

Essentials of Online Course Design

A Standards-Based Guide

Marjorie Vai
Kristen Sosulski



Essentials of Online Course Design

In spite of the proliferation of online learning in higher education, creating online courses can still evoke a good deal of frustration, negativity, and wariness in those who need to create them.

Essentials of Online Course Design: A Standards-Based Guide takes a fresh, thoughtfully designed, step-by-step approach to online course development. At its core is a set of standards that are based on best practices in the field of online teaching and learning. Pedagogical, organizational, and visual design principles are presented and modeled throughout the book, and users will quickly learn from the guide's hands-on approach. The course design process begins with the elements of a classroom syllabus, which, after a series of guided steps, easily evolve into an online course outline.

The guide's key features include:

- A practical approach informed by theory.
- Clean interior design that offers straightforward guidance from page 1.
- Clear and jargon-free language.
- Examples, screenshots, and illustrations to clarify and support the text.
- A companion website with examples, adaptable templates, interactive learning features, and online resources.
- A checklist of online course design standards that readers can use to self-evaluate.

Essentials of Online Course Design: A Standards-Based Guide serves as a best-practices model for designing online courses. After reading this book, readers will find that preparing for online teaching is, contrary to popular belief, a satisfying and engaging experience. The core issue is simply good design: pedagogical, organizational, and visual.

Marjorie Vai has been directly involved with online education and training for almost 25 years. Most recently, she designed and developed the online Masters Degree Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL) at The New School, New York.

Kristen Sosulski is the Academic Director of Distance Learning and a Clinical Assistant Professor at New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

A special dedication from Marjorie to Susan Kinsey who has been a good, wise, and supportive friend. Her belief in my vision for this book has been a constant source of comfort.

We both want to dedicate the work we've done in putting this book and website together to online teachers everywhere.

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Kristen Sosulski

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Foreword

When I pick up a new book in my fields of language education and technology-mediated learning, I am sometimes struck by bad thoughts.

If the book is really good, I wish that I had written it, and I had thought of this new approach to teaching and learning. Thankfully rare are the books that engender such wicked thoughts.

But this is one of those books.

Essentials of Online Course Design explains how to design, build, and implement online learning solutions, to ensure that learners receive high quality educational engagement. The book aims to meet the needs of different groups of readers and practitioners who are anxious to learn more about the design of successful online learning courses—and what makes them successful.

As an experienced geek myself, and having spent many years melding the technical and the pedagogical, I have bought many books and attended many courses that purported to explain how online learning worked, and how I should design a course.

In many cases these offered me technical solutions while ignoring the pedagogical issues. Others gave me pedagogical theory but no support in implementing it in a way that learners could enjoy. Few of them focused on the impact that visual design and user experience design would have on the learning process.

That is why this book is so important. I know of no other book that combines a focus on pedagogical learning design and all that entails, with technical background and support, with expert insights into the world of visual design and optimising the user experience. This provides an added dimension for the

online course designer—the melding of key standards of course design but seen from new angles and with added depth and breadth.

The book aims, as the authors state in the Preface, to “model simple and intelligent design and provide abundant examples of good online design.” Throughout the book this is exactly what they do.

One of the beauties of this book is that it can be read and utilised practically and successfully by a wide range of education professionals, not all of whom are geeks or Blackboard experts or devotees of Moodle (or even know what that is).

It is aimed at a broader, non-technical readership and yet maintains an intellectual discipline that demands much of its readership.

The focus on the practitioner shines through from every page—the inclusion of personal statements from practitioners about how they have learned and taught, along with screenshots and real-world examples of course design in action, help the teacher internalize the skills and competences needed for successful design.

The book offers practical advice which is, in the words of the authors, “informed by theory but not about theory”—precisely what a professional practitioner needs. It also offers a supporting website where practitioners can find further guidance and resources such as templates.

The book helps teachers move, in Argyris and Schon’s terms, from “espoused theory” to “theory in use”—from what we say we believe we should do, to what we actually do.

The authors are uniquely qualified to produce this book. Marjorie Vai has been an innovator in language teaching for many years, and has always been a leader in the application of technology to learning. She published innovative software solutions for language learning long before most publishers and teachers had begun to appreciate the benefits to the learner of a technology-mediated learning resource. Marjorie

has designed and implemented a ground-breaking online Masters program in TESOL for the New School in New York (full disclosure: I wrote one of the modules) and launched a new style of learning (and opened new channels of access to that learning) for TESOL professionals globally.

