

Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites

ADVANCED STANDARDS FOR E-LEARNING

STAFF DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

BASIC STANDARDS
FOR
E-LEARNING SITES

Authorship

The Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites were written by Janne Malfroy, Lynnae Rankine, Helen Correia, Tim Griffin and Jennifer Ireland.

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The E-Learning Quality Framework Project is an initiative of the Teaching Development Unit (TDU) at the University of Western Sydney. The project team consisted of:

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The project team was also supported by an advisory group which provided feedback on the process and contributed to plans for wider dissemination. The advisory group was chaired by Professor Stuart Campbell, PVC Learning and Teaching, and its membership included Associate Deans (Academic), the Library and Student Learning Unit staff.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of the Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites. Please email your comments or suggestions to contact-tdu@uws.edu.au

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Foreword

The online teaching environment has become such an integral part of tertiary teaching that quality standards are now a central element of that environment. As UWS moves towards 100% coverage of units taught using the e-learning management system (known as vUWS or 'virtual UWS'), I am pleased to introduce an initiative to develop an *E-Learning Quality Framework* which will provide criteria and standards for guidance in developing quality online sites.

The *UWS E-Learning Quality Framework*, developed by the Teaching Development Unit, provides clear standards and criteria for both Basic and Advanced Standards for E-Learning sites. The framework guides academic staff through an evaluative process of their own sites, helping them to develop enhanced skills in both the technical and pedagogical aspects of online learning and teaching. The Basic Standards focus on technological and design aspects, whereas the Advanced Standards are explicitly pedagogical. More information about the Advanced Standards will be available later in 2009.

This booklet introduces the Basic Standards, which provide a self-review framework that allows staff to independently rate the quality of their site against good design principles. These principles are based on scholarly literature and are informed by web accessibility principles as well as educational design. They have also been adapted to the UWS context. They are foundational in building well designed online learning environments and it is expected that all sites will be based on the principles identified in these standards.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Associate Professor Janne Malfroy, Lynnae Rankine, Dr Helen Correia, Dr Tim Griffin, and Jennifer Ireland in the development of these standards, and the ongoing work of all UWS academic staff in promoting quality in learning and teaching at the University of Western Sydney.



Professor Stuart Campbell
PVC Learning and Teaching

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UWS E-Learning Quality Framework

The imperative for quality assurance initiatives for e-learning in tertiary education is broadly acknowledged in the higher education literature. Oliver (2005) explains this 'quality agenda' in the following terms:

'As more and more universities seek to use e-learning as a mode of delivery for their units and courses, and as more and more they are being held accountable for the quality of the services they provide, the need grows for accepted standards and benchmarks against which performance can be judged' (p 183).

In response to the quality agenda in e-learning and the comprehensive uptake of e-learning at UWS, the Teaching Development Unit has developed an *E-Learning Quality Framework* which focuses on the improvement of individual sites and the development of academic staff skills, for the explicit purpose of improving student learning in the online environment.

The *E-Learning Quality Framework* consists of three 'layers':

- Basic Standards,
- Staff Development Toolkit,
- Advanced Standards.

This enables designers to develop their own e-learning design skills from a basic level right through to advanced, pedagogical uses of e-learning.



The framework provides explicit support systems in place at all stages.

Oliver, R. (2005), 'Quality assurance and e-learning: blue skies and pragmatism' ALT-J, 13:3, 173-187

UWS E-Learning Quality Framework: Basic Standards

The Basic Standards have been designed to be applicable to the diverse ways in which e-learning sites are used and to enable all designers, regardless of their familiarity with designing e-learning environments, to review and improve unit and hub sites.

The Basic Standards consist of the following:

1. Organisation and Appearance. This Standard focuses on principles that support clear structure and presentation of the site (e.g. 'Site design promotes ease of navigation').

2. Consistency and Compliance. This Standard emphasises legal and institutional aspects such as copyright, privacy, compliance with policies and consistency in documentation (e.g. 'Information in the site is consistent with the Unit Outlines and Learning Guides').

3. Appropriate Use of Tools. This Standard promotes using tools with clear purpose and responsible management (e.g. 'Expectations about use of communication tools are clear to students').

