



9 Tips to Avoid Course Design Failure

By Analisa McMillan, MEd

You put a lot of effort into creating your course content, but all that could be in vain if your Learning Management System (LMS) — the way the information is delivered to students — isn't designed well.

If done correctly, your LMS can help students stay engaged with you, the content, and each other, rather than wasting time trying to figure out how to navigate the content.

Here are nine tips to help you deliver content clearly and concisely:

1. Use the Course Syllabus as a Guidebook

Think of your syllabus as the ultimate guidebook/map that allows students to navigate your course efficiently to get from Point A to Point B.

2. Include a Topic/Weekly Outline

Include a course outline that students can use as a checklist for content completion.

3. Establish a Communication Policy

Make yourself available to students via Email, office hours, virtual platforms, feedback, telephone, netiquette, etc.

4. Clearly Define all the Student/Instructor Responsibilities

Include course participation, activities, assessments, plagiarism, etc.

5. Develop a Consistent Grading/Feedback Policy

Provide information about grading turnaround times, types of feedback and frequency. Most students prefer quick turnaround time with minimal feedback!

6. Create a "Start Here" Folder

This should contain: your syllabus, instructor info, welcome announcement/video, Blackboard or Canvas help links, short video/document on accessing content, Course link to introduction discussion board, etc.

7. Keep Content Organized and Consistent

Weekly/module folders should contain all the content and course links on one page for easy access. Content should consistently be placed in the same order in the folders. Less time spent navigating Blackboard or Canvas allows students more time for learning and collaborating.

8. Build a Social Space to Stimulate Communication

Create a "Coffee House" discussion board that encourages students to discuss life outside of the course content.

9. Schedule Regular "Spring Cleaning"

Freshen up your course space by updating broken links, changing dates to reflect current semester, and deleting old content.

About the Author

Analisa McMillan, MEd, is the Director of Distance Education at the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. She believes that online education is just as good as traditional education, and she works with faculty on creating engaging learning communities in their courses.