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Standard description of project here

## Creating online materials

### Checklist and guide

This part of the guide looks at how to create the materials for your online course.

The key questions we look at are:

- ^ What materials are needed?
- ^ Where can I find materials?
- ^ How do I structure the materials?
- ^ How can I use pictures and videos?
- ^ How do I make changes?

### What materials are needed?

There are three types of material you need for your online course.

- 1 Course descriptions
- 2 Content
- 3 Learning activities

#### **1 Course description**

This will include items such as

- ^ the course aims
- ^ programme and timetable

- ^ any entry requirements
- ^ guidance for learners
- ^ course outline

If you are designing a series of courses, use the same format each time. This will simplify the process and help learners to find their way around.

## 2 Content

This is the subject matter of your course. It can consist of many types of material:

- ^ documents that already exist – such as policies, research papers, codes of practice. They may stem from your organisation or some the body such as a government department.
- ^ Presentations used in face-to face courses or meetings
- ^ your own or external websites
- ^ images, videos or audio recordings you already have or from web sources

However these materials are usually not enough. They will need to be introduced, explained, and key points need to be summarised – such as in a checklist.

## 3 Learning activities

In conventional face-to-face courses learning takes place through a series of activities carried out by the participants, usually with the assistance of a tutor. These activities cover a wide range and develop skills such as:

finding information

interviewing

writing reports

making presentations

role playing

making calculations on data

analysing problems

drawing up plans

carrying out surveys of union members

...and many others

These activities may be carried out by individuals or often small groups of 2 to 4 people.

The challenge for designers of online courses is to build good activities that help people to learn while they are remote from their tutor and other course participants.

## Examples

Here are some examples of how learning activities can be designed for your online courses.

**Course discussions** can be held using an online forum or bulletin board. The online forum could be for a whole course, or for a sub group working on a project. The online forum should also allow the learners to add attachments such as documents or photographs.

**Finding information** is one area which is suitable for online courses. The course materials can contain links to useful websites. Learners can be encouraged to find their own online information and recommend it to others – for example by writing a summary or giving a star rating.

**Learner portfolios** may also have a role to play. In conventional courses learners may be required to build up a portfolio of documents and perhaps photographs as evidence of work they have completed. In an online course the learners can be given their own space to hold files they have uploaded.

**Quizzes** are popular activities in online courses. They can help learners find their way through information and check their own knowledge. Quizzes can be open to access at any time or only open for a fixed period.

**Case studies** may be used to combine several types of learning. In a case study a problem or situation is described. Learners – often working in small groups – are then asked to analyse the problem, find relevant information, and then discuss and propose solutions, for example through a bulletin board discussion.

**Finding trade union documents and reporting content.** Unions have various policy documents regarding discrimination, racism, collective agreements, policies and such. A good learning activity in group or individually is finding a specified document and report some of the content to tutor/discussion forum.

## Where can I find materials?

We have already looked at some of the most important materials for your course – the course description and learning activities. These you will have to produce yourself – although you will often want to look at examples from elsewhere.

But what about the course content? This should be the basis of your approach.

### **1 Collect your own materials**

Your trade union and national centre will have much useful material to use in courses – guides, handbooks, leaflets and perhaps videos. The union's magazines are also a useful source for photographs and graphics. Collect all the files together in one place to assemble into your course.

### **2 Look for useful external materials**

The internet is a vast store of content for trade union education. Some of the most useful content is:

- ▲ Wikipedia and other online encyclopedias
- ▲ Government and official websites, often containing details of labour legislation
- ▲ Campaign websites, such as on health and safety and equality

Collect the web addresses for the sites you find and keep them in one place for use later

### **3 Identify the gaps**

Once you have collected all your internal and external materials then you will almost always find gaps. Often these gaps will be explanations and checklists that help to make sense of the material you already have.

### **4 Make sure you are clear about intellectual property rights**

Laws on copyright and intellectual property vary between countries but it is important that you are clear about your right to use materials from other sources. If in doubt, check.

Here are some general guidelines:

- ▲ You may use any material created by you or your union. An exception may be where a photographer for example retains publication rights over photos used in the union newspaper.
- ▲ Many websites make it simple for you to link to their material – for example Youtube has a feature to create an automatic link
- ▲ Short extracts from books or periodicals are usually permitted for educational purposes
- ▲ Many government websites allow you to download official documents and guidance notes
- ▲ Many materials are now being issued with Creative Commons licences. These licences allow use of the materials in a variety of ways. For more information, see [www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org).

