



**NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE  
Online Course Design Rubric**

As a form of self-review, you may want to apply this rubric yourself to your online course.

You may also want to seek feedback from another professional by asking a peer to visit one of your online courses and apply this rubric.

The following standards are adapted from The Quality Matters 05/06 Rubric and OEI. The Quality Matters program is sponsored by MarylandOnline, and was supported in part by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), U.S. Department of Education.

**Online Course Design Rubric**

**I. COURSE OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION**

**General Review Standard:** The overall design of the course, navigational information, as well as course, instructor and student information are made transparent to the student at the beginning of the course.

<b>Specific Review Standards:</b>	<b>Annotation: What's the idea?</b>
<p>I.1 Navigational instructions make the organization of the course easy to understand.</p>	<p>Instructions provide a general course overview, guide the new student to explore the course website, and indicate what to do first, rather than list detailed navigational instructions for the whole course.</p> <p>Instructors may choose to incorporate some of this information in the course syllabus. If so, students should be directed to the syllabus at the beginning of the course. A useful idea is a “Read Me First” or “Start Here” button or icon on the course home page, linking students to start-up information.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A course “tour”</li> <li>• Clear statements about how to get started in the course</li> <li>• A “Scavenger hunt” assignment that leads students through an exploration of the different areas of the course areas</li> </ul>
<p>I.2 A statement introduces the student to the course and to the structure of the student learning.</p>	<p>The instructor’s statement gives the new student an idea of how the learning process is structured including schedule, communications modes, types of activities, and assessments. These features are often found in the course syllabus.</p> <p>Look for some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The course schedule (self-paced, following a set calendar, etc.)</li> <li>• Course sequencing, such as a linear or random order</li> <li>• Types of activities the student will be required to complete (written assignments, online self-tests, participation in the discussion board, group work, etc.)</li> <li>• Course calendar with assignment and test due dates</li> <li>• Preferred mode of communication with the instructor (email, discussion board, etc.)</li> <li>• Preferred mode of communication with other students</li> <li>• Testing procedures (online, proctored, etc.)</li> <li>• Procedure for submission of electronic assignments</li> </ul>

<p>I.3 Netiquette expectations with regard to discussions and email communication are clearly stated.</p>	<p>Expectations of student conduct online are clearly stated, however brief or elaborate they may be. The expectations themselves are not evaluated.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules of conduct for participating in the discussion board</li> <li>• Rules of conduct for email content</li> <li>• “Speaking style” requirements, (i.e. use of correct English required as opposed to net acronyms)</li> <li>• Spelling and grammar expectations, if any</li> </ul>
<p>I.4 The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate.</p>	<p>The initial introduction creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the students. It should present the instructor as professional as well as approachable, and include more than the essentials, such as the instructor’s name, title, field of expertise, email address and phone.</p> <p>The self introduction helps students get to know the instructor. It could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on teaching philosophy</li> <li>• Past experiences with teaching online classes</li> <li>• Personal information such as hobbies, etc.</li> <li>• A head shot (“It makes a big difference for online students to see and hear their instructor” to combat the “social isolation that exists in online courses.” <a href="#">Online Classroom</a>)</li> </ul>

<p>I.5 Students are requested to introduce themselves to the</p>	<p>The student introduction helps to create a supportive learning environment and a sense of community. Students are asked to introduce themselves and given</p>
<p>I.6 Minimum technology requirements, minimum student skills, and, if applicable, prerequisite knowledge in the discipline, are clearly stated.</p>	<p>Explanations of technical requirements and skills, and prerequisite knowledge and skills may be found within the course, in documents linked to the course, or in supporting material not on the course site. Look for a link to that content and/or a reminder of it for the entering student.</p> <p>Technology requirements may include information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardware</li> <li>• Software and plug-ins</li> <li>• ISP requirements</li> </ul> <p>Examples of technology skills may include the capability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use email with attachments</li> <li>• Save file in commonly used word processing program formats (e.g. MS Word)</li> <li>• Use MS Excel or other spreadsheet programs</li> </ul> <p>Discipline knowledge prerequisites should include academic course prerequisites.</p>