Kristen Sosulski has a solid grounding in online theory and practice, and oversees the online program in one of the most respected universities in the U.S.

For me a crucial focus of the book is how to engage the learner. This is the basis of constructivist learning theory—that learning must be an active process—and at the heart of every successful teacher or trainer’s toolkit. Teachers must know how to engage learners, to motivate, involve, and guide them to learning success.

I hope this book helps teachers and course designers worldwide achieve more for their learners and clients. I am certain it will support the raising of standards in online learning across multiple disciplines and academic fields.

Michael Carrier
Head of English Language Innovation
British Council, London

Preface

Marjorie Vai: John Maeda wrote his small book *The Laws of Simplicity* (2006) to address the need for simple solutions when dealing with the complexities of our technologically-oriented world. For Maeda, this became a personal mission, and was a focus of his research at MIT.

Maeda inspires the approach we take in the design of this project. “For the foreseeable future, complicated technologies will continue to invade our homes and workplaces, thus simplicity is bound to be a growth industry.”

Consumers can usually find an array of easy-to-follow books on computers and technology. Educators have not been so lucky. Simplicity of design helps cut through the technological mire and saves time. It opens the mind and pleases the eye.

This guide models simple and intelligent design, and provides abundant examples of good online course design. And so, we will reference both Maeda and other designers, along with academic specialists.

Most of my professional life has been spent working in publishing and academia in the field of teaching English (TESOL) as educator, publisher, author, and administrator. For 20 years, I served as founding director and then chair of the English Language Studies department at The New School in New York City. I designed and developed several programs both onsite and online, including an internationally-oriented online Masters Degree Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL). Students and teachers were involved from around the world.

When the time came to train the MATESOL faculty in online course development, what we needed was a book for each teacher that first explained how online worked, then modeled and walked instructors through the process of developing a

well-designed online course. Such a book would, I assumed, focus on standards of good design.

There were theoretical books. There were books that seemed to be written by people in the field of educational technology for other people in educational technology. Other books outlined a process but offered no examples of good course design (as though an understanding of good online design were intuitive). There were whole books on single aspects of course design (working collaboratively, creating activities, etc.). Some referenced some standards of good design but were not comprehensive. Creating our own comprehensive set of materials at The New School was unrealistic.

The bottom line: there was no guide that you could give an instructor that simply and intelligently walked them through the online course design process. And certainly there was no approach organized and modeled on standards or best practices for online education. This was the case, in spite of the proliferation of online education around the world. So, I became intent on developing such a guide; a guide that has now evolved into a larger project including a supporting website full of resources.

My own experience working with online media began about 25 years ago as a writer and contributing editor for *Dowline*, the magazine of Dow Jones Online Services. It was there that I developed the habit of paying careful attention to all aspects of instructional design—pedagogical, organizational, and visual.

Teachers need simple, straightforward guidance on how to use technology so that subject matter is the central focus of their efforts. Students need engaging and easy-to-use learning environments. This guide is hands-on and practical. It is informed by theory, but not about theory. It addresses the practical task at hand—designing an online course, based on a set of accepted standards.

I was confident that I could write this guide. However, what I needed was a co-author with long-term experience working with the kinds of instructors who need books like this.

Fortunately, I met and got to know Kristen Sosulski, Academic Director at the Office of Distance Learning at New York University. Kristen shared my focus and vision for the project. She brings to this project both a strong background in theory and a first-hand understanding of the realistic needs of online instructors and learners.



<http://www.marjoriecai.com>

Kristen Sosulski: Throughout my career as an educator, I have collaborated with university faculty to explore the ways in which technology can be used to facilitate and enhance teaching and learning. At the New York University Office of Distance Learning, I lead a team that partners with faculty to develop high-quality online courses. I've found that, in addition to the support we provide, faculty members continually request a simple guide to walk them through the process of transforming their traditional classroom courses into online courses. Simply put, there is a lot for teachers to learn when embarking on the creation of their first online course. There are pedagogical, organizational, technical, and administrative considerations to keep in mind. With time and resources always at a minimum, it can be challenging to demonstrate best practices while simultaneously guiding teachers through the "how to" of teaching online.

