# Learning activities

A major strategy for effective teaching and learning in course materials and in an online learning environment is the provision of a range of activities and strategies to encourage learners to engage with the content and acquire the knowledge, skills and values linked to the course outcomes.

#### What are good learning activities?

Good learning activities motivate and engage the learner to attain an acceptable level of success in achieving the learning outcomes specified in the course. The following criteria and guidelines are drawn from different [[1]](#footnote-0)sources. They are integrated to provide an overview of the main elements constituting good learning activities.

### Purpose of activities

The purpose and nature of a course determines the level, type and spread of learning activities. By analysing the course outcomes you can determine the right mix of activities.

* Relate to course level outcomes and content (Blooms Taxonomy)
* Relate to the type of knowledge, skills and values that need to be acquired.
* Provide learners with clear expectations and criteria.

### Promote learning

The aim of any learning activity is to motivate learners to become actively involved in interrogating concepts and content to develop their own understanding and acquire or strengthen identifed skills. Activities are not haphardly thrown into the content but are carefully designed and integrated to create a focused and engaging learning pathway.

* Activities are informed by and reflect appropriate learning processes and strategies e.g. Kolb’s Learning Cycle, Constructivist Learning Theory
* The number of activities adequately covers the course outcomes and content
* Activities are sufficient to give learners enough practice
* Activities are distributed at fairly frequent intervals throughout a section
* Activities are sufficiently varied in terms of task and purpose
* Activities are life/work related
* Activities show a range of difficulty. Initial activities should be less complex with more complex tasks assigned to students as the course progresses
* Activities are realistic in terms of time indications
* Activities motivate and engage the learners.

### Support learners

Research has shown that learners do not attempt activities if they are unclear about what to do and have insufficient background knowledge. Learners need adequate support in the form of clear and unambiguous explanations and guidelines including illustrative examples where necessary.

* Detailed step-by-step instructions are provided for each activity and evaluative exercise. Clear instructions help the learners to know exactly what they are expected to do
* Guidelines for submitting outputs of activities are provided
* The number of activities/assignments and their due dates are reasonable and do not overload the student
* Learners are encouraged to interact with others and engage in collaborative information sharing.

### Provide feedback

Feedback is an integral part of the learning process. Appropriate feedback and commentary on activities enables the learner to experience a form of interaction and discussion that normally takes place in lively classrooms. In addition, because learners work through the materials largely on their own, they need some means of assessing their own progress. Comments on the activities in the materials can help to do this.

* Feedback to learners is clearly indicated
* Feedback is offered in the form of suggestions and is only prescriptive where necessary
* The learners are able to identify the errors they have made, and they are able to assess their progress from their responses
* Where calculations are required, the stages in the working are displayed and explained.

### Online features

The online learning environment offers a variety of features, which when integrated provide learners with flexible, diverse and supported learning experiences. The main features are:

* Access to a range of resources both embedded and through hyperlinks to resources on other relevant websites.
* Ease of updating resources and keeping them current.
* Inclusion of online resources that cater for different learning preferences. It is possible to include text, video, sound, interactive games and activities, real time or synchronous and off line or asynchronous learning activities.
* Reliable and valid online assessment which is easy to use, is responsive and provides speedy feedback. Learners can upload their assignments and key assessment tasks.
* Communication processes such as discussion forums, blogs, emails make it possible for two way communication both synchronous and asynchronous between learners and tutors and between peers.
* Appropriate use is made of online technology tools to create an interactive learning environment which is suitable for the level of the course and the target group
* Clear navigation structures are in place with clear directions to learners.
* Learners have convenient access to up to date Internet connected computers that have the hardware and software necessary for ease of operation in the online environment.
* Technical support is accessble to learners
* The online learning management system allows opportunities for learners to interact with the facilitator or tutor and fellow learners.
* Adequate orientation and support is provided to enable learners to become skilled in operating in the online learning space.
* There are effective tracking and feedback mechanisms to and from learners to enable them to check their own progress.

### Structure and layout of activities

A well designed structure and layout consistently threaded through the unit or module of the course signals to learners when they are expected to become actively involved. A predictable but not inflexible structure is like a learning thread or pathway through the learning materials whether in print or online.

