

Considerable Broad Changes

This edition of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses has some significant changes in comparison to the previous releases:

1. Sections have been renamed “Standards.”
2. Items previously listed under “To what extent does the course meet the criteria in this area” have been reworked and presented as measurable “indicators.”
3. Indicators under each standard have been relabeled with letter and number in order to make them more easily identified.
4. Criteria previously listed under “Reviewer Considerations,” has been reorganized and presented as “Explanations” and “Examples” for further clarification and consistency with the other National Standards sets.
5. Two new Standards have been introduced. Standard A, “Course Overview and Support,” and Standard E, “Accessibility and Usability.”

Considerable Standard and Indicator Changes

1. “Section A: Content” is now repositioned as new Standard B: Content.
2. A new Standard A has been introduced in the Third Edition, focusing on indicators specific to the “Course Overview and Support.”
3. “Section B: Instructional Design” is now repositioned as new Standard C: Instructional Design.
4. “Section C: Student Assessment” has been renamed and repositioned as new Standard D: Learner Assessment.
5. “Section D: Technology” has been repositioned as new Standard F: Technology.
6. “Section E: Course Evaluation and Support” has been reworked, renamed and repositioned as new Standard G: Course Evaluation. The items addressing support have been moved into the new Standard A: Course Overview and Support, as overall revisions have resulted in this move for a more cohesive flow and fit.
7. A new Standard E has been introduced in the Third Edition, expanding the standards to more thoroughly address “Accessibility and Usability.”

Overall Comparison

	National Standards for Quality Online Courses (Version 2: October 2011)	National Standards for Quality Online Courses (Third Edition: 2019)
Number of standards	5	7
Number of “indicators”	53	45

Changes to the Standards and “indicators”

The changes described in this document are not an exhaustive account of all the changes that were made to the National Standards for Quality Online Courses, Third Edition. In some cases, “Reviewer Considerations,” have been folded into the indicator explanations and/or examples. Always read the indicators and accompanying explanations and examples completely and carefully when applying the standards to your specific situation. For more detailed information about how to use the standards to review online course quality, check out the Quality Matters K-12 Rubric.

**Portions of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses (indicators, explanations, and examples) are taken directly from the Quality Matters™, K-12 Rubric, Fifth Edition and are noted with an asterisk. For a direct correlation between the two standards sets, visit nsqol.org. To cite the QM Rubric, use the following citation: Quality Matters. (2019). K-12 Rubric Workbook Standards for Course Design (Fifth Edition). Annapolis, MD. Copyright 2019. MarylandOnline, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved.*

	National Standards for Quality Online Courses (Version 2: October 2011)	National Standards for Quality Online Courses (Third Edition: 2019)
		<p>NEW Standard</p> <p>A: Course Overview and Support</p> <p><i>The overall design of the course is made clear to the learner at the beginning of the course. The course materials include support services essential to learner and instructor success. Course instructions articulate or link to relevant information and services.</i></p>
Section A	<p>Content</p> <p><i>Description: The course provides online learners with multiple ways of engaging with learning experiences that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state or national content standards.</i></p>	<p>Repositioned to Standard B: “Content.”</p> <p><i>The online course provides learners with various content options that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state or national content standards.</i></p>

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Academic Content Standards and Assessments		Removed this label.
	1. The goals and objectives clearly state what the participants will know or be able to do at the end of the course. The goals and objectives are measurable in multiple ways.	B1 The online course objectives or competencies are measurable and clearly state what the learner will be able to demonstrate as a result of successfully completing the course.*
	2. The course content and assignments are aligned with the state’s content standards, common core curriculum, or other accepted content standards set for Advanced Placement courses, technology, computer science, or other courses whose content is not included in the state standards.	B3 The online course content is aligned with accepted state and/or other accepted content standards, where applicable.*
	3. The course content and assignments are of sufficient rigor, depth and breadth to teach the standards being addressed.	Removed. Addressed in B2 .
	4. Information literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.	B4 Digital literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.*
	5. Multiple learning resources and materials to increase student success are available to students before the course begins.	Relocated into Standard A, Indicator A8 . A8 Learners are offered an orientation prior to the start of the online course.
Course Overview and Introduction		Removed this label.
	6. A clear, complete course overview and syllabus are included in the course.	Relocated into Standard A, Indicator A1 . A1 A course overview and syllabus are included in the online course.
	7. Course requirements are consistent with course goals, are representative of the scope of the course and are clearly stated.	B2 The online course expectations are consistent with course-level objectives or competencies, are representative of the structure of the course, and are clearly stated.

