

PCC Online Quality Assurance Standards

Updated 03/23/10 Version 4.5

The PCC Online Standards have been researched and created to provide a uniform online class design. Research states that the content of each class should be easy to read and navigate. Research also suggests the concept of breaking long scrolling pages into shorter individual documents to increase the readability of the text. This and more information of what should be included in the separate sections of an online class are in this packet and will help you design a quality PCC online class. An example online class has also been designed.

This first part of the information packet is a short and simple overview of what should be included in a quality PCC online class.

The second part of this information packet describes in detail what should be included to provide a quality PCC online class. There is also a scoring rubric that will be used to help the instructor determine if there are areas that need improvement.

The third part is a checklist for the instructor and the designer for the four most important sections of an online class:

1. Before a class starts
2. The first week of class
3. During the semester
4. The last week of class

Overview

Course Home Page-

1. Course News with a “Welcome to Class” that will include course number, name of instructor, phone number (if instructor chooses to provide), email, and a reference for students to access the Content Tool to get started into the class.
2. Picture of instructor or graphic for a visual aid for students to recognize.

Content Tool

A. First Module – Start Here

1. Instructor welcome message, office hours, and biography
2. Instructions how to proceed through course and for submission and completion of all course work and assignments
3. Instructions to communicate with instructor and when to expect (timely) feedback from instructor
4. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page

B. Second Module – Syllabus and Schedule

1. Syllabus – updated, printable, and required course material
2. Schedule Page – printable outline of each week of course with required items that will be due to the instructor
3. Grading Procedures – grading procedures, instructions on gradebook access, and an information link if requiring proctored testing

C. **Course Content** – This will be the organization of your lessons.

1. Lesson Intro/Overview
 - a. Essential Question
 - b. Key Words/Concepts
2. Learning Objectives
3. Pre-Assessments
4. Lecture Pages
5. Assignments
 - a. Assigned Reading
 - b. Assigned Writing
 - c. Exercise/Activities
 - d. Assessment
 - e. Lesson Discussion
6. Resources and Materials

There are two other areas that are addressed that are not in a specific module but are a part of the overall class design.

Learner Engagement and Course Technology - both of these areas assist every student to become an active participant in the learning community using all tools available with the instructor's help.

PCC Online Quality Assurance Standards

Course Title: _____ Date of Evaluation: _____

Name of Evaluator: _____ Course Instructor: _____

PCC Campus: Pueblo Fremont Durango Cortez

Rating scale:

- 0** = Absent—component is missing
- 1** = Unsatisfactory—need significant improvement
- 2** = Somewhat satisfactory—needs targeted improvements
- 3** = Satisfactory—discretionary improvement needed
- 4** = Very satisfactory—no improvement needed

*A rating of 2 or lower must have an accompanying comment that explains the reason for the rating with suggestions for fixes.

Course Home Page	Score
To ensure consistency between all online courses they will have a standard course home page, provide instructor information, and use specific course tools.	
The first course news on the course home page contains a welcome message and will also include the course title, instructor name, contact phone number (if available) and contact email.	
The first course news on the course home page contains a reference to the student guides for the course tools located on the course home page.	
The first course news on the course home page contains a reference for students to go to the Content Tool to look at course materials.	
Note: The Course News should be used as a place to put information about news items, events, and link updates. The Course News area is not meant as the place to put the actual course content.	
Comments:	

Start Here The first module in the Content Tool that contains the course orientation.	Score
Includes a welcome message and a simple instructor biography which may consist of a brief bit of streamed audio or video of the instructor.	
Instructions are provided on how to complete and submit all required assignments.	
Instructions are provided on how to communicate with the online instructor. A process of providing timely feedback to students is also provided.	
The requirements and expectations for student interaction are clearly stated for assigned course work that requires student participation.	
Instructions are provided for the use of any course resources such as publisher resources, CD's, web sites and activities.	
Instructor will provide information for online office hours.	
Instructor will provide a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page.	
Students are instructed on how to proceed through the course.	
Comments:	

