# Online Course Design Guide

**The goal of this guide is to help Heritage Christian University (HCU) faculty develop high-quality online learning experiences for students.**

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This guide shares information about research-informed **best practices** for course development.

*Best practices are adapted from several core sources, including the Quality Matters "Higher Education Rubric" and Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education."*

Based on these best practices, this guide outlines **standards** to apply in your own courses.

*Every major component of course design outlined in this guide is accompanied by Essential Standards and Exemplary Standards. All new and redeveloped courses are expected to follow the Essential Standards. As much as possible, please endeavor to meet the Exemplary Standards as well.*

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Your commitment to best practices in online course design will help to create positive, effective online learning experiences for HCU students.

Thank you for the work you do!

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# Introduction to Online Course Design

## Why Does It Matter?

Amazing learning experiences don't happen by chance—they happen by design. This can be especially true for online learning.

Left to chance, online learning can be:

- Impersonal
- Repetitive
- Unengaging (or even disengaging)
- Confusing
- Unsupportive

With planning and strategic design, we can address these issues and create an online learning experience that is:

- Personal
- Varied
- Engaging
- Clear
- Supportive

As teachers and mentors, we all want to give our students a positive and impactful experience! In this guide, you will gain the basic principles and tools to help you plan and build amazing learning experiences in your online courses.

## Stages of Design

The following stages are key to designing online learning:

1. **Plan the learning experience.**
2. **Create the learning environment.**
3. **Support ongoing engagement.**
4. **Learn from your experience and plan for the future.**

Learning the key elements of online course design will help you successfully implement each of these steps.

# How to Use this Guide

This guide is designed to help you learn best practices for online course design. By working through this guide, you will understand what the best practices are, how they make an impact, and how you can apply them in your own courses.

## What You Will Find

This guide is organized into three main sections:

1. **Promoting Online Engagement**
2. **Course Organization**
3. **High-Quality Content and Activities**

For each section of the guide, you will find:

- **An overview of best practices, including why they matter.**
- **A checklist of concrete steps you can take to apply these best practices.**
- **Examples and step-by-step Populi instructions (as needed).**

## Design Standards Checklist

Use this guide to go through your course and check off important steps and design goals. By addressing the checklist items in this guide, you will meet HCU online course design best practices and provide a great learning experience for your students.

There are two levels of design standards provided: Essential Standards and Exemplary Standards. All new and redeveloped courses are expected to follow the Essential Standards outlined in this guide. As you grow in your online course design skills, make it a goal to meet the Exemplary Standards as well.

## Getting Support

For support with online course design, please contact:

**Mrs. Autumn Richardson**
Director of Distance Learning
Heritage Christian University
arichardson@hcu.edu

**Mrs. Delaney Collyer**
Online Course Design Consultant
Delaney Collyer Ltd.
delaneycollyer@tutanota.com

# Best Practices and Standards

## 1. Promoting Online Engagement

Online learning can feel isolating and impersonal. The steps that you take to connect with your online learners are essential for ensuring that they have a positive learning experience and feel they can reach out for support and mentorship.

In this section, you will learn some small changes that you can make in your online classes to help students feel that all-important sense of human connection. You will learn to foster “virtual presence”—students' sense that you are available, interested, and human. You will also learn how to help students connect with and learn from each other.

This will benefit your students immensely. It will also benefit you, allowing you to know and connect with them in a more meaningful way.

### 1.1. Communication Plan

Good communication is one of the top investments online learners value from their instructors.

Unfortunately, online students often receive slower or poorer communication than their in-person counterparts. This can lead to their feeling that their learning experience is not a priority. It can increase learners’ stress as they try to navigate the course while they await assistance. Some students will start to avoid seeking help and even disengage from the course.

To stay connected with your online learners, it is essential to have a good communication plan in place.

Recognize that online students may desire different options and times for contacting you, depending on their comfort level, types of questions, and schedules. Plan to support multiple modes of contact (such as email, phone, and office hours) for your students. You may encourage students to attend office hours by setting up occasional activities (such as review games) to occur during those hours. Some students feel more comfortable with this kind of structure.

Be open about your expected response times for course-related questions. Commit to responding promptly and thoughtfully. After addressing a question, you may want to plan to follow up with students within a week or so to check that they are comfortable and understand what they need to know or do. Some students will be afraid to continue to ask about the issue, even if they don’t understand it. Your follow-up will help them feel cared for and comfortable continuing to discuss areas of confusion or concern.

Remember that it is easier to miss communications sent virtually than those given in person. Plan to overcommunicate with your online students, using multiple pathways (such as Bulletin announcements, lesson overviews, and verbal reminders in course videos) to share updates and remind them of course goals and tasks.

## Essential

☐ **Multiple contact options are provided.**

The syllabus and/or course office provide guidelines for each of these modes of contact:

- Email
- Phone
- Live office hours
- Virtual office hours

☐ **Instructor response times are clearly communicated.**

The syllabus and/or course office note how quickly you will respond to student communications.

Responses to emails occur no later than 72 hours after receipt (excluding weekends).

Returned phone calls occur no later than 72 hours after receipt (excluding weekends).

## Exemplary

☐ **Student questions receive follow-up after initial response (if appropriate).**

When students reach out with a question, they receive an initial response, followed by a check-in within a week (or other appropriate timeframe) to ensure that they are comfortable and understand what they need to know or do.

