

NSQ NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE COURSES

Third Edition 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 Acknowledgments

05 Preface

06 Introduction

08 Standard A: Course Overview and Support

10 Standard B: Content

14 Standard C: Instructional Design

17 Standard D: Learner Assessment

19 Standard E: Accessibility and Usability

21 Standard F: Technology

22 Standard G: Course Evaluation

24 Standards and Indicators from The National Standards for Quality Online Courses

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE COURSES

Third Edition 2019



[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons, Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

For more information or to contact the publishers visit www.nsqol.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The National Standards for Quality Online Courses has been the benchmark for online courses since it was published in 2010. The Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance (VLLA) and Quality Matters (QM) organized a committee of experts with various backgrounds in the field of K-12 online learning to take the lead in refreshing the National Standards for Quality Online Courses previously updated and maintained by iNACOL. These dedicated educators represent organizations that share an interest in promoting and supporting quality online educational courses.

Many people contributed in significant ways to the research and writing effort required for this revision of the National

Standards for Quality Online Courses. First, Quality Matters and the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance would like to express our deep appreciation Allison Powell and Storie Walsh for sharing their experience and expertise as co-chairs of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses project. Invaluable contributions were made to the standards by online learning leaders and practitioners from more than 34 organizations, ranging from districts, state agencies and statewide online learning programs, to content and technology providers, and institutions of higher education. This refreshing of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses would not have been possible without their time, effort and openness to share their expertise.

CHAIRS

Allison Powell, BloomBoard
Storie Walsh, The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.)


CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Barbour, Touro University, CA
Jerad Brewer, ASU Prep Digital
Gloria Burdette, West Virginia Department of Education
Heather Causey, Hanover County Public Schools
Cathy Cavanaugh, Microsoft
Burell Charity, TRECA Digital Academy
Jessica Daily, PBIS Application/University of Oregon
Jon DeCou, Consultant
Tad Douce, TRECA Digital Academy
Tami Echard, Georgia Virtual School
Deirdre Edwards, VirtualSC
John Englander, The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.)
Mitzi FehI-Seward, WHRO Education
Elizabeth Freeman, Community Unit School District 300
Davilla Gose, UH Online/Academic Technologies, University of Hawaii

Kevin Heller, University of California
Jill Hobson, IMS Global Learning Consortium
Cory Kanth, Utah State Board of Education, Excelsior College, Southern New Hampshire University
Raelynn Kelley, Idaho Digital Learning Alliance
Kathryn Kennedy, Evergreen Education Group/Kathryn Kennedy Consulting
Beverly Knox-Pipes, Consultant: BKP Solutions & Nova Southeastern University
Karyn Koven, LanguageBird
Randy LaBonte, Canadian eLearning Network (CANeLearn)
Robert Lindsay, Salt Lake Community College
Holly Mosca, Odysseyware
Jon Oestreich, Wisconsin Virtual School
Wendy Oliver, Consultant
Sarah Overpeck, National Collegiate Athletic Association
Anne Pasco, Community Unit School District 300

Mia Peterson, Consultant
Susan Poyo, Franciscan University of Steubenville
Sherawn Reberry, Idaho Digital Learning Alliance
Doug Renfro, Metro Nashville Public Schools
Mary Rice, University of New Mexico
Verena Roberts, Werklund School of Education, Univ. of Calgary
Robin Robinson, Framingham State University
Ben Rollins, Pearson Online and Blended Learning
Adam Rose, The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.)
Jeannette Shaffer, South Mountain Community College
Vicky Smith, Consultant
Lisa Sitkins, EdTech Specialists, LLC
Bobbi Jo Stoner, Gull Lake Community Schools
Krista Tomaselli, Michigan Virtual
Barbara Treacy, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Annette Walaszek, Wisconsin Virtual School

We also want to thank the scores of educators and experts that provided initial feedback on the online course standards by responding to our user survey, and to the talented reviewers of the standards that contributed invaluable guidance and content on this final revision of the standards. A broader list of acknowledgments can be found on the NSQ website at www.nsqol.org.

 Additionally, thanks go to the Digital Learning Collaborative and all of its members for their support and contributions to the National Standards for Quality Online Courses.

Much gratitude,
Cindy Hamblin, Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance, NSQ Project Manager
Christine Voelker, Quality Matters, NSQ Project Manager

Lastly, we acknowledge the National Standards for Quality Online Learning Leadership Team for their continued oversight, vision, and guidance throughout the process. In addition to the project co-chairs and project managers, members of the Leadership Team include:

Andrea Connolly, Nevada Learning Academy
Edi Cox, Horry County Public Schools, SC
Ronda Eshleman, Indiana Online
Joseph Freidhoff, Michigan Virtual
Christopher Harrington, Institute for Teaching and Leading
John Jacobs, Wisconsin eSchool
Bradley Mitchell, Virtual South Carolina
Dawn Nordine, Wisconsin Virtual School
Matthew Wicks, Pearson Online & Blended Learning

PREFACE

The National Standards for Quality Online Courses is one of three sets within the National Standards for Quality Online Learning, which also includes the recently revised The National Standards for Quality Online Programs (2019) and The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching (2019). Designed to complement one another, the National Standards for Quality Online Learning have been the benchmark for online programs, districts and state agencies since their creation in 2007. A number of states have even incorporated the National Standards for Quality into legislation, state rule or adopted them less formally as the criteria by which they assess and approve online learning instruction and course content. The previous edition of The National Standards for Quality Online Courses was last published in 2011. Quality Matters (QM) and the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance (VLLA), both educational nonprofit organizations, are leading a broad-based effort to revise and maintain the National Standards for Quality Online Learning, building upon the work started by The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL).

