# ONLINE COURSE HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS

A Guide to Online Course Development January 2024



## How to Use this Guide

This workbook is designed to be both a self-assessment tool and a support for online course high quality review and design teams. Faculty, Instructional Designers, and Curriculum Designers use this Guide for recommendations on designing and building high quality online courses that meet Florida's new quality standards (Quality Matters) as well as federal laws for financial aid and accreditation requirements. Note that each standard is mapped to the corresponding Quality Matters standard (QM) or to the federal and state requirement.

### The High-Quality Standards

- Standard 1: Course Introduction/Orientation: Sets course tone, provides expectations, and offers guidance for success.
- Standard 2: Course Alignment and Organization: Course design standards that support student engagement
- Standard 3: Course Content (Curriculum)
- Standard 4: Course Activities and Teaching Strategies
- Standard 5: Assignments, Projects, and Graded Events
- Standard 6: Course Assessments
- Standard 7: Evaluation and Feedback
- Standard 8: Communication
- Standard 9: Course Technology and Skills
- Standard 10: Course Accessibility

### Review your Course to See if it Meets Florida's High-Quality Standards

- 1. Read the specific standard.
- 2. Review the examples.
- 3. Look for evidence that the specific standard is met in your course.
- 4. Decide if the standard is met.
- 5. Put the appropriate score in the scoring area.
- 6. In the Reviewer Recommendations area:
  - a. If yes, write the location of where and how the standard is met.
  - b. If no, make a note of what is needed to meet the standard.

### Scoring

There are 73 quality standards. Each standard is scored from 1 – 3 points. Total points possible: 184

- Forty-five 3-point standards = essential
- Twenty-one 2-point standards = very important
- Seven 1-point standards = important

### High Quality Achievement

To achieve high quality course status:

- All three-point, essential standards must be met.
- The total course score must be 156 (85%) or greater.

# Scoring Standards that are Not Applicable or Present in a Course.

This rubric is point based. Under certain circumstances, a course may not have a specific standard. For example, a course may not use a publisher or audio files. This specifically applies to individual standards associated with Standards 3, 6, and 10. To ensure an accurate score.

- Award full points in the Score section.
- In the recommendation section, note that this item does not apply to the course or is not a feature.

### Scoring Standard 3: Publisher Content

Standard 3 is devoted to Course Content (Curriculum). Two essential standards are related to publisher content. Standard 3.6 addresses the Customization of Publisher Content. Standard 3.7 covers adding new content to existing publisher content. If the course does not feature publisher content, award full points for the standard. In the recommendation section, indicate that this standard does not apply to the course as it does not use publisher content.

## Scoring Standard 6: Publisher Assessments

Standard 6: Course Assessments includes Standard 6.6 which explores Publisher Assessments.

If the course does not feature publisher assessments, award full points for the standard. In the recommendations section, indicate that this standard does not apply to the course as the course does not use publisher assessments.

### Scoring Standard 10: Accessibility

Within Standard 10, all individual standards are considered essential. However, a course may not feature a specific item or content type. This can include accessible Video and Multimedia (A. 2), Audio (A.3), Images (A.4), Tables (A.6), and Charts/Graphs (A.7). In addition, a course may or may not feature the Microsoft Word Documents (A.10), PowerPoint Presentations (A.11), or PDF Documents (A.12).

If the course does not feature specific content, award full points for the standard. In the recommendations section, indicate that this standard does not apply to the course as the item is not present.