This follow-up communication may include an invitation to get in touch during your office hours to talk it through, in case they are more comfortable discussing their question this way.

☐ **Use of office hours is encouraged by scheduling engagement activities.**

Engagement activities are scheduled during some office hours to encourage student attendance. Activities may include structured review sessions or subject-related games.

Students are invited to explain their areas of confusion and get answers to their questions during these activities.

☐ **Bulletin Board is used to recap and follow up on course topics.**

The Bulletin Board is a useful tool for casual course communication, updates and reminders. To maintain instructor presence and communication, at least one Bulletin Board message is sent per week.

Bulletin Board messages are automatically sent out to students via email (as well as being available to them on their Populi Dashboard), facilitating easy communication with all course members.

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***WHAT TO INCLUDE***

*Possible messages:*

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1. *Provide a brief recap of the activities of the previous week. Introduce what students will be doing in the upcoming week.*

2. *Send out an announcement when a new module starts. Remind students of the goals and value of the module. Suggest an appropriate amount of time for students to budget for each activity.*

3. *Reiterate any course policies with which students tend to struggle. Keep this positive and supportive—often, written communication (especially from authority figures) can come across as more stern or direct than is intended.*

4. *Send additional comments or information to follow up on an idea discussed in class. This provides a casual route to keep the conversation open and ongoing.*

5. *Provide general feedback on course assignments, noting how the class did as a whole and where any areas of confusion were. Point students to relevant resources for review. Keep comments positive and encouraging. Be constructive when addressing negative issues.*

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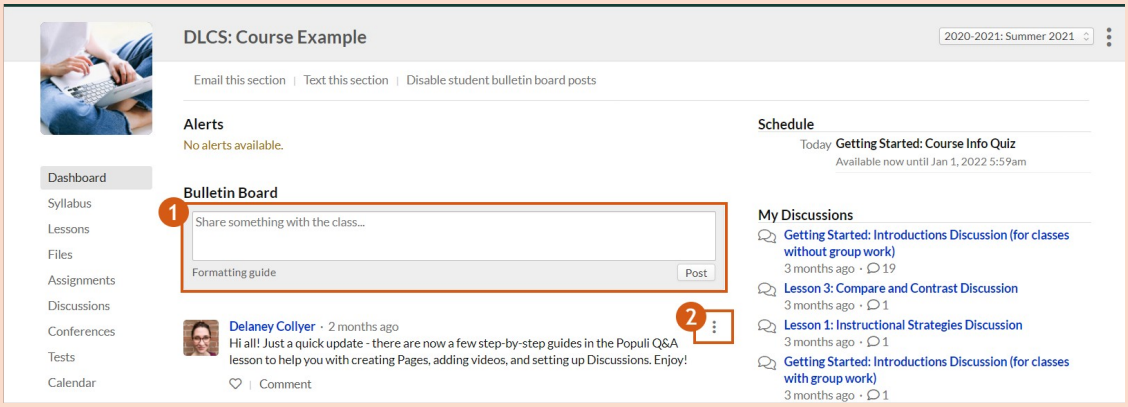
## Dashboard: Bulletin Board




To post a message:

1. Type your message in the text entry box, and click “Post.”
2. To delete or edit a message, click the three-dot menu to the right of your posted message and select “Delete post” or “Edit post.”

## 1.2. Instructor Personalization

People like to engage with other people. It is hard for online learners when they feel like they can't relate to their instructor as a person. Sharing a photo and some personal information about yourself can make a huge difference.

This will help students feel like they know you better. It helps to make you more approachable when students have questions or simply want to engage with you.

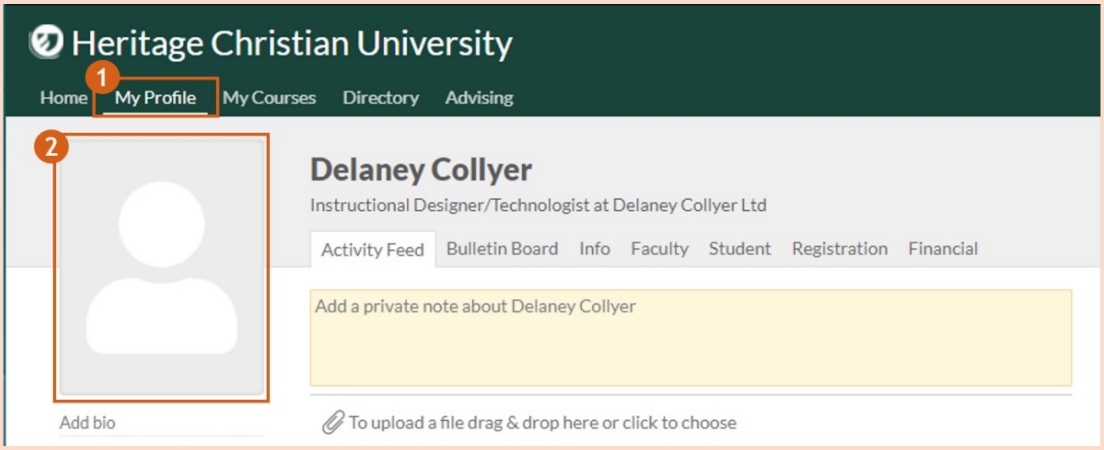
It's also a good idea to create some videos specifically for your online learners. There is no need for high production value in these videos—they can be casual recordings. In fact, students connect well with informal, relatable videos. Speaking directly to your online students will help them feel that they are personally engaged.