The purpose of the National Standards for Quality (NSQ) revision initiative is to provide the K-12 online and blended learning community with an updated set of openly licensed standards to help evaluate and improve online courses, online teaching and online programs. Both the VLLA and QM, as well as the project contributors, are committed to an improvement cycle in which all three sets of standards are reviewed and revised to keep the standards relevant as a quality benchmark for schools, districts, statewide programs and commercial suppliers of online and blended learning.

The team working on the revisions for National Standards for Quality Online Courses included online learning expertise from statewide and regional online learning programs – state virtual schools, consortia, regional service agencies, state departments of education - district online and blended learning programs, full-time virtual schools, universities and researchers, private companies ranging from online course and professional development providers to education service providers and technology suppliers, and nonprofit organizations.

Prior to revising *The National Standards for Quality Online Courses*, the revision team had access to user feedback on the usefulness of each standard, as well as an updated literature review. Each document served to inform the team, allowing them to make community and research supported updates. Subsequently, reviewers took time to evaluate each standard based on the following criteria: measurable, valid, complete, relevant, and specific. Feedback was then incorporated into the final document. Further information about the process, including more detailed methodology, can be found at www.nsqol.org.

INTRODUCTION

The National Standards for Quality Online Courses provide a framework for schools, districts, state agencies, statewide online programs and other interested educational organizations to improve online learning courses. The standards are intended to provide guidance while providing maximum flexibility for the users.

The National Standards for Quality Online Courses are separated into the following categories:

Standard A: Course Overview and Support

Standard B: Content

Standard C: Instructional Design

Standard D: Learner Assessment

Standard E: Accessibility and Usability

Standard F: Technology

Standard G: Course Evaluation

Each standard is accompanied by a set of indicators. The standards team of contributors has expanded the guidance provided in previous versions of the standards by including explanations and examples. The explanations and examples will be particularly helpful for users adopting the standards and indicators to fit their unique needs. By including explanations and examples, the standards revision teams have been mindful to balance the need for a usable set of benchmarks for quality online learning practices with the need for flexibility to accommodate the wide range of program types and available resources. For expanded explanations and examples, see the annotations in the Quality Matters K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition¹, which provides additional guidance for those reviewing courses.

The National Standards for Quality Online Courses are identified on the following pages.

1. Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved.

THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE COURSES ARE SEPARATED INTO THE FOLLOWING SEVEN STANDARD CATEGORIES

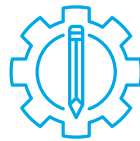
*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. See citation below.



Standard A
Course Overview and Support



Standard B
Content



Standard C
Instructional Design



Standard D
Learner Assessment



Standard E
Accessibility and Usability



Standard F
Technology



Standard G
Course Evaluation



STANDARD A: COURSE OVERVIEW AND SUPPORT

The overall design of the course is made clear to the learner at the beginning of the course. The course materials include support services essential to learner and instructor success. Course instructions articulate or link to relevant information and services.

- A1** A course overview and syllabus are included in the online course.
- A2** Minimum computer skills and digital literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.*
- A3** The instructor’s biographical information and information on how to communicate with the instructor are provided to learners and other stakeholders.
- A4** Learner expectations and policies are clearly stated and readily accessible within the introductory material of the course.
- A5** Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.*
- A6** Grading policies and practices are clearly defined in accordance with course content learning expectations.
- A7** The online course provides a clear description or link to the technical support offered and how to obtain it.*
- A8** Learners are offered an orientation prior to the start of the online course.



A1 A course overview and syllabus are included in the online course.

EXPLANATIONS An overview of the course and the syllabus make clear to learners how to get started and where to find essential course components. These can be presented up front in the course instructions.

EXAMPLES The instructor has a syllabus posted in the course that includes a scope and sequence, pacing guide, contact information, link to orientation, textbook information, and grading information.



A2 Minimum computer skills and digital literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.*

EXPLANATIONS Computer skills might include the ability to download and upload files; download and install software; use email with attachments; copy and paste; create, save, and submit files in commonly used word-processing program formats; and work in multiple browser windows and tabs simultaneously.

Digital literacy skills might include using online libraries and databases to locate information; using online search tools, properly citing sources; critical evaluation of information, including the accuracy of data sources; and creating digital content in various sources of media.

EXAMPLES Information about and/or a list of needed computer and digital literacy skills, tools, and resources should be included on the course homepage or on the learner dashboard.

General, as well as course-specific skills, tools, and resources that learners must have to succeed in the course are specified.

Resources include tutorials and practice exercises to practice computer and digital literacy skills.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

A3**The instructor's biographical information and information on how to communicate with the instructor are provided to learners and other stakeholders.****EXPLANATIONS** Information includes standards for instructor responsiveness and availability that are clearly stated. It also includes a self-introduction by the instructor, which is appropriate and is clearly available in the course.**EXAMPLES** Instructor information is provided to learners with contact, availability, and biographical information.

Instructor response time and information on how to contact the instructor via phone, email, and/or online messaging tools is provided within the contact information.

If regular contact with the instructor is required as part of the course, clear expectations for meeting this requirement are posted within the course.

A4**Learner expectations and policies are clearly stated and readily accessible within the introductory material of the course.****EXPLANATIONS** The Acceptable Use Policy, as well as learner expectations for academic integrity, use of copyrighted materials, plagiarism and netiquette (Internet etiquette), privacy policies, and the accessibility policy are clearly stated.**EXAMPLES** Policies are provided up front within the course overview, syllabus, or orientation.

Learners are instructed to use the appropriate copyright and licensing labeling of all third-party content used in their assignments, including documents, videos, audio recordings, etc.

A5**Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.*****EXPLANATIONS** Learners are provided with detailed, clearly worded information regarding the technologies they will need throughout the course, including information on where they can be obtained. The term "technologies" covers a wide range, including hardware, software, and plug-ins and mobile applications (apps).**EXAMPLES** Learners are told whether software used in the course runs on both Mac and PC.