Syllabus and Schedule The second module in the Content Tool that is named Syllabus and Schedule. The module contains the course syllabus, schedule page, grading rubrics, and other course information such as student learning guides.	Score
Syllabus	
The syllabus is updated and is saved as a printable web page or PDF file.	
The required course materials (text books and other resources) are listed and are current.	
Schedule Page	
The schedule page outlines each lesson, module or unit of the semester.	
The required readings, assignments, assessments, and any other items that are to be turned in are listed with appropriate due dates.	
The course schedule is updated and is saved as a printable web page or PDF file.	
Grading Procedures	
Rubrics, or grading procedures, are provided for all graded materials.	
Note: If you are requiring proctored testing at a location other than PCC, you must include a link to the proctor instruction page: http://www.pueblocc.edu/Admissions/AssessmentTesting/Basic_Skills/ProctorForm.htm	
Comments:	

Course Content – The online course content is presented in learning modules, units or lessons. Avoid time references such as Week 1 for lessons titles. Time references are used in the context of assignment due dates on the schedule page.

Each module, unit or lesson should include these topics: Lesson Introduction, Essential Question, Key Words/Concepts, Learning Objectives, Pre-Assessments, Assigned Readings, Lecture Pages, Assigned Writings, Exercise/Activities, Grades, Resources and Materials, and Assessments.

Online courses must have the same rigor as face-to-face courses. Students must spend an equivalent amount of time preparing for and participating in online learning activities as they would spend in face-to-face learning activities (e.g., 15 hours of participation for each credit hour earned). Sufficient documentation must be presented by the faculty to indicate that students will spend an equivalent amount of time in the proposed online course. The Copyright and Fair Use Law must be addressed.

Lesson Introduction/Overview (On the first page of the lesson)	Score
Introduce the students to the lesson by providing a summary of the lesson and its relationship to the course content.	
Essential Question The overview should contain a thought provoking question promoting critical thinking. An essential question drives students to encounter (and struggle with) the central concepts of the lesson.	
Key Words/Concepts A list of key words, with or without definitions. The concepts might include a list of concepts listed here or mentioned for emphasis so the student will be on the alert for the explanation later in the lesson.	
Learning Objectives (On the first page of the lesson)	
Objectives are listed in the lessons and identify the course objectives to which they relate.	
The lesson objectives are clearly defined and written in a way that allows students to easily grasp their meaning and the learning outcomes expected of them.	
The lesson objectives include the actions, performance criteria, and conditions of what the student will be able to do.	
Pre-Assessments	
At the beginning of a lesson, students are assessed to determine their entry-level knowledge of the topic. The results can be compared to assessments at the end of the module to measure the students' learning outcomes. This could be in the form of a discussion, quiz, worksheet or other forms of evaluation. The student is provided with feedback from the pre-assessment that may serve as a study guide for the lesson.	
Lecture Pages	
Faculty comments on topics presented in each unit (may be called Lectures, Instructor's Remarks, Notes, or whatever is deemed an appropriate title by the faculty). Lecture pages should generally be no longer than 2-3 screens in length.	
Assignments Page	
This page contains a summary of all required activities like reading, homework, projects, assessments, and required discussions. Instructions are provided for each assignment.	
Assigned Reading Specify all required readings (chapters in course text, pages, documents...etc). Provide guided reading suggestions or points to look out for in the reading. Readings are separated into "required" and "optional".	
Assigned Writing Identify the type of writing such as outlines, discussions, essays, etc... Explain the process and timeline to submit the writing assignment along with the evaluation criteria. Examples for the students to follow may be provided.	

