Bridge to Quality: A QM Online Course Design Guide

Basic Edition

Last updated: October 2023

How to Use This Guide

The Design Guide is organized into three, overarching Phases, with discrete and actionable Design Steps contained within each Phase. The phased, iterative approach outlined in this Guide is best applied during a multi-week period set aside for course design..

The process and steps recommended represent a path — where applicable — from emergency remote instruction (ERI) successes to quality course design based on QM Higher Education Specific Review Standards. While ERI was ubiquitous during the COVID pandemic, the Guide retains this portion to recognize that faculty and designers are called to quickly transition a course from on-campus to online for a variety of reasons, such as adding an online option right before the academic term begins. Users of this guide should view the steps as a progression to achieving a quality online course that may ultimately meet QM Standards in an official course review.

Definition of Symbols
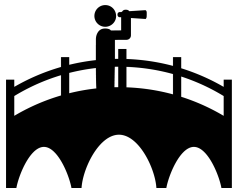
This icon signals a Design Step detailing Action Items that progress your course design.. If you can't complete a Step, focus on making progress on the Action Item as much as possible before moving on, knowing that you can come back — using an iterative approach — to complete, improve, or refine previous work.

This icon signals notations related to "foundational design." Tasks with explanations next to this icon are directly related to designing a course to meet QM Specific Review Standards associated with the alignment of course components.

This icon signals notations related to synchronous components of a course and/or considerations for hybrid courses. Refer to these for creating consistency between course elements used in the in-person or virtual portions of a course and the accompanying asynchronous elements (usually found in a Learning Management System or other course site).

This icon signals steps that you may have taken when using the QM Emergency Remote Instruction Checklist (ERIC) to quickly transition your course from face-to-face to remote delivery and/or hosted in an online platform (LMS or Google classroom). Not all QM Course Design Guide steps have ERIC equivalents.

This symbol indicates a Specific Review Standard included in the principle of alignment. When aligned, course assessments, instructional materials, learning activities, and technologies are directly tied to and support learning objectives.

Definition of Phases

Phase 1: Align

A phase of thoughtful pedagogic planning. Begin with foundational design: measurable learning objectives, aligned assessments, activities, materials, and technology. Plan your design (or evaluate your existing course) using an alignment map/course map — a tool that identifies alignment gaps or mismatches. Assessments and course material are created in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Engage

Focus on designing activities, content, and technology to elevate presence, interaction and engagement in your course. Engaged learners feel a sense of belonging and are active participants in the online learning community. Active learning is vital to an engaging online course, and this phase will present a variety of considerations for engaging online learners.

Phase 3: Connect

Connect course components by organizing content into learning units. Use text or graphics to help learners connect learning activities and materials with learning objectives. Connect learners with the appropriate information and resources to help them succeed.

Plan for Inclusivity

Due to the potential diversity of learners enrolled in online, blended or otherwise technology-enhanced courses, aspects such as time zone, geographical location, language, and cultural/religious differences need to be taken into consideration. Instructors should acknowledge and show understanding of those matters and, whenever possible, make efforts to provide reasonable flexibility and accommodations for the increasingly diverse learner population. Consider any issues your learners might have in accessing required technology, including appropriate hardware and software requirements, as well as reliable internet access. Inclusion is a key determining factor in learner success.

For example, keep in mind that English may be a second or foreign language for some learners. When providing directions or explanations, use simple, professional, grammatically-correct English without idioms or slang heavily rooted in U.S. history or culture. If such language is relevant to the educational context, provide additional explanation or historical reference. In an effort to create a

cohesive and safe learning environment, remind learners to be sensitive to and respectful of cultural or religious differences of the learning community.

Phase 1: Align

SECTION A — CONNECTING LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENTS

1. Begin evaluating alignment by first examining your learning objectives to ensure that they are measurable and at the right level for your learners and the course.
2. Next, you'll start to use an "alignment map" to examine whether your assessments are aligned to your course objectives. In other words, consider whether your current assessments provide learners with the opportunity to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning objectives. Each assessment should align with at least one learning objective.

You can note on your Alignment Map where there is a disconnect between objectives and assessments, which can be addressed by editing or adding an assessment and/or an objective.

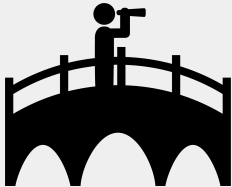| Design Step 1	Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard
Bridge to Quality Action Item Revisit your course learning objectives to ensure they use action verbs that can be assessed. Since your learning objectives form the basis for the entire design of the course, it's important to create measurable course learning objectives, or course/program competencies.* (If you have module/unit-level learning objectives for your course, you'll incorporate those later, in Phase 3.)	**HE SRS 2.1 |** The course-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable. Alignment

Design Step 2	Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard
Bridge to Quality Action Item Examine the action verbs used in your learning objectives and ensure they are appropriate for the course level. Consider to what extent the outcomes allow your learners to make connections to their lived experiences and communities. Make sure students have the chance to *apply* what they're learning and the ability to have voice and choice in how they demonstrate mastery of the content. Higher-level courses might focus more activities on the Bloom's Taxonomy level of Application or above (analyze, evaluate, create, etc.).	**HE SRS 2.5 |** The learning objectives are suited to and reflect the level of the course. Alignment

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Plan assessments so they measure what learners have been told they will be able to do when they complete the course.

Begin to create [an alignment map](#) for your course. First, assess alignment by ensuring that all assessments, both formative and summative, evaluate achievement of the course objectives. An example of lack of alignment is: the learning objective is to "write a persuasive essay," but the assessment is a multiple choice test. Review your alignment map to include relevant opportunities when possible for students to have choices (or "agency") as to how they will meet each learning objective. An assessment where learners can choose their topic and/or preferred medium (i.e., essay, blog, website, dialogue, etc.) is an example of an assessment where learners have choice or "agency."