Learners are informed that they will need speakers, a microphone, and/or a headset.

Learners are provided with a list of required downloadable resources, including links.

A6**Grading policies and practices are clearly defined in accordance with course content learning expectations.****EXPLANATIONS** Expectations for successfully completing the course, earning course credit, and calculating grades are clearly defined for the learner and instructor.**EXAMPLES** Learners begin the course with an instructor-supported overview of grading policies and procedures as they link to content objectives. These policies and procedures are clearly captured in an accessible document.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

A7

The online course provides a clear description or link to the technical support offered and how to obtain it.*

EXPLANATIONS

Online technical help and support should be available any time. If 24/7 support is not available, support hours are clearly posted within the course or on the online program’s website, and a maximum response time is noted.

EXAMPLES

The course provider has staff available by chat client from the content page for learners who are facing technical issues. From their location they are able to remotely access the learner’s machine to diagnose technology issues (i.e., browser extensions, system compatibility, connectivity issues, etc.).

Assistance may take the form of Frequently Asked Questions, training resources, mentors, peer support, or conversational agent (chatbot).

A8

Learners are offered an orientation prior to the start of the online course.

EXPLANATIONS

Learners are offered an orientation for taking an online course before starting the coursework when they are new to the learning environment, course structure, or tools. The orientation should describe the experience of learning online and what is needed to manage challenges successfully.

EXAMPLES

Time commitments, software and hardware requirements, and how to set up the learner’s computer and work environment may be part of this orientation. The training may be provided either in written form, face-to-face, through a video, or entirely online.



STANDARD B: CONTENT

The online course provides learners with various content options that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state or national content standards.

- B1** The online course objectives or competencies are measurable and clearly state what the learner will be able to demonstrate as a result of successfully completing the course.*
- B2** The online course expectations are consistent with course-level objectives or competencies, are representative of the structure of the course, and are clearly stated.
- B3** The online course content is aligned with accepted state and/or other accepted content standards, where applicable.*
- B4** Digital literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.*
- B5** Supplemental learning resources and related instructional materials are available to support and enrich learning and are aligned to the specific content being delivered.*
- B6** The online course content and supporting materials reflect a culturally diverse perspective that is free of bias.*
- B7** The online course materials (e.g., textbooks, primary source documents, OER) that support course content standards are accurate and current.
- B8** The online course is free of adult content and avoids unnecessary advertisements.*
- B9** Copyright and licensing status for any third-party content is appropriately cited and easily found.
- B10** Documentation and other support materials are available to support effective online course facilitation.*

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

B1

The online course objectives or competencies are measurable and clearly state what the learner will be able to demonstrate as a result of successfully completing the course.*

EXPLANATIONS Within the online course, course objectives or competencies are present, explicitly stated, measurable, and can be easily found by learners. After reading the list of objectives or competencies, learners will understand what they will be learning throughout the course.

Course-level learning objectives or competencies are typically provided to learners in a course syllabus and/or at the beginning of a course and establish the basis upon which online instructional units or modules are organized and aligned.

EXAMPLES

The following are some examples of measurable course-level objectives or competencies:

1. I can **select** appropriate mathematical operations for problem solving.
2. The learner will be able to **develop** a personalized plan for success which integrates academic integrity, setting goals, and managing time.
3. You will be able to **articulate** personal attitudes around risk and its relationship to high risk situations on the road.
4. I can **collaborate** on a group project on the Solar System by completing designated tasks and offering feedback to team members on their tasks.

B2

The online course expectations are consistent with course-level objectives or competencies, are representative of the structure of the course, and are clearly stated.

EXPLANATIONS Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course. Course expectations are consistent with course objectives or competencies, are representative of the scope of the course, and are clearly stated.

EXAMPLES

Detailed expectations for class participation and/or any other specific expectations the instructor may have for learners are provided within the online course. Learner expectations of the instructor should also be specified.

Course policies regarding attendance, absences, late submissions, feedback, response time, revisions, exams, etc. are detailed.

Learners are told at the course start that they will be expected to complete all readings and assignments, participate in weekly online discussions with the other learners and the instructor, submit a semester project detailed in the project description, and participate in multiple peer-review activities.

B3

The online course content is aligned with accepted state and/or other accepted content standards, where applicable.*

EXPLANATIONS Where state standards and/or other accepted content standards exist for the subject area of the course, those standards must be identified and accurately represented in the content and objectives of the course.

If an elective course is not meant to meet every standard, it should be aligned to those standards relevant to the course.

The content and assignments for the core courses are explicitly and thoroughly aligned to the state's academic standards, curriculum framework, assessments, or currency. Advanced Placement® courses must be approved by the College Board, and other elective courses should be aligned to other nationally accepted content standards such as computer science, technology courses, etc.

EXAMPLES

AP Environmental Science is aligned to the AP College Board standards.

Environmental Science is aligned to the state standards.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

B4**Digital literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.*****EXPLANATIONS** Digital literacy and communication skills are an integrated, instructional component of the curriculum.

Digital literacy refers to the ability to effectively and responsibly locate, evaluate, create, and communicate knowledge using technology.

Links to support as well as sample assignments are included either within task instructions or an appendix.

Learners are provided with clear and specific expectations for all types of communications and interactions during the online course. Expectations for all online communications should include guidelines on appropriate online behavior in all academic and nonacademic interactions, including peer interactions, as well as interactions with the instructor in both synchronous and asynchronous environments.

EXAMPLES Guidelines and rules of conduct for participating in discussion boards, which are introduced within the course overview, are referenced from discussion activity details.

Digital communication skills are emphasized and measured in rubrics and grading.

