

# Introduction to the Quality Matters Rubric

Quality Matters is a faculty-centered, peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of online and hybrid/blended courses. QM is a leader in quality assurance for online education and has received national recognition for its peer-based and continuous improvement approach. The Quality Matters rubric is based on research, sound instructional design principles and best practices.

## General Standards

- 1. Course Overview and Introduction**
- 2. Learning Objectives**
- 3. Assessment and Measurement**
- 4. Instructional Materials**
- 5. Learner Interaction and Engagement**
- 6. Course Technology**
- 7. Learner Support**
- 8. Accessibility**

## Alignment

A primary focus of the rubric is the concept of alignment in which core course components: Learning Objectives (2), Assessment and Measurement (3), Instructional Materials (4), Learner Interaction and Engagement (5), and Course Technology (6) work together to support the accomplishment of the learning objectives. This holistic approach ensures the course is structured to provide an optimal learning environment for students.

## Rubric Scoring

There are 95 points possible in the QM Rubric. The three member review team each decide whether or not to award the total points possible for the specific standard. If at least 2 out of 3 reviewers determine the course meets the standard the total points are awarded for that standard.

## Standard 1: Course Overview and Introduction

The nature of an online course necessitates **thorough** information about the course be provided **upfront**. This information should include class policies, assignment/assessment instructions, explanation of the general course flow, and provide students with a clear understanding of **how to succeed** in the course.

This can be accomplished through a **welcome document** and directions on where to get started in the course. It is also a good idea to include **orientation activities** which introduce students to tools used in the course.

Elements must also be included that promote a **sense of community**. Instructors should provide an introduction which goes beyond contact information such as teaching philosophy, hobbies and interests, and

experience teaching online. Including a photo also helps to **create a connection**.

Students should be asked to introduce themselves online as well. Providing an **icebreaker activity** or specific questions students should address will create a more engaging introduction. Icebreakers, such as “one true and one false statement” in which other students are asked to guess the true and false statement, will encourage interaction among students.

<b>Specific Standards</b>	<b>Point Values</b>
1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.	3
1.2 Students are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.	3
1.3 Etiquette expectations (sometimes called “netiquette”) for online discussions, email, and other forms of communication are stated clearly.	2
1.4 Course and/or institutional policies with which the student is expected to comply are clearly stated, or a link to current policies is provided.	2
1.5 Prerequisite knowledge in the discipline and/or any required competencies are clearly stated.	1
1.6 Minimum technical skills expected of the student are clearly stated.	1
1.7 The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate and available online.	1
1.8 Students are asked to introduce themselves to the class.	1

## Standard 2: Learning Objectives

**Learning objectives** are the starting point of the course development process and the focus of alignment for the entire course.

Establishing good learning objectives begins with a review of **Bloom's Taxonomy**. The **cognitive domains** outlined by Bloom’s explain the process in which knowledge is built. By designing learning objectives with Bloom’s

taxonomy, the learning environment is more likely to be **structured** for student success.

Specific Standards	Point Values
2.1 The course learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable.	3
2.2 The module/unit learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives.	3
2.3 All learning objectives are stated clearly and written from the students' perspective.	3
2.4 Instructions to students on how to meet the learning objectives are adequate and stated clearly.	3
2.5 The learning objectives are appropriately designed for the 3 level of the course.	3

### Standard 3: Assessments and Measurements

Once the learning objectives are defined, it is important to **design assessments** that **clearly measure** the learning objectives. For instance, if the learning objective was stated as: *Evaluate the key arguments of Keynesian economics*. A multiple choice quiz will likely not be able to determine the successful accomplishment of this objective, while a discussion post or essay could.

It is also necessary to provide a **clear grading policy** for the course and include **specific instructions and expectations** for each assessment. **Rubrics** are a good way to ensure students are made aware of the criteria they will be graded upon and provide direction for completing the assessment.

To address different **learning styles** and **deter cheating**, it is a good idea to include **multiple and varied assessment types**. Objective tests, should be employed along with subjective assessments such as discussions, research papers, and projects.

Students should also be given the opportunity to **measure** their **learning progress** through practice quizzes, scaffold assignments with feedback or example submissions.

Specific Standards	Point Values
3.1 The types of assessments selected measure the stated learning objectives and are consistent with course activities and resources.	3
3.2 The course grading policy is stated clearly.	3
3.3 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of students' work and participation and are tied to the course grading policy.	3
3.4 The assessment instruments selected are sequenced, varied, and appropriate to the student work being assessed.	2
3.5 Students have multiple opportunities to measure their own learning progress.	2

## Standard 4: Instructional Materials

**Instructional materials** are a core component of the course and should be chosen or created to support the learning objectives. It is important to **distinguish** between **required** and **supplemental** materials and include an explanation of their **purpose** and intended use.

