







Ensuring Appropriate Student Workload in Online Courses

A Guide for Instructors

Learning is hard work. Not all work is equally effective to promoting learning. An excessive workload can actually detract from learning, or simply encourage surface rather than deep learning. Thoughtful and accurate workload planning is central to course design and delivery.

Workload related recommendations for course design and delivery

	Course Design	Course Delivery
 Communication	Plan student workload in a typical course to be on average less than 10 hours per week.	Communicate learning expectations and activities to students on a weekly basis.
 Asynchronous Lectures	50 minutes of asynchronous class time should have no more than 30 minutes of watching videos so that students can use the remainder of the time to process the knowledge (e.g., solve problems or do self-assessment).	Use low stakes self-assessment quizzes to track student learning through asynchronous content and identify students that are falling behind.
 Length of Tasks	Divide your course into weeks and estimate the total hours of workload expected for every week.	Indicate your estimated completion time for each activity and consider asking students for feedback on how long it took them to complete.
 Feedback and revisions	Critically review your course to ensure that everything is essential to the learning objectives. Clearly identify optional enrichment material.	Solicit regular student feedback from students regarding which course activities they feel are benefiting their learning.
 Distribution of deadlines	Break larger assignments into smaller pieces with interim delivery deadlines.	Make deadlines for completion of activities and assignment delivery as flexible as possible.
 Guidance	Include, where possible, guidance on managing heavy workloads such as the student guide.	Be open with students regarding the challenges of managing a heavy workload and mental well being.

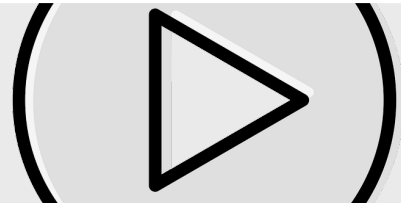
The scholarship and literature underlying this guide is described in this [supporting document](#).

Course Design Tips

1

Video Styles

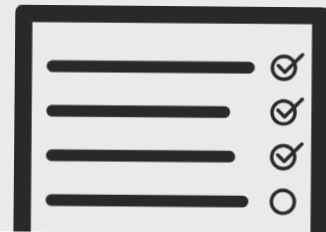
Consider various lecture styles such as videos shot in course relevant locations (e.g. workplaces, outside).



2

Workload Calculators

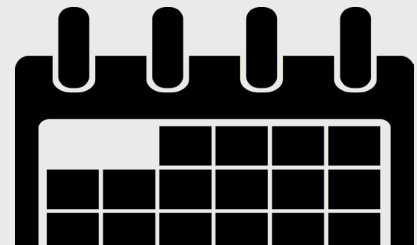
[The Beer 2019 calculator values for online courses](#) can provide estimates of the student workload in remote learning. Keep the objective workload of a course **under 10 hours/week**.



3

Divide your course into weeks

Divide your course into weekly modules on Quercus. This way, students can see the expectations for the week and better manage their time.



4

Feedback forms/surveys

Solicit regular student feedback on assessments and workload to see if students report having excessive work.



5

Streamline course work

Critically review and streamline your coursework to identify activities (e.g. reading, set of problems, quiz, assignment, etc.) and topics that can be dropped or made optional.



Course Delivery Tips

1

Communicate learning expectations and outcomes

Provide an outline to students at the start of each week (e.g., a 1-2 min video). Knowing what will be taught in a given week or lecture session helps students get a better sense of where they are in the course, where they should be at the end of the week, and how this information fits into the course.

2

Communicate your estimated time required for tasks

Give students a general idea, or range, of how long you expect a task to take.



3

Post your major deliverables on the Quercus calendar

Post your assignment here so that the student's [Quercus calendar](#) contains all important deadlines from your course on top of their other courses.

4

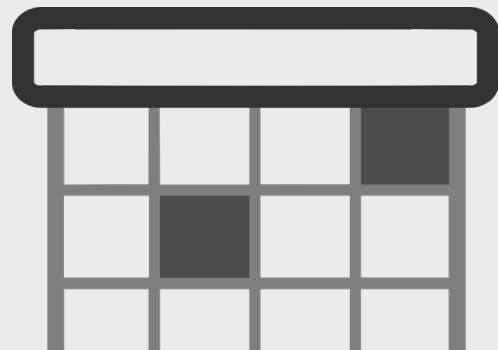
Use flexible deadlines

Where possible, provide flexibility to help students manage their workload across their courses. Consider allowing a one time only exemption for a late submission.

5

Use interim deliverables

Break larger assignments into smaller chunks, with interim deliverables spread over weeks to reduce student stress and workload, and help students stay on track. The feedback you provide at each checkpoint is central to learning as it gives students a chance to learn from misconceptions, revise their work and stay on track.



6

Be honest and encourage motivation

Consider ways to support your students' ongoing motivation throughout the course. Speak openly with your students about the challenges of being an undergraduate student, how to best manage workload and mental wellbeing, and that it is normal if they are not be able to complete all items of work perfectly.