Standard 1: Course Introduction/Orientation	Points (29)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
1.1 Course Starting Point & Instructions (QM 1.1)	3	Instructions for starting the course are clearly stated; consider a "Start Here" or "Read Me First" section on the course home page or as the first module of the course.		
1.2 Overview of Course Organization (QM 1.1)	3	The overview should include the location of key components, access to major course items including the Calendar, Modules, Syllabus, Announcements, etc.		
		Use the course navigation links included in the LMS. Hide the navigation links not used in the course.		
		Examples include a course orientation video, course scavenger hunt with quiz, syllabus review and quiz, document with instructions, PPT with instructions.		
1.3 Course Purpose Statement (QM 1.2)	3	Consider including a course purpose statement in the syllabus; indicate how the course relates to previous or future courses; include the broad learning goals for the course		
1.4 Course Grading Policy (QM 3.2)	3	NOTE: The course grading policy must be clearly stated in the syllabus. Include a list of all graded items, points, weights, etc.		
1.5 Accessibility Services (QM 7.2)	3	Consider including accessibility information in the course syllabus or as a separate page in the orientation module.  Examples include links to the web pages for the campus offices of services for students with disabilities, college accessibility policy, instructions for how to obtain accessibility services, etc.		

Standard 1: Course Introduction/Orientation	Points (29)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
1.6 Academic Support Services (QM 7.3, QM 7.4)	3	Consider including support service information in the course syllabus or as a separate page in the course orientation module.		
		Include email addresses, phone numbers, links to SharePoint pages, office locations, and other relevant information for contact.		
		Examples include testing center, tutoring services, library information, student computer lab locations, math and writing labs.		
1.7 First Week Requirement (SACS, Federal Requirement for Financial Aid)	3	Students must establish a record of participation in academic-related activities to comply with the first week's participation requirement required to receive federal financial aid.		
		NOTE: Logging into the course and not completing an activity or graded item does not meet the first week requirement needed for federal financial aid.		
		Examples include a syllabus quiz, discussion, assignment, exam, or other academic activity.		
1.8 Home Page (QM 1.1)	2	Create a welcoming home page; do not overwhelm students with a cluttered page.		
		Provide only essential information that allows students to begin the course. Include the course prefix, number, and title.		
1.9 College and Course Policies (QM 1.4)	2	Consider including course and college policies in the course syllabus.		
		Examples include policies for academic integrity, late assignments, test proctoring, accessibility requirements, student conduct,		

Standard 1: Course Introduction/Orientation	Points (29)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		emergency policies, and all policies associated with the course.		
1.10 Prerequisite Knowledge (QM 1.7)	1	Consider including prerequisite courses, knowledge, and skills in the course syllabus.		
		Examples include discipline-specific knowledge/skills; general skills needed; and recommended skills to enhance success in your course.		
1.11 Instructor Introduction (QM 1.8)	1	Examples include an instructor introduction page within the course orientation module; instructor introduction information included in the syllabus; instructor introduction video included on the home page.		
1.12 Student Introductions (QM 1.9)	1	Ask students to introduce themselves to the class. Examples include an introductions discussion forum included in the orientation module, individual introductions during the first live synchronous class session.		
1.13 Student Privacy and Data Protection (QM 6.4)	1	Consider including privacy statements in the course syllabus or on a separate page in the course orientation module.		
		Examples include HCC's privacy policy, privacy policies for the LMS and other technologies or external vendor content used in the course, links to the privacy policies of social media or other third-party content used in the course, etc. (Most vendors have privacy policies on their websites.).		

Standard 2: Course Alignment and Organization	Points (15)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
2.1 Consistent Course Navigation (QM 8.1)	3	Examples include clean course navigation with only tools used in the course, URL links that are labeled, limited "clicks" to access content, consistent navigation within modules.		
2.2 Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes (QM 2.1, QM 2.3)	3	NOTE: The college-approved course outcomes must be included in the syllabus.  Access the college-approved outcomes at <a href="https://hccfl.sharepoint.com/sites/cio">https://hccfl.sharepoint.com/sites/cio</a>		
2.3 Module-level Objectives (QM 2.2, QM 2.3)	3	Stated at the beginning of each module, written in specific and measurable terms; SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time sensitive		
		Module-level objectives must align with the college-approved course objectives/outcomes. Module-level objectives form the foundation for content, assignment, and assessment alignment throughout the course.		
2.4 Module-level Objectives Reflect the Level of the Course (QM 2.5)	3	Module-level objectives reflect the level of the course.  Examples include an introductory course that utilizes lower levels of a learning taxonomy.		
2.5 Module Introduction (QM 2.3)	3	Consider using the Module tool to organize course content.  Examples of a module introduction include an overview page as the first page of each module. Module-level objectives should be included on the overview page as well as necessary background information, a module schedule/calendar, and tips for success.		

