



MSc in Digital Education

COURSE GUIDE:

Course Design for Digital Environments

Session 2017/18: Semester 1

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Welcome

Welcome to *Course design for digital environments*.

Our study over this semester will start from the perspective that there is no single, easy response to the question, 'How do I design an online course?' While much of the literature – sometimes rather uncritically – assumes that a single model can provide the answer, in fact there are multiple routes into course design, both online and offline. Each of these is informed by our own understanding of what it means to teach and learn, and the purpose of education and learning within our own particular context. Each is also, of course, structured by the institutional and technical contexts within which we are embedded.

The early weeks of this course are therefore dedicated to exploring other people's different approaches more fully, and to discussing our own understandings of the function of course design. We are looking here at how media, curriculum, learning activity, assessment and context can be brought together in the design of effective courses which are informed by a critical understanding of the various ways of approaching course design.

Building on these foundations, the course then makes a space for individual experimentation with different approaches to designing for learning, giving you the chance to try out your own ideas on a small group of your fellow students. Over this period, you will be building your ideas for the final assignment, which is to design and part-build a course for delivery online.

We will be working with a variety of media. We will be using the Moodle discussion forums across the 12 weeks, along with a wiki for longer contributions and resource sharing. There are also optional synchronous sessions in Skype and Blackboard Collaborate. We'll visit other people's courses, which may themselves involve a range of media. In designing and running your learning event during weeks 8-10 the choice of technological environment will be up to you. We come back together in Moodle for the assignment preparation period and also offer more optional synchronous sessions in the final two weeks, as you work toward the submission of your assignment.

There are many contemporary debates about course design, partly fuelled by Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). So this is an interesting time to be considering what is important for online course design. We're looking forward to the coming 12 weeks, and to working with you.



Phil Sheail



Christine Sinclair

Course learning outcomes

The formal learning outcomes for *Course design* are as follows.

On completion of the course you will be able to:

- understand and apply a range of approaches to the design of online and offline courses
- critically evaluate these approaches via an understanding of their philosophical and theoretical bases
- select and design media, learning activities and assessment tasks appropriate to each approach
- design and build course components appropriate to your own institutional and educational context.

Delivery and workload

Course design for digital environments – as with all our courses – is delivered entirely online using as its main delivery platform the virtual learning environment Moodle, but also making extensive use of a wiki for collaborative working.

As with other 20 credit courses, successful participation will require a time commitment of around 7-10 hours a week, with more likely around the time of assignment completion (20 credit courses require 200 hours of study). Your strong commitment to the collaborative class activities is expected across the 12 weeks of the course. During the weeks where you are engaged in small-group work, you will have a particular responsibility to three or four of your fellow students – in small groups each individual's contribution is essential.

You should aim to log in almost every day to keep track of discussions and developments in the discussion boards and wiki, and should set aside dedicated periods of time three or four times a week for doing the readings and making your own contributions to the work of the class.

Although the course is designed to be flexible, **you will need to keep up with the week-by-week structure** in order to take part in the group activities.

Participation etiquette

When taking part in the **Moodle discussion forums**, please apply the basic rules of netiquette:

- Make contributions short and to the point.
- Keep contestation polite.
- Try to make sure others' contributions are answered, though this doesn't mean everyone has to answer everyone else!
- Don't worry about structure or typos, but do make yourself clear.

Our main aim should be to move the discussion forward in a positive way.

Longer contributions are better in the wiki. Forum posts can get too overwhelming if everyone is sharing resources. We'll use a **wiki** during this course, which has different challenges in terms of etiquette. Please bear in mind the following, very basic, set of guidelines:

- Try to add to, amend (respectfully) or comment on others' content...
- ... but try not to take offence if you have been 'edited'.
- Remember you are free to create new wiki pages if you are introducing a substantial new topic or area.
- Make sure you create a link to your new page from one of the existing pages, otherwise your page will go unnoticed.
- You are also free to 'refactor' pages or the entire class wiki if you wish – this is where you re-organise a page, sum it up or edit the layout.
- Remember wikis only succeed through collective effort so please take the time to contribute substantively to this class resource.

