

Learning Modules for ISP

Using a learning module approach is considered a “best practice” in most distance education instructional design. It may also be a useful approach for face-to-face courses.

What’s a course “module?”

Learning Modules are similar to the traditional concept of “lessons” that together constitute a course. A course “module” is a relatively self-contained, consistently organized grouping of materials and assignments that has clear learning objectives and instructions. It usually corresponds in scope to a text chapter or course topic. Modules become the building blocks of the course content. In a correspondence course with a textbook a module might include supplemental content such as articles or commentary on the readings by the instructor, instructions or guidelines for completing assignments, or commentary about the importance of the topics in that module in relation to the course as a whole. In the case of the FRC ISP the modules should also correspond to the seven prison deliveries and pickups every two weeks, assisting students, instructors, and ISP staff in tracking student progress and deliveries.

All modules for the ISP courses will typically be delivered in one packet at the beginning of the semester. However, instructors should encourage students to respond to each module sequentially rather than doing two or more at once. This can make sure that student progress is monitored, periodic feedback from the instructor can be given, and instructors do not receive a massive amount of student material all at once. Some key features of learning modules are:

- ❖ Each module should represent a consistent pattern of assignments (for instance each might include reading assignments, a response essay, and a quiz)
- ❖ Each module should take approximately the same time to complete
- ❖ What the student needs to do to complete the assignment should be clear (a cover page with a check list is one approach)
- ❖ Modules should be self-contained so each module can be completed as a unit (if supplemental materials are needed to complete the module they should be included with the module)
- ❖ Each module should address course Learning Outcomes.

It is recommended that you list the course outcomes covered in that module in the beginning of the module. This will help you keep track of the outcomes that are being covered, help the student focus, and allow for an evaluation of the outcomes that were covered if a student doesn’t complete all the modules. In the near future instructors will be asked to assess course Student Learning Outcomes as part of our requirements to meet state and accrediting guidelines.

More than one module may address the same Learning Outcomes. Official Student Learning Outcomes for the course can be found on the Title V Course Outline. These can currently be found (Spring 2010) in public folders through Outlook . Go to Public Folders>All Folders>Instruction Office>Approved, and then the folder for that particular subject matter. This document also specifies the official catalog description, requirements, transferability, and typical content for the course. Contact Mick Presnell (mpresnell@frc.edu) if you can’t locate the Title V Outline for your course or if you have any questions about it.

What are some advantages of learning modules?

- ❖ Modules make it easier for the student to anticipate and manage work load
- ❖ Modules make it easier for students to track their progress within modules and in the course in general
- ❖ Modules provide a feeling of accomplishment when a module is completed
- ❖ Modules make it easier for the instructor to track student progress
- ❖ Modules make it easier for instructors to monitor the effectiveness of assignments and sequences of material
- ❖ Modules facilitate instructors using modules in different courses or to more easily update one course
- ❖ Modules make it clear what work remains to be completed if the student doesn't complete the work by the end of the semester

Do modules require extra work?

Some courses may be more of a challenge to turn into modules than others, especially if the instructor has been used to changing the pacing and assignments of a face-to-face course based on student response. But for distance education courses a modular approach makes courses easier to manage and adjust over time. Strategies that work for face-to-face courses may not work for distance education courses.

Usually instructors organize courses according to text chapters or topics so that the end of one module and the beginning of another follow a natural pattern with existing instructional plans. In this case a little attention to evening the work load per module and providing a consistent set of assignments for each module is all that is needed to make it a modular approach. If a topic stretches across 4 or even 6 weeks, the course may still be divided into two week modules in which each 2 week module represents "Part I," "Part II," etc. of the larger topic. The key is to keep the work load and organization of the assignments consistent so the student knows what to do and what it takes to complete that module.

Modules and student feedback

One advantage to using learning modules is that it makes it easier to provide regular feedback to students. The Learning Objectives can be referenced and linked to the student's performance on one or more task in the module, earlier modules can be referenced to in your responses when you want to make suggestions about how to improve or give praise to a student for using earlier material, and it will make it easier to specify what a student needs to complete if their studies are interrupted. Likewise, students can be encouraged to refer to modules when discussing various course topics or assignments. It will also be easier to track your students' progress. You can check off or assign an overall grade to each module in your grade book.

Modules and course organization

Modules can make it easier to organize a course since they provide a basic outline of topics, each with specified Learning Outcomes. Since each module is relatively self-contained you can make decisions about the order of the presentation of material by simply re-organizing the order of the modules, more easily identify if certain Learning Outcomes (and therefore the corresponding module or modules) need to be enhanced. Some modules may be used in more than one course. For instance, if you have an introductory section to your discipline such as a history of the field or basic concepts, this could be included in the first module for two or more courses with little or no additional modification. For a sequence of courses in which student proficiency in skills or knowledge should progress but the same basic instruction is provided, the modules might be similar except for guidelines for assignments that specify increasing levels of performance as the students progress through the series.