Self-assessment tool for self-paced learning materials



Version 0.8

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# Purpose of this tool

Technologically mediated learning has been around for many years, but the use of such approaches has become much more common following the COVID19 pandemic. Done well such learning can be cost effective and deliver high quality learning outcomes, especially when used as part of a wider approach to teaching (Hosie et al., 2005).

In an article from 1987, “Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” Chickering and Gamson (1987) considered a range of research on university teaching and identified seven core principles:

1. Encourage contact between students and staff.
2. Develop reciprocity, communication and cooperation between students.
3. Promote active learning techniques.
4. Give quality and timely feedback.
5. Be clear about how long students should spend on tasks.
6. Set high, but reasonable expectations of students.
7. Respect different ways of learning.

These principles are just as valid in today’s online, internet enabled world and when considering self-paced learning materials. For the purposes of this evaluation tool, the areas of accessibility of materials and consideration of module and University aims and objectives have been added, and the seven core principles condensed to keep the tool manageable.

This tool is intended for a rapid review of online learning materials presented for students to use at their own pace (self-paced materials). It is intended for use by module leaders, staff and independent reviewers. The tool should assist in producing high quality and accessible content.

It is primarily aimed at materials presented via Minerva but is also useful for other platforms.

The tool is concerned with self-paced learning materials. It does not cover wider issues such as technical IT platforms, pedagogy, module aims etc., nor lectures, seminars and workshops that are not self-paced.

The intention is for a rapid assessment of self-paced materials that can be used by module staff to make improvements and ensure high quality materials are presented to students. It does not replace any formal evaluation methods in use by the University of Leeds.

# General points on good practice

**Provide choice** – Students welcome a choice of how to engage with self-paced materials and enjoy having a variety of content to choose from that ideally reflects their specific knowledge, interests and needs. Providing this choice is a key part of their transition to becoming self-directed learners (Bonk and Cummings, 1998). Wherever possible self-paced learning materials should provide clearly signposted choices over content, style and medium (video, text etc).

**Provide answers (but not too swiftly).** Students value clear accurate feedback as well as model answers to questions. However they should be allowed to wrestle with problems on their own or in groups initially, before a lecturer’s particular world-view or approach is provided as this can stifle conversation and interaction. (Bonk and Cummings, 1998).

**Provide personalisation** - Using activities where students can build on their own existing personal knowledge rather than an imposed framework will improve learning outcomes (Bonk and Cummings, 1998).

**Provide high quality content**. Be reflective on what external content is used, both in terms of volume and medium. The web has an apparently infinite range of videos, books, blogs and pictures on almost every possible subject, and it is all too easy to select external content that is slick and well produced, without necessarily considering how it links to learning outcomes. Similarly, not everything needs to be explained in a five minute video, when a short paragraph could convey the same meaning. “We may be swayed by professional-style, longer lecture-style videos and disappointed by brief “bare bones” videos of instructors discussing course concepts. Flashy presentation skills can mask a lack of … subject knowledge” (Tobin, 2018 p243).

**Provide accessible content**. The best content in the world is useless if students cannot access it, cannot see past outdated cultural references, or simply give up if accessing material takes too long.

**Provide feedback opportunities**. Ensure that there are opportunities for student feedback throughout, not just at the end of the module. Each learning cohort will be different, and ensuring that students can raised concerns early will allow changes to teaching and materials in response to student input (Tobin, 2018).

# How to use the tool

The tool comprises this overview and guidance document, with the actual checklists provided as an appendix.

## Who should use it?

Although this tool is suitable for module staff to use to self-evaluate, it is arguably more useful as a tool for an independent peer review and part of the quality assurance process for module materials.

The person doing the evaluation needs full access to all the self-paced materials and would benefit from a familiarity with the area being taught.

## How does this tool fit in with other evaluation approaches?

This tool should be used alongside other ways of evaluating content, including student feedback, reviews of teaching inputs (whether online or in person), end of module assessments, formal evaluations of learning outcomes etc. No single evaluation method is likely to be sufficient in isolation.

