

# SREB

*Educational Technology  
Cooperative*

## Checklist for Evaluating Online Courses

November 2006

Southern  
Regional  
Education  
Board

592 10th St. N.W.  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
(404) 875-9211  
[www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)

---

This publication was produced by SREB's Educational Technology Cooperative and funded by the BellSouth Foundation. For more information, e-mail [bthomas@sreb.org](mailto:bthomas@sreb.org) or call (404) 875-9211.

# Checklist for Evaluating Online Courses

## Introduction

---

This checklist is based on the SREB report *Standards for Quality Online Courses* and is designed to assist states and schools in determining the quality and effectiveness of online courses. It is suggested that each course be rated on the extent to which it meets the criteria, with 3 indicating that a course does not meet the criteria and 1 indicating that it does. This evaluation is key to ensuring that online courses provide students with access to quality instruction and resources.

Course:		Reviewer:			
Course Provider:		E-mail:		Phone:	
URL:		School/Office:		Date:	

**DIRECTIONS:** Rate each item based on the extent to which the item meets the criteria. Circle the value.

## Section A: Content

---

- Academic Content Standards and Assessments
- Course Overview and Introduction
- Legal and Acceptable Use Policies
- Teacher Resources

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. The course goals and objectives are measurable and clearly state what the participants will know or be able to do at the end of the course.	Objectives are matched to content requirements and to the grade and skill levels of the intended audience.	1	2	3		

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
2. The course content and assignments are aligned with the state's content standards or nationally accepted content standards set for Advanced Placement courses, technology, computer science, or other courses whose content is not included in the state standards.	Course objectives, student learning outcomes and assignments are listed and align with established content standards and the content and format requirements of required local school system, state or national assessments.	1	2	3		
3. Course tasks and assessments align with the required local, state and national assessments that are associated with the course.	Advanced Placement testing requirements; national assessments; state assessments; local school system assessments; technology certification assessments.	1	2	3		
4. The course content and assignments are of sufficient rigor, depth and breadth to teach the standards being addressed.	Clear and explicit alignment exists between objectives, assessments, instructional strategies, content and technology; and the content, activities and assignments provide multiple learning opportunities to master the standards.	1	2	3		
5. Information literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.	Promotes student-to-student communication as part of lesson activities; utilizes communication forums such as threaded discussion forums, chats, etc.; information literacy is addressed.	1	2	3		
6. Sufficient learning resources and materials to increase student success are available to students before the course begins.	Self-assessments or checklists that assess prerequisite knowledge and skills; orientations, tutorials, activities, policies and procedures to help students acquire the prerequisite knowledge and skills.	1	2	3		

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
7. A clear, complete course overview and syllabus are included in the course.	The syllabus and overview include: course objectives and student learning outcomes; assignments; student expectations; time requirements; required materials; the grading policy; teacher-student, teacher-parent contact policies; the intended audience; and the content scope and sequence. Other important information includes a rationale indicating how this course is related to other courses, the date of original publication and last revision, the instructor availability and response time, and a description of the final product or other activities that are central to the course content.	1	2	3		
8. Course requirements are consistent with course goals, are representative of the scope of the course and are clearly stated.	The course requirements include: a timeframe for participation; an approximate time required for individual activities; expectations for communications, such as online discussion, synchronous chats and e-mail; activity and other assignment expectations; and survey and/or exam expectations.	1	2	3		
9. Information is provided to students, parents and mentors on how to communicate with the online teacher and course provider, including information on the process for these communications.	This could be included in the course materials or in the orientation to the course materials.	1	2	3		
10. Issues associated with the use of copyrighted materials are addressed.	The course provider guarantees in writing that all course materials that they developed comply with copyright laws.	1	2	3		
11. Academic integrity and netiquette (Internet etiquette) expectations regarding lesson activities, discussions, e-mail communications and plagiarism are clearly stated.	The course includes guidelines for students on the use of copyrighted materials, appropriate use of networked resources and academic honesty.	1	2	3		

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
12. Privacy policies are clearly stated.	This could be included in the course materials or in the orientation to the course materials.	1	2	3		
13. Instructor resources and notes are included.	Instructor has included: additional guidance for teachers; possible scenarios for course module sequence; suggestions for guiding students on paths; teaching strategies for diverse students; suggestions for fostering student interaction and participation in discussions; additional content materials, such as optional simulated lab materials or activities or extra-credit assignments; ideas for sensitivity to background and student needs; and guidelines for using the learning paths.	1	2	3		
14. Assessment and assignment answers and explanations are included.	Built-in course assessments are provided, and user access to answers and information about each item is available.	1	2	3		

## Section B: Instructional Design

- Instructional and Audience Analysis
- Course, Unit and Lesson Design
- Goals/Objectives
- Instructional Strategies and Activities
- Communication and Interaction
- Resources and Materials

