Guidelines for Minimum Standards for Learning Management System (LMS) Unit Design

Overview
Ensuring a minimum standard for design of an LMS unit for teaching, learning and assessment purposes at UWA supports student expectations of consistency which lead to ease-of-use and a positive learning experience. In addition, these standards are designed to support a basic progress towards optimising resources, a component of UWA’s Education Futures 2020 (http://www.education-futures.uwa.edu.au/optimised-resources), and a blended learning approach to learning at UWA. Minimum standards support staff moving into online presence for their units.


Note: CATL eLearning provides professional development workshops and support to staff wishing to develop knowledge and competency in these areas. Contact: help-elearning@uwa.edu.au or #8190.

Categories
These standards provide a basic checklist relating to the following key areas:

1. **Unit design** – has the unit been built in a way that encourages student engagement and provides a positive learning experience?
2. **Communication** – does the unit provide appropriate channels for communication?
3. **Resources** – are students provided with all the resources they require to successfully achieve the learning outcomes and assessment of the unit?
4. **Activities** – have appropriate interactive activities been included which will support student-centred learning and assessment?
5. **Assessment** – are students provided with adequate information and support with regard to any items of assessment?
6. **Evaluation & feedback** – have you provided feedback on improvements to your unit, and have you including the opportunity for students to provide feedback about their experience studying your unit?
## Standards

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Basic Requirement</th>
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| **Unit design**  
Planned overall design, structure, look and feel | Design of your LMS unit based on the following key design principles:  
- Consistent layout and design  
- Clear/logical organisation and presentation of information  
- Consistent and easy-to-use navigation  
- Aesthetically pleasing design (e.g. the effective use of white space, colour, images)  

**Why:**  
The value of your LMS unit, in providing your students with an effective learning space, will depend in part on how easy it is for them to use. | Map out your unit design before you create your LMS unit. Have a clear idea of what it is you are trying to achieve with your LMS unit and the online teaching and learning strategies you want to incorporate.  
Based on the learning outcomes, identify the appropriate online resources and activities that you can make available within your LMS unit.  

**Why:**  
With a clear idea of what it is that you are trying to achieve within your LMS unit you are far more likely to create an online learning space that fully supports your students in achieving the learning outcomes for your unit. |
| **Unit design**  
Resources  
External to LMS | Include links to the Lecture Capture System (LCS) and other eLearning systems/software (e.g. Personal Learning Environment, PLE; SparkPlus) used during the unit so that students have one place from which to access all learning activities and resources.  

**Why:**  
- Using the LMS as the unit online ‘home’ creates a positive student experience with the unit. Students know to go to this place to access all learning activities and resources – even if the link from there extends externally to LMS. | Consider adding an html block to the right hand side, with an image that is hyperlinked to the relevant external service.  
*Note: LCS has a dedicated linked block.*  

**Why:**  
- This extends the layout and depth of the LMS unit. Leaving the centre blocks for learning sequences and information, and placing external sources externally on the side creates a more user friendly system. |
| **Unit design**  
Resources  
Lecture Capture System | With links to the Lecture Capture System (LCS), students have easy access to face to face lecture recordings and other recorded resources.  

**Why:**  
Access to recorded lectures provides:  
- resources for revision and study after the lecture | The provision of online lecture recordings can be used to support the flipped classroom approach.  
Consider creating micro lectures for specific purposes, and integrating them with activity. You can upload them direct to LMS or LCS for easier future recovery. |
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<tr>
<th>Unit design</th>
<th>Resources Unit Readings</th>
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| Include links to unit readings (both essential and recommended). | Why:  
students respond positively to digital content that can be accessed anywhere, anytime via a variety of mobile devices. The assurance that any learning materials made available through the UWA libraries are appropriately copyright protected |
| Add an eye catching graphic to your Topic Outline. You might consider including a photograph of yourself and the members of your teaching team, along with your contact details, even a short 2 minute video of yourself introducing the unit. | Why:  
The Topic Outline is the first section your students are likely to look at when they access your LMS unit and first impressions can make a big difference. |
| The Topic Outline (the first section of your unit and the area that by default contains the Announcements Forum) should contain no more than two or three resources and/or activities. | Conditionally release unit topics based on date, grade conditions, completion conditions and/or user fields. |
| By default LMS units are created with 13 topics. You should hide any of these topics that you are not using. | Caveat – hiding or not hiding unit content needs to be a conscious |