Misalignment can be addressed by either redesigning the assessment or editing the wording of the learning objective. At this stage in your design, you are creating an "assessment plan" by noting the assessment type (exam, discussion, essay, etc.) and a brief description of what learners are being asked to do in the assessment (e.g., take a summative essay exam where they will [insert relevant learning objectives here]). It's vital to make alignment between assessments and learning objectives clear to learners, as they may otherwise feel they're completing "busy work" only because they do not understand how their work on assessments is directly tied to them demonstrating achievement of learning objectives.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Specifically explain how each activity or assignment is related to the course objectives and how you will evaluate submitted work.**

Just as you would in an on-campus class, introduce an assignment by going over the instructions using text, audio, or video, providing relevant examples when useful/possible, and reminding learners how the assignment is connected to learning objectives/outcomes. Include clear information, whether through an assignment prompt, rubric, or other means, about how the assignment will be graded.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help aligning learning objectives with the assessments, consider the Connecting Learning Objectives and Assessments workshop. If you're interested in learning more about creating quality, aligned assessments, QM offers a dedicated web conferencing workshop package to help meet your assessment goals, called Assessing Learning Remotely.

SECTION B — CONTINUING YOUR ALIGNMENT MAP: LEARNING ACTIVITIES, INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, AND TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

1. Continue completing your alignment map by adding your learning activities. Learning activities are all the things that learners will do during the course to practice and work with the new information they are learning. Learning activities support learners in meeting the desired learning outcomes by allowing them to apply what they are newly learning, and receive instructor feedback before they are assessed.
2. Next, you'll add your instructional materials/content and your technology/tech tools to your alignment map. Instructional materials and technology are two critical components that are tied to any online learning activity. If either or both of these components are not aligned/not supporting the given activity, then the learning activity is difficult to complete.

Design Step 1
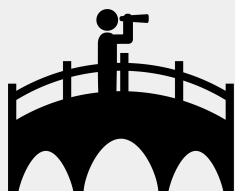
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Create and use activities that directly support subsequent assessments, as well as the learning objectives of the course. When possible, structure activities so that learners have choices that leverage their unique strengths. Activities are no or low-stakes ways for learners to practice working with the new knowledge and skills they are learning in the course, before being assessed.

Return to your alignment map to add and connect your activities to your course learning objectives. Here, include everything learners will do to achieve the learning objectives that is not an assessment, such as an ungraded or practice quizzes, project or paper drafts, or reading, reviewing, or summarizing instructional materials. Check your alignment map to verify that learners have agency in selecting multiple pathways to be successful in a learning outcome.

Note that you may have already included some "practice learning activities" under "Assessments," so this is a good opportunity to pause and consider the pedagogical goal behind a given assignment: if the goal is low-stakes practice centered on feedback for improvement, then chances are that item is a learning activity. However, if the goal is incremental/partial assessment (i.e., formative, and also includes instructor feedback for further improvement) or culminating (i.e.,

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 5.1 | The learning activities help learners achieve the stated learning objectives.

Alignment

summative) assessment of learners, then the item is an assessment.

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Choose and use instructional materials that are directly connected to the learning objectives. Whether you create, have students purchase, or adapt free Open Educational Resources (OER), ensure that these materials support the learning objectives.

Return to your alignment map, and describe how your instructional materials connect to each relevant assessment and your course objectives. If you can't make a clear connection yourself, you might consider making that content optional. Content that learners are being asked to engage with, but not use or apply in some way, can be seen as "busy work" or wasted time, so ensure that learners are applying all materials in the course. Any misalignment you find can be addressed by either creating or finding new material to address a "gap," or eliminating or making optional content that is not aligned to an objective and assessment.

When creating or curating your content, consider representation of people and perspectives as well. Ask yourself who a novice would think are the authorities on this topic after seeing your list of instructional materials. Is that an accurate representation of the authorities in the discipline? Consider whether or not your materials allow learners to see themselves or people like them as knowledge creators in your field.

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 4.1 | The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives.

Alignment

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Explain to your learners how the learning materials help them complete course activities and achieve the course learning objectives.** *Reflect on how you begin your face-to-face class sessions, and use that to create a module/unit introduction that is text-based or a short video that you record. You can post this as an Announcement or send via email. In this Module Introduction, explain to learners how what they're reading or watching that week connects to the course learning objectives.*

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Choose and use technology and tools that support the learning objectives of the course, are accessible, and have support or documentation readily available. The technology and tools are present to support learners in their work, but should not lead or direct your design choices.

Return to your alignment map, and enter the tools and technology you plan to use to support your course objectives. Ensure technology is supporting your learning goals, rather than setting them.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help developing learning activities, QM offers the Assessing Your Learners workshop.QM also offers the Instructional Materials for Online Teaching dedicated web conferencing workshop series, which helps connect the materials to objectives and different approaches for content in the online classroom.

Phase 2: Engage

## SECTION A — PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

Active, applied learning is vital for the online classroom, as passive learning often serves to further "distance" online learners. In the design of your activities, strive for learner engagement that supports active learning or learning by doing (application).

Active learning can incorporate interaction, which is vital to build a sense of belonging online. Learners can interact and engage with the content, with you, and with other learners. All interactions should be meaningful. Course topic or class size may impact learners' ability to interact with one another, but learners will always interact with their instructor and course material.

1. As you continue your course design, determine how learners will interact with digital materials, and within a digital environment..
2. Choose technologies that support the forms of interactions you want your learners to participate in, but focus first on institutionally-supported technologies, so learners are assured they will have help with technology and online security.

3. Lastly, in this section, focus on your formative assessments and "knowledge-check" types of activities, which engage learners by providing them with opportunities to gauge their level of understanding and to receive feedback for improvement before moving on to summative assessments. Feedback can come either from you or via automated tools.

Design Step 1
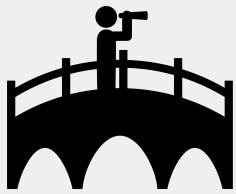
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Examine your learning activities holistically, and consider the degree or depth of opportunity your learners have to apply what they're learning while interacting with course material, peers, communities outside the classroom, and with you as their instructor. Where appropriate, guide learners to engage with their local community, as well as with their own and other cultures outside of the learning community.

