



Guidelines and Procedures for Writing Course Outlines

The course outline is an integral part of curriculum planning. It gives a ‘road map’ or rationale to students about the purpose and structure of the course, and it explains to them how their learning performance in the course will be assessed and graded. It is important that course outlines are consistent with the University’s teaching and learning policy. Course outlines should include the following sections:

1. Course title and description
2. Content, highlighting fundamental concepts
3. Learning outcomes
4. Learning activities
5. Assessment scheme
6. Learning resources
7. Feedback for evaluation
8. Course schedule
9. Teachers’ or TA’s contact details
10. A facility for posting course announcements
11. Academic honesty and plagiarism

1. Course title and description

Key points: Explain concisely in your statement(s) what the course is about and how the overall course will support student learning in the discipline(s) of the programme. The purpose of a course description is to provide a holistic view of your course with coherent information for your students. It is useful to give details of the background of the subject: the prior knowledge the students should have; the overall aims of the course; and/or how the course relates to the other courses in the programme.

Example 1 (course description)

Physical activity has now been firmly linked to the reduction of health risks and is therefore an important strategy in health promotion. While exercise and general activity seem to be a simple remedy for the possible reduction of illness later in life, the prevalence of inactivity continues to rise in modern industrialized countries as more and more people crowd into urban areas. Urban lifestyles and habits seem to reduce the amount of exercise in which individuals choose to participate. While efforts are now being made to promote active lifestyles as a way of combating the inevitable rise of disease later in life, increasing numbers of people continue to do no regular exercise and it is becoming more difficult to understand the psychology behind these trends.

This course will explore the current issues in school physical education from a sociological perspective. The course will focus on the meaning of sport and physical activity in society and how it fits into the physical education programmes in Hong Kong schools. Because most of the students taking this course are training to be physical education teachers, the course will emphasize issues that relate to the role of physical education teacher and challenges that are expected when they enter schools as practicing professionals.

(extracted from a Sport Science and Physical Education course, CUHK)

Remark: The above statement is targeted at students who will become physical education teachers. The first paragraph effectively puts the course into perspective by relating it to problems and concerns in real life, and explaining how it will help students understand the issues and challenges faced by the physical education teachers. The second paragraph describes the core areas/ main content of the course. It is worth noting that this description aligns with the learning outcomes in a later part of this course outline (see Example 4).



2. Content, highlighting fundamental concepts

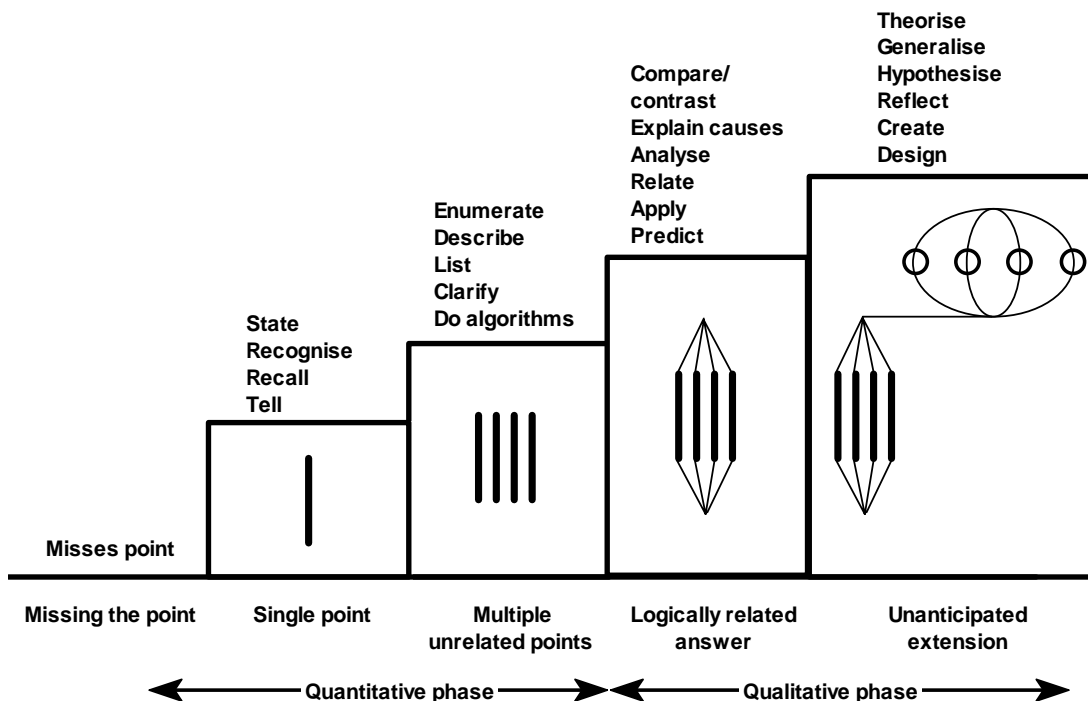
Key point: Highlight the fundamental concepts involved in each topic in order to help students better understand what is and what is not covered in the course.