Networking and connecting

As well as using different digital spaces for formal course discussions, we would strongly encourage you to make connections informally. Skype and Twitter and even Collaborate have proved useful for students on the course in networking, after class discussions, debriefs and the occasional 'wee blether' (a random chat about nothing in particular). Guidance on setting up accounts for these technologies is in the *Technologies Handbook*, available at <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/mscdetech/>. Don't feel you have to wait for tutor encouragement!

Computer skills and equipment you need

As with other courses on this programme, you must have good access to an internet-enabled computer and browser capable of delivering the VLE Moodle and any other applications you wish to use this during the course.

You may wish to organise space on your own institutional virtual learning environment, if you have one, for your course build (please bear in mind that your tutors will need to access this for assessment purposes).

Course readings will be delivered electronically, via a Leganto Resource List managed through the Library.

Course structure and format

Course design runs over 12 weeks, or one semester, from Monday 18 September until Sunday 10th December 2017. It involves 10 weeks of teaching and group work, with two weeks for supported assignment preparation. A week of study on this course includes the weekend, i.e. each week of work runs from Monday to Sunday. Each week will start with a tutor introduction and reflections on a prompt for your own course design thinking.

The course can be usefully divided into three broad themes: the impact of different theories and values; decisions in course design; design and implementation (assessment phase).

The impact of different theories (Weeks 1-3)

The choices we make about course design are strongly informed by our own values and beliefs relating to how teaching should be conducted, how curriculum or content should be structured and the ideological and political implications of our design decisions. The situation is made more complex by our context: our own values may be subordinated to those of an institution, a professional body or a manager. We look at potential theoretical roots of some of the preferences influencing course design.

From the start, we'll try to identify key resources and examples of courses in a wiki. It is hoped that this will build into a valuable source of additional information that will help with subsequent group and individual work on course design.

Week 1: What are we talking about?

The words 'course' and 'design' are not straightforward: they mean many different things to different people. And rapid changes in technology have brought additional complexity to theoretical debates about course design – we want to ensure we're all talking about the same thing, or at least are aware of what the differences might be! There is an opportunity to meet others on the course synchronously, when we take an overview of the course.

Week 2: Constructive alignment

Theories about learning may offer different starting points for course design. For example, a systems approach is likely to start with intended learning outcomes; an experiential perspective may emphasise experiences that lead to students constructing their own learning. We ask whether the idea of 'constructive alignment' is a way of bringing them together and whether educators would claim to have this or an alternative philosophy of learning.

Week 3: Social approaches to course design

In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis on social aspects of learning and how these need to be taken into account in course design. Even these can be further subdivided: social constructivism, connectivism and critical pedagogy have all been seen as particularly relevant for online course design. What epistemological stances can be seen in the methods used to make claims about course design?

By the end of the first three weeks, it should be clear that all courses contain a mix of people, aspiration, mediation, content, context and judgement. Different approaches to course design will lead to different elements being privileged and valued under these headings. Now all you have to do is decide what the appropriate mix will be for your own courses!

People	Aspirations	Mediation	Content	Context	Judgement
Teachers	Goals	Methods	Subject	History	Assessment
Students	Aims	Media	Discipline	Time	Evaluation
Peers	Objectives	Technology	Information	Place/space	Criticality
Self	ILOs	Language	Knowledge	Connections	
Others	Product Behaviour Action	Process	Problems	Regulations	

Decisions in course design (Weeks 4-7)

Starting with an opportunity to think about what the theories identified in Weeks 1-3 might look like in practice, this phase asks you to think about essential elements of a course. During this time, you can use your Moodle playground to experiment if you want; we'll also encourage you to find and share ideas about other suitable platforms, for example, you could use an alternative VLE from Blackboard's CourseSites.

Week 4: Outlining a course design

This week mainly consists of a group activity. Instructions will be given out at the beginning of the week and we'll get together towards the end to discuss it.

Week 5: Preparing to build an online course

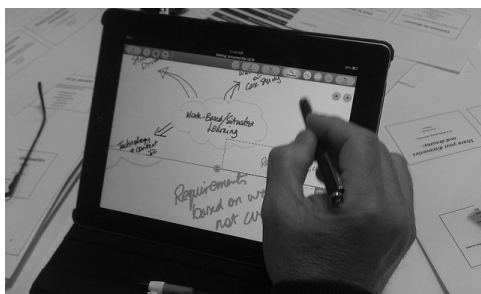
By this stage, you have been exposed to a number of competing perspectives on course design that might have an influence on the decisions you'll make. The first decision is likely to be on the nature of the course – is it fully online, blended, or flipped, for instance? What effects will this have on the users and what steps should you take to ensure that your course is both usable and accessible to all your potential students?

