine what evidence students will need to produce in order to show that the LOs are being/have been achieved, and how that evidence will be assessed (not necessarily graded).

Since understanding and the development of skills are ongoing cognitive processes, it is important that this evidence is gathered throughout the course (through a variety of formal and informal tasks, interactions, etc.) and not only in the form of end-of-course graded assignments.

Key questions to determine acceptable evidence are:

- *What performance/products will be evidence that LOs are being/have been achieved?*
- *How will this evidence be used to incorporate feedback and self-reflection?*
- *How will this evidence be used to adjust teaching?*
- *How will you evaluate student performance in fair and consistent ways?*
- *What specific characteristics in students' responses will be examined to determine the extent to which desired results are being/have been achieved?*

3. PLAN LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

Once clear LOs have been identified and appropriate evidence and assessment have been determined, the next step is to plan instruction and learning.

Instruction should focus not only on presenting information and modeling basic skills, but also on helping students construct meaning (e.g. give students opportunities to connect new information to previous knowledge) and transfer learning (e.g. provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills in new situations).

Key questions to plan learning and instruction are:

- *What activities and instruction are needed to support students as they come to understand important ideas and processes?*
- *What activities and instruction can help students produce appropriate evidence?*
- *In what sequence and pace?*
- *What resources are best suited to achieve these goals?*
- *How can students be prepared to transfer their learning?*

Some key considerations to bear in mind when designing learning activities are:

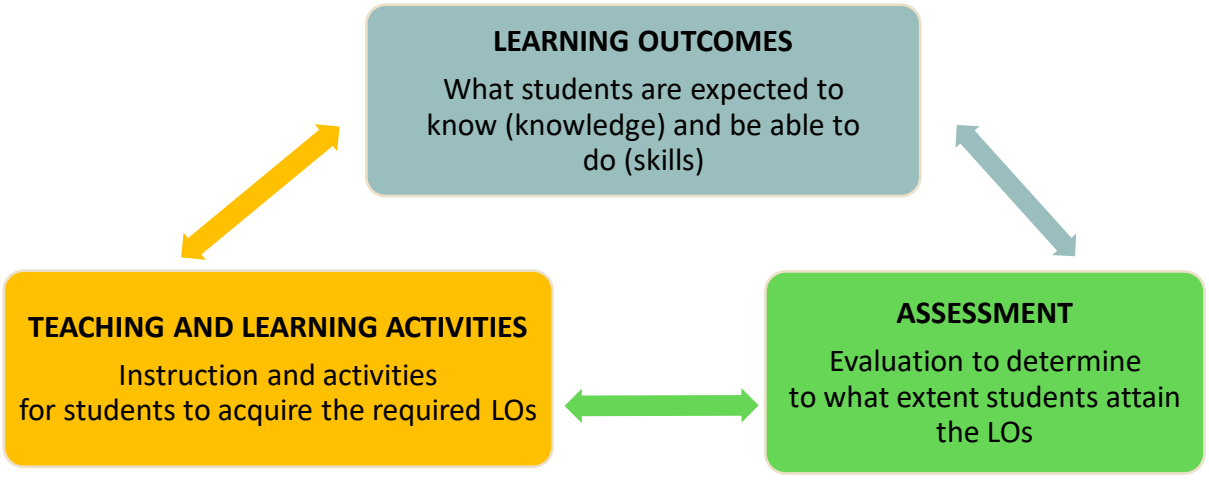
- Help students know where the activity is going/what is expected? (goals)
- Help students know why the activity is important (reasons for learning)
- Provide students with opportunities to revise their understanding and work on the basis of timely feedback and self-evaluation
- Account for different needs and abilities by providing options to complete the activities

Completing a storyboard is an efficient way of planning and visualizing learning and instruction:

	Weekly learning outcomes	Face-to-face Blended Fully online	Activities Assessment Feedback	Resources Materials	Student Workload	Points of action
Week One	Related to but more specific than the general course LOs	Teaching format can determine: types of activities; how they are sequenced and connected; the delivery	Activities suited to LOs and teaching format Describe activities in terms of what students do Feedback and self-reflection	Suited to LOs and activities Right level of difficulty Guidelines to use them	Number of hours needed by students to complete readings, do activities, organise group work, etc.	Need of technical support? Explore new tools? Ideas for activities?

Download these EXAMPLES AND TEMPLATE to start the Backward design of your course.

Backward design supports the alignment of LOs, assessment and teaching and learning activities in a course. Once your design is complete, double check that there is a clear correlation between these three components.



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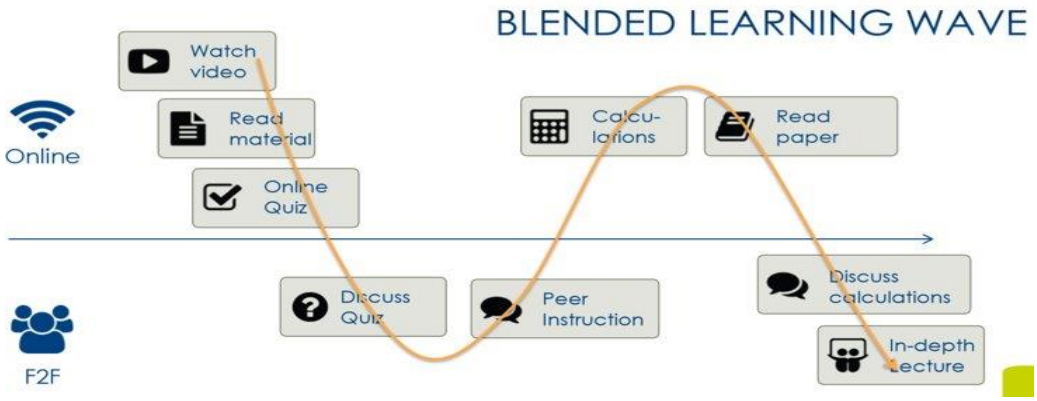
3. Blended courses

Blended learning environments are characterized by a well-integrated and deliberate combination of face-to-face and online elements.



European Maturity Model for Blended Education

Along with the Backward design considerations, it is recommended to pay additional attention to the following aspects when designing a blended course:

- Consider how much of the course will take place face-to-face and how much online
- Decide what instruction, activities and assessment are more suitable to take place face-to-face and which ones would benefit students more if completed online
- Make sure that face-to-face and online activities are connected and mutually supporting (see blended learning wave above)
- Introduce technological tools gradually and always with a pedagogical purpose

When converting a face-to-face course to a blended format, use the opportunity to enhance the course; avoid simply adding online work to the existing course (this can also result in an increase of student workload for the same amount of credits).

Blended courses require students to be more self-directed and autonomous, bear this in mind and provide guidance and support to develop those skills. In the case of blended courses with a considerable amount of online learning, think carefully how to maintain social presence and emotional engagement.

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