## II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES (COMPETENCIES)

**General Review Standard:** Learning objectives are clearly defined and explained. They assist the student to focus learning activities.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
<p>II.1 The learning objectives of the course describe outcomes that are measurable.</p>	<p>Measurable learning objectives ensure instructors precisely describe what students are to gain from instruction, and then guide instructors to accurately assess student accomplishment. Objectives should describe student performance in specific, observable terms. If this is not possible, (e.g., internal cognition, affective changes), check for clear indications that the learning objective is meaningfully assessed.</p> <p><u>Special situations:</u> In some cases (check the Instructor Worksheet), objectives for the course are institutionally mandated and the individual instructor does not have the authority to change them. For such cases, review Standard II.1 in connection with Standard II.5 below. If the specific learning outcomes on the module/unit level are measurable but the institutionally mandated learning objectives <i>for the course</i> are not, Standard II.1 should be considered as met for scoring purposes. Please note in the “comments” box that the institutionally mandated learning objectives for the course are not measurable.</p> <p>Examples of measurable objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select appropriate tax strategies for different financial and personal situations</li> <li>• Develop a comprehensive, individualized wellness action program focused on overcoming a sedentary life-style</li> </ul>

<p>II.2 The learning objectives of the course are clearly stated and understandable to the student.</p>	<p>Students can easily grasp the meaning of the learning objectives. Use of jargon, confusing terms, unnecessarily complex language, and puzzling syntax are avoided.</p> <p><u>Special situations:</u> In some cases (check the Instructor Worksheet), objectives for the course are institutionally mandated and the individual instructor does not have the authority to change them. For such courses, review Standard II.4 in connection with Standard II.5 below. If the specific learning outcomes on the module/unit level are clearly stated and understandable to the student but the institutionally mandated learning objectives <i>for the course</i> are not, Standard II.4 should be considered as met for scoring purposes. Please note in the “comments” box that the institutionally mandated learning objectives for the course are not clearly stated and understandable.</p>
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## III. ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

**General Review Standard:** Assessment strategies use established ways to measure effective learning, assess student progress by reference to stated learning objectives, and are designed as essential to the learning process.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
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<p>III.1 The types of assessments selected measure the stated learning.</p>	<p>Assessments, learning objectives, and learning activities align in a clear and direct way. The assessment formats provide a reasonable way to measure the stated learning objectives.</p> <p>Examples of inconsistency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The objective is to be able to “write a persuasive essay” but the assessment is a multiple choice test.</li> <li>• The objective is to “demonstrate discipline-specific information literacy” and the assessment is a rubric-scored term paper, but students are not given any practice with information literacy skills on smaller assignments.</li> </ul>
<p>III.2 The grading policy is transparent and easy to understand.</p>	<p>Review the clarity of presentation to the student, not the simplicity or complexity of a given grading system itself. A relatively complex grading system can still be unambiguous and easy to understand.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of all activities, tests, etc. that will affect the students’ grade is included at the beginning of the course.</li> </ul>
<p>III.3 Assessment and measurement strategies provide feedback to the student.</p>	<p>Students learn more effectively if they receive frequent, meaningful, and rapid feedback. This feedback may come from the instructor directly, from assignments and assessments that have feedback built into them, or even from other students.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor participation in a discussion assignment</li> <li>• Writing assignments that require submission of a draft for instructor comment and suggestions for improvement</li> <li>• Self-mastery tests and quizzes that include informative feedback with each answer choice</li> <li>• Interactive games and simulation that have feedback built in</li> </ul>
<p>III.4 The types of assessments selected and the methods used for submitting assessments are appropriate for the distance learning environment.</p>	<p>Assessments make use of the technologies and security typically found in an online classroom.</p> <p>Examples that DO meet the standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submission of text or media files by email or ‘drop box’</li> <li>• Exams given in a proctored testing center</li> <li>• Quizzes with time limitations, printing disabled, and other security measures</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple assessments which enable the instructor to become familiar with individual students' work and which discourage "proxy cheating" (someone other than the student completing and submitting work)</li> </ul> <p>Examples that do NOT meet the standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Required assessments that cannot be submitted online, such as a lab practicum in a science course.</li> <li>A course in which the entire set of assessments consists of 5 multiple choice tests taken online, with no enforced time limit, the print function enabled, and minimal security features in place.</li> </ul>
<p>III.5 STRONGLY SUGGESTED: "Self-check" or practice types of assignments are provided for quick student feedback.</p>	<p>Students have ample opportunity to measure their own learning progress.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice quizzes</li> <li>Games, simulations, and other interactive exercises</li> <li>Practice written assignments</li> <li>Peer reviews</li> </ul>

#### IV. RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

**General Review Standard:** Instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive to achieve announced objectives and learning outcomes and are prepared by qualified persons competent in their fields. (Materials, other than standard textbooks produced by recognized publishers, are prepared by the instructor or distance educators skilled in preparing materials for distance learning.)

