

Best Practices in Online Library Instruction @ Mason Libraries

# The Teaching & Learning Team

# George Mason University Libraries

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## Introduction

Online learning is unique in that it is the “convergence of the technological and pedagogical developments” (Garrison, 2011). While one can technically teach a face to face class with no digital technology, it is not possible to do that in online learning environments. Skill development needs to be in equal parts pedagogy and learning technology.

George Mason University community members frequently refer to the Community of Inquiry (COI) Framework to develop online learning environments. This framework, developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999), theorizes that learning occurs in three domains, the cognitive, social, and teaching presences. In this framework, not only does critical thinking need to be a part of the learning experience, but the social-emotional part of learning must be developed equally. Finally, the design of the learning environment must work to foster the development of both. The best practices described in this document are grounded in the COI framework.

In the work context of George Mason University Libraries, much of the library instruction is implemented in Blackboard, Mason’s learning management system (LMS). Instructors can choose to use library learning objects independently of library instructors or they may choose to embed a library instructor in their course to build the content and facilitate student learning.

This document provides guidance for synchronous and asynchronous online library instructional experiences at Mason Libraries, from outreach to teaching faculty, setting up content in Blackboard, and to providing feedback to students.

## Expectations of the Library Instructor

*Purpose: This section provides basic expectations of the library instructor at George Mason University Libraries*.

### Types of Online Instruction

#### Synchronous

Like face to face instruction, you and your faculty partner may decide to hold a synchronous session or set of sessions. These are very similar to what you might do face to face, just with some adjustments for the online environment.

#### Asynchronous

Online classes allow for instructors to embed content instead of or in addition to hosting synchronous sessions. This content may include text, images, videos, discussion boards, or anything else students can interact with in their own time. At Mason, we typically build asynchronous content to include some interaction with one or more embedded library instructors, like a discussion forum.

## Expectations for Online Instructors

### Build in interactivity

Whether doing a synchronous or an asynchronous model, it is important to build in interactivity with your students. This includes with the library instructor and between the students to encourage peer-to-peer-learning. During synchronous sessions this would most likely take the form of an activity or discussion. For asynchronous content, using a discussion board is another effective way to do this.

### Add your own content

This is especially important for asynchronous content but adding in your own content (rather than the faculty importing our content) is a best practice. To do this, request that faculty add you to Blackboard as a Course Builder.

### Accessibility

With any instruction we do, ensuring that our content is accessible to our students is crucial in the online environment. All video content should include captions, and images should include alternate text. More information about accessibility can be found in the section “Design Principles for Online Teaching” (p. 8).

### Resources

The Library Collaboration space is a shared organization that contains pre-made Blackboard content and research modules primarily designed for undergraduate students. You can be added to this organization by emailing the Instruction Coordinator or the Online Learning Coordinator on the Teaching & Learning Team. Once added you will be able to view and copy pre-made content to your sandbox for customization. *Please do not make any content changes in the organization itself.* You can make a request for a sandbox course through Mason’s ITS Dept by completing this [form](https://gmu.teamdynamix.com/TDClient/33/Portal/Requests/TicketRequests/NewForm?ID=QOgVUuM2M3M_).

Video and web page instructional content is available at <https://library.gmu.edu/tutorials>. Again, these videos can be embedded in your modules or shared with instructors.

## Blackboard Basics

*Purpose: This is not an extensive Blackboard help page, but a list of resources and learning object standards specific to the University Libraries as well as some typical Blackboard quirks and solutions. Extensive Blackboard help may be found through Mason’s ITS Department’s* [*Knowledge Base*](https://its.gmu.edu/service/blackboard-courses/)*.*

### Accessing Blackboard

Blackboard can be accessed by navigating to [mymason.gmu.edu](https://mymason.gmu.edu/) and by signing in with your Mason NetId and password. 2-factor authentication via Duo is also required.

Learning Object Standards & Quirks

#### Constructing a Module vs. Folder

Learning modules and content folders in Blackboard are both great ways to organize content, including videos, quizzes, blank pages, etc.

