



GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING ONLINE COURSES

The CPD Standards Office is a unique organisation that was founded with the vision of understanding and enabling positive and successful CPD and learning experiences. As a highly specialised expert team, our university led research has equipped us with extensive expertise on all things CPD.

Between the work of the Professional Development Consortium and the CPD Standards Office dual CPD research and accreditation activities sharpen our knowledge and expertise. This enables us to work with individual coaches, training providers, employers, and membership organisations as a collaborative CPD network & community.

This factsheet provides advice and guidance on how to get started designing and developing online training courses and achieve the CPD Standards Accreditation.

Guidelines for Designing Online Courses

When we talk about ‘online courses’ we have to be clear that they are activities and should not just be thought of as courses in the conventional sense. For example, it could be a trainer interacting with a candidate online via a video link so we should maybe start using the term ‘activity’ rather than ‘online’. Activities delivered online are becoming more diverse with the development of technology therefore providers need to remain mindful of the fast-moving pace of change in the digital world.

When a customer is buying any training activity, it is not just the actual activity they are receiving but the whole experience from the marketing of the course, the service they receive before, during and after purchase along with the actual course itself. And remember, the purchaser may not be the end-user. So, what makes an online course *good*?

1. The Activity

- The title should be descriptive
- The learning objectives should be clear

- Consider what the topics, knowledge or skill sets are needed and what the end user is looking for
- The course needs to be focussed on the intended audience - pitch it at the right level
- Be clear how the course will add to users' existing knowledge
- State clearly any pre-course requirements and preparations
- Cater for all different learning styles

2. Content

- Should be well structured and sequenced, focused on the participants needs
- Learning progresses in steps meaningful to the learner
- The pace is appropriate (not too simple nor too challenging)
- Evaluative feedback is delayed, allowing a chance to learn
- Include references to relevant codes of practice, regulations or standards
- Ensure the content is reviewed by a third party and take external advice wherever possible.
- Ensure supporting materials complement on-screen learning
- Include creative features - animations, video, images, recap quizzes and games
- Establish a process to ensure the content remains up to date

3. Interface

- Should enable straightforward participation
- Options are clear and understandable
- Features are easy to remember and require minimal effort
- Learners are reminded of features they can use
- Features that enhance the learning experience

4. Navigation

- Ensure participants can see where they are going and the boundaries
- They can see how the content is organised
- Be able to see where they are on the journey
- The ability to move forward or backwards
- They can correct themselves in a task (by seeing the consequences of their decisions).

5. Motivation

- Ensure it will engage the user to learn effectively
- It is clear how the tasks are linked to desired outcomes
- Feedback is early, frequent and contains learning content
- Consider opportunities for users to interact with each other

6. Technical considerations

- Ensure the joining instructions are clear
- Easy login is essential
- Consider the devices on which the activities will be delivered - PC, tablet, mobile, etc.

7. Assessment of learning

- The need for assessment, and the form it takes, should be considered carefully
- Assessment is more than just asking a few multi-choice questions
- It should be designed to not only assess the learning but also be used to inform learning
- Wherever possible, external advice should be sought when developing an assessment

8. Feedback

- Feedback from users should be encouraged and analysed as part of a programme of continuous improvement
- Providers are encouraged to publicise feedback as a positive means to support their marketing strategy
- Seek it... Use it... Publicise it!

9. Marketing

- Have a clear strategy for marketing the activity
- Research the gap in the market that the activity is intended to fill
- State clearly how much the activity costs and what is included as well as the full duration
- Implement and publicise a complaints policy covering customer satisfaction and consider including a money back guarantee

10. Government and legislative requirements

- Even though the course is not delivered in person, the provider must ensure that relevant legislation is observed
- Consideration should be given to Disability Discrimination and Equal Treatment Acts e.g. those with impaired vision and the use of colours, contrast and font size
- Data protection is often an area overlooked by providers
- There is comprehensive guidance on the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website www.ico.org.uk which all providers should review, especially to establish whether registration with the ICO is required.

We hope you have found this factsheet helpful.

Please see www.cpdstandards.com for more information on our accreditation services or call 0203 745 6463 for further advice.

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