Example 2 (content)	
Topic	Content
Introduction to Business Forecasting	This chapter presents a broad overview of business forecasting
The Forecast Process, Data Considerations, and Model Selection	This chapter establishes a practical guide to implementing a successful forecasting process stressing evaluation of data for trend, seasonal, and cyclical components. In addition, basic applied statistics are reviewed.
(extracted from a Business Administration course, CUHK)	

Remark: The course description above not only provides information on the broad topics but also highlights the important concepts to be covered in each topic to provide more assistance to students.

3. Learning outcomes (also referred to as learning objectives, educational objectives, and instructional objectives)

Key point: State clearly what you expect/ intend students to achieve. This is usually more helpful than stating what the teacher is planning to teach. Teachers can indicate different levels of students' expected learning outcomes. The model below may be helpful in distinguishing basic and higher order desired learning outcomes (after Biggs, 2003).



(after Biggs, 2003)

Biggs, J. B. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (2nd ed.). Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.



Example 3 (learning outcomes)

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the role, function and activities of the personnel and human resource activities by the HR department and line managers.
 - Understand and apply the basic concepts, process and techniques involved in HR planning, recruitment, selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and employee relations.
- (extracted from a Management course, CUHK)

Remark: *This statement shows that students are expected to gain basic understanding of the key concepts through this foundation course of the discipline. The programme has the arrangement that the more demanding tasks that require higher order cognitive skills (the qualitative phase of the model above) are covered in later courses.*

Example 4 (learning outcomes)

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- To familiarize the student with the philosophy, models, organization and implementation of the general curriculum in schools.
 - To critically evaluate curriculum models in order to appraise the efforts being made to improve educational practices in modern schooling.
 - To be able to develop and defend a curriculum of physical education.
- (extracted from a Sport Science and Physical Education course, CUHK)

Remark: *The above statements clearly state what the student will achieve in attaining the subject knowledge of the course. The learning outcomes are succinct and helpful to them in their learning. Taken together, they serve as the specific goal for the whole course. The course demands learning at higher cognitive levels. Students not only need to understand the concepts and models, but are also required to critically evaluate and put into use the learned concepts by developing and defending their own curriculum. They reach the qualitative phase in the diagrammatic model.*

Example 5 (learning outcomes)

Objectives of the Course

- To acquaint the student with how the theory and principles help us understand about management.
- To develop the student's awareness of the issues and challenges presented to today's managers.
- To reflect upon the meaning of work and management. What motivates us and how we could find meaning and purpose in work?

(extracted from a Management course, CUHK)

Objectives for Student Development

- To develop *leadership, communication, and team skills*
- To reinforce proactive attitudes and behaviors of taking initiative
- To reinforce values of integrity, helpfulness, and professional behavior
- To apply what you've learned toward university activities and prepare you for future work

(extracted from a Management course, CUHK)

Remark: *This is a good example in describing learning outcomes of the course. The outcomes cover both attainments in the knowledge and also cover more general learning capabilities. Students are expected to be well acquainted with the knowledge and are able to reflect upon the concepts learnt as well. In addition, the course also looks into the development of appropriate learning attitudes and learning skills.*



4. Learning activities

Key point: The purpose in distinguishing between time in terms of number of hours ‘in class’ and ‘out of class’ is to suggest that considering student work load is an important part of course design. Here are some examples of rough calculations one might make for a 3-credit-point course.

A student might do four 3-credit-point courses in a semester. Working on approximately 50 hours of actual study per week, this implies that students might be expected to spend about 12-13 hours a week on work associated with a 3-credit-point course. Only a small number of these hours might be in class.

- How do you anticipate students will apportion the remaining hours?
- Will this vary significantly throughout the term?

Answers to these questions should assist students in planning their work and also assist the programme as a whole in assessing likely variation in student workload.

In the examples below, the hours are mapped for the main teaching weeks only. Towards the end of term students will obviously spend more time in finishing their major assignments and/or studying for examinations. In courses where there is significant change in the teaching format throughout the term, this format may not be useful and a weekly schedule may be more appropriate. The key point is that providing some map to students about the learning activities that are planned for them is likely to be helpful.

Example 6 (learning activities in mainly lecture-based courses - 1)

Lecture		Discussion of case		Project discussion		Project presentation	
In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class
2-3 hrs	6 hrs		1 hr		1 hr	1 hr	1 hr
M	M/O		M		M	M	M

(hypothetical example)

M: Mandatory activity in the course O: Optional activity NA: Not applicable

Example 7 (learning activities in mainly lecture-based courses - 2)

Lecture		Interactive tutorial	
In class	Out class	In class	Out class
3 hrs	8 hrs	1 hr	1 hr
M	M	M	M

(hypothetical example)

M: Mandatory activity in the course O: Optional activity NA: Not applicable

Remark: The above examples illustrate the class hours specified for each type of learning activity. The course in both examples is mainly lecture-based. On average, there are 3 hours of lecture per week. Students are expected to spend about 6-8 hours a week in preparing and revising materials related to the lectures. In Example 6, there are also discussion activities, project work and work associated with presentations that mainly takes place outside the lecture hours, but may occasionally replace a lecture. In Example 7, tutorials are the only additional planned activity and so students are expected to do more work associated directly with the lectures. All together, students are expected to do about 13 hours’ work per week in the learning activities.