Use a learning module when:

* You have a complete lesson plan and activity for a student to complete in a particular order

Use a content folder when:

* You just need to share a few resources

#### Building Learning Objects in Blackboard

##### Content Areas

* Ask the instructor where library instruction content should go in their course.
* If they want content to be separate from their own lessons, create a [course content area](https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/how-to-organize-information-in-a-blackboard-course/) in the course menu. Keep the area hidden from students until your work is complete.
* When naming content, consider using self-explanatory names like “research help” or “library assignment.” Alternatively, you can name items based off learning outcomes, such as “evaluating sources.”

##### Learning Module Basics

* Include learning outcomes either on the “cover” of the learning module, or on the first page.
* When building text content in learning modules, use blank pages, not module pages. Module pages do not copy across Blackboard courses.
* It is best practice to name each blank page beginning with an action verb to foster learner engagement. (Example: Evaluating Sources)
* Preferred fonts: Trebuchet is the font commonly used in our Blackboard learning modules. At minimum, only sans serif fonts should be used. Body text is generally size 14, main headings 18, and subheadings 16

##### Content Folder Basics

* Title should clearly reflect content to the learner
* Consider putting an item list in the description along with how the resources will be useful to learning or a specific assignment

## Accessibility

* Text should be formatted as paragraph, heading, subheading, etc. to help people who use screen readers navigate the page. These formats are available in Blackboard’s editing mode.
* External/internal links: When setting the “target” in Blackboard for hyperlinks the general rule of thumb is to have links open in the same window. New windows can be confusing for users, especially in mobile view. The exception for this is links that navigate students away from a secured site (like Blackboard) or when students might lose unsaved work by being taken off the page (i.e. a hyperlink in a survey or quiz).
* Multiple modalities: Include information in multiple media to provide varied communication options (see more about “Universal Design for Learning,” p. 7-8), but be mindful of accessibility requirements. For example, if you design a gif, include a text description underneath it.

### Troubleshooting Common Issues in Blackboard

* Kaltura is Blackboard’s video recording tool and it can be temperamental. Videos can be downloaded to YouTube and added as mashups as a workaround.
* Adding pictures:
  + To add images to Blackboard, use the image button in the content creation area. Set the dimensions in the appearance tab ahead of time or right click and resize after submission.
  + To add aligned, multiple images, first add a table with a border width set to zero so the lines cannot be seen outside of editing mode. Insert the pictures within the table.
* Font changes: If you have trouble changing font type/size, highlight the text and remove formatting first by using the eraser tool in editing mode.

### Active Learning Tools & Communication Options in Blackboard

* Wiki - collaborative space within a course where students can view, contribute, and edit content, as well as comment on their classmates’ content. Teaching use example: building a shared resource list
* Blog – students can create blog posts and view and comment on classmates’ posts. Teaching use example: reflective exercises and peer to peer learning via commenting
* Discussion boards - most used in library instruction for higher order, critical thinking skills. Subscribe to discussion board forums to get email alerts when new posts are created. Useful for peer to peer learning via commenting
* Ultra/Zoom - live online conferencing tools integrated in Blackboard.
  + Ultra tools: polling, breakout rooms, whiteboard, tools that check for understanding (hand raising), chat, screensharing, emojis
  + Zoom tools: polling, breakout rooms, whiteboard, tools that check for understanding (hand raising, yes/no buttons, etc.), chat screensharing
* Journals - library instructors and other students may only view journals if set to public.
* Feedback Box -provides a place for students to give anonymous feedback, only visible to instructor
* Tests/Surveys/Polls - allow for immediate feedback to students and seamless grading for faculty; course builders cannot see results without faculty assistance
* Email - send students emails about resources, workshops, etc.
* Announcements – functions like an email if appropriate settings are selected but also stays on the announcement section of the course
* Leganto - as of spring 2021, Leganto is the new e-reserves system. It may also be used to create suggested readings. Use this tool in careful coordination with the instructor

