
Guidelines for Digital Learning

'Digital learning' - the use of digital technology to enhance learning. Encompasses all modes of delivery, including online and on campus.

Many students participate in topics from across the University and in different colleges and courses. Students have requested consistency in layout and structure in FLO topic sites. These guidelines are designed to provide guidance on how to design FLO topic sites so students experience a level of consistency in layout and structure and good practice to support teaching and student engagement. These guidelines, and associated [good practice guides and tip sheets](#), are based on evidence from literature, evidence-based practice across the Australia/New Zealand university sector and are in line with the [key considerations for providers related to online learning](#) issued by TEQSA.

Historically, the University has had both the [Web Presence in Every Topic](#) (WebPET) and the [FLO topic baseline](#) which have gone some way to outline minimum expectations for tools, use and layout of the digital learning environment. These guidelines enhance and build upon, and ultimately replace, both WebPET and the FLO topic baseline. They outline good practice for digital learning at Flinders and are to be used as a guide for teaching staff.

Rationale

Currently, the differences in layout and structure of FLO sites are significant. These guidelines are designed to assist in developing topic sites to ensure that a level of consistency and quality is maintained in the digital learning environment. Many of these elements may already be in place in your topics. If so, you are encouraged to share your FLO site as an exemplar. However, these elements either do not currently exist in all FLO sites across the University, or do not exist in a consistent manner. The intention is to reduce inconsistency across FLO topics sites via these digital learning guidelines, supported by [good practice guides and tip sheets](#).

It is not the intention of these guidelines to dictate approaches to teaching. [Learning and teaching principles](#), the alignment of purposeful curriculum and assessment design and effective pedagogic practices must drive topic design. Strategic and rigorous learning design informs topic design and use of digital tools. These guidelines are therefore intended to complement and enhance topic design by providing a baseline of effective practice expectations for the digital learning environment. Whilst it may appear that some guidelines are not specific to digital learning, all statements relate to good teaching practice and are intended to convey how our learning and teaching principles can be expressed in a digital environment.

How to use these guidelines

These guidelines apply to topics that have a digital component. In the Flinders University context, this includes all topics delivered as part of our award courses and non-award courses and all delivery modes.

These guidelines are written to provide flexibility of application and interpretation so that they can be applied across all topics, year levels and disciplines, and according to context, for example, mode of study and positioning within the course. There is intentionally room within these guidelines to personalise and adjust according to context.

Where possible, elements of these guidelines have been incorporated into a [FLO starter site](#). The use of the starter site and iterative implementation of guidelines in new topics, topics undergoing re-design or re-development, and strategically selected topics is intended to produce efficient and effective approaches to digital learning.

These guidelines can be used as a mechanism to assist with the development of topic sites, or as an aid to reviewing a topic site as part of a course review process. They can be used as a self-evaluative tool, or in peer review practices. They can be used to guide consistency in design across topics within a course. These guidelines can also be used iteratively in existing topics as part of continuous improvement efforts.

In some cases, structures and processes already exist that address some of these guidelines, for example, the Statement of Assessment Methods (SAM) and a link to FLO support for students. Where structures and process already exist, these have been indicated within the relevant statement.

The statements below reference the [Flinders learning and teaching principles](#); the intention of these guidelines is to prompt engagement with the principles and how they are expressed in topics via digital learning methods. These guidelines should also be used in conjunction with institutional good practice guides and tip sheets and where these exist, links have been provided. These resources provide practical strategies and ideas for implementation.

Key areas

The guidelines provide eight key interconnected areas to address when providing a consistent quality digital experience for students.

1. [Topic overview, welcome and orientation](#)
2. [Learning outcomes](#)
3. [Assessment and feedback](#)
4. [Learning resources](#)
5. [Learning activities, engagement and learner interaction](#)
6. [Technology and online tools](#)
7. [Support for learning](#)
8. [Accessibility and useability](#)

Review and feedback

Given changes in digital learning technology and innovative teaching practice is it expected that these guidelines will be refined and iterated over time. This document will be reviewed annually. Feedback and items for review can be sent to cilt@flinders.edu.au.

