

ONLINE COURSE ESSENTIALS

While every course is unique, we recommend all online courses integrate the following course design and teaching components. Backed by extensive research, these practices align with Quality Matters standards for online and hybrid instruction. Widely considered the gold standard for assessing quality instructional practice, Quality Matters (QM) Essential Standards reflect minimum expectations for a successful online course.

Self-Evaluation Checklist for Online Instructors

Review the following list and consider how each item is integrated into your online course and instructional practice.

Component/Description	Related QM Std.
✓ SYLLABUS - clearly sets expectations around course learning, interaction, assessment, and grading; provides a detailed calendar of course work; includes course, college, and university policies.	3.2, 3.3, 7.1-7.3
✓ OBJECTIVES – course and unit-level learning objectives are present; measurable; written from the learner perspective; available in course syllabus and/or modules.	2.1-2.5, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1
✓ ORIENTATION - course homepage and getting started module are present; includes instructor contact information and steps for beginning the course.	1.1, 1.2
✓ MODULES – modules are used to organize and chunk course content; there is a logical and consistent organization and layout that continues throughout the course.	8.1
✓ ACCESSIBILITY - course content and materials are accessible; images address color contrast and include alt-text, tables are formatted for screen-readers, hyperlinks use meaningful text, documents use heading structure, bulleted or numbered lists, etc.	8.2, 8.3
✓ ASSESSMENT - course offers a variety of methods for assessment; assignments support learning aims and include clear instructions; criteria for assessment is clearly articulated (rubrics, detailed feedback).	2.4, 3.1
✓ LEARNING ACTIVITIES - required learning activities, materials, readings, media, etc. support the learning aims and are present in each module.	4.1, 4.2, 5.1
✓ MEDIA - course uses created or sourced media to engage and support learners, media is accessible (quality audio, captions, transcripts).	4.1, 4.2
✓ ENGAGEMENT - course provides opportunities for student-student interaction and active learning.	5.2, 6.2
✓ INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE – course provides regular instructor guidance to support learner success and opportunities for instructor-student interaction.	5.3