# Copyright

Parts of this tool are adapted from Penn State University under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) for non-commercial use.

This tool can likewise be used under the same license for non-commercial use. The author would love to hear how you have used this and adapted it for your own purposes, and to receive feedback on how to improve it – email [bnjlp@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:bnjlp@leeds.ac.uk).

# The tool

This tool covers five broad headings:

1. **Aims and objectives**. Do the materials support the learning outcomes and reflect the values of the University of Leeds?
2. **Learning Styles and Pedagogy**. Are the materials interesting, relevant and learner centric, whilst reflecting different ways of learning?
3. **Relevance**. Are the materials up to date and relevant to students. Are the materials chosen with a clear purpose?
4. **Accessibility and Inclusivity**. If some students cannot access the materials effectively or cannot relate to them it does not matter how good they are. Are the materials easily accessed by all students, and do they reflect a diverse set of views?
5. **Feedback and Communication**. Are there opportunities for students to receive feedback, discuss the course with other students and with module staff, and see examples of high-quality answers to key questions?

For each area there is a description and examples of what to look for. These areas are developed primarily from Tobin (2018), Taylor (2020) and Hosie et al. (2005).

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| **SECTION A: Aims and Objectives** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** |
| 1. Do the self-paced materials support and reflect the module goals, content and learning plans? | The place of the self-paced materials in the module and expectations of students are clear. | Minerva has information on the module, assessments, self-paced materials and requirements for lectures etc.  There are explicit links made between the learning outcomes, self-paced materials, activities and assessments.  Students can see why the self-paced materials have been chosen and how they support the overall learning outcomes for the module.  All module Instructions are consistent and clear. Where present materials such as module handbooks, overviews etc are all consistent. |
| 1. Do all the materials reflect the corporate style and values of the University? | All material is in a style and of a quality and standard that reflects the corporate style of the University of Leeds. | Module materials are laid out consistently from week to week, both in terms of location and style.  Self-paced material is of a high quality and content that reflect the values of the University.  Any university or faculty style should not determine the correct pedagogical approach.  Fonts, colours, layout etc, should conform to the University style where possible, (but alternatives should be possible when needed for example by those with visual impairments). |
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| **SECTION B: Learning styles and Pedagogy** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** |
| 1. Are the materials engaging and interesting? | Learning materials are challenging and provide motivation for students to complete them. | Materials are interesting and appropriately complex, rather than simply presenting theory without context.  Where possible activities are designed to encourage engagement and student interest rahter than only passive watching or reading.  Activities are designed to arouse students’ curiosity and their own interests around and beyond the subject matter.  Expectations on which activities are essential to be completed (before a specific lecture or seminar for example) are clearly laid out.  Materials that use contemporary elements such as case studies, TV shows, films, memes, music etc are sufficiently up to date to be relevant and relatable to students. |
| 1. Do the material and activities consist of authentic ‘real-world’ tasks? | Activities reflect how the knowledge will be used in real world situations. | Materials use real-world contexts that are relevant and up to date.  Activities are based in workplace settings to assist in future employability.    Tasks are suitably complex and of an appropriate length to represent real-world experience. |
| 1. Are the materials learner-centred? | The materials aim to foster student learning rather simply ‘dumping’ information. | Activities are designed to support and develop students’ metacognitive skills.  Activities involve one or more of the following:   * Opportunities for self-expression, (including but ideally more than) active writing, and speaking. * Students gathering, synthesising, and analysing their own data to solve problems. * Opportunities to use resources such as the library, internet, other computerised sources, online databases, open-source materials, social media networks etc to build skills of reasoning and interpretation as well as a healthy scepticism of sources and potential bias. * Consideration of alternative points of view and differing cultures. * Development of academic skills such as reseach, referencing, integrity etc. * Activities that move students away from their computers such as interviewing experts, photographing examples in the real world, etc. |
