

National Standards for Quality Online Teaching

NACOL
North American Council for Online Learning



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Introduction

The mission of the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) is to increase educational opportunities and enhance learning by providing collegial expertise and leadership in K-12 online teaching and learning.

National Standards for Quality Online Teaching is designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online teaching and instructional design. The initiative began with a thorough literature review of existing online teaching quality standards, a cross-reference of standards, followed by a research survey to NACOL members and experts to ensure the efficacy of the standards adopted.

These guidelines should be implemented and monitored by each district or organization, as they reserve the right to apply the guidelines according to the best interest of the population for which they serve.

As a result of the research review, NACOL has chosen to fully endorse the work of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) *SREB Standards for Quality Online Teaching and Online Teaching Evaluation for State Virtual Schools* as a comprehensive set of criteria.* The standards as identified by SREB, already in use by sixteen SREB states, proved to be the most comprehensive and included guidelines set forth in the other criteria from the literature review. A full cross-reference of standards was conducted. The following other standards were reviewed: the NACOL-endorsed *NEA Guide to Teaching Online Courses*, [Fifty-one Competencies for Online Instruction](#), the Ohio Department of Education's [Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession](#), and the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow's [Teacher Evaluation Rubric](#).

We are grateful for SREB's work and for their permission to distribute these standards on a national scale. In partnership with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), NACOL is adopting the *Standards for Quality Online Teaching* as a primary source, with three additional rubrics.

The *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* are identified on the following pages:

*NACOL conducted a comprehensive review of online teaching standards available. Based on this review, the SREB *Standards for Quality Online Teaching*, Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, Georgia, 2006 is adopted, with minor modifications, as the source for the NACOL *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching*. NACOL added two standards to the 11 SREB standards. Some of the SREB indicators were deleted and others were added. NACOL added two additional standards from the Ohio Department of Education's *Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow's *Teacher Evaluation Rubric* based on the results of the review.

Rating Scale

- 0 Absent—component is missing
- 1 Unsatisfactory—needs significant improvement
- 2 Somewhat satisfactory—needs targeted improvements
- 3 Satisfactory—discretionary improvement needed
- 4 Very satisfactory—no improvement needed

A	The teacher meets the professional teaching standards established by a state-licensing agency or the teacher has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching.	Score
✓	Meets the state’s professional teaching standards or has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching.	
✓	Provides evidence that he or she has credentials in the field of study to be taught.	
✓	Knows the content of the subject to be taught and understands how to teach the content to students.	
✓	Facilitates the construction of knowledge through an understanding of how students learn in specific subject areas.	
✓	Continues to update academic knowledge and skills.	

B	The teacher has the prerequisite technology skills to teach online.	Score
✓	Demonstrates the ability to effectively use word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation software.	
✓	Demonstrates effective use of Internet browsers, e-mail applications and appropriate online etiquette.	
✓	Utilizes synchronous and asynchronous tools (e.g., discussion boards, chat tools, electronic whiteboards) effectively.	

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✓	Troubleshoots typical software and hardware problems (i.e. change passwords, download plug-ins, etc).	
✓	Demonstrates growth in technology knowledge and skills in order to stay current with emerging technologies and trends.	

C	The teacher plans, designs and incorporates strategies to encourage active learning, interaction, participation and collaboration in the online environment.	Score
✓	Demonstrates effective strategies and techniques that actively engage students in the learning process (e.g., team problem-solving, in-class writing, analysis, synthesis and evaluation instead of passive lectures).	
✓	Facilitates and monitors appropriate interaction among students.	
✓	Builds and maintains a community of learners by creating a relationship of trust, demonstrating effective facilitation skills, establishing consistent and reliable expectations, and supporting and encouraging independence and creativity.	
✓	Promotes learning through group interaction.	
✓	Leads online instruction groups that are goal-oriented, focused, project-based and inquiry-oriented.	
✓	Demonstrates knowledge and responds appropriately to the cultural background and learning needs of non-native English speakers.	
✓	Differentiates instruction based on students' learning styles and needs and assists students in assimilating information to gain understanding and knowledge.	
✓	Demonstrates growth in teaching strategies in order to benefit from current research and practice.	
✓	Creates a warm and inviting atmosphere that promotes the development of a sense of community among participants.	
✓	Encourages students to bring real-life examples into the online classroom.	
✓	Mandates participation by setting limits if participation wanes or if the conversation is headed in the wrong direction.	

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✓	Provides structure for students but allows for flexibility and negotiation.	
✓	Uses best practices to promote participation.	
✓	Begins each lesson with a short, student-friendly, summary statement indicating the goal of the lesson and the primary benchmarks that will be covered.	
✓	Provides extended resources and activities to increase achievement levels.	

