



## First year curriculum principles: First year teacher

### Low risk, 'do-able' actions that would make a difference

First year curriculum principle	Actions that would make a difference
<p><b>1. Transition</b></p> <p>The curriculum and its delivery should be designed to be consistent and explicit in assisting students' transition <i>from</i> their previous educational experience <i>to</i> the nature of learning in higher education and learning in their discipline as part of their lifelong learning. The first year curriculum should be designed to mediate and support transition as a process that occurs over time. In this way, the first year curriculum will enable successful student transition into first year, through first year, into later years and ultimately out into the world of work, professional practice and career attainment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use curriculum time to discuss expectations and responsibilities of learning in higher education and in the discipline (e.g. identify and explain key university processes and procedures — participation in tutorials, attendance at lectures, out-of-class preparation, academic reading, special consideration, grading; draw up student/staff contract on responsibilities; agree statement on what is an 'independent learner').</li> <li>2. Be consistent in all student communications (e.g. in presentation of program material; program language; use of assessment criteria and standards; communicating sense of program progression).</li> <li>3. Use a series of email or LMS communications to deliver just-in-time transition information over the course of the first semester.</li> </ol>
<p><b>2. Diversity</b></p> <p>The first year curriculum should be attuned to student diversity and must be accessible by, and inclusive of, all students. First year curriculum design should recognise that students have special learning needs by reason of their social, cultural and academic transition. Diversity is often a factor that further exacerbates transition difficulties. The first year curriculum should take into account students' backgrounds, needs, experiences and patterns of study and few if any assumptions should be made about existing skills and knowledge.</p> <p>'Diversity' here can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• membership of at-risk or equity groups</li> <li>• widening participation (e.g. non-traditional cohorts)</li> <li>• students' existing skills and knowledge</li> <li>• patterns and timing of engagement with the first year curriculum (e.g. mid-year entry).</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be aware of the diversity characteristics of your incoming cohort.</li> <li>2. Make no assumptions about students' entry level knowledge, skills and attitudes. Especially, be cognisant of the disparity of academic preparedness and allocate class time to attending to the unevenness of entering academic skills (e.g., examine a piece of text from different perspectives on the cognitive hierarchy; embed scaffolded reading and writing tasks in class materials and curriculum time; discuss planning and self management skills (including time and stress management)).</li> <li>3. At critical times during semester, assist students to make links to relevant university services (e.g. course and administrative advising; pastoral care/ counselling; academic support services; financial support; peer mentoring opportunities; etc.).</li> </ol>



### 3. Design

First year curriculum design and delivery should be student focused, explicit and relevant in providing the foundation and scaffolding necessary for first year learning success. This requires that the curriculum must be designed to assist student development and to support their engagement with learning environments through the intentional integration and sequencing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

1. Make explicit to students where this subject sits and what it contributes to the whole-of-program curriculum design (as regards contribution to knowledge, skills and attitudes of the discipline).
2. Make explicit to students how they can track their progress and the career/employability relevance of their program by making portfolio entries and reflections once artefacts/skills have been acquired.
3. Make linkages/connections explicit between first year subjects of study.

### 4. Engagement

Learning, teaching, and assessment approaches in the first year curriculum should enact engaging and involving curriculum pedagogy and should enable active and collaborative learning. Learning communities should be promoted through the embedding in first year curriculum of active and interactive learning opportunities and other opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and teacher–student interaction.

1. Make curriculum time available to help students connect their previous education/experiences with current subject content (e.g. use constructivist approaches to contextualise learning with practical examples and/or current issues to make learning meaningful).
2. If not already designed in, encourage students to work collaboratively (e.g. in pairs, informal groups, on other activities) in order for them to get to know each other and develop a sense of academic and social belonging.
3. Encourage and facilitate teacher-student interactions (e.g. ice-breakers: call students by name; attend co-curricula activities; offer career advising; make yourself physically and ‘psychologically’ available within appropriate boundaries; reference faculty research activities relevant to the subject to engage them further with the discipline).

### 5. Assessment

The first year curriculum should assist students to make a successful transition to assessment in higher education, while assessment should increase in complexity from the first to later years of curriculum design. Critically, students should receive regular, formative evaluations of their work early in their program of study to aid their learning and to provide feedback to both students and staff on student progress and achievement.

1. Schedule an early piece of formative assessment to be submitted and returned before Week 4 to:
  - relieve early student anxiety
  - provide feedback to both students and staff on student progress and achievement
  - identify students in need of extra support.
2. Be consistent regarding communication of assessment expectations across the first year — use consistent criteria and standards, naming of assessment tasks, use of assessment verbs, etc.
3. Make class time available to discuss with students tertiary assessment practices and expectations (e.g. to achieve shared understanding of meaning of assessment criteria; provide examples of good, fair and poor performance of assessment criteria; try correcting a piece of writing using track changes function in large class; have class (including teacher) write a paragraph to swap and mark against criteria; discuss the nature, quantity, and use of feedback with students).



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## 6. Evaluation and monitoring

Good first year curriculum design is evidence-based and enhanced by regular evaluation that leads to curriculum development and renewal designed to improve student learning. The first year curriculum should also have strategies embedded to monitor all students' engagement in their learning and to identify and intervene in a timely way with students at risk of not succeeding or fully achieving desired learning outcomes.

1. Be aware of first year program and subject evaluation results and the key areas identified for improvement and staff development.
2. Have a strategy in place for monitoring and responding to students you see not engaging, at risk of disengaging, or at risk of not acquiring the basic academic and discipline related skills relevant to your subject (e.g. identify a designated discipline/school person you can report these students to for follow-up; be aware of support and referral options for various cohorts and issues; contact students yourself to see if everything is okay).
3. Promote a climate of support and encouragement (e.g. know students by name if at all possible; take an interest in student progress; be accessible and responsive; manage student queries promptly and effectively).