

COURSE HANDBOOK

**An Introduction to Digital
Environments for Learning**

Session 2020-21: Semester 1

Contents

Welcome	3
Course team	4
Course learning outcomes	6
Delivery and workload	6
Course structure	7
Participation etiquette	7
The IDEL blog	8
Blog requirements	8
Very important: setting up the blog	9
Computer skills and equipment you need	10
Learning environments	10
Readings	10
Good academic practice on this course	11
Assessment	12
1. The IDEL blog	12
2. The course assignment	14
The postgraduate common marking scheme	15
Credit and continuation of study	15
Advance HE Fellowship route	16
Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)	17
Course contact information	17

Welcome!

Welcome to *An Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning* (IDEL), a core course on the Digital Education programme and the starting point for your studies with us, whether you are working towards a Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma, or MSc.

This course is noteworthy for its introduction to a range of learning environments and the collaborative and individual learning activities we ask you to engage with. Our aims are to provide a snapshot of some of the current technological possibilities and challenges in digital education, and to discuss some of the key practical and theoretical issues in the field. During the course you will experiment with a variety of environments and media for communication and for learning – from discussion boards and blogs, to social media and Minecraft – and engage with a range of conceptual areas important to research and practice in online education. In terms of assessment, you will use a blog to record and reflect on your studies, and will complete an additional assignment on a relevant issue in digital education.

The course is taught by several members of the Digital Education programme team in order that you get a chance to get to know us at this early stage of your studies. You will have a dedicated tutor (your 'blog tutor') during your time on the course, who will be reading and commenting on your blog and acting as your first point of contact for any academic concerns or questions. The course organisers this semester are Huw Davies (huw.davies@ed.ac.uk) and Philippa Sheail (p.sheail@ed.ac.uk), so please contact Huw or Phil with any wider course-related issues you might have.

All your course tutors are committed to working with you in online discussion, and in providing one-to-one support in your IDEL blogs. In return, we ask that you demonstrate a commitment to the collaborative activities and that you engage fully with the learning opportunities offered.

We look forward to the coming weeks, and anticipate many interesting debates and discussions!

Course team



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Course learning outcomes

On completion of the course you will be able to:

- critically evaluate a range of technologies in terms of their impact on teaching and learning
- begin to design your own online learning resources
- contextualise your own practice in terms of the key issues emerging from current research in digital education.

Delivery and workload

IDEL is delivered entirely online using a range of digital resources, with the virtual learning environment (VLE) Moodle as its starting point. As with all courses on the Digital Education programme, there is no requirement to attend the physical campus. This mode of delivery not only enables you to shape your study pattern around your working day and other commitments, but also lets you experience first-hand the dynamics which result from working with a study group which never physically meets.

This is a double-credit course, successful completion of which will gain you 40 credits toward your MSc, Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate. This means that the workload is heavier than it is in our other, 20-credit, courses. Successful participation will require around 15 hours a week in reading, discussion, exploration and writing, with more intensive work likely around the time of assignment completion. You will need to make a significant commitment to the course in order to contribute to class discussions and fully take part in the course activities. We recommend logging in several times a week to keep track of class discussions, in addition to setting aside good chunks of time 3 or 4 times a week for undertaking course activities, doing the readings and writing blog posts. Although the course is designed to be as flexible as possible in terms of when you engage with it, you will need to keep up with the week-by-week structure in order to take part in the group activities.

Reflecting the pattern of work of many of our students, a week of study on this course includes the weekend, i.e. each week of work runs from Monday to Sunday. Discussion boards remain busy on weekends, and we have found that many students also post to their blogs at this time. Tutors and topic leaders are active during the working week, from Monday to Friday; blog tutors may wish to discuss with you at the outset their planned schedule for commenting on your blog posts.

You will have access to the course Moodle space from **Monday 14 September 2020** which is the beginning of our 'orientation week'. You will need your student login (EASE) to access the Moodle space.

Course structure

The IDEL course runs over 12 weeks (one semester), from **Monday 21 September 2020**. The preceding week is set aside for orientation, giving you a chance to become familiar with the basic online environments we will use.

