



# Qualities of Effective Online Courses

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# Course design

I have learned the most about online course design through:

- A. Designing my own courses
- B. Working with course designers
- C. Teaching my own courses
- D. Viewing or taking well-designed courses
- E. Reading, workshops, classes in course design

# Course design models

Successful virtual schools have adopted models to develop inquiry-based e-learning, to prepare students for today and for the ever-changing workforce:

- ⌘ Gagne's Events of Instruction
- ⌘ Keller's ARCS motivation model
- ⌘ Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
- ⌘ McTighe and Wiggins' Understanding by Design

## What the research tells us

### About effective courses:

- Structure in courses and a meaningful curriculum are critical to student success:
  - clear expectations, concrete deadlines with some flexibility, outlines of course requirements, time sheets, and study guides.
- Students need built-in supports to help them manage their time in the course.
- Meaningful learning is active, interactive, and collaborative

# What the research tells us

## About effective courses:

- Flexibility, independence, and experience with online tools resulted in improved critical thinking, research, and computer skills.
- Online learning can strengthen K–12 students' teamwork skill, problem-solving abilities, creativity, decision-making proficiency, and higher order thinking skills. Virtual schools can design courses to highlight and evaluate these skills.

# What we still need

Programs and course modules should be developed to foster the abilities known to result in success online:

- ☒ Self-discipline, motivation, responsibility, organization

Studies should identify the most effective interaction types, tools, and frequency for the learners and tasks in a course.

# Learner Attributes

Do distance learning experiences improve learner autonomy and independence?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Maybe

# Learner Interaction

How important is learner interaction in online courses?

- A. Not important at all
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Important
- D. Very important
- E. Essential

# Teacher support for interaction

- Types of Learner Interaction
  - ☒ Learner-to-content
  - ☒ Learner-to-instructor
  - ☒ Learner-to-learner
  - ☒ Learner-to-interface
  
- Teacher concerns with Interaction:
  - ☒ Providing “clear enough...explicit” directions (L-C)
  - ☒ Conducting “just-in-time assessment” (L-I)
  - ☒ Providing students reassurance, immediate feedback (L-I)
  - ☒ Ensuring students participate in discussions (L-L)
  - ☒ Developing worthwhile discussions (L-C)


# Instructional Strategies for Interaction

What strategy is recommended to promote student interaction within online courses?

- A. Requiring students to post weekly
- B. Providing teacher feedback and summaries
- C. Creating meaningful and clear discussion questions or group assignments
- D. Assigning more weight (points) for student postings in overall course grade
- E. Hire high quality teachers

How important is standards-based curriculum content:

- A. Very important
- B. Important
- C. Neutral
- D. Unimportant
- E. Completely unimportant



...Effectiveness of distance education appears to have more to do with *who is teaching, who is learning, and how that learning is accomplished*, and less to do with the medium. (Rice, 2006; emphasis mine)

# What we still need

- ⌘ Study of the demands of the content areas enabling course designers to supplement courses with the appropriate media, synchronous tools, and offline materials.
- ⌘ Course design standards and job aids for designers for intended learning across domains.
- ⌘ More teacher research & university research determining critical components within the varied online learning models

# References

- ⌘ Rice, K. (2006). A comprehensive look at distance education in the K-12 context. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 38(4), 425-448.
- ⌘ Lowes, S. (2005). *Online teaching and classroom change: The impact of Virtual High School on its teachers and their schools*. Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory at Learning Point Associates.
- ⌘ Zucker, A. (2005). *A study of student interaction and collaboration in the Virtual High School*. Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory at Learning Point Associates.

# Resources

- ⌘ SREB Standards for Online Teaching, 2006  
<http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF/StandardsQualityOnlineTeaching.asp>
- ⌘ Learning Point Associates studies  
<http://www.ncrel.org/tech/>
- ⌘ Michigan State University distance learning research database  
<http://ott.educ.msu.edu/literature/>
- ⌘ The upcoming book, What Works in K-12 Online Learning, from ISTE
- ⌘ The upcoming Handbook of Distance Education, from Erlbaum