Students appreciate, and increasingly expect, consistent and well-considered use of online learning. This page 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 current policy relating to the E-Learning Baseline forms part of Chapter 11 of the Academic Manual.

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.

Baseline Navigation
Document Coming Soon

The online baseline (on this page, below) has been updated for 2019 (scroll down for the full online baseline or click on a section title in the menu to the left). Printed and downloadable document versions are in progress.

Please direct queries, feedback and suggestions on using the Baseline and associated guidance to your school’s Digital Education Advisor or via digi-ed @ucl.ac.uk.

Baseline, Baseline+ and Beyond

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

1. Baseline (for campus-based courses ¹).
2. Baseline+ (in addition to the Baseline, for wholly online courses ²).

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

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.

Every taught module at UCL should meet the Baseline, 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.

### Alongside and Beyond the Baseline...

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.

**Further suggestions for how you might extend your use of e-learning tools** are available at the bottom of each Baseline+ section.

---

**UCL E-Learning Baseline 2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UCL Baseline</th>
<th>UCL Baseline+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MUST</td>
<td>for all (wholly online and campus-based).</td>
<td>MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These items are</td>
<td>expected for every taught module at UCL.</td>
<td>As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all wholly online courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expected for every</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taught module at UCL.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
## 1. 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.

**1.1 Present activities and resources in a meaningful, clearly structured and sequenced way.** Typically each Moodle section represents a topic, which may cover one or more weeks of study.

- **Use headings** - 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.
- **Provide section overviews** - Provide a description in each section to introduce the topic or set of resources/activities.
- **Clearly group and label items within a section** - Bring together common elements, use labels to provide common sub-headings across sections to help students navigate.
- **Use Groups and Groupings** to give different views and information to specific groups of students, where needed.

**1.2 Minimise cognitive load.** Avoid overloading the front page by placing content off the main page in Pages, Books, and Lessons, and by hiding unused items. If your front page is still long, consider using the Collapse Topics format and ensure the navigation block is set to Generate navigation for the following: Everything.

**1.3 Include navigation aids** - Suggested blocks to add to your Moodle course include Latest News, Recent Activity, Library Resources and Library Search.

Further information on structure, navigation & clarity.

**1.4 Use a template** 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.

**1.5 Guide students as to which task to complete next.** This may include appropriate use of conditional release, so tasks are hidden until prerequisite tasks are completed, or until a certain date.

![](image)

Go beyond the baseline...

## 2. 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.

**2.1 Include the Module Syllabus and Intended Learning Outcomes.** Include these directly in Moodle, or via a link to the module handbook or departmental website.

**2.2 Explain participation requirements:**

**2.6 Provide an overview of the course** within the 'Course Summary' in the Moodle course settings. This should define who students contact to request access to the course.

**2.7 Students are sent a welcome message before the start of the module.** Using the Moodle News forum ensures all students get an email. Include:
2.3 Display staff contact details - Include name, position, telephone, email, location, drop-in hours, as appropriate.

Further information on adding staff contact details to a Moodle Free Text block and updating Moodle profiles.

2.4 Moodle roles reflect the functions of staff (e.g. Tutor, Course Administrator, Leader).

2.5 Ensure students are aware of all services and support available from the department and UCL (this may be done at course, programme or department level). In particular, link to:

- The 'Digital Learning at UCL' Moodle course to familiarise students with Moodle (available from the Student Help menu);
- 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.

Further information on student support.

What this could look like...

- Outline how students are expected to use Moodle in a course usage statement.
- Identify which activities are compulsory and optional.
- Explicitly signpost all online and offline activities and how they interrelate.
- Provide an indicator of effort (such as timings or page counts) for all compulsory tasks.
- Explain how students are expected to use UCL and external e-learning tools. This PowerPoint Induction template provides a starting point. Wholly online courses might provide this information as a screen-cast video, with a voice over.
- Link to instructions for any e-learning tools that students are expected to use.
- Explain what digital devices and software students are expected to provide for themselves.

- A short overview of the course;
- A summary of expectations for online engagement.
- How they can gain access to their course.
- Explain the introductory activities to be completed and by when (e.g. posting to an introductions forum).
- Link to the 'UCL online learning orientation' Moodle course (for wholly online courses).

The inclusion of audio or video is encouraged.

2.8 Outline the Intended Learning Outcomes for every activity and resource in the description and provide a clear overview of what the student is expected to do.

Further information on inducting and supporting students.

Go beyond the baseline...
### 3. Communication

Ensure effective and consistent online communication with and between students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1 Provide a communication statement</th>
<th>3.5 Include a Q&amp;A forum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>describing 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.</td>
<td>for tutors and or students to pose questions and receive answers, which students can choose to unsubscribe from (if automatic subscription is selected).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.2 Use the News forum</th>
<th>3.6 Use learning forum(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.3 Make the purpose of every discussion forum clear</th>
<th>3.7 Track student participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>including how students are expected to engage with it and how often staff will reply to posts (if at all).</td>
<td>and send reminders to those who have yet to contribute to activities or submit assessments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further information on communication.

---

### 4. Assessment

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.1 Provide an assessment outline</th>
<th>4.3 Provide online assignment submission points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with a clear description of the module assessment, including schedule, criteria and submission details. This must align with the data stored in Portico and published on the Module Catalogue. Moodle should be used to amplify and support that information, perhaps to include sources of advice, etc.</td>
<td>Students submit electronic documents online (Moodle / Turnitin Assignment) and provide clear guidance, e.g. by linking to either the ‘Turnitin Assignment Guide’ or ‘Moodle Assignment Guide’ as appropriate, so students understand how to submit and receive feedback on their work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.2 Provide tools and information for avoiding plagiarism</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Link to the Plagiarism and Academic Writing course, where students can check their work for plagiarism independent of assessment submission points.</td>
<td>Further information on electronic submissions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further information on assessment.