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	8. Information is provided to students, parents, and mentors on how to communicate with the online instructor and course provider.	Relocated into Standard A , and Reworked into Indicators A3 and A7 . A3 The instructor’s biographical information and information on how to communicate with the instructor are provided to learners and other stakeholders. A7 The online course provides a clear description or link to the technical support offered and how to obtain it.*
Legal and Acceptable Use Policies		Removed this label.
	9. The course reflects multi-cultural education, and the content is accurate, current and free of bias or advertising.	Reworked into three indicators: B6 The online course content and supporting materials reflect a culturally diverse perspective that is free of bias.* B7 The online course materials (e.g., textbooks, primary source documents, OER) that support course content standards are accurate and current. B8 The online course is free of adult content and avoids unnecessary advertisements.*
	10. Expectations for academic integrity, use of copyrighted materials, plagiarism and netiquette (internet etiquette) regarding lesson activities, discussions, and e-mail communications are clearly stated.	Relocated into Standard A , Indicator A4 . A4 Learner expectations and policies are clearly stated and readily accessible within the introductory material of the course.
	11. Privacy policies are clearly stated.	RELOCATED into Standard F , Indicator F1 . F1 Educational tools ensure learner privacy and maintain confidentiality of learner information in accordance with local, state, and national laws for student data.
Instructor Resources		Removed this label.

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	12. Online instructor resources and notes are included.	Combined with criteria #13 into B10 B10 Documentation and other support materials are available to support effective online course facilitation.*
	13. Assessment and assignment answers and explanations are included.	Combined with criteria #12 into B10 B10 Documentation and other support materials are available to support effective online course facilitation.*
Section B	Instructional Design <i>Description: The course uses learning activities that engage students in active learning; provides students with multiple learning paths to master; the content is based on student needs; and provides ample opportunities for interaction and communication – student to student, student to instructor and instructor to student.</i>	Repositioned to Standard C: “Instructional Design.” <i>The online course incorporates instructional materials, activities, resources, and assessments that are aligned to standards, engage all learners, and support the achievement of academic goals.</i>
Instructional and Audience Analysis		Removed this label.
		NEW Indicator C1 The online course design includes activities that guide learners toward promoting ownership of their learning and self-monitoring.
	1. Course design reflects a clear understanding of all students’ needs and incorporates varied ways to learn and master the curriculum.	C2 The online course’s content and learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.
Course, Unit and Lesson Design		Removed this label.
	2. The course is organized by units and lessons that fall into a logical sequence. Each unit and lesson includes an overview describing objectives, activities, assignments, assessments, and resources to	C3 The online course is organized by units and lessons that fall into a logical sequence.

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	provide multiple learning opportunities for students to master the content.	
Instructional Strategies and Activities		Removed this label.
	3. The course instruction includes activities that engage students in active learning.	C9 Online course instructional materials and resources present content in an effective, engaging, and appropriate manner.*
	4. The course and course instructor provide students with multiple learning paths, based on student needs that engage students in a variety of ways.	C6 The online course provides learners with multiple learning paths as appropriate, based on learner needs, that engage learners in a variety of ways.
	5. The course provides opportunities for higher-order thinking, critical reasoning activities and thinking in increasingly complex ways.	Removed. Addressed in C2 .
	6. The course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate students' needs.	Relocated into Standard F, Indicator F3 . F3 The online course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate learners; needs and preferences.*
	7. Readability levels, written language assignments and mathematical requirements are appropriate to the course content and grade-level expectations.	C4 The online course is appropriate to the reading level of the intended learners.*
Communication and Interaction		Removed this label.
	8. The course design provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student interaction, including opportunities for timely and frequent feedback about student progress.	C8 The online course provides opportunities for learner-instructor interaction, including opportunities for regular feedback about learner progress.*
	9. The course design includes explicit communication/activities (both before	C5 The online course design includes introductory assignments or activities

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	and during the first week of the course) that confirms whether students are engaged and are progressing through the course. The instructor will follow program guidelines to address non-responsive students.	to engage learners within the first week of the course.
	10. The course provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student and student-student interaction to foster mastery and application of the material.	Reworked into two indicators: C7 The online course provides regular opportunities for learner-learner interaction. C8 The online course design provides opportunities for learner-instructor interaction, including opportunities for regular feedback about learner progress.*
Resources and Materials		Removed this label.
	11. Students have access to resources that enrich the course content.	Relocated into Standard B, indicator B5 B5 Supplemental learning resources and related instructional materials are available to support and enrich learning and are aligned to the specific content being delivered.*
Section C	Student Assessment <i>Description: The course uses multiple strategies and activities to assess student readiness for and progress in course content and provides students with feedback on their progress.</i>	Repositioned to Standard D: “Learner Assessment.” <i>A variety of assessment strategies are used throughout the course geared toward learning and engagement and learners are provided with feedback on their progress.</i>
Evaluation Strategies		Removed this label.
	1. Student evaluation strategies are consistent with course goals and objectives, are representative of the scope of the course and are clearly stated.	D1 Learner assessments are linked to stated course, unit, or lesson-level objectives or competencies.

