

Teaching Guide

A Quick Guide to Preparing your 8-week Course

The title of the Walsh *et al.*, 2019, Equivalent but not the Same: Teaching and Learning in Full Semester and Condensed Summer Courses, raises the question that we all ask when we think about converting a full 16-week semester course to an 8-week condensed course: Will it be the same? How can you condense everything into 8 weeks? Many colleges adopt this format with the intention of improving student learning and retention. The expectation is that 8-week courses will be the academic equivalent of 16-week courses. To meet these expectations 8-week courses require careful and intentional thought about the course design. This guide hopes to give you some tips to think about as you convert your courses to an 8-week format.

Planning and Aligning Your Course.

Think of this as an opportunity to reconsideration how the various parts of your course are connected. Best practice in course development requires you to carefully plan the way different parts of your course flows. 8-week course redesign requires up front planning and mapping of your course. You need to think about the entire course and not only making changes to specific

- What will mapping your course mean? This means thinking intentionally about the following relationships.

Course learning outcomes → Course Content → Instructional Activities → Assessments

Course Learning Outcomes	Module Outcomes	Course Resources and Materials	Instructional Activities	Assessments
These describe your expectations of students at the end of the course.	Describes the expectations for the module. They are related to the course learning outcomes. What do you expect students to be able to do at the end of the module?	Describes the materials and resources that will be used in the delivery of content. Things to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The level of the course▪ Resources and materials that are appropriate for content delivery.	Describes/outlines the types of learning activities you will use in the course to help students engage and stay focused.	Describes/outlines the types of assessments that will be used to ensure that students have achieved the course learning outcomes.

Think about your current course what is the relationship between these elements. Can you provide a map of your current course? If you can then it is time to begin mapping out your 8-week course. Use your old course for comparison as you proceed. If you do not have a map of your old course, then mapping out your 8-week course can help you think about these relationships.

Your Course Content.

Carefully select your course content.

- **Determine what students must know.** Wilson, 2007, suggests determining what are “the must haves”, “needs to have” and “may need to know”. It requires seriously contemplating what students need without jeopardizing them achieving the learning outcomes of the course. Focus on removing any unnecessary information.

- **Sequencing Content.** As you think about the content, determine where you can place easier content vs complex content. How can the content be interwoven into the information for each week?
 - **For in-person classes** think about how content can be more effectively be delivered. Should it be during longer class periods? Or can this time be utilized in active learning exercises. The learning management system can be a good place to house pre-class assignments that can be used to support the in-person activities.
 - **Online classes** think about how content can be effectively sequenced and connected to allow students to move seamlessly through the materials.
- **Consider breaking information down into smaller chunks.** Break information into smaller pieces, particularly complex tasks. Overall think about the timing of content. Can more complex content be assigned over weekends, giving students more time to process and think about it.
- **Include supporting materials.** Supporting materials provide opportunities for students to use in their spare time.

Types of tasks or instructional activities chosen. How is the content delivered? What types of instructional activities will be included in the course?

- **Active learning.** These require additional planning and structure in order to be successful. The flipped classroom approach is one that allows students to view the course materials/ video and discuss these in the classroom.
- **Require more preparatory work.** Create more up-front activities for tasks that students are required to perform. These include practice activities and pre-class assignments.
- **Support your activities.** Give students support resources such as solved problems, graphic organizers, useful websites, templates. Consider methods such as I do, we do, you do.
- **Time per session.** The time per session will increase. This means activities need to be structured to use the time effectively. Less time should be used on repeating content. Keep in mind some activities will have to take place outside of class time.
- **Use different types of instructional activities.** Small group, individual activities, online research, video presentations, flipped classroom. Vary your instructional strategies.

Assessments

Careful selection of assessments. Assessments should always link to course learning outcomes but this can be done in more than one way. Like planning the course content, you need to be intentional about the types of assessments you choose for these courses.

- **Assessment Scaffolding.** Similar to chunking content assessments can be broken down into smaller steps. Such as splitting a project into smaller steps, breaking a big exam into smaller exams.
- **Timing of assignments.** Think about the times and days when assignments are due. Depending on the assignment consider scheduling due dates at the end of a weekend.
- **Providing timely and relevant feedback.** Because the semester is shortened it is important for students to receive timely feedback allowing them to make the necessary adjustments for improvement. This will also help you be responsive to student's needs.

- **Examples.** Staggered projects, authentic assessment using real world examples, discussion forums increasing engagement.

Use the Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas to support your teaching. Canvas is your virtual classroom. Whether this is an in person or online course let the technology work for you. It can serve as

- A repository for sharing additional resources and include preparatory work.
- A place for students to be more engaged with the material/course content.
- A tool to communicate with students.
- A place for students to communicate with each other.

Supporting Your Students

Students have various reactions to the 8-week format, for some it is exciting to be able to focus on one course over a concentrated period with the added bonus of finishing their program quickly. Others are apprehensive since this is a new way of doing things and may be overwhelmed at the idea of having so much to do in a short space of time. In either instance it is important to consider the students perspective. Here are a few things you should consider.

- Find ways of getting to know your students and some of their limitations or challenges. The time is short but still find ways to get to know your students. Whether in a 16- week or 8-week format each student's background and experiences are different.
- Impress upon students the need for time management.
- The course design should help students to set goals and achieve their goals.
- Include the ability for students to self-reflect and reassess.
- Create an environment where students are able to ask questions and seek out answers.
- Build motivation.
- Think carefully about the types of activities and assessments that you are going to include in your course.

Keep in mind that this format will need students to become more independent learners. It is important that faculty are aware of some of the challenges that a shortened course poses for students.

Small changes can go a long way. Always remember that the objective of this format is to improve student success. Put yourself in your student's shoes.

- Try to increase interaction. For example, increase the number of office hours. Include virtual check-ins.
- Know where to direct students to resources and support. You can include this in your course syllabus or on your course page.
- Be intentional about your course design. It is important that students not feel overwhelmed.
- Provide open communication.
 - Include check-ins and constant formative assessments throughout the course.
- Create organizers, downloadable materials and guides.

Internal Resources

Faculty at Durham Tech can access the videos and resources created for the 8-week Course Redesign Tips Series on Canvas. Simply use the following [link](#) to self-enroll into the Canvas course.

External Resources

- [University of Colorado – Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Central Michigan University Curriculum and Instructional Support – Preparing a Course for Hybrid Delivery](#)
- [The University of North Carolina Charlotte Charlotte Center for Teaching and Learning – Short Courses/Part-of-Term Courses: Condensing Course Content](#)
- ECU Office of faculty Excellence: [Designing Successful Short – Format Courses](#)
- Iowa State University [Teaching a condensed course format](#)
- [Designing Effective and Innovative Courses](#)

References

- Kops, W. (2013). [Teaching Compressed-Format Courses: Teacher-Based Best Practices](#). *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*. 40(1), 18.
- Walsh, K. P., Sanders, M. & Gadgil, S. (2019). Equivalent but not the Same: Teaching and Learning in Full Semester and Condensed Summer Courses, *College Teaching*. 67:2, 138-149.
- Wilson, L. O. (2007). When backward is forward thinking: Radical changes in instructional designs for summer school. Presentation at the North Central Conference of Summer Sessions Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.