



# UCL E-Learning Baseline: enhancing e-learning provision

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**Baseline** and **Baseline+**



# UCL E-Learning Baseline: enhancing e-learning provision

**Students appreciate, and increasingly expect, consistent and well considered use of online learning. This guidance document sets out the minimum expectations, or baseline, for e-learning provision for all taught programmes and modules at UCL, with a focus on Moodle.**

The original Baseline was developed after wide consultation on best UCL practice and was endorsed by Academic Committee in September 2011. The Baseline is reviewed annually and the 2016 version is a product of merging the UCL Moodle Baseline with the Student Minimum Entitlement to On-Line Support from the Institute of Education.

You may direct feedback and suggestions to [digi-ed@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:digi-ed@ucl.ac.uk).

The E-Learning Baseline covers two levels of e-learning use:

1. **Baseline** (for campus-based courses<sup>1</sup>).
2. **Baseline+** (in addition to the Baseline, for wholly online courses<sup>2</sup>).

For each of the ten categories there is a description of what is needed to meet the requirements for both levels.

Every taught module at UCL should meet the **Baseline** level in order to provide a consistent experience for students. Additionally, wholly online courses should also meet the **Baseline+** level, to ensure students studying online have the additional support and information they need. However, many points under **Baseline+** would also benefit campus-based courses, especially if there is a high online component.

There are 10 sections in the Baseline:

1. **Structure**
2. **Orientation**
3. **Communication**
4. **Assessment**
5. **Resources**
6. **Cross-platform compatibility**
7. **Accessibility**
8. **Legal**
9. **Student Active Participation**
10. **Quality Assurance**

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## UCL E-Learning Baseline Benefits

This Baseline addresses the increasingly integrated and sophisticated level of technology use at UCL and aims to ensure consistency and quality of the e-learning experience for all students across all modules. It offers a number of benefits:

- Helps articulate e-learning provision during the programme or module proposal and review process.
- Encourages consistency across modules when used at departmental, faculty or school level. This may be via templates for Moodle courses and content.
- Enables course teams to enhance the use of technology by offering suggestions on how to move beyond the baseline.
- Assists course teams and departments to review and quality assure their use of e-learning in a systematic way and identify gaps in provision.
- Provides a framework to monitor progress over time.

It is recognised that departments may wish to develop their own local customisations of this baseline, extending these recommendations.

Although the use of Moodle is strongly encouraged, the following guidelines may also be used with alternative systems. If other online learning tools are used, then the Moodle course associated with that programme/module/course should contain a link to this alternative or supplementary provision. There is no central support for any such systems external to UCL.

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## Avoiding duplication

To avoid duplication of information across modules, it is recommended that common information is provided through departmental and/or programme level Moodle courses linked to from each module level course. Module-specific information can be linked to existing online information in module handbooks and/or on department websites.

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## How to use this document

It is recommended you read through the relevant baseline as you develop your Moodle courses.

You can also use it as a final checklist to ensure you have not missed out any crucial elements.

If you are using a departmental Moodle template many of these items should be already addressed in the placeholders provided.

Programme and module teams can request guidance and support in meeting the baseline from the Digital Education team in ISD.

Access this document online, or download the booklet. To help you navigate this information and see examples, an online web version is available at:

<http://bit.ly/UCLELearningBaseline>

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## Beyond the Baseline...

Further suggestions for how you might extend your use of e-learning tools are available at

<http://bit.ly/UCLELearningEnhanced>

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## Definitions

- [1] **Campus-based:** Students attend UCL and are taught via lectures, seminars, tutorials, practicals etc. They also learn through online resources, tools, forums and activities, and undertake independent study both on and off campus.
- [2] **Wholly online:** All teaching, learning and assessment activities are conducted online, usually asynchronously, but occasionally with scheduled synchronous online events, such as webinars. There is generally no attendance at UCL, although students have access to UCL libraries, facilities and learning support.





# Structure

Structure your course clearly to help students navigate quickly, understand the sequence of activities, access information and easily understand the layout of unfamiliar courses.