### External Active Learning Software that Integrates with Blackboard

* LibWizard – feedback and assessment tool available under the Library’s LibApps subscription. You can create forms, quizzes, surveys, and tutorials in LibWizard as an alternative to using these tools from Blackboard. Contact the Online Learning Coordinator for an account.
  + Benefits:
    - Tools created in LibWizard can be used external to Blackboard
    - Library instructor has full control and access to the responses to these tools
    - These tools provide options for immediate feedback and offer the option of a certificate of completion that can be downloaded, printed, or emailed
  + Integration in Blackboard: LibWizard provides embed widget code as one way to share their tools. Add this code into the HTML editor box in Blackboard to embed this content on a blank page. Alternatively, you can add the link to your LibWizard content in Blackboard. Currently tutorials cannot be embedded in Blackboard, only linked.
  + Student privacy considerations: do not collect more information than you **need** with LibWizard or ask for identifying student information, i.e. name, email, NetId, etc.Blackboard tools should be used if grades or other sensitive student information is collected.
    - If you are using LibWizard and need to provide this information for grading, students can download their certificate of completion and upload it in Blackboard.

## Resources

* Information Technology Services (ITS) -- <https://its.gmu.edu/service/blackboard-courses/>
* Blackboard help -- <https://help.blackboard.com/>
* Mason Leaps Courses on Blackboard -- <https://masonleaps.gmu.edu/>
* 13 Thing is Blackboard is a library-specific Blackboard training offered in the spring semester. See the Online Learning Coordinator for more information.

## Design Principles for Online Teaching

*Purpose: This section of best embedded practices focuses on the design principles. Specifically, we rely on guidance from Universal Design for Learning as well as the* [*ADDIE Model*](https://www.instructionaldesign.org/models/addie/#:~:text=The%20ADDIE%20model%20is%20the,training%20and%20performance%20support%20tools.)*.*

## Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guides our online instruction design principles. Using the UDL framework, instructors provide multiple means of:

* + Engagement (online learning example: use real-world scenarios in learning activities)
  + Representation (online learning example: use text and media)
  + Action and expression (online learning example: allow students to represent their knowledge through discussion forums and quizzes)

When designing online teaching and learning content, it is best practice to utilize UDL guidelines to the best of your ability. Learn more about [UDL Guidelines](http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.X2Ug2RBKjIU) from the Center for Applied Special Technology.

### Accessibility

#### Closed Captioning

Captions allow accessibility for videos and are also useful to people who are viewing content in noisy environments. For content made at Mason the [Assistive Technology Initiative](https://ati.gmu.edu/accessible-media/) provides captioning, audio description, and transcription services. (**preferred method**)

#### Color

When choosing color combinations for text and backgrounds of videos, check all color combinations in an [online contrast checker](https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/). This checks that people with color blindness will be able to distinguish text from the background.

* + Colors will not be the same across screens, so test it if you have any doubt.
  + Use 2-3 colors at most. Keep it simple.
  + [The Adobe Color](https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel) website is useful for color ideas.
  + [The Colorzilla](https://www.colorzilla.com/) website browser add-on to use an eyedropper to get color from the web.

#### Alt Text

When adding images be sure to add alternative text for screen readers. This is a basic description of what the image depicts. It is not needed for things that are purely for visual appeal. Example: put alt text for a picture of a person but NOT for a green square used to visually change the page.

#### *Documents*

Word and text documents are easier to make accessible than PDFs. WebAIM offers [guidance](http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.X2Ug2RBKjIU) on making PDFs accessible. More information on making your documents accessible can be found on the [ATI website](https://ati.gmu.edu/resources/creating-accessible-resources/).

## ADDIE Model

The ADDIE Model is a framework used by many instructional designers to create training programs, course curriculum, learning objects, etc. The model is iterative, so at any point in the design process a return to a previous stage may be necessary. Here is the breakdown of the model and some leading questions for each stage:

### Analysis

* + Who will you be teaching?
  + What is your timeline?

### Design

* + Storyboard your learning content around COI strategies.
  + Decide on headings you may use for your module pages like you would do for a presentation.
  + What resources will you be using for your teaching?

### Development

#### Organization Tips:

* + Create your module/learning activity.
  + Let students know what information will be covered through both learning outcomes and specific page titles.
  + Ask these questions:
    - Does this content cohesively fit together?
    - Does this module successfully teach my learning outcomes?
    - Do I need any interactive activities to engage my students?
    - Am I logically getting from point A to point B?
    - How long do I expect a student to be on this page?
  + Bullet out activities.
  + Students need to easily understand WHAT assignments are due.
  + Student need to easily understand HOW to submit the assignment (discussion boards, etc.)
  + Repeat assignment directions in the submission area
  + Include tables or forms as needed to make certain activities easier to complete.
  + For activities use diverse examples and try use scenarios with long-term relevance.

