



Design Smarter, Not Harder

A Practical Guide to Online Course
Development & Evaluation



sixredmarbles.com



ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Why Online Course Quality Matters

You're already doing the hard work: creating meaningful learning experiences, supporting students, and managing countless demands.

But with limited time and ever-evolving expectations for online learning, even the most dedicated educators and teams need simple ways to keep courses fresh, engaging, and effective. This guide is here to support that work.

Whether you're developing a new course or reviewing one that's been taught for years, this resource helps you enhance what's already working—offering a clear, modern approach to online course design and evaluation.

Use it to:



Reinforce strong practices



Identify quick wins



Create shared standards across teams



Build a course experience students love

Let's make it easier to do what you're already doing with more clarity, consistency, and confidence.

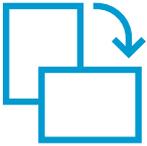


Plan Before You Build

Ask these key questions before any course development begins:



WHAT ARE YOUR COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES?



WHAT DELIVERY FORMAT FITS BEST (SYNCHRONOUS, ASYNC, HYBRID)?



WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPMENT—AND WHAT SUPPORT DO THEY NEED?



DO YOU HAVE INTERNAL CAPACITY OR NEED EXTERNAL SUPPORT?

Tool Highlight: Course Planning Kickoff Worksheet (See pg. 7)

Start strong with clarity on purpose, outcomes, delivery, and ownership.



The 6 Pillars of Online Course Design

These pillars serve as your foundation. They ensure every course is clear, consistent, accessible, and engaging—for students and faculty alike.

1 Structure & Navigation

- Clear weekly/module layout
- Intuitive navigation and consistent formatting
- Orientation or welcome module

2 Content Clarity & Alignment

- Outcomes aligned with content and assessments
- Chunked content, clear visuals, no overload

3 Assessments & Feedback

- Variety of assessment types
- Timely, clear feedback with rubrics or self-checks

4 Engagement & Interaction

- Opportunities for student-student and student-faculty interaction
- Activities that build connection and community

5 Accessibility & Inclusivity

- Alt text, captions, accessible documents
- Inclusive examples, UDL strategies

6 Technology & Tools

- Tools that work across devices and browsers
- Faculty comfort and support included



A Smarter Way to Evaluate

Course quality isn't a one-and-done checkbox. Smart institutions build in a regular cadence of review. That doesn't mean full redesigns every year. It means knowing when to tweak and when to overhaul.

Types of Review:



Light Touch Audit

Quick check-in each term



Annual Review

Analyze feedback, update resources



Major Refresh

During LMS shifts or major curricular changes

Inputs that Matter:



Student feedback



Faculty Reflection



LMS Analytics

Tool Highlight: Evaluation Planning Template

(See pg. 8)



Online Course Development Checklist

The checklist is designed to meet you where you are. **Use this checklist during course creation or review.** Mark what's in place, note gaps, and prioritize improvements. Categories are labeled to help guide scope and effort.

Each item is labeled:

- ✓ **Core:** Essential for any online course
- ★ **Recommended:** Strong practices for higher quality
- 🚀 **Optional:** Adds polish, personalization, or innovation

Use this tool:

- When developing a new course
- When refreshing or reviewing existing courses
- To create a shared rubric across departments

1. Structure & Navigation

- ✓ Clear, consistent weekly/module layout
- ✓ Welcome or orientation module
- ✓ Intuitive LMS navigation
- ★ Weekly overviews and checklists
- 🚀 Course tour video or visual syllabus

2. Content Clarity & Alignment

- ✓ Learning outcomes stated clearly
- ✓ Outcomes aligned with content & assessments
- ✓ Content is chunked and easy to scan
- ★ Cognitive load minimized (clear visuals, no overload)
- 🚀 Infographics or interactive visuals



Online Course Development Checklist

✔ Core | ✨ Recommended | 🚀 Optional:

3. Assessments & Feedback

- ✔ Mix of formative and summative assessments
- ✔ Rubrics or clear grading criteria
- ✨ Opportunities for self-checks and reflection
- 🚀 Multimedia feedback or peer review options

4. Engagement & Interaction

- ✔ Prompts for student-faculty or peer-to-peer interaction
- ✨ Group activities, case studies, or discussions
- ✨ Timely, regular communication with students
- 🚀 Real-world scenarios or guest videos

5. Accessibility & Inclusivity

- ✔ Alt text on all images
- ✔ Captions on all videos
- ✔ Content readable by screen readers
- ✨ UDL principles applied
- 🚀 Inclusive perspectives and diverse sources

6. Technology & Tools

- ✔ Embedded tools function across devices/browsers
- ✔ Tech tutorials or support links provided
- ✨ Faculty comfort with tools addressed during dev
- 🚀 Optional use of AI or adaptive tech



Course Planning Kickoff Worksheet

Use this worksheet before you start building. Answering these questions ensures the course has a clear scope and intentional structure from the start.

Course Title: _____

Lead Faculty or Team: _____

1. Goals & Outcomes

- What are the big-picture goals for this course?

- What learning outcomes will guide development?

2. Delivery Format

- Will this course be async, synchronous, or hybrid?

- What tools/platforms will be used?

3. Scope & Support

- Who is responsible for building the course?

- Is there internal capacity, or is external help needed?



Course Evaluation Planning Template

Keep your review process consistent across terms, departments, or programs.

1. Review Cadence

- End of every term
- Annually
- During major LMS or curriculum changes

Next planned review date: _____

2. Responsible Parties

- Faculty
- Instructional Designer
- Centralized Academic Team
- External Reviewer / Consultant

Primary contact: _____

3. Data Inputs

- Student feedback
- LMS data (access, completion, clicks)
- Faculty reflection
- Peer or SME input

Anything else to consider?

4. Version Control & Next Steps

- Assign owners for each update
- Document changes
- Save updated versions in a central location
- Notify faculty or students of major changes



Building Better Courses—Together

ELEVATING ONLINE LEARNING ONE COURSE AT A TIME

What does a high-quality online course look like? It's not about bells and whistles. It's about intentional design.

Every clear heading, accessible video, or timely piece of feedback makes a difference.

At **Six Red Marbles**, we've reviewed thousands of courses. And while no two are the same, we've learned what works and how to help teams improve without adding unnecessary burden.

This guide captures the strategies, templates, and best practices we've refined over decades of collaboration with colleges and universities.

Use what's useful. Adapt what you need. And know we're always here to help make course development a little simpler, a little smarter, and a lot more impactful.



Building Better Courses—Together

LET'S GET STARTED

You don't have to do it alone. Six Red Marbles helps colleges and universities build and review online courses that are engaging, inclusive, and effective.

From quick audits to full-scale course builds, we meet you where you are.

Explore our services:



Semester Prep (maintenance made simple)



Reviews, audits, and AI support



Instructional design across formats and LMSs



Faculty onboarding and support

Let's review a course together.

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sixredmarbles



HIGHER EDUCATION, ELEVATED: Smarter Course Design for Student Success.

Get In Touch

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Let's work together to build a **dynamic, student-centered online program** that prepares learners for success. **Scan the QR code** above to schedule a strategy session.