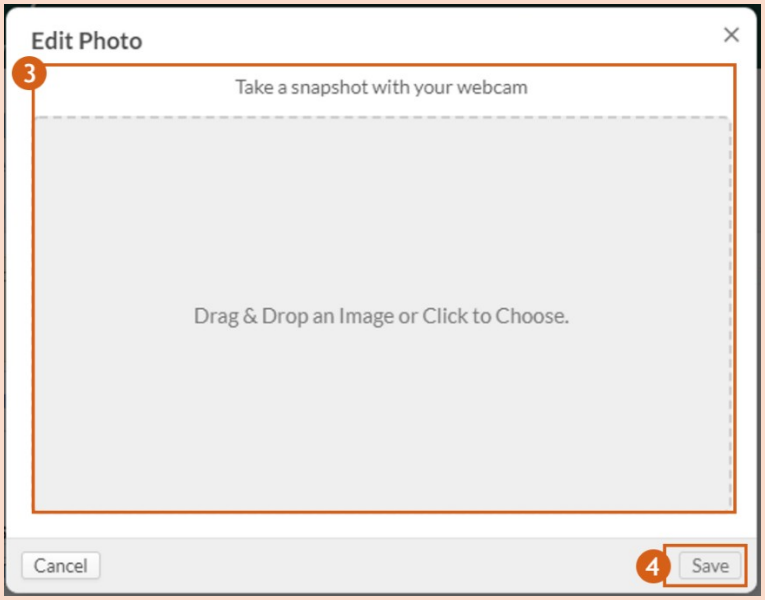
### Essential

- ☐ **Instructor profile in Populi includes photo.**

  Instructor photo is uploaded to Populi. Ideally, this will be a recent photo of the instructor's face.

**My Profile: Upload a profile photo**






1. Go to “My Profile.”
2. Click on the image placeholder.
3. Use the “Drag and Drop” or “Click to Choose” option to upload your photo. You may also click “Take a snapshot with your webcam” to take a new photo. Crop and adjust the photo as desired.
4. Click “Save.” The photo will now show as your profile photo in all of your courses.

In special circumstances, the instructor may use an avatar or other representation instead of a photo.

☐ **Course office includes introduction to instructor.**

The “Course Office” lesson provides an introduction to the instructor. This introduction familiarizes students with the instructor’s personal and professional background.

The level of detail provided is professionally appropriate and subject to the instructor’s comfort and discretion.

***WHAT TO INCLUDE***

*In your course office, you may include:*

1. *About Me – Your name, background, what interested you in the field, what you do in your personal time.*

2. *About this Course – How the course is structured, initial guidance on how to navigate.*

3. *Contacting Me – How to reach out, where to ask different kinds of questions.*

***EXAMPLE***

*Hello! I am Delaney Collyer. I will be your instructor for this course.*

***About Me***

*I am a course designer who specializes in online education. I consult with businesses and higher education institutions to help you create learning experiences that are engaging, effective, and learner-centered, using online tools.*

*I have always been interested in learning and cognition. As an undergraduate, I studied Psychology and Spanish at Harding University. I moved on to complete a Master's degree in Psychology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a second Master's degree in Instructional Technology at East Carolina University. Now I am an independent instructional designer and consultant.*

*In my personal time, I love playing with my greyhound, Rebel, and attempting to teach him tricks. ("Attempting" is the key word.) I also have recently moved to England, where I am enjoying exploring as much as possible as lockdown lets up!*

***About this Course***

*This course is split into several core lessons. Each lesson is open for you to explore at any time.*

*Lessons typically include an Overview, Reading(s), and a related Discussion and/or Assignment. Be sure to click through all of the pages in each lesson to access all lesson content/activities.*

*I will use the Bulletin Board under the Dashboard tab to share class announcements. Please check this tab regularly to be sure you stay up-to-date on any changes or important information.*

***Contacting Me***

*If you have questions or comments about this course at any time, feel free to reach out!*

*You may use my Contact Info (under the Syllabus tab) for topics you'd like to discuss with just me (such as grades or confidential questions), or you may use the Bulletin Board (under the Dashboard tab) for topics the whole class may like to see (such as clarifications about assignments or thoughts or resources you'd like to share in relation to class).*

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## Exemplary

☐ **Course office includes video introduction to instructor.**

In addition to the written introduction in the Course Office, there is a brief video introduction to the instructor.

The video is less than five minutes long. It may be recorded using a webcam or other video setup.

***WHAT TO INCLUDE***

*The following model (adapted from the AIDET communication model) provides a recommended pattern for structuring your introductory videos:*

1. *Acknowledgement – Greet the students.*

2. *Introduction – Share some information about yourself, your background, etc.*

3. *Explanation – Briefly discuss the key purpose and the general rhythm of the course activities. Provide encouragement to students about their role as online learners and your commitment to them. Direct students to check out the "Getting Started" lesson for information on first steps in the course.*

4. *Thank You – Thank students for watching and for joining the course.*

*Bonus: Duration –Set the expectation up front for how long this video will be (ideally, 3-4 minutes). This can be done as a part of the video, but sometimes it's hard to know exactly how long it will be when you record. I find it easier to include in the text introducing the video (e.g., "Check out this 4-minute video about this course.")*

## 1.3. Social Learning and Connection

You can engage students in class activities and discussions by creating group-building experiences.