4. Learner Resources and Supports. This Standard focuses on ensuring students have access to appropriate supports and resources in the site (e.g. 'Links to learning supports are contained in the site').

Within the Basic Standards there are two sections:

The **first** is a self review of the e-learning site. This section contains a description of each Standard and related criteria. Each criterion is expanded with a rationale and design principles that relate to achieving quality in the relevant area. A rating scale is also included so that designers can review their site against each criterion.

The **second** section consists of development strategies. This section contains a description of the Standards and criteria, and provides tips and references to resources that can assist designers to improve their sites in line with the Basic Standards.

Basic Standards: Self Review process

The person reviewing the e-learning environment should have primary design responsibilities for that site (e.g. Unit Coordinator).

- 1 Work through the self review by completing the ratings for each criterion in relation to your selected e-learning environment. You will notice that there are typically several rating options:
 - **Yes** – indicates the site meets the criterion for quality.
 - **No** – indicates the site does not meet the criterion. However, if there is a strong rationale for why it should not, this can be included in the 'Comments' section.
 - **Working towards** – indicates the site does not meet the criterion but will be addressed before the next time the unit is offered.
 - **Not applicable / Not used** – the criterion does not apply to your unit site (e.g. there are no third party copyright resources on the site) or has not been used (e.g. a particular tool has not been added).

Note: The Standards can generally be applied to all sites. If a specific criterion is not relevant to a type of site (e.g. hub sites), this will be indicated next to the criterion.

- 2 Work through Section 2 to identify the relevant tips and resources that you can use to assist you in achieving 'Yes' for all criteria.
- 3 To help you develop the knowledge and skills to achieve a 'Yes' for all criteria you may wish to speak to a peer, visit the *E-Learning Quality Framework* support website at <http://tdu.uws.edu.au/qilt/>, attend a relevant TDU workshop, or contact the Teaching Development Unit.
- 4 After you have completed the review you may want to:
 - a. Include your self review in your teaching portfolio or related teaching profile
 - b. Improve your other sites
 - c. Discuss results with your relevant Head of Program or Head of School

BASIC STANDARDS SECTION 1: SELF REVIEW

When you review your site, record the details below. It may help you in future site design if you include things that you decided to modify in the 'Comments' section.

Your name: _____

Unit: _____

Date of self review: _____

Comments:

Standard 1 - Organisation & Appearance

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>1.1 The homepage design is clear, simple and welcoming.</p>	<p>The homepage is the point of access to the e-learning site. It should look professional and be welcoming for students.</p> <p>Homepages should not be cluttered and the number of icons or links should be kept to a functional minimum.</p> <p>The homepage should not be blank and not only rely on the 'course tools' menu to the left of screen.</p>	<p><i>The homepage design is clear, simple and welcoming.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>1.2 The Unit Outline and Learning Guide can be located easily from the home page.</p> <p><i>(Only applies to unit sites)</i></p>	<p>The Unit Outline and Learning Guide are key documents and must be easily accessible at all times. If they are not located on the home page, there must be a clear link to them.</p>	<p><i>The Unit Outline and Learning Guide can be located easily from the home page.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>1.3 Text on the e-learning site pages can be read easily.</p>	<p>The site uses the following elements in ways that do not interfere with clarity and legibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Backgrounds - picture backgrounds can interfere with the legibility of text on the page. ▪ Colours - a simple colour scheme enhances the professional appearance and legibility of the site. ▪ Fonts - fonts used for text should have sufficient contrast to be clearly read. 	<p><i>Text on the e-learning site pages can be read easily.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
1.4 The e-learning site design promotes ease of navigation.	<p>Navigation refers to how students follow links to access learning resources and information. Site design should make it easy for students to find and access information in the e-learning site.</p> <p>Navigation also refers to clear icon use (see Criteria 1.5 & 1.6) and the number of 'clicks' students have to make to get to the information or resource they require. In general, the fewer the clicks (e.g. 3) the better.</p> <p>Navigation is easier if links are set to 'open in a new window' as students are less likely to inadvertently close the site when closing a window.</p> <p>The site should also include instructions about where students can find resources and information on the site.</p>	<p><i>The e-learning site design promotes ease of navigation.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
1.5 Icon style is consistent throughout the site.	<p>Use of the same icon set for the entire site enhances professional appearance and makes the site easier to navigate.</p> <p>There may be exceptions to this design principle, for example, where different, but compatible icon sets are used on different pages, where icon sets are mandated by the School or Program, or where icons are not used at all because the link is 'Text Only'.</p>	<p><i>Icon style is consistent throughout the site.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
1.6 Icons represent the items to which they are linked.	<p>Icon sets include icons for different types of links (e.g. folders, quizzes, readings, information).</p> <p>When icons consistently refer to the items to which they are linked, students find them easier to remember and the site easier to navigate. Text descriptors next to icons can identify the items being linked.</p>	<p><i>Icons represent the items to which they are linked.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites - Section 1: Self Review