When Marjorie asked me to co-author this book, I was delighted. I knew how important a simple guide to online course design was to our own faculty, here and abroad. I also knew from conferences and colleagues in the field that this seemed to be true across the board. Marjorie's vision for a simple, concise, and clearly written guide to online course design encouraged me to reflect on my own work with faculty and, in the process, to develop new ways to mentor them.

Whether you are a new or seasoned online teacher, this guide will serve your professional needs well by providing you with a

streamlined set of organizational, pedagogical, and visual-design standards, which can serve as the foundation for any online course. The standards checklist alone is an invaluable resource and is intended to serve as a reminder for all course developers.

This is a great guide for students in educational technology programs who are learning about instructional design principles. The book exemplifies many of the best practices in the field. The examples we provide from featured teachers show how they are applied in an authentic setting.

One major challenge all teachers face is how to ensure that their students remain engaged throughout their courses. Chapters 5–8 provide excellent examples of lessons, resources, activities, and appropriate assessments for use in online courses. I am particularly excited by the activity types that we put together, and our website, which supplements this book by providing models and examples.

In my experience, teachers need guidance in developing digitally-based materials for their online courses. Considerations such as writing style, layout, and use of media tend to be overlooked. This book highlights the importance of these design elements through concrete examples and guidelines.

One of the most difficult concepts to translate to the online medium is that of time. Chapter 1 visually illustrates how to structure time in an online course and Chapter 9 helps teachers design online syllabi to reflect a timeline that is appropriate for an online course.

Together, we present this simple guide to online course design. I would like to thank Marjorie for inviting me to work with her to create this essential resource for teachers, support staff working with teachers, and trainers to guide them through the online course design process.



Acknowledgments

This book could not have been everything we envisioned without the full cooperation of our publisher, Routledge. *Essentials of Online Course Design: A Standards-Based Guide* exemplifies as many standards of online course design as a book can. We firstly want to thank our current editor, Alex Masulis. He has been very supportive and successfully communicated the importance of the design features to the production department in the UK. We would like to acknowledge all involved with the production of the book with special thanks to Sarah Stone, Sue Leaper, Charlotte Hiorns and Andrew Craddock for their fine work in following through on our design, and editorial concerns.

We are also grateful to Sarah Burrows, former editor at Routledge, for recognizing the value of our vision and for initially supporting the project.

The fine work of featured teachers Joelle Scally and Scott Thornbury enabled us to provide our readers with real world examples and voices. Their contributions have added much to the practical, hands-on quality of the book.

We appreciate the ability to use and feature two LMSs, Epsilen and E360, in portions of the book.

Finally, we want to thank Steve Goss, Kristen's husband, for the elegant design he created for the cover of the book. It evokes those central ideas of simplicity, clarity, engagement, interactivity, and collaboration that are emphasized throughout the text.

Marjorie Vai: First and foremost, I am very grateful to my co-author, Kristen Sosulski, for her excellent contribution to this book. It has been a pleasure working with her and getting to know her. She is a fine person as well as as a fine co-author.

Acknowledgments

My views about what is important for successful online study owe much to The New School pioneers who started the online learning program there in 1994. They were (with titles from then): Elizabeth Dickey, Dean of The New School; Stephen Anspacher, founding Director of the online program; and Elissa Tenny, Associate Dean. They emphasized training online teachers, standards of good course design, and a general can-do attitude that encouraged department heads and imaginative teachers to develop quality online courses and programs. I also need to acknowledge Dhal Anglada, the gifted instructional designer who worked with me during the design phase of the online MATESOL at The New School.

My early experience writing for Dow Jones Online Services was critical in developing my thinking on online engagement and accessibility. I thank Cathy Smith my editor at Dow Jones, for her role in encouraging my work and constantly presenting me with new challenges.

As for family and friends, I want to thank Lynne, Robyn, Daniel, and Michael for their support.

Kristen Sosulski: First, I would like to begin by thanking my colleague, best friend, and husband, Steven Goss, Director of Online Education, Bank Street College. He's been my number one advocate. He has been extremely generous in providing thoughtful feedback and examples for this book.

I'm so grateful to Susan Kinsey, Divisional Dean, NYU-SCPS who introduced Marjorie and me. Without her, Marjorie and I would not have co-authored this book and become good friends in the process. I want to especially thank Marjorie, for her friendship, inspiration, and giving me the opportunity to reflect on my practice by working on this book.