 <b>Baseline</b>	 <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>1.1 Present activities and resources in a meaningful, clearly structured and sequenced way</b> e.g. chronologically or by theme. Typically each Moodle section represents a topic, which may cover one or more weeks of study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use headings</b> – Use Section Headings for each topic area and heading styles within labels, books and pages to maintain consistency across sections and help students see where they are.</li> <li>• <b>Provide section overviews</b> – Provide a description in each section to introduce the topic or set of resources / activities.</li> <li>• <b>Clearly group and label items within a section</b> – Bring together common elements, use labels to provide common sub-headings across sections to help students navigate.</li> <li>• <b>Use Groups and Groupings</b> to give different views and information to specific groups of students, where needed.</li> </ul> <p><b>1.2 Minimise cognitive load</b> – Avoid overloading the front page by placing content off the main page in Pages, Books, Folders, Lessons and by hiding unused items. If your front page is still long consider using the Tabs format, or the Course Menu block to aid navigation.</p> <p><b>1.3 Include navigation aids</b> – Suggested blocks to add to your Moodle course include Activities, Latest News, Recent Activity, Library Resources, Library Search, Course Menu and People.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>1.4 Use a Faculty or Departmental template</b> to provide a consistent layout and experience for students and staff. These provide a starting point to help staff meet this baseline, but may be modified to suit the course being delivered.</p> <p><b>1.5 Guide students as to which task to complete next.</b> This may include appropriate use of conditional release, so tasks are hidden until prerequisite tasks are completed, or until a certain date.</p>

## Orientation

Help learners orientate themselves, especially outlining how they are expected to learn and engage and how they may contact key staff members to get help when they need it.

 <b>Baseline</b>	 <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>2.1 Include the Module Syllabus and Intended Learning Outcomes</b> – Include these directly in Moodle, or via a link to the module handbook or departmental website.</p> <p><b>2.2 Explain participation requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline how students are expected to use Moodle in an introductory statement.</li> <li>• Identify which activities are compulsory and optional.</li> <li>• Explicitly signpost all online and offline activities and how they interrelate.</li> <li>• Provide an indicator of effort (such as timings or page counts) for all compulsory tasks.</li> <li>• Explain how students are expected to use UCL and external e-learning tools.</li> </ul> <p><b>This PowerPoint Induction template</b> (<a href="http://bit.ly/UCLMoodleInduction">http://bit.ly/UCLMoodleInduction</a>) provides a starting point. Wholly online courses might provide this information as a screen-cast video, with a voice over.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link to instructions for any e-learning tools that students are expected to use.</li> <li>• Explain what digital devices and software students are expected to provide for themselves.</li> </ul> <p><b>2.3 Display staff contact details</b> – Include name, position, telephone, email, location, drop-in hours, as appropriate.</p> <p><b>2.4 Moodle roles reflect the functions of staff</b> (e.g. Tutor, Course Administrator, Leader).</p> <p><b>2.5 Ensure students are aware of all services and support available from the department and UCL.</b> Link to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ‘<b>Learning with Technology</b>’ Moodle course (<a href="http://bit.ly/UCLLearningTechnology">http://bit.ly/UCLLearningTechnology</a>) to familiarise students with Moodle;</li> <li>• The department website or a departmental ‘Office’ area on Moodle, which may be a good place to raise awareness without time-consuming duplication of links across modules.</li> </ul>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>2.6 Provide an overview of the course</b> within the ‘Course Summary’ in the Moodle course settings. This should define who students contact to request access to the course.</p> <p><b>2.7 Students are sent a welcome message before the start of the module.</b> Using the Moodle News forum ensures all students get an email. Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A short overview of the course.</li> <li>• A summary of expectations for online engagement.</li> <li>• How they can gain access to their course.</li> <li>• Explain the introductory activities to be completed and by when (e.g. posting to an introductions forum).</li> <li>• Link to the ‘UCL online learning orientation’ Moodle course for wholly online courses (<a href="http://bit.ly/UCLCompass">http://bit.ly/UCLCompass</a>).</li> </ul> <p>The inclusion of audio or video is encouraged.</p> <p><b>2.8 Outline the Intended Learning Outcomes for every activity and resource</b> in the description and provide a clear overview of what the student is expected to do.</p>

# Communication

Ensure effective and consistent online communication with and between students.

