

WHAT ONLINE COURSES LOOK LIKE

COMMON TOOLS IN ONLINE COURSES

Your online course will be delivered to students via a learning management system, often referred to as an LMS. There are many different systems that institutions can use, such as Blackboard, Desire2Learn, Canvas, and Moodle. No matter which LMS you use, most of them offer the same set of tools commonly used for online courses. And most online courses will probably have similar structures and components.

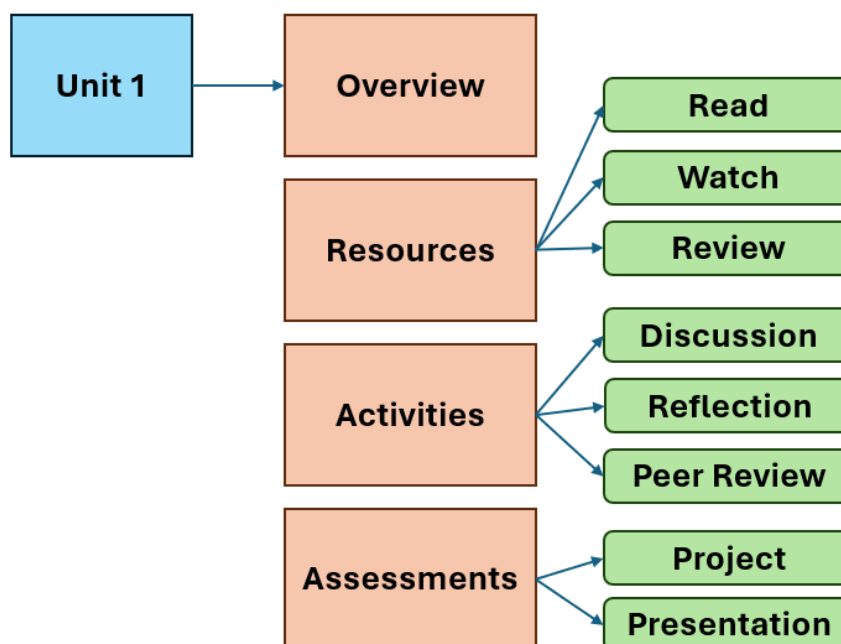
The tools most commonly used in online courses are the content area, a course calendar, discussion forums, quizzes, an assignment submission area, checklists and rubrics, and web conferencing or chat tools.

- The content area is where students will find the primary learning materials for the course.
- The course calendar, checklists, and rubrics will guide students through the course and help them meet your expectations.
- Discussion forums, and conferencing and chat tools, will foster rich student-to-student engagement.
- Assessments will be handled through the quizzes and assignment submission areas.



A TYPICAL ONLINE COURSE STRUCTURE

The structure shown here is a typical online course structure. You can organize your course by modules, units, lessons, or weeks. Students will be able to see this organization because it is clearly laid out in the content area.



Students will visit the content area very frequently because it's the heart of the course. It's where they will find all of the most important information and learning materials. The content area often begins with course syllabus information.

Similar to as in a face-to-face course, an online course syllabus contains a course introduction with the following information:

- Course information (including online communication expectations)
- Textbook details
- Faculty bio and contact information (including a bio, photos, or a short audio/video clip)
- Course calendar
- Grading policy and scheme
- Accessibility information
- Technology support
- General discussion

Unit or lesson information may contain:

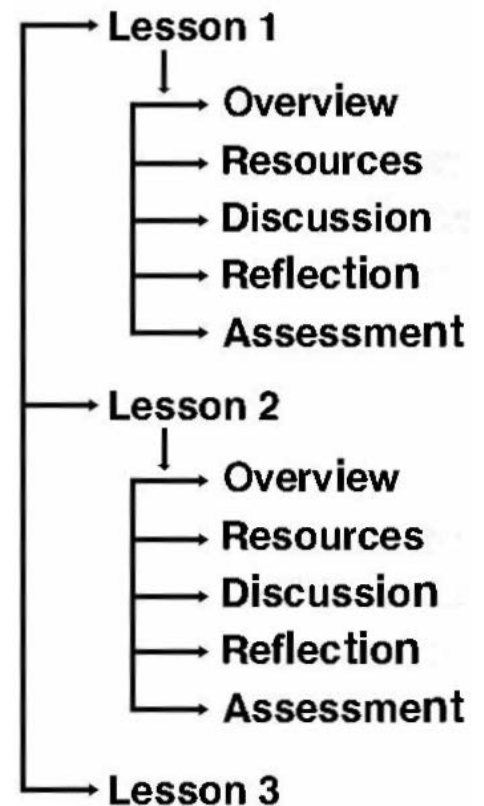
- An overview
- Learning resources
- Activities
- Assessments

Usually, course content is organized by modules, units, or lessons. Although it's not necessary to follow the same sequence as the textbook you're using, doing so can be a good way to get started when developing your first online course.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Murray, M., Pérez, J., Geist, D., Hedrick, A., & Steinbach, T. \(2012\). Student interaction with online course content: Build it and they might come. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 11, 125–140.](#)
- [Brown, A. R., & Voltz, B. D. \(2005\). Elements of effective e-learning design. *International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning*, 6\(1\), 1–8.](#)

Unit 1



Tips for an excellent online course:

- Use sample course structures. They can help you start a new online course.
- Clearly state communication expectations and course structure.
- Provide a clear road map for students to follow.