1. Topic overview, welcome and orientation

It is important for students to experience a level of consistency between topics as they progress through their course at the University. Consistency means that students are not required to adjust to a new layout, navigation, styling or terminology within each topic in FLO, not that every topic must be taught in the same way. The guidelines below and the [FLO starter site](#), are designed to assist staff achieve a high level of consistency of layout and navigation across topic sites, whilst providing flexibility according to topic context and teaching approach. The statements below reference the [Flinders learning and teaching principles](#); the intention of the guidelines is to prompt engagement with the principles and how they are expressed in topics via digital learning methods.

Meaningful and purposeful engagement with the digital learning environment is key to student success at university. Ensuring each topic site has an appropriate welcome, orientation, and introduction to the topic and how it will function in the digital environment is crucial. Students should be provided with information about the skills they will need or develop, the support available to them and how to engage with their topic in a digital environment (Sandhu, Sankey & Donald 2019; Sankey, 2017). When students are better prepared for digital learning, this may also flow over into the long-term retention rates, particularly in online study (Jones, 2013).

	Guideline	Support resources
1.1	Students have access to topic sites that align with the Flinders learning and teaching principles and good practice .	Teaching and learning principles Good practice guides and tip sheets
1.2	Students have access to topic sites in FLO that are consistent in layout, navigation, and styling.	FLO starter site
1.3	Students are provided access to topic sites in FLO no later than 7 calendar days before the commencement of the topic, including key resources and activities and all assessment information (including the SAM).	
1.4	Students are provided with an online welcome to the topic by the topic coordinator and/or teaching team that includes a photo, video and/or audio.	
1.5	Topic coordinators draw students' attention to the endorsed acknowledgement of country in FLO.	Culturally responsive digital learning
1.6	Students have access to communication expectations and protocol for online discussions, including preferred tools and mechanisms for staff-to-student and student-to-student communication.	Facilitating Student-Teacher interaction in FLO
1.7	Students have access to all academic staff details, including role, contact details, availability and response times.	Facilitating Student-Teacher interaction in FLO
1.8	Staff draw students' attention to links that exist to FLO support.	Links in FLO to student support services and information
1.9	Staff draw students' attention to the SAM and the published information for the topic.	
1.10	Students are provided with an online orientation to the topic, including clear and explicit participation expectations and a study schedule / structure / overview / plan that provides format and focus of sessions and a logical study path.	

	Guideline	Support resources
1.11	Students studying online have opportunities to engage in synchronous communication and have access to timely opportunities to discuss assessment tasks.	
1.12	Synchronous online classes should be used if appropriate to cohort and discipline.	Engaging students in a synchronous session
1.13	Students are made aware of any necessary skills, knowledge or resources (e.g. scientific integrity, laboratory safety) needed for successful engagement with the topic, and information on what to do if they do not possess these.	
1.14	Students are reminded of any specialised software, hardware or connectivity items required to engage with the topic.	

2. Learning outcomes

When designing a topic – creating learning activities, curating resources, building assessment – it is important that these are aligned with the intended learning outcomes through constructive alignment (Biggs, 2014; Kandlbinder, 2014). This process ensures that the activities and resources lead students to achieving the specified learning outcomes.

	Guideline	Support resources
2.1	Staff draw students' attention to topic learning outcomes in FLO, available via the topic information link and the SAM (also see 1.9)	
2.2	Students are provided with clear and explicit explanations in FLO of what the learning outcomes mean and how these relate to the intended learning.	
2.3	Students are provided with clear and explicit information in FLO about how all assessment items, learning activities and resources are linked to the learning outcomes (also see 3.1, 4.7 and 5.1)	

3. Assessment and feedback

It is critical to align topic activities and resources to learning outcomes. It is just as important to align assessment to resources, appropriate learning activities and learning outcomes. Expressing this alignment clearly to students will allow you to provide them with meaningful feedback that they can use to help them meet the objectives of the topic. Feedback is a key part of assessment for ongoing learning, indeed has been described as ‘the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement’ (Hattie, 1999). Feedback should be constructive, timely and meaningful.