<p>Exercises/Activities</p> <p>Provide an interactive exercise for the entire class or for groups that promote critical thinking and problem solving skills. Suggested interactive exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Games such as crosswords, word search puzzles, game-show-style games related to course content. • Student blogs with peer review. • Present an individual or group project for student review and comment. • Student submission of web resources on the lesson topic. • Have students create questions for a self-assessment quiz and then use the Assessment tool to post it for all to use for review. • Use Web Quests or scavenger hunts. 	
<p>Assessment</p>	
<p>Students are provided with a clear description of the criteria that will be used to assess and evaluate their work and participation in the course.</p>	
<p>Assessments are varied to provide opportunities for the demonstration of mastery and to accommodate multiple learning styles.</p>	
<p>Students have ample opportunity to measure their own learning progress. "Self-check" or practice types of assignments and exercises are provided with timely student feedback. Research shows students learn more effectively if they receive frequent, meaningful, and timely feedback.</p>	
<p>Lesson Discussion</p>	
<p>The discussion area in each course is where the majority of the faculty-student and student-student interaction occurs throughout the semester. PCC requires that faculty include a discussion topic for each lesson, unit, or module. Student evaluations and research into adult learning make it clear that discussion is one of the most valuable online learning tools we have at our disposal. As online educators, we are also learning that sense of community can be very important to online retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The discussion space is our classroom. We can draw from our campus-based questioning techniques and use them in discussion to engage a class online. For example, when a writing instructor begins a section on Argument, the discussion might begin with the basic knowledge questions as "What is Argument according to our book? What are the key elements? Can someone give an example of an argument that didn't work? What happened to make it fizzle?" • In introducing any discussion session, letting students know that all are welcome to answer any questions can be helpful. This encourages multiple participation, rather than the sense that only one person at a time can be involved in a given exchange with the instructor. • Creating a welcoming (safe) and courteous environment is vital! • Faculty Presence online is important – presence and immediacy of response are important. We should all be in the courses at least three times a week and responding to posts so students know that we are present in the course. It is a best practice to respond to new posts within 24-48 hours. It is okay not to be in courses on the weekends, though many students may be active on the weekend, particularly Sunday evenings. Interacting Friday, then again Monday, is okay. The point of presence is much more than the hours between responses. If you were a student, would you want to be in a course room posting in a thoughtful way, yet not get any reinforcement, nor a response from the faculty to you or the class for several days? <p>Tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions at the end of the book chapter can be used to initiate/forward discussion. • Acknowledging a group of responses by naming more than one person is a good way for the instructor to economize on being very present, yet economizing on answering every post. For example, "Joe, James, and Sally together provided us with a great summary of most key points! Would anyone else like to add to their list?" • Using follow-up questions can also be used to move the discussion forward, as well as 	

moving students to bring forth key points from the reading. Keeping a list of focus and follow-up questions is most helpful from term to term. Groups of faculty teaching the same course have the opportunity to build a large, shared, bank of questions.

- Compliments and acknowledgments are great motivators to the class's engagement with provocative or follow-up questions.
- Students can be invited to summarize the discussion or parts of it.
- Carefully select written language, tone, and voice to establish a positive, supportive, and unambiguous exchange of information in email messages. Messages must avoid direct or subtle tones of anger, impatience, rejection, unfavorable comparison, sarcasm, etc. We all know students sometimes fail to live up to these standards. As professionals, however, it is important that we maintain professional communication with our students at all times.
- Instructor handles the following through other means of communication (email or telephone): academic censure, academic failure, discipline, student complaints.
- Respond frequently to students. It is a best practice to respond within 24 hours to student posts.
- If students do not initiate discussion the instructor must do so.

Developing a structure to discussions, or heuristic for promoting engagement:

First post: Respond to the reading or assigned topic with specific reference to the reading. Include a brief summary, select a specific focus or point, develop that point with explanations and examples, and invite commentary from classmates about a particular concern, not the whole post, ending with an invitation or question.

Second post: Read all the posts in your group and then respond to the first post of a classmate who has not yet received a reply. Include specific reference to the main idea of the classmate's post and to the assigned reading or topic, expand on the classmate's ideas with additional information or ideas or offer an alternative viewpoint on the topic and support your position with references to the reading or posts by other group members. Perhaps raise questions and speculate further on the topic.

Third post: Respond to the person who answered your first post with appreciation for their response and an explanation of ways their message increased your own understanding or stimulated your thinking. Remember your audience is a specific individual plus your whole class.

Additional post: Summarize all the messages from your group and analyze for primary points, similarities and differences, and other observations about the group's thinking.

Additional post: For a subsequent post, respond to one or more classmates from a different group than the one you have been participating in.