Consider redesigning activities or creating new ones to promote greater interaction and active, applied learning inside and outside the classroom if you feel more opportunities are needed. This step is a great opportunity to determine whether the type of activities currently included in the course are the best and most engaging, and is a chance to try new activities beyond traditional quizzes and exams.

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 5.2 | Learning activities provide opportunities for interactions that support active learning.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Plan active learning opportunities and use course tools to meaningfully facilitate learners' interaction and active learning.**

Consider how students will continue to interact with one another, you, and course material by engaging with collaborative tools (e.g., Google docs, Voice Thread), synchronous tools (e.g., Zoom, Teams), and tools for asynchronous, online interaction (e.g., discussions, blogs, reflective journals).

Design Step 2
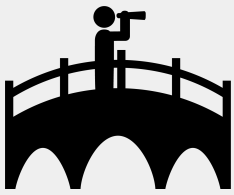
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Continue examining your activities, but now look at which tool or technology is being used. Determine how those tools support learners engaging with one another, the instructor, and the course. As with the previous step, take the opportunity to focus on active engagement. Use readily available, low-cost tools and technologies when possible.

What do you want learners to do? Typical interaction types and tools that can support those interactions include:

- Engaging with each other through discussion forums, blogs, peer feedback, and use of virtual breakout rooms for think-pair-share
- Collaborating with other learners on a final product through collaboration tools, such asGoogle docs or slides, as well as synchronous and asynchronous discussions
- Reflecting on their learning through blogs, journals, concept or mind-mapping tools, and ePortfolios
- Engaging with you or other experts through announcements, email, virtual meetings, online office hours, social media, and/or an instructor's blog

Emergency Remote Instruction *Quick Start:* **Plan active learning opportunities, and use course tools to meaningfully facilitate learners' interaction and active learning.**

Consider how students will continue to interact with one another, you, and course material by engaging with collaborative tools (e.g., Google docs, Voice Thread), synchronous tools (e.g., Zoom, Teams), and tools for asynchronous, online interaction (e.g., discussions, blogs, reflective journals).

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Provide smaller, formative assessments and activities as these are the primary way your learners (and you) know whether or not they are understanding course material and concepts. These assessments allow learners to check their learning progress and allow you to provide robust feedback when it is most useful for your students.

For example, use a flipped classroom approach to develop reading quizzes before a virtual class meeting. Short, frequent quizzing helps you see where learners are having trouble, and can be informative for subsequent class discussions and assessments.

Evaluate the timing and sequencing of the assessments to ensure that learners have time to put your feedback to use. Additionally, explain to learners how they can use the feedback, and consider providing it in more than one form (written, audio, screencast, video, etc.) to enhance learner understanding.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Provide learners with timely feedback to enable them to track their learning progress.**

When teaching remotely, it's important to include acknowledgement feedback as well – let learners know, for example, that their assignments have been received. Additionally, provide informative feedback in a timely manner, so that students can use it to improve future coursework. If possible, consider including "knowledge check" types of activities via low-stakes, simple quizzes or simplified online discussions that reflect the activities you'd already planned for in-class work.

QM Professional Development Options

If you'd like to learn more about engagement and active learning online, there are several relevant web conferencing workshops in the Assessing Learning Remotely package. If you need help with developing learning activities, QM offers the Using Instructional Materials and Technology to Promote Learner Engagement and the Assessing Your Learners workshops.

SECTION B — CHOOSING AND CREATING CONTENT

1. Model the academic integrity that we expect from our learners. To do this, ensure that instructional materials that are shared clearly identify the source material and follow copyright law.

2. Examine your content to ensure there is a variety of types (e.g.., not just a textbook or text readings as PDFs) and that it reflects current thought in the field, when applicable.
3. Keep in mind that learners should be able to easily access and use all material. For example, videos should be relatively short and have clear audio and closed captions. All content, including text in the course itself, should be readable.
4. Finally, be proactive in meeting accessibility requirements for text, images, and multimedia. When choosing content, focus first on material that is already accessible, and then explore ways to create accessible content yourself.

Design Step 1

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Review the instructional materials in your course to ensure that learners have more than one type of instructional material with which to engage, such as a textbook, digital articles, and videolectures.

A key benefit of the online classroom is the ability to incorporate engaging materials, including multimedia materials, such as videos, interactive games, podcasts, etc. To increase cognitive engagement, present subjects from different perspectives or in ways that respect different learning preferences. Similarly, consider how the instructional materials in the course introduce content from diverse perspectives.

Many quality materials are available for educational use. Check with your textbook publisher to see what companion materials have already been created, and curate content using vetted materials such as OER (Open Educational Resources). Consider the sources of educational materials and whether they incorporate and reflect diversity and equity.

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 4.5 | A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.
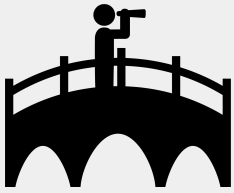
Design Step 2
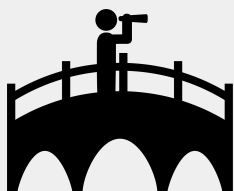
Bridge to Quality Action Item
Ensure that the materials in your course represent timely ideas and practice within your discipline. This does not pertain to older, foundational pieces and does not necessitate dismissing older textbook options. Consider the extent to which instructional materials include marginalized voices and embrace changes to longstanding practices that may have reduced benefit in modern times.

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 4.4 | The instructional materials represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline.

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Review your course, including any new or redesigned instructional components, journal articles, linked works, materials, etc. to ensure that all non-original work is appropriately cited.

Images used in presentations must include an appropriate citation, even if used only in synchronous settings. Model for your learners the attribution practices you expect from them and that are in compliance with governmental copyright laws and institutional policies.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Provide appropriate citations and permissions for the materials you use in your course.**

Focus on material and images that are Creative Commons licensed and learn more about Fair Use and other copyright laws by connecting with your institutional librarians. Share your sources of information to help learners better understand proper attribution and how to avoid plagiarism.

Design Step 4

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Ensure your course materials facilitate readability and minimize distractions. Breaking up large blocks of text and using headings for organization, for example, helps to make text readable.

Check the text font size, type, formatting, and color. For example, a small font may be difficult to read, and certain colors (such as light shades), are especially difficult for some users to distinguish between, as are red and green for colorblind learners.

Avoid using too much color or images that are purely decorative and do not add to students' learning, as this could be a cognitive distraction for some learners. Use ALT-text for images, and do not place tables in the middle of text, as they break the flow for screen readers.

Additionally, text that is fully justified (rather than right- or left-aligned) or long passages of italicized text can present cognitive distractions for learners for whom focusing is a challenge.

If displaying materials (e.g., presentation slides or material from the internet) during a synchronous session, ensure their readability.

Design Step 5

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Ensure that the audio quality is good for all videos and audio files, and avoid videos that are too long. Ten to 15 minutes or less is a good rule of thumb for video length. Longer videos can always be broken in shorter segments, which is best for technology considerations, accessibility, and brain-based learning.

Be aware of video resolution so that playback controls remain visible on the screen while the video is being watched.

Multimedia controls and interactive elements should allow learners to control motion and navigation features.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Consider using short multimedia pieces for interaction, and make sure students have easy access to any software, plugs-ins, etc. they'll need to access the multimedia content.**

If you're comfortable, explore using video as a way to connect with your face-to-face learners, by posting short webcam announcements, recording shorter online lectures, or giving learners screencasted feedback for assignments. Whether it's existing video material or a new recording you create, however, refrain from sharing videos longer than 10 minutes. Instead, consider breaking up longer videos into shorter chunks.
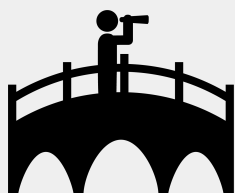
Design Step 6

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Providing accessible text-based material supports the success of all online learners and helps courses comply with governmental and institutional policies for accessibility. Providing accessible material from the beginning will also eliminate the need for revising the course to make materials accessible later. Use software, such as MS Word and Adobe Acrobat Pro, to easily check the accessibility of text-based material. Examine any PDFs included in the course to ensure they have selectable text, and are not image scans. In addition, review the accessibility of text-based publisher materials you are using. Connect with your institution's accessibility office for additional guidance.

Design Step 7

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Static images, such as pictures and icons, should be tagged with "alt-text" – a text-based description of the image. Multimedia content — such as videos or simulations — should be captioned even in cases where transcripts are available, and any interactive content, including publisher material, should be accessible. Using materials that are already accessible is a time saver, so consider curating images, video, and audio from vetted OER, as they frequently meet accessibility requirements Your institution's accessibility office can help you to determine if specific content is accessible or not.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help creating accessible content or assuring your content is accessible, QM offers the Addressing Accessibility and Usability workshop as well as the Making Materials Accessible dedicated web conferencing workshop series. QM also provides the Accessibility & Usability Resource Site (AURS) as a free, public resource to help you create accessible materials. QM community members developed AURS and monitor the site's discussion forums.

SECTION C — UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY

Institutions choose, acquire, and support specific educational technologies to foster digital learning. Focus first on institutionally-supported technologies so that students have dedicated technical support, as well as protections for their privacy and data.

If your course's technology needs go beyond those that are institutionally supported, you must understand the privacy and data protections the technology has in place for students, in addition to its accessibility.

In this section, focus on ensuring that:

1. The course uses a variety of technology and tools.
2. Learners can protect their privacy.
3. The technologies used are accessible.
4. The learners can receive help to use course technology.

Design Step 1
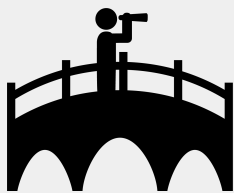
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Determine which technologies and tools learners will use, and examine them for type and function.

Take a holistic view of the technology used to ensure that the course is not designed around only one technology or tool. For example, a course might currently use only the discussion tool, but a short essay or reflective journal might be a better pedagogical fit for one or more of the existing discussions. Different technologies — such as videos or web-based applications — may be useful to integrate depending on the discipline. Focus on technology that is readily available, free or low-cost, and that uses relatively low bandwidth so that learners with poor internet access can still use the technology.

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Check with the appropriate office at your institution to see what the policies are regarding student privacy and data protection. Explain to students what data, including data from the LMS, is collected and how it is used.

Consider that choosing to use technologies not vetted by your institution might pose a data risk to you, your institution, and/or your learners. Be sure to read the technology provider's Privacy Policy and determine how privacy and data are protected. Communicate clearly to learners about what they need to do to protect their privacy and data.

There are unique privacy and security risks with synchronous technologies. Consult with the appropriate office at your institution, and read the privacy policy for any non-institutionally supported synchronous technology that you choose to use, so that you are aware of how to protect learners' data and privacy during synchronous interaction. Then, communicate those policies and protections to your learners.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Provide learners with information on protecting their data and privacy for tools introduced or recommended throughout the course.**

As the easiest approach, keep all course work inside your institutional LMS. For anything outside of that where students will have to create an account, submit material, etc., ensure that FERPA and other institutional policies regarding student privacy are being followed.

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Multimedia might be used for instructional material or even for learner feedback, and includes images, video, audio, animation, tools with interactive components, and more. Learners should be able to easily use multimedia, including having clear audio for video and audio files, using images and graphics to enhance understanding without causing distractions, and breaking longer videos into shorter segments.

Synchronous technologies may have unique accessibility considerations. Ensure all technologies that students are using in all modalities are accessible.

Design Step 4

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Determine all the different technical support learners might need (e.g., LMS, hardware, software, etc.). Communicate to learners what support is available and how to obtain it, including live help desk support. Include links to any relevant technology training that learners could complete as another means of technical support and help. Additionally, let learners know about access to free, low-cost, or borrowing options for required technology, including hardware and software.

Learners may have unique support needs for synchronous technologies. Ensure they know what help is available and how to obtain assistance.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Identify where you and your students can receive prompt support for technology used in the course, and inform students in advance about what technologies they will need to acquire and/or use and how to find support.**

List the technology help contact information for your institution, as well as a brief description of the help that is offered. Include links for software students might need to download, such as web conferencing software, as well as links to learner tutorials for using the technology.

SECTION D — ESTABLISH PRESENCE & FACILITATE INTERACTION

The elements of Teaching, Social, and Cognitive Presence comprise the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001), and they all begin with the design of your course. In this section:

1. Create and communicate the planned interaction between you and your learners, and explain to learners how to interact with you, with peers, and with the course itself.
2. Design introductions for both yourself and your learners, which helps increase the feeling of "presence" in an online course.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2001), Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *The American Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 7-23.

Design Step 1
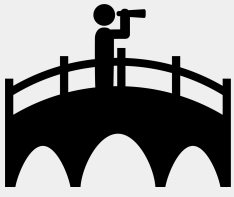
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Quality online teaching relies heavily on teaching presence, which begins with the design of the course. Whether in the syllabus, in the assignment instructions, in discussion forums, or elsewhere, let learners know how and when you will interact with them — either as a group or by providing individualized feedback.

Provide realistic time frames so they know when to expect to hear back from you. Being present online means interacting with learners in multiple ways at multiple times each and every week, just as you would face-to-face. However, like everything online, it must first be planned into the design of the course. Communicate to learners all the ways you will be present with them throughout the course. Be aware that learners come from different backgrounds and cultures, and be clear how they should address you and how interactions with you will take place. Include reasons they may want to contact you, such as to ask clarifying questions or discuss feedback or grades.

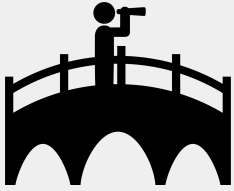*Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start:* **Tell learners what to expect from you and when to expect it.**

Tell learners when they will receive an answer to an emailed question (e.g., 24 hours, 48 hours, etc.) and when they can expect assignment grades and feedback.

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Even experienced online learners need guidance on how to interact with each other, their instructor, and the course itself. What does "participation" look like in an online class? State how much time students can expect to spend on coursework each week. Describe how learners should interact with peers on the discussion board and elsewhere. Consider thoughtful ways that learners can build connections in the course, and be mindful of different language and culturally-situated interaction styles; reflect these in learner interaction requirements.

If there are different or specific requirements for interacting synchronously, include policies and guidelines for synchronous discussions and communication, as well as consequences for inappropriate behavior.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Address communication and interaction expectations.**

Explain to learners how they should contact you (email, via online office hours, through the LMS, etc.), how often they should log in to the class site, and how they should interact with course materials and peers.

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Online students need guidance and directions on how to communicate professionally in different formats — including digital and written communication. Include course policies that ask students to log in a certain number of times per week to ensure they are keeping up with the pace of the course. Provide clear information on course "netiquette" and digital communication with peers. Provide clear guidelines with examples of respectful language, and consider what cultural norms are embedded within your course communication policy.

Synchronous interaction, whether virtual/online or face-to-face, often necessitates different communication guidelines than asynchronous online interaction. Develop guidelines for learners communicating in real time that include guidance on how they should approach any synchronous interaction that is connected to an assessment (e.g., a synchronous discussion connected to a grade, delivering a presentation to the class, etc.).
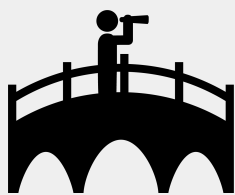
Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Address communication and interaction expectations.**

Explain to learners guidelines for communicating with peers (e.g., professional communication, "Netiquette," etc.) in synchronous and/or asynchronous environments.

Design Step 4

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Welcome learners to the course the same way you would on the first day of a face-to-face class.

Include information on why you love teaching the class, your academic background, and what learners can expect from you as the instructor. Provide your photo with accompanying text, or create a short video, so learners can hear your voice, see you, and get to know your communication style. Include information on how you will create and promote an inclusive atmosphere, and foster a community built on mutual respect.

Use synchronous class time to introduce yourself, and model professional, synchronous communication for learners.

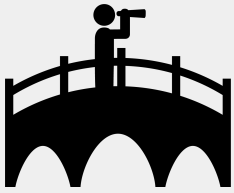*Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start:* **Introduce yourself to remote learners.**

If teaching remotely, be sure to introduce yourself during the first class session, just as you would in an in-person class. Welcome learners and provide a brief overview of the course, including how it's structured and a high-level view of the topics learners will be engaging in.

Design Step 5

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Include a self-introduction discussion activity that gives learners ideas on how to introduce themselves, such as sharing their academic background or major, their goals for the class, and a photo or avatar. Give learners options of what to say about themselves; do not force learners to disclose personal information about themselves or their family.

You can also get a bit creative with learner introduction prompts, which are a great way to increase social presence and get learners connected and engaged early on.

Synchronous introductions might be done during class time for smaller classes. Otherwise, you could create an introduction assignment within the LMS, and then extend the conversation to the next synchronous session.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Create a sense of community by encouraging and guiding learners to introduce themselves in the online classroom/platform and/or engage in online discussions.**

An early "introduction discussion" activity gets learners using the LMS discussion tool, which they may need for upcoming assignments. If the class has already begun before being moved to remote delivery, however, learners may have already done an in-class introduction. In this case, consider a different angle for a "get-to-know-you" discussion post, such as describing where they're logging in from. Activities such as these may seem unimportant, but they can be vital in helping learners feel connected to you and their peers in ways that build rapport and camaraderie.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help developing presence, QM offers the Creating Presence in Your Online Course workshop.


Phase 3: Connect

SECTION A — ORGANIZING YOUR CONTENT INTO MODULES

1. At this point in your design, you may have completed an alignment/course map, which gives you a macro-level view of your course. Your next step is to organize all your aligned assessments, activities, and materials into smaller units of learning, commonly called

"modules." As you organize, determine the appropriate sequencing and timing of assessments, so that learners have time to receive and use your feedback prior to completing the next assessment.

2. Common ways to organize modules is by week or thematic unit. Modules provide learners with a comprehensive area where they can actively engage with the materials, activities, and assessments relevant for that specific unit of learning, while also including context and guidance from you (such as a module introduction and/or summary). This is the organizational structure that you will construct in the learning management system (LMS). Check with the appropriate office at your institution to determine if there is an LMS template that can help you get started with good navigation and links to support it or other institutional resources. Begin building your course in the LMS at any point in Phase 3.

3. Each module has its own, discrete set of learning objectives called module objectives, which is what you will create next. What you are having learners do in each module serves as the blueprint for writing your module objectives. Writing your module objectives can serve as a final alignment "check," as you look at the content/activity/assessment alignment within the module and write that as an objective that begins with an active or measurable verb.

Design Step 1
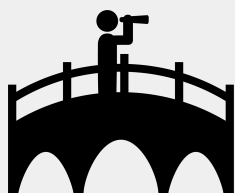
Bridge to Quality Action Item
Create measurable objectives for the modules/units/weeks in your course, and connect them to your course-level objectives so that students can connect what they're learning and doing to course objectives, and can track their learning as they progress through the course.

It is typically easiest to draft these after you've designed an individual module by examining what students will do in the activities and assessments.

The module objectives state in discrete, concise, and inclusive language what learners will be able to do by the end of that module. Writing the module objectives is a reflection of the alignment between the content and the activities/assessments you have in each learning unit. By using inclusive and descriptive language in the design of the module objectives, you provide learners with opportunities to increase their confidence and demonstrate competence by achieving the stated objectives.

Consider using a combination of narratives and diagrams to explicitly show diverse learners how the module-level learning objectives pave the way for them to achieve the course-level learning objectives. Learners whose cultures rely on and celebrate oral traditions may benefit from having this presented in an audio-visual format, for example. Taken as a whole, aligning your module objectives to your

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 2.2 | The module/unit-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives.

Alignment

course learning objectives is the final step in completing the alignment map of your course. (If you've gotten to this step, well done!)

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Write learning objectives in short, easy-to-understand sentences that use common terms and avoid jargon in order to reduce learners' cognitive load. Learning objectives should be relevant and speak to the authentic richness of the cultures represented in your class.

Include the objectives in places that are easy to locate, such as the syllabus or a **Start Here** area.

Learners need to understand from the first day what they will be able to *do* with their new knowledge and skills by the end of the course.

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 2.3 | Learning objectives are clearly stated, are learner-centered, and are prominently located in the course.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help with developing modules, QM offers the Designing Your Online Course workshop, which enables you to create a module using an alignment map, providing a framework for organizing the modules/units/weeks of your course. The Designing Your Hybrid Course workshop is for those offering a hybrid course. QM also offers a dedicated workshop on Creating Course Maps.
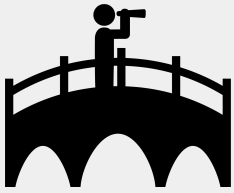
SECTION B — MAKE CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS

In this section, make learning connections transparent, just as you would face-to-face when introducing a topic, an assessment, or an activity that asks learners to engage with specific content. Online, we often can't tell if learners know why we're asking them to focus their learning efforts in a particular way or if they think something is "busy work." Learners may not understand why they are being asked to, for example, read a certain chapter or view a particular video if they don't see the connection to doing well on an assessment or achieving a learning objective. You can make connections between different parts of the course in various ways, including text and graphics; the key is to communicate to learners how the course components are aligned with each other.

Guide your learners purposefully along the learning path you've designed by:

1. Helping them connect their use of course materials to completing learning activities.
2. Connecting the activities to the course objectives.

Design Step 1

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Incorporate alignment visibly into your online course by connecting what learners are reading, watching or doing to how they will use the material for specific activities. This facilitates achievement of course objectives. Diverse learners will benefit from the use of clear, concise language when explaining the relationship; some of your students may be English Language Learners (ELL), so using simple sentence structure and providing clear information supports and empowers diverse learners in your courses. Consider including this information in an audio/video format to meet the needs of different learning preferences.

Explain each piece of material, and include it within the associated assignment prompt.

If you are using the flipped approach, remind learners of the link between materials and activities prior to beginning the activities. Alternatively, remind learners how the material they are interacting with during a synchronous session is connected with upcoming learning activities.
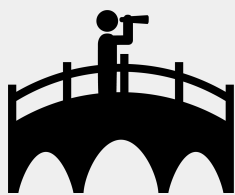
Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Explain to your learners how the learning materials help them complete course activities and achieve the course learning objectives.**

Reflect on how you begin your face-to-face class sessions, and use that to create a module/unit introduction that is text-based or a short video that you record. You can post this as an Announcement or send via email. In this Module Introduction, explain to learners how what they're reading or watching that week connects to the course learning objectives.

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Explain to your learners how the activities relate to achieving the learning objectives. This is where you can explain your instructional rationale for including each activity in the course. Again, diverse learners will benefit from the use of clear, concise, and intelligible language when explaining the relationship, ensuring linguistic accessibility.

Make this relationship clear via the layout of the module by including a course map or via announcements or module introductions — similar to how you would make connections for students in-person.

Especially if you are using the flipped approach in a hybrid or synchronous course, use class time to reinforce the connection between what learners are doing and the role the activities play in helping learners achieve the course's learning objectives.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Specifically explain how each activity or assignment is related to the course objectives and how you will evaluate submitted work.**

Just as you would in class, introduce an assignment by going over the instructions using text, audio, or video, providing relevant examples when useful/possible, and reminding students how the assignment is connected to learning objectives. Include clear information, whether through an assignment prompt, rubric, or other means, about how the assignment will be evaluated.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help connecting assessments with learning objectives, QM offers the [Connecting Learning Objectives and Assessments](#) workshop. .
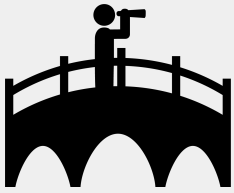

SECTION C — ASSESSMENT CHECK

In Phase 1, you created your aligned assessment ideas/plan. Now, create the specific digital assessments, such as exam or quiz questions, discussion or journal prompts, or group activities. This is not listed as a separate step below, as you've already designed the plan for aligned assessments, and the creation of those assessments can happen in various ways, such as constructing exam questions or reflective journal prompts directly in the LMS, or creating scenarios that form the basis for a class discussion.

1. In this section, first develop instructions/prompts for those assessments to ensure learners know what to do and how they will be evaluated. Clear prompts or rubrics lessen clarifying

questions from students as they are completing course assessments and are the online equivalent to discussing upcoming assignments in a face-to-face class. Remember, some of your students may be English Language Learners (ELL), so using simple sentence structure and providing clear, concise information helps to support and empower diverse learners in your courses.

2. It's also time to see how work is graded, explain how learners will be evaluated, and place the grading policy in the course so learners have this information on the first day.

3. Lastly, you'll take a final, holistic view of your assessments to ensure they are of various types and are scaffolded and sequenced to allow learners to "ramp up" to the appropriate level of mastery.

Design Step 1

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Create assessments that are appropriate to the course level and are structured and sequenced to encourage cognitive growth and mastery. For example, longer papers might be sequenced from topic to outline to draft, and then to submission of the final paper.

Take a holistic view of the types of formative and summative assessments in the course, and ensure that students have a variety of ways to check their understanding and demonstrate their learning. For example, you might use a narrative discussion of a case study; a private, reflective journal; or an opportunity for learners to tell their story as it relates to the material being assessed.

Sequence your formative (andsummative) assessments in a way that allows them to build on each other over time and equips learners with the knowledge and skills they need before they move on to more complex skills and tasks. Breaking down bigger assignments into smaller tasks helps diverse learners to acquire the necessary skills, retain the targeted knowledge, and develop more effective metacognitive strategies.

Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE 3.4 SRS | The course includes multiple types of assessments that are sequenced and suited to the level of the course.

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Explain to learners how each assessment will be evaluated by using clear instructions and connecting their work to both the evaluation criteria and the achievement of course objectives.

You might do this through text associated with the assessment, by creating a clear assignment prompt via a rubric, or in other ways that work well for your course and your learners. This is especially important, as in some cultures, seeking clarification from instructors and requesting help might not be encouraged, making it difficult for some learners to get the assistance they need to successfully complete the assessment.

If there are graded components of synchronous interactions, learners will need clear directions or instructions for how their participation, etc. will be evaluated. You can use the synchronous class session as a time to talk through assignment prompts and answer learner questions about them.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Specifically explain how each activity or assignment is related to the course objectives and how you will evaluate submitted work.**

Just as you would in class, introduce an assignment by going over the instructions using text, audio, or video, providing relevant examples when useful/possible, and reminding learners how the assignment is connected to learning objectives/outcomes. Include clear information, whether through an assignment prompt, rubric, or other means, about how the assignment will be graded.

Design Step 3
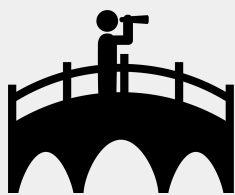
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Ensure the point or percentage value of all assignments and assessments is clearly communicated, including weighted components. Explain how grades will be calculated, or how student work will be evaluated if using a non-traditional grading approach. Include policies for late or missed work.

If there are grades attached to synchronous activity, the grading policy should explain that as well, including how students will be evaluated on their participation or work.

Emergency Remote Instruction *Quick Start:* **Provide instructions on how learners can access their grades.**

Explain to learners how they will receive grades, how to view grades online, etc. Depending on how long you will be remote teaching, you may want to set up an online gradebook so that learners can determine their current course grade as well.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help with assessments, QM offers the Assessing Learning Remotely synchronous workshop series. The Assessing Your Learners and the Connecting Learning Objectives and Assessments asynchronous workshops also help with these design decisions.

SECTION D — TELL YOUR LEARNERS HOW YOUR COURSE IS STRUCTURED & HOW TO GET HELP

In the face-to-face classroom, learners know where to sit and that the instructor will be in the front of the room. Online, the framework for how to get to the course, what to do once you arrive, how to find assignments, and how to move through the course is not readily apparent. You must make these things visible for your learners. Now that the design has been completed in the alignment map and then built in the learning management system or other digital learning environment, tell learners:

1. How to proceed through the course.
2. What the relevant course and institutional policies are.
3. How they can access help online.

Design Step 1

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Course navigation and organization can have a significant impact on student learning. If learners cannot quickly locate important course items, they may waste time, feel frustrated, and/or experience an increased cognitive load, all of which can negatively impact learning. ELL students may find this particularly challenging, so consider offering directions in different languages if relevant. Include a narrated and captioned screencast to illustrate how the course is organized and how to navigate within the course.

Ensure that learners' movement between course elements is logical and that learners know how to navigate between online materials and synchronous interaction.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Organize your course online to guide learners along the learning path and help them progressively navigate through the course each week.**

Focus on organizing weekly modules/learning units into folders that contain the materials and assignment information students will need for that week. If possible, also add explanation and context by including a module introduction and/or summary, information on how materials and assignments are connected to learning objectives, and assignments prompts and/or rubrics.

Design Step 2

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Create a **Start Here** area on the course home page. Include your text or video "welcome message," the syllabus and schedule, and the first few things you want learners to do to get started in the course. Use text or a captioned "course orientation" screencast to explain to learners what to do first and where to find important course tools and components.

If connecting with learners synchronously, dedicate time during the first class meeting to help orient learners on interacting with web conferencing software, etc.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Provide explicit directions and comparisons of the structure of the online version with the face-to-face version, clearly identifying where learners can find course components and what they should do to get started.**

Explain how the remote class will be structured, if learners need to log on for synchronous sessions (and how), where they can find assignment information, and how they should submit assignments.

Design Step 3

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Describe the focus and purpose of the course, making real-world connections to your learners' lived experiences if possible. Provide an overview of the schedule, highlighting prominent activities, so learners will have a basic understanding of the types of learning activities with which they will engage. Take learners through a typical module to showcase the structure of it via a screencast or other means.

Determine the module structure and the pacing of the course. If you want learners to complete activities in a certain order, such as read/watch "X"first, and then complete "Y" assignment, tell them via the module organization or introduction.

If the course has any type of synchronous or hybrid component, design the activities accordingly. Decide what learners will do on their own and what they will do when the class meets virtually or in person. Consider the flipped pedagogical approach, where learners engage with instructional material on their own in preparation for application or dialogue when the class convenes. Clearly explain in the syllabus, on the Home Page, etc. how the class will be structured, and explain how this structure will help students learn.
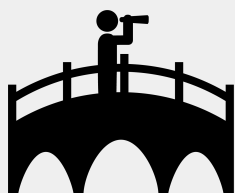
Relevant QM Higher Ed. Standard

HE SRS 1.2 | Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Provide explicit directions and comparisons of the structure of the online version with the face-to-face version, clearly identifying where students can find course components and what they should do to get started.**

Explain how the remote class will be structured, if learners need to log on for synchronous sessions (and how), where they can find assignment information, and how they should submit assignments.

Design Step 4

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Include in your syllabus any online-learning specific course or institutional policies, for example:

- Attendance
- Participation
- Accessibility
- Online Learner Conduct
- Cultural and Religious Observations

Add any policy addendums you might need for hybrid courses, HyFlex courses, or courses with a synchronous online component. For example: How can learners make up a missed class session if they could not connect due to technology issues? If there are options for attendance in a HyFlex course, state all options clearly to help learners decide the best modality for them, and explain if learners have the option to switch modalities, and how to do so.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Directly identify any relevant changes to any course and institutional policies.**

Let learners know immediately if there are changes to due dates/times for assignments.

Design Step 5
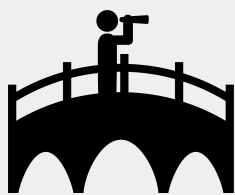
Bridge to Quality Action Item

Ensure learners are aware of and can obtain all the technology they will need to be successful, including:

- Hardware requirements
- Whether they can use their mobile device
- Whether hardware and/or software is available for checkout from the institution (with directions on how to access it)
- Software needed, such as Microsoft Office

Learners using synchronous technologies may have additional technology requirements. Tell learners if they will need a headset and webcam, what web conferencing software the class will use, and how to obtain it.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Identify where you and your learners can receive prompt support for technology used in the course, and inform learners in advance about what technologies they will need to acquire and/or use, and how to find support.**

List the technology help contact information for your institution, as well as a brief description of the help that is offered. Include links for software learners might need to download, such as web conferencing software, as well as links to learner tutorials for using the technology.

Design Step 6

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Describe the technology-related skills learners will need to be successful online learners.

This might include a certain level of skill in using software,such as Microsoft Word, or other skills, such as searching the web and uploading digital documents.

Determine whether or not learners will need additional time to learn a new piece of software or tool. Include that time within the workload of the course.

Learners using synchronous technologies need a certain level of skill to be successful. Create a screencast or share a tutorial that shows learners how to use tools during a synchronous session, such as screen sharing, using breakout rooms, etc.
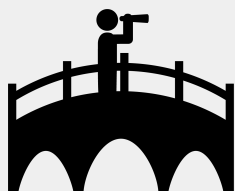
Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Identify where you and your learners can receive prompt support for technology used in the course and inform students in advance about what technologies they will need to acquire and/or use, and how to find support.**

List the technology help contact information for your institution, as well as a brief description of the help that is offered. Include links for software learners might need to download, such as web conferencing software, as well as links to learner tutorials for using the technology.
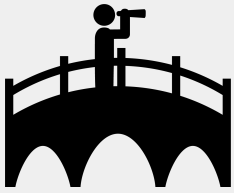

Design Step 7

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Identify expectations, whether in the syllabus or elsewhere, for prerequisite knowledge/courses or any competency requirements learners must meet before beginning the course.

Design Step 8

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Connect with the accessibility office at your institution, and communicate to learners:

- The services available.
- Relevant course and/or institutional policies.
- Who they should contact and how if they need an accommodation.

There may be unique accommodations needed for certain synchronous technologies and tools.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Explain to learners how to access the institution's accessibility services and be responsive to learners who need assistance in accessing digital course materials.**

Provide the contact information for your institutional office for accessibility and direct learners to reach out early and proactively if they think they might need an accommodation.

Design Step 9

Bridge to Quality Action Item
Determine the services online learners will need to support their academic success — such as library, ELL support, tutoring, or testing services.

Determine the academic support services to which online learners have access. Provide links to those services and include all contact information for the support services.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Articulate quick and easy ways for learners to find appropriate academic or learner services support offices and resources.**

Provide information about support offices and resources that offer services to help with the shift to remote teaching. For example, check with your library to see if they have information for how to access resources from off-campus, and ask tutoring centers if they'll be continuing tutoring via synchronous web sessions.

Design Step 10

Bridge to Quality Action Item

Online learners still need learner support services. Provide them with information on getting assistance from the offices of advising, registration, financial aid, accessibility, diversity, and counseling. This includes those services that meet the needs of racially and culturally diverse learners (for example, including links to African American, LatinX, and indigenous/Native American student services or groups). Ensure that online learners know what support services are available and how to connect with those service offices and/or people.

Emergency Remote Instruction Quick Start: **Articulate quick and easy ways for learners to find appropriate academic or learner services support offices and resources.**

Provide information about support offices and resources that might've altered services due to the shift to remote teaching. For example, check with your library to see if they have information for how to access resources from off-campus, and ask tutoring centers if they'll be continuing tutoring via synchronous web sessions.

QM Professional Development Options

If you need help designing your course to get learners started, QM offers a Design That Welcomes Your Learners workshop.