<b>Specific Review Standards:</b>	<b>Annotation: What's the idea?</b>
<p>IV.1 The instructional materials support the stated learning objectives and have sufficient breadth and depth for the student to learn the subject.</p>	<p>Instructions should provide meaningful content in a variety of ways, including the textbook, PowerPoint presentations, websites, lecture notes, outlines, and multimedia.</p> <p>Decisions on this standard may be particularly difficult for individual reviewers whose expertise is not in the course discipline. Reviewers should consult with the SME (subject matter expert) and use common sense to determine if the content is robust enough to support the course.</p>

<p>IV.2 Instructional materials are presented in a format appropriate to the online environment, and are easily accessible to and usable by the student.</p>	<p>Students who have the required technical equipment and software can view the materials online.</p> <p>If some of the course resources, including textbooks, videos, CD-ROMs, etc., are unavailable within the framework of the course website, determine how students would gain access to them and examine their ease of use.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbooks and/or CDs, if used, include titles, authors, publishers, ISBN numbers, copyright dates, and information as to where copies can be obtained</li> </ul> <p>A navigation button is devoted to “Resources” and appropriately tied in with the overall course design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required software plug-ins are listed, along with instructions for obtaining and installing the plug-ins</li> </ul>
	<p>Examples of some visual format problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text size may be too inconsistent for typical View/Text Size setting</li> <li>• Large text files are presented without table of contents or unit numbering</li> <li>• Multimedia files require plug-ins or codecs students do not have</li> <li>• Science lab courses may include learning activities that are not easy to format for online learning</li> </ul>
<p>IV.3 The purpose of the course elements (content, instructional methods, technologies, and course materials) is evident.</p>	<p>Students can easily determine the purpose of all materials, technologies and methods used in the course and know which materials are required and which are recommended resources.</p> <p>For example, a course may be richly garnished with external links to Internet resources, but it is not clear whether those resources are for background information, additional personal enrichment, or required for an assignment.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to external web sites indicate the purpose of the links or are completely self-evident.</li> <li>• The functions of animated games or exercises are clearly explained or are completely self-evident.</li> </ul>

<p>IV.4 The instructional materials, including supporting materials - such as manuals, videos, CD ROMs, and computer software – are consistent in organization.</p>	<p>Online courses often use multiple types of instructional materials. Students can easily understand how the materials relate to each other. The level of detail in supporting materials is appropriate for the level of the course.</p> <p>For example, a course requires students to use the following materials: a textbook divided into chapters, video segments ordered by topics, a website organized around specific skills, and a tutorial CD-ROM that has an opening menu consisting of “practice quizzes,” “images,” and “audio examples.” Reviewers would need to determine if such diversely formatted course materials are integrated well enough to be useful to the uninitiated student.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An introductory Gen Ed course does not require materials meant for upper level intensive study in a major.</li> </ul> <p>Decisions on this standard may be particularly difficult for individual reviewers whose expertise is not in the course discipline. Reviewers should consult with the SME (subject matter expert) and use common sense to determine if the materials are appropriate to this course.</p>
<p>IV.5 All resources and materials used in the online course are appropriately cited.</p>	<p>Materials created by the instructor and those borrowed from other sources are distinctly identified. Text, images, graphic materials, tables, videos, audios, websites, and other forms of multimedia are appropriately referenced according to the institution’s copyright and intellectual property policy.</p> <p>Courses that use an e-pack or course cartridge may provide a blanket statement acknowledging that a significant portion of the course materials came from the publisher rather than include individual citations for each instance of publisher materials.</p>

## V. LEARNER INTERACTION

**General Review Standard:** The effective design of instructor-student interaction, meaningful student cooperation, and student-content interaction is essential to student motivation, intellectual commitment and personal development.

<b>Specific Review Standards:</b>	<b>Annotation: What’s the idea?</b>
<p>V.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of stated objectives and learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Learning activities are various including class discussions, case studies, simulation exercise, practice quizzes, tests, etc. Activities align with and support the learning objectives. Most of the objectives can reasonably be achieved by students completing the learning activities.</p> <p>Examples of <i>mismatches</i> between activities and objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The objective requires students to be able to deliver a persuasive speech, but the activities in the course do not include practice of that skill</li> <li>• The objective is “Prepare each budget within a master budget and explain their importance in the overall budgeting process.” The students review information about this in their texts, observe budgets worked out by the instructor, and produce only one of the several budgets</li> </ul>