#### Design Tips:

* + Consider accessibility first in your design.
  + Chunk content in logical ways
  + Enforce information with scenarios or specific examples.
  + Keep paragraphs and sentences brief. Example: lines of text should have no more than 75 characters.
  + Use [simple fonts](https://elearningindustry.com/typography-in-elearning-5-key-tips-for-elearning-professionals)
    - Be consistent with fonts throughout your lesson since it offers continuity for the learner.
    - Sans-serif font type is best for online instruction.
    - Consult this [webpage](https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/bid/353234/A-7-Step-Typography-Lesson-for-First-time-eLearning-Developers) for more on typography.
  + Keep alignment the same throughout the module (left align is preferred, but some creativity is also welcomed).
  + When making tables, use colors and infographics to make them stand out.
  + If using stock images, make sure that they are relevant and represent diversity.
    - [Office 365 PowerPoint](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/create-professional-slide-layouts-with-powerpoint-designer-53c77d7b-dc40-45c2-b684-81415eac0617?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us&irgwc=1&OCID=AID2000142_aff_7593_1375745&tduid=%28ir__xsat6f9kc9kftllrkk0sohznxe2xip1kshw9pztr00%29%287593%29%281375745%29%28%29%28%29&irclickid=_xsat6f9kc9kftllrkk0sohznxe2xip1kshw9pztr00) design suggestions work great
  + Other resources:
    - Use [Pixabay](https://pixabay.com/) or [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/) for stock images
    - Use [The Gender Spectrum Collection](https://genderphotos.vice.com/) for gender diverse images
    - The [Noun Project](https://thenounproject.com/) offers free icons with artist attribution

#### Language Tips:

* + Avoid jargon if possible, especially in introductions and directions.
    - Ex: Students may understand vocabulary in their discipline but might not understand what ILL is.
  + Be consistent with language.
    - Ex: Don’t interchange the words “sources” and “resources” because it will confuse students.
  + Consider skill level but do not assume every student has had library instruction.

### Implementation

* + How will you test your lesson?
  + Do you have coworkers who can review your work?
  + Teach your lesson!

### Evaluation

* + How will you make your lesson better?
  + Reuse content and utilize assessment data.
    - See Student Learning Assessment Plan for more guidance.

### Fun Things - Gifs!

* Screen record video in Kaltura (available in Blackboard).
* [Giphy](https://giphy.com/) allows video conversion of less than 15 seconds into gifs.
  + Great for showing quick ways to navigate online on repeat.
  + Not fully accessible so also include text instructions.

## Resources for Design

Admin. *Understand These 10 Principles of Good Design Before You Start Your Next eLearning Project*. <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/bid/277278/understand-these-10-principles-of-good-design-before-you-start-your-next-elearning-project>.

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Zambito, V. (2018, August 28). *11 Principles Of eLearning: Demystified and Applied*. <https://elearningindustry.com/principles-of-elearning-demystified-applied>.

# Classroom Management: Developing a Social Presence

*Purpose: This section focuses on techniques and strategies for cultivating social presence in the online classroom. These techniques and strategies rely on the* [*Community of Inquiry Framework*](https://coi.athabascau.ca/coi-model/)*'s definition of social presence, “the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (Garrison, 2009). Below are a few ideas for cultivating social presence and student engagement in the classroom. Of course, since every instructor is different, some of these ideas may be more approachable than others. But at a minimum, it is important to incorporate two or three techniques from the sections below.*

## Identity

Arguably the most important aspect of social presence is expressing one’s identity. This helps to build trust, meaning, and relationships. We should express ourselves and let our students get to know us which, hopefully, will encourage them to do the same with their peers.