B5**Supplemental learning resources and related instructional materials are available to support and enrich learning and are aligned to the specific content being delivered.*****EXPLANATIONS** Learners have access to online academic help resources and optional additional materials to pursue areas of course content more deeply or to branch into related areas that might be of interest.

Course instructions articulate or link to academic support services and resources that can help learners in the course. Learners also have access to resources that enrich the course content.

These resources are made available within the online course from where they are most needed or helpful.

EXAMPLES Learners have access to a virtual library of resources from the home page. Course activities may have links to the library when learners are expected or may need to do additional research for an assignment.

Academic support services, such as tutoring, are available, and supplemental learning resources and related instructional and technical materials are available to support and enrich the online learning experience.

A list of prerequisite knowledge and skills for the online course are provided in the course information and syllabus materials along with links to resources for sharpening these skills if needed.

B6**The online course content and supporting materials reflect a culturally diverse perspective that is free of bias.*****EXPLANATIONS** The online course content (including readings, images, assignments, etc.) reflects a predominantly multicultural or bias-free approach. In some courses, it may not be possible or appropriate to take a multicultural or bias-free approach.

The course invites multiple perspectives and reflects an understanding of the perspectives of diverse ethnic groups.

EXAMPLES The course includes a diverse and balanced choice of images and other forms of media.

Images and other forms of media in the course reflect a variety of ethnicity, body styles, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

B7**The online course materials (e.g., textbooks, primary source documents, OER) that support course content standards are accurate and current.****EXPLANATIONS** The online course materials are accurate and valid and represent up-to-date thinking and practice in the discipline.**EXAMPLES** The AP textbook used is a current edition and one of the recommended texts of The College Board.
Instructor-created content reflects current industry practices in the content area.
Links to external content are checked regularly to ensure access and consistency.**B8****The online course is free of adult content and avoids unnecessary advertisements.*****EXPLANATIONS** The course does not expose learners to adult content, developmentally inappropriate content, or unnecessary advertisements.**EXAMPLES** The course links, materials, and resources do not expose learners to unnecessary advertisements.
The course does not expose learners to pornographic material and subject matter containing content unfit for the age level of the typical learner in the course.**B9****Copyright and licensing status for any third-party content is appropriately cited and easily found.****EXPLANATIONS** All instructional materials (including media such as pictures and video) used in the course are appropriately cited, including permission to share where applicable. Guidance for learner content use, downloading, and sharing is also included.

Instruction models appropriate source citation following the conventions of an appropriate style guide (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.).

EXAMPLES Copyright information, including Creative Commons licensing, can be included on each course page, at the end of each module, or in a document that includes all citations for the entire course.**B10****Documentation and other support materials are available to support effective online course facilitation.*****EXPLANATIONS** The instructor has access to resources to promote effective course facilitation.

Assessment and assignment answers are provided to instructors so that they can provide timely feedback to learners and increase mastery of content and concepts and support instructional capacity.

Guidance is provided regarding opportunities for appropriate instructor-learner interaction, including opportunities for regular feedback about learner progress and discussion prompts for critical thinking.

EXAMPLES Links to documentation, screencasts, instructor orientations, and/or other materials explaining how to most efficiently and effectively use the grading system within the online environment are clearly displayed in the instructor's course view.

Templates and answer keys for assignments and assessments are provided the instructor.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved



STANDARD C: INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The online course incorporates instructional materials, activities, resources, and assessments that are aligned to standards, engage all learners, and support the achievement of academic goals.

- C1** The online course design includes activities that guide learners toward promoting ownership of their learning and self-monitoring.
- C2** The online course’s content and learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.
- C3** The online course is organized by units and lessons that fall into a logical sequence.
- C4** The online course content is appropriate to the reading level of the intended learners.*
- C5** The online course design includes introductory assignments or activities to engage learners within the first week of the course.
- C6** The online course provides learners with multiple learning paths as appropriate, based on learner needs, that engage learners in a variety of ways.
- C7** The online course provides regular opportunities for learner-learner interaction.
- C8** The online course design provides opportunities for learner-instructor interaction, including opportunities for regular feedback about learner progress.*
- C9** Online course instructional materials and resources present content in an effective, engaging, and appropriate manner.*



C1 The online course design includes activities that guide learners toward promoting ownership of their learning and self-monitoring.

EXPLANATIONS The course design includes opportunities for learners to engage with content through research, collaboration, discussion, and application. Rather than being passive receivers of information, learners are able to participate in the discovery process of their learning.

EXAMPLES The course design includes web-based content, which allows learner choice of learning pathway, and self assessment tools that provide feedback and motivation to continue learning evidenced through efforts made to actively engage with course content.

Learners take ownership of their learning through progress trackers and learning-target trackers that provide learners with information and feedback that they need for the next level of proficiency.



C2 The online course’s content and learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.

EXPLANATIONS Alignment is clear between the learning activities and objectives within a course resulting in learner’s achievement.

Assignments are meaningful, rigorous, and relevant. They contain appropriate levels of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) in order to ensure learners can meet the learning objectives or competencies in the course.

EXAMPLES Learning activities are chosen in order to align with the learning objectives to reinforce what is intended for learners to learn. Based on content area and what is being learned, activities chosen may include simulations, reading, presentations, labs, case studies, etc. For instance, if a learner is asked to learn about a well-known historical event and understand that there are various versions of the event based on different stakeholders that were involved, the learner might consider sharing his or her learning through a play that he or she writes and casts character roles based on the various perspectives.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

C3**The online course is organized by units and lessons that fall into a logical sequence.****EXPLANATIONS** The course is organized into a logical sequence, with a consistent presentation of both the modules/units and the lessons and content within each module.**EXAMPLES** At the start of each module/unit, an overview is posted describing the activities, assignments, assessments, and resources to be used and completed, and how they relate to the learning objectives for the module/unit.**C4****The online course content is appropriate to the reading level of the intended learners.*****EXPLANATIONS** The text used in the course largely matches the desired level. Where the text used is more complex than appropriate for the target audience, scaffolding techniques are used to make text accessible to learners.**EXAMPLES** A design team/subject matter expert identifies the grade level of the intended online course and a target level of quantitative text complexity.

