Effective Virtual Course Structure

A well-designed course doesn’t draw attention to itself; instead, the design fades into the background, allowing student learning to take center stage. This document addresses three key areas of ICON course design to consider as you develop your virtual course: the course home page, the getting started module, and weekly content modules. Access the shared ICON course template and the ICON (Canvas) instructor guides when you are ready to try out strategies found in this guide.

Course Home Page

A home page is the welcome mat for your course. Create positive instructor presence with an introductory message to students with personality and warmth.

- Home pages do not need to be overly designed. Focus on introducing yourself and the course and providing clear steps for how students should move forward.
- Consider how to use the home page as the semester progresses. Add announcements to the top of the page, update text with a weekly summary or introduction, or provide links to ongoing projects.
Course Orientation

A getting started module orients students to the course organization and requirements and prepares them to begin learning. Take time to answer the big questions students will have up front to calm fears and address immediate concerns.

- **Record a course tour video.** Demonstrate the regular course flow and point out unique course technology, activities, or timelines important for success. [View a sample course tour video](#).
- **Address communication expectations.** Tell students how to contact you for questions or virtual office hours. Include expected turnaround time on email requests, grading, and feedback on assignments.
- **Use onboarding activities** to engage students early and provide student-to-student interaction.

Module Design

Structure your modules and content pages to provide a clear learning path. Think of modules like a folder of content used to deliver all the learning material, lectures,
readings, and activities for each week. Use ICON’s pages tool to direct student learning and build your teaching presence or opt to display links to content under each module for a streamlined approach.

- **Orient students to each module** with a text or video introduction, module-level learning objectives, and a checklist of activities and assignments.
- **Provide clear, detailed instructions** and expectations for assignments and activities. Remember, you are the expert, the student a novice. Write directions as if you have never completed this task before. Try to forecast where students may struggle and provide the answers to those questions in advance.

Download an accessible version of the [getting to know an online course infographic](#).