* Introduce Yourself
  + Give students an idea of who you are a person. Consider posting a short biography, preferably with an accompanying picture, video, or icon. You might also include information about your background, hobbies, work, research, etc.
  + Help students get to know you, and one another, with icebreakers and games.
* Show Some Personality
  + Model affective responses so students feel comfortable expressing their own identities. For example, you might rate how you feel about a particular discussion or topic and ask students to do the same.
  + Don’t be afraid to use humor, punctuation, capitalization, emoticons, gifs, pictures, etc. to add vibrance and dimension to your online identity.
  + Express your thoughts, interests, and emotions—and let your students do the same!
* Embrace Imperfection
  + Own your weaknesses or struggles (staying focused, positive, active, etc.)
  + Try not to sweat the technology or panic when glitches happen.

## Communication

Another hallmark of social presence is open communication. This not only includes communication between you as the instructor and your students, but also communication amongst the students. You want to encourage openness, honesty, and engagement.

* Communicate Often:
  + Respond to posts/emails as quickly as possible
  + Create and subscribe to a Q&A board for students
  + Check-in with the class (or, if possible, individual students) to make sure they're on track
* Consider Language
  + Use cohesive language to make everyone feel connected and included: "we” instead of “you” or “I"
  + Address students by name and preferred pronouns (if unsure, call them by name (or "they”) and use inclusive terms: “folks,” “y’all," or “everyone"
* Be Engaged:
  + Model good behavior by providing interactive and meaningful feedback during discussions
  + Continue a thread, quote a student, refer to other students by name, ask questions, express agreement or appreciation, etc.

# Navigating Faculty Collaboration and Outreach

*Purpose: This section offers resources on how to reach out to faculty with instruction requests as well as a suggested timeline of outreach and instruction related tasks.*

## Outreach Departmental Instructors

For gathering a list on who to reach out to, course offerings for each semester can be viewed at <https://masononline.gmu.edu/programs-courses/courses/>. Instructor emails can be found at <https://peoplefinder.gmu.edu/>.

You can also filter by online and search under the [Schedule of Classes](https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/pls/prod/bwckschd.p_disp_dyn_sched). This will give you the instructor and email for online courses for a given subject.

## General Instruction Outreach Touchpoints

* Departmental involvement
* Tabling
* Events
* Newsletter
* Departmental Listservs
* Social Media

Outreach to instructors and departments should happen before the start of every semester as a reminder of what the library can offer. See the template below for ideas on how to structure this email:

|  |
| --- |
| Dear Professor,  I am [NAME], the library instructor for the <DEPARTMENT> department. I saw on the Mason Online course list that you are teaching <COURSE NAME> online during the <SEMESTER> semester, so I wanted to reach out to you to offer library services, resources and research assistance with this course.  **First, a note about course copying: we are constantly improving and creating new library resources and tutorials. If you have copied your course be sure to check any library links are still working and not obsolete. We’d be glad to help you with this if needed.**  Some online professors find it useful to have a library instructor embedded in the course. As an embedded librarian, I could:   * + Create and manage an “Ask a Librarian” discussion forum to provide detailed research assistance to your students.   + Provide or create tutorials to support research skills needed to complete your assignments. See our [tutorials page](https://library.gmu.edu/tutorials/instructor-tutorials) for available content.   + Create a learning module with a graded assignment. See our [Online Instruction Menu](https://library.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/common/Online%20Menu-pdf%20version-accessible.pdf) to view content that is already created.   + Provide synchronous instruction. You can also require students to attend an [online library workshop](https://library.gmu.edu/workshops).   + Consult with your students at key points in the semester.   If you are interested, I would be glad to consult online or face to face with you about your class.  I hope to be working with you this upcoming semester.  Best,  <YOUR EMAIL SIGNATURE> |

## Pre-Course

After you have established a connection with an instructor there are certain actions and negotiations you can have to form your presence in their course. First consideration is usually teaching delivery:

### Synchronous VS Asynchronous Instruction

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Asynchronous | Synchronous |
| Pro:   * Rich Interactions: With asynchronous instruction you usually have a week or more with students as they work through your Blackboard content. This allows more time to communicate and individual communication with students * Student flexibility: The ability to work on instruction content on their own schedule | Pro:   * Real-time interactions: This most closely mimics in-person instruction and allows for instant feedback and communication |
| Con:   * Time Consuming: Since this isn’t confined to normal class times instruction can span weeks and overall takes more effort to stay on top of. Especially when you are involved in multiple courses | Con:   * Individualized time with students: During a confined session time you may not be able to interact with each student in the session * Technology issues: There’s always the chance of technology troubles during online synchronous sessions. |

Here is a list of additional discussion points. Not everything here will always be an option depending on the instructor you work with, but these are things you can negotiate.