* All activities are clearly structured:
  + Short motivational introduction (WHY is this activity important and worth doing)
  + Clear description of task and instructions (WHAT do you have to do)
  + Guidelines (HOW can you approach this task)
  + Time allocated
  + Feedback (Comments to enable students to track their progress and additional information to strengthen learning)
* Activities are clearly stated and All deadlines for completion of activities should be clearly stated upfront.
* The activities are clearly signposted and learners know where each begins and ends
* The signposting of activities is consistently followed through in each unit and module of the course.

#### Types of activities

We can cluster learning activities into 3 broad categories: activities building comprehension, activities building critical thinking and activities building skill. The three groups of activities as shown in the table below must be viewed as interrelated as they serve to develop competence. We understand competence to mean: The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required to perform at an acceptable standard.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Activities building comprehension** | **Activities building critical thinking** | **Activities building skill** |
| Computer marked quizzes   * Short answers * True/False or Yes/No * Multiple choice | Online research | Simulations, role plays (online) |
| Video reflections | Case studies | Demonstration and practice |
| Webquests | Problem based learning | Games |
| Matching and sequencing  Drag and drop | Decision making trees | Projects |
| Cloze | Webquests | Peer to peer collaboration and communication   * Chat sessions * Blogs * Forum discussions * Emails |
| Label and identify diagrams |  | E-portfolios |
| Scavenger hunts |  | Student presentations |
| **Activities are interrelated and serve to build competence comprising knowledge, skill, values and attitudes that enable students to perform at a specified standard** | | |

The following examples serve to illustrate the use of selected learning activities from the above list. They are drawn from units, modules and courses found on OER websites. The activities can be reused, adapted, remixed according to specified CC licences.

### Activities building comprehension

##### Computer marked quiz

###### What is it?

Computer marked quizzes include different types of question options: multiple choice, True or False, Yes or No, selection of options from a drop down menu, text or numerical questions that require students to enter a short text or number. The quiz can comprise a set list of questions or a database of questions developed by the educator/facilitator and marked by the computer. The database allows for random selection of questions per quiz attempt which makes it possible for students to redo the quiz several times. Immediate feedback is built in to enable learners to check their progress.

###### Why use it?

Computer marked quizzes provide objective testing and offer students immediate feedback. The quizzes are interactive and allow learners to continuously check their understanding of what they are learning. Quizzes can be used:

* to introduce a topic or unit
* to create the learners’ awareness of their entry level knowledge
* for formative or summative assessment. Quizzes usually form part of a broader assessment strategy.

###### Example 1: Simple quiz for use to start topic or unit

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **CC licence** |
| This *Copyright Taster Quiz* is offered at the start of the Copyright unit and immediately gets the student involved in engaging with the introduction to Copyright.  The quiz uses True and False statement options. Feedback is provided for both True and False answers and students are encouraged to read both comments. | **Unit: *Copyright:* Your educational right to copy**  Open Content Licensing 4 Educators Workshop on the WikiEducator website  <http://wikieducator.org/Copyright_for_Educators/Introduction> | **CC-BY** |

###### Example 2: Complex quiz for multiple uses

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| **Description of activity** | Name of unit module/course and website | **CC licence** |
| The *Good academic practices quiz* is offered at two levels:   * Introductory level * Advanced level   This allows for learners of different entry levels to engage with the module.  Students are encouraged to try the quiz at the start of the module to test their entry awareness of good academic practices.  Students can try the quiz at the end of each section of the module as well as at the end to check their progressive understanding of academic practices.  A variety of question options are used and effective use is made of supportive feedback that strengthens insight and comprehension and is motivating. | **Unit: Developing Good Academic practices (DGAP\_1)**  **Introductory level**  OpenLearn, Open University UK  <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=399993&direct=1>  **Unit outcomes**  This resource will provide:   * explanations about good academic practice and how to build it into your studies; * advice on how to avoid inappropriate or bad academic practice; * techniques on how to avoid plagiarism; * **a quiz to test your understanding of good academic practice and your ability to avoid plagiarism.** | **CC-BY NC SA** |

##### Video reflections

###### What is it?

Video reflections provide factual information visually about concepts and topics. The presentations are usually short and provide imaginative insights into difficult concepts and topics. A variety of images can be used as deemed appropriate, e.g. simple graphics, still photographs, diagrams, animations, moving pictures and interactive graphics.