D	The teacher provides online leadership in a manner that promotes student success through regular feedback, prompt response and clear expectations.	Score
✓	Models effective communication skills and maintains records of applicable communications with students.	
✓	Encourages interaction and cooperation among students, encourages active learning, provides prompt feedback, communicates high expectations, and respects diverse talents and learning styles.	
✓	Persists, in a consistent and reasonable manner, until students are successful.	
✓	Establishes and maintains ongoing and frequent teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction and teacher-parent interaction.	
✓	Provides an online syllabus that defines objectives, concepts and learning outcomes in a clearly written, concise format.	
✓	Provides an online syllabus that defines the terms of class interaction for both teacher and students, defines clear expectations for both teacher and students, defines the grading criteria, establishes inappropriate behavior criteria for both teacher and students, and explains the course organization to students.	
✓	Uses student data to inform instruction, guides and monitors students' management of their time, monitors learner progress with available tools and develops an intervention plan for unsuccessful learners.	
✓	Provides timely, constructive feedback to students about assignments and questions.	

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✓	Gives students clear expectations about teacher response time.	
✓	Contacts students who are not participating.	
✓	Recognizes that student interaction with the lesson has instructional value and therefore encourages students to participate in leading the instruction and/or demonstrating mastery of the content in other appropriate ways.	
✓	Personalizes feedback (support, growth and encouragement).*	
✓	Communicates high expectations.*	

E	The teacher models, guides and encourages legal, ethical, safe and healthy behavior related to technology use.	Score
✓	Facilitates student investigations of the legal and ethical issues related to technology and society; teaches students that copyright laws are created for a reason.	
✓	Establishes standards for student behavior that are designed to ensure academic integrity and appropriate uses of the Internet and written communication.	
✓	Identifies the risks of academic dishonesty for students.	
✓	Demonstrates an awareness of how the use of technology may impact student testing performance.	
✓	Uses course content that complies with intellectual property rights policies and fair use standards.	
✓	Provides students with an understanding of the importance of Acceptable Use Policies (AUP).	
✓	Demonstrates knowledge of resources and techniques for dealing with issues arising from inappropriate use of electronically accessed data or information.	
✓	Informs students of their rights to privacy and the conditions under which their names or online submissions may be shared with others.	

F	The teacher has experienced online learning from the perspective of a student.	Score
✓	Has taken an online course and applies experiences as an online student to develop and implement successful strategies for online teaching.	
✓	Demonstrates the ability to anticipate challenges and problems in the online classroom.	
✓	Demonstrates an understanding of the perspective of the online student through appropriate responsiveness and a supportive attitude toward students.	

G	The teacher understands and is responsive to students with special needs in the online classroom.	Score
✓	Understands that students have varied talents and skills and uses appropriate strategies designed to include all students.	
✓	Provides activities, modified as necessary, that are relevant to the needs of all students.	
✓	Adapts and adjusts instruction to create multiple paths to learning objectives.	
✓	Encourages collaboration and interaction among all students.	
✓	Exhibits the ability to assess student knowledge and instruction in a variety of ways.	
✓	Provides student-centered lessons and activities that are based on concepts of active learning and that are connected to real-world applications.	
✓	Demonstrates ability to identify students struggling with ELL or literacy issues and delivers specific strategies.	
✓	Identifies options to expand student thinking, address styles of learning and avenues for enrichment or intervention.	
✓	Knows how to implement a team teaching concept.	



H	The teacher demonstrates competencies in creating and implementing assessments in online learning environments in ways that assure validity and reliability of instruments and procedures.	Score
✓	Creates or selects fair, adequate and appropriate assessment instruments to measure online learning that reflect sufficient content validity (i.e., that adequately cover the content they are designed to measure), reliability and consistency over time.	
✓	Implements online assessment measures and materials in ways that ensure instrument validity and reliability.	

I	The teacher develops and delivers assessments, projects, and assignments that meet standards-based learning goals and assesses learning progress by measuring student achievement of learning goals.	Score
✓	Includes authentic assessment (i.e., the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of acquired knowledge and skills as opposed to testing isolated skills or retained facts) as part of the evaluation process; assesses student knowledge in a forum beyond multiple guess.	
✓	Provides continuous evaluation of students to include pre- and post-testing and student input throughout the course.	
✓	Demonstrates an understanding of the relationships between and among the assignments, assessments and standards-based learning goals.	

J	The teacher demonstrates competencies in using data and findings from assessments and other data sources to modify instructional methods and content and to guide student learning.	Score
✓	Assesses each student's background and content knowledge and uses these data to plan instruction.	
✓	Reviews student responses to test items to identify issues related to test validity or instructional effectiveness.	
✓	Uses observational data (e.g., tracking data in electronic courses, Web logs, e-mail) to monitor course progress and effectiveness.	

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✓	Creates opportunities for self-reflection or assessment of teaching effectiveness within the online environment (e.g., classroom assessment techniques, teacher evaluations, teacher peer reviews).	
✓	Addresses multiple intelligences and levels of ability through a variety of alternative interventions such as adjusting lessons based upon re-teaching and using varied assessment strategies.	
✓	Provides evidence of effective learning strategies that worked for the individual student and details specific changes in future instruction based upon assessment results and research study (data-driven and research-based).	
✓	Evaluates instructional strategies to determine their accuracy and usefulness for presenting specific ideas and concepts.	