| 1. Do activities include opportunities for joint working and student peer support? | Self-paced materials include opportunities for students to work jointly and produce content that couldn’t be produced individually. | Activities involve different ways of interaction and collaboration with other students.  Opportunities for peer-evaluation of work and the development of mutual support networks.  Informal ‘buddy’ approaches to ensure no learners are left behind, especially those who have English as a second language or have additional needs.  Students are asked to report back to the class.  Opportunities for students to create and suggest learning materials. |
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| **SECTION C: Relevance** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** |
| 1. Are the materials current and relevant? | Materials are up to date and relevant, (although this will vary by subject matter). | Resources and materials are current and reflect a recent review of the literature.  Primary sources are cited wherever possible.  All materials are cited correctly. |
| 1. Are the materials rich and broad? | Materials reflect a wide selection of viewpoints, including conflicting views where appropriate. | Materials present a range of views, including conflicting views, to allow students an opportunity to assess opposing arguments.  Students are encouraged to  establish their own evidenced views on contentious matters.  Materials do not shy away from sensitive and contentious material where this is appropriate and relevant.  Where a module deals with emerging and changing issues, the self-paced materials are updated and refreshed as often as needed to remain valid and relevant.  A range of media are used to enrich data sources and provide further context and detail. |
| 1. Are the materials chosen for a clear learning purpose? | Materials (and the media they are presented through) are suitable for the intended purpose, and not overly complex of ‘flashy’ for no purpose. | A range of media are used as appropriate, not simply to provide ‘variety’, but to support learning outcomes.    Simply providing presentations or large amounts of text on screen should be the exception rather than the rule.  Complicated multi-media presentations should be avoided where a simpler approach may be sufficient. |
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| **SECTION D: Accessibility and Inclusivity** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** |
| 1. Are all the provided materials accessible? | All materials meet appropriate standards to be accessible for all students. | External web sites are accessible to all students, including those who may need assistive technologies.  The module requirements and access to essential resources are made explicit to students well in advance.  Students are not hampered by firewalls or geographically sensitive restrictions as far as possible.  Appropriate contact details are provided for any clarification required on accessibility requirements for individuals. |
| 1. Are the materials clearly indexed and easily findable? | Materials are organised to make them easily located. | Materials are clearly and consistently indexed to allow students to easily refer back to earlier material.  Resources are accessible in a non-linear format.  Resources are separate from learning tasks for ease of later reference. |
| 1. Are the materials inclusive of a variety of cultural perspectives? | Materials take account of different social, cultural, and gender perspectives. | Materials include a variety of cultural perspectives where possible.  Materials avoid gender and culturally exclusive terms unless these are critical to the content. |
| 1. Are the materials presented on a reliable and robust platform? | Access to the materials is reliable and error free. | All web sites used are able to be accessed reliably. Where passwords and user accounts are required, these are clearly available to students.  Navigation between pages is effective (both forwards and backwards) and students can ‘orient’ themselves in a section to see where the current page sits in the wider activity. |
| 1. Are the materials appropriate to varying bandwidth capacities? | Materials are accessible to those with slower internet access without lengthy delays. | Content is checked for overly large file sizes or elements that may not download correctly.  Where large file sizes are required, this is clearly signposted in advance and alternatives provided wherever possible. |
| 1. Do the materials respect diverse ways of learning? | Where possible allow for multiple ways to learn and benefit from the materials to reflect differences in individual learning styles. | Provide multiple ways for students to achieve results and complete assignments, such as written, audio, video etc. to allow them to demonstrate their progress in a way that matches their skills and interests.  Encourage students to respond to class discussions using a variety of media.  Materials allow a range of individual learning paths where possible rather than a rigid order to follow.  Any assessment tools are appropriate to measure student progress in multiple ways.  Additional background material is available to students who may lack prior learning or knowledge. |