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. Course design reflects a clear understanding of student needs and incorporates varied ways to learn and multiple levels of mastery of the curriculum.	A course for students with low literacy skills may be designed differently than a course for students who are taking Advanced Placement; for example, more scaffolding and chunking of content, or more audio scripts of written materials.	1	2	3		
2. The course is organized into units and lessons.	The course is organized by units and the associated lessons.	1	2	3		
3. The course unit overview describes the objectives, activities and resources that frame the unit.	The unit overview: describes the objectives, lessons and resources included in the unit; and includes a description of the activities and assignments that are central to the unit.	1	2	3		
4. Each lesson includes a lesson overview, content and activities, assignments and assessments to provide multiple learning opportunities for students to master the content.	The lesson overview: describes the objectives, activities, assignments, assessments, estimated timeframe, and resources included in the lesson.	1	2	3		
5. The course is designed to teach concepts and skills that students will retain over time.	Course includes: backward design (focus on expectations for student learning); essential questions; broad-based concepts; important and worthwhile concepts or skills that are relevant to subject matter and to the “real world” in which the content may be applied; and meaningful and authentic learning experiences that help students apply course concepts and achieve course objectives.	1	2	3		

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
6. The course instruction includes activities that engage students in active learning.	For students who need or want remediation or enrichment, additional learning activities are present; resources are present when students need more foundational skills or explanations for very difficult concepts. The course also affords the opportunity for students to learn at their own pace, with clear directions and structure as to expectations and timelines with teacher input and monitoring.	1	2	3		
7. Instruction provides students with multiple learning paths to master the content, based on student needs.	Students are given choices for alternative assignments and assessments to make the best use of their talents and skills, as appropriate.	1	2	3		
8. The teacher engages students in learning activities that address a variety of learning styles and preferences.	Learning activities may include: examples; case studies; simulations; research; a variety of reading and writing activities; visuals and graphics; discussions and labs; podcasts; streaming video; and audio-scripted text. A learning style inventory is included. Strategies that consider the different learning styles of students are used.	1	2	3		
9. The course provides opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking, critical reasoning activities and thinking in increasingly complex ways.	Supporting opinions with evidence from test and experience; higher-order thinking inquiries with a variety of questions; interpersonal and self-directional skills; critical and systems thinking (understanding the interconnections among systems); activities that require students to frame, analyze and solve problems, form opinions and develop mental models.	1	2	3		
10. The course reflects multicultural education and is accurate, current and free of bias.	Images; language and content and selection of print and non-print resources.	1	2	3		



<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
11. The teacher can adapt learning activities to accommodate students' needs.	Students with disabilities; 504 plans; ELL; low skill or literacy levels; enrichment and gifted.	1	2	3		
12. Readability levels, written language assignments and mathematical requirements are appropriate for the course content and the students.	Sensitivity to readability issues, written language skills and mathematical requirements is demonstrated.	1	2	3		
13. The course design provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student interaction, including timely and frequent feedback about student progress.	Teachers respond to students in a timely fashion. Feedback may include e-mails, discussions and portfolios; feedback using LMS tools (e.g., dropbox, quizzes and grades; phone calls; webinars; regular progress reports; and end-of-semester/term grades) also may be used.	1	2	3		
14. The course provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student and student-student interaction to foster mastery and application of the material and a plan for monitoring that interaction.	Collaborative learning opportunities are available through e-mail, discussion strands, oral assessments, synchronous chats, webinars, simulations, lab activities and other group projects.	1	2	3		
15. The course provides opportunities for appropriate student interaction with the content to foster mastery and application of the material.	Course structure should be designed to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, student interaction with others and with learning resources.	1	2	3		
16. Students have access to resources that enrich the course content.	Materials and/or Web links have been reviewed for appropriateness and are aligned with course objectives and specifications.	1	2	3		

## Section C: Student Assessment

- Evaluation Strategies
- Adequate and Appropriate Methods and Procedures
- Feedback
- Assessment Resources and Materials

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. Student evaluation strategies are consistent with course goals and objectives, are representative of the scope of the course and are clearly stated.	Student evaluation: provides ongoing and frequent diagnostics to verify student's readiness for next modules; allows student to be continuously aware of his/her progress in class and mastery of content beyond grades; provides clear expectations and criteria for assignments, including rubrics for projects and written assignments; specifies the relationship between individual assignments and final course grade; provides detailed, step-by-step instructions for each evaluative exercise; provides guidelines for submitting assignment; provides a variety of feasible and content relevant assignments or evaluative exercises; considers accommodations for ELL and Special Education requirements.	1	2	3		
2. The course structure includes adequate and appropriate methods and procedures to assess students' mastery of content.	Valid and reliable assessments are frequent and timely and include online or proctored testing, performance assessments, projects, demonstrations, oral assessments, case studies and portfolios; assessment and measurement strategies include "self-check" or practice types of assignments to provide automated, immediate feedback to students, including content that explains the error or alludes to the content presentation; multi-layered approach to promote academic integrity; student participation in the evaluation of their work; and assignments resubmitted to demonstrate mastery.	1	2	3		