Standard 1 - Organisation & Appearance

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>1.7 File sizes enable efficient downloads.</p>	<p>Students should be able to download files efficiently.</p> <p>Student access to files linked online is compromised by large files that take a long time to download.</p> <p>Smaller files allow students easier, quicker, cheaper downloads with fewer problems (e.g. time outs).</p> <p>The recommended maximum file size is 20 MB. Some media files (audio or video) are large and can take students a while to download.</p> <p>Large file sizes can be indicated in text descriptors next to icons or links.</p>	<p><i>File sizes enable efficient downloads.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>1.8 File types and software requirements for opening them are specified.</p>	<p>Files can be of various types (e.g. .pdf, .swf, .ppt, .mov) and students should be informed of those types through link descriptions or an appropriate general statement about any specific software that they require to open files.</p>	<p><i>File types and software requirements for opening them are specified.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Standard 2 - Consistency & Compliance: Legal & Institutional

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>2.1 Information in the e-learning site is consistent with the Unit Outline and Learning Guide.</p> <p><i>(Only applies to unit sites.)</i></p>	<p>Information in the e-learning site is consistent with the Unit Outline and Learning Guide with respect to the UWS format template and approved content and delivery.</p> <p>Information set out in the following sections of the Unit Outline is accurately reflected in the site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. General Information B. Unit Details C. Assessment Details D. Assignment Cover Sheet E. Important Information – Policies F. Additional Information 	<p><i>Information in the e-learning site is consistent with the Unit Outline and Learning Guide.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>2.2 All information on the site has been updated and is current.</p>	<p>Sites that contain outdated information or 'dead' links are frustrating for students and do not enhance the professionalism of the site.</p> <p>If the e-learning site is based on a previous site, dates must be updated and links checked.</p>	<p><i>All information on the site has been updated and is current.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>2.3 Readings and other resources provided in the site are appropriately linked to avoid copyright infringements.</p>	<p>To avoid copyright infringements third party copyright content (e.g. text or graphics) must comply with UWS Copyright procedures (i.e. using e-reserve at the library and 'deep links' allocated by the UWS Copyright Officer).</p>	<p><i>Readings and other resources provided in the site are appropriately linked to avoid copyright infringements.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Used</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites - Section 1: Self Review

Standard 2 - Consistency & Compliance: Legal & Institutional

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>2.4 Information on the site complies with the Privacy Policy.</p>	<p>Files that identify student names and numbers (e.g. results of assessments) are not posted to the site.</p>	<p><i>Information on the site complies with the Privacy Policy.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>2.5 If e-learning site templates are prescribed they have been used.</p>	<p>Some courses, programs or Schools have design templates for e-learning sites which may include backgrounds, icon sets, headers and other features.</p>	<p><i>If e-learning templates are prescribed they have been used.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Standard 3 - Appropriate Use of E-Learning Tools

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>3.1 The tools added to the e-learning site have a clear purpose and rationale.</p>	<p>Tools added to the site should be planned and should reflect how the designers want students to use the e-learning environment in the context of the unit.</p> <p>Designers should only add the tools that reflect a clear purpose and rationale and should be able to use them competently and appropriately.</p> <p>For example, students are confused when discussions, chat, assessment links, and assignment drop boxes are added but not used.</p>	<p><i>The tools added to the e-learning site have a clear purpose and rationale.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Used <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>3.2 Students receive instructions about how tools will be used in the site.</p>	<p>The purpose and use of tools should be communicated to students so they can learn to use them effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>Specific criteria related to communication tools follow (i.e. 3.3 & 3.4). Other tools such as Web Links, Assessments (including quizzes) and Assignments should have clear instructions on how and when they are to be used by students.</p>	<p><i>Students receive instructions about how tools will be used in the site.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Used <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites - Section 1: Self Review