<p>↓ ↓ <b>Baseline</b></p>	<p>↓ ↓ <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b></p>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>3.1 Provide a communication statement –</b> Describe how students and staff will communicate for different purposes (e.g. using Moodle forums for coursework-related questions and email for personal matters). Include expected staff response times.</p> <p><b>3.2 Use the News forum</b> as a one-way channel for important news such as key dates and events. Students receive an email (which they can't unsubscribe from), but can't post or reply themselves, avoiding mass emails to the cohort.</p> <p><b>3.3 Make the purpose of every discussion forum clear</b>, including how students are expected to engage with it and how often staff will reply to posts (if at all).</p> <p><b>3.4 Advise staff and students to upload profile pictures</b> to help personalise the online environment and allow online discussions between collaborators to be more easily followed.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>3.5 Include a general Q&amp;A forum</b> for tutors and / or students to pose questions and receive answers, which students can choose to unsubscribe from (if automatic subscription is selected).</p> <p><b>3.6 Use learning forum(s)</b> for moderated discussions related to specific course activities. These might be discrete forums or topics within a forum. Automatic subscription then allows students to choose which forums or topics they wish to unsubscribe from.</p> <p><b>3.7 Track student participation</b> and send reminders to those who have yet to contribute to activities or submit assessments.</p>

## Assessment

Clearly outline assessment requirements and link to tools and information to help avoid plagiarism.

↓ <b>Baseline</b>	↓ <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>4.1 Provide an assessment outline</b> with a clear description of the module assessment, including schedule, criteria and submission details. To avoid duplication this might include a link to a module webpage.</p> <p><b>4.2 Provide tools and information for avoiding plagiarism</b> – Link to the Plagiarism and Academic Writing course (<a href="http://bit.ly/UCLPlagiarism">http://bit.ly/UCLPlagiarism</a>) where students can check their work for plagiarism independent of assessment submission points.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>4.3 Provide online assignment submission points</b> – Students submit electronic documents online (Moodle / Turnitin Assignment) and are provided with clear guidance e.g. by linking to the ‘Turnitin Guide’ or ‘Moodle Assignment Guide’ (<a href="http://bit.ly/UCLMoodleAssessment">http://bit.ly/UCLMoodleAssessment</a>), so they understand how to submit and receive feedback on their work.</p>



# Resources

Provide well labelled learning resources, using internal and external sources.

↓ <b>Baseline</b>	↓ <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>5.1 Use descriptive titles for all items</b> and consider displaying the item's description on the course homepage, as this helps students understand the purpose of the activity or resource.</p> <p><b>5.2 Provide learning resources</b> – Provide presentation slides, notes or handouts. See which file format to use when (<a href="http://bit.ly/MoodleFileFormats">http://bit.ly/MoodleFileFormats</a>).</p> <p><b>5.3 Provide reading list(s)</b> – Provide a list of course readings, preferably using the UCL online reading list service (<a href="http://readinglists.ucl.ac.uk">http://readinglists.ucl.ac.uk</a>) outlining which are compulsory and which are optional.</p> <p><b>5.4 Check resources</b> – Regularly fix or remove broken hyperlinks (URLs) and check that all resources are up-to-date before releasing these to students.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>5.5 Link to external online resources</b> – (e.g. case studies, image libraries, multimedia, articles). See Cross-platform compatibility &amp; accessibility section below.</p> <p><b>5.6 Embed videos and other media</b> (such as animations, audio, virtual labs) from Lecturecast, Box of Broadcasts, YouTube, Vimeo, Khan Academy and other sources.</p> <p><b>5.7 Include dynamic content from the wider web</b>, so students can better contextualise their learning and relate it to world events (if appropriate to the course), e.g. Twitter feeds, RSS news feeds.</p>



## Cross-platform compatibility

Provide files in accessible formats to enable students to view them on mobile devices.