Quoted directly from Fischer, Reiss, and Young (2005)

Resources and Materials	
Instructions on how to access resources are sufficient and easy to understand.	
Course materials are separated into "required" and "optional" categories.	
The Copyright and Fair Use Law is addressed and followed by using the information in the .pdf version of a classroom copyright chart: http://www.mediafestival.org/old_site/copyrigh.pdf	
The instructional materials are logically sequenced and integrated.	
The instructional materials support the stated learning objectives. Course materials, resources, and learning objectives align in a clear and direct way.	
The instructional materials are robust and create a rich learning environment. The instructional materials are appropriate for the level of the course, and represent up-to-date thinking and practice in the discipline.	
Students can easily determine the purpose of all materials, technologies and methods used in the course.	
Content pages are saved as web pages or PDF files and are printable. All word files that need to be downloaded are saved in Rich Text Format (rtf).	
PowerPoints are saved as PDF files for online viewing and printing. If there is interactivity in the PowerPoint, it should be saved as a .ppt (Office 2003) format.	
All resources and materials used in the course are appropriately cited.	
Grades	
All gradable content for each module, unit or lesson is posted in the gradebook in a timely fashion for students to review.	
Comments:	
Learner Engagement	
Online courses must use a wide range of teaching and learning activities to assist every student in becoming an active participant in a learning community through interacting with both the instructor and other students.	Score
Instructor provides the opportunity for students to use email, phone, discussion tools, chat room, and online voice communication tools.	
Activities align with learning objectives.	
Learning activities cultivate instructor-student, content-student, and student-student interaction.	
The course design provides opportunities for the instructor to regularly interact with the students.	
Instructor uses the Course News tool to notify students of course modifications and events.	
All gradable content is in the gradebook, available for students to review and is posted in a timely fashion.	
Comments:	

Course Technology	Score
The course design takes full advantage of available tools and media.	
<p>The Online courses must include the following tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course News • Content • Classlist • Discussions • Dropbox • Grades • Quizzes 	
Technologies required for this course are either provided or easily downloadable. The term “technologies” may cover a range of plug-ins (e.g. Acrobat Reader, media players) or special software packages. Clear instructions list the required software and plug-ins, along with instructions for obtaining and installing these items.	
The tools and media support the learning objectives and are appropriately chosen to deliver the content of the course.	
Tools and media used in the course help students actively engage in the learning process rather than passively “absorbing” information.	
<p>Note: SoftChalk LessonBuilder is strongly suggested for development of course lessons. LessonBuilder provides easy navigation, 508 disability compliance and uniform styles.</p>	
<p>Comments:</p>	

Prior to the beginning of the semester, the instructor...

√

Administrative	
Copy content into new course section by the Saturday prior to the first day of the semester. Remember, content can be copied from a previous semester.	
Update the Course News on the course home page which contains course title and instructor information.	
Update the course Syllabus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course syllabus is updated and opens as a web page or PDF that is printable. • The required course materials (text books and other resources) are listed and are current. • Disability accommodation information is provided • Policy of academic standards and ethics is provided 	
Review and update the Start Here module content.	
Review and update the Schedule page in the Syllabus and Schedule module.	
Review and update the Grading Procedures in the Syllabus and Schedule module.	
Review and update Dropbox, Discussions, and the Quizzes due dates.	
Correct spelling or grammatical errors throughout the course content.	
Ensure online grade book is current and all graded assignments are listed.	
Social	
Update the course home page Course News with a brief paragraph welcoming students to the class and a reference to the Content Tool.	
Provide a personal welcoming introduction and a simple instructor biography in the Start Here module. This may consist of a brief audio or video of the instructor.	
Create a discussion for students to introduce themselves to the class. Encourage students to share pictures, graphics or other representations (e.g., avatars) of themselves.	
Instructional Strategies	
Review past course evaluations to determine if enhancements for instructional strategies are required.	
Provide a method for students to use online tools before required assignments to reduce anxiety and resolve technical issues before tasks are due.	
Technical	
Update hyperlinks to remove dead or broken links.	
Check all media for proper display (broken images, video playback, etc.)	
Test the course navigation for accessibility and correct any accessibility problems.	
Update course to reflect new features of the course management software.	

During the first week the instructor ...

Administrative	
Monitor logins and student access.	
Contact missing students to encourage their participation.	
Social	
Respond to each student's introduction in the discussion tool.	
Model discussion response behavior and tone. Use a conversational tone for responses that is inviting, personal, friendly, and encouraging.	
Use humor and emoticons sparingly and carefully.	
Invite and encourage students to use online office hours and/or to make appointments.	
Add a social forum for non-class related topics using chat/discussion tools.	
Instructional Strategies	
Create an ice breaker activity related to a course key objective or concept: such as a WebQuest, scavenger hunt, or group activity.	
Communicate with students daily to maintain a positive rapport.	
Challenge the students by asking questions which apply to the readings and communicating high expectations.	
Technical	
Assist students with login/access difficulties or refer them to the appropriate support contacts.	
Provide detailed tutorial links and/or instructions on using the technology to help the students feel comfortable.	
Have students send an email message, with an attachment, to the instructor.	
Have students submit a practice assignment, with an attachment, using the Dropbox tool.	