The first step is to provide a good connection-focused activity towards the beginning of your course. Starting with a social activity may seem “cheesy” or “fluffy,” but these activities have a vital place in online learning! Connection activities are the first chance for your students to interact with others in the class. Establishing initial connections helps students feel more invested (and curious to hear others' thoughts) when more content-focused discussions come up later in the semester. A good rule of thumb to keep in mind is “connection before content.”

Discussion activities and peer review opportunities provide an ongoing channel for social learning. Check out section 3.4, “Discussions,” for guidance on best practices for great social discussions and section 3.5, “Peer Review,” to learn how to build peer reviews into your course activities.

It can also be helpful to provide chances for students to connect with each other, study together, and share thoughts outside of the “official” classroom space. These unofficial conversations are known as “backchannel communication.” These conversations often occur naturally in live classroom environments, as students chat in the hallways or at their desks and plan to help each other. They can be very beneficial for students who like to learn with others.

You can support backchannel communication by creating a “Hallway” discussion board for students to talk about whatever they like. You may also consider helping students coordinate study groups or the sharing of study materials so that they can form learning relationships with each other.

Finally, engagement activities during office hours are also great for social learning (see section 1.1, “Communication Plan”). You can get students playing review games or chatting through content together.

### Essential

- ☐ **A connection activity is provided early in the semester.**

  Towards the beginning of the semester, students participate in an activity to get to know one another.

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***WHAT TO INCLUDE***

*This checklist is drawn from p. 47 of the book "Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction" by Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson.*

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*To check whether you've created an effective connection activity, ask the following questions:*

1. *Is the activity fun and nonthreatening?*
2. *Is it person-focused, not content-focused?*
3. *Does it require learners to read one another's entries?*
4. *Does it require the learner to find something in common with at least 10% of the learning community?*
5. *Does it require a person to be imaginative or express genuine emotions or openness?*
6. *Are learners required to respond to one another?*

## Exemplary

☐ **Instructor supports backchannel communication.**

Instructor supports backchannel communication by:

- Creating a “Hallway” discussion board.
- Helping students coordinate study groups or the sharing of study materials.
- Providing engagement activities during office hours.
- Using other techniques identified by the instructor.

# 2. Course Organization

Clear and consistent course organization helps students know what to expect and where to find key information to succeed. With good course organization, students can spend less time trying to understand how to navigate the course and more time learning.

## 2.1. Lessons

Lessons provide a helpful structure and order for online learners. Learners can look over the list of lessons at the beginning of the semester to get an idea for how the course is paced and when each topic occurs.

Great online lessons often include several components, such as overview text, reading assignments, video or other media, and activities. Placing all of this on a single page can become a bit chaotic. Lessons should be divided into sections as appropriate to help students read and process the information.

Students spend a lot of time in the lessons area. When they first join, it is helpful to provide them with some introductory lessons before the “course content” lessons. These introductory lessons share basic information about the instructor and the course and support students as they get started. They also show your students up front that you care about their experience.

### Essential

- ☐ **Content is organized into lessons.**

  A lesson is created for each module. Usually, this means there is one lesson for every week of the semester.

  Each lesson is numbered to show the sequential order of the course. Each lesson includes a topic name so that students know what topics to expect in upcoming lessons and can easily locate and review topics in previous lessons.

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***EXAMPLE***

*Lesson 1: Introduction to Greek*

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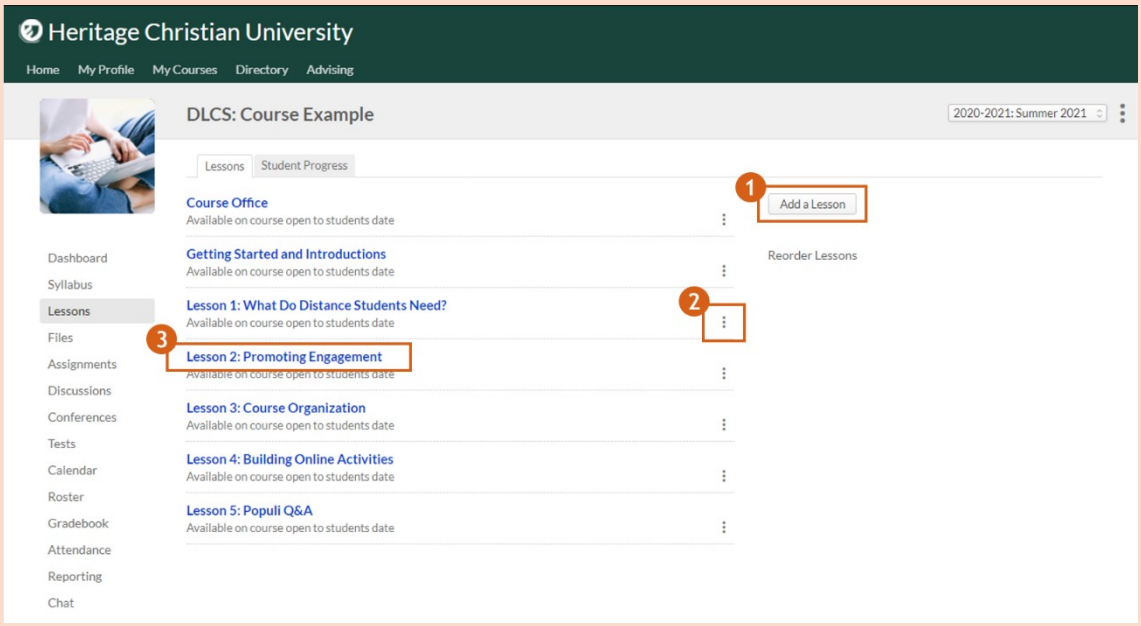
Lessons are set to become available at the appropriate time in the semester. This allows students to see when lessons are scheduled, and prevents them from accidentally working on the wrong lesson.