*opportunity to view a missed lecture  
another level of flexibility in relation to the delivery of content and therefore addressing the needs of a greater range of learning styles and requirements  
the convenience of anywhere, anytime learning resource accessibility*
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<tr>
<th>Unit design</th>
<th>Topic design - naming</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each section or topic in your unit should have a meaningful title and match the curriculum breakdown included in the Unit Outline.</td>
<td>pedagogical decision. Allowing students to prepare ahead or work in advance is also a valuable learning service.</td>
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<td>Why:</td>
<td>Ideally within the design of each unit topic you should include:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It will make your unit easier to use.</td>
<td>• Topic purpose, description and instructions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Logical and consistent sequence of resources and activities</td>
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<td>Improving the attractiveness of your unit and potentially student interest and engagement is sometimes done with an image and quote, learning outcome, or other 1-sentence text for each topic area.</td>
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<td>Why:</td>
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<td>• Providing resources and activities within every topic in a consistent, logical and easy to follow format will make your LMS unit a more effective learning space.</td>
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<th>Unit design</th>
<th>Topic design – consistency</th>
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<td>Each unit section should represent a week or topic/module and contain all the necessary online resources and activities to support students in successfully achieving any learning outcomes.</td>
<td>You may consider adding an introductory video at the beginning of each topic where you cover aims, learning outcomes and expectations. The addition of a “wrap video” is also a useful tool for re-capping what has happened and highlighting the learning outcomes that have been covered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For each topic the aims, learning outcomes and expectations should be clearly communicated to students.</td>
<td>Why:</td>
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<td>Why:</td>
<td>• This sort of video introduction and review helps you stay connected with your students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Providing this level of detail for each unit topic means that your students are always informed of what you are trying to achieve and what is expected of them.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Unit design</th>
<th>Topic design – preparedness</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unit sections should be complete before they are released to students. If you have not completed all the sections of your unit by the beginning of semester make sure you hide any incomplete topics until they are ready for students to access.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why:</td>
<td>The display of incomplete topics is poor unit design, can be confusing, and reduce student satisfaction.</td>
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### Unit design

**Topic design - first collapsible topic**

Your first Topic (this is the first content area that you can collapse) should include key pieces of information about the unit:

- Provide your students with all the information relevant to completing the unit, including work load, assessment, participation, academic conduct, netiquette, and communication with teaching staff
- Link to the Unit Outline in UIMS
- Links to generic UWA student support resources like StudySmart, and the essential online tutorials Communication and Research Skills (CARS), and Indigenous Studies Essential (ISE).

**Why:**

- Presenting your students with this essential information at the beginning of the unit will support their learning through the Semester.

You may consider going beyond the essential study requirements of your unit and provide your students with more detailed information about your teaching approach and how you will be using the LMS in support of your teaching.

You can also provide an explanation of why you are using particular resources and activities within your unit.

Alternative to links within the content area, you might like to add an html block and link the URL to student support services. You can add an image to improve the look and create a hyperlink.

**Why:**

- Students are more likely to engage with the resources and activities contained in your unit if they can see clearly how they will support their study of your unit.
- Student engagement and satisfied experiences includes support for the whole student experience.

### Unit design

**Communication Unit Outline**

Provide the Unit Outline or a link to an external UnitOutline website, e.g. [University Information Management System (UIMS)](UIMS).

Every UWA timetabled unit has a Unit Outline which contains a detailed breakdown of the unit including code, title, availability, location, teaching staff details, unit description (introduction, content, goals, learning outcomes, unit schedule), teaching and learning responsibilities, assessment, textbooks and resources.