I would like to express my gratitude to Robert Lapiner, Dean, NYU-SCPS, for his enthusiasm and confidence in me. He's been a champion for me and my work and a huge supporter for online education. Also, a special thanks to Dennis DiLorenzo, Associate Dean NYU-SCPS who has given me the tools and resources to build a successful online learning team.

Acknowledgments

A very special thanks to the NYU SCPS Distance Learning team (Ted Bongiovanni, Vanessa Carrion, Bancha Srikacha, Vladimir Merisca, Bobby Aviles, and Mary Ann Mazzella) and all the NYU faculty and students who gave me the opportunity to collaborate and grow with them. Some of them are featured in this book.

Deep appreciation is extended to Robert Manuel, Dean of the School of Continuing Studies, Georgetown University. He gave me the opportunity to teach my first online course, and was gracious enough to provide me with thoughtful feedback on this book.


Also, it's been an honor to have Felice Nudelman, Executive Director of Education at *The New York Times* provide feedback on this book.

Finally, I'd like to thank my parents, Deborah and Richard Sosulski for encouragement and ongoing support while I was writing this book.

Order and simplification
are the first steps towards the
mastery of a subject.

Thomas Mann

Introduction to this Guide

How simple can you make it?  How complex does it have to be?

Source: Maeda (2006)

To design is much more than simply to assemble, to order, or even to edit; it is to add value and meaning, to illuminate, to simplify, to clarify, to modify, to dignify, to dramatize, to persuade, and perhaps even to amuse.

Paul Rand—author, graphic designer, teacher

To borrow some words from Paul Rand above, this guide aims to simplify, to clarify, and to illuminate. We hope you find that it helps you to do the same in your online course.

i.1

A Unique Guide for Online Course Design

This is the only book on this topic that has all these qualities:

- A clearly outlined set of **online course design standards** establishes the core principles.
- The **guide itself serves as a model** of many of the design elements espoused.
- The step-by-step development process builds the online course up **from syllabus to course framework to final course**.
- The writing is **concise and clear**, and avoids jargon.
- The content focuses on **practical application informed by theory**.



- Examples and illustrations of good online course design are provided throughout the book and on the book's website.
- The book's website, www.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415873000, provides additional reference and resource materials, templates for units, and models of good online course design. Look for the website icon throughout the book.
- A standards checklist enables readers to do a reflective self-evaluation of the work they have done.
- Learning styles are emphasized and modeled in examples, and in the way the guide itself is written and designed.

i.2

Who Is the Guide and Website For?

The guide and website are for those involved with online teaching and training at all levels, including:

- Higher education teachers who face the short- or long-term realities of transforming an onsite course to online.
- Staff development trainers who work through the online course-building process with teachers.
- High-school teachers developing online courses.
- Instructors teaching courses on online course design in schools of education (i.e. educational technology programs). The standards-based models and examples reduce the burden on these instructors to provide such resources on their own.
- Students in educational technology programs who will be working in the field or taking a course in the area.
- Trainers to those learning about online pedagogical design. Again, the standards-based models support the process.
- Higher-level administrators who need to understand the elements of good online course design.
- Individuals within an institution, or entrepreneurs who wish to initiate online course development or training. Given the

availability of learning management systems such as Moodle, anyone can begin an educational or training program, provided they have the ability to do so and a market for their offerings.

- Anyone interested in learning about, or brushing up on, best practices in teaching with technologies.

i.3

What Do Online Students Need?

After years of traditional classroom study, most students have questions about studying online. For those committing to more than one course (e.g. a program or degree), they may have even more questions. Some examples:

- What is it like taking a course online?
- How does online work?
- How does it compare to classroom study?
- Does it require special technical knowledge?
- Can I get help if I have technical problems?
- Will studying at a computer be boring?
- Will there be help if I find I have problems with online study?
- Will I feel isolated studying online? Will I miss out on working within a community?
- How much of my time will an online course require compared to taking an onsite course?
- How do you do hands-on in an online environment?

Of course, you can always find answers that will satisfy students enough to get them to sign up for the course. However, there are still academic programs that post long lectures (in type, video, or audio) in online courses. They may submit students and teachers to painfully long encounters with discussion boards or emails. Some students who have made the commitment may stick with it in spite of these issues, and some not.