<p>V.2 Learning activities foster instructor-student, content-student, and if appropriate to this course, student-student interaction.</p>	<p>All online courses should include interaction between the instructor and the students and between the students and the content. The degree and type of student-to-student interaction may vary with the discipline and the level of the course.</p> <p>Examples of learning activities that foster the following types of interaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor – student (consider for ALL courses): Self-introduction; discussion postings and responses; feedback on project assignments; evidence of one-to-one e-mail communication, etc.</li> <li>• Student – content (consider for ALL courses): Essays, term papers, group projects, etc. based on readings, videos, and other course content; self-assessment exercises; group work products, etc.</li> <li>• Student – student (if appropriate to this course): Self-introduction exercise; group discussion postings; group projects; peer critiques, etc. Refer to the Instructor Worksheet to determine if student-student interaction is appropriate for this course. If the Worksheet indicates that such interaction is appropriate then consider this in deciding if this standard is met. If the Worksheet indicates that such interaction is not appropriate, then focus only on instructor-student and student-content interaction to decide whether this standard has been met. Where possible, include recommendations and comments where student-student interaction can be incorporated in this course.</li> </ul>
<p>V.3 Clear standards are set for instructor response and availability (turn-around time for email, grade posting, etc.)</p>	<p>Information clearly indicates how quickly the instructor will respond, when feedback will be provided, and when the instructor is available to meet.</p> <p>Information clearly indicates instructor response time for key events and interactions, including e-mail turnaround time, time required for grade postings, discussion postings, etc. Standards also include instructor availability, including e-mail response time, degree of participation in discussions, and availability via other media (phone, in-person) if applicable.</p> <p>This standard does not prescribe what that response time and availability ought to be.</p>
<p>V.4 The requirements for course interaction are clearly articulated.</p>	<p>A clear statement of requirements should indicate the criteria for interaction.</p> <p>For example, students required to participate in discussions are told how many times each week they must post original comments, how many times they must post responses to other's comments, what the quality of the comments must be, how the comments will be evaluated, what grade credit they can expect for various levels of performance, and whether the interaction is required or optional.</p>

<p>V.5 The course design prompts the instructor to be present, active, and engaged with the students.</p>	<p>Students know that the instructor is approachable and will regularly interact with them. Opportunities for interaction will vary with the discipline of the course.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An actively used and well organized instructor-facilitated discussion board</li> <li>• Optional “electronic office hours” provided in the chat room or chat sessions on selected topics, archived/edited and posted as a FAQ for other students</li> <li>• An invitation for the class to email the instructor with individual concerns</li> <li>• Current announcements, either in the classroom or via email</li> </ul>
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## VI. COURSE TECHNOLOGY

**General Review Standard:** To enhance student learning, course technology enriches instruction and fosters student interactivity.

<b>Specific Review Standards:</b>	<b>Annotation: What’s the idea?</b>
<p>VI.1 The tools and media support the learning objectives of the course and are integrated with texts and lesson assignments.</p>	<p>Tools and media used in the course support related learning objectives, and are integrated with texts and lesson assignments. Students know how the tools and media support the assignments and how they support the learning objectives. Technology is not used simply for the sake of using technology.</p>
<p>VI.2 The tools and media enhance student interactivity and guide the student to become a more active learner.</p>	<p>Tools and media used in the course help students actively engage in the learning process, rather than passively “absorbing” information.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automated ‘self-check’ exercises requiring student response</li> <li>• Animations, simulations, and games that require student input</li> <li>• Software that tracks student interaction and progress</li> <li>• Use of discussion tools with automatic notification or ‘read/unread’ tracking feature</li> </ul>
<p>VI.3 Technologies required for this course are either provided or easily downloadable.</p>	<p>For this standard, the term “technologies” may cover a range of plug-ins such as Acrobat Reader, media players, etc. In addition, courses may require special software packages (spreadsheets, math calculators etc.). Clear instructions tell students how to obtain needed plug-ins and software packages.</p>
<p>VI.4 The tools and media are compatible with existing standards of delivery modes.</p>	<p>Course tools, media, and delivery modes meet current standards for widespread accessibility.</p> <p>For example, if most students have access to DVD players or use streaming media, use of those delivery modes in an online class meets this standard. If the typical student cannot be expected to have access to a technology at his or her out-of-the box home computer off campus, that technology should probably not be used in the course.</p>
<p>VI.5 Instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy to</p>	<p>Online students need to know about and be able to obtain access to educational resources by remote access. Information on these resources is readily visible with clear instructions on how to access these resources.</p>

understand.	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The instructor mails to students a custom CD he has prepared for the course</li> <li>• An explanation of how to obtain full text journal articles is provided in the assignment that requires their use</li> </ul>
VI.6 Course technologies take advantage of existing economies and efficiencies of delivery.	<p>As innovative technologies appear on the market all the time, online course technology should be current. Courses not recently developed may need to be updated. (Check the Instructor Worksheet).</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using compressed files to reduce file downloading time</li> <li>• Delivering Audio files in a common file type such as Windows Media or RealPlayer</li> </ul>

## VII. LEARNER SUPPORT

**General Review Standard:** Courses are effectively supported for students through fully accessible modes of delivery, resources, and student support.