---

What this could look like...

Go beyond the baseline...
### 5. Resources

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

#### 5.1 Use descriptive titles for all items

and consider displaying the item's description on the course homepage, as this helps students understand the purpose of the activity or resource.

#### 5.2 Provide learning resources

- Provide presentation slides, notes or handouts. See which file format to use when. UCL policy is to provide lecture materials 48 hours in advance.

#### 5.3 Provide reading list(s)

- Provide a list of course readings, preferably using the UCL online reading list service, outlining which are compulsory and which are optional.

#### 5.4 Check resources

- Regularly fix or remove broken hyperlinks (URLs) and check that all resources are up-to-date before releasing these to students.

Further information on providing learning resources.

#### 5.5 Link to external online resources

- (e. g. case studies, image libraries, multimedia, articles). See Cross-platform compatibility & accessibility section below.

#### 5.6 Embed videos and other media

(such as animations, audio, virtual labs) from Lectur recast, Box of Broadcasts, YouTube, Vimeo, Khan Academy and other sources.

Further information on incorporating Twitter and RSS feeds to provide context to students.

Go beyond the baseline...

### 5. Cross-platform compatibility

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

#### 6.1 Consider file formats

When possible provide electronically-editable documents, but especially in the case of templates, worksheets or cover sheets. Avoid niche proprietary technologies such as Flash (swf files, iSpring etc.) as these do not load on all devices.

Further information on which file types to use when.

#### 6.2 Compress file sizes

particularly to aid those students viewing them on mobile devices. In file settings, ensure the file size and type is displayed alongside the filename (e.g., 'Chemistry Lab Induction, 34MB video').

Further information on compressing images.

Go beyond the baseline...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. Accessibility</th>
<th>The Accessibility baseline applies across all UCL modules.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide accessible resources by following a few simple rules for the benefit of all students.</td>
<td>Go beyond the baseline...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Provide accessible learning resources* by ensuring:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Layout is clear, with good spacing, including text that isn’t cramped or dense.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Navigation is consistent (e.g., use departmental template).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fonts are sans serif and large enough to read (minimum 11pt).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coloured text has high contrast against backgrounds. Avoid red, green and pink text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Links are descriptive (avoiding 'click here') and open in the same window.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where there is heavy dependence on images, there is also a text description of the key learning points, for screen-reader users (e.g., alongside the image, as a caption, or as 'alternative text').</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resources provided 48 hours in advance of lectures are in accessible formats.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*UCL is currently updating its policies on creating accessible teaching materials, and more detailed guidance on requirements for making images and videos accessible will be available soon.

7.2. Provide a brief, course-level accessibility statement containing any additional guidance and indicating who to contact (e.g., module leader, administrator) to request an alternative format for any resource.

7.3. Use tools to check resources for usability and accessibility where available (e.g., Blackboard Ally, MS Office Accessibility Checker).

For further information and guidance see [www.ucl.ac.uk/digital-accessibility](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/digital-accessibility).
### 8. 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.

**8.1 Observe intellectual property and copyright legislation** by utilising the ReadingLists@UCL service for all reading; linking out to useful websites rather than copying text directly into a course, and where possible using openly-licensed or copyright-cleared images.

**8.2 Avoid guest access (without a password) unless you are sure your material is copyright-cleared for open access** - 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.

**8.3 Communicate potential data protection issues when students are asked to use non-UCL systems.** An alternative must be provided if students refuse to register with an external service. Please contact the UCL Data Protection Officer for advice.

**8.4 Ensure student-generated content is stored on a password protected system** (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.

Further information on legal considerations.

**8.5 Students learn about copyright** 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.

Further information on copyright.

Go beyond the baseline...

---

### 9. Student Active Participation

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

**9.1 Students can share learning resources** either individually or collaboratively using online tools (such as wikis, glossaries, databases and discussion forums).

**9.2 Students are required to interact with online activities,** 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.

Go beyond the baseline...
10. Quality Assurance

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

10.1 Students can evaluate the module anonymously, including its online elements, e.g. via an end-of-module questionnaire.

10.2 All stakeholders, including tutors, administrators and support staff, can contribute to the module/programme evaluation, including its online elements, at regular intervals (e.g. yearly, or at major reviews).

Further information on module and programme evaluation.

10.3 Students can submit their module evaluations online, e.g. via Moodle questionnaire or Opinio.

10.4 The module evaluation covers all aspects relevant to the use of technology for teaching and learning 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).

Further information on how to evaluate course components.

Go beyond the baseline...

The original Baseline was developed after wide consultation on best UCL practice and was endorsed by Academic Committee in September 2011, and has been reviewed periodically. The current 2019 version reflects changes to the legal environment regarding accessibility, changes in Moodle, and some changes to wording to improve clarity.

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 setting up a Moodle course based on a departmental 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.

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.

Examples

- What could your campus-based course look like?
- What could a wholly online course look like?
- Example course usage statement.
- Example communication statement.
- Example of assessment guidance.
- Example student feedback information.
- Example Announcements forum description.
- Example Questions and Answers forum descriptions.

UCL E-Learning Baseline by UCL is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.