Week 6: Methods, media and multimodality in course design

All course designers need to make a decision about methods and media, even if it is just the default 'We'll do it the way we've always done it.' The options have undoubtedly expanded over recent years; we consider positive and negative implications of this and ask more generally how you can shape your course so that it is fit for purpose. And we'll take a look at how others do this too, and consider the rationales used in 'how-to' guides and more theoretical writing.

Week 7: The role of judgement: assessment and evaluation

There is a full course on assessment in the MSc programme – *Assessment and Learning in Digital Environments*. However, it is such an important influence on course design that we need to think about it here at the planning stage. We offer some principles and practical advice – and additional sources that might be of interest. Assessment needs to be applied to the course itself as well as to the students – to differentiate them, we talk about assessing the student but evaluating the course. The key reading here looks at redesigning a course, which is often the context for course design decisions.



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Design and implementation: assessment phase (Weeks 8-12)

In this final phase, you have the opportunity to try out aspects of course design at different levels: a 'learning event' which might form one component of a course; a (partial) course design that would allow others to see what is intended. The formal issues for your two pieces of assessment are detailed in the next main section; here we just think about what you'll be doing over this period.

About the learning event – Weeks 8-10

The learning event is intended to help your understanding of the key concepts we are covering, and to contribute to the development of your course design project, although it can be on a completely different topic if you want (e.g. it might be on a hobby, rather than on the course you are planning to design).

The requirements for this learning event are that:

- it is conducted online
- it is informed by one (or more) of the concepts or approaches discussed in the course (and this can include a critique of such approaches)
- it is achievable within the three-week time period, and by the small group of fellow students with whom you are working

The assessable component of this activity will be a short reflection that will form 20% of the final assessment for the course (see the Assessment section below). Note that the reflective account does not depend on your learning event having been a success.

There will be a rapid response from the tutors to your reflective account and you will receive feedback on it in Week 12. The provisional grade will come a few days later. This is to allow you to reflect on any implications of the feedback for thinking about your final assignment.

About the course design – Weeks 11-12

Although you have been encouraged to think about this throughout the course, the final two weeks have been allocated for bringing it all together in a course. This should mean that you can get the whole thing finished before the Christmas break. However, the deadline for this is in January as we found that the schedule proved to be rather tight for many people (as course design often is). But if you can do it before the break, you will enjoy it all the more!

The course you design will, of course, relate to digital environments. While it is OK to propose a blended course, we recommend that you don't think of 'online' as simply a repository for materials; this would certainly be against the spirit of *Course design for digital environments*.

If you need to design a course for imminent delivery within your own workplace, this will be an excellent opportunity for you. Alternatively, you may wish to work on a hypothetical course that may never be delivered but still gives you the opportunity to practise. Note that the work is about **designing a course, not about evaluating one you have recently designed**. However, you may be re-designing an existing one, which would involve a fair amount of evaluation.

Assessment

There are two parts to the assessment for this course:

1. a reflective report on your learning event (20%)
2. a course design (80%)

Assignment 1. Reflective account of learning event

Weeks 8 to 10 will involve you individually designing and then conducting the small-scale 'learning event' described above. At the end of this period, you will write a short piece reflecting on this event, discussing its ethos and rationale, and considering its success or otherwise.

The reflective account should be 1,000 words maximum, and will constitute 20% of your final mark for the course. The word count is taken seriously, so please stay +/-10% within the limit. (See the note on word counts at the end of this section on assessment.)

While the account is reflective, it is an academic piece of work and subject to the following criteria.

Reflective account assessment criteria

In assessing the reflection, the following criteria will apply. The criteria are based on the university's Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme, which is more fully described in your *Programme Handbook*.

Reflection

Does the piece demonstrate meaningful insight into the development and process of the learning event? Does it convincingly apply these insights to the participant's professional practice?

Knowledge and understanding

Does the reflection convincingly relate the design of the learning event to one or more of the approaches studied during the course? (It's probably best not try to cover all of them!)

Writing style

Is the account well-written, well-structured, engaging and coherent? Does it reference sources correctly?