<b>Specific Review Standards:</b>	<b>Annotation: What's the idea?</b>
VII.1 The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered.	<p>Technical support for online students differs from institution to institution. Technical support includes information about such topics as how to log in, how to use the software, and how to upload files. It does not include help with course content, assignments, academic or student support services.</p> <p>Look for evidence that students have access to technical support services from within the course. The purpose is not to review the adequacy of those services on an institutional level.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear description of the services, including directions on how to access Canvas (or other LMS) help.</li> <li>• An email link to an online learning helpdesk</li> <li>• A phone number for an online learning helpdesk</li> </ul>
VII.2 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's academic support system can assist the student in effectively using the resources provided.	<p>Academic support for online students, and the scope of what "academic support" entails, differs from institution to institution. For the purposes of review, academic support includes access to library resources, readiness assessment, testing services, tutoring, a writing center, a math center, supplemental instruction programs, and teaching assistants.</p> <p>Look for evidence that students have access to academic support services from within the course. The purpose is not to review the adequacy of those services on an institutional level.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear description of the academic support services and how to access them.</li> <li>• A link to the academic support website, along with a definition of academic support</li> </ul>

<p>VII.3 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution’s student support services can assist the student in</p>	<p>Student support services for online students, and the scope of what such support entails, differs from institution to institution. For the purposes of this review, student support services include advising, registration, financial aid, student life, counseling, etc.</p> <p>Look for evidence that students have access to student support services from</p>
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<p>effectively using the resources provided.</p>	<p>within the course. The purpose is not to review the adequacy of those services on an institutional level.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear description of student support services and how to access them</li> <li>• A link to the student support website, along with a definition of student support services</li> </ul>
<p>VII.4 Course instructions articulate or link to tutorials and resources that answer basic questions related to research, writing, technology etc.</p>	<p>Online students’ access to tutorials and help files related to writing, technology, research, etc. differs from institution to institution.</p> <p>This item does NOT refer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students getting help from another person</li> <li>• Tutorials and resources specifically related to course content</li> </ul> <p>Look for evidence that students taking the course DO have access to those support services from within the course, for example, a clear description of the tutorials available and how to get them.</p>

## VIII. ACCESSIBILITY

**General Review Standard:** The course is accessible to all students.

<b>Specific Review Standards:</b>	<b>Annotation: What’s the idea?</b>
<p>VIII.1 The course acknowledges the importance of ADA requirements.</p>	<p>All online courses should direct students to the institution’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) services on their campus. There should be a statement in the course that tells students how to gain access to ADA services at their institution.</p> <p>To meet this standard a course must have both a statement that tells students how to gain access to an institution’s ADA services <b>AND</b> be on an approved Course Management System (Blackboard, WebCT, or WebTycho) or documentation provided by the CMS that it is ADA compliant.</p> <p>Encourage faculty to consult the office on their campus that provides disability services for the wording of an ADA Statement appropriate to their institution.</p>
<p>VIII.2 Web pages provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content.</p>	<p>Alternative means of access to course information are provided for the vision or hearing impaired student, such as, equivalent textual representations of images, audio, animations, and video in the course website. Presenting information in text format is generally acceptable because screen reader software (used by the vision impaired) can read text.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audio lecture has a text transcript available</li> <li>• Video clip, image, or animation is accompanied by text transcript</li> </ul>

<p>VIII.3 Web pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful.</p>	<p>Instructors provide links to Internet content that includes useful descriptions of what students will find at those sites. These descriptions enable the vision impaired student to use screen reader software to understand links.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All file names and web hyperlinks have meaningful names. For instance, the link to take a quiz should say “Take Quiz 1”, not “click here”</li> <li>• Icons used as links should also have HTML tags or an accompanying text link</li> </ul>
<p>VIII.4 The course</p>	<p>The course employs appropriate font, color, and spacing to facilitate readability</p>