BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE LEARNING
DESIGN COMPONENTS

The Office for Academic Innovation provides the best practices for implementing essential design components into your course. These design components will help to create an effective online learning environment for your students.

DESIGN COMPONENT CRITERIA

The following chart will display the rankings of each online learning design component.

Design Component Classifications

● = Essential & Standard

●● = Best Practice & adds value

●●● = Exemplary & elevates learning

DESIGN COMPONENTS	CLASSIFICATION
Start Here provides visual representation of course; a brief course description or introduction; clear instructions for students (e.g., where to begin) and quick and easy navigation to current content.	●
Course Navigation is clear and consistent	●
Instructor has provided **class expectations** such as participation rules, etiquette expectations, code of conduct; policies for grading, late work and make-up work; and technology requirements.	●
Instructor has provided **contact information** which may include biography, availability information, communication preferences, response time, and picture.	●
Course contains information and links to institutional resources (e.g. **University Library, Keep Learning,** TAMU Academic Resources for Students page in Canvas Course Template).	●
All links, files, videos and **external URLs** are active and working.	●
Detailed **instructions** are clearly written to ensure understanding to support student actions.	●
A **variety of assessments** is used (e.g., discussions, individual and/or group assignments and quizzes) to increase learner engagement and promote active learning.	●●

FOUNDATIONAL

DESIGN COMPONENTS	CLASSIFICATION
ENGAGEMENT	
Learning activities include **student-student interaction** to foster a sense of community (e.g. discussions, constructive collaboration and peer reviews).discussions, constructive collaboration and peer reviews). work; and technology requirements.	●●
Learning activities include **student-teacher interaction** (e.g. teacher is actively engaged in authentic conversations and provides quality feedback).	●●
Learning activities include **student-content interaction** (e.g. students interact with engaging content and resources) and provide opportunities for self-assessment	●●
There is a **welcome discussion** designed to build a sense of community and establish rapport.	●●
Opportunities for **course feedback** are present and available to students throughout the duration of course. Instructor uses formal and informal feedback to improve subsequent course revisions.	●●
MODULAR DESIGN	
Content is chunked into manageable pieces by leveraging **modules** (e.g. organized by units, chapters, topic, or weeks).	●
Modules and items within modules have a **thoughtful naming convention.**	●
Modules begin with an Introduction/Overview section and end with a Conclusion/Summary section to **bookend** each module.	●●●
Text headers and indention are included within modules to help guide student navigation.	●●●
Module **completion** requirements and/or **prerequisites** are utilized to provide course structure, pacing and flow.	●●●
ASSESSMENT	
High-stakes (summative) **assessments** are clearly aligned with stated goals, learning objectives and/or standards.	●●
Low-stakes (formative) **assessments** occur frequently throughout the course to measure knowledge, skills and attitude and occur before high-stakes assessments.	●●

DESIGN COMPONENTS	CLASSIFICATION

ACCESSIBILITY

Accommodation Statement is present and easily located (e.g., on Start Here or Syllabus). ●

Color enhances the aesthetic appeal and effectiveness of the course; sufficient contrast between text and background makes information easy to read; and color is not used in isolation to convey meaning. ●

Images are used to support course content (e.g., banners, headings and icons) and **accompanied by text descriptions** (Alt text) or captions for more complex descriptions. ●

Styles (e.g. Paragraph, Heading 2, etc.) are used to format text. ●

Hyperlink text incorporates the hyperlink destination/purpose (avoid raw URLs, e.g., https://www.tamu.edu) and includes words and phrases to provide context for screen-readers. ●

Audio materials (mp3, wav, etc.) are accompanied by a transcript and videos / screencasts are closed-captioned. ●

Tables are used appropriately and are accessible. ●