
Guidelines for Digital Learning

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

These guidelines offer design guidance for FLO topic sites, ensuring consistency in layout and structure. They draw on evidence from literature and best practices across Australian and New Zealand universities, aligning with [TEQSA’s considerations for online learning](#). These guidelines and associated [good practice guides and tip sheets](#) replace both WebPET and the FLO topic baseline, providing good practice recommendations for digital learning at Flinders University.

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 in Canvas Community of Practice at Flinders. 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 [Canvas topic shell](#). The use of the topic shell and iterative implementation of guidelines in new topics, topics undergoing re-design or redevelopment, and strategically selected topics is intended to produce efficient and effective approaches to digital learning.

The guidelines can serve various purposes including aiding in the development and review of topic sites, self-evaluation, peer review, ensuring consistency in design across course topics, and facilitating 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. Feedback and items for review can be sent to Learning and Teaching Innovation email address: lti@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 Canvas topic shell, 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
1.1	Students have access to topic sites that align with the Flinders learning and teaching principles and good practice.
1.2	Students have access to topic sites in FLO that are consistent in layout, navigation, and styling.
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 sites.

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.
1.7	Students have access to all academic staff details, including role, contact details, availability and response times.
1.8	Staff draw students' attention to links that exist to FLO support.
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.
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.
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.

Support resources

- [Acknowledgement of Country](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Embarking on the digital journey: The Online Orientation](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Supporting students in topic sites](#)
- [Learning and teaching: Good practice guides and tip sheets](#)
- [Learning and teaching: Learning & teaching principles](#)
- [Learning and teaching: The Canvas topic shell](#)
- [Staff FLO support: Statement of Assessment Methods](#)

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
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)

Support resources

- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Constructive alignment for student engagement](#)
- [Staff FLO support: Statement of Assessment Methods](#)

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
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.
3.5	FLO is used to organise and scaffold activities and assessments so that students are supported to progressively develop their skills and understandings.
3.6	Staff draw students’ attention to Academic Integrity for students in FLO and assistance available with interpretation of text-matching reports.
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.
3.9	Assessment tasks will only use University supported and approved learning technologies (core and recommended).

Support resources

- [Academic Integrity for students](#)
- [Flinders University Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Flinders University Assessment Policy](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Constructive alignment for student engagement](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Supporting students in topic sites](#)
- [Staff Support: FLO ecosystem](#)

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
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.
4.3	Students are provided with topic resources which align with cultural inclusivity guidelines.
4.4	Students are provided with University managed digital resources, open educational resources or teacher-created resources to support relevant key concepts.
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.

Support resources

- [Copyright Compliance Procedures](#)
- [Learning and teaching: Academic integrity](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Constructive alignment for student engagement](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Design principles for sourcing, adapting, or creating engaging digital content](#)

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
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.
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
6.1	The technology and tools used in the topic support the learning objectives and promote active learning.
6.2	Technology and tools used should promote and support the digital literacy of students.
6.3	Students are provided with appropriate introduction to new technologies used in the topic.
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.
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.
6.7	Use of applications and content provision systems beyond institutionally approved/supported technology will not require additional purchase by students.

Support resources

- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Authentic and active learning for deep learning](#)
- [Learning and Teaching: Digital literacy](#)
- [Staff Support: FLO ecosystem](#)

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
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.
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.
7.3	Students are provided with a single location in FLO (preferably announcements) for important topic related notices, updates and reminders.
7.4	Staff draw students' attention to links in FLO to technical support services for the learning technologies used in the topic.
7.5	Staff draw students' attention to links in FLO to student-related policies.
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.
7.7	Students are directed to topic specific support resources (e.g. support for specific software, lab induction, placement requirements) in FLO.

Support resources

- [Student portal](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips- Communication interaction and collaboration](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Supporting students in topic sites](#)

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

Support resources

- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Accessibility and inclusivity](#)
- [Learning and teaching: FLO tips - Captions ,subtitles and transcripts](#)

Next steps

The [FLO checklist](#) can help you achieve these guidelines by providing you with a summary of key components and links to support resources when preparing topics in FLO.

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