	Guideline	Support resources
3.1	Students are provided with explicit information in FLO on how assessments align with learning outcomes, graduate attributes and, where appropriate, professional standards (also see 2.3, 4.7 and 5.1).	
3.2	Students have access to the SAM , plus clearly identified assessment-related activities and resources, information on assessment expectations, due dates, rubrics and marking guides and instruction for assignment submissions in FLO prior to submission.	
3.3	All topic assessment decisions must conform with the Flinders University Assessment Policy and the Flinders University Academic Integrity Policy .	
3.4	Students are provided with effective, useful, constructive, and timely progression-focused feedback in FLO to allow them to improve the quality of their learning.	Providing constructive feedback in FLO Rubrics and marking guides in FLO
3.5	FLO is used to organise and scaffold activities and assessments so that students are supported to progressively develop their skills and understandings.	Scaffolding assessment in FLO
3.6	Staff draw students’ attention to Academic Integrity for students in FLO and assistance available with interpretation of text-matching reports.	Links in FLO to student support services and information
3.7	Students have explicit direction about expected referencing standards for their topics, as well as access to support resources via FLO to help them meet these standards.	
3.8	Students submit assessment and access grades/marks and feedback via FLO to support high quality and timely feedback.	Providing constructive feedback in FLO Rubrics and marking guides in FLO Using Gradebook
3.9	Assessment tasks will only use University supported and approved learning technologies (core and recommended).	Using technology in your teaching

4. Learning resources

It should be as easy as possible for our students to access the latest information that is aligned with their studies. Learning resources should be current, reflect the level of study and provide enough detail about their use to enable students to meet the learning outcomes. Students should be supported to be independent learners by providing them with carefully curated resources for extended learning that encourages investigation beyond content covered by the required resources. Resources that are not required should be indicated by a statement that articulates that these are extended learning resources and not required for successful topic completion.

	Guideline	Support resources
4.1	Students can easily identify which resources are required/essential and which are optional/supplementary.	
4.2	Students are provided with topic resources which meet academic integrity standards and comply with copyright requirements .	Academic integrity website Copyright Compliance Procedures
4.3	Students are provided with topic resources which align with cultural inclusivity guidelines .	Culturally responsive digital learning
4.4	Students are provided with University managed digital resources, open educational resources or teacher-created resources to support relevant key concepts.	Sourcing and creating digital content Design principles for creating engaging digital content
4.5	Students will have access to a variety of types of learning resources.	
4.6	Students can navigate topic resources using a logical progression and sequencing in FLO.	
4.7	Topic resources in FLO align with activities students undertake, assessment and learning outcomes (also see 2.3, 3.1 and 5.1)	
4.8	Students have access to up-to-date, current and relevant topic resources in FLO.	
4.9	Lecture recordings as a primary teaching resource should only be used if they have been designed for or are of appropriate quality and relevance for the specific mode.	

5. Learning activities, engagement and learner interaction

Active learning can assist students develop higher order thinking and link knowledge to meaning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Gibbs, 1992; Hanson & Moser, 2003; Scheyvens et al., 2008). Evidence indicates that active learning approaches in digital learning lead to successful outcomes for students (Zhan et al., 2011); impactful, purposeful, active online activities keep learners engaged, motivated, and participating (Salmon, 2013) and effective use of digital learning tools can promote active learning (Cook & Babon, 2017). Key considerations for learning design include providing students with [authentic learning activities](#) that provide interaction that support [active learning approaches](#) and opportunities to engage in formative learning activities designed to scaffold learning towards assessment.

	Guideline	Support resources
5.1	Students are provided with explicit advice in FLO on how all learning activities are genuinely connected to learning outcomes (also see 2.3, 3.1 and 4.7).	
5.2	Students are provided with detailed learning activity instruction in FLO to guide and support successful activity completion.	
5.3	Students are provided with online activities that are suitable to the mode of delivery.	
5.4	Students are provided with opportunities in addition to Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) to provide feedback on topic design, teaching quality and student experience.	Touchpoint survey
5.5	Teaching resources (tutor guides, marking guides, tutorial guides) are embedded within FLO (hidden from students) to enable a consistent approach over time and within teaching teams.	