## How do I structure the materials?

Just like materials on paper, your online materials should have a clear structure. A clear structure will help you to plan a consistent approach. It will also help learners to find their way around your course.

### Simple structure

The simplest structure for your course is well known. It goes like this:

- 1 beginning
- 2 middle
- 3 end

**The beginning** of your course will contain the course aims, programme and timetable, guidance for learners and anything else needed to start the course.

**The middle** of your course will contain the learning content and learning activities, usually arranged in parts, units or modules. We look at this in more detail below.

**The end** of your course may contain a course review, action checklist, evaluation form, and suggestions for follow up.

### Parts, units and modules

Unless your course is very short – for example less than ten hours long – then it is helpful to break it down into parts, sometimes called units or modules. In this guide we use the word 'parts'.

Here is guidance on how to plan the parts of your course:

- ⤴ each part should be the same length – except perhaps the beginning and end which may be shorter. Often this is expressed as the number of hours needed to complete the part, and/or the number of learning activities to be carried out by learners.
- ⤴ Parts may often need to be subdivided into subsections, each containing a learning activity.
- ⤴ Like the whole course, parts should have their own clear structure with beginning,

middle, and end. This structure should be consistent across all the parts of the course.

## How can I use pictures and videos?

Images, graphics and videos can add to the impact of your course materials. They can also help to structure the materials – for example, each part of the course might start with a graphic illustrating the theme of that section. There are however some important things to consider.

**Photographs** can be used to show images of people, places and objects relevant to the course. Examples include photos of a wide range of union members and workplaces, front pages of union booklets, and equipment used in safety monitoring.

*Thumbnail examples here*

**Graphics** are often used to replace lengthy explanations of structures or procedures. Examples include union organisation plans, and steps in grievance and disciplinary procedures.

*Thumbnail examples here*

**Videos** are often used to capture people speaking and to present case studies. Avoid however lengthy 'talking heads' shots.

### Sources

There are three main sources of images and videos for your materials:

- 1 those you make yourself or already made by your union
- 2 those from public websites including photo and video sharing sites
- 3 those made by participants on your courses and submitted for example to a discussion forum.

You need to check carefully that you have the right to use any images from source 2 on this list.

### Problems to avoid

Common problems with use of images and videos include slow download times due to large image files, and compatibility problems with video formats. To overcome these problems you can:

- ▲ reduce the size of your image files by using photo editing software

- ⤴ put your images on public sites such as Youtube, Flickr and Photobucket and link to them, rather than putting them directly in the materials. ~}
- ⤴ keep your videos short – often a 1 minute video will do
- ⤴ put videos in Flash format which is accessible from many computers and browsers

## How do I make changes?

Ok – you have created your brilliant new online course. Now you ave to think about how you are going to change it.

You will need to make changes for a number of reasons:

- ⤴ errors need to be corrected – for example weblinks might get broken or out of date
- ⤴ updates are needed because of for example changes in laws or policies
- ⤴ experience of running the courses suggests better ways of doing things

However you need a clear plan for making changes. The plan needs to make sure that changes are made at the right time, that the right people are consulted, and that there is no confusion over which version of the course is the correct one. Here are some guidelines:

- ⤴ create a master copy of the course materials and keep tin a safe place. When a change is made, create a new master copy
- ⤴ use a version control method setting out dates and authorisation for reviewing the materials
- ⤴ make corrections to errors immediately, updates every few months, and major reviews every 1 – 3 years

### examples from partners

The British TUC use a system of master courses

Small corrections are reported to a helpdesk and made immediately. Where updates are required they are referred to the course authors to implement. Every two or three years, the courses unerggo a major review based on feedback from learners and tutors.

# Action checklist

- ⤴ Decide on a clear structure for your course materials with a beginning, middle and end
- ⤴ Be clear about the number of parts, units or modules and make sure they have a consistent length and structure
- ⤴ Choose effective and engaging learning activities that will work online
- ⤴ Collect existing materials from internal and external sources
- ⤴ Make sure you are clear about intellectual property issues
- ⤴ Decide on what images and/or videos you need and collect or produce them
- ⤴ Design your version control and revision plan

## Further references

(to follow)