The course is thematically arranged around concepts from the *Manifesto for Teaching Online* that we will discuss at the beginning of the course. We will explore ideas around *Critical perspectives* (weeks 2 and 3), *Technology and the teacher* (weeks 4 and 5), *Spaces* (weeks 6 and 7), *Open everything* (weeks 8 and 9) and then *Data and analytics* (weeks 10 and 11). This will be followed by *Final reflections* (week 12) where you will have the chance to look back across the course and put the final, finishing touches to your IDEL blog.

Each theme will be led by appropriate members of the course team (introduced at the beginning of this handbook), who will invite you to participate in a range of synchronous and asynchronous activities in a variety of digital spaces. At the same time, you will be exploring emergent themes and ideas from each part of the course within your IDEL blog, where the audience will be your designated blog tutor.

Participation etiquette

Across the coming weeks you will be expected to actively participate in conversations across discussion boards and other synchronous and asynchronous environments. Details of synchronous 'real time' sessions will be posted in the Moodle course space – please book these into your schedule as soon as they become available.

When taking part in online discussions, some basic rules of 'netiquette' apply, as follows:

- any contribution you make should intend to move the conversation along
- please keep contributions fairly short and to the point – longer stretches of argumentation are more suited to your blog
- contributions to discussions do not need to be in the form of polished academic prose, or need to contain detailed academic references (although links are often helpful)
- please try to respond to others' contributions if no-one else has done so
- please keep conversation polite

The IDEL blog

As a participant on IDEL you will be provided with your own blog. Although blogs are often intended to be open to the public, on this course **your blog will only be accessed regularly by you and your allocated blog tutor**. Your IDEL blog will work as an online reflective diary: a place where you bring together various threads of investigation and thought. It will be a record of your unfolding thinking, learning and development, rather than a neatly finished 'place of arrival'.

Your IDEL blog is intended to function as an ongoing dialogue between you and your blog tutor, growing around your developing ideas and insights. By using a form specific to the online mode of delivery, it also gives you the opportunity to think about how digital literacies might be developed within teaching contexts.

Blog requirements

You should begin using your IDEL blog as soon as the course starts. **Please note that if you do not have any substantive blog entries by the beginning of week 3, we will assume you are not on-course and you will be withdrawn** – please speak to your blog tutor (or, if you prefer, the course organisers) in good time if you are having problems with the blog.

Your entries should be regular and frequent. This does not mean that you have to post an entry every day, but you should be adding some form of reflective commentary at each point of your engagement with the course material. We recommend aiming for at least three substantive posts each week that engage with course themes and readings. It is likely that some ideas or topics will merit a longer or shorter discussion than others, however we generally expect blog posts to be around 500 words in length.

How your blog develops will be very much up to you and your emerging blogging 'voice'. You may, for example, decide to use it in a very structured way by entering relatively formal comments and reflections specific to each week's activities. Alternatively, you might decide that a less formal, more open-ended, 'stream-of-consciousness' mode suits you better. What is essential, though, is that it reflects your critical engagement with the different parts of the course as it unfolds.

You will also need to find some balance between your blog entries and your contributions to the group discussions elsewhere in IDEL. It is up to you how to negotiate this. You may wish to use the blog for more reflective or tentative commentary than you would wish to post to a group discussion, or you may find it works well as a space where you can expand on the points you make to the group as a whole. If you wish to re-use blog entries in the discussion board or vice versa this is acceptable, as long as you bear in mind that the audience for each is rather different (and always remembering that discussion board postings should be kept reasonably short).

As well as these more general entries, the blog also involves some more structured and specific tasks in certain weeks; more information about these is provided in the appropriate areas of the course Moodle site.

Very important: setting up the IDEL blog

The blogging environment for our course is a part of a WordPress service hosted by the University, which offers a good degree of functionality and the level of privacy we want. Your blog, which will be created for you automatically when you follow the link to it from the course Moodle site, will initially be visible only to you and the course organisers. You will need to add your blog tutor as a user so that they can see your published posts, which by default are private to users of the blog. More information about how to add users is available in the *Technologies Handbook*, where you can also find out how to customise the appearance of your blog. If you choose to alter the appearance of your blog substantially, do please remember that content needs to be clear and accessible to your tutor.

