

Tips on Sequencing Concepts

Once you have identified your course concepts, the next step is to sequence them into an instructional plan. This instructional plan will become your blueprint.

Sequencing concepts is a little like developing a storyline for the course. You want to create an instructional framework that will give you the confidence to move forward with the course design process but not such a rigid framework that it prevents you from changing the sequence of instructional units or adding or deleting instructional units later on. You also want to work out the teaching sequence so that the concepts students encounter early in their course will help with their later learning.

The way you sequence your course's concepts will depend on how the various concepts relate to each other. Some common course sequences include:

1. Where certain concepts/instructional units must be studied and learned earlier in order for later ones to make sense (i.e., prior learning of some other topic is required).
2. Where a course or instructional unit is structured around the exploration of an issue, a case or problem. Presenting students with a case or problem and then engaging them in developing solutions or interpretations can provide them with a realistic context within which they can learn the essential knowledge and skills you've identified in the course objectives.
3. Where each concept or instructional sequence includes aspects of all the previous concepts you've presented. For example, if teaching about work team management in organizations, you might choose to sequence the concepts this way:
 - role and importance of work teams
 - aptitudes and skills of work team leaders in organizations
 - work team management issues including interpersonal issues
 - influence of organizational structure and culture on teamwork and team management
4. Where you keep revisiting concepts examined in earlier instructional units, but in greater depth each time. This can apply if your course topic is one where students cannot get deeply into one concept unless they already have some familiarity with most of the others.
5. Where certain concepts/instructional units are presented in the order in which they occurred. For example, you might use this kind of sequencing to teach the development of theories, discoveries or organization – wherever understanding of one event depends on understanding what occurred previously.
6. Where concepts are linked together in cause-and-effect chain from first cause to final effect so that your students can work out and explain a cause-and-effect relationship. For example, in teaching about plant structure, you could start with the root system and then work up through the shoot system, focusing first on the stem and then on the leaves.

The above material has been adapted from Derek Rowntree:

Preparing materials for open, distance and flexible learning: and action guide for teachers and trainers (1994) pp. 93-100.

Teaching through Self-Instruction: How to Develop Open Learning Materials (1990) pp. 61-71.