

Online Course Quality Review Rubric

Revised 2026 from an original rubric I developed in 2014. Use it before each course launch and after major revisions.

Course: _____

Term: _____

Instructor: _____

Reviewer / date: _____

Standard	Guidelines	Met?	Reviewer notes
Course Overview & Organization			
Getting started message	Home page or announcement leads students to the orientation, syllabus, and first-week activities.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Online orientation <i>Updated in 2026</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tour of the course layout and key tools. Practice space for trying LMS tools before graded work. Explanation of the course format and how learning happens each week. Readiness tips or a self-check for learning online. 	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Instructor introduction	Welcome message introducing the instructor and the course. A short captioned video is encouraged. Students also introduce themselves.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Syllabus <i>Updated in 2026</i>	Includes: course description, measurable objectives, grading, schedule, instructor availability and response times, academic integrity, generative AI policy, accessibility statement, technology requirements, and contact information.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Course schedule <i>Updated in 2026</i>	Due dates for all assignments appear in the LMS calendar and in a schedule that is accessible and readable on any device.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Content is organized into manageable modules	Every module follows the same structure and navigation. Pages, readings, and videos are short and focused. Avoid long scrolling pages.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Module overviews	Each module opens with an overview, its learning objectives, and a checklist of tasks and due dates.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Welcoming, supportive language	Written materials set a friendly, encouraging tone.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Clear directions	Students are told in plain language what to do, how to do it, and where to submit it.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Designed for easy updates <i>Updated in 2026</i>	Dates live in one place (the LMS), not in documents or media. The master course shell copies cleanly into each new term.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Mobile-friendly design <i>New in 2026</i>	Content and activities work on a phone and in the LMS mobile app. Tested before launch.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Alignment & Instructional Design			
Measurable objectives	Course and module objectives are written from the student's perspective, use measurable verbs, and align with each other.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Objectives align with evidence	Every objective is supported by at least one activity and one assessment. A course map documents the alignment.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Materials are current	Content, links, and media are accurate, up to date, and working. Reviewed each term.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	

Standard	Guidelines	Met?	Reviewer notes
Variety and frequency of assessments	Frequent low-stakes practice plus larger assessments broken into parts. Students can show learning in more than one format (e.g., written, video, visual).	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Higher-order thinking	Activities include case studies, scenarios, problem-solving, projects, and peer critique where appropriate.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) <i>New in 2026</i>	Multiple ways to engage, to access content (text, audio, video, visuals), and to show what students know.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Clear grading	The gradebook matches the syllabus. Rubrics or criteria are provided for assignments, discussions, and group work.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Discussions and group work	Grading reflects individual contributions as well as group contributions.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Affordable course materials <i>New in 2026</i>	Open educational resources (OER) or low-cost materials are used where possible. Required materials list cost and how to access them.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Generative AI			
Course AI policy <i>New in 2026</i>	States which uses of AI are allowed, encouraged, or not allowed for each assignment, and how students should disclose AI use. Consistent with institutional policy.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Assessment design <i>New in 2026</i>	Assignments value process and personal application (drafts, reflections, local or course-specific context) so they are harder to complete with AI alone.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
AI literacy <i>New in 2026</i>	Where appropriate for the discipline, at least one activity asks students to critically evaluate AI output for accuracy, bias, and sources.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Responsible use in course design <i>New in 2026</i>	Any AI-assisted course content is reviewed for accuracy, bias, and accessibility. No student data is entered into unapproved tools.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Interaction & Communication			
Regular, substantive instructor interaction <i>New in 2026</i>	The instructor initiates interaction on a predictable schedule (announcements, discussion participation, individual feedback). Required for distance education under federal financial aid rules.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Discussion design	Each discussion has a clear purpose, open-ended questions, a timeframe, and expectations for peer replies.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Student interaction	The design promotes student–student, student–content, and student–instructor interaction (introductions, peer review, group work).	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Timely, substantial feedback	Response and grading times are stated and met. Feedback arrives in time for students to use it on the next assignment.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Student feedback on the course	A mid-term check-in or survey invites suggestions so the course can be adjusted now and improved for the next term.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Communication guidelines	Clear expectations for tone, quality, and response times in discussions, email, and messaging (netiquette).	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Accessibility (WCAG 2.1 AA / ADA Title II)			
Accessibility statement <i>Updated in 2026</i>	Syllabus links to accessibility or disability services and explains how to request accommodations.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	

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Structure and headings New in 2026	Pages use built-in heading styles and lists. Link text describes the destination (no “click here”).	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Images New in 2026	Meaningful images have alt text. Complex images (charts, diagrams) have a full text description. Decorative images are marked as decorative.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Video and audio New in 2026	Videos have accurate captions (auto-captions are reviewed and corrected). Audio has a transcript.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Color and contrast New in 2026	Text meets at least 4.5:1 contrast. Color is never the only way information is shown.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Documents New in 2026	PDFs, Word files, and slides are accessible (tagged, correct reading order, headings), or the content is provided as an LMS page instead.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Keyboard access and interactive content New in 2026	All interactive content, eLearning modules, and embedded tools can be used with a keyboard alone and with a screen reader.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Math and scientific notation New in 2026	Equations are created with an accessible equation editor, not as images of text.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Accessibility check New in 2026	The LMS accessibility checker is run and issues are fixed. A keyboard-only and screen-reader spot check is completed before launch.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Technology & Learner Support			
Technology requirements Updated in 2026	Lists required hardware, software, and browsers, including mobile use, with links to technical support.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Third-party tools New in 2026	Tools outside the LMS are approved by the institution, checked for accessibility and student privacy (FERPA), and link to their accessibility and privacy statements.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Tips for success	Practical guidance on succeeding in this course, included in the orientation, module overviews, or syllabus.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	
Student support resources Updated in 2026	Links to the library, tutoring and writing support, accessibility services, technology help, and counseling and wellness services.	☐ Met ☐ Not yet	

Standards referenced

WCAG 2.1 Level AA, the standard required for public institutions under the 2024 ADA Title II rule (WCAG 2.2 recommended). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (CAST). Regular and substantive interaction requirements for distance education (34 CFR 600.2). Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric, used as a reference point.