### Questions for the instructor

* Would you like to have a meeting to discuss learning goals or work over email?
* May I review your syllabus and/or assignment description(s)?
* How many students do you have in your course? (may also be found on Patriot Web)
* Do any of your students need accommodations beyond making materials accessible (i.e. sending materials ahead of time, sensitivity to bright white/black backgrounds)?
* What dates would you like instruction to be delivered?
* Are you willing to add me as a course builder so that I may build content and manage learning activities?
* Do you want any of these learning activities to count as a grade and if so, let me know if you’d like me to grade them?

### Collaborating with Instructors

There are a lot of different things that can be negotiated when you first contact an instructor before your scheduled course. To get started here is an idea of what an initial email might look like for asynchronous online instruction to gather some vital information. This can be modified depending on your needs:

|  |
| --- |
| Hello!  I’m the library instructor for the asynchronous XXX class you requested. I can’t wait to work with you and your students this semester. To get started, can you add me to your class as a course builder? My NetID is XXX.  [confirm the module(s) and topic they requested or let them know about their options] Just to confirm the timing, what day would you like each module to be available for students to start and what day would you like the activity accompanying each module to be due on?  Where would you like these module(s) to live in your course? Once I have access as a course builder I can copy/paste the modules in and customize it for your class. I will let you know when the modules are ready for you to check over before students have access.  If you send out a normal weekly communication to your students, can you briefly introduce them to me and the library module(s) before the first one goes live? I’ll send an email out to all students on the first day of each module to introduce myself as a way of opening communication and to set expectations for the library module.  I believe this is everything I need to get started. I look forward to collaborating with you. Let me know if there is anything you need from me.  Your Name  Title  George Mason University Libraries |

## FERPA (Compliance with Student Information)

Faculty can grant you access to their courses. When requesting to be embedded in a Blackboard course the official response from FERPA is: “the general rule is the lowest amount of access should be granted, in order to do your job.” This means that for most of your Blackboard courses you will request to be a [**course builder**](https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/how-to-enroll-users-into-blackboard-courses/) which gives you access to add and edit the course without being able to view the grading center.

Access beyond the **course builder** level is “dependent upon the department and the job description.” If there is a **legitimate educational** reason for a person to have a higher access level (i.e., you can explain why that level of access is necessary to teach and the faculty member understands that need), then that level of access should be granted. If you need to request a higher level of access to the course to complete your job, i.e. enter grades into the grade center, you can do so.

### Grading

Whether you decide to provide this option to instructors for your activities is completely up to your comfort level. If provided access to the grade center, the grades you provide should be communicated via Blackboard in the course’s grading center to protect student information.

### Preparation time

Depending on what instruction you plan on doing and what still needs to be created, make sure to negotiate an appropriate timeline with the instructor to deliver the best content possible. For example, videos can take 1-2 weeks (or longer) to produce.

### Level of Communication

Depending on your Blackboard user-level status you might be able to host discussion boards, send email communications, etc. Manage expectations ahead of time with faculty and students regarding response times, frequency, etc.

# During the Course

The kinds of interactions you will have with students will greatly depend on whether your instruction is being offered asynchronously or synchronously. Synchronous instruction closely mimics in-person instruction, so many of the points below focus on asynchronous instruction for which you spend a longer amount of time with students and have more power over extended communication.

* Level of Interaction: Based on the negotiations with the instructor, decide how often you want to communicate with students.
  + Format: Emails and announcements directly from Blackboard are great for relaying group feedback and new information (workshop announcements, new resources, etc.) to the instructor and students. (See “Blackboard Basics” section for more on communication tools.)
  + Timing: Review the syllabus for timing and content ideas
* Check-in with the instructor as needed. How are things going? Are students demonstrating the learning outcomes?

## Post-Course

These steps should be taken after any online library instruction to give students and the instructor resources and to strengthen the lines of communication after your time with them.