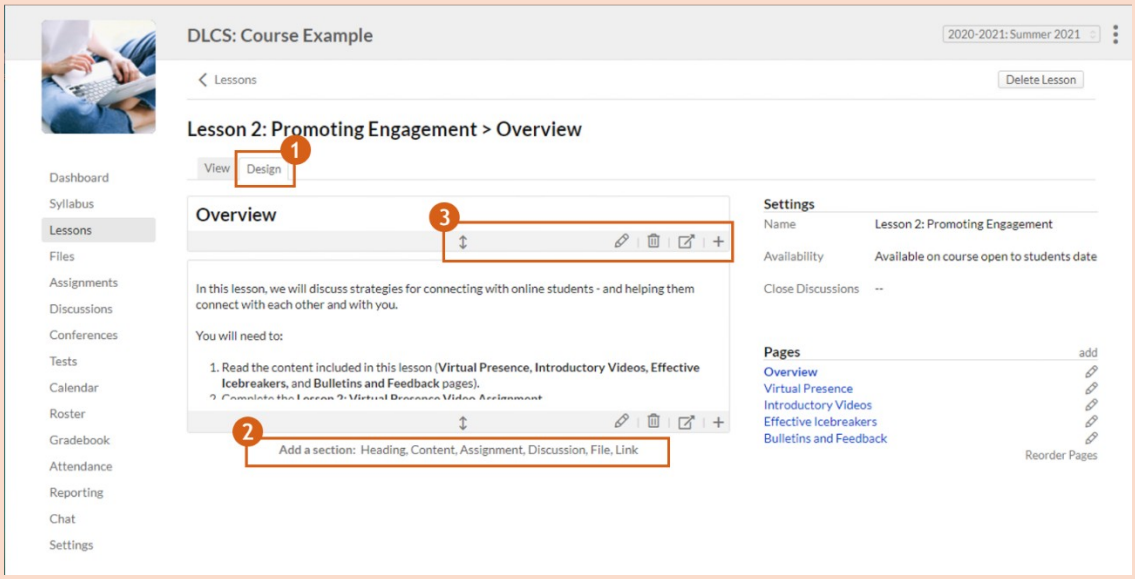
**Lessons: Basic Setup**




Go to the Lessons tab.

1. Click “Add a Lesson” to create a new lesson.
2. Click the three-dot menu to rename the lesson, change its availability, or delete the lesson.
3. Click the lesson name to edit the contents of the lesson.

**Lessons: Contents**




Go to the Lessons tab and click the name of the desired lesson.

1. Click the “Design” tab at the top to go into editing view.
2. Add desired content by clicking the content type beside “Add a section.”
3. Use the icons at the bottom of each section to reorder, edit or delete sections.

☐ **Lessons begin with an overview.**

Each lesson begins with an overview page that introduces students to the content and activities in the lesson. The overview states the main goal of the lesson and outlines what students will need to do. You may also use the overview to invite students to reach out with questions about the lesson and remind them how to do that.

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***EXAMPLE***

*In this lesson, we will discuss strategies for connecting with online students—and helping them connect with each other and with you.*

*You will need to:*

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1. *Read the content included in this lesson (**Virtual Presence, Introductory Videos, Effective Connection Activities,** and **Bulletins and Feedback** pages).*

2. *Complete the **Lesson 2: Virtual Presence Video Assignment**.*

*Visit each page in this lesson to go through the related readings, discussion, and/or assignments.*

*If you have any questions, as always, you can reach out to me via my contact info, office hours, or by posting in the Course Bulletin (under the Dashboard tab).*

☐ **Introductory lessons are included at the beginning of the course.**

Before the lessons that cover course content, the course includes:

- A "Course Office" lesson.
- A "Getting Started" lesson.

The "Course Office" lesson provides an introduction to the instructor. (More guidance on what to include in this lesson is in section 1.2, "Instructor Personalization.")

The "Getting Started" lesson provides an overview to help students understand the course flow and expectations.

***WHAT TO INCLUDE***

*In the "Getting Started" lesson, include:*

1. *A welcome to the course.*

2. *A few sentences telling students the first steps that they will need to complete in the course. Direct students to review the course syllabus and visit the Course Office. Call out any first assignments they will need to complete.*

3. *An orientation to how the course is organized. Explain the structure, such as whether content is organized by week or modules, when those weeks or modules*

*start and end, and any other patterns they should expect (for example, a quiz after every module).*

4. *An overview of the weekly rhythm of the course. Explain the sequence of activities students should expect to do each week. (For example, check the bulletin, read any assigned text, work through the lesson, complete all assigned activities.)*