The online course content is appropriate to the reading level required by content and grade and depth of knowledge. Accommodations should be made available to assist learners with the understanding associated with the reading level.

C5**The online course design includes introductory assignments or activities to engage learners within the first week of the course.****EXPLANATIONS** It is important for learners to engage with the course early and establish a relationship with their instructor to help ensure that learners are progressing adequately through the course. Introductory assignments allow the instructor to recognize whether or not a learner is able to get started in the course. This will allow the instructor to see whether additional help is needed to ensure the learner gets off to a good start. In some cases, submitting an introductory assignment helps with accountability and accurate learner enrollment counts.**EXAMPLES** A course orientation requires learners to learn how to engage with the course and complete assignments/activities.

Learners introduce themselves to their instructor or peers in a discussion assignment.

Learners are required to complete and submit introductory assignments or assessments within the first few lessons.

C6**The online course provides learners with multiple learning paths as appropriate, based on learner needs, that engage learners in a variety of ways.****EXPLANATIONS** Engaging learners, especially in an online course, can be challenging at times and is often one of the first areas of struggle reported by an online instructor, whether new or seasoned or somewhere in between. A course that is designed to provide learners with multiple ways of expressing their knowledge throughout the course, allowing for learner voice and choice, engages learners.**EXAMPLES** The course design incorporates assignments in the form of video and audio uploads for a variety of expressions of the students' learning.

Instructors provide differentiated instruction to meet learners' individualized instructional needs.

Instructional design represents best practice in online learning and industry-standard tools for engaging learners. Assignments and assessments reflect learner voice and choice and demonstrate 21st century skills of communication and collaboration.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

EXAMPLES (CONT.) Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework based on how people learn is used to design engaging activities that address learner variability.

C7

The online course provides regular opportunities for learner-learner interaction.

EXPLANATIONS

The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated and substantial.

Learning activities are developed to foster regular learner-learner interaction. The instructional design and course content encourage exchanges amongst the learners through discussion boards, synchronous chats, and/or other communication tools.

Learner agency in question and hypothesis generation, discussions, and the exchange of ideas is essential to learning. Thus, learners should have access to discussion boards to participate both in instructor-directed activities and learner-initiated discussions.

In some courses, learner-learner interaction may not be appropriate, such as, for example, a credit-recovery course and where learners are working at their own pace.

EXAMPLES

Threaded discussions are available for developing community, asking and finding answers to questions, and commenting on the content. Rules and expectations for the discussion are clear and posted within the course.

Learners are required to respond to a discussion prompt, which directs them to write at least three sentences addressing the prompt, and provide a thoughtful response (at least one sentence) to at least two of their classmates' answers.

C8

The online course design provides opportunities for learner-instructor interaction, including opportunities for regular feedback about learner progress.*

EXPLANATIONS

Interactions between the learner and instructor are designed to enhance learners' understanding and mastery of the learning objectives.

EXAMPLES

Learners submit an assignment or project for instructor feedback. Instructors monitor a frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) discussion forum.

Learners engage in frequent conversation with their instructor utilizing synchronous and/or asynchronous tools such as e-journals, emails, text, discussion boards, and teleconferencing.

C9

Online course instructional materials and resources present content in an effective, engaging, and appropriate manner.*

EXPLANATIONS

Online course materials and resources are appropriate, relevant, and accessible to diverse learners and convey online course content in an effective and engaging manner to support learner mastery of course content and concepts.

The online course materials contribute to the achievement of the stated course and module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies, and their relationship with learning objectives or competencies is clearly stated.

The course content and instructional materials are of appropriate cognitive rigor (Depth of Knowledge & Bloom's taxonomy), scaffolding, and range to support the learning goals.

EXAMPLES

To meet the objective "Learners will write a five paragraph argumentative essay," materials are scaffolded to walk learners through the process over a series of assignments that progress from more basic to more complex skills.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

EXAMPLES (CONT.) A closed-captioned, 3-minute video illustrating cell mitosis is employed to show the process in a unit on cell biology within the context of genetics.

Images of paintings by Van Gogh, da Vinci, and Rembrandt are used to illustrate the painting techniques they used: impasto, sfumato, and chiaroscuro. (Images are alt-tagged and narratively described for diverse learners.)



STANDARD D: LEARNER ASSESSMENT

A variety of assessment strategies are used throughout the course geared toward learning and engagement and learners are provided with feedback on their progress.

- D1** Learner assessments are linked to stated course, unit, or lesson-level objectives or competencies.
- D2** Valid course assessments measure learner progress toward mastery of content.
- D3** Assessment practices provide routine and varied opportunities for self-monitoring and reflection of learning.*
- D4** Assessment materials provide the learner with the flexibility to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways.*
- D5** Rubrics that clearly define expectations for varied levels of proficiency are created and shared with learners.*

D1

Learner assessments are linked to stated course, unit, or lesson-level objectives or competencies.

EXPLANATIONS A clear link between the assessment and the stated goals of the online course is established.

EXAMPLES For an objective or competency where learners are told they need to learn how to identify metaphors in poems, an assessment would present a poem with metaphors and require learners to identify the metaphors therein. The assessment would NOT require the learner to define the term “metaphor,” to write their own metaphor, or to explain the meaning of a metaphor for that objective or competency; although these are helpful tasks, they are not linked to the stated objective or competency.

D2

Valid course assessments measure learner progress toward mastery of content.