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| **SECTION E: Feedback and Communication** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** |
| 1. Do module staff provide opportunities for frequent feedback from students? | Timely feedback assists students to assess their knowledge and reflect on their learning. | Options for students to submit early drafts of assignments for feedback.  Feedback on activities is provided in a timely manner.  Assignment feedback is clear, positive, specific, and focused on observed changeable behaviour.  Open discussion facilities where students and module staff can ask and answer questions about course content and materials.    Feedback from student surveys is used to improve the module materials. |
| 1. Is there ongoing communication between module staff and students? | There are opportunities for dialogue between module staff and students. | At the start of the module a welcome message is provided that includes video or images of all the teaching staff on the module. This message should encourage students to contact module staff for module related issues or concerns.  Clear ways of staff contact are set out and adhered to (for example regular online “office hours”).  A maximum time to respond to emails and other communications is published and adhered to  Where there are changes or news, updates are provided in a single place on a regular basis. This should include upcoming deadlines, comments on marked assignments etc. |
| 1. Is there ongoing communication between student peers? | There are opportunities for dialogue between students. | Both the facility for regular student to student communication and the encouragement to use these facilities for topics such as:   * Formal and/or informal discussions of course topics. * Collaborative assignments. * Self-organised study and support groups. * Opportunities to meet each other at the module start and end to encourage personal connections. * Sharing of student’s portfolios, web sites, blogs and other such material. * Discussion prompts to facilitate in class discussion activities. |
| 1. Are estimated times to complete self-paced learning clear and accurate? | All activities should have accurate estimates of time required to complete to allow students to plan effectively. | Students have clear and accurate estimates of how long activities will take.  Estimated times that students would normally spend on all course activities.  The progress of the whole class towards overall and milestone goals is communicated regularly.  The published course schedule and topics is clear and allows students to plan their own work. |
| 1. Are there examples of high quality completed tasks? | Students benefit from examples of tasks completed to a high standard, once they have had a chance to attempt the task themselves. | Samples of ‘good’ work are provided to allow students to gauge their own progress towards the learning objectives.  Provide examples of student work that is exceptional or provides a unique perspective (with approval of the student involved). |

# References and Further sources

## Further Sources

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/>. Guidance and information on making online materials accessible. Includes detailed guidance and examples of failure, in a range of areas including text, video, audio materials, under four main headings: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust.

Penn State University guidance for online teaching resources - <https://facdev.e-education.psu.edu>. Detailed guidance for all stages of online course development from design to evaluation. Acknowledgement is given to the influence of their guidance on the development of this tool.

Online Learning Consortium Quality Framework - <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/about/quality-framework-five-pillars/>. A detailed set of resources for implementing a quality framework for online learning resources, under four pillars: Learning Effectiveness, Scale, Access, Faculty satisfaction and Student Satisfaction.

## Leeds University resources

Inclusive teaching guidance and resources <https://studenteddev.leeds.ac.uk/developing-practice/inclusive-teaching/>. Includes guidance on accessibility.

## References

Bonk, C.J. and Cummings, J.A. 1998. A Dozen Recommendations for Placing the Student at the Centre of Web-Based Learning. *Educational media international.* **35**(2), pp.82-89.

Chickering, A.W. and Gamson, Z.F. 1987. Seven Principles For Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. *AAHE Bulletin.* pp.3-7.

Hosie, P., Schibeci, R. and Backhaus, A. 2005. A framework and checklists for evaluating online learning in higher education. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education.* **30**(5), pp.539-553.

Taylor, A.H. 2020. *Faculty Peer Review of Online Teaching.* [Online]. [Accessed 29/06/2021]. Available from: <https://facdev.e-education.psu.edu/evaluate-revise/peerreviewonline>

Tobin, T. 2018. The eLearning Leader’s Toolkit for Evaluating Online Teaching. In: Piña, A.A., et al. eds. *Leading and Managing e-Learning What the e-Learning Leader Needs to Know.*  Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, p.235.