It is technically possible to add further users to the blog, and even to change the settings so that it is more widely visible. For this course, however, you are expected to post entries which can only be read by tutors on the programme. **We strongly encourage you to keep course posts private between you and your tutor.** Every blog is crafted according to its expected readership – for the purposes of this course, we would like you to be writing in a personal, informal style, and for the blog to be a place where you gain one-to-one support from your tutor. The blog is 'high stakes' in this course, representing **60% of your final mark**, so please do take some time to set it up properly at the beginning of the semester.

Please note that only your blog tutor will be regularly reading and commenting on your blog. However, the course organisers will also have access for tutor support purposes, and other tutors, and our External Examiner, may need to view your blog for assessment purposes at the end of semester.

A small note on tags: Tags are a useful way of categorising the content of your postings, so that you can start to identify themes and issues of interest in your writing. If you are following the HEA route through the programme, you might find it useful to tag potential HEA posts as you go.

Computer skills and equipment you need

The *Technologies Handbook* contains details of what you need to do in order to gain access to University systems before beginning your studies.

You do not need to be an advanced computer user to take any of the courses on the Digital Education programme, though you will need a basic level of competence in the use of your computer. This will include being comfortable with word processing and file management software, alongside a familiarity with social media and the ability to search for content online. We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself as early as possible with looking up and accessing materials via the University's online library:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/online-learning/postgraduate/support-resources/library>

As with all of our courses, to take part in IDEL you will need regular access to a computer with a stable broadband connection. You will need Acrobat Reader or a comparable PDF application to work with some of the course readings.

Some of the tools we use require access to a computer with a reasonably high specification and, for Minecraft, a smartphone, tablet or similar mobile device. If this may be a problem for you, please discuss the situation with your blog tutor, who will talk through the options with you. Again, the *Technologies Handbook* has more about what is required.

Some of the synchronous sessions will require a microphone, headphones/headset, and a webcam. Again, if this is likely to be a problem for you then please contact the relevant tutors for those weeks.

Learning environments

During the IDEL course we use a range of different digital platforms or learning environments. These will include overtly social public spaces, such as Twitter, alongside more conventional settings such as Collaborate, where video conferencing takes place. On some occasions you will be encouraged to present work which incorporates images, and we ask you to credit any images produced by others appropriately.

Readings

You are not required to purchase any books for this course - all core readings are provided via the course Moodle site and resource list. Some resources are provided through the Library's 'e-reserve' system, which means they have been copyright-cleared specifically for use on this course, and are available to download in PDF format from the course site. Others are journal articles made available via the University of Edinburgh online collections, or are openly available on the web. When you download published materials please take note of their conditions of use, for example where they state that they must not be shared - such restrictions are extremely common for licensed materials from publishers.

Beyond the core readings, most topics of study will guide you toward useful secondary and additional readings. Some of these may require you to track down journal articles or book chapters yourself, using the Library's search tools. References to secondary and additional readings are collected together in the relevant areas of course content.

As this is a 40-credit course (compared with 20-credit courses after this point of the Digital Education programme) it is really important that you keep up and engage with the core reading for each block of study which will always be made clear. Any readings recommended beyond this are simply to follow up on if you wish to, particularly for your assignments. You are not expected to do *all* the secondary or additional readings for each area of study, though you should certainly aim to tackle some of them.

Good academic practice on this course

During this course you will be doing quite a bit of reading, alongside the activities and course discussions. It will be particularly helpful at this early stage to get into the good note-taking habit of **always including the sources of quotes or summaries you are jotting down**. This will prevent having to retrace your steps to find sources later on, and the danger of accidentally using other people's words or ideas without attribution in your assessed work. Copying and pasting key passages from online sources and PDFs might be convenient, but you **must always** properly indicate when you are quoting a passage directly and always remember to reference your sources; **accidental lack of attribution in assessed work is still considered academic misconduct**, so you should always be attentive to this.

Beyond this, the Programme Handbook provides wider guidance on referencing, while your blog tutor will be happy to discuss any questions you have. There are a number of good online and hybrid systems that can help you to manage articles and other materials, such as EndNote, Zotero and Mendeley, some of which are free to use.