Standard 3: Course Content (Curriculum)	Points (25)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
3.1 Content Alignment (QM 4.1, QM 4.2) State the relationship between the module-level objectives and the course content/materials.	3	The course materials must align to module- level learning objectives; Clearly explain the purpose of the learning materials included in each module.		
		Examples include an explanation of how a video is used as part of a discussion assignment or how a required reading is connected to a quiz or text. Course content may include textbooks, OER, presentations, simulations, videos, online resources.		
3.2 Content Promotes Readability (QM 8.2)	3	Examples include appropriate use of white space, limited use of color, appropriate color contrast, san serif fonts, consistent use of font types, use of header text for screen readers, written at an academic level appropriate for the course, etc.		
3.3 Copyright (QM 4.3)	3	Copyright issues are addressed; appropriate permissions have been received and/or proper citations provided on the page where the content is accessed. Proper citations and permissions must be provided for all non-original course materials.		
3.4 Content Accessibility Statements (QM 8.7)	3	All third-party content includes an accessibility statement. Consider including this in the course syllabus by providing a URL link to the vendor's accessibility statement.		
3.5 Free of Bias	3	Content is free of cultural, racial, religious, gender, ability, identity, and age bias.		
3.6 Customization of Publisher Content (QM 4.5 T, QM 2.2)	3	The instructor can customize existing publisher content to align with course and module objectives.		

Standard 3: Course Content (Curriculum)	Points (25)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
3.7 Additions to Publisher Content (QM 4.6 T, QM 2.2)	3	The instructor can add content to the existing publisher materials to align with course and module objectives.		
3.8 Accurate, Relevant and Current (QM 4.4)	2	Instructional materials represent current thinking in the discipline. Older works considered "seminal" in the field are appropriate. The content is accurate and relevant to the course.		
3.9 Content Format, Multimedia, Video (QM 4.5)	2	Content is provided in a variety of media formats to meet the needs of all students. Each content item does not have to have multiple formats. However, throughout the course, a variety of content items should be used to include, text, images, video, simulations, web-based content, interactive elements, etc.		

Standard 4: Course Activities and Teaching Strategies	Points (19)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
4.1 Course Activity Alignment (QM 2.4, QM 5.1)	3	State the relationship between module-level objectives and course learning activities. Examples include a course map that could be included in the course orientation module or as part of the syllabus, a module introduction page that includes a relationship statement, a numbering system that identifies the relationship between items.		
4.2 Regular Student-to-Student Engagement (QM 5.2, QM 5.3, RI – SACS)	3	The requirements for student interaction are clearly stated.  Learning activities facilitate active engagement in the learning process, requiring students to regularly interact with each other.		

Standard 4: Course Activities and Teaching Strategies	Points (19)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		Examples include collaborative projects, opportunities for peer feedback, and group problem solving.		
4.3 Regular Student-to-Instructor Engagement (QM 5.2, QM 5.3, RI – SACS)	3	The instructor's plan for regular interaction with students in substantive ways is clearly stated.		
		Learning activities provide opportunities for regular interaction between students and instructor. Instructors must interact weekly with students.		
		Examples include assignments that require instructor feedback, interaction during a synchronous or asynchronous class discussion, announcements sent to students, weekly course summaries, messages sent through the LMS.		
4.4 Substantive Student-to-Instructor Engagement (QM 5.2, SI – SACS)	3	Learning activities provide opportunities for substantive interaction between students and instructor. Substantive interaction is focused on course content and promotes active learning.		
		Examples include an instructor email previewing course concept, a weekly announcement to synthesize learning, or individual feedback on assignments.		
4.5 Clear and Concise Instructions	2	Provide instructions for each course activity. Instructions should be complete and specific. Instructions can be provided in text, captioned audio, or captioned video.		
4.6 Varied Teaching Strategies (QM 3.4)	2	A variety of learning activities/teaching strategies are included to meet the needs of		