EXPLANATIONS Frequent formative assessments measure progress towards mastery of content (as measured by summative assessments). Learners at all learning levels are given the opportunity to demonstrate progress in acquiring major content ideas.

EXAMPLES The online course includes a visible path of formative and summative assessments measuring learner progress toward mastery of content within the course objectives.

Learners are tasked to demonstrate understandings of the immediate major effects of the Great Depression on American politics in the 1930s and 1940s. Multiple formative assessments, such as learning checks, reflections, or short quizzes, are included in the course to measure progress toward mastery as well as a summative assessment to measure mastery. Formative assessments incorporate self-assessments as well as instructor-led assessments.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

D3

Assessment practices provide routine and varied opportunities for self-monitoring and reflection of learning.*

EXPLANATIONS Assessment strategies provide learners with opportunities to reflect on their progress towards meeting course requirements and mastering learning objectives or competencies.

EXAMPLES Writing assignments that allow for the submission of a draft for instructor comments and suggestions for improvement.

The course includes formative assessments, which provide clear feedback for each answer choice.

Learners engage with interactive games and simulations that have feedback built in.

Self-scoring practice quizzes.

Peer reviews.

Example papers or essays provided for learner viewing.

D4

Assessment materials provide the learner with the flexibility to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways.*

EXPLANATIONS Multiple methods of assessment strategies are included, based on the specified learning objective or competencies and learner need.

Each assessment does not have to have multiple methods, but over the entire course there are multiple methods of assessments used.

In addition, alternative assessments should be open to all learners when appropriate. Alternative assessment strategies may be more appropriate for some subjects and competency types (e.g., knowledge) than others (e.g., CTE skills). In some cases an authentic assessment strategy may be the only reliable way to measure skill mastery.

EXAMPLES A U.S. History course provides learners with choice and flexibility in demonstrating their application of content knowledge, including oral reports, videos, computer presentations, group posters, musical projects, etc. These may be chosen at the time of assessment or as a second choice option for revisions, as provided by the instructor.

Learners have an opportunity to correct errors and receive feedback on their level of proficiency. Learners may demonstrate mastery of any content using varying assessment strategies.

D5

Rubrics that clearly define expectations for varied levels of proficiency are created and shared with learners.*

EXPLANATIONS Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work and assist the instructor in determining the level of achievement of learning objectives and competencies.

Rubrics allow learners and instructors to understand expectations for varied levels of proficiency. Rubrics might be created by instructors as well as course designers, but course designers should create space for rubrics and add templates in accordance with the norms of the school.

Rubrics clearly define expectations by being linked to learning objectives and current state and/or other accepted content standards.

EXAMPLES Examples: Learners must demonstrate their knowledge of the immediate political outcomes of WWII. The provided rubric allows for a variety of performance-based products, videos, papers, speeches, etc. Further, the provided rubric offers a rich description of key competencies for each type of performance-based product.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved



STANDARD E: ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY

The course design reflects a commitment to accessibility so that all learners can access all content and activities and to usability so that all learners can easily navigate and interact with all course components. Online course materials, activities, and assessments are designed to ensure that all learners have access to the same information and are able to engage in the same interactions and within the same time frame. The course, developed with universal design principles in mind, addresses Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by following (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) WCAG 2.0 AA standards. This does not guarantee or imply that particular country/federal/state/local accessibility regulations are met. Please consult with an accessibility specialist to ensure that all required accessibility regulations are met.

- E1** Online course navigation is logical, consistent, and efficient from the learner's point of view.*
- E2** The online course design facilitates readability.*
- E3** The online course provides accessible course materials and activities to meet the needs of diverse learners.*
- E4** Course multimedia facilitate ease of use.*
- E5** Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.*



E1

Online course navigation is logical, consistent, and efficient from the learner's point of view.*

EXPLANATIONS

Navigation refers to the process of planning, controlling, and recording the movement of a learner from one place to another in the online course.

Navigation throughout the course is consistent, logical, and efficient and facilitates ease of use.

EXAMPLES

Consistent layout and design are employed throughout, making content, instructional materials, tools, and media easy to locate from anywhere in the course. Design elements are used consistently, increasing predictability and intuitiveness.

Online course pages have links that are consistently labeled with easy-to-understand, self-describing, and meaningful names (for example, the text "National Standards for Quality Online Learning website" is the hyperlink rather than www.nsqol.org). Icons used as links also have a text alternative that describes the function of the icon or an accompanying text link.

The course design enables learners to easily locate where they are within the course and to easily return to the homepage from any location.

The hierarchy of material in a page or document is clearly indicated through heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.). A table of contents is included that allows learners to move easily throughout documents.



E2

The online course design facilitates readability.*

EXPLANATIONS

Online course design elements maximize usability by facilitating readability and minimizing distractions.

For information pertaining to the reading level of course content, see Indicator C4.

EXAMPLES

Content is formatted to serve specific instructional purposes. For example, format and text color are used purposefully to communicate key points, group like items, and emphasize relevant relationships. Color alone is not used to convey meaning, and sensory characteristics (size, shape, location) are not required for understanding directions.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

EXAMPLES (CONT.) Similar content is grouped together; headings are used to indicate change of topic.

Heading and body styles are consistent throughout the course and follow a logical structure.

White space or negative space is used around content to help increase comprehension and reduce eye fatigue that occurs with large blocks of text or use of many images.

E3

The online course provides accessible course materials and activities to meet the needs of diverse learners.*

EXPLANATIONS

All online course content (text and images, documents, LMS pages, web pages, media, etc.) used in the course are accessible to all learners, or an equitable alternative is available. The international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) provide additional guidance for achieving accessibility.

