

Develop an Orientation Module

Students taking online courses often underestimate the time and effort required to succeed in this format (Bawa, 2016). Therefore, the purpose of an orientation module is to make sure that students understand how to be successful online, how to use the different features of the course, and how to meet course expectations (Stavredes, 2011). It can also be an opportunity for students to start to get to know each other and build community through syllabus activities.

Key Components of an Orientation Module

General information about online learning: Since some students may have little experience with online courses, provide a list of proven suggestions such as creating a plan that includes a weekly schedule of where to work, when to work, and the tools and technology they will need.

Weekly communication expectations: Describe the weekly patterns students should follow to be successful in your course such as, *“Each Monday, you should review the recorded microlecture and take the quiz. Each Wednesday, you should participate in the online discussion. Every other Friday, you should submit your reflection paper.”* Let students know where in the syllabus they can find the weekly schedule.

Navigating your online course: Record a brief introductory video, narrating as you navigate through the key elements of your course including important tools such as the gradebook, instructor contact information, the course syllabus, supplementary materials, course calendar, course email, video chat tools, assignment uploading tools, collaboration tools, and where to go for technical assistance.

Syllabus Activity: Use one of the syllabus activities below to help students learn how to engage in the online platform and understand course expectations.

Open Discussion/Q & A Forum: Include an open discussion forum and encourage students to post any questions or comments about the course, the syllabus, or anything else in the orientation module. Keep this forum open throughout the course and continue to encourage students to post questions there. Remind them that if they have a particular question, it is likely that other students do as well, so asking and answering questions in the open forum is helpful to everyone.

Syllabus Activities

Use one or more of the activities below to ensure that students understand course expectations by reviewing the course syllabus and demonstrate the ability to engage in the online platform.

Activity 1. Syllabus Scavenger Hunt: A Syllabus Scavenger Hunt can be made using the quiz function on your learning management system (LMS). Here are some example questions—using fill in the blank responses:

1. Whom do you contact for technical assistance?
2. How do you set up a meeting with your instructor?

3. When do you need to post an initial response to the weekly discussion board?
4. How many of your peers do you need to reply to?
5. What is the first guideline for Online Netiquette?
6. What is due on March 16?
7. When is your project proposal due?
8. What happens if you plagiarize?

Activity 2. Syllabus Discussion Board: Create a discussion board, and require that all students post a question or comment about the course objectives, participation expectations, grading, or any other element of the syllabus. Example discussion questions include:

- What two key points or aspects of the syllabus caught your attention and why?
- What two key points or aspects of the syllabus need some further explanation?

In addition to creating a written record of questions and responses that may be useful later in the course, it also provides some early feedback as to what is important and/or confusing for the students. This activity also gives students the opportunity to practice posting. You can award a few points for successfully posting to the discussion board. Success breeds success, so starting all students off with a few earned points sets them on the right path.

Activity 3. Personalize and Customize Learning Outcomes: In order to have students think more deeply about the learning outcomes of your course and make connections to their own lives, ask students to choose one learning outcome listed in the syllabus that really resonates with them for personal or professional reasons. In a discussion board post, ask them to explain why they chose that outcome, how it connects to their goals or interests, and how they can customize the outcome to help them move towards their goal.