

In the Classroom 22

Exploring the Content and Activities Standards for an Online Course Review

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Stan Skrabut: Well, hello, and welcome back. Thanks for taking time to hang out with me on this podcast episode. It certainly means a lot. I recognize the fact that you are busy, everyone's busy, but you're taking time to hang out with me and I really appreciate it. I want to let you know that. Today we are continuing our review of the OSCQR rubric. The OSCQR rubric deals with online quality review. We are basically looking at the four-section which focuses on content and activities.

We started this whole series on the OSCQR rubric with episode number 19, but today we are focusing on content and activities. There are eight standards in this particular section. Let's get on to it. Number 29, course offers access to a variety of engaging resources that facilitate communication and collaboration, deliver content, and support learning and engagement. This is a interesting one. Basically, it's saying that you need to provide some really quality content but there's a little more to that.

First of all, we have to focus on the "why". Learners need to know why they need to review a specific piece of content. How does it fit into the bigger picture? This whole "why" thing shows up in this book called *Teaching Naked Techniques*, a really good book. Chapter one talks specifically about this idea why. Why are they taking this course? Why are they interested in this discipline? Why are you teaching this discipline? Why is this activity? Why are you doing this now? Why are we doing it this way? Why, why, why, why.

Really important because once you can tap into that, and they accept the "why", then the "how" and the "whats" go a lot easier. At this point in this particular standard, learners want to know why they're required to read, review, discuss or create material in the course. When they know the reasoning behind this, what they need to complete, they will be more engaged. The other part of this is all this external reading and assignments and all these things should be connected clearly to your course concepts and objectives.

You need to really just spell this out, and I realized it takes time, but the nice thing about online course is you tend to roll this over so you just keep on improving these things. That's what you need to do it, the essence of this particular standard. Here's some ideas. When posting learning materials, let learners know why you want them to access these resources, what they're looking for. Don't just pop a video up there and say, "Watch this video." Why are they watching this video? What do you hope that they're going to learn?

Make sure that you read everything. Sometimes we go out there and we skim something and we know that other people have suggested it, but we didn't read it. We really need to read these things too. Give them an opportunity to rate the content. Let them vote on it, whether they like it, give a thumbs up or not on your content. If everyone thinks it's horrible content and you can't justify why you're putting it in your course, maybe you need to switch it out with something better.

Refresh your resources once a semester, look at what you're providing, does it still have relevance? If not, time to give it an update. Use tools like Diigo. Diigo is social bookmarking and create a class group where your learners can contribute and comment on resources that they also find. Other places to find, and I'll put these in the show notes, are the Moodle. That is a repository where there's lots of great learning materials out there. Your textbook publisher may have specific resources, and open education resources. That is a big push.

We talked about open education resources back in episode number three, and that just keeps gathering traction. It's becoming its own flywheel.

In this part, let's put together some good resources, let them know why we're doing this, how they connect with the course. Number 30, course provides activities for learners to develop high order thinking problem-solving skills, such as critical reflection and analysis. Basically, we want to work through this whole Bloom's taxonomy.

Benjamin Bloom, he put together this taxonomy where we're starting at the very basic level, and we're just moving up from knowledge to comprehension, application, but then we get into analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are more complex in higher-order thinking skills.

Create activities that provide opportunities for learners to be puzzled. Don't give them the answer right away, let them struggle with it and work through the problems in your course. Self-reflection or reflection opportunities should be part of all the projects.

Throughout the course, giving them an opportunity to think about the project itself, what lessons were learned in the processes that also help the learner. It's not always about learning the content or building that knowledge but also talking about the processes that helps their learner.

When you're actively doing something, those lessons tend to stick a lot longer. Have learners present a proposed project or research topic to the class to facilitate feedback that they can integrate that feedback into their own work. That's another opportunity with doing peer reviews.

Recently, I just finished a course where they're writing an OER chapter and students, they had other students review their chapters and provided feedback. This is the opportunity to do those things. Encouraging them or creating assignments where they blog as a reflection tool. I'm a huge fan of this that my blog started out as a class assignment where we were supposed to keep a learning journal and I just took it to--created a blog out of it as opposed to just something that was just between the

instructor and I. Been going since that time, I think 2011 I want to say, a very useful tool to me.