Standard 3 - Appropriate Use of E-Learning Tools

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>3.3 Communication tools are monitored and 'netiquette' standards reinforced.</p>	<p>Designers are responsible for the communications in e-learning sites and should provide instructions on appropriate communication (e.g. 'netiquette').</p> <p>Communications are monitored and breaches of 'netiquette' are dealt with promptly.</p>	<p><i>Communication tools are monitored and 'netiquette' standards reinforced.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Used <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>3.4 Expectations about use of communication tools are clear to students.</p>	<p>Communication tools made available to students should be used consistently for their intended purposes.</p> <p>Students are confused by communication links being added with no clear instructions about how they are to be used.</p> <p>Expectations regarding communications with the lecturer or tutors should be managed in terms of frequency and purpose.</p> <p>'Interaction overload' (many messages being posted daily or weekly) is appropriately managed.</p>	<p><i>Expectations about use of communication tools are clear to students.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Standard 4 - Learner Resources & Supports

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>4.1 The relevance of online scholarly resources is clearly presented to students.</p>	<p>Students have been informed of the presence and relevance of online scholarly resources available on vUWS (e.g. library links, externally developed resources such as e-packs, learning objects or courseware).</p>	<p><i>The relevance of online scholarly resources is clearly presented to students.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Used <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>4.2 Students are provided with information about what e-learning supports are available and where to find them.</p>	<p>It is good practice to orientate students to e-learning sites and to inform them, either on the e-learning site or in classes, of additional e-learning student support.</p> <p>All students have a link on their 'My vUWS' to 'E-Learning Student Support'. This site contains information on the use of tools (e.g. communication and assessment), browser tune-ups and where and how to get support.</p>	<p><i>Students are provided with information about what e-learning supports are available and where to find them.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Used <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites - Section 1: Self Review

Standard 4 - Learner Resources & Supports

Criteria	Design Principles	Self-Rating Checklist
<p>4.3 Students with disabilities have been informed about where to get support for e-learning accessibility issues.</p>	<p>Accessibility standards refer to design features that enable access by students with disabilities. Standard 1 – ‘Organisation & Appearance’ is also relevant for accessibility.</p> <p>This Standard does not list the Accessibility Standards but it is good practice to inform students either on the e-learning site or in classes that accessibility issues should be referred to the Unit Coordinator and/or the Disability Service.</p>	<p><i>Students with disabilities have been informed about where to get support for e-learning accessibility issues.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>4.4 Links to learning supports are contained in the site.</p>	<p>Your e-learning site contains links in a templated footer, or elsewhere on the site, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ E-Learning Support ▪ Library ▪ Support Services for Students 	<p><i>Links to learning supports are contained in the site.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Working Towards</p> <p>Comments:</p>

SECTION 2: DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Standard 1 - Organisation & Appearance

Criterion 1.1 The homepage design is clear, simple and welcoming

Design Principles

The homepage is the point of access to the e-learning site. It should look professional and be welcoming for students.

Homepages should not be cluttered and the number of icons or links should be kept to a functional minimum.

The homepage should not be blank and not only rely on the 'Course Tools' menu to the left of screen.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Homepage design will depend on the unit and how designers want their students to use the site. To help you plan your site please refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online > Planning your site structure*.

For most sites, six to eight links on the homepage would be sufficient (e.g. Unit Outline, Assessments, Lectures, Tutorials/Workshops, Communication).

The header can be used to construct a welcome message and short orientation to the vUWS site. Instructions for how to add/edit headers and footers can be found in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and Teaching Capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Customising the appearance of your vUWS site > Add & Edit Headers & Footers* (in Flash or PDF format).

Notices should not be placed in the header or footer; the 'Announcements' tool is designed for this purpose. Instructions for how to add announcements can be found in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and Teaching Capabilities of vUWS > Communication > Adding Announcements*.