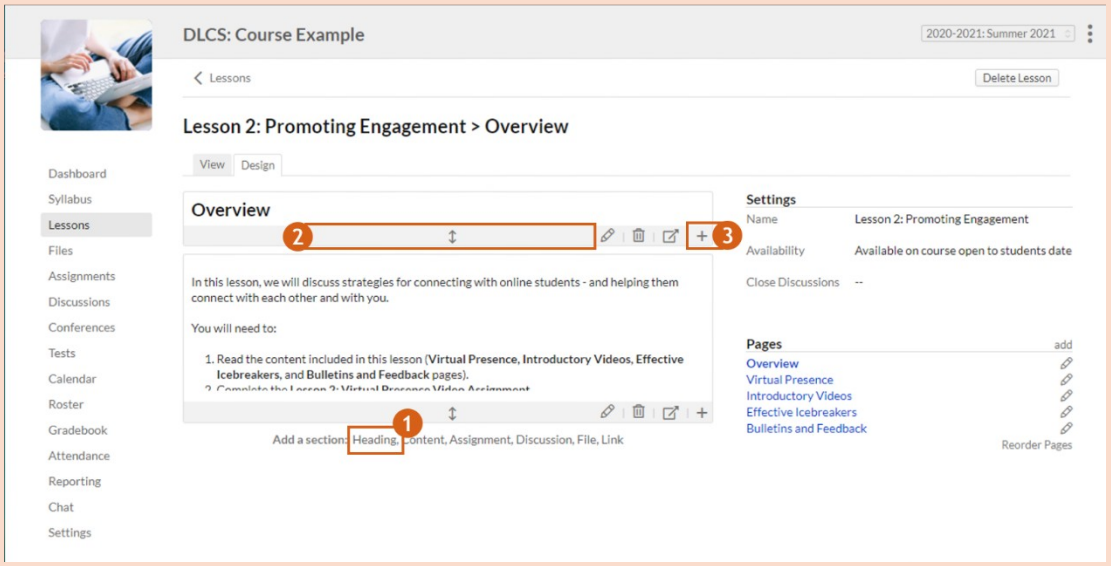
## Exemplary

☐ **Lessons are split into sections as appropriate.**

Lessons that contain multiple components (such as assignments, media, and activities) are divided in a way that helps students easily read and process the information.

This may include using headings to divide the content. It may also include placing the content on separate pages within the lesson.

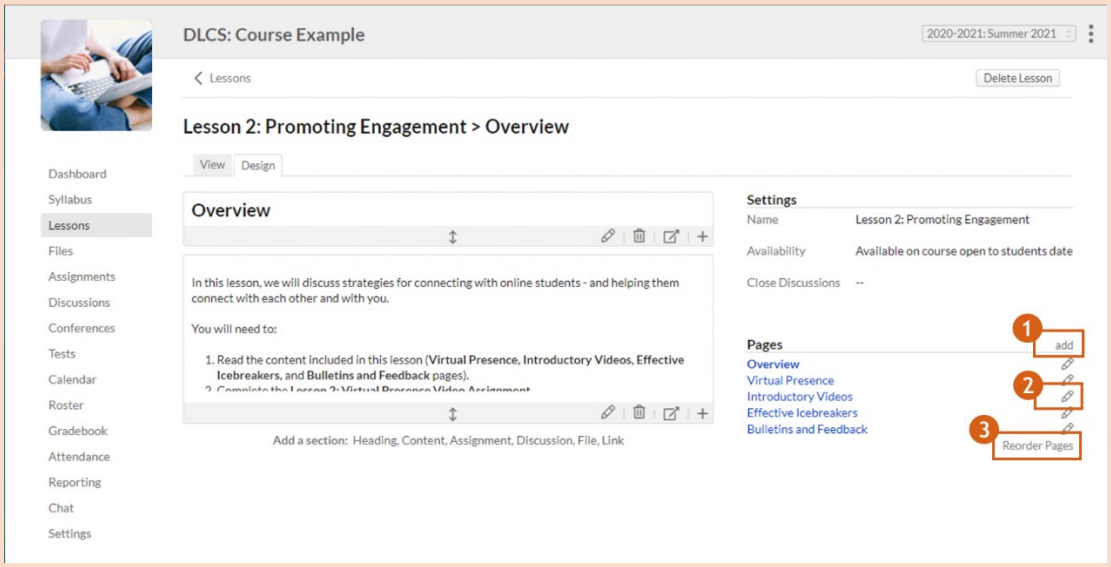
**Lessons: Headings**




Go to the Lessons tab. Open the desired lesson in design view.

1. Click “Heading” beside “Add a section” to insert a heading.
2. Drag the heading into the desired location using the bar with the arrows.
3. You may also click the plus icon and select “Add heading below” to add the Heading directly below a particular section.

## Lessons: Pages




Go to the Lessons tab. Open the desired lesson in design view.

1. Click “add” to create a new page within the lesson.
2. Click the pencil icon beside a page to edit the page name.
3. Click “Reorder Pages” to change the order in which the pages occur in the lesson.

## 2.2. Course Syllabus

The Course Syllabus provides a helpful overview and reference guide for the course. Most students use the Course Syllabus as their first tool to understand and prepare for course requirements.

However, it's important to remember that many students also use other approaches to learn about their courses. For example, many students rely on the initial class periods or ongoing reminders to learn about course expectations. Additionally, many students take multiple courses alongside other commitments. Students in this situation can find it challenging to process and remember all of the syllabus content.