**Module/Materials reviewed:**

**Reviewer(s)**

**Date Reviewed:**

**Date submitted to Module Leader:**

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| **SECTION A: Aims and Objectives** | | | | **Feedback for Module Staff for completion by reviewer(s)** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** | **Where to look for evidence** | **Rate**  **(Usually, Sometimes, Rarely)** | **Strengths**  **Include examples of good practice here.** | **Areas for Improvement**  **Include areas and examples where there may be some need for improvement here. Be sure to be clear about the issue and ways it could be addressed.** |
| 1. Do the self-paced materials support and reflect the module goals, content and learning plans? | The place of the self-paced materials in the module and expectations of students are clear. | Minerva has information on the module, assessments, self-paced materials and requirements for lectures etc.  There are explicit links made between the learning outcomes, self-paced materials, activities and assessments.  Students can see why the self-paced materials have been chosen and how they support the overall learning outcomes for the module.  All module Instructions are consistent and clear. Where present materials such as module handbooks, overviews etc are all consistent. | Module overview page.  Learning outcomes are set out in each set of learning materials. |  |  |  |
| 1. Do all the materials reflect the corporate style and values of the University? | All material is in a style and of a quality and standard that reflects the corporate style of the University of Leeds. | Module materials are laid out consistently from week to week, both in terms of location and style.  Self-paced material is of a high quality and content that reflect the values of the University.  Any university or faculty style should not determine the correct pedagogical approach.  Fonts, colours, layout etc, should conform to the University style where possible, (but alternatives should be possible when needed for example by those with visual impairments). |  |  |  |  |
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| **SECTION B: Learning styles and Pedagogy** | | | | **Feedback for Module Staff for completion by reviewer(s)** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** | **Where to look for evidence** | **Rate**  **(Usually, Sometimes, Rarely)** | **Strengths**  **Include examples of good practice here.** | **Areas for Improvement**  **Include areas and examples where there may be some need for improvement here. Be sure to be clear about the issue and ways it could be addressed.** |
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| 1. Do the material and activities consist of authentic ‘real-world’ tasks? | Activities reflect how the knowledge will be used in real world situations. | Materials use real-world contexts that are relevant and up to date.  Activities are based in workplace settings to assist in future employability.    Tasks are suitably complex and of an appropriate length to represent real-world experience. | Learning materials  Discussion boards |  |  |  |
| 1. Are the materials learner-centred? | The materials aim to foster student learning rather simply ‘dumping’ information. | Activities are designed to support and develop students’ metacognitive skills.  Activities involve one or more of the following:   * Opportunities for self-expression, (including but ideally more than) active writing, and speaking. * Students gathering, synthesising, and analysing their own data to solve problems. * Opportunities to use resources such as the library, internet, other computerised sources, online databases, open-source materials, social media networks etc to build skills of reasoning and interpretation as well as a healthy scepticism of sources and potential bias. * Consideration of alternative points of view and differing cultures. * Development of academic skills such as reseach, referencing, integrity etc. * Activities that move students away from their computers such as interviewing experts, photographing examples in the real world, etc. | Learning materials  Discussion boards |  |  |  |
| 1. Do activities include opportunities for joint working and student peer support? | Self-paced materials include opportunities for students to work jointly and produce content that couldn’t be produced individually. | Activities involve different ways of interaction and collaboration with other students.  Opportunities for peer-evaluation of work and the development of mutual support networks.  Informal ‘buddy’ approaches to ensure no learners are left behind, especially those who have English as a second language or have additional needs.  Students are asked to report back to the class.  Opportunities for students to create and suggest learning materials. |  |  |  |  |
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| **SECTION C: Relevance** | | | | **Feedback for Module Staff for completion by reviewer(s)** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** | **Where to look for evidence** | **Rate**  **(Usually, Sometimes, Rarely)** | **Strengths**  **Include examples of good practice here.** | **Areas for Improvement**  **Include areas and examples where there may be some need for improvement here. Be sure to be clear about the issue and ways it could be addressed.** |
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| 1. Are the materials rich and broad? | Materials reflect a wide selection of viewpoints, including conflicting views where appropriate. | Materials present a range of views, including conflicting views, to allow students an opportunity to assess opposing arguments.  Students are encouraged to  establish their own evidenced views on contentious matters.  Materials do not shy away from sensitive and contentious material where this is appropriate and relevant.  Where a module deals with emerging and changing issues, the self-paced materials are updated and refreshed as often as needed to remain valid and relevant.  A range of media are used to enrich data sources and provide further context and detail. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Are the materials provided for a clear purpose? | Materials (and the media they are presented through) are suitable for the intended purpose, and not overly complex of ‘flashy’ for no purpose. | A range of media are used as appropriate, not simply to provide ‘variety’, but to support learning outcomes.    Simply providing presentations or large amounts of text on screen should be the exception rather than the rule.  Complicated multi-media presentations should be avoided where a simpler approach may be sufficient. |  |  |  |  |
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| **SECTION D: Accessibility** | | | | **Feedback for Module Staff for completion by reviewer(s)** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** | **Where to look for evidence** | **Rate**  **(Usually, Sometimes, Rarely)** | **Strengths**  **Include examples of good practice here.** | **Areas for Improvement**  **Include areas and examples where there may be some need for improvement here. Be sure to be clear about the issue and ways it could be addressed.** |