The UWS Publications Style Guide is available as a link on the UWS Visual Identity webpage at: <http://www.uws.edu.au/staff/visualidentity>

Criterion 1.2 The Unit Outline and Learning Guide can be located easily from the home page *(only applies to unit sites)*

Design Principles

The Unit Outline and Learning Guide are key documents and must be easily accessible at all times. If they are not located on the home page, there must be a clear link to them.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

The Unit Outline could be uploaded as a file to the homepage or be placed within a folder for 'Unit Information' which might include other related files.

Files can only be uploaded from the 'Build' tab.

If the Unit Outline is in a folder, a short description of what is in the folder can be added by clicking the 'Action Link' (i.e. the downward grey arrow) next to the folder and then 'Edit Properties' and then writing a 'Description'.

Criterion 1.3 Text on e-learning site pages can be read easily

Design Principles

The site uses the following elements in ways that do not interfere with clarity and legibility.

- Backgrounds - picture backgrounds can interfere with the legibility of text on the page.
- Colours - a simple colour scheme enhances the professional appearance and legibility of the site.
- Fonts - fonts used for text should have sufficient contrast to be clearly read.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Picture backgrounds should usually be avoided; however, if a picture background is used, a faint image (watermark) is less likely to impede legibility.

The HTML editor allows text to be edited in a similar way to a word processor. Instructions for how to use the HTML editor can be found in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and Teaching Capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Using HTML*.

When using the HTML editor:

- Reserve bolding of text for important headings or points but use it sparingly as overuse lessens its effectiveness.
- Sans-serif fonts, such as Arial and Verdana, are easier to read on the screen than serif fonts such as Times New Roman.
- Do not underline text as the text may appear to the user to be a link to another page.

Criterion 1.4 The e-learning site design promotes ease of navigation

Design Principles

Navigation refers to how students follow links to access learning resources and information. Site design should make it easy for students to find and access information in the e-learning site.

Navigation also refers to clear icon use (see Criteria 1.5 & 1.6) and the number of 'clicks' students have to make to get to the information or resource they require. In general, the fewer the clicks (e.g. 3) the better.

Navigation is easier if links are set to 'open in a new window' as students are less likely to inadvertently close the site when closing a window.

The site should also include instructions about where students can find resources and information on the site.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

An item in an e-learning site should not be more than 3 clicks from the homepage. To help you plan your site, and how many levels or clicks away from the homepage an item will be, refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Teaching Online > Planning your site structure*.

Use learning modules rather than folders inside other folders to flatten the navigation structure. Instructions for how to use learning modules can be found in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Presenting Content > Using Learning Modules*.

Web links, PDF files and other large files should open in a new browser window by clicking the 'Action Link' (i.e. the downward grey arrow) next to the item and selecting 'Customise Link' then selecting the check box for 'Open in a new browser window'. Whilst the student is waiting for a large file to download they can navigate through your e-learning site in the original browser window.

Icon links can include short text descriptions of what they lead to so that students know what will be displayed before they click on the link. Select the 'Action Link' (i.e. the downward grey arrow) next to the item and select 'Edit Properties' then type into the 'Description' box.

Students should be made aware of the 'breadcrumb trail' which is a series of links that appear at the top of the vUWS information window and accumulate as a user navigates through the site. More information for students is available in *E-Learning Student Support > Module 1: Getting Started > Course Tools and Breadcrumb Trail*.

Criterion 1.5 Icon style is consistent throughout the site

Design Principles

Use of the same icon set for the entire site enhances professional appearance and makes the site easier to navigate.

There may be exceptions to this design principle, for example, where different but compatible icon sets are used on different pages, where icon sets are mandated by the School or Program, or where icons are not used at all because the link is 'Text Only'.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

The icon style can be changed for the whole site by using:
Build Tab > Designer Tools > Manage Course > Course Content Icons.

