Instruction Design Tips for Online Learning

*Instructional Design Tips for Online Learning* was developed by Joan Van Duzer of Humboldt State University to be used in conjunction with the *Rubric for Online Instruction* developed by CSU, Chico, c 2002.

Categories one through six, below, correspond to the categories of the Rubric for Online Instruction, developed by CSU, Chico.

Both instruments are available online, [www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi](http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi).

---

**Category 1 - Learner Support and Resources**

**Category 2 – Online Organization and Design**

**Category 3 – Instructional Design and Delivery**

**Category 4 – Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning**

**Category 5 - Appropriate and Effective Use of Technology**

**Category 6 – Faculty Use of Student Feedback**
Category 1 - Learner Support and Resources

A. Information about being an online learner

- Tips for being a successful online student
- Quiz to self-assess readiness to be an online student
- Link to Library resources
- Instructions for how to conduct online research
- Instructions on how to write a research paper
- Guidelines for APA/MLA format of papers and/or citations
- Link to the testing center
- Link to campus remedial resource center
- Link to student disability resource center
- Information/tutorials on how to use software required by class assignments
- Contact information for technical support or Help Desk
- Checklist or other method for common troubleshooting tips
- Minimum computer hardware and software requirements
- Tips for avoiding and dealing with computer viruses
- Sources for any required plug-ins (and links)
- Tutorial(s) or job aids for how to use the LMS tools
- FAQs for LMS
- Netiquette guidelines

B. Course specific resources

- Contact information for the instructor
- Contact information for academic department or advisor
- Information on additional related courses
- Pre-requisites of course
- Link(s) to Bookstore(s) to order textbooks or other instructional materials
- FAQ site on course information
- Estimated amount of time needed for completing course requirements

C. Resources supporting course content

- Link(s) to web sites with supporting information relevant to course content
- Link(s) to web sites of organizations or associations related to course content
- Glossary of terms or links to definitions of new vocabulary
- Link(s) to learning objects (external to course, such as MERLOT)
A. Course navigability and organization

☐ Syllabus is easily located
☐ Links to other parts of the course or external sources are accurate and up-to-date
☐ Instructional materials required are easily located
☐ Numbers identify sequenced steps; bullets list items are not prioritized or sequential
☐ Course content is organized in a logical format
☐ Topics are clearly identified and subtopics are related to topics
☐ Sequential (vs. concurrent) topics are annotated with dates
☐ Course schedule is available in a printer-friendly format for student convenience
☐ Organization and sequencing of the course content is logical and clear
☐ Resources are separated into “required” and “optional” categories

B. Syllabus includes

☐ Course objectives
☐ Course completion requirements
☐ Expectations of students’ participation, honesty, etc.
☐ Timeline for student participation is clear
☐ Faculty member(s) introductory information
☐ Expectations of availability of and turnaround time for contact with instructor
☐ Course schedule is summarized in one place

C. Aesthetic design

☐ Typeface is easy to read
☐ Sufficient contrast between text and background makes information easy to read
☐ Appropriate images supporting course content add visual interest
☐ Design keeps course pages to a comfortable length with white space.

D. Consistency in course

☐ Layout of course is visually and functionally consistent
☐ Navigability is clear, simple and user friendly
☐ Spelling and grammar are consistent and accurate
☐ Written material is concise
☐ Language of written material is friendly and supportive
☐ Clear directions are given for each task or assignment
☐ Sentences and paragraphs brief
E. Universal accessibility

☐ Universal accessibility concerns are addressed throughout the course, including transcripts of any non-text objects
☐ Images are optimized for speedy display and include alternative text
☐ Alternative formats of materials provided, when possible (e.g., optional print packet of extensive reading materials, CD of audio clips used in course, etc.)
☐ Use of color adds interest but does not disadvantage those with color blindness

Category 3 – Instructional Design and Delivery

A. Promote interaction and communication

☐ Students introduce themselves
☐ Students are encouraged to respond to classmate introductions
☐ “Ice-breaker” activity to get acquainted
☐ Instructor introduces himself/herself to model interaction
☐ Students’ input is not evaluated as “right” or “wrong”
☐ Netiquette described and enforced
☐ Student participation is tracked and “wallflowers” drawn in to the discussions
☐ Students are prompted by facilitator to expand on relevant points
☐ Facilitator may play “devil’s advocate”
☐ Reading and writing requirements are consistent with student abilities and course unit load

B. Goals and alignment to learning objectives

☐ Pace of delivery of course content is managed
☐ Course content is “chunked” for more manageable learning
☐ Instructional design is made clear (e.g., is it self-paced, or group-paced)
☐ Expectations for synchronous vs asynchronous activities are clearly spelled out