Online programs at even some of the best universities have been poorly designed or ill-conceived. Sometimes students feel that they are adrift without support or a sense of structure or community. Instructors may feel the same. Good, well-intentioned universities have had programs that have crashed and burned because they couldn't create courses that consistently engaged and challenged. How can this be avoided?

Instructors and teachers should be able to answer the questions outlined above so that students feel confident about the process and its benefits. This book provides the answers and the means of following through on promises made. Standards of good online design are at the core of this process.

i.4

A Standards-Based Approach

A great deal of work and research has been done to determine what works in an online learning and teaching environment. As a result, standards and best practices have been developed to guide course designers and teachers. Often such standards are presented in complicated or dense formats. We have tried to simplify the process of applying standards in this guide so that you will have more time to spend on the challenging task of rethinking your content for online study.

Essentials of Online Course Design; A Standards-Based Guide takes a carefully designed, step-by-step approach to creating an online course. At its core, the standards are reinforced in a variety of ways and finally presented as a checklist that teachers can use to reflectively self-evaluate their online course.

We present standards in three stages:

1. In each chapter as they are covered. At this stage they look like this:

- Presentations of new knowledge and skills, activities, and assessments address a variety of learning styles.**

2. Next, all standards covered in a chapter are listed in summary form at the end of the chapter. Use this to review the points covered in the chapter, or as a focused checklist when working through the chapter topic in your course. At this stage the squares in front of the standards are open—waiting for you to check them.

Presentations of new knowledge and skills, activities, and assessments address a variety of learning styles.

3. Finally, Appendix B is a standards checklist for you to use when you have developed your course. This also serves as a standards index so that you can go back to the points where the standard was covered, and review where and how each was presented. Each standard is followed by the page numbers where it comes up so that you can review as needed.

The redundancy built into this small guide reinforces your understanding of the essentials of good online design.

Underlying Principles

These standards have been culled from a number of resources and our own experiences of creating and developing online courses and multimedia projects. They are presented and reinforced in a straightforward and constructive way. Some of the major resources we have used are:

- Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987) “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” *The American Association for Higher Education Bulletin*, March.
- Horton, S. (2006) “Design Simply. Universal Usability: A Universal Design Approach to Web Usability,” available at www.universalusability.com (accessed April 21, 2010).
- Lidwell, W., Holden, K., & Butler, J. (2003) *Universal Principles of Design: 125 Ways to Influence Perception, Increase Appeal, Make Better Design Decisions, and Teach Through Design*, Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers.

- Lynch, P.J. & Horton, S. (2009) *Web Style Guide*, 3rd Edition, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, available at <http://webstyleguide.com> (accessed May 3, 2010).
- Maeda, J. (2006) *Laws of Simplicity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mayer, R.E. (2001) *Multimedia Learning*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Palloff, R.M. & Pratt, K. (2007) *Building Online Learning Communities*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Quality Matters (2006) “Inter-institutional Quality Assurance in Online Learning,” available at www.qualitymatters.org.

Note: A full list of sources and references can be found on pages 196–197.

i.5

Organization of the Book

The book is organized as follows:

- The **Introduction** provides an overview of the book, with time spent on basic issues including notes on the terminology used in the book, and a brief description of the website and how it relates to the book.
- Chapter 1, **Orientation to Online Teaching and Learning**, introduces aspects of and priorities for online teaching and learning that may be new to you.
- Chapter 2, **Elements of an Online Course**, is an illustrated tour through the elements of a learning management system (LMS), using real examples from an online course.
- Chapters 3 and 4, **Language and Writing Style** and **Visual Design Basics**, cover two core aspects that are not unique to online. Teachers must be aware of the critical importance of adapting these to online.
- Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, **Engaging the Online Learner**, **Activities and Tools**, **Resources that Engage**, and

Assessment and Feedback, cover the essential elements of the presentation and design of the course, such as introducing new knowledge, activities, resources, and assessment.

- Chapters 9 and 10, **Building the Course Foundation** and **Creating the Course Structure**, begin by using the standard elements of a classroom syllabus as a point of departure to create an online syllabus. After a series of guided steps, this evolves into the online course framework as presented in Chapter 10.
- Appendix A, **Writing Learning Outcomes**, reviews the essential points of writing good learning outcomes.
- Appendix B, **The Standards Checklist**, summarizes the standards in a checklist format.