Achieving accessibility means that individuals with sensory, physical, cognitive, or learning disabilities can independently acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same learning experiences, with substantially equivalent ease of use as individuals without disabilities. Alternative content is “equally effective,” which means that the same information is as readily available as the original content.

EXAMPLES

Images and graphs are described via alternative text, long description, or audio description.

All tables are set up as text and not embedded as images.

Tables are set up with headings for columns and rows and are used only for summarizing data, not for formatting.

Document or HTML titles, headings, etc. are formatted using styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) found in the word processing software (such as Word) style gallery; they do not merely utilize a larger or bold or italic font.

PDFs that contain text are not merely image scans; any text contained in PDFs is selectable and searchable.

If the audio content corresponds with the visual content in a way that conveys meaning (e.g., a video demonstrating how to operate a Bunsen burner in a chemistry lab), captions provide an equivalent experience.

Visual information that is critical to meaning is conveyed through audio description.

E4

Online course multimedia facilitate ease of use.*

EXPLANATIONS

Multimedia used as a vehicle for content or feedback (e.g., images, audio, animation, video, and interactive components) are easy to use, intelligible, and interoperable across devices.

EXAMPLES

Graphics and animations are used to enhance instructional materials and illustrate ideas without causing distractions.

Images are appropriately sized and can be viewed in their entirety without scrolling.

Audio quality is clear.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

E5

Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.*

EXPLANATIONS

Learners have access to information on the accessibility of the learning management system and all additional required technologies and content.

Course tools and materials link to the vendor’s accessibility statement or vendor-provided details through a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT).

EXAMPLES

A vendor’s accessibility statement is provided in the course syllabus or a page on resources or required technology software.

A district manages a web page that includes anchored links to the accessibility statements for technologies used in the course, including the learning management system, any integrated third-party software (e.g., plagiarism-detection software), and polling and social media tools.



STANDARD F: TECHNOLOGY

The technologies enabling the various course components facilitate active learning and do not impede the learning process.

- F1** Educational tools ensure learner privacy and maintain confidentiality of learner information in accordance with local, state, and national laws for learner data.
- F2** The online course tools support the learning objectives or competencies.*
- F3** The online course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate learners’ needs and preferences.*
- F4** The course allows instructors to control the release of content.*
- F5** The course provides the necessary technical functionality to score and record assessments and calculate earned course points or grades.*



F1

Educational tools ensure learner privacy and maintain confidentiality of learner information in accordance with local, state, and national laws for learner data.

EXPLANATIONS

All technologies and tools included for use as part of the course ensure that learner privacy is protected in accordance with Acceptable Use Policy and applicable law.

EXAMPLES

Online course tools and technologies chosen, whether included in the learning platform or external to the learning platform, comply with applicable state and relevant U.S. child protection laws such as the following (if outside of the U.S., consult relevant national law):

- The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA)
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)



F2

The online course tools support the learning objectives or competencies.*

EXPLANATIONS

Clear information and instructions are provided regarding how the tools support the learning objectives or competencies. Tools are not used simply for their own sake.

EXAMPLES

An online course that requires posting to a discussion forum makes it clear how the discussions support a learning objective or competency.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

F3

The online course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate learners' needs and preferences.*

EXPLANATIONS The online course permits the instructor to add and/or revise course content, activities, and assessments to modify or extend learning opportunities as appropriate.

EXAMPLES The online course allows the instructor to select, add, sequence, and modify the assessments and content provided.

The online course has the capability for the instructor to upload documents and links and add text and commentary to course pages.

F4

The course allows instructors to control the release of content.*

EXPLANATIONS The system in which the online course is presented allows the instructor to adapt the release of content and make content available to users as needed or as indicated by a calendar or pacing guide.

EXAMPLES A course allows instructors the capability to select or hide particular lessons or modules, re-order the sequence of lessons, provide timed release of content, and select among provided activities, exercises, etc.

F5

The course provides the necessary technical functionality to score and record assessments and calculate earned course points or grades.*

EXPLANATIONS In online courses where assessments are designed to interact with an online gradebook, the publisher must provide the necessary technical integrations that allow assessment results to be automatically recorded in the gradebook.

If a gradebook is provided, it should be a flexible tool, providing functions beyond the recording of individual scores on assignments.

EXAMPLES The gradebook provided within the course allows an instructor to manage the class roster, assign weights to assignments, examine specific individual learner assignments or quiz results, and import and export scores/grades.

The gradebook allows for generation of scores/grades by learning objective.

Technical functionality within a course allows for analysis of grading patterns – statistics, charts and graphs – by course, learning objective, etc., in addition to statistical analysis of performance on individual questions or unit learning objectives – mean, median, percentile, standard deviation, etc.



STANDARD G: COURSE EVALUATION

The online course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness, using a variety of assessment strategies, and the findings are used as a basis for improvement. The course is kept up-to-date, both in content and in the application of new research on course design and technologies.

G1 The online course uses multiple methods and sources of input for assessing course effectiveness.

G2 The online course is reviewed to ensure that the course is current.

G3 The online course is updated on a continuous improvement cycle for effectiveness based on the findings from ongoing reviews.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved

G1

The online course uses multiple methods and sources of input for assessing course effectiveness.

EXPLANATIONS

A combination of learner, instructor, content experts, instructional designer, and outside reviewers may be used to evaluate the course for effectiveness. A variety of methods may be used, including online course evaluations, learner completion rates, satisfaction surveys, peer review, instructor and learner feedback, content and learning analytics, and learner performance on in-course as well as state or national assessments. External researchers or evaluators are considered to study the effectiveness of the course.

EXAMPLES

The online course is evaluated through a documented process on a set schedule, ensuring all courses are evaluated on a regular cycle. The evaluation process includes analysis of learner surveys, learner performance, and peer review.

G2

The online course is reviewed to ensure that the course is current.