C. Learning objectives and activities are integrated

☐ Reading assignments match learning objectives
☐ Activities lead to learning desired concepts
☐ Tasks and activities are designated as synchronous or asynchronous; sequential or may be completed in any order (clarified)
☐ Instructional material may be reviewed repeatedly (built-in redundancy)
☐ Summary provided frequently, particularly at the end of topics, to reinforce learning
D. Activities to enhance student learning (addressing multiple learning styles)

- Video clips of interviews, movements
- Historical audio clips of famous speeches
- Screen animations for instructional exercises using software
- Personal interview reports
- Crossword or word search puzzles
- Matching and game-show-style trivia games
- Online scavenger hunt / WebQuest
- Annotated bibliography
- PowerPoint presentations as assignments
- Flash simulations

E. Activities to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills

- Discussions center on questions without a single correct answer
- Compare and contrast exercises
- Case studies
- Critique classmates’ assignments
- Collaborative exercises
- Portfolios (building one activity upon another) to share/peer review

Category 4 – Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning

A. Assess student readiness for learning

- Pre-requisites are defined and enforced
- Acceptable methods for completing assignments are identified (group work, open book, etc.)
- Consequences of cheating or plagiarism

B. Assessment activities are aligned with learning objectives

- Criteria used to evaluate participation in online discussion groups
- Study questions
- Quantity and scope of graded assignments is reasonable
- Authentic assessments

C. Multiple assessment strategies

- Students’ bibliography or reference list includes a variety of materials such as URLs, books and journals, and videos
- When possible, options among assignments are provided to allow for different interests, backgrounds, and personal learning styles
Students are not assessed solely on tests/quizzes but are provided ample opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in different ways.

D. Regular feedback
- Rich and rapid feedback – self-grading assignments released immediately
- Frequent and substantial feedback from the instructor
- Samples of assignments illustrate instructor’s expectations
- Detailed instructions and tips for completing assignments
- Due dates for all assignments
- Rubrics for all assignments identify assessment guidelines
- Grading scale
- Instructor models assignment

E. Self-assessments and peer feedback
- Self-tests similar to the final evaluation instruments
- Students pose discussion questions, respond to others’ discussion topics, later post answers to their own questions and respond to others’ comments on their discussion topic
- Peer review opportunities
- Students apply rubric to their own work and describe/defend their score
- Clear guidelines for peer review, if applicable

Category 5 - Innovative Teaching Technology

A. Appropriate tools to facilitate communication
- Discussion boards
- Synchronous “chats”
- Email
- Listserv
- Teleconferencing
- Group discussion areas, when appropriate for group activities
- Instant messaging

B. New teaching methods
- Instructor is open to trying new methods of delivery of instruction
- Instructor is open to accepting new methods of students preferred learning styles
C. Multimedia elements

- Flash animations
- Tutorials with screen captures and voice over
- Audio clips
- Graphics
- Video clips
- PowerPoint presentations
- CD-Rom or DVD supplemental materials
- Other learning objects, simulations or interactivities

D. Engage students throughout the course

- Students off-campus with modems are provided with low-bandwidth alternatives for downloading media
- Technology is used to engage students in learning, not just for viewing but for interacting with other students or with the course content

Category 6 – Faculty Use of Student Feedback

A. Course content

- Evaluation survey at end of course
- Student input sought at regular intervals
- Open ended questions
- Students falling behind are prompted to determine what might be delaying their progress
- Students prompted to find web-based resources supporting the topic to share with classmates; the highest quality resources incorporated into the course

B. Online technology

- Instructor has an open door to students to point out flaws of delivery of instruction using technology
- Instructor solicits feedback on how delivery can be more effective for student learning (e.g., a Discussion Topic for Feedback)

C. Instruction and assessment

- Instructor is willing to modify course (live) as needed to improve or fix inadequacies
- Instructor is able to modify elements (e.g., fix bad quiz questions, extend deadlines, review methods of achieving course objectives)
**Instructional Design Tips for Online Instruction** was developed by Joan Van Duzer of Humboldt State University to be used in conjunction with the **Rubric for Online Instruction** developed by CSU, Chico. Categories one through six correspond to the categories of the Rubric for Online Instruction.

Both instruments are available online, [www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi](http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi).

**Contributors**

Gayle Burns, Faculty Instructional Technology Support Center, CSU Los Angeles. gburns@calstatela.edu

Bonnie Correia, Information Technology Consultant, CSU Hayward. bcorreia@csuhayward.edu

Laura J. Sederberg, Technology & Learning Program, CSU Chico. lsederberg@csuchico.edu

Shari Shelton, Blackboard Administration, San Diego State University. sshelton@mail.sdsu.edu

Joan Van Duzer, Educational Technologist, Humboldt State University. joan@humboldt.edu

**References**