As an online instructor, you can use a few simple strategies to be sure that all of your students gain the information they need to succeed.

Be sure to include all key information in the syllabus. HCU has a syllabus checklist to help you with this.

It may sound obvious, but an accurate, up-to-date syllabus is very important. Online students have less "face time" to clarify items with you. Syllabus mistakes or inconsistencies therefore impact online students more than in-person students.

Plan a way to go through the syllabus with your online students. This could be as simple as a syllabus quiz (for a few points or maybe for extra credit) that they take at the beginning of the semester to encourage them to read through the syllabus carefully. Or it could include creating a short syllabus review video especially for your online students. Keep it brief and light, but make sure it helps reinforce key points and clarify points that tend to trip students up.

### Essential

- ☐ **The syllabus follows HCU requirements.**

  The syllabus includes all required information as defined in the HCU syllabus checklist.

  You may wish to add a section explaining to students their role as active online learners. This can equip them with tips to succeed, as well as setting an expectation that they take ownership of their responsibilities as online learners.

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***HOW TO***

*You can find the HCU syllabus checklist under the shared Files tab in Populi. Click "Files" in the black bar at the top of the screen, then go into the "Academics" folder to locate the most recent syllabus checklist.*

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☐ **The syllabus is up-to-date.**

The syllabus has been updated for the current semester and course section, with particular attention to:

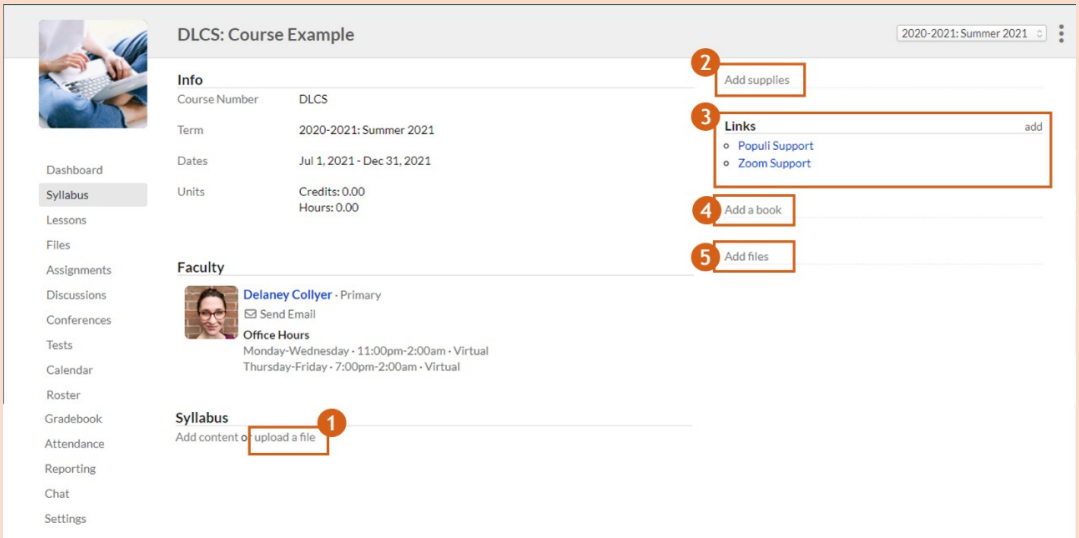
- Instructor contact information
- Grading weights and scale
- Assignment list (if included)
- Due dates (if included)

☐ **The syllabus is accessible in Populi.**

The syllabus is uploaded as a PDF under the syllabus tab in Populi.

This is completed for each section of the course. (It is possible to use a different syllabus for different sections of the course.)

**Syllabus: Upload syllabus**




Go to the Syllabus tab.

1. Select “Upload a file.” Locate and upload your syllabus PDF. If you have multiple sections of the same course, you will need to upload to each section. You can do this by using the dropdown at the top of your course (below the words “crosslisted with…”) to select each section. Upload the file to each one.
2. Add any required supplies to the supplies list by clicking “Add supplies” (or simply “add” if some supplies are already present).

3. Add standard support links to the Links section by clicking “Add link” (or simply “add” if some links are already present). It is recommended that you add the Populi support link (https://support.populiweb.com/hc/en-us/categories/203333527-For-Students) and the Zoom support link (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us) for students’ technical support needs. You will also wish to add your class Zoom link to this section.
4. Add books to the reading list by clicking “Add a book” (or simply “add” if some books are already present). Be sure to indicate whether the book is required or optional. This section should match the reading list in your syllabus PDF.
5. Add files as desired by clicking “Add files” (or simply “add” if some files are already present). It is recommended that you add the Academic Honesty Policy file to all of your courses. You can do this by clicking “Add files” or “add,” then clicking the link to “import files” from your Populi files. The Academic Honesty Policy file is shared with you under “My Populi files” in the “Shared with Everyone” folder. Select this folder in the popup window, click the Academic Honesty Policy file, then click the button to “Import Selected File(s).”

## Exemplary

☐ **The syllabus contains additional guidance for online students.**

The syllabus contains a section explaining students’ role as active online learners. This section equips learners with tips to succeed and sets the expectation that they take ownership of their online learning.

The syllabus states participation expectations. In particular, it explains the expected frequency, timing and depth of participation in discussions and other activities (as appropriate).

The syllabus notes the response time that students can expect when reaching out to the instructor for course-related communications.