Example 8 (learning activities in laboratory courses, which are often 2-credit-point courses)

Interactive tutorial		Laboratory		Self-study	
In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class
1 hr		3 hrs	3 hrs		1 hr
M		M	M		O

(hypothetical example)

M: Mandatory activity in the course O: Optional activity NA: Not applicable

Remark: *This course has tutorials, laboratories, and also self-study sessions. These altogether occupy a total of about 4 hours' (1+3) time of the students in the tutorial and laboratory. The students are also expected to self-learn or do a significant amount of group work. Students are expected to spend about 3 hours a week on preparing and revising lab reports probably with their group mates, and also 1 hour self-study per week, in lab-related work.*

Example 9 (learning activities in courses with field work)

Lecture		Interactive tutorial		Discussion of cases		Field-work / practicum		Project		Web-based teaching	
In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class	In class	Out class
2 hrs	3 hrs	1 hr	1 hr		2 hrs total	1 hr	2 hrs		1 hr		1 hr
M	M	M	M		M	M	M		M		O

(hypothetical example)

M: Mandatory activity in the course O: Optional activity NA: Not applicable

Remark: *This is a professional experience course. It shows not only formal teaching situations such as lectures and tutorials, but it also includes web-based teaching (the teacher has a website set up with abundant learning resources) and field work or practicum. These activities are embedded in an overall plan to enable students to relate theory to practice.*



5. Assessment scheme

Key point: If we consider assessment to be part of the learning activities in the course, then it is clear that assessment must be matched to the desired learning outcomes. You need to consider what and how the assessment task(s) which are able to help students achieve the desired learning outcomes/ educational objectives.

Example 10 (assessments)

Task nature	Percentage
Class presentation	15%
Term Project	25%
Midterm* Examination	30%
Final Examination* (Take Home)	30%

(extracted from a Sport Science and Physical Education course, CUHK)

Remark: *This example shows the assessments used in the course portrayed in Example 4. The assessments match the learning outcomes very well. For example, the Term Project consists of an essay that discusses the problems of implementing change in the PE curriculum in HK and is a test of students' familiarity with the philosophy, models, organization and implementation of the curriculum in schools (learning outcome 1), and their ability to critically evaluate curriculum models (learning outcome 2). The class presentation will test students' ability in defending their curriculum (part of learning outcome 3).*

6. Learning resources

Key points: A well structured set of learning resources should be provided to students. These are usually in the form of reading lists and references. They may also include sets of links to online resources and eBooks. It is often helpful to separate these resources into ones which are central to the content and desired learning outcomes of the course, and those which are relate to extensions of areas of the course. One needs to be realistic about the amount of reading material students are likely to delve into. Overly long reading lists can be counter-productive and discourage students.

7. Feedback for evaluation

Key point: There are many forms of evaluation that you can use to generate the feedback from students such as questionnaires, and qualitative feedback from students through focus-group meetings or email exchanges. Planning to have a variety of evaluation strategies is more likely to ensure that valid, rich and diagnostic information is received.

8. Course schedule (including lecture, lab and tutorial arrangements)

Key point: A matrix is suggested as a good way to represent a course schedule including class, date, topic and requirements so that students can prepare their own learning before classes. It is useful to highlight important dates for students, including holidays, dates when assessments are due and/or dates of tests and examinations.



Example 11 (course schedule)

Class	Date	Topic	Requirements
Week 1	Jan. 11 (W) Jan. 13 (F)	1. Syllabus 2. Reviewing basic concepts in managerial accounting 3. Activity-based costing	Reading: chapter 5 Short case: Wong Association I and II.
Week 2	Jan. 18 (W) Jan. 20 (F)	1. Activity-based Management 2. Determining how costs behave	Reading: chapters 5 and 10 Group exercise: IT Dept. Group exercise: NAG-Measure supplier performance

(extracted from an Accounting course, CUHK)

Remark: *The above example gives students a holistic picture of the timing and the topics to be covered. There is useful information such as class commencement date, details of each topic, required readings and so on. It is helpful to students in preparing their own reading or learning materials in advance.*

9. Teachers' or TA's contact details

Key point: Help students to easily locate your contact information. The information allows students to arrange for any consultation after classes or receive support in terms of learning and teaching from teacher, tutors and/or teaching assistants. It is better to put both the teachers' and TAs' contact details such as name, office location, phone number and email address.

10. A facility for posting course announcements

Key point: Information concerning the accessibility of the course website (if it exists). This might be an open website or any of the platforms such as iHome, CUForum and WebCT hosted by the University. Teachers should also demonstrate the site in class so as to familiarize the students with the key functionalities. More information on setting up course websites can be found at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/eLearning>

11. Academic honesty and plagiarism

Key point: Relevant information can be allocated via: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/> A course outline may also include subject-specific requirements on plagiarism.

Other resources

Teaching and Learning Support. The University of Queensland, Teaching and Educational Development. Retrieved January 4, 2007, from <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/teaching/assessment/index.html>

Biggs, J. B. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (2nd ed.). Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.