

**Practical advice for enhancing
your teaching and learning**

Student

workload

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Inside ...

[How much time do students have available to spend on a course?](#) 3

[How can you structure the workload of a course?](#) 4

[How do your students know how long to spend studying?](#) 5

[How long do your students take to study a reading?](#) 6

How much time do students have available to spend on a course?

Students have many demands on their time. Some may have part-time or full-time jobs. Some will have family responsibilities. Others will have a full social life to maintain!

However, if a course is one quarter of a full-time load, then a student could reasonably be expected to spend between 8 and 12 hours per week studying that course.

Designing your course with attention to the workload expected from students would make the course more manageable and enjoyable for them.

How can you structure the workload of a course?

Structure your course so that the time allocated by students each week allows for:

- attending lectures, tutorials or other face-to-face sessions.
- studying the texts, readings and learning material.
- completing related learning activities.
- working towards assessment pieces, including time to find references and resources, and undertaking group activities.
- other related activities, for example, administrative tasks such as filling in forms to be returned, or time spent participating in online tutorials.

Students appreciate a course structure that allows them to have a lighter workload the week before an assignment is due.

How do your students know how long to spend studying?

It is especially helpful to give students as much guidance as possible as to how long each section of their study should take them. You can do this by:

- providing a clear indication of how the overall structure of the course is best worked through, for example, indicate how many weeks should be spent studying each topic.
- giving an estimate of how much time a student should spend on each reading or section of a textbook. Some readings may need more in-depth study if they contribute to understanding a vital part of the course; others may only need to be skimmed over to gain a general overview of a topic.
- specifying a time estimate for learning activities. Problems could arise if a conscientious student spent 4 or 5 hours completing an activity that asked them to search the internet for some relevant resources, when you might only have expected them to spend 20-30 minutes having a brief look at what is available.

How long do your students take to study a reading?

It is also important to consider the length of time students will actually take to study the readings you set for them. There are a number of factors to consider, including:

- the difficulty level of the reading according to the lengths of words and sentences.
- the amount of technical language or jargon used.
- the background knowledge the students bring to the reading.
- the instructions you provide for the student, for example, to "skim the reading" or to "study the introduction in detail".
- the relevance to the learning outcomes and assessment.
- the general appeal or interest of the reading.
- the overall length of the reading.

How long do your students take to complete assessment tasks?

The following activities associated with assessment tasks contribute to the students' overall workload:

- researching resources.
- thinking and planning.
- organising and attending group meetings.
- preparing drafts and proof reading.
- preparing for presentations.

For more information

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