It is not necessary to use icons on every page. For example, on pages that are one or two levels from the homepage or for pages that might have a number of links, the icons themselves could appear to clutter the page. In these cases, a clearer appearance might be achieved by using 'Text Only' rather than icon and text. To change the Page Display where an icon is not required go to *Build Tab > Page Options > Customise Page Display > Custom Layout > Icon/Text > Text Only.*

To change the default icon style for the site go to *Build Tab > Manage Course > Course Content Icons > Select New Content Icon Set.*

Individual icons can also be changed. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Customising the appearance of your vUWS site > How do I select icons for my site?*

Criterion 1.6 Icons represent the items to which they are linked

Design Principles

Icon sets include icons for different types of links (e.g. folders, quizzes, readings, information). When icons consistently refer to the items to which they are linked, students find them easier to remember and the site easier to navigate. Text descriptors next to icons can identify the items being linked.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Each icon in a set is named by what it represents (e.g. Communication, Quiz, Media Library Collection). Choose icons that best match the function and use them consistently (e.g. use the same Web Link icon for every web link).

Individual icons can be changed by referring to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Customising the appearance of your vUWS site > How do I select icons for my site?*

Icon links can include short text descriptions of what they lead to so students know what will be displayed before they click on the link. Select the 'Action Link' (i.e. the downward grey arrow) next to the item and select 'Edit Properties' then type into the 'Description' box.

Criterion 1.7 File sizes enable efficient downloads

Design Principles

Students should be able to download files efficiently.

Student access to online files is compromised by large files that take a long time to download.

Smaller files allow students easier, quicker, cheaper downloads with fewer problems (e.g. time outs).

The recommended maximum file size is 20 MB. Some media files (audio or video) can take a while to download.

Large file sizes can be indicated in text descriptors next to icons or links.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Tips on the use of different file types, file sizes and converting files to PDF can be found at *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Managing Files*.

PowerPoint files can be very large. Before uploading your PowerPoint file remove any unnecessary slides and graphics, sounds and animations. If you have added images or photos to your slides it is a good idea to use a graphic software program to compress the image to a lower resolution before adding them to your PowerPoint file. A digital photo could be taken at 600 dpi whereas 150 dpi is suitable in a PowerPoint file. Compression of the file size significantly reduces the download time for students. The E-Learning Service Desk can assist with file compression.

If your file is over 20 MB please contact the E-Learning Service Desk for advice on how to decrease its size. Media files such as audio or video can be compressed in quality to reduce file size. MP3 is the smallest conversion for audio files. An alternative is to break the file down into smaller files. Large documents can be broken into smaller chunks, as can movies or PowerPoints (e.g. Part 1 of 2).

It is good practice to indicate file size using text descriptions next to the link. Select the 'Action Link' (i.e. downward grey arrow) next to the item and select 'Edit Properties' then type into the 'Description' box.

Criterion 1.8 File types and software requirements for opening them are specified

Design Principles

Files can be of various types (e.g. .pdf, .swf, .ppt, .mov) and students should be informed of those types through link descriptions or an appropriate general statement about any specific software that they need to open files.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

If your site contains content that requires a plug-in (e.g. Flash or other media files, PDF etc):

- refer your students to *E-Learning Student Support > Check your Set Up > Need to download a program?*
- copy the relevant links to your own e-learning site and after adding a link always double check that the link works.

It is good practice to indicate file type and size using text descriptions next to the link. Select the 'Action Link' (i.e. the downward grey arrow) next to the item and select 'Edit Properties' then type into the 'Description' box.

Standard 2 - Consistency & Compliance: Legal & Institutional

Criterion 2.1 Information in the e-learning site is consistent with the Unit Outline and Learning Guide *(only applies to unit sites)*

Design Principles

Information in the e-learning site is consistent with the Unit Outline and Learning Guide with respect to the UWS format template and approved content and delivery.

Information set out in the following sections of the Unit Outline is accurately reflected in the site.

- A. General Information
- B. Unit Details
- C. Assessment Details
- D. Assignment Cover Sheet
- E. Important Information – Policies
- F. Additional Information

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Unit Outline - Information Requirements Policy available online at:
<http://policies.uws.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00154>

The UWS Unit Outline Template is available online at:
http://library.uws.edu.au/unit_outline.phtml

Criterion 2.2 All information on the site has been updated and is current

Design Principles

Sites that contain outdated information or 'dead' links are frustrating for students and do not enhance the professionalism of the site.

