



Online Course Delivery & Facilitation Checklist

Mason Online | Office of Digital Learning

Overview

Our Online Course Delivery & Facilitation Checklist is intentionally designed to be a practical tool to demonstrate minimum expectations for teaching in online asynchronous and synchronous courses. The checklist outlines fundamental quality indicators across two domains: Instructor Role and Learner Support.

Within each domain, essential components are outlined, along with additional ways in which faculty might further enhance their course design. This checklist can be used for:

- Formal course reviews as part of Mason Online's course review process;
- Programmatic quality assurance for ongoing faculty and course development;
- Self-assessment for instructors aiming to refine their courses.

Using the Checklist

The checklist is used to identify evidence of instructional practices aligned with established quality standards for online teaching and offers examples of how standards can be demonstrated. In formal reviews, the Quality Assurance reviewer will offer constructive feedback on the evidence of quality instruction within the online course, highlighting strengths and providing actionable recommendations to guide meaningful improvements for quality. Faculty can also use the checklist for self-reviews, reflecting on their own courses.

Contact Us

If you have any questions about the Online Course Delivery & Facilitation Checklist or wish to discuss a formal review, please contact the Quality Assurance team at gateam@gmu.edu.

1.1 Instructor Presence

Quality Indicator	Indicator Description	Why is this Important?	Essential Components
Indicator 1.1 Instructor Presence	Instructor presence is central to maintaining student engagement in online learning. Regular presence not only fosters trust and accountability but also directly influences student satisfaction, persistence, and course completion. Aligned to University Policy 3014: Distance Education and 34 CFR 600.2 "Distance education", instructor presence is necessary to meet expectations for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in online courses.	Instructors who actively guide discussions, share weekly updates, and provide timely feedback create a learning environment that mirrors the immediacy and support of the classroom.	☐ The instructor regularly initiates contact with students, such as through announcements, emails, office hours, or scheduled virtual meetings. ☐ The instructor actively guides student learning in a variety of ways, such as through timely feedback, detailed instructions and rubrics, supplemental resources and prompt responses to student questions. ☐ The instructor provides regular, ongoing and meaningful communication with students, including regular announcements, participation in discussion forums, Q&A forums. ☐ The instructor monitors student participation and progress, reaching out to students who may be falling behind or in need of additional support.
Additional ways to take this further: - Conduct activities that require direct involvement from the instructor, such as facilitating group projects, conducting live lectures and webinars. - Use Course Analytics to monitor student engagement and performance, allowing for targeted interventions to support students who may be struggling.			

1.2 Introduction & Information

Quality Indicator	Indicator Description	Why is this Important?	Essential Components
Indicator 1.2 Introduction & Information	A clear introduction helps establish transparency, connection, and trust at the start of the course. When students understand who is teaching, how to communicate, and what to expect, they are more likely to engage and seek support when needed. Providing contact information, communication expectations, and instructor availability aligns with best practices in online course facilitation and supports a consistent student experience across courses and programs.	Clear instructor introductions and communication expectations reduce student uncertainty and anxiety, especially for those new to online environments.	☐ The instructor shares an introduction, including personal background, educational qualifications, and interests. ☐ The instructor shares contact information and preferred communication mode. ☐ The instructor outlines how students can reach them in emergencies or urgent situations. ☐ The instructor provides a clear communication plan, stating when students can expect replies to emails and feedback on assignments.
Additional ways to take this further: - Record a personal introduction video where the instructor shares their teaching philosophy, interests and enthusiasm for the course. This adds a personal touch and helps students connect with the instructor. - Host a live orientation session at the beginning of the course where the instructor can introduce themselves, review course expectations and answer any initial questions from students.			

1.3 Professionalism

Quality Indicator	Indicator Description	Why is this Important?	Essential Components
Indicator 1.4 Professionalism	Professionalism in online teaching reinforces respect, consistency, and academic integrity. Modeling professional communication and responsiveness sets the tone for a productive learning environment and demonstrates the standards expected in higher education. Maintaining professionalism also aligns with institutional policies on conduct, accessibility, and data privacy, ensuring courses reflect the values and ethical standards of the university.	Instructors who demonstrate professionalism set a tone that supports civil discourse, reinforces ethical learning practices, and helps students develop transferable professional skills relevant beyond the course.	☐ The instructor is available in regular virtual office hours via Zoom and is flexible in scheduling one-on-one meetings with students as needed ☐ The instructor responds to student inquiries posted in the online classroom promptly (usually within 24-48 hours); the instructor also uses multiple communication channels to be available and responsive to students. ☐ The instructor includes a netiquette section in the syllabus, outlining expectations for respectful online communication in the course. ☐ The instructor consistently models professionalism in their communications in the course, with professional and respectful language. ☐ The instructor demonstrates professionalism by correctly citing sources, adhering to copyright, data privacy, and student record policies.
Additional ways to take this further: ● Use scheduling tools (such as Canvas Calendar) to allow students to book appointments easily. ● Post links or video tutorials with information about proper citation methods, copyright considerations and professional communication standards. ● Show students examples of exemplary work and explain how these meet professional guidelines.			