↓ Baseline	↓ Baseline+ (Online Baseline)
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>6.1 Consider file formats</b> – PDF versions are provided wherever possible, as they can be accessed on a variety of devices. Word documents are used only for electronically-editable documents such as templates, worksheets or cover sheets. Avoid niche proprietary technologies such as Flash (swf files, iSpring etc.) as these do not load on all devices.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>6.2 Compress files</b> to minimise the file size and aid those students viewing them on mobile devices. The file size and type is displayed alongside the filename. e.g. Chemistry Lab Induction (34MB video).</p>







# Accessibility

Provide accessible resources by following a few simple rules for the benefit of all students.

↓ <b>Baseline</b>	↓ <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>7.1 Provide accessible learning resources</b> by ensuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Graphics have alternative text</b> (for screen-readers);</li><li>• <b>Navigation is consistent</b> between modules;</li><li>• <b>Fonts are large enough to read</b> (minimum 10pt);</li><li>• <b>Coloured text has high contrast</b> against backgrounds;</li><li>• <b>Links are descriptive</b> (avoiding 'click here').</li><li>• <b>Original PowerPoint slides are provided</b> in advance of lectures and alongside screen recordings (in addition to PDF versions – see 5.1), so students can modify them to suit their needs (e.g. to print in note form, change font size/colours, enable screen reading).</li></ul> <p><b>7.2 Links open in the same window</b> – so the browser back button works. If a new window is essential (e.g. to provide pop-up help) warn the students by labelling the link with '(opens in new window)'.</p> <p><b>7.3 Adhere to the UK Equality Act</b> – If a student with a disability requests an accessible format of any resource, this must be provided, within reason. Read more at <a href="http://www.ucl.ac.uk/disability">www.ucl.ac.uk/disability</a>.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>7.4 Provide video transcripts or notes</b> (where these already exist) to Lecturecast or external video systems (like YouTube or Vimeo). If using YouTube you might want to check the auto transcription and edit any inaccuracies.</p> <p><b>7.5 Check online learning tools for usability and accessibility</b> using <a href="http://www.web2access.org.uk">www.web2access.org.uk</a></p>

# Legal

Model good copyright practices. Communicate data protection issues and provide a private space for class interaction, so students have a safe environment to work in.

<p>↓ <b>Baseline</b></p>	<p>↓ <b>Baseline+ (Online Baseline)</b></p>
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>8.1 Observe intellectual property and copyright legislation by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilising the <b>ReadingLists@UCL service</b> for all reading.</li> <li>• <b>Linking out to useful websites</b> rather than copying text directly into a course.</li> <li>• <b>Using open source or copyright-cleared images.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>8.2 Avoid guest access (without a password) unless you are sure your material is copyright-cleared for open access</b> – Copyrighted/licensed material must only be supplied through a password protected system (such as Moodle), which complies with the terms and conditions of the publishers and of the Copyright Licensing Agency licence.</p> <p><b>8.3 Communicate potential data protection issues when students are asked to use non-UCL systems.</b> An alternative must be provided if students refuse to register with an external service. Please contact the UCL Data Protection Officer (data-protection@ucl.ac.uk) for advice.</p> <p><b>8.4 Ensure student-generated content is stored on a password protected system</b> (e.g. discussion boards, blogs, wikis, videos). Non-password protected sites should only be used if students are aware the material is publicly available, and are satisfied with the implications of this e.g. their full names may appear alongside their work.</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>8.5 Students learn about copyright</b> and can differentiate between what they are allowed to submit for their own private studies; what they can publish publicly in portfolios; and what can be used for personal or business use.</p>

## Student Active Participation

Encourage students studying wholly online to share their learning resources, interact with each other and participate in online activities.