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	2. The course structure includes adequate and appropriate methods and procedures to assess students' mastery of the content.	D2 Valid course assessments measure learner progress toward mastery of content.
Feedback		Removed this label.
	3. Ongoing, varied, and frequent assessments are conducted throughout the course to inform instruction.	Removed. Addressed in indicator D2 .
	4. Assessment strategies and tools make the student continuously aware of his/her progress in class and mastery of the content.	D3 Assessment practices provide routine and varied opportunities for self-monitoring and reflection of learning.*
Assessment Resources and Materials		Removed this label.
	5. Assessment materials provide the instructor with the flexibility to assess students in a variety of ways.	D4 Assessment materials provide the learner with the flexibility to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways.*
	6. Grading rubrics are provided to the instructor and may be shared with students.	D5 Rubrics that clearly define expectations for varied levels of proficiency are created and shared with learners.*
	7. The grading policy and practices are easy to understand.	Relocated into Standard A, indicator A6. A6 Grading policies and practices are clearly defined in accordance with course content learning expectations.
		NEW Indicator E2 E2 The online course design facilitates readability.*
		NEW Indicator E5 E5 Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.*
Section D	Technology	Repositioned to Standard F: "Technology."

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	<i>The course takes advantage of a variety of technology tools, has a user-friendly interface and meets accessibility standards for interoperability and access for learners with special needs.</i>	<i>The technologies enabling the various course components facilitate active learning and do not impede the learning process.</i>
Course Architecture		Removed this label.
	1. The course architecture permits the online instructor to add content activities and assessments to extend learning opportunities.	F3 The online course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate learners' needs and preferences.*
	2. The course accommodates multiple school calendars, e.g., block, 4X4 and traditional schedules.	Removed.
User Interface		Removed this label.
	3. Clear and consistent navigation is present throughout the course.	Relocated into Standard E, indicator E1. E1 Online course navigation is logical, consistent, and efficient from the learner's point of view.*
	4. Rich media are provided in multiple formats for ease of use and access in order to address diverse student needs.	Relocated into Standard E, and reworked into two indicators: E3 The online course provides accessible course materials and activities that meet the needs of diverse learners.* E4 Course multimedia facilitate ease of use.*
Technology requirements and interoperability		Removed this label.
	5. All technology requirements (including hardware, browser, software, etc.) are specified.	A5 Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.*
	6. Prerequisite skills in the use of technology are identified.	A2 Minimum computer and digital literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.*

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	7. The course uses content-specific tools and software appropriately.	F2 The online course tools support the learning objectives or competencies.*
	8. The course is designed to meet internationally recognized interoperability standards.	Removed. See the National Standards for Quality Online Programs.
	9. Copyright and licensing status, including permission to share where applicable, is clearly stated and easily found.	B9 Copyright and licensing status for any third-party content is appropriately cited and easily found.
Accessibility		Removed this label.
	10. Course materials and activities are designed to provide appropriate access to all students. The course, developed with universal design principles in mind, conforms to the U.S. Section 504 and Section 508 provisions for electronic and information technology as well as the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines WCAG 2.0).	Relocated into NEW Standard E: "Accessibility and Usability" <i>The course design reflects a commitment to accessibility in that all learners can access all content and activities and to usability so that all learners can easily navigate and interact with all course components. Online course materials, activities, and assessments are designed to ensure that all learners have access to the same information and are able to engage in the same interactions and within the same time frame. The course, developed with universal design principles in mind, addresses Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by following (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) WCAG 2.0 AA standards. This does not guarantee or imply that particular country/federal/state/local accessibility regulations are met. Please consult with an accessibility specialist to ensure that all required accessibility regulations are met.</i>
		NEW Indicator E2 The online course design facilitates readability.*