Standard 4: Course Activities and Teaching Strategies	Points (19)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		all students. Avoid the use of all group work, or all autonomous work, or use of only one or two strategies.		
4.7 Level of Difficulty (QM 3.4)	2	Vary the level of difficulty of the course learning activities. Multiple levels of the Cognitive Domain of Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning (or other learning taxonomy) are represented in the course.		
4.8 Work Samples	1	Provide samples of exemplary and unacceptable assignments, discussion posts, etc. While it is not necessary for every assignment or activity, consider providing these for each major assignment/project as an additional guide or instruction tool.		

Standard 5: Assignments, Projects, Graded Events	Points (9)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
5.1 Assignment Alignment (QM 3.1)	3	Assignments align with module objectives. Assignments should reflect the action verbs used in the module objectives.		
		Examples include a graded discussion that asks students to "explain" or "describe" a concept.		
5.2 Assignment Types and Timing (QM 3.5)	2	The number and release of assignments is appropriate for the estimated time of module completion and student workload.  Assignment types should provide multiple		
		opportunities for students to track their progress.		
5.3 Assignment Instructions and Academic Integrity (QM 3.6)	2	Instructions for completing assignments are clear and include due dates. Provide concise		

Standard 5: Assignments, Projects, Graded Events	Points (9)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		instructions that include all needed information for students to be successful.  Instructions should provide guidance to students about how to uphold academic integrity.		
5.4 Assignment Submission	2	Instructions for submitting assignments are provided and include a description of acceptable file/software formats.  Consider including a general statement in the course syllabus as well as specific instructions with each assignment.		

Standard 6: Course Assessments	Points (13)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
6.1 Assessment Alignment (QM 3.1)	3	Tests, quizzes, and other assessments align with module-level objectives. Assessments should reflect the action verbs used in the module objectives. Examples include a multiple-choice question that asks students to select the best description of a concept, a quiz where students "identify" course vocabulary definitions, etc.		
6.2 Formative Assessments (QM 3.4)	2	There are a variety of assessments in the course that allow for ungraded, formative feedback.		
6.3 Summative Assessments (QM 3.4)	2	There are a variety of assessments in the course that allow for summative, graded evaluation.		
6.4 Assessment Instructions and Academic Integrity (QM 3.6)	2	Tests, quizzes, and other assessments include clear instructions, due dates, and evaluation criteria.		

Standard 6: Course Assessments	Points (13)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		Instructions should provide guidance to students about how to uphold academic integrity.		
6.5 Assessment Submission	2	Tests, quizzes, and other assessments include submission requirements and instructions as well as acceptable formats.		
6.6 Publisher Assessments (QM 3.5 T)	2	The publisher provides for the instructor to vary the selection and timing of specific assessments.		

Standard 7: Evaluation and Feedback	Points (12)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
7.1 Descriptive Feedback (Rubrics) (QM 3.3)	3	Strategies are in place to provide descriptive feedback for students to improve learning.		
		Examples include grading checklists, rubrics, or other detailed evaluation tool. Consider a rubric that is used to evaluate all graded course discussions or a detailed checklist for a major assignment.		
7.2 Prompt Feedback (QM 5.3)	3	Strategies are in place to provide prompt evaluation and feedback.  Consider including this as part of your communication policy to include identifying a plan for regular interaction with students in substantive ways.		
7.3 Learning Progress (QM 3.5)	2	Provide students with opportunities to track their learning progress.  Examples include formative learning activities such as drafts for writing assignments, self-scoring practice quizzes.		