Number 31, course provides activities that emulate real-world application of the discipline such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities. These type of activities are really powerful, where they get to actually go try to apply those in a real-world setting or they're using the real world to talk about, to write about, to learn about. That it shouldn't be some abstract assignment, it should be something that's not disposable, that you get them out there engaging in the real world and trying to find solutions for the real world.

Moodle has case studies that you can build into your course. You can use mini cases as prelab work so learners can see what might go wrong before they actually do the online lab. Have them turn in reflective essays, for example, to see what kind of level of their critical thinking. If you're doing a foreign language, interacting with native speakers online and summarizing their experiences. Really powerful tool. Using digital storytelling, have them go out and interact with their communities, and then tie that back together in a digital story, lots of different opportunities to get them to work within that real world.

Number 32, where available, use open education resources. As I talked about it, episode three, we were introducing an OER to the class I was teaching, but there has been a huge push for open educational resources at the senior level that the state has put money behind it to get more of these resources into the classroom and move away from traditional expensive textbook. A lot of benefits from that and you can go back to listen to that episode and I talked at length about that.

OER materials either are in the public domain or have an open license. The typical open license is creative commons. Everything starts with copyright except for public domain, but everything starts with copyright, then it's a matter of negotiating for permissions. The creative commons license basically gives their permissions upfront. They say, "I recognize it's copyrighted, but I'm going to allow you, the user to use it in these ways." That's what spells out to the licenses.

The great thing about OER right now is that it is spreading like wildfire. All these different disciplines are now having open material created for them.

This can be a textbook, it could be lectures, assignments, lab, simulations, interactive modules, projects, exams, animations, videos, games, and all kinds of other things. It's a matter of going out there, do a search for whatever your topic is. I use quotes around my topic and then in quotes right behind it, I add creative commons and you'll be amazed at the great material that you probably can find with that.

I'm going to put in some resources in the show notes that you'll be able to find but another good place to touch base is with your librarian, your campus librarian. They can also point you to OER resources or you may have somebody that's dedicated to OER on your campus. Moving on, number 33, course materials and resources include copyright and licensing status, clearly stating permission to share where applicable.

Started with OER, but now we're getting really down to the copyright that if you are out there and you copy a chapter out of a book, there is some fair use to that.

If you use that chapter for 20 years, you've probably violated the fair use. That's not the intent and the spirit of the copyright laws. It's really important to get with your librarians, have them looking over your materials to make sure that you're not violating the law. I would really encourage you to go out and find some open education resources. That'll save you a lot of headache and making sure that you're using it properly. Go, get some creative common license and use material that's around that.

Number thirty-34, text content is available in a easy access format preferably HTML. All text content is readable by assistive technology including a PDF or any text contained in an image. It's really important to do this that if you scan something to a PDF that PDF may not be accessible to someone who has a vision difficulty, that a screen reader may not be able to read that if it was not processed through an OCR or optical character reader in a proper format. It really needs to be put into kind of a text file, HTML or a proper PDF that is treated as text.

I'm just saying this based on my experience, I have reviewed courses and I find documents that are not accessible to the students because the screen readers can't read them. That's why it's important to get it into these text. When possible, try to refrain from using graphic images that include text. If you use them, make sure that you use descriptive alt tags, alternative text. This sits behind the image and when a screen reader hits it, it reads what the image is about.

If you are not doing this and you have images throughout your course, you're denying some of your students from being able to access that material, you're denying them content and I know that we want to make sure that we get our material to all the students. You can go out and look for an accessibility review and once again, I'll include some of these resources in the show notes but there's a video that I'm going to include that listens to a screen reader reading an unformatted PDF document. Kind of important.

Number 35, a text equivalent for every non-text element is provided. You have alt text, you have closed captions, you have transcripts, you have some way that somebody within some type of impairment can be able to access material. Also more importantly, there are times where I will watch a video and not have the sound on because I may be in an area where sound is not appropriate but I still want to access that material. Having the closed captions is really useful and important.

Screen readers cannot read the image, what they need to read is this other text that is provided. It's important that all the images that you use that you also fill out this alternate tag with a proper description to explain it. For some images, alternative text is enough. If it's really complex, then you are going to have to break that out and provide a proper narrative to do that. It's the law and this is what we need to do as far as educational institutions.

