



# Teaching toolkits

## Module design using 'ABC' curriculum design

Module design is about selecting and ordering the types of learning activities that students will undertake to achieve the module outcomes.

You should always consider how the module you're designing links to the programme of which it's a part.

Certain aspects will often have been decided at the programme design stage, such as the:

- overall student experience
- focus of the discipline
- broad approaches to research-based education.

Modules at UCL should:

- enable students to learn through research and enquiry as part of the Connected Curriculum
- encourage students to critique and challenge concepts
- enable students to learn individually and in groups
- give students the chance to engage in work-based learning
- include collaborative learning within their programme and beyond
- exploit the power of assessment and feedback to shape learning.

## What module design means

Modules are self-contained blocks of learning and teaching that may be compulsory or optional.

It is important to develop a clear idea of the educational purpose of each module and where it fits in the programme. The learning outcomes of each module should follow from this.

The student journey is made up of a series of planned and ordered teaching and learning activities, some of which will be assessed.

### Connected Curriculum: a framework for research-based education

The Connected Curriculum is a conceptual framework, unique to UCL, for integrating a research-based education into all our taught programmes.

A research-based education means helping students discover things for themselves across communities and subjects, with our guidance. It also allows students to get involved in research activities as part of their studies, whatever stage they're at.

## Putting it into practice

Digital education technologies can enhance the student experience by providing a multimedia, blended environment to support student learning.

Choose a range of conventional and online activities to ensure your students learn as effectively as possible.

Use conventional and online assessment and feedback methods too.

## Attend an ABC workshop

If you can, arrange an Arena Blended Connected (ABC) Curriculum design workshop. This is a 90-minute session to help module teams work together to plan engaging learning activities.

The workshop is particularly useful for designing blended modules (using both conventional and digital activities) in new programmes or for reviewing existing programmes. By reviewing modules together, teams can identify any gaps or overlap across the programme and recognise how modules fit together.

Once your team has attended the workshop, you could then run similar sessions.

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## Using the ABC method

As a starting point, you will probably have some information about the module from designing the programme.

For example, you will know:

- the title
- brief descriptions of the topics, learning outcomes and types of assessment
- how the module relates to other modules within the overall programme

Rather than designing a module sequentially (creating week one content, then week two content, and so on), the ABC method encourages module designers to take a broad approach.

Start by looking at the module as a whole.

One useful tip is to write a short (for example tweet-length) description of your module, without using the module title. This can help to focus your mind on the unique features of the module and what students will achieve by completing it.

## The learning mix

The ABC method encourages teams to consider how much of each of six types of learning (as defined by Diana Laurillard from the UCL Institute of Education) the module should contain.

The six types of learning are:

1. Acquisition
2. Collaboration
3. Discussion
4. Investigation
5. Practice
6. Production

It can help to plot the learning styles on a 6-axis graph (provided as part of the ABC workshop resources). This will give you a visual representation of the module's learning mix.

## The learning sequence

The module team should now decide when to use each of the six different learning types.

The ABC workshop resources pack includes cards that you can print out representing each of the six learning types.

Teams place these cards on a ‘storyboard’, showing where activities – usually groups or patterns of activities – occur throughout the module.

Using this type of storyboard approach makes it easier to identify any gaps in the structure that you need to fill.

### Top tip

If you can, get your entire module design team together in one room to design the module.

This creates an open, collaborative atmosphere in which everyone involved will contribute to, and agree on, the structure and content.

## Specific learning activities

Once you’ve decided when each learning method should be used, you can decide on the specific learning to be included.

On the back of each of the ABC learning cards are two lists of activities for you to choose from that relate to that type of learning.

These are:

- conventional activities (such as a face-to-face classroom discussion)
- digital activities (such as an online forum discussion)

Each list contains specific suggested activities, as well as space to add your own. This is a helpful checklist of possible teaching and learning methods and might suggest new ways of approaching a topic.

This is the time to think about the mix of digital and conventional activities that will help your students achieve the programme and module outcomes. Ask colleagues in UCL Digital Education if you need any extra help.

The programme-level design may have already identified possible activities associated with UCL’s Connected Curriculum. If not, this is a chance to think about this.

## How students will be assessed

Now that you know which specific learning activities you will be using in the module, you can decide which of these will be used to assess students both during and at the end of the module.

All of the six types can be assessed – you don’t have to restrict students to essays, reports and presentations. You could ask students to produce a blog or vlog instead, for example.

Don’t forget to consider the impact of your assessments across the whole programme.

See the guide on Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA) on the Teaching and Learning Portal.

### Top tip

Think about the broad student experience – the ‘shape’ and balance of the course in terms of the sequence and types of activities – before the detail of the activities themselves. This will come in the next stage.

## Write up the activities

You can now use the structure you've created in the session to write up each week's content and learning activities.

By creating a timeline of the various activities in the module, the student journey – what students are going to learn and how – becomes much clearer.

The timeline can be used, for example, to document the module, provide a framework for Moodle, and as a development plan for the module team.

## Where to find help and support

[arena@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:arena@ucl.ac.uk): contact the UCL Arena Centre

[bit.ly/ABCModuleDesign](http://bit.ly/ABCModuleDesign): to access this full online guide, including links and further resources.

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