Standard 7: Evaluation and Feedback	Points (12)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
7.4 Self-assessment	2	Opportunities are included that allow students to evaluate their own learning (selfassessment) as a means of formative assessment.  Consider creating a self-assessment checklist or rubric to guide students.		
7.5 Peer Feedback (QM 5.3)	2	Opportunities are included that allow students to provide peer feedback for formative assessment or as a part of group work.  Consider creating a peer evaluation checklist or rubric to guide students.		

Standard 8: Course Communication standards should include:	Points (10)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
8.1 Instructor Presence (RI – SACS, SI – SACS)	3	Course design should promote instructor presence to include opportunities to engage with students, frequent communication		
Regular and Substantive Interaction Policy		Examples include formative feedback, regular course announcements, motivational messages, participation in discussion forums, one-on-one meetings with students.		
8.2 Communication Expectations (QM 1.3)	2	Communication expectations are clearly stated. Consider including this in the course syllabus.		
		Examples include types of communication tools used, frequency of communication, expected tone, writing style, synchronous live communication expectations, etc.		
8.3 Instructor-to-Student Communication (QM 5.3)	3	A specific plan for the instructor interacting with students is clearly stated. Include		

		opportunities for private communication between student/instructor. Consider including this in the syllabus and/or as part of the course orientation module.	
		Examples include a timeline for feedback and grades, the use of the course inbox, synchronous office hours, messaging in Teams.	
8.4 Student Participation Requirements (QM 5.4)	2	A specific policy or requirement for student participation and interaction is clearly stated. Consider including a participation statement in the course syllabus. If participation is part of the students' grade, then this must be noted as part of the grading criteria outline in the course syllabus.	

Standard 9: Course Technology and Skills	Points (16)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
9.1 Technology Alignment (QM 6.1)	3	The required course technologies align with module-level objectives. Course technologies include the tools included in the LMS, plagiarism detection tools, online proctoring tools, videos, web-conferencing, etc.  An example of alignment is requiring students to explain a specific process or concept and using the discussion board or the assignment tool for students to submit their responses.		
9.2 Minimum Technology Requirements (QM 1.5)	2	Consider including a syllabus statement providing details of the required technology used in the course to include hardware, software, plug-ins, mobile applications, and access/download instructions if applicable.  Examples: headset, microphone, media players, software, etc.		

Standard 9: Course Technology and Skills	Points (16)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
9.3 Student Engagement (QM 6.2)	3	Course technology promotes engagement.  Examples of technology that promotes engagement include synchronous communication (Teams), shared documents (Google docs), simulations.		
9.4 Technology Variety (QM 6.3)	1	A variety of technology is used in the course.  Examples include video, synchronous conferencing tools, simulations, web-based tools, varied tools within the LMS, etc.		
9.5 Technology Accessibility Statements (QM 8.7)	3	All third-party technology includes an accessibility statement. Consider providing URL links to the vendors' accessibility statements as part of your course syllabus.		
9.6 Technical Support (QM 7.1)	3	Module or assignment instructions include a link or clear description of the available tech support as well as how to obtain it.  Examples include links to tech support for external tech used in the course or specific assignments, college tech support resources, links to tutorials or other tech resources.		
9.7 Technical Skills (QM 1.6)	1	Include general and course-specific technical skills needed for success. Examples include using the LMS, using specific software and apps, using web-conferencing tools such as Teams, using online libraries, researching using the Internet, or other skills needed for the course.		