If the e-learning site is based on a previous site, dates have to be updated and links checked.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Refer to the *Before Start of Semester Checklist* available at *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Managing Your Site > Before start of semester check of your site*.

Criterion 2.3 Readings and other resources provided in the site are appropriately linked to avoid copyright infringements

Design Principles

To avoid copyright infringements third party copyright content (e.g. text or graphics) must comply with UWS Copyright procedures (i.e. using e-reserve at the library and 'deep links' allocated by the UWS Copyright Officer).

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Contact the UWS Copyright Officer for advice and assistance in making third party copyright content available for students. (Frank Hill – f.hill@uws.edu.au).

Information about Copyright is available in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online*.

Criterion 2.4 Information on the site complies with the Privacy Policy

Design Principles

Files that identify student names and numbers (e.g. results of assessments) should not be posted to the site.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Information about Privacy is available in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online*.

By using the Grade Book to record your grades you will be able to have one secure place to record all your grades and other relevant information during the semester. Instructions on using the Grade Book can be found in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Managing Students > Using the Grade Book*.

Once the grades are in the Grade Book you can release them to students via My Grades tool thereby ensuring that students have access to their own grades and not the grades of other students. Instructions on releasing grades to students can be found in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Managing Students > Releasing marks with My Grades*.

Register for the 'Managing Student Data in vUWS' workshop in Staff Online to learn more about using the Grade Book.

Criterion 2.5 If e-learning site templates are prescribed they have been used

Design Principles

Some courses, programs or Schools have design templates for vUWS sites which may include backgrounds, icon sets, headers and other features.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

For advice on setting up a template for your course or School contact Kathie Goldsworthy at vuws@uws.edu.au

Standard 3 - Appropriate Use of E-Learning Tools

Criterion 3.1 The tools added to the e-learning site have a clear purpose and rationale

Design Principles

Tools added to the site should be planned and should reflect how the designers want students to use e-learning in the context of the unit.

Designers should only add the tools that reflect a clear purpose and rationale and should be able to use them competently and appropriately.

For example, students are confused when discussions, chat, assessment links, and assignment drop boxes are added but not used.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

To help you decide on what tools and content students will need to support their learning, develop a plan of the structure of your site. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online > Planning your site structure*.

Criterion 3.2 Students receive instructions about how tools will be used in the site

Design Principles

The purpose and use of tools should be communicated to students so they can learn to use them effectively and efficiently.

Specific criteria related to communication tools follow (i.e. 3.3 & 3.4). Other tools such as Web Links, Assessments (including quizzes) and Assignments should have clear instructions on how and when they are to be used by students.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

To help you decide on what tools and content students will need to support their learning, develop a plan of the structure of your site. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online > Planning your site structure*.

Criterion 3.3 Communication tools are monitored and 'netiquette' standards reinforced

Design Principles

Designers are responsible for the communications in e-learning sites and should provide instructions on appropriate communication (e.g. 'netiquette').

Communications are monitored and breaches of 'netiquette' are dealt with promptly.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Add the 'online netiquette' guidelines to your site or use them as a guide to creating your own. Refer students to these guidelines for acceptable behaviour when using discussions. The guidelines are available in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Communication > Using Discussions*. Also, *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Communication > Using Chat/Whiteboard*.

It is important not to add the discussion tool to your site unless you make a commitment to monitor the discussion. By adding the 'online netiquette' guidelines to your site you are providing students with the rules for behaviour. If there are breaches of guidelines or complaints from other students please contact Kathie Goldsworthy on vuws@uws.edu.au for advice.

Interactions should be guided by existing policies on student-staff communication:

Teaching and Learning Fundamental Code online at:
<http://policies.uws.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00139>

Student Academic Misconduct Policy online at:
<http://policies.uws.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00051>

Criterion 3.4 Expectations about use of communication tools are clear to students

Design Principles

Communication tools made available to students should be used consistently for their intended purposes.

Students are confused by communication links being added with no clear instructions about how they are to be used.

Expectations regarding communications with the lecturer or tutors should be managed in terms of frequency and purpose.

'Interaction overload' (many messages being posted daily or weekly) is appropriately managed.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Design of discussion topics should involve the use of different topics for specific aspects of communication. To help you decide what communication tools to add to your site start by planning the structure of your site. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online > Planning your site structure*.