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| 1. Are the materials clearly indexed and easily findable? | Materials are organised to make them easily located. | Materials are clearly and consistently indexed to allow students to easily refer back to earlier material.  Resources are accessible in a non-linear format.  Resources are separate from learning tasks for ease of later reference. |  |  |  |  |
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| 1. Are the materials presented on a reliable and robust platform? | Access to the materials is reliable and error free. | All web sites used are able to be accessed reliably. Where passwords and user accounts are required, these are clearly available to students.  Navigation between pages is effective (both forwards and backwards) and students can ‘orient’ themselves in a section to see where the current page sits in the wider activity. |  |  |  |  |
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| 1. Do the materials respect diverse ways of learning? | Where possible allow for multiple ways to learn and benefit from the materials to reflect differences in individual learning styles. | Provide multiple ways for students to achieve results and complete assignments, such as written, audio, video etc. to allow them to demonstrate their progress in a way that matches their skills and interests.  Encourage students to respond to class discussions using a variety of media.  Materials allow a range of individual learning paths where possible rather than a rigid order to follow.  Any assessment tools are appropriate to measure student progress in multiple ways.  Additional background material is available to students who may lack prior learning or knowledge. |  |  |  |  |
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| **SECTION E: Learning styles and Pedagogy** | | | | **Feedback for Module Staff for completion by reviewer(s)** | | |
| **Question** | **Description** | **Examples of evidence to look for** | **Where to look for evidence** | **Rate**  **(Usually, Sometimes, Rarely)** | **Strengths**  **Include examples of good practice here.** | **Areas for Improvement**  **Include areas and examples where there may be some need for improvement here. Be sure to be clear about the issue and ways it could be addressed.** |

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| 1. Do module staff provide opportunities for frequent feedback from students? | Timely feedback assists students to assess their knowledge and reflect on their learning. | Options for students to submit early drafts of assignments for feedback.  Feedback on activities is provided in a timely manner.  Assignment feedback is clear, positive, specific, and focused on observed changeable behaviour.  Open discussion facilities where students and module staff can ask and answer questions about course content and materials.    Feedback from student surveys is used to improve the module materials. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Is there ongoing communication between module staff and students? | There are opportunities for dialogue between module staff and students. | At the start of the module a welcome message is provided that includes video or images of all the teaching staff on the module. This message should encourage students to contact module staff for module related issues or concerns.  Clear ways of staff contact are set out and adhered to (for example regular online “office hours”).  A maximum time to respond to emails and other communications is published and adhered to  Where there are changes or news, updates are provided in a single place on a regular basis. This should include upcoming deadlines, comments on marked assignments etc. |  |  |  |  |
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| 1. Are estimated times to complete self-paced learning clear and accurate? | All activities should have accurate estimates of time required to complete to allow students to plan effectively. | Students have clear and accurate estimates of how long activities will take.  Estimated times that students would normally spend on all course activities.  The progress of the whole class towards overall and milestone goals is communicated regularly.  The published course schedule and topics is clear and allows students to plan their own work. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Are there examples of high quality completed tasks? | Students benefit from examples of tasks completed to a high standard, once they have had a chance to attempt the task themselves. | Samples of ‘good’ work are provided to allow students to gauge their own progress towards the learning objectives.  Provide examples of student work that is exceptional or provides a unique perspective (with approval of the student involved). |  |  |  |  |