COMMON ELEMENTS FOR ONLINE COURSE DESIGN

While it is probably the case that most experienced instructors possess an inherent sense of design, when teaching and learning online, this pattern of design needs to be made evident, and the enormous amount of detail embedded in an online course means that development is best handled in an organized and deliberate fashion.

Online course design includes

- Purposeful planning

- Organizing, sequencing, and pacing course content

- Thinking in terms of the student learning experience and desired learning outcomes

- Realizing that there is more than one way to fulfill learning outcomes

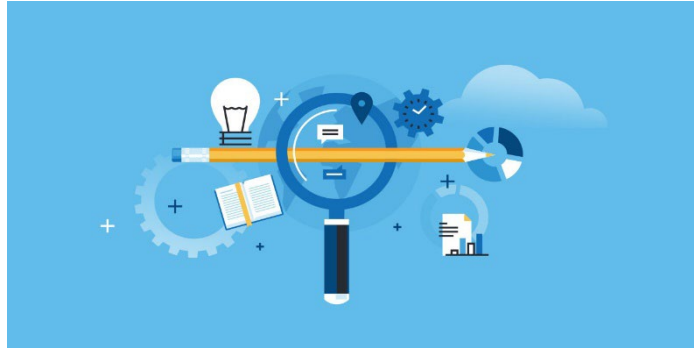- A basis in a particular teaching and learning model

    o **Below are some common elements required for online course design.**
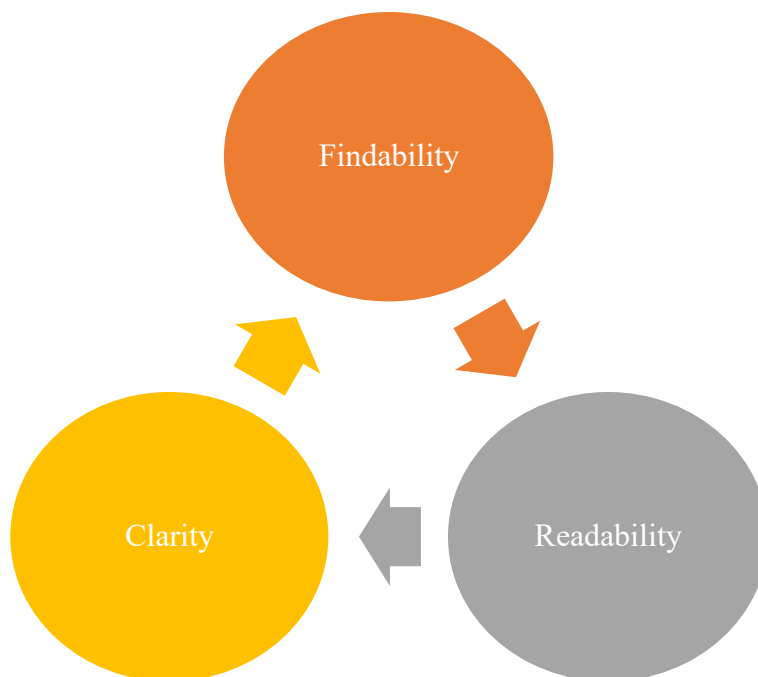
Findability

Learners will not be able to perform what you are asking them to do or learn what you are asking them to learn if they cannot find what they are searching for, cannot download an article or worksheet, or cannot discern from the instructions what they should be looking for in the first place. Students' self-efficacy, motivation, and learning are all affected by their inability to find information. You can improve findability by making sure

- Everything is structurally and visually *consistent* to the fullest extent.

- The titles of the pages, assignments, and discussions *appropriately* convey the material. For example, labeling assignments "Assignment 1," "Assignment 2," and so on fails to adequately differentiate them and wastes students' time double-checking the substance of each assignment.

- *Few clicks* should be needed to reach important contents.

- All links in your material and instructions should work for students and include a *description* of what the link is about and what the student should do after clicking on it. Because you are logged in to a certain website or database, or because you have a higher level of authority than your students, links may be included that work for you.

- Instructions accurately match the current *user interface* in TEDU LMS, linked applications, and websites.

Readability

The readability of your written materials will be substantially improved if you write in an active voice in the second person at an easy reading level. Some ways to improve readability are;

- All text should be aligned to the **left**

- Colorful text should be **legible**

- Avoid using *italics* for any content that is more than one phrase long (large blocks of italicized text are difficult to read)

- The text and highlight colors should have **a good contrast**

- Instead of underlining, use **bold** (underlining indicates the text is a link)

- Stay away from **large bulleted** and **numbered lists**

- In all links, use **descriptive** words instead of URLs

- All written information should be **grammatically proper**, no words should be missing, and no erroneous terms should be used (their, they're, there, etc.)

Make sure to keep the following in mind whenever you use a readability test:

- ✓ Are the ideas (and not just the sentences) in this passage complex?

- ✓ Do the sentences make sense? Remember: the readability tests do not take content into account. A nonsensical passage could be scored as highly readable.

- ✓ Is the passage or sentences organized logically?

- ✓ Is the passage appropriate in regard to other factors you may know about your student audience?

Completeness

While you may know how to perform something and might not believe it requires further explanation, learners may need detailed explanations. Providing full and correct instructions is a huge assistance to online students.
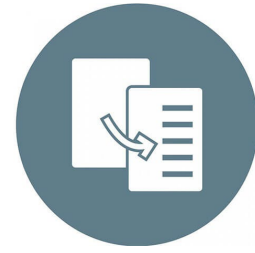
It takes time to learn something new. This is something that students and instructors working in online environments should be aware of. Just because an online course is more flexible in terms of scheduling doesn't mean it won't need a considerable amount of time. Instructors must explain required time commitments while still remaining realistic in their expectations.

Contradictory instructions are a typical clarity issue, whether inside an assignment description, the syllabus, an announcement, or a module summary page. For instance, students may be "put into groups" according to the syllabus, yet an announcement may suggest "create your own groups." **Using rubrics**, models, or examples to help students comprehend what they need to complete is also a good idea (Bates, 2015).

References

Bates, A. W. (2015). *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and*

    learning.

Online Course Design Principles

https://eclearn.emmanuel.edu/courses/1390874/pages/online-course-design-

principles?module_item_id=13056999

Western University - Centre for Teaching and Learning

https://teaching.uwo.ca/curriculum/coursedesign/online-course-design.html

Indiana University – Center for Teaching and Learning

https://ctl.iupui.edu/Teaching-Online/DevelopingYourOnlineCourse

Readability, Pacing, and Accessibility

https://spscoursedesign.commons.gc.cuny.edu/readability-pacing-and-accessibility/

Further Reading and Resources

- 4 Expert Strategies for Designing an Online Course

- Developing an Online Course

- Teaching an Online Course