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
3. Ongoing and frequent assessments are conducted to verify each student's readiness for the next lesson.	Imbedded assessments and other assessment strategies are in place throughout the course to ensure accurate and up-to-date assessment of student performance.	1	2	3		
4. Assessment strategies and tools make the student continuously aware of his/her progress in class and mastery of the content beyond letter grades.	Use of feedback tools and procedures built into the course; students should be able to continuously self-monitor their academic progress.	1	2	3		
5. Assessment materials provide the teacher with the flexibility to assess students in a variety of ways.	Multiple versions of the same test; test bank available for the teacher's use; alternative evaluation methods available; test/question item banks organized by the learning outcomes they are intended to assess.	1	2	3		
6. Grading rubrics and models of partially to fully completed assignments are provided to the teacher.	Grading rubrics specify the criteria for the assignments, and models of partially completed assignments demonstrate the characteristics of quality expected.	1	2	3		
7. The grading policy and practices are easy to understand.	The grade values given to assessment and assignments are balanced to reflect their importance in assessing mastery and the importance of the content being assessed.	1	2	3		

## Section D: Technology

---

- Course Architecture
- User Interface
- Technology Requirements and Interoperability
- Accessibility
- Technical Support

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. The course architecture permits the online teacher to add content, activities and assessments to extend learning opportunities.	Additions can be made within the course itself.	1	2	3		
2. The course accommodates multiple school calendars; e.g., block, 4X4 and traditional schedules.	The course design allows users to adapt to various school calendars and schedules.	1	2	3		
3. The course is easy to navigate.	Consistent and predictable navigation methods: Students can move logically and easily between areas of the course; color, graphics and icons are used to guide the student through the course; and a consistent look and feel exist throughout the course (consistent text, colors, bullets, and heading styles).	1	2	3		
4. Course makes maximum use of the robust capabilities of the online medium and makes these resources available by alternative means (video, CDs, podcasts).	Rich media are provided in multiple formats for ease of use and accessibility.	1	2	3		
5. Hardware, Web browser and software requirements are specified.	Operating system, processor speed, plug-ins and connection speed are specified.	1	2	3		
6. Prerequisite skills in the use of technology are identified.	Course describes what skills and knowledge of Internet and software applications are needed.	1	2	3		
7. The course utilizes the appropriate content specific tools and software.	Graphing calculators, probes, microscopes, word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software, audio recordings.	1	2	3		

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
8. Interoperability technical standards allow sharing content among different learning management systems.	Content is SCORM 1.2 conformant at a minimum (includes IMS Content Packaging 1.1.2); IMS QTI conformant assessments.	1	2	3		
9. Interoperability technical standards ensure sharing of questions, assessments and results with others.	Content is SCORM 1.2 conformant at a minimum (includes IMS Content Packaging 1.1.2); IMS QTI conformant assessments.	1	2	3		
10. The course meets universal design principles, Section 508 standards and W3C guidelines to ensure access for all students.	Content can be accessed by all students, including students who use assistive technology to see, hear and move the information.	1	2	3		
11. Online textbooks used in a course meet nationally endorsed standards (NIMAS).	Electronic resources meet national accessibility standards for publishers to ensure distribution of accessible, alternative versions of textbooks and other instructional materials.	1	2	3		
12. The course provider offers the course teacher and school coordinator assistance with technical and course management.	The course provider offers product/course updates, a help desk, special assistance and answers to frequently asked questions.	1	2	3		
13. The course provider offers orientation training.	The course provider provides adequate training to ensure user understanding and knowledge to use each course. This training should be available when and in what format the user needs it.	1	2	3		

## Section E: Course Evaluation and Management \_\_\_\_\_

- Assessing Course Effectiveness
- Updating Course
- Accreditation
- Data security

<i>To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area?</i>	<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Meets criteria</i>	<i>Partially meets criteria</i>	<i>Does not meet criteria</i>	<i>Not enough information</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. The results of peer review and student evaluations of courses are available.		1	2	3		
2. Course provider uses multiple ways of assessing course effectiveness.	Course is evaluated on multiple criteria: student completion rates; student performance on in-course assessments and on county, state, and/or national assessments or satisfaction surveys.	1	2	3		
3. The course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness and the findings used as a basis for improvement.	Course provider provides evidence of ongoing evaluations and associated improvements.	1	2	3		
4. The course is updated periodically to ensure timeliness.	This information may be in a separate publication from the course publisher. It also could be included in the course overview; e.g., course updated June 2006.	1	2	3		
5. The course provider is authorized to operate in the state in which the course is offered.	State review of courses and accreditation of providers are ways to ensure that the course provider is of quality.	1	2	3		
6. The teacher meets the professional teaching standard established by a state licensing agency or the teacher has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching and has been trained to teach online and to use the course.	See the SREB report <i>Standards for Quality Online Teaching</i> for additional considerations.	1	2	3		
7. Student information remains confidential, as required by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).		1	2	3		



(06T06)