In compliance with accessibility guidelines, videos included in online courses need to include closed captionings or have a transcription. Ideally, it's closed-captioned but not all the videos that we get do we own. What you can do is you can pull together a transcription, give it back to the owner of the video and ask them to update their video with a proper closed caption. That's something I've done and people are usually pretty happy if you've gone out and helped them out.

Why closed captions? One is for the hearing-impaired. We talked about that, individuals that cannot hear, this is really an important tool. Also, not everyone in our classroom is a native English speaker so they may have trouble understanding complex words and having those closed captions. I know when I watch BBC and it's an English show, I need two closed captions because sometimes I just can't follow what they're saying. If I happen to be watching something in Dutch, I'll turn on closed captions in order to follow along and that helps out. Those are things to keep in mind.

Number 36, text, graphics and images are understandable when viewed without color. You got to remember that there are some individuals who are color blind or their vision is so bad that when you start changing colors or rely on colors, they can't see it properly. A good strategy is print out your material and see what it looks like in black and white. Are you able to discern what the points of emphasis that you were trying to make with color, how it looks in black and white? There are some statistics out there, 15% of the world population has some form of disability which includes, it affects seeing, hearing, motor abilities, cognitive abilities.

15%, that's a big number. 4% of the population have low vision. 7% to 12% of men have color vision deficiency. If you want to see what your website looks like, there is websites that will allow you to look at your webpage through a colorblind filter and you can see what things look like. Once again I'll toss them into the show notes. Things that we need to keep in mind when we're building a course. You thought this, "Building a course, I'll just throw this material online," there's a lot of important details that we got to consider when we're putting together a course.

Last but not least number 37, hyperlink text is descriptive and makes sense out of context. In other words, avoid using "click here". Not all learners are using mice or other clicking devices so that's why the whole clicking thing is not necessarily relevant. Also, here is irrelevant for learners using assistive devices, so a screen reader, that really doesn't mean a lot. Screen readers provide learners with the ability to hear only the links that appear on the page.

Should a learner come across the page with a "click here" used for every link, there would be no distinction between the different links. They have to listen to everything in context in order to be able to understand it. Where if you instead labeled each of those links appropriately, writing rubrics, you would have journal examples, that makes a lot more sense than saying "click here" and "click here". Which of the two should I click on? Try to use concrete nouns that if you're trying to link to the library, use the word "library", that makes something.

If you want them to do something specifically and the example is "Subscribe to the Harvard Business Review", that provides more information than simply "click here". Ideally, you want to use the name of the destination page as your link text. Associate these links with an action you want your learner to take then revise your link text to match those actions. Those are the things that you want to do. Usability studies show that users catch their eye on the first two words of the links, so start your links with the most important words for learners to follow.

Well that was the information that we needed to talk about on content and activities. It's just another piece of the puzzle when we're talking about getting your course up to standards to where you have a really quality course. Just by thinking of those types of things, you will improve your course. If you worked on just one of these, it would improve your course. Naturally, there's 50, five-zero standards that we're working through and we just got to number 37 so we're almost there. We got two more sections to go through.

As a recap in this episode, we talked about number 29, course offers access to a variety of engaging resources that facilitate communication and collaboration, deliver content and support learning and engagement. Number 30, course provides activities for learners to develop high order thinking and problem-solving skills such as critical, reflection, and analysis. 31, course provides activities that emulate real-world application of the disciplines such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities.

32, where available, open education resources free or low-cost materials are used. Number 33, course materials and resources include copyright and licensing status, clearly state permissions to share where applicable. 34, text content is available and an easily access format, preferably HTML. All text content is readable by assistive technology including a PDF or text contained in an image. 35, a text equivalent for every non-text element is provided. All tags, captions, transcripts and so forth.

36, text, graphics and images are understandable when viewed without color. Text should be used as a primary method for delivering information. 37, hyperlink text is descriptive and makes sense when out of context. In other words, avoid using "click here". With these elements, you're on your way to making just that much better of a course. I'm going to cut you loose but before I do, here's a quick plug for my book.