6. Technology and online tools

Effective use of technology can play a valuable role in higher education by supporting and enhancing curriculum design and implementation. Supported tools available at present, and others to be included in FLO sites, will offer our students different learning experiences (e.g. diverse modes of content delivery, multiple means of expression, engagement and representation). The use of learning technology supported by Flinders' will also achieve a higher level of consistency in the user experience and help staff to accommodate different student learning needs; enable student active and equal participation and break down common barriers to learning (Reisreis, 2014). Using supported tools also makes it easier to track student activity; important as we evolve our use of learning analytics to inform how we improve learning experiences.

	Guideline	Support resources
6.1	The technology and tools used in the topic support the learning objectives and promote active learning.	Active, engaged and collaborative learning
6.2	Technology and tools used should promote and support the digital literacy of students.	Digital literacy
6.3	Students are provided with appropriate introduction to new technologies used in the topic.	Using technology in your teaching
6.4	The technology and tools used are up-to-date, readily available, and accessible for all users.	
6.5	Institutionally approved/supported technologies are used in the delivery of topics to ensure accessibility and equity of access, security, consistency of student experience and alignment with education strategy.	Approved/supported learning technology at Flinders Using technology in your teaching
6.6	Where it is appropriate that student work occurs using external non-supported platforms (e.g. industry-based technology), attention should be paid to legal and security issues and use may need to be made optional.	Using technology in your teaching
6.7	Use of applications and content provision systems beyond institutionally approved/supported technology will not require additional purchase by students .	Using technology in your teaching

7. Support for learning

Given the increasing diversity within our student cohorts, there is often a need to identify and indicate the institutional learning supports available to students to help them succeed. There is no need for teaching staff to recreate this support where it already exists. Student support involves many areas, including professional teams, library teams, academic staff and in some cases student peer mentors.

	Guideline	Support resources
7.1	Students are provided with a location in FLO for asking topic-related questions where teaching staff are actively participating and answering questions in a timely manner.	Communication, interaction and collaboration tools in FLO Facilitating Student-Teacher interaction in FLO
7.2	There should be a mechanism to respond to frequently asked questions (FAQ) that can be accessed by all students and maintained and monitored by teaching staff.	Communication, interaction and collaboration tools in FLO Facilitating Student-Teacher interaction in FLO
7.3	Students are provided with a single location in FLO (preferably announcements) for important topic-related notices, updates and reminders.	Communication, interaction and collaboration tools in FLO Facilitating Student-Teacher interaction in FLO
7.4	Staff draw students' attention to links in FLO to technical support services for the learning technologies used in the topic.	Links in FLO to student support services and information
7.5	Staff draw students' attention to links in FLO to student-related policies.	Links in FLO to student support services and information
7.6	Staff draw students' attention to links in FLO to student learning support services and all applicable student support services as listed on the student portal .	Links in FLO to student support services and information
7.7	Students are directed to topic specific support resources (e.g. support for specific software, lab induction, placement requirements) in FLO.	

8. Accessibility and useability

Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others (Hockings, 2010). Providing accessible and useable resources benefits all students and takes account of personal and technological circumstances that diverse learners encounter on their learning journey.

	Guideline	Support resources
8.1	The online learning environment, learning resources and any additional learning technologies used, comply with accessibility legislation and guidelines .	Accessibility and inclusivity in FLO
8.2	Students have access to a range of formats in which materials are presented (i.e. text, video, audio, multimedia).	Accessibility and inclusivity in FLO Using captions and transcripts
8.3	Students are provided with multimedia-based materials that are accessible regardless of location, device or modality.	Accessibility and inclusivity in FLO Using captions and transcripts
8.4	Students are provided with information to support participation in different time zones and geographical locations.	Managing FLO for students in different time zones

References

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