The accompanying website provides many models of good online design, and additional references and resources. Adaptable templates help readers to conceptualize and develop the substance of each learning unit. Again, all concepts and elements in this guide are reinforced through models and examples that emphasize online course design standards. It also covers multimedia basics for making your own material.

i.6

How to Use the Guide

If you have the time, we suggest that you review everything and look at the examples. This can only strengthen your basic understanding of the online design process so that, later, you can focus on your content.

However, depending upon your time frame and/or what you may already know, you may find one or more topics that you can bypass. If writing learning outcomes is second nature to you, for example, you can skip that section. If you have taken online courses and are familiar with time considerations and learning management systems, you may want to skip those sections.

A great deal of time and space in this project has been devoted to assembling the models and examples of good course design that appear in the book and on the website. Familiarizing yourself with these examples will strengthen your skills in online course design.

The organization of the website mirrors that of the book. So if, for example, you are guided to web materials in Section 9.2 of the book, you will find them in Section 9.2 on the website.

i.7

This Guide as a Model

Standards are modeled in the way this guide is written and designed. The modeling in the guide, of course, is limited to the qualities a book and an online course share. Flip through the pages and notice what has been done in the following categories:

Graphic Design

- This is an easily readable typeface.
- Right margins are jagged.
- There is ample space between the lines of text.
- The pages are uncluttered.
- There is a good deal of white space on the page—there is no crowding.
- Bold type is used sparingly for emphasis.
- Graphic design elements are used consistently.

Images, Audio, and Video

- Visual elements are used to improve clarity of presentation and understanding—they enhance rather than distract from learning.
- All elements in images are easily discernible.
- A variety of visual and text elements support different styles of learning.

Language and Writing Style

- Language is clear, brief, and to the point.
- The tone is relaxed, conversational, and supportive.
- Jargon and technical terms are avoided whenever possible, or defined.
- Bullets are used for lists, and numbers are used for sequenced items.

Learning Resources

- An ample number of models and examples are presented.
- A rich collection of links and references to online resources, books, and articles are included in the book and on the website.
- A full list of references is included at the back of the book.

Chapter Structure

- An introduction begins the chapter.
- “Chunking” (i.e. breaking down content into smaller sections than you might normally find in a book) is used to reflect the breakdown needed when material is presented online.
- Practical resources are included for exploration and expansion of the topic.
- The chapter ends with a list of standards that serves as a summary of core points.

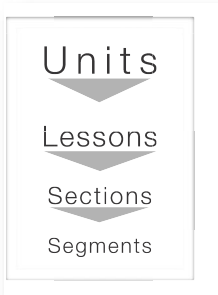
Real-world Examples

The website is a rich source of additional resources, such as:

- full-color screenshots
- examples of lessons and activities
- downloadable templates
- videos, and
- additional references.

Terminology in this Guide

For the sake of consistency, we have used specific words or phrases to represent, in some cases, a variety of possibilities. Once again, we have also done this for the sake of simplicity.



Unit structure

- **Teacher.** The course designer/developer, instructor, professor, facilitator, or trainer. While phrases such as teacher and facilitator may suggest two approaches that are fairly far apart, this guide does not cover the actual running of the course and therefore tries to take as neutral a position as possible. Whether we are talking about the teacher or the designer/developer will be made clear from the context.
- **Student.** The individual that is taking the online course (i.e. the trainee, class member, or participant).
- **Learner.** This term is used when we refer to the ways an individual obtains knowledge.
- **Course.** We use this term to cover any of the following: university or college course, high-school class, training program, seminar, or workshop.
- **Lesson.** A unit of instruction that distinguishes the different topics within an online course, which the learners cover in a particular order. You will see, even in this guide, that there are many different terms used in different ways to divide things up. There is, especially, a great deal of variety on the lesson level. It can also be called: module, lecture, or section.
- **Learning management system (LMS).** The LMS is the web-based software application used to design, develop, teach, and manage online courses. It is ultimately the virtual environment in which the learner engages with the content, peers, and teacher. It is sometimes called a course management system (CMS).

Introduction to this Guide

- **Onsite course.** A course that is taught in a physical location where teachers and learners are present in a face-to-face setting.
- **Gender.** We simply use both male and female in our examples and writing.