K	The teacher demonstrates frequent and effective strategies that enable both teacher and students to complete self- and pre-assessments.	Score
✓	Employs ways to assess student readiness for course content and method of delivery.	
✓	Employs ways for students to effectively evaluate and assess their own readiness for course content and method of delivery.	
✓	Understands that student success (e.g., grade, level of participation, mastery of content, completion percentage) is an important measure of teaching and course success.	
✓	Provides opportunities for student self-assessment within courses.	
✓	Empowers students to independently define short- and long-term learning goals and monitors their personal progress.	



L	The teacher collaborates with colleagues.	Score
✓	Networks with others involved in online education.	
✓	Leads collaborative efforts to create common assessments among grade-level and/or content-area teachers and share assessment results with colleagues to collaboratively plan instruction that will best meet individual student needs.	

Instructional Design

The following section outlines standards for instructional design skills for the online teacher of record, where applicable. These standards are considered optional, as instructional design does not always fall under online teaching responsibilities.

M	The teacher arranges media and content to help students and teachers transfer knowledge most effectively in the online environment.	Score
✓	Demonstrates the ability to modify and add content and assessment, using an online Learning Management System (LMS).	
✓	Incorporates multimedia and visual resources into an online module.	
✓	Demonstrates the ability to effectively use and incorporate subject-specific and developmentally appropriate software in an online learning module.	
✓	Reviews all materials and Web resources for their alignment with course objectives and state and local standards and for their appropriateness on a continuing basis.	
✓	Creates assignments, projects and assessments that are aligned with students' different visual, auditory and hands-on ways of learning.	
✓	Arranges media and content to help transfer knowledge most effectively in the online environment.	

References

Guide to Teaching Online Courses. (2002-2006). National Education Association. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html>

This guide was produced as an effort to ensure secondary students with quality online content as it focuses on teaching skills, professional development, and the overall improvement of online teaching.

Online Teaching Evaluation for State Virtual Schools. (2006.) Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from

<http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/2006Pubs/OnlineTeachingEvaluationSVS.asp>

This document is based on the SREB publication Standards for Quality Online Teaching and provides state virtual schools in SREB states with an instrument to evaluate the quality of online teachers of middle grades and high school students. Including a checklist and a year-end evaluation, it is designed to gauge whether an online teacher meets each standard, recognize achievements and enable the teacher to understand what needs to be accomplished to ensure high-quality teaching.

Smith, Theodore C. (2005). *Fifty-One Competencies for Online Instruction.* The Journal of Educators Online. 2(2). Retrieved from

<http://mansvu.mans.edu.eg/delor/admin/uploads/comp.pdf>

The effectiveness of distance learning must be measured in results—quality learning. Learner-center programs and competent instructors are two oft-cited keys to success in higher education. Teaching online requires specific skill sets (competencies). This paper identifies and describes 51 competencies needed by online instructors and outlines an instructor-training program that satisfies 3 of the 24 benchmarks for excellence recommended by the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Standards for the Teaching Profession. (2005). Ohio Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=312&ContentID=8561&Content=37548>

The Educator Standards Board (ESB) was established by the Ohio General Assembly to bring standards-based reform to the educator level by defining standards for teachers and principals at all stages of their careers. In 2004, Senate Bill (SB) 2 placed into law many of the recommendations made by the Governor's Commission on Teaching Success in the areas of standards, teacher preparation, recruitment and retention and professional development. <http://esb.ode.state.oh.us/>

Standards for Quality Online Courses. (2006). Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from http://www.sreb.org/programs/edtech/pubs/2006Pubs/06T05_Standards_quality_online_courses.pdf

The *Standards for Quality Online Courses* "examines the essential components of quality online courses in the context of today's learners and the increased emphasis on accountability. It also addresses the need for state-level policies regarding online course quality."

Standards for Quality Online Teaching. (2006). Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF/06T0_Standards_Online_Teaching.pdf
The Standards for Quality Online Teaching “examines what qualifications are needed to be a quality online teacher and outlines specific standards for academic preparation, content knowledge, online skills and delivery, and more.”

Teacher Evaluation Rubric. (2005). Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow.

The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow’s (ECOT) *Teacher Evaluation Rubric* was developed in 2005 as a collaborative evaluation tool to assess the quality of online teaching. With the support of ALTAIR Learning Management, the members of the Teacher Advisory Council (TAC), made up of K-12 teachers and administrators from diverse disciplines and content areas, were able to organize and design the necessary components of each domain to assure ECOT’s teachers were meeting the highest possible teaching standards. This document remains fluid as it evolves and changes to reflect the current needs of the students they serve. The Ohio Department of Education’s Teacher Education and Licensure Standards and the book *Enhancing Professional Practice – A Framework For Teaching* by Charlotte Danielson were used as foundational references during this process.

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