* For a synchronous instruction, give the instructor any instruction materials to be posted on Blackboard.
* Complete any required grading and/or feedback.
* Send a wrap up email to the instructor after the library lesson has finished. If there are any library concepts students struggled with, outline these and provide additional materials for reinforcement if possible.

# Assessment

*Purpose: When assessing student learning online, it is important to continue to utilize your best practices for assessment and let the* [*Student Learning Assessment Plan*](https://gmuedu-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/ablinstr_gmu_edu/ESZW-IQT28tGlPWntr6cSKcByGz_6LNbODoNdgmiV3LjsQ?e=6DWwPw) *guide you. The Student Learning Assessment Plan outlines each outcome that is the focus for the upcoming year.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Year | Outcome Schedule |
| FY 21 | Outcome 1: Articulate their information need. |
|  | Outcome 5: Describe the information creation and dissemination process |
| FY 22 | Outcome 3: Critically evaluate information and where it comes from. |
|  | Outcome 6: Identify the legal, economic, and social context of the use and creation of information. |
| FY 23 | Outcome 2: Locate resources using appropriate search tools and strategies for their information need. |
|  | Outcome 4: Synthesize information from multiple sources |

## Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are measurable statements that describe what students will be able to do after the instruction session, class, or workshop is over. Starting with learning outcomes allows instructors to build a session that captures the most essential knowledge or skills students need. For assessment purposes, they are even more important as they show what the instructor intended for students to be able to do. When conducting assessments, then, thinking about the learning outcomes and choosing a measure that captures the specific outcome in question is the best way to think about the use of outcomes in assessment.

## Student Learning Assessment Plan Learning Outcomes and Sub-outcomes

The learning outcomes given below are presented in an order which follows the research process, from developing a topic to publication. Each outcome is equally important and there is no expectation that a workshop or class will cover all outcomes. The descriptions and sub-outcomes are meant to guide your instructional efforts and spark ideas; they are by no means the only way to teach these outcomes. **Library instructors are encouraged to create unique sub-outcomes that are relevant to the courses and subjects that are taught.**

Outcome 1:Articulate their information need. **(Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration)**

Students will be able to express the type and amount of information needed based on a given context, discipline, question, or problem.

* Students identify a research question to begin their search process.
* Students articulate how information within their discipline is organized and structured.
* Students analyze a topic or research question to determine whether a single answer or multiple, conflicting answers exist.

Outcome 2: Locate resources using appropriate search tools and strategies for their information need. **(Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration)**

The tools and strategies a researcher use will vary by the type of information they need. Students will be able to translate their information need into a set of tools and strategies that are appropriate for their context.

* Students refine search strategies and search language (keywords, controlled vocabulary, natural language) based on search results.
* Students expand their information searches through cited reference searching techniques.
* Students reformulate research questions based on information gaps and possibly conflicting information.
* Students match information needs and search strategies to appropriate search tools.

Outcome 3: Critically evaluate information and where it comes from. **(Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information Creation as Process)**

Understanding that the credibility and reliability of a source depends on how and where it will be used, successful students will be able to evaluate the information they find. They will also be able to evaluate their information’s sources, examining them for potential bias.

* Students describe various research methods utilized in their discipline.
* Students define different types of authority, such as subject expertise (e.g., scholarship), societal position (e.g., public office or title), or special experience (e.g., participating in a historic event.
* Students recognize that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it is packaged.

Outcome 4: Synthesize information from multiple sources. **(Research as Inquiry)**

Students will be able to take information from diverse sources and synthesize them into their own work, being able to compare, contrast, and analyze that information.

* Students compare how scholarly perspective changed over time on a particular topic within a discipline.
* Students draw reasonable conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of information.

Outcome 5: Describe the information creation and dissemination process. **(Information Creation as Process / Information Has Value)**

The process by which information is created and distributed varies by discipline and within different contexts. Students will be able to discuss that process within their own context or discipline and understand their own place within it as both consumer and creator of information.

* Students articulate the capabilities and constraints of information developed through various creation processes.
* Students recognize that a given scholarly work may not represent the only or even the majority perspective on the issue.