**Why:**

- Students are far more likely to study effectively in your unit if they know exactly what to expect from the unit and exactly what is expected of them.
- Having LMS as the unit online ‘home’ makes the search for relevant information for the unit efficient for students.

You should make sure that at the beginning of the year you have made the following information very clear to your students:

- The subject matter that the unit will include
- The learning outcomes
- The unit structure and your approach to teaching it
- What your students can expect from both the face to face and online components of your unit
- What you expect from your students in the face to face and online components of the unit
- What assessments will be included in the unit
- Where they can get support throughout the semester

Consider an FAQ using an LMS tool such as the database, glossary or discussion forum, and/or a Q&A discussion forum.

**Why:**

- Students are far more likely to study effectively in your unit if they know exactly what to expect from the unit and exactly what is
| **Unit design Communication**  
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<th><strong>Contact details for staff</strong></th>
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| Provide your contact details including email, telephone, office location and consultation hours.  
Make it clear to students where, when, in what form they can get support (from you and your teaching team) and what response time they can expect.  
**Why:**  
- Providing contact details can set realistic expectations about the level of support you will be providing your students. |
| Provide more than just your contact details. You might consider including a photo, your teaching approach/philosophy, publications, research, professional associations you belong to, Skype and twitter details.  
**Why:**  
- By providing your students with this level of detail can help students establish a level of trust and understanding of you as a teacher and what they can expect from you as they study your unit. |

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<th><strong>Communication Introduction to unit and teacher</strong></th>
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| In the Topic Outline you should write a short welcome "blurb" about yourself and the unit.  
- Introduce your students to the unit and how you will be using the LMS unit as a learning space (detailing the purpose and structure of the unit)  
- Make it clear how the unit is going to be used to support their studies and how they are expected to participate in the unit.  
**Why:**  
- If you want your students to actively participate in your LMS units you need to convince them that it is an essential part of their studies in the unit. |
| Record a short video introducing yourself and what they can expect from the unit. For accessibility purposes, include an rtf text version.  
**Why:**  
- By using a video format you can present all the essential information about studying your unit in a format that can be more personable. |