Assignment 2. A course design

The main part of the assessment will involve you designing a course for delivery, or part delivery, online. It is acceptable for this to be a redesign of an existing course, though you should make it clear if this is the case. It will constitute 80% of your final mark for the course.

The assessment will comprise three elements:

- a) a course descriptor
- b) a written rationale for the design approach you have taken
- c) a build or part-build of the course in an online learning environment of your choice.

Here's a brief overview of what will be expected for each element of the assignment.

a) The course descriptor

Course or module descriptors are formal documents – usually required by institutions for validation or approval of programmes of study – which give all the key information about the course. In our public website, you will find elements from all the course descriptors for the courses that make up this programme - <http://digital.ed.ac.uk/courses>

Those who are working within institutions that have frameworks and protocols for the development of course descriptors may wish to use these in developing their descriptor for this assignment. If you are not, you should base your descriptor on those we use for this programme, or a similar example from your own sector.

As a basic guide, the descriptor should include the following information:

- Course title
- Indication of credit rating, and course level, if appropriate. *
- Short description of the course
- Course intended learning outcomes
- Brief outline of content
- Two or three examples of indicative reading, if appropriate
- Brief outline of the teaching methods to be used
- Overview of the assessment mechanism, if appropriate

* For example, our Digital Education courses are all at Level 11 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. <http://scqf.org.uk/framework-diagram/Framework.htm>. This is equivalent to Level 7 in the European Qualifications Framework <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/compare>

b) The rationale

The rationale gives you a chance to explain the thinking behind your course design, and how it relates to the work you have been doing on this course. This is where you are most likely to provide evidence for the academic criteria we use for marking. You might include in the rationale insights gained from the learning event and subsequent discussions. You might also consider the institutional and sectoral constraints and opportunities that have informed the design, and expand on its media context if appropriate.

You should write this in a formal academic style, relating the course design explicitly to the reading you have been doing over the period of the course, to the approaches to design we covered in the early weeks, as well as the other key concepts covered in the course, and to your own beliefs and understanding of the nature of learning and teaching. Note that it is not necessary to include all the perspectives visited in the course.

The course descriptor and rationale should contain no more than 3000 words +/- 10%. We strongly recommend that this should be split 1000/2000 respectively, but the split may depend on your specific circumstances.

c) The build or part-build

The final element of the assessment is the build of your course, or part of it, in some kind of online environment. **You are not expected to build a complete online course for this element of the assignment.** All that is required is that you demonstrate that you have thought through the media implications of your teaching approach, and that you have a plan in place for materialising your design in some kind of digital environment.

So, for example, if you wanted to build your course in Moodle you might use your 'playground' to map out a basic structure of folders, with some learning activities embedded and some suggestion of the aesthetic approach. If you wanted to do something more open you might create a simple web page demonstrating a course structure, perhaps with links to a freely-available discussion board or a wiki. If your course design is dependent on the use of podcasts, for example, you might create one or two of these and make them available.

The descriptor and the rationale elements of the assignment will provide the main evidence of the quality of your design. This technological aspect will allow you to begin to express the design through the digital environment and demonstrate how the design might be realised. As with the other elements of the assignment, you should use this opportunity to create something that is both manageable and meaningful in your own context.

In terms of the technological environments you might use, again this is for you to determine. Your institution may have its own virtual learning environment which it would make sense to use – this is fine, as long as you are able to give access to what you have done for the purposes of assessment. Alternatively, you may wish to piece together your own environment using free online environments of which there are many. Or you may wish to create a simple web page to host elements of your course.

It will be important to keep the scope of your build manageable – don't attempt something which is technically complex if you don't have advanced skills on the technological side of things – just stick to Moodle, a wiki or something similar.

Your course build does not have to be a slick and polished final artefact – all that is required is evidence that your design, rationale and built artefact cohere and make sense pedagogically and conceptually.

If you have any worries about this, or any other aspect of the assignment, please raise the concern either on the discussion board (so everyone can benefit) or, if you don't feel that's appropriate, via email.

Assignment assessment criteria

The final assignment will be assessed according to criteria based on the Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme.

Knowledge and understanding of concepts

Does the assignment demonstrate critical engagement with (some of) the main concepts and theories developed in the course? Does it show the ability to integrate understanding into a coherent conceptual framework?