2.1 Learner Support & Encouragement

Quality Indicator	Indicator Description	Why is this Important?	Essential Components
Indicator 2.1 Learner Support & Encouragement	Intentional learner support and encouragement promote persistence, motivation, and academic success. When instructors reach out proactively and provide resources, students feel seen, supported, and more capable of overcoming challenges. These practices align with institutional goals for student retention and inclusive excellence, ensuring that all learners have equitable access to the tools and support they need to succeed.	Providing accessible learning resources and personal outreach builds resilience, mitigates feelings of isolation, and connects students to institutional support systems such as advising, tutoring, or counseling.	☐ The instructor fosters open and approachable communication with students, encouraging them to reach out with questions or concerns via email, discussion forums, or messaging platforms. ☐ The instructor posts links to tutorials or guides to support learning in the course. ☐ The instructor is ready to provide reasonable support (such as alternative assignments or extended deadlines) to students dealing with personal challenges. ☐ The instructor provides guidance for accessing campus resources for learning support, such as the Writing Center, Libraries, and CAPS.
Additional ways to take this further: - Post regular motivational announcements that celebrate student successes, encourage persistence and offer support during challenging periods in the course. - Use analytics tools within Canvas to monitor student engagement and performance. Identify students who may be struggling and proactively reach out with targeted support or resources to address their specific challenges.			

2.2 Constructive & Timely Feedback

Quality Indicator	Indicator Description	Why is this Important?	Essential Components
Indicator 2.2 Constructive & Timely Feedback	Constructive, timely feedback is central to learning and growth in online education. When instructors provide specific, actionable comments, students can better understand their progress and apply feedback to improve performance. Providing feedback that is consistent, transparent, and aligned with grading criteria reflects evidence-based teaching practices and supports institutional expectations for quality instruction.	Timely, constructive feedback is one of the strongest predictors of student learning and engagement in online courses. When feedback is specific, actionable, and delivered consistently, it helps students close performance gaps, and signals that the instructor is actively invested in their success.	☐ The instructor communicates clear expectations regarding when and how students can expect to receive feedback. This helps manage student expectations and ensures they know when to look for grades and feedback. ☐ The instructor provides feedback in various formats, such as written comments, audio or video messages, announcements, and discussions. ☐ The instructor regularly posts general feedback in the announcements section, addressing common challenges faced by the class and suggesting strategies for improvement. ☐ The instructor uses functions in Canvas to deliver feedback, such as gradebook annotations, SpeedGrader, or rubrics.
Additional ways to take this further: • Use detailed rubrics for assignments that outline specific criteria and levels of achievement. Share these rubrics with students beforehand to ensure transparency and help them understand how feedback aligns with expectations. • Incorporate peer feedback processes where students review each other's work based on guided criteria. Peer feedback complements instructor feedback and promotes collaborative learning.			

2.3 Respectful Classroom Climate

Quality Indicator	Indicator Description	Why is this Important?	Essential Components
Indicator 2.3 Respectful Classroom Climate	A respectful classroom community encourages open dialogue, inclusion, and a sense of belonging. Instructors who foster civility and empathy help students feel valued and confident in contributing to discussions and collaborative work. This approach reflects the university's commitment to creating inclusive learning environments and supports compliance with institutional diversity, equity, and accessibility standards.	Students are more willing to take risks, share perspectives, and engage critically when instructors set clear norms and model inclusive communication.	☐ The instructor encourages students to share their thoughts and experiences relevant to the course, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected. ☐ The instructor creates a supportive and respectful classroom community where students feel safe to express themselves and participate fully. ☐ The instructor ensures a positive and safe learning environment by overseeing classroom interactions and actively promoting respectful behavior that aligns with established expectations. ☐ The instructor begins the course with icebreaker activities that encourage students to introduce themselves and share personal interests or experiences. This establishes a foundation for respectful interaction.

Additional ways to take this further:

- Implement anonymous feedback channels where students can express concerns or suggestions about the classroom climate. This provides a safe space for students to voice their thoughts.
- Establish clear protocols for resolving conflicts or misunderstandings, ensuring that issues are addressed promptly and respectfully.
- Promote collaborative activities and group work that require students to engage respectfully and cooperatively with one another.
- Set up a virtual space in the course allowing students to engage in informal optional conversations, share interests, and discuss non-course-related topics.

Final Considerations

This checklist is designed to provide a foundation for quality online course delivery and facilitation. We encourage faculty to reflect on their teaching practices, seek feedback from students, and explore opportunities for continuous improvement. Online learning is dynamic, and ongoing engagement helps ensure that our courses remain accessible, meaningful, and student-centered.

Faculty may also consider how institutionally approved AI tools can assist with course design tasks. [PatriotAI](#), George Mason's AI platform, includes [SyllaBright](#), a course design assistant that can support the development and refinement of syllabi, learning objectives, assessment planning, and adaptation of materials for multilingual learners. These tools are intended to supplement, not replace, faculty expertise and should always be used in ways consistent with University policy and best practices in online learning.

Learn More

For additional information, examples, and support materials related to online course delivery and facilitation, please visit our website: [Designing for Online Learning](#)

There, you'll find:

- Expanded guidance about online course design and facilitation;
- Faculty resources and best practices in online learning;
- Contact information for consultations and individual support.

If you have questions, suggestions for improvement, or would like to schedule a review, contact the Quality Assurance team at qateam@gmu.edu.



The framework for Mason Online's **Online Course Delivery & Facilitation Checklist** is based on "[OLC Course Review Scorecard](#)" and licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License.



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