↓ Baseline	↓ Baseline+ (Online Baseline)
	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>9.1 Students can share learning resources</b> either individually or collaboratively using online tools (such as wikis, glossaries, databases and discussion forums).</p> <p><b>9.2 Students are required to interact with online activities,</b> such as online self-assessments, contributing to discussions and completing interactive scenarios, in order to maintain student motivation and engage them actively in the learning process.</p>

## Quality Assurance

Enable staff and students to evaluate online learning provision, so they can help to improve it year on year.

↓ Baseline	↓ Baseline+ (Online Baseline)
<p><b>MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.</b></p> <p><b>10.1 Students can evaluate the module anonymously,</b> including its online elements, e.g. via an end-of-module questionnaire.</p> <p><b>10.2 All stakeholders, including tutors, administrators and support staff, can contribute to the module/programme evaluation,</b> including its online elements, at regular intervals (e.g. yearly, or at major reviews).</p>	<p><b>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based. As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</b></p> <p><b>10.3 Students can submit their module evaluations online,</b> e.g. via Moodle questionnaire or Opinio.</p> <p><b>10.4 The module evaluation covers all aspects relevant to the use of technology for teaching and learning</b> in the module, including quality of all course components (e.g. activities, resources, administration, library provision), the e-learning experience (e.g. workload, involvement, restrictions), and the role of tutors and administrators (e.g. engagement, feedback, support).</p>

# E-Learning Baseline checklist

These Baseline items are expected for every taught module at UCL. Additional requirements exist for wholly online courses (Baseline+), but are not listed below. The Baseline and Baseline+ are covered in greater detail within this booklet.

## 1. Structure

- 1.1 Present activities and resources in a meaningful, clearly structured and sequenced way.
  - Use headings.
  - Provide section overviews.
  - Clearly group and label items within a section.
  - Use Groups to give different information.  
to specific students.
- 1.2 Minimise cognitive load.
- 1.3 Include navigation aids.

## 2. Orientation

- 2.1 Include the Module Syllabus and Intended Learning Outcomes.
- 2.2 Explain participation requirements.
- 2.3 Display staff contact details.
- 2.4 Moodle roles reflect the functions of staff.
- 2.5 Ensure students are aware of all services and support available from the department and UCL.

## 3. Communication

- 3.1 Provide a communication statement.
- 3.2 Use the News forum as a one-way channel for important news such as key dates and events.
- 3.3 Make sure the purpose of every discussion forum is made clear.
- 3.4 Advise staff and students to upload profile pictures.

## 4. Assessment

- 4.1 Provide an assessment outline.
- 4.2 Provide tools and information for avoiding plagiarism.

## 5. Resources

- 5.1 Use descriptive titles for all items.
- 5.2 Provide learning resources.
- 5.3 Provide reading list(s).
- 5.4 Check resources.

## 6. Cross-platform compatibility

- 6.1 Consider file formats.

## 7. Accessibility

- 7.1 Provide accessible resources by ensuring:
  - Graphics have alternative text.
  - Navigation is consistent.
  - Fonts are large enough to read.
  - Coloured text has high contrast.
  - Links are descriptive; provide original PowerPoint slides.
- 7.2 Links open in the same window.
- 7.3 Adhere to the UK Equality Act.

## 8. Intellectual property

- 8.1 Observe intellectual property and copyright legislation by using the ReadingLists@UCL service; linking out to useful websites; and using open source or copyright-cleared images.
- 8.2 Avoid guest access (without a password) unless you are sure your material is copyright-cleared for open access.
- 8.3 Communicate potential data protection issues when students are asked to use non-UCL systems.
- 8.4 Ensure student-generated content is stored on a password protected system.

## 9. Student Active Participation

N/A (Baseline+ only).

## 10. Quality Assurance

- 10.1 Students can evaluate the module anonymously.
- 10.2 All stakeholders, including tutors, administrators and support staff, can contribute to the module/programme evaluation.

<http://bit.ly/UCLLEarningBaseline>