EXPLANATIONS

Review and revise the online course to ensure quality, integrity, and that the content is current, including assessment. The frequency and level of review should be established as a policy of the course provider (school, district, state, or national).

EXAMPLES

The online course review process and cycle are shared publicly. Online courses should be reviewed on a regular cycle to keep the content current, engaging, and relevant.

G3

The online course is updated on a continuous improvement cycle for effectiveness based on the findings from ongoing reviews.

EXPLANATIONS

The provider indicates the frequency of online course evaluations, whether reviews are conducted internally or externally, and how the provider uses evaluation results to improve courses.

EXAMPLES

Built into the evaluation process for online courses, the provider cites improvements in the online course based on the latest research-supported best practices.

STANDARDS AND INDICATORS FROM THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ONLINE COURSES



STANDARD A: COURSE OVERVIEW AND SUPPORT

The overall design of the course is made clear to the learner at the beginning of the course. The course materials include support services essential to learner and instructor success. Course instructions articulate or link to relevant information and services.

- A1** A course overview and syllabus are included in the online course.
- A2** Minimum computer skills and digital literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.*
- A3** The instructor's biographical information and information on how to communicate with the instructor are provided to learners and other stakeholders.
- A4** Learner expectations and policies are clearly stated and readily accessible within the introductory material of the course.
- A5** Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.*
- A6** Grading policies and practices are clearly defined in accordance with course content learning expectations.
- A7** The online course provides a clear description or link to the technical support offered and how to obtain it.*
- A8** Learners are offered an orientation prior to the start of the online course.



STANDARD B: CONTENT

The online course provides learners with various content options that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state or national content standards.

- B1** The online course objectives or competencies are measurable and clearly state what the learner will be able to demonstrate as a result of successfully completing the course.*
- B2** The online course expectations are consistent with course-level objectives or competencies, are representative of the structure of the course, and are clearly stated.
- B3** The online course content is aligned with accepted state and/or other accepted content standards, where applicable.*
- B4** Digital literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.*
- B5** Supplemental learning resources and related instructional materials are available to support and enrich learning and are aligned to the specific content being delivered.*
- B6** The online course content and supporting materials reflect a culturally diverse perspective that is free of bias.*
- B7** The online course materials (e.g., textbooks, primary source documents, OER) that support course content standards are accurate and current.
- B8** The online course is free of adult content and avoids unnecessary advertisements.*
- B9** Copyright and licensing status for any third-party content is appropriately cited and easily found.
- B10** Documentation and other support materials are available to support effective online course facilitation.*

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved



STANDARD C: INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The online course incorporates instructional materials, activities, resources, and assessments that are aligned to standards, engage all learners, and support the achievement of academic goals.

- C1** The online course design includes activities that guide learners toward promoting ownership of their learning and self-monitoring.
- C2** The online course’s content and learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.
- C3** The online course is organized by units and lessons that fall into a logical sequence.
- C4** The online course content is appropriate to the reading level of the intended learners.*
- C5** The online course design includes introductory assignments or activities to engage learners within the first week of the course.
- C6** The online course provides learners with multiple learning paths as appropriate, based on learner needs, that engage learners in a variety of ways.
- C7** The online course provides regular opportunities for learner-learner interaction.
- C8** The online course design provides opportunities for learner-instructor interaction, including opportunities for regular feedback about learner progress.*
- C9** Online course instructional materials and resources present content in an effective, engaging, and appropriate manner.*



STANDARD D: LEARNER ASSESSMENT

A variety of assessment strategies are used throughout the course geared toward learning and engagement and learners are provided with feedback on their progress.

- D1** Learner assessments are linked to stated course, unit, or lesson-level objectives or competencies.
- D2** Valid course assessments measure learner progress toward mastery of content.
- D3** Assessment practices provide routine and varied opportunities for self-monitoring and reflection of learning.
- D4** Assessment materials provide the learner with the flexibility to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways.*
- D5** Rubrics that clearly define expectations for varied levels of proficiency are created and shared with learners.*



*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved



STANDARD E: ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY

The course design reflects a commitment to accessibility so that all learners can access all content and activities and to usability so that all learners can easily navigate and interact with all course components. Online course materials, activities, and assessments are designed to ensure that all learners have access to the same information and are able to engage in the same interactions and within the same time frame. The course, developed with universal design principles in mind, addresses Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by following (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) WCAG 2.0 AA standards. This does not guarantee or imply that particular country/federal/state/local accessibility regulations are met. Please consult with an accessibility specialist to ensure that all required accessibility regulations are met.

- E1** Online course navigation is logical, consistent, and efficient from the learner's point of view.*
- E2** The online course design facilitates readability.*
- E3** The online course provides accessible course materials and activities to meet the needs of diverse learners.*
- E4** Course multimedia facilitate ease of use.*
- E5** Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.*



STANDARD F: TECHNOLOGY

The technologies enabling the various course components facilitate active learning and do not impede the learning process.

- F1** Educational tools ensure learner privacy and maintain confidentiality of learner information in accordance with local, state, and national laws for learner data.
- F2** The online course tools support the learning objectives or competencies.*
- F3** The online course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate learners' needs and preferences.*
- F4** The course allows instructors to control the release of content.*
- F5** The course provides the necessary technical functionality to score and record assessments and calculate earned course points or grades.*



STANDARD G: COURSE EVALUATION

The online course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness, using a variety of assessment strategies, and the findings are used as a basis for improvement. The course is kept up-to-date, both in content and in the application of new research on course design and technologies.

- G1** The online course uses multiple methods and sources of input for assessing course effectiveness.
- G2** The online course is reviewed to ensure that the course is current.
- G3** The online course is updated on a continuous improvement cycle for effectiveness based on the findings from ongoing reviews.

*Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. Citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved