10 Principles of Learning Design (2026)

	[1] We design for constructive alignment	[2] We design to harness authoritative voices	[3] We design culturally responsive learning	[4] We design for the learner's context	[5] We design for digital futures
Interpretation for a Distance Learning Context	**We adopt constructive alignment**[1] as a foundational concept, in which the first step is to define measurable intended learning outcomes (ILOs), followed by assessment designed to enable learners to evidence their ability to meet those outcomes. Finally, learning and teaching activities are designed to support learners in this endeavour. Designing in an iterative loop, including feedback, and we ensure the learning is both teachable and learnable. **We create objectives** to organise the learning at topic and activity level, thereby enabling learners to evidence their attainment of the learning outcomes. This ensures alignment and the answer to the perennial question: *"Why am I being asked to do this?"*. **We design authentic and concise assessment** tasks and transparent rubrics aligned directly to the ILOs without explicit reference to the course materials.	**We work with academics and subject matter experts** to ensure that our learning materials are current, accurate, and future-focused.[2] **We listen to multiple voices** and hear what the learner needs are, paying attention to learners' evaluative comments and stakeholder expectations. **We ensure courseware is designed to be appropriately facilitated**, without forcing the learner to engage unless outcomes explicitly require it.[3] We enable, although do not always require, an effective learning-teaching conversation to occur, fulfilling the personal connection and need for support that many Open Distance Flexible Learning (ODFL) learners require.	**We design for learning that reflects our specific cultural context**. This means being conscious of the diverse epistemological approaches reflected in Indigenous Peoples of our lands as well as the broader context of multiculturalism. **We ensure culturally responsive designs** by applying an approved institutional framework to ensure culturally appropriate learning materials. Our designs support the reflections of our learners. **We make the cultural perspectives present in the courseware evident**. While it is not always possible to interpret learning experiences through multiple cultural lenses, we will make evident the lens taken and encourage learners to reflect on their own perspectives and those held by others.	**We design for context and not cohort** unless there is a specific accreditation requirement. **We structure learning to be experienced by individuals as and when they need it.**[4] A context-focused approach puts the onus on us to design learning that is directly relevant to the learner in their own setting, social and or professional, encouraging them to leverage a wide range of professional networks and social engagements to support them in their learning journey. **We design for emerging patterns of learning facilitation**. We work with partners to define the best context for learners, enabling them to situate their learning in real-world contexts when required. Where we do not have sufficient expertise, we work with others to inform and validate our designs.	**We design for the contemporary learner,** aware of the changing patterns in digital and information literacies amongst our learners, distinguishing between the digital capabilities across disciplines and levels of study. **We design for digital versatility,** acknowledging that learners expect to be able to access learning at any time and in any place, increasingly making use of mobile devices to support their learning.[5] Our emphasis on digital design means we strive for digital innovation in learning and creating courseware that is learner focused, engaging, and personalized. **We adopt appropriate and available tools** that highlight the newest pedagogies in technology-enhanced learning. We take account of the opportunities and challenges associated with Generative Artificial Intelligence.
	[6] We design applied learning	[7] We design for learner autonomy	[8] We design with a view to the evolving nature of work	[9] We design to enable academic and learner analytics	[10] We design for renewal and reuse
Interpretation for a Distance Learning Context	**We support learners** in their professional and vocational advancement, and their desire for social enhancement. **We encourage learners** to be informed and free-thinking individuals and enable them to make a contribution to a global society. **We champion clearly articulated outcomes**, in the form of concise and precise Graduate Profile Outcomes (GPOs) and enhance their development through well-articulated ILOs, often broadening the learning journey to encompass a wide range of competencies designed to reflect a broad range of personal and professional skills.[6]	**We allow the learner to define their own route**, fully informed as to the professional and academic requirements of their validated learning. We do not restrict the learner to our planned pathway. Learning is structured so that learners can review early learning and teaching activities and determine their own competence,[7] empowering learners to decide whether to take foundational topics or move forward through their learning. **We acknowledge the social and cultural context of our learners**[8] and support them to orientate themselves as autonomous learners embracing their future as lifelong learners, sharing and engaged with their community. **We encourage the learner to personalise their learning experience**; We do this by drawing on the professional and social context of the learner in their study and their assessment.	**We design in light of the changing nature of work**, shifting patterns of employment and the evolving needs of professions. Our designs are informed through scholarly review, an on-going consultancy with professional representatives and learners' evaluation of their learning experiences. **We anticipate the future in our** designs, including the impact of technological and broader societal changes on the nature of work within a particular discipline.[9] **We design for the future,** by anticipating the changing needs of students, stakeholders, and advancements in technology. We do this by actively engaging with current practice-based evidence in research and the global market.	**We structure learning within optimally defined and responsive pathways,**[10] allowing learners to support their choices for advancing speedily through courseware or revisiting earlier studies, where academic regulations allow this. **We establish touch-points for supportive intervention**, structuring the learning journey in such a way as to trace the learners' engagement. These touchpoints are respectful of learners' ownership of their data. **We design courses that will be able to incorporate emerging online learning practices**. We do this by anticipating the introduction of adaptive learning technologies and supportive analytics that guide the learner to success.	**We ensure that each assessable ILO is mapped appropriately**. Mapping ILOs to GPOs and establishing a hierarchy of non-assessed learning objectives makes it possible to redeploy existing resources across courses and programmes. **We design learning that is meta-tagged and recoverable.**[11] **We link intelligently to selected curated resources**. We work collectively to meet the need for continuous updating and maintenance of content, acknowledging that our designs are never 100% complete.

[1] John Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*, 3rd ed. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2007).

[2] Börje Holmberg, "Guided Didactic Conversation in Distance Education," in *Distance Education: International Perspectives*, ed. David Sewart, Desmond Keegan, and Börje Holmberg (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 114–22.

[3] Diana Laurillard, *Rethinking University Teaching: A Conversational Framework for the Effective Use of Learning Technologies*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge Falmer, 2002).)

[4] Rosemary Luckin, *Re-Designing Learning Contexts : Technology-Rich, Learner-Centred Ecologies* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[5] Janet MacDonald and Linda Creanor, *Learning with Online and Mobile Technologies: A Student Survival Guide* (Routledge Ltd, 2017).

[6] Simon P. Atkinson, "Graduate Competencies, Employability and Educational Taxonomies: Critique of Intended Learning Outcomes," *Practice and Evidence of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 10, no. 2 (July 9, 2015): 154–77.

[7] Simon P. Atkinson, "Embodied and Embedded Theory in Practice: The Student-Owned Learning-Engagement (SOLE) Model," *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 12, no. 2 (February 2011): 1–18.

[8] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "The 'What' and 'Why' of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior," *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (2000): 227–68, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01.

[9] Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind, *The Future of the Professions: How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts*, Reprint edition (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2017).

[10] Bart Rienties et al., "The Role of Scaffolding and Motivation in CSCL," *Computers & Education* 59, no. 3 (November 2012): 893–906, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.04.010.

[11] Allison Littlejohn, ed., *Reusing Online Resources: A Sustainable Approach to e-Learning*, Open & Flexible Learning Series (London ; Sterling, VA: Kogan Page, 2003).