For example, if the objective is for the student to use excel spreadsheets to complete calculations, students should be able to easily identify the materials which provide a demonstration of how to create the formula.

It is also important for materials to be **current** and reflect a **variety of perspectives** when appropriate. Supplementing your own materials with resources from learning object repositories such as [Merlot](#) or incorporating relevant YouTube videos is one way to accomplish this. **Proper citation** of all outside resources is all important to protect yourself and set a good example.

Specific Standards	Point Values
4.1 The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated course and module/unit learning objectives.	3
4.2 The purpose of instructional materials and how the materials are to be used for learning activities are clearly explained.	3
4.3 All resources and materials used in the course are appropriately cited.	2
4.4 The instructional materials are current.	2
4.5 The instructional materials present a variety of perspectives on the course content.	1
4.6 The distinction between required and optional materials is clearly explained.	1

## Standard 5: Learner Interaction and Engagement

Students should be encouraged to **interact** with the **content**, the **instructor**, and **each other** to **engage** them in the learning process. Whatever the activities are they must be designed to **align** with the **learning objectives**.

Through **active learning** strategies students will have opportunities to **apply their knowledge**. Active learning refers to students “doing” something with the knowledge gained in the course, such as seeking additional information, solving a problem or reflecting upon their own experiences in relation to the concepts.

Including opportunities for students to **direct their own learning** will further engagement and interaction with the content. This can be accomplished by providing general guidelines about an assignment and allowing students to fill in the details according to their own learning style. This may include an option to demonstrate understanding of a concept either through a written report, a multi-media production or a website, for example.

Ensuring students have opportunities to interact with the instructor can be achieved through **virtual office hours** or an asynchronous **FAQ discussion**

**board.** It is important to inform students at the beginning of the course when they can expect to receive feedback for work completed in the course, that is **instructor turn-around time.**

When appropriate, including **student to student interaction** through discussions or collaborative assignments will further engage with the course. When student to student interactions are included it is necessary to provide **clear expectations of the requirements.**

Specific Standards	Point Values
5.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives.	3
5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.	3
5.3 The instructor's plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated.	3
5.4 The requirements for student interaction are clearly articulated.	2

## Standard 6: Course Technology

Technology should never be used for technology's sake but further the accomplishment of course and unit level objectives by **effectively delivering** the assessment strategies, instructional materials, and learning activities. **Clear instructions** on their purpose and use are important to include so as not to distract from the learning experience.

The Blackboard Learning Management system provides many ways to facilitate **learning activities** such as discussions, blogs, journals and wikis. The course does not need to have all these “bells and whistles” to contribute to a good learning experience, but rather be included when appropriate.

A **well-designed course** with logical, consistent and efficient navigation is paramount to ensuring students are focused on **mastery** of the **learning objectives** rather than learning the system. This process begins by deciding the **pathway students** should take to consume content and interact in the course.

Specific Standards	Point Values
6.1 The tools and media support the course learning objectives.	3
6.2 Course tools and media support student engagement and guide the student to become an active learner.	3
6.3 Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient.	3
6.4 Students can readily access the technologies required in the course.	2
6.5 The course technologies are current.	1

## Standard 7: Learner Support

The inclusion of **comprehensive support resources** will ensure students are able to focus on mastering the content. A template of resources is included in the course (located under “Orientation”) such as where to get **technical support**, services related to **accessibility**, **academic support** and **student support**.

Specific Standards	Point Values
7.1 The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to access it.	3
7.2 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution’s accessibility policies and services.	3
7.3 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution’s academic support services and resources can help students succeed in the course and how students can access the services.	2



7.4 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's student support services can help students succeed and how students can access the services.	1
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## Standard 8: Accessibility

Incorporating **accessibility** standards based on the principles of **Universal Design** is a foundational development principle. Blackboard strives to make

Incorporating **accessibility** standards based on the principles of **Universal Design** is a foundational development principle. Blackboard strives to make the learning management system accessible according to prevailing standards and any additional tools incorporated must also **demonstrate** adherence to these standards.

Providing **alternative formats** for auditory and visual content when appropriate is also necessary for meeting accessibility standards. Another aspect of this is facilitating **readability** within the course. This requires designing content for the web, based on best practices. Finally, the course and content should be designed to support the use of **assistive technologies** such as screen readers.

Specific Standards	Point Values
8.1 The course employs accessible technologies and provides guidance on how to obtain accommodation.	3
8.2 The course contains equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content.	2
8.3 The course design facilitates readability and minimizes distractions.	2
8.4 The course design accommodates the use of assistive technologies.	2

## Learn More:

- View the [resources site](#) for Quality Matters at UALR.
- Visit the [Quality Matters Program Website](#)
- Visit the [Help Tab](#) on Blackboard.