The University's Institute for Academic Development offers some helpful online workshops on citing sources and other academic writing skills:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/taught/courses-events/online>

It is also likely that you will want to convey your ideas in ways beyond words during the IDEL course, particularly in the case of the blog. You might for instance choose to create or use photography, sound, or video-based content. If you do this, it is important for you to remember that images, music and other materials may have limitations on how they are used (expressed for instance through copyright). And just as in the case of reproducing passages of text from a journal article, we want you to acknowledge the author (which might be an individual, group or organisation) for that material. As well as being good academic practice, it is essential that tutors can distinguish between original work (for instance if you include your own photographs or audio material in your blog) and content created by somebody else. Helpful guidance around the attribution of digital content can be found in the 23 Things resource developed by some of our colleagues within the Information Services Group here at Edinburgh University:

<http://www.23things.ed.ac.uk/week-6/#copyright>

Assessment

The course will be assessed in two ways:

1. by your IDEL blog (60% of your final mark)
2. by your course assignment (40% of your final mark)

Your IDEL blog should be completed by midday on **Monday the 14th of December 2020**. Posts made after this date will not be assessed.

Your course assignment should be submitted by midday on **Monday the 21st of December 2020**, using the drop-box on Moodle (instructions for this are in the *Technologies Handbook*).

You will receive feedback on both of these exercises by **Wednesday the 20th January 2021**.

1. The IDEL blog

Blog assessment criteria

When your blog is assessed, 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 blog demonstrate sustained reflection on the course content and its application for the participant's professional practice?

– **Regularity**

Are entries into the blog frequent and substantial enough to demonstrate such sustained reflection?

Are they spread throughout the duration of the course?

Were the structured tasks (e.g. the Critical review) properly attempted?

– **Knowledge and understanding**

Does the blog demonstrate a good critical understanding of the technologies and ideas introduced?

Does it show a critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of a range of technologies and pedagogical approaches?

– **Communication style and multimodality**

Is the style of the blog vivid and personal?

Are the ideas discussed well-structured and well-argued?

Are sources cited – either conventionally or via links?

Does it make creative use of the blog form via inclusion of image, media and linkage?

For example, a blog graded at 70% or above (an A) would meet the criteria in the following way:

70% - 100%

Reflection

Writing is consistently and deeply reflective, with many insightful connections made between the participant's professional practice and course content.

Regularity

Several blog posts are published each week and are evenly spread throughout the duration of the course.

Knowledge and understanding

Writing critically engages in a consistent way with the content of the course and the course readings. Evidence is shown of reading and thought which goes beyond the immediate course content. The process of developing understanding is coherently described and reflected upon.

Communication style and multimodality

Writing is grammatical and flows well (though this need not be in conventional academic style). Original ideas are well and creatively expressed, and argumentation is coherent and clear. A sense of creative and personal ownership of the blog is conveyed and imaginative use of multiple media and modes is made.

By contrast, a failing blog (0-39%) would demonstrate the following in relation to the criteria:

0% - 39%

Reflection

Writing shows no reflection, and no connections are made between the participant's professional practice and course content.

Regularity

Entries are made very infrequently or are very unevenly spread throughout the duration of the course.

Knowledge and understanding

Writing does not engage with the content of the course, and no evidence is shown of sustained reading within course content. There is no evidence of the process of developing understanding.

Communication style and multimodality

Writing is consistently ungrammatical and difficult to read. There is no evidence of original thinking in terms of ideas or creative usage of the blog form.

As explained above, we want the IDEL blog to act as a record of the way that your thinking has developed across the course. Consequently, we ask you not to retrospectively remove or revise posts. Additionally, when it comes to marking your completed blog, your tutor will normally revisit the comments and feedback they offered throughout the course (therefore any revisions will not be taken into account at the point of assessing your work). Do not hesitate to ask your tutor if you have any questions or concerns about the blog assessment.

2. The course assignment

Rationale and requirements

In addition to the IDEL blog, you will also be required to produce a written assignment on one of the questions provided in the Assessment area of the course Moodle site. We have created a question to correspond with each of the 5 course themes.