###### Why use it?

Video reflections can be inserted at any point in a unit where they fit best. Suitable questions are linked to the video and learners are alerted to the questions in advance. Learners can share their thoughts on the video with their peers through blogs and microblogs. Video reflections can:

* capture the interest of learners
* clarify difficult concepts
* stimulate reflection on a new or known topic
* encourage sharing of ideas on a particular topic.

###### Example 1: Video to introduce a topic

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Video 1: Building on the past to shape the future**  This is a short video clip used to introduce Creative Commons Licences. Participants are asked to answer two questions after viewing the video:   * What was the most important message of the video for you? * Did you learn anything new?   Learners post their thoughts in a microblog, e.g. twitter or Wenote. | **Unit: Creative Commons Unplugged**  Open Content Licensing 4 Educators Workshop on the WikiEducator website  <http://moodle.wikieducator.org/mod/page/view.php?id=257>  **Unit outcomes**   * Introduce the free legal tools provided by Creative Commons which educators can use to refine their copyright. * Explain how Creative Commons licenses work and introduce the six licenses * Learn about the compatibility among the different licenses * Share thoughts and experiences with fellow participants via WENotes, identi.ca or Twitter. | **CC-BY** |

###### Example 2: Video to reflect on and consolidate new knowledge

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Video: Wanna work together?**  This video follows on from Video 1 and is used to reflect on the basics of Creative Commons licenses.  After viewing the video participants are asked to share what they have learned by posting a microblog. | **Unit: Creative Commons Unplugged**  Open Content Licensing 4 Educators Workshop on the WikiEducator website  <http://moodle.wikieducator.org/mod/page/view.php?id=257> | **CC-BY** |

##### Webquest

###### What is it?

The task is the central focus of a webquest. It requires that learners find information on the web for a particular purpose.

###### Why use it?

Webquests encourage learners to gather information from the web to enable them to complete a specific task. Webquests can be used in different ways. For example:

* Browsing: Look for information on specified websites in order to become familiar with the information on offer
* Solving puzzles or problems: Look for information from diverse sources in order to solve a puzzle or problem
* Reporting task: Look for information about a specific topic from different sources and compile it into an integrated account or report

###### Example 1: Browse specific websites to gather information

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Activity 4: What is available for me to use?**  In this activity learners are required to browse specific OER repositories to look for “bits and pieces” they could use, adapt and mix when creating a set of OER online learning resources. They can create a useful reference list of OER resources for future use.  Learners are advised to look at and record the the CC licences as they will determine how the resources can be used. The repositories listed in the activity are:  **Music**  [ccMixter](http://ccmixter.org/)  **Multi-media resources across a range of topics**  [Merlot](http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm)  **Images**  [Flickr](http://www.flickr.com/)  **A wiki of general repositories hosted by UNESCO**  [UNESCO Open Educational Resources](http://oerwiki.iiep-unesco.org/)  **Jorum – a sharing site for Higher Education in the UK**  [Jorum](http://www.jorum.ac.uk/)  **OER Commons**  This site has a range of open resources  [OER Commons](http://www.oercommons.org/)  **Science**  [Science Repositories](http://www.wikieducator.org/OER_Handbook/educator/Science_repositories)  **Humanities**  [Humanities Repositories](http://www.wikieducator.org/OER_Handbook/educator/humanities_repositories) | **Unit: Creating Open Educational Resources\_OER 1**  **Intermediate level**  OpenLearn, Open University  <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=397777&section=4.1>  **Unit outcomes**  After studying this unit you will:   * be able to state your own motivation for producing self-study Open Educational Resources (OERs); * have investigated and analysed some of the research into online learning; * **have evaluated some examples of educational resources for active open learning;** * be able to plan a structured learning experience using a range of resources; * be able to construct an Open Learn-style unit by remixing resources; * have considered how to evaluate your teaching resource | **CC-BY NC SA** |

### Activities building critical thinking

##### Case studies

###### What is it?

Online case studies are stories or scenarios that reflect a range of authentic contexts. Appropriate technology can be used to present case studies, such as graphics, video and audio clips, multimedia interactions.

###### Why use it?

Case studies create a link with reality and can be used at any point in a unit. They can:

* capture the interest of learners and enable them to get an insight into a present or past reality
* clarify difficult concepts
* stimulate critical thinking, problem solving and evaluation
* prompt research
* stimulate analysis of a situation from a variety of viewpoints or perspectives.

###### Example 1: Printed case study to stimulate critical reflection

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Activity 5: Learning from a story (Case study 1)**  This story operates at two levels. It is both a personal story and an historical account of child-care policy and practice in the last century, from someone on the receiving end.  The first task is to note reactions to the personal story in the **Learning Journal**. The learning journal can be accessed on line and comments can be typed into the specified space.  The second task is to note in the learning journal the main features of the child migration scheme indicating own thoughts on what the story reveals about the atitutudes to children that prevailed at the time.  Feedback can be accessed by clicking on the **Reveal Discussion** button. | **Introducing Social Work Practice K113\_1**  **Introductory level**  OpenLearn, Open University UK  <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=398072&section=3.3>  **Unit outcomes**   * develop awareness of the underpinning knowledge relating to the key roles of social work; * **illustrate the application of knowledge, skills, values and processes through case study examples;** * demonstrate awareness of the skills required to build relationships with service users, colleagues and others through effective communication; * introduce the social work service standards and codes of practice relevant to each nation in the UK. | **CC-BY NC SA** |

###### Example 2: Audio case study to stimulate critical reflection

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Activity 3: Biographical perspective using pathways (Audio clip 1: John)**  This is one of 4 audio clips of interviews with 4 homeless people. The audio clips give a brief insight into life without a home. They demonstrate the importance of a biographical perspective in udnerstanding the unique and diverse needs of individual homeless people.  The tasks involve:   * reading the background information about the individual * listening to the audio clip in which the person talks about his situation. A transcript of the audio clip can be accessed by clicking on **View document** * identify the needs of the person and make notes * make notes about who should be responsible for meeting the needs of the person   A commentary on the audio clips can be accessed in Section 8. | **Unit: Homelessness and need K202\_3**  **Intermediate level**  OpenLearn, Open University UK  **Unit outcomes**   * understand how some of the needs of homeless people can be met. | **CC-BY NC SA** |

### Activities building skills

##### Demonstration and practice

###### What is it?

An online multimedia demonstration of a process or system that shows its component parts and provides guidance on the steps that need to be followed. Structured practice activities are usually linked to the demonstration and give learners the opportunity to practise the requisite skills.

###### Why use it?

Online demonstrations are appropriate options when it is difficult to show a process in any other way or when supporting learners to carry out a set of actions to achieve a specified outcome. Online demonstrations have a number of helpful features, e.g. inclusion of audio and video elements, use of animations, allowing multiple viewing and permitting the learner to control the pace and progress.

###### Example 1: Video demonstration and practice activites

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Web searching demonstration videos and practice activities:**   * Search preparation activity. Learners download a template into which they can type their responses. * Video introduction to search strategies * Online activity to practise using keywords to search for information   This is a short sample. There are other online web search activities included in the tutorial, e.g. boolean search, title search, domain search, URL search, file format search  The online activities are inserted into the learning text and learners are able to practice the search skills immediately after each video demonstration. | **Tutorial: Web searching**  VUMA Skills Zone. A set of online tutorials designed to provide university students with opportunities to practice critical skills in key areas: Language, Number, Computer, Study and Social/Personal.  SAIDE, OER Africa  <http://www.vuma.ac.za/skillszone/mod/lesson/view.php?id=129&pageid=740> | **CC-unclear** |

##### Skills practice

###### What is it?

A skills practice activity is a learning activity that focuses on building and supporting practical performance. Learning a skill is a continuous and dynamic process and requires a range of skills practice activities: from simple to more complex and challenging. Feedback plays a vital role in the acquisition of skills.

###### Why use it?

Skills practice activities can be used at different intervals of the skills acquisition process: basic skills practice activities at the beginning with intermediate and more advanced follow up skills practice activities.

###### Example 1: Skills practice activity

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Activity 3 Writing a longer summary**  This is a practical activity that requires learners to compare two summary versions of an original text about HIV/AIDS.  Learners identify the version they think best uses the 5R’s (reduce, reject, reword, reproduce, repackage) and summary organization.  They can type their reasons for selecting the best summary inside a typing block included in the highlighted activity space.  They can click on *save and reveal answer*. The feedback appears and learners can compare their answer with the one provided. | **Unit: Summarising text L185\_3**  **Introductory**  OpenLearn  Open University  <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=401419&section=2>  **Unit outcomes**   * understand what a summary is: ‘the 5Rs’ * recognise a successful summary * practise turning notes into a summary. * identi.ca or Twitter. | **CC-BY NC SA** |

##### Games

###### What is it?

Games are interactive activities that can enhance and strengthen learning. A range of games can be used in the online learning environment, from simple practice games to more complex, challenging and competitive games. Games require learners to be actively engaged in a variety of ways: they can follow simple rules to achieve a result; they can participate in online role plays to gain an insight into different perspectives; they can engage in a simulated environment where they are required to analyse problems and find solutions. Participation is central to all games.

###### Why use it?

Online games can provide a stimulating multi-media learning space. Games can use visual representation, animation, drama, humour, simulated contexts to create a compelling learning experience. Games are by their very nature action oriented and can encourage participation at different levels. Post-game reflections can be used to encourage sharing among learners and to deepen the learner’s learning experience. The challenge is to select appropriate and enjoyable games that will encourage longer attention spans and result in a positive learning experience. ‘

###### Example 1: Test and consolidate new knowledge

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| **Description of activity** | **Name of unit/module/course and website** | **OER licence** |
| **Remix game**  The game challenges the player to consider a number of remix scenarios to explore license compatibility.  **Purpose**  Test knowledge about remix of Creative Commons Licences  **How it works**  Six examples are presented. For each example the dealer deals four cards, each representing an open educational resource (OER). Each card has an icon representing its media type: Text, Image, Audio, and Movie. Each card also shows the license mark of the original resource. The work's license may be CC BY, CC BY-SA, CC BY-NC-SA, or GFDL, or considered public domain.  The intention is to determine which of the four OER’s shown on the cards can easily be remixed into a derivative work and which not. | **Unit: Creative Commons Unplugged**  Open Content Licensing 4 Educators Workshop on the WikiEducator website  <http://moodle.wikieducator.org/mod/page/view.php?id=257>  **Unit outcomes**   * Introduce the free legal tools provided by Creative Commons which educators can use to refine their copyright. * Explain how Creative Commons licenses work and introduce the six licenses * Learn about the compatibility among the different licenses * Share thoughts and experiences with fellow participants via WENotes, identi.ca or Twitter. | **CC-BY** |

### Sequence of learning activities in a unit

Creating stimulating and supportive online learning requires an appropriate mix of learning activities. It starts with a clear idea of the purpose and outcomes of the unit. Equally important is the selection of relevant learning activities that will best enable learners to achieve the stated outcomes. Here is an example of a sequence of learning activities for an online unit.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of course** | **Open Content Licensing 4 Educators (#OCL4Ed) workshop**  <http://wikieducator.org/Open_content_licensing_for_educators/Workshop_schedule> | | | |
| **Unit** | ***Copyright*: your educational right to copy** | | | |
| **Resources to work through** | **Learning activities** | | | |
|  | **Activity** | **Description** | **Time** | **Section** |
| * Getting started and definitions * A brief history of copyright * How does copyright work in an international setting? * What works qualify for copyright protection? * Who owns the copyright of your work? * What does copyright protect and how long does it last? * What are the exceptions to copyright protection? * How do you transfer rights? | Quiz | Getting started: Copyright taster quiz | 3 mins | Introduction |
| Quiz | Orientation questions | 2 mins | History of copyright |
| Microblog post | Reflect on how "copy" right has changed through history | 3 mins | History of copyright |
| Quiz | Copyright teaser quiz | 2 mins | Scope of copyright |
| Reading | Consult relevant documentation to determine who owns the copyright of your creative work | 15 mins | Ownership of copyright |
| Microblog post | Share what you have found out and feel about the ownership of your creative works | 3 mins | Ownership of copyright |
| Microblog post | Share something new you learned about rights and protections | 3 mins | Rights and protections |
| Web resources | Visiting institutions who have adopted open licensing policies | 8 mins | Transfer of rights |
| Case study | Reviewing copyright implications for developing an online course on Shakespeare's Hamlet | 20 mins | Case study |
| Discussion | Reflection and sharing of ideas on the Case study | 5 mins | Moodle forum |

1. Saide Criteria for Quality Course Materials

   Nadeosa Quality Criteria for Course Materials, 2003 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)