Knowledge and use of the literature

Are key areas of the literature referred to appropriately? Is there evidence of sustained and wide reading, and are existing conceptual approaches integrated into a coherent analytical framework?

Constructing academic discourse

Is the quality of writing (in the written elements) well structured, clear and appropriate? Is the rationale, in particular, written according to the conventions of academic writing?

Framing and analysing practice

Does the course design take appropriate account of institutional and sectoral contexts? Does the built element demonstrate appropriate understanding of the nature and form of the digital environment for learning? Is there internal coherence in the course design? Does the course design demonstrate creativity and innovation?

A note on word counts: The absolute minimum/maximum for each of the written assignments is +/-10%. So for the two written parts of the assignment taken together the minimum is 2700 and the maximum is 3300. However, this is *not* an invitation to write 3300 words for the assignment! Aim for as close to the 3000 limit as possible, but don't worry if you go a little over or under – that's the purpose of the margin.

Word counts *include* anything in the assignment up to the list of references (including tables, footnotes, and so on). The list of references and appendices are not included in the word count. Please state the word count somewhere in your assignment. Those going over or under the 10% margin will be considered not to have met the requirements for the assignments, and mark penalties are therefore very likely to result.

A note on (self-)plagiarism: If you use the same topic for both your assignments, you may want to refer back to your reflective account. It is important to reference your own previous work as you would anyone else's, paraphrasing where appropriate and enclosing exact quotes in quotation marks only if necessary. If you are concerned about this, do get in touch or post on the discussion forum. It raises issues of interest to course design and especially its assessment practices.

Submission dates

The reflective account should be submitted at the start of week 11 – by **Tuesday 28 November 2017**. You will receive feedback on this during Week 12 and the grade on or before 13 December.

The final assignment is due after the break, on **Monday 8 January 2017**. You should receive feedback and your provisional mark for the course within 15 working days.

All assignment documentation should be submitted in the Moodle assignment dropbox.

The postgraduate common marking scheme

Grades will be awarded in line with the University's postgraduate common marking scheme:

Mark (%)	Grade	Description
90-100	A1	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
80-89	A2	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
70 – 79	A3	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
60 – 69	B	A very good performance
50 – 59	C	A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree
40 -49*	D	A satisfactory performance for the diploma, but inadequate for a masters degree
30-39**	E	Marginal fail
20-29	F	Clear fail
10-19	G	Bad fail
0-9	H	Bad fail

The pass mark is grade D (40%).

For more detail on the regulations which govern the course and the programme you should consult your Programme Handbook and the University's Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS) which are to be found on the Web at: <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/>

In particular, the regulations governing taught postgraduate programmes are included at: <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/17-18/regulations/postgrad.php>

Credit and continuation of study

Successful completion of this course will give you 20 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) points at postgraduate level 11. More details of the SCQF can be found on the Web at: <http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

The full MSc in Digital Education will comprise one foundation course and four additional 20 credit courses, plus a dissertation. The list of available options is available on the programme web site at: <http://digital.ed.ac.uk/courses>

The regulations governing satisfactory progress for continuation to Masters level by submission of a dissertation are given in your Programme Handbook.

Readings

You are not required to purchase any books for this course. All essential readings are provided, in electronic form, in the relevant areas of course content. A few are openly available on the web. The majority are in the form of links to e-books and e-journals which you should be able to access if you are signed into EASE.

E-books are presented in various ways by different publishers. If you are asked for your Shibboleth link, this means finding the University of Edinburgh in the drop down list provided. [See the Library for more information on access to e-books.](#) If you do not get a good result from your link to e-books in the Library, you might want to try changing your browser. If there seems to be a problem, though, do let us know.

There is one essential reading per week. We expect you to read this, and at least one or two of the recommended readings.

As with other courses on the programme, you are not expected to do *all* the further readings, though you should aim to do some of them. You will be able to nominate your own readings on the course wiki.

Formative feedback/feedforward

The course has been designed to include opportunities for formative feedback on participation and planning for assignments. The tutor comments on the smaller assignment – reflection on the learning event – act as feedforward for the final assignment, and there is a rapid turnaround of this feedback, which you will receive a few days before you get the provisional grade for the assignment.

Course co-ordinator contact information

Do contact Christine or Phil if you have any questions or concerns about the course.. We are jointly co-ordinating this course.

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