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<th><strong>Communication Announcements</strong></th>
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| Announcements are an effective way to communicate important information, date reminders, changes, etc. Students are not able to respond to an Announcement and all the Announcements you post in your unit are also sent to everyone in the unit as an email.  
**Why:**  
- Announcements are an effective way to communicate important information, date reminders, changes, etc to all students at the expected of them.  
- They feel supported by an avenue to ask questions and receive specific answers. |
| Create a regular schedule for posting announcements so that your students know that you will be regularly posting unit information and updates.  
**Why:**  
- By posting regular announcements you will establish a presence in the unit that demonstrates your investment in the unit and your students. |
| Communication | Create a Q&A Forum where your students can ask questions about the unit. Make sure you let your students know that this forum is available for them to get support and what response turn-around they can expect.  
**Why:**  
- Creating a Q&A Forum is a far more efficient approach to providing your students with information, compared to fielding individual student emails or face to face queries.  
When creating a Q&A Forum, manage the forum in such a way that your students are given the opportunity to not only ask questions to you but also offer solutions to their fellow students.  
**Why:**  
- Letting your students be actively involved in a Q&A Forum is a great way of building a learning community and make the space more student-centred  
- When students are invited to answer questions as well as generate them the pressure is taken of teaching staff as the providers of support. |
| Resources | At the very least your LMS unit provides an efficient and convenient tool for providing content resources to your students.  
The LMS supports both the planned/structured/curriculum-based provision of unit content as well as the flexibility of releasing content as required.  
Be selective with the content you provide in your LMS unit – it should support your students in achieving the learning outcomes and align with your teaching strategies. It should also be up-to-date and relevant.  
**Why:**  
- Students respond positively to digital content that can be accessed anywhere, anytime via a variety of mobile devices  
- You can provide your students with exactly the materials they will need to study your unit  
You can use your LMS unit to enable students to generate their own content, which has been generated independently or collaboratively and then shared with the rest of the class.  
Activities such as the database, glossary, discussion forum, wiki all support student collaboration in sharing content.  
**Why:**  
- Requiring your students to contribute content within your LMS unit is an effective way of getting them more engaged and actively involved. |
| Resources | If you upload published materials onto your LMS unit, make sure you comply with copyright restrictions.  
Seek help from subject librarians. Creative Commons licensed materials or your own created materials are other options.  
If you upload published materials onto your LMS unit, make sure you comply with copyright restrictions.  
**Why:** |
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<th>Why:</th>
<th>Provide students with practical evidence of correctly cited materials.</th>
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| Resources Activities On-going unit management | If you have chosen to re-use any resources or activities from a previous LMS unit, make sure you thoroughly check these to make sure that they are still relevant, up-to-date, and useable (e.g. links work).
A simple but effective method of checking the resources and activities in your unit is to use the “Switch role to...” function so that you can review every element of your unit from the students perspective. Why: In order for your LMS unit to effectively support your teaching the resources and activities have to be carefully selected so that they are appropriate for your teaching and learning goals. |
| Activities Active learning principles | The LMS offers a variety of Activities that support interactive, engaging, efficient, student-centred, summative, and formative learning opportunities. Any activities that you include must support your learning outcomes. Why: The LMS is designed to provide you with the opportunity of creating a totally online learning environment for your students. You can design your unit in a way that will be supportive of your teaching efforts but also create an effective and engaging setting for your students. When adding activities to your LMS unit make sure they are student-centred, engaging, interactive, authentic and support active learning. It is important to remember that while the LMS does have a broad range of resource and activity options, it is only a tool. Your choice of resources and activities should always be a reflection of your learning outcomes and teaching strategies. To ensure that students get the most of any activities that you may provide in your unit it is recommended that you provide an explanation of what activities you are going to be using and why. Why: The effective use of the LMS and the resources and activities available with it is determined by how well it supports your teaching and what you are trying to achieve. |
| Assessment — | The LMS offers a range of tools that support both summative and formative assessment. A general assessment Q&A forum ensures all students benefit from the queries of others, and reduces your administrative workload. |
| **Scaffolding and supporting students** | formative assessment. Provide your students with clear instructions about what assessments activities will be used in the unit and why as well as what they are expected to do to successfully complete any activities. Also ensure all supporting resources and information for the assessment are provided in the LMS.  

**Why:**  
- Student ability to understand assessment expectations and requirements is part of their success.  
- Providing all information as well as submission source in the one location, the LMS unit, is important for successful assignment completion. |
| **Assessment – Submission** | The LMS provides two LMS tools for students to submit assignments, both link with the LMS gradebook:  
1. Assignment  
2. Turnitin Assignment  
Use one of these. With the Turnitin Assignment, ensure an educative focus and allow students to submit a draft before the final submission.  

**Why:**  
- These tools provide teacher and student efficiencies.  
- Turnitin supports an educative focus for students learning of appropriate academic conduct. |
| **Evaluation & feedback** | **Gathering Feedback** | Provide your students with the opportunity to let you know how they are getting along in your unit.  

**Why:**  
- Incorporating student feedback and performance will help you make sure that your teaching approach is both responsive and |
|  |  | Set up a Feedback activity during the teaching period to gather feedback from your students about how they are going in the unit.  

**Why:**  
- This sort of action research will help you assess whether your learning strategies are being effective in relation to your learning outcomes and enable you to make any appropriate adjustments.
| Evaluation & feedback | In your unit, add a topic that informs students about feedback from SURF and SPOT evaluations in past iterations, and what changes have been made to this unit in response to those changes. **Why:**  
- This demonstrates to students that their evaluations are taken seriously and may support increased future evaluation response rates. | Do this periodically throughout the teaching period. |