Throughout the course the instructor ...

Administrative	
Monitor attendance in class in order to follow up with missing students. Students that have not logged into their class two days prior to census date must be dropped from the course in Banner.	
Promptly grade the assignments after student submission and immediately post to the online grade book.	
Conduct course according to designated schedule with any deviations communicated in advance.	
Enforce guidelines for learner behaviors such as netiquette and due dates.	
Remind students of upcoming deadlines using the Course News tool or the Schedule tool.	
Post group rosters before group projects begin.	
Create areas for group members to work on group projects.	
Maintain privacy of student grades and feedback.	
Activate or inactivate course materials and activities to optimize student learning and avoid confusion.	
Monitor student participation in class and communicate/encourage students who are falling behind.	
Inform and encourage students to complete the course evaluation.	
Social	
Use Course News to keep class current and personal. Announcements may include holiday wishes and real world social issues (e.g. Katrina) as well as course information.	
Continue to maintain a regular presence in discussion forums.	
Provide individual messages (emails, postings, announcements) of encouragement.	
Monitor discussions for respectfulness based on netiquette standards and Pueblo Community College behavior policies.	
Immediately contact students with inappropriate posts for explanation and clarification.	
Immediately make disrespectful posts unavailable to the class.	
Block disruptive students from class activity if behavior continues to conflict with Pueblo Community College policy and contact department chair.	

Instructional Strategies	Notes
Respond to student questions promptly--consistent with timeline for feedback stated in the Start Here module. (Recommended: within the next business day.)	
Schedule and maintain class time to interact with students. This would be equivalent to the same amount of time spent in a face-to-face class.	
Focus discussions, or other assigned writings, on specific issues utilizing questions and problems to actively engage students in the learning process. This will serve dual purposes by consistently verifying students' identity through their participation and promoting writing skills.	
Summarize discussions.	
Provide supportive information for course content.	
Monitor student feedback to provide information on clarity of instruction.	
Provide helpful and constructive suggestions to complete assignments.	
Detect and correct misconceptions.	
Present course content in various ways to accommodate and respect different learning styles.	
Assign groups or create a method for students to select groups before beginning group projects.	
Invite and encourage students to complete a peer review of individual and group projects.	
Create transitions from one topic to the next to help students recognize time on task.	
Utilize specific teaching/learning strategies which promote self-directed learning.	
Implement rubrics/grading procedures established in Syllabus and Schedule module.	
Use illustrations and examples to clearly explain important concepts.	
Provide practical suggestions to students on how to complete their work on time.	
Provide feedback indicating areas in which the students have succeeded as well as areas that require further development in a timely manner.	
Update the frequently asked questions (FAQ) page on a regular basis.	
Technical	
Direct students to links and information on technical support.	
Consistently address universal accessibility. (ADA compliance)	
Provide handouts in easy-to-use formats and provide details for successfully downloading.	
Announce information related to interruptions of access to servers delivering course materials in advance (when possible) or after (when necessary). This is generally handled by the Pueblo Community College Online administrators, but it's helpful to pass information to students yourself as well.	
Make reasonable accommodations due to technical difficulties beyond the students' control.	
Receive and respond to completed student assignments electronically.	
Use other technologies for the course appropriately.	

Completed

During the last week, the instructor ...

√

Administrative	
Provide general information concerning the nature and format of the final assessment(s).	
Alert students on how long course materials will continue to be available after the end of class (generally two weeks).	
Post final grades promptly.	
Social	
Send an email with a closing personal message to students.	
Instructional Strategies	
Provide feedback on final project and make it available to students even after the class is over. (Available for two weeks)	
Technical	
List technical aspects that worked well and those that need improvement. Discuss with Virtual Campus staff.	

Thanks to Weber State University for their cooperation and much of the valuable information provided.