Standard 10: Course Accessibility	Points (36)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
10.1 Consistent Course Design for Accessibility (QM 8.1)	3	Examples include consistent layout and structure of each course module, consistent and limited font types, consistent titles and labels for modules and pages  Course navigation is consistent and easy to use		
10.2 Video and Multimedia Accessibility (QM 8.5, QM 8.6)	3	All course videos and multimedia must be captioned with accurate captions. Consider using Microsoft Stream to generate captions. Edit captions afterwards as necessary so the captions are a true reflection of the video's content.  Keep videos to less than 5 minutes. Read from a transcript to help you stay on point. Make sure to speak about what is on the screen so that vision impaired students know what is there.		
10.3 Audio Accessibility (QM 8.5)	3	Audio recordings must be clear and include accurate captions.  Consider using Microsoft Stream to generate captions. Edit captions afterwards as necessary so the captions are a true reflection of the video's content.		
10.4 Image Accessibility (QM 8.4)	3	Images must include descriptive alt tags. If the descriptive text is too long for the tag, consider using a Word document to provide the description. Images should be sized appropriately for full viewing.		
10.5 All text on Canvas Pages and files promotes Accessibility (QM 8.3)	3	Use proper heading levels and text formatting styles. Limit the use of color. Include ample white space.		

Standard 10: Course Accessibility	Points (36)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
10.6 Tables Accessibility (QM 8.2, QM 8.3)	3	Tables must be created with text and cannot be an image or scan. Tables must include proper headers rows for accessibility.		
		Screen readers keep track of the location in a table by counting table cells. If a table includes nested tables within another table, or if a cell is merged or split, then the screen reader loses count and cannot provide helpful information about the table after that point. Blank cells in a table could also mislead someone using a screen reader into thinking that there is nothing more in the table.		
10.7 Charts/Graphs Accessibility (QM 8.2)	3	Provide a full description so that visually impaired students understand the content.  Consider using a Microsoft Word document to create a description and insert the document next to the chart or graph		
10.8 URL Links for Accessibility (QM 8.2)	3	All URL links are working. Use the "link checker" in Canvas to confirm.  Add meaningful hyperlink text and ScreenTips so that clear and accurate information is conveyed about the destination. Do not use the URL address as the live link in the course.		
10.9 Use of Color for Accessibility (QM 8.2, QM 8.3)	3	Examples include not using color or bold text to convey meaning. Do not use red to indicate importance, do not highlight in yellow to draw attention. Use accessible text formatting features.		
10.10 Accessible Microsoft Word Documents (QM 8.3 and 8.4)	3	Use the built-in accessibility features such as headings and alt text to create accessible documents.		

Standard 10: Course Accessibility	Points (36)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		Heading 1 should be used as the title, and there should one be one Heading 1 in the documents. All other headings should follow a sequential order without skipping a heading level.		
		Add meaningful hyperlink text and ScreenTips so that clear and accurate information is conveyed about the destination.		
		To convey meaning, bold or italics should always be used instead of color.		
10.11 Accessible Microsoft PowerPoint Presentations (QM 8.3 and 8.4)	3	Use the built-in accessibility design features.  PowerPoint presentations often include pictures, SmartArt graphics, shapes, groups, charts, embedded objects, links, and videos, causing issues with accessibility. Consider creating a Microsoft Word document, accessible with a screen reader, to convey the information provided in the PowerPoint. By doing so, visually impaired students can use the document and not the presentation to receive the content.		
		Screen readers read a PowerPoint in the order that objects were added to the slide, which may not be the intended order. Use a screen reader to confirm reading order.		
		Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you must use an image with text in it, repeat that text in the presentation. In the alternative text, briefly describe the image and mention the existence of the text and its intent.		

Standard 10: Course Accessibility	Points (36)	Examples	Score	Reviewer Recommendations
		Accurately caption all videos. Provide every slide with a unique title. Use sufficient color contrast and do not use color or bold to convey meaning.		
		Use larger font size with sufficient white space and sans serif fonts. Avoid using all upper-case letters and excessive italics or underlines.		
10.12 Accessible PDF Documents (QM 8.3 and 8.4)	3	Consider creating the pdf document in another application such as Microsoft Word, and then save as a pdf. The accessibility features created in Word should transfer to the pdf.		
		Accessible pdf documents have searchable text, working navigation/hyperlinks, headings, and alternative text descriptions for non-text elements.		

# **Contact Information**

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