Consider the best discussion topic type:

- Threaded discussion topics allow the conversation to flow from one message to another with users being able to reply to any message posted and to see the order of the conversation.
- Blog topics are a series of messages in chronological order. Messages are commented on rather than replied to.
- Private or Public Learning Journal topics provide students with a space where they can reflect on their experiences, chronicle their learning or record their reactions to a class lecture or discussion.

Criterion 3.4 Expectations about use of communication tools are clear to students *continued*

Set up your discussion area with relevant topics. When adding a topic, also add a description so that students are aware of the purpose of the topic. Relevant topics will also help you monitor the discussions and will help students focus on topics related to learning activities. To help you administer the unit provide topics such as 'Unit Related Questions', 'Assignment Questions' etc.

If you require students to discuss a topic or an issue through online discussion it is suggested that you break a large class up into smaller discussion groups so that the discussion is not exhausted quickly and there are not too many posts. Setting up groups in your vUWS site can be done through the Group Manager. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Managing Students > About the Group Manager*.

Standard 4 - Learner Resources & Supports

Criterion 4.1 The relevance of online scholarly resources is clearly presented to students

Design Principles

Students have been informed of the presence and relevance of online scholarly resources included on their vUWS site. (e.g. library links, externally developed resources such as e-packs, learning objects or courseware).

Tips & Resources for Site Development

For advice on integrating library resources, contact your School's Liaison Librarian:
<http://library.uws.edu.au/infoContacts.phtml?case=LL>

For advice on integration of e-packs and other publisher materials contact the E-Learning Service Desk at vuws@uws.edu.au.

Criterion 4.2 Students are provided with information about what e-learning supports are available and where to find them

Design Principles

It is good practice to orientate students to e-learning sites and to inform them, either on the e-learning site or in classes, of additional e-learning student support.

All students have a link on their 'My vUWS' to 'E-Learning Student Support'. This site contains information on the use of tools (e.g. 'Communication' and 'Assessments'), browser tune-ups and where and how to get support.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Include information in the Unit Outline about how students are expected to use the e-learning site. If there are assessment tasks that students are required to complete in vUWS, provide detailed information on how to do this in the Unit Outline.

Provide an orientation to your e-learning site at the beginning of semester to give students an outline of what the vUWS site is to be used for. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > About vUWS > vUWS Student Orientation*.

Refer students to the E-Learning Student Support site and other support available to them through the E-Learning Service Desk. Refer students to links on the vUWS login page at: <http://elearning.uws.edu.au>

Criterion 4.3 Students with disabilities have been informed where to get support for e-learning accessibility issues

Design Principles

Accessibility standards refer to design features that enable access by students with disabilities. Standard 1 – ‘Organisation & Appearance’ is also relevant for accessibility.

This Standard does not list the Accessibility Standards but it is good practice to inform students either on the e-learning site or in classes that accessibility issues should be referred to the Unit Coordinator and/or the UWS Disability Service.

Tips & Resources for Site Development

Information about accessibility is available at *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Designing your vUWS site*

Students with a disability may need additional time to complete an online quiz. A copy of a quiz can be created with additional time set in and made available only to individual students through selective release. Ask the E-Learning Service Desk about these options.

Information about selective release is available in *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Managing Your Site > Using Selective Release*.

For examples of assistive technologies, search Word Help for ‘Accessibility’.

Criterion 4.4 Links to learning supports are contained in the site

Design Principles

Your e-learning site contains links in a templated footer, or elsewhere on the site, to:

- E-Learning Support
- Library
- Support Services for Students

Tips & Resources for Site Development

To help you decide on the student support services that you should add to your site start by planning the structure of your site. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Using vUWS > Teaching Online > Planning your site structure*.

Use the 'Web Links' tool in vUWS to create a specific group of support links and link to them from relevant places throughout the site. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > Learning and teaching capabilities of vUWS > Presenting Content > Adding Weblinks*.

Remember that first year students will be new to UWS and to vUWS. It is therefore important to provide an orientation to your vUWS site at the beginning of semester to give students an outline of what the vUWS site is to be used for. Refer to *E-Learning Staff Support > About vUWS > vUWS Student Orientation*.

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