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		NEW Indicator E5 Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.*
Data Security		Removed this label.
	11. Student information remains confidential, as required by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).	F1 Educational tools ensure learner privacy and maintain confidentiality of learner information in accordance with local, state, and national laws for learner data.
		NEW Indicator F4 The course allows instructors to control the release of content.*
		NEW Indicator F5 The course provides the necessary technical functionality to score and record assessments and calculate earned course points or grades.*
Section E	Course Evaluation and Support <i>Description: The course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness, using a variety of assessment strategies, and the findings are used as a basis for improvement. The course is kept up to date both in content and in the application of new research on course design and technologies. Online instructors and their students are prepared to teach and learn in an online environment and are provided support during the course.</i>	Repositioned to Standard G: “Course Evaluation.” <i>The online course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness, using a variety of assessment strategies, and the findings are used as a basis for improvement. The course is kept up-to-date, both in content and in the application of new research on course design and technologies.</i>
Assessing Course Effectiveness		Removed this label.
	1. The course provider uses multiple ways of assessing course effectiveness.	G1 The online course uses multiple methods and sources of input for assessing course effectiveness.
	2. The course is evaluated using a continuous improvement cycle for	G3 The online course is updated on a continuous improvement cycle for effectiveness based on the findings

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	effectiveness and the findings used as a basis for improvement.	from ongoing reviews.
Course Updates		Removed this label.
	3. the course is updated periodically to ensure that the content is current.	G2 The online course is reviewed to ensure that the course is current.
Certification		Removed this label.
	4. Course instructors, whether face-to-face or virtual, are certificated and “highly qualified.” The online course teacher possesses a teaching credential from a state-licensing agency and is “highly qualified” as defined under ESEA.	Removed. See the National Standards for Quality Online Programs and the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching .
Instructor and Student Support		Removed this label.
	5. Professional development about the online course delivery system is offered by the provider to assure effective use of the courseware and various instructional media available.	Removed. See the National Standards for Quality Online Programs and the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching .
	6. The course provider offers technical support and course management assistance to students, the course instructor, and the school coordinator.	A7 The online course provides a clear description or link to the technical support offered and how to obtain it.*
	7. Course instructors, whether face-to-face or virtual, have been provided professional development in the behavioral, social, and when necessary, emotional, aspects of the learning environment.	Removed. See the National Standards for Quality Online Programs and the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching .
	8. Course instructors, whether face-to-face or virtual, receive instructor professional development, which includes the support and use of a variety of communication modes to stimulate student engagement online.	Removed. See the National Standards for Quality Online Programs and the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching .

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	9. The provider assures that course instructors, whether face-to-face or virtual, are provided support, as needed, to ensure their effectiveness and success in meeting the needs of online students.	B10 Documentation and other support materials are available to support effective online course facilitation.*
	10. Students are offered an orientation for taking an online course before starting the coursework.	A8 Learners are offered an orientation prior to the start of the online course.

Quick Reference:

2 nd Ed. (iNACOL)	Third Edition		Third Edition	2 nd Ed. (iNACOL)
A1	B1		A1	A6
A2	B3		A2	D6
A3	B2		A3	A8
A4	B4		A4	A10
A5	A8		A5	D5
A6	A1		A6	C7
A7	B2		A7	A8, E6
A8	A3, A7		A8	E10
A9	B6, B7, B8		B1	A1
A10	A4		B2	A7
A11	F1		B3	A2
A12	B10		B4	A4
B1	C2		B5	B11
B2	C3		B6	A9
B3	C9		B7	A9
B4	C6		B8	A9
B5	C2		B9	D9
B6	F3		B10	A12
B7	C4		C1	-
B8	C8		C2	B1, B5
B9	C5		C3	B2
B10	C7, C8		C4	B7
B11	B5		C5	B9
C1	D1		C6	B4
C2	D2		C7	B10
C3	D2		C8	B8, B10
C4	D3		C9	B3
C5	D4		D1	C1
C6	D5		D2	C2, C3
C7	A6		D3	C4

D1	F3		D4	C5
D2	-		D5	C6
D3	E1		E1	D3
D4	E3, E4		E2	-
D5	A5		E3	D4
D6	A2		E4	D4
D7	F2		E5	-
D8	NSQ – P		F1	A11, D11
D9	B9		F2	D7
D10	Standard E		F3	B6, D1
D11	F1		F4	-
E1	G1		F5	-
E2	G3		G1	E1
E3	G2		G2	E3
E4	NSQ – P – T		G3	E2
E5	NSQ – P – T			
E6	A7			
E7	NSQ – P – T			
E8	NSQ – P – T			
E9	B10			
E10	A8			