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# An eLearning Partnership: Applying the Quality Matters Rubric to Online Library Instructional Materials

Mandi Goodsett, Performing Arts & Humanities Librarian
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## Interning in CSU's Center for eLearning

In Spring of 2017, I had the opportunity to participated in an internship with my campus' Center for eLearning. The internship was a required component of my Adult Learning & Development degree. Cleveland State University's (CSU) Center for eLearning is responsible for troubleshooting issues with, and providing support for, use of the campus learning management system, Blackboard. The Center for eLearning also works closely with faculty to ensure, whenever possible, that online courses take advantage of the benefits of a virtual environment to provide powerful, effective instruction to the same extent as a classroom environment. One way this is accomplished is through the Quality Matters program (explained in more detail below).

During my internship, I completed the following projects:

- Created an online orientation course for new faculty using Blackboard.
- Developed a four-module online workshop for students, called "Developing a Research Strategy," using Adobe Captivate and Blackboard.
- Completed some preliminary Quality Matters training.
- Conducted informational interviews with all of the eLearning staff members, and attended some of their team meetings.

I found the experience working in the Center for eLearning to be very rewarding and productive, but one of the most valuable discoveries I made during my internship was of the existence of a program called Quality Matters (QM).

## Quality Matters Program

The QM program was developed by a group of colleagues in the state of Maryland who were attempting to measure the quality of online courses in a more systematic way. With the help of a grant, the QM program was established in the early 2000s and quickly grew to be accepted by many higher education institutions. Now QM is a non-profit organization with paid membership. Membership to QM is at the institution level, and provides the following services:

- Rubrics and standards for evaluating online courses
- An expert peer-review process resulting in course certification
- Professional development opportunities, including training and certifications

Faculty who agree to undergo training can become peer-reviewers for others' courses. Faculty who wish to improve the quality of their online courses can submit their courses for peer-review and, hopefully, certification. Certified QM courses can use the QM logo to designate their status as peer-reviewed.

## Resources to Consult

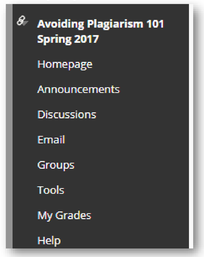
Below are some resources you might consult to explore Quality Matters and online instructional methods in greater depth.

Quality Matters
Quality Matters Homepage – https://www.qualitymatters.org/
Quality Matters Ohio Consortium – www.qmohio.org

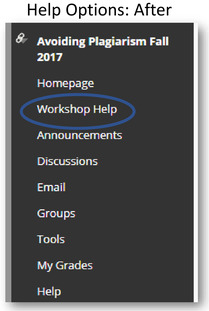
Instructional Design
Writing Learning Outcomes: Library Instructors' Toolkit – http://accessibility.arl.org/standards-best-practices/

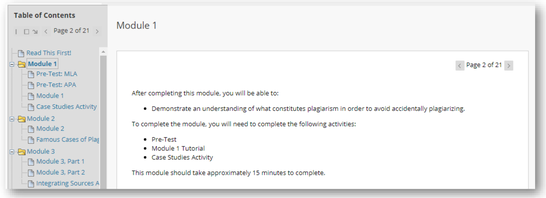
Accessibility
Association of Research Libraries' Web Accessibility Toolkit – http://accessibility.arl.org/standards-best-practices/
WebAIM Color Contrast Checker – https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/
WebAIM Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Documents – https://webaim.org/techniques/word/

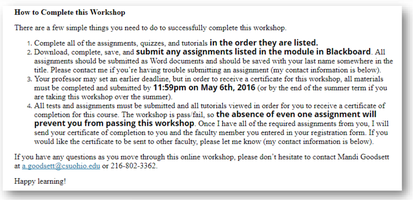
Help Options: Before




Help Options: After



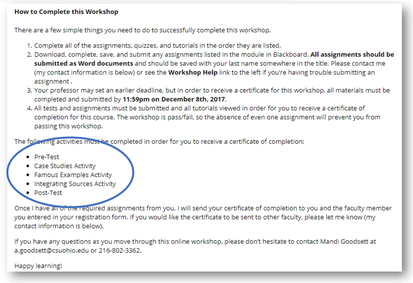




Above – Module Introductory Material (added after evaluation)

Above – Workshop Instructions: Before

Right – Workshop Instructions: After




## Applying the QM Rubric to Information Literacy Instruction

The primary way that I used Quality Matters was to improve the online workshops that I had developed in Blackboard. I used the parts of the QM rubric which I found most applicable to my work, as the rubric is meant to assess credit-bearing online courses, not online workshops. I am happy to send the QM rubric, with all the changes I applied, to any librarian affiliated with a QM institution.

The results of these steps to improve the course are below.

| | |
|---|---|
| Clarity | • Associated each module with corresponding learning outcome<br>• Indicated time needed to complete module |
| Instructional Design | • Determined if learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessments were in alignment<br>• Spent time reworking outcomes and assessments |
| Student-Centered User Experience | • Provided more options for getting help<br>• Made sure students could easily find all necessary help easily |
| Accessibility | • Added closed-captioning to videos<br>• Updated MS Word Documents to be accessible |

## General Recommendations for Improving Information Literacy Online Learning Objects Based on the Quality Matters Rubric

While the Quality Matters rubric is designed for full online courses, and my own alterations to the rubric were for application to an online workshop, there are many potential applications of the QM rubric. It could be applied, as appropriate, to library research guides, webpages, online tutorials, and other online instructional platforms. Regardless of the format, I found the following outcomes of applying the QM Rubric to be most useful for creating information literacy online learning objects.

### Establish a Friendly Tone

- Help the student realize that the creator of the content is a human being.
- Provide a few details about you and your passions or interests.
- Use a conversational tone as you would in a reference interview.
- Make information about the creator easily accessible as students move through your online content.

### Align Learning Outcomes, Learning Activities, and Assessment

- Do your learning outcomes drive learning content and assessment?
- Give students a clear sense of what they are going to be taught and how they will be assessed.
- Some students mistakenly assume that online materials will be much easier than in-person instruction, so let them know exactly what and why they will be learning online.

### Provide Obvious Help

- Help links should be functioning and easily found, even for short or small learning objects, such as a brief video or single webpage.
- Try to anticipate what your students might need help with. For example, if students have to upload a document, do they know how to convert an Apple Pages file into a MS Word document, or a Word document into a PDF?

### Make Links, Pages, and Documents Accessible

- Closed-captioning – Make sure all videos have closed-captioning. Most, but not all, YouTube videos will be captioned, and the quality of captions varies. If a video is not captioned, you may be able to contact the creator about adding captions.
- Accessible MS Word documents – Word documents should use built-in headings and styles, alt text for all tables and images, and simple structures for tables.
- Links – Link titles should be descriptive of their destination and make sense out of context. Links that are lengthy sentences or simply "Click here!" are not as useful for the visually-impaired using a screen-reader.
- Colors – Make sure your page colors contrast such that they are easy to read. See this online contrast checker to test the colors of your online instruction interface for accessibility: https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/.

### Work with Your eLearning Department

- Ask the instructional designers in your eLearning Department what you can do to learn the QM rubric.
- Seek professional development opportunities with the eLearning Department.
- Build relationships with instructional designers and ask for advice.

Please feel free to contact me with questions, comments, or ideas at a.goodsett@csuohio.edu or 216-802-3362.