The form of the written assignment may be experimental or conventional, as you choose. For example, you might choose to present it as a wiki, or a hypertext or illustrated web essay, with the proviso that they can be preserved and submitted in a reasonably stable form for assessment. The aim is to give you space to experiment with alternative ways of presenting scholarly discourse in a digital environment, if you wish to do so. If you prefer simply to write a conventional essay, however, this too is perfectly acceptable.

You may also produce the assignment collaboratively with a partner. Should you choose this option, there are additional possibilities for your assignment format – a series of email exchanges with reflective commentary, for example, or an annotated chat session. If you decide to collaborate, you and your partner will each be given the same mark and feedback for the piece of work you submit.

The assignment should be **2,500 words in length +/-10%**, not including the reference list but including footnotes and tables where present. For some formats, such as hypertext or video, this can only be a rough guide to the amount of work you should be putting into the piece, and it will be up to you to consider how this length guide translates.

Assessment criteria for the assignment

This assignment will be assessed according to three core criteria:

- **Knowledge and understanding of concepts**
Does the assignment show a *critical* engagement with the concepts and theories introduced? (Descriptive accounts lacking in analysis will be marked down.)
- **Knowledge and use of the literature**
Have relevant key references been used?
Have other relevant sources been drawn on and coherently integrated into the analysis?
- **Constructing academic discourse**
Is the assignment produced with careful attention to the quality of the writing and the skilful expression of ideas?
Is it within word count?

If you wish to nominate additional criteria against which your assignment is marked (for instance if you intend to present your work in an experimental digital format) this can be negotiated with your blog tutor.

The Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme described in the *Programme Handbook* gives more detail on how the core assessment criteria are graded.

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 governing the course and the programme you should consult your *Programme Handbook* and the University's Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS), which can be found at:

<http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/>

In particular, the regulations governing taught postgraduate programmes are at:

<http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/20-21/>

Credit and continuation of study

Successful completion of this course will give you 40 credits at postgraduate level 11 within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). More details of the SCQF can be found at:

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

The full MSc in Digital Education will comprise one foundation course (this one) and four additional 20-credit courses, one of which should be 'Introduction to Social Research Methods', plus a dissertation worth 60 credits. The list of available options can be found at:

<https://www.digital.ed.ac.uk/courses>

The regulations governing satisfactory progress for continuation to Masters level (that is, the dissertation stage) are given in your *Programme Handbook*.

Advance HE Fellowship route

For those working in higher education there is an optional route through the programme which meets the requirements of the UK Professional Standards Framework and results in accreditation as a Fellow of Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy or HEA). See the *Higher Education Academy Route Handbook* for more information about Advance HE, eligibility, and accreditation. This is available from the course Moodle site.

Those following the Advance HE route will need to meet some additional requirements in this course. In IDEL, **at least three of your blog posts** during the semester need to include discussion of how the following topics are relevant to your own professional Higher Education role and context:

1. assessment and feedback
2. student diversity
3. effective learning environments
4. participatory learning environments

You should refer to course readings and topics in these posts wherever possible. In short, we are looking to see you connect your own practice in these areas with what you have learned on this course.

At the end of semester, you will need to submit, along with your blog, the appendices included at the end of the *HEA Route Handbook* (these will be returned to you after you have received your course marks and feedback) along with two references from people who can verify your practice.

If you have any questions about this, please contact the programme secretary, Shannon Payne, at digitaled@ed.ac.uk in the first instance.

Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)

The SSLC provides a valuable forum for gathering feedback from students, and for discussing issues arising, and potential changes, on the Digital Education programme. The committee aims for a representation of students from across the programme, along with representatives from the teaching team, and meets once each semester. Meetings are held online.

Opportunities to join this committee will arise from time to time; think about whether you would like to be considered for membership. There is also a discussion forum where all students are welcome to contribute views and suggestions. You'll find this, and a list of current student representatives, in the SSLC section of our programme-level Moodle site:

<https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=131>

This page is only available when you are logged into Moodle, so new students will not be able to access it until they have been given access to the Moodle platform.

Course contact information

For help and advice during the semester, please speak to your blog tutor in the first instance – you will find details of who this is on the Moodle site from the beginning of Week 1. Alternatively, you can contact one of the Course Organisers, Huw Davies or Phil Sheail.

Good luck with your studies, and we look forward to seeing you online!