Outcome 6: Identify the legal, economic, and social context of the use and creation of information. **(Information Has Value / Scholarship as Conversation)**

Information is created within a set of environmental contexts, and successful students will be able to identify those contexts. These legal, economic, and social factors also create inequities in information access and production. Students will be able to identify those inequities and their own information privilege as students at George Mason University. Library instructors will not give out legal advice to students, but introduce legal issues surrounding information (copyright, etc.).

* Students describe the commodification of information and how it affects access to various types of information.
* Students understand how and why some individuals or groups of individuals may be underrepresented or systematically marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information.
* Students recognize issues of access or lack of access to information sources.
* Students articulate the purpose and distinguishing characteristics of copyright, fair use, open access, and the public domain.

## Writing a Learning Outcome

When writing an outcome, it is helpful to **begin with an action verb.** This verb should capture the way that students will demonstrate that they have gained the knowledge you intend to teach. [Bloom’s taxonomy](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/), which is a way to categorize these verbs, can be a helpful resource for developing these words.

Outcomes should also be **measurable**. When writing your outcome, think about how students will demonstrate that they have achieved that goal. Rubrics can be a helpful tool for this, as they help to define/codify what success looks like. Outcomes should also only focus on one skill or piece of knowledge at a time, which greatly helps with making sure they are measurable.

When writing an outcome, it helps to remember that **one size does not fit all.** Depending on your context, the type of instruction you are doing, and your own teaching style, your outcomes will vary. Tailoring your outcome based on these criteria will lead to a more effective and engaging instruction session for your students.

Lastly, when writing a learning outcome **use the Student Learning Assessment Plan (SLAP) outcomes as a guide.** The SLAP includes six general and thematic outcomes that can be applied in many different contexts. When writing your outcome, taking one of those general themes (for example, “Synthesize information from multiple sources”) and applying it to your environment will connect you to broader Libraries’ outcomes while allowing you a large degree of customizability.

## Assessing Student Learning Online

When assessing students learning in an online environment, it is important to continue to utilize your best practices for assessment. Activities will need to be transferred to an online environment- collaborative documents and forms instead of worksheets, typing on either Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate’s whiteboard instead of writing on a classroom whiteboard, and discussion posts instead of class-led discussions are just some of the examples of ways you can transfer active learning and assessment online. Vanderbilt University has developed a [guide that gives resources on how to develop online assessments of student learning quickly](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/brightspace/2020/03/25/developing-online-assessments-of-student-learning-in-a-hurry-we-have-resources-for-you/). This guide highlights that online assessment should emphasize mostly synthesis and analysis questions, instead of recall questions. The University of Central Florida has a [guide to creating discussion rubrics](https://topr.online.ucf.edu/discussion-rubrics/).

Below are some examples of how you can assess student learning online:

* Have students fill out a form or collaborative document as part of an active learning exercise to collect data for assessment
  + If you want students to work in small groups, use breakout groups
* Poll students to test their knowledge and check for understanding
* Have students summarize on the session whiteboard
* Score discussion post to assess student learning
  + Below is an example of how to assess student learning in a discussion post

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Possible Points: 0-4** |
| Student posted their concept map on the discussion board. | 0-1 |
| Student responded to a peer’s post with at least **2** keywords. | 0-2 |
| The concept map is based on **4** keywords created from their research topic. | 0-1 |
| Total Earned |  |

It is also important to utilize online learning tools to your advantage. Blackboard Collaborate and Zoom both have tools built in that can assist with assessment of student learning, such as polls, breakout rooms, and whiteboards. The charts below discuss the pros and cons of these tools on both platforms.

### Assessment Tools on Blackboard Ultra

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| Polling | Polling does not save data for guests |
| Breakout rooms | Can’t hear all conversations in breakout rooms |
| Whiteboard | Must screenshot whiteboard to save data |
| Screensharing with PowerPoint (you can see chat) | Screensharing/live demo (cannot see chat) |

### Assessment Tools on Zoom

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| Polling | Polling does not save data for guests |
| Breakout rooms | Can’t hear all conversations in breakout rooms |
| Whiteboard data can be saved | Student annotation tools are not immediately obvious |
| Check for understanding features (yes/no) |  |
| Screensharing allows chat alerts |  |

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