If rubrics are used in the course, the syllabus directs students to review assignment rubrics in Populi.

☐ **A syllabus quiz (or other introductory activity) is provided.**

A syllabus quiz is provided early in the semester to encourage students to read and process the syllabus information.

This quiz is worth extra credit or a small amount of course credit. The goal of the quiz is to get students to look actively through the information and to catch misunderstandings early on.

The quiz is as simple and fun as possible. Silly answers or “easter eggs” may be included for students to find. The quiz is treated as an introduction, not an exam.

After the quiz (or other introductory activity), the instructor provides general feedback to the class to help correct any misunderstandings and clarify their understanding of course expectations.

## 2.3. Assignment Setup

All assignments should be created and shown in the online course environment. Creating assignments in Populi provides students with a clear overview of what they will need to complete and when. It also gives them the chance to review assignment instructions and rubrics, submit their work and receive feedback, and understand how assignments fit into the grading scheme.

It can also cut down on the work that you have to do as an instructor to remind students of instructions and deadlines found in the syllabus (as they will be reinforced by your assignment setup), collect assignments, and send out comments. In some cases, it can even help you with grading!

Assignment groups are a useful starting place when setting up your assignments. Creating an assignment group allows you to group together several assignments to:

- See statistics for that set of assignments (for example, to examine students' average scores).
- Drop a desired number of lowest grades from that set of assignments.
- Assign the weight that the assignment group will contribute to the students' overall grades.

Be sure that assignment groups you use in Populi reflect any groups or weighting that you mention in your syllabus.

After determining the assignment groups, add your assignments for the semester. The best time to do this is before your course begins. You do not need to add all of the assignment details from the outset, but you should create the assignments, set the dates for when they will become available and when they will be due, and assign the appropriate point values. This reinforces any assignment details noted in your syllabus.

It can be easy to end up with small errors over different semesters, so it is worth double-checking (before your course begins) that the Populi assignment details match those in your syllabus. A little extra effort up front will spare you time clarifying inconsistencies later.

Additionally, it helps to name assignments to correspond with the name of the lesson in which they will occur. (For example, "Lesson 1: Greek Basics Quiz.) If students are looking in the Assignments section of Populi, this allows them to easily see the order of the assignments by sorting by assignment name.

## Essential

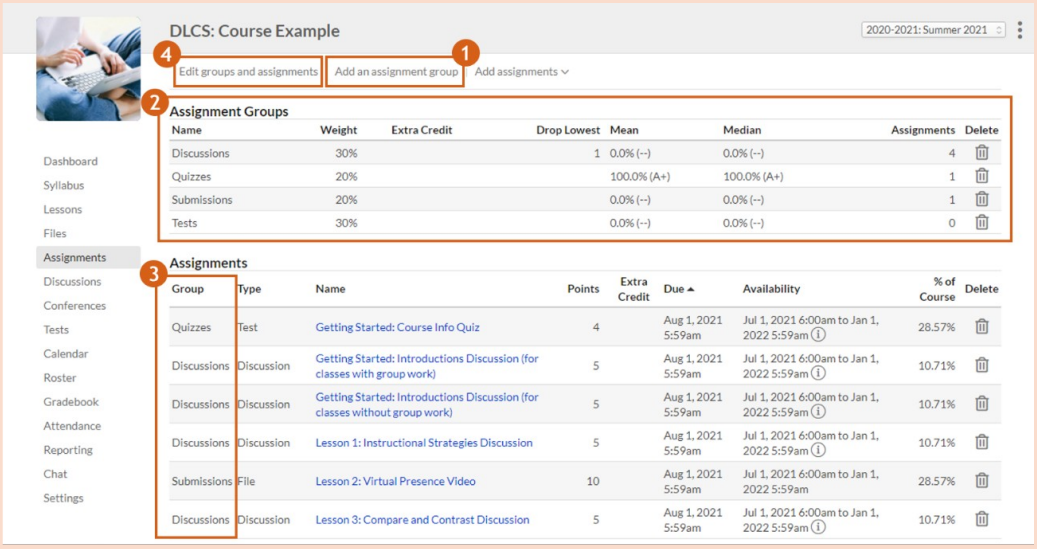
☐ **Assignments are organized in groups (if appropriate).**

Assignments are organized in groups when:

- There are assignment groups listed in the course syllabus.
- You would like to examine student averages on a group of assignments.
- Different assignment groups contribute a different weight to the overall course grade.
- The lowest grade(s) in a group of assignments will be dropped.

Assignment groups and their grading setup match the information provided in the syllabus.

**Assignments: Add assignment groups**




Go to the Assignments tab.

1. Click “Add an assignment group” to create a new group.
2. The groups you have created will appear in the Assignment Groups list. Your assignment groups should account for 100% of the course grade (when you add all of the weights). Otherwise, Populi will add an “Other” group to account for the remaining percentage. Click the trash icon to the right of any assignment group to remove that group.
3. When you create an assignment, be sure to select the appropriate assignment group. The assignment group will appear in the leftmost column beside all assignments.

4. To edit the settings for the assignment groups and assignments, click “Edit groups and assignments.”

☐ **Assignments are labelled by lesson and assignment name.**

Each assignment is named to match the lesson in which it will be completed. (If the assignment does not correspond to a particular lesson, no lesson name is required.)

---

***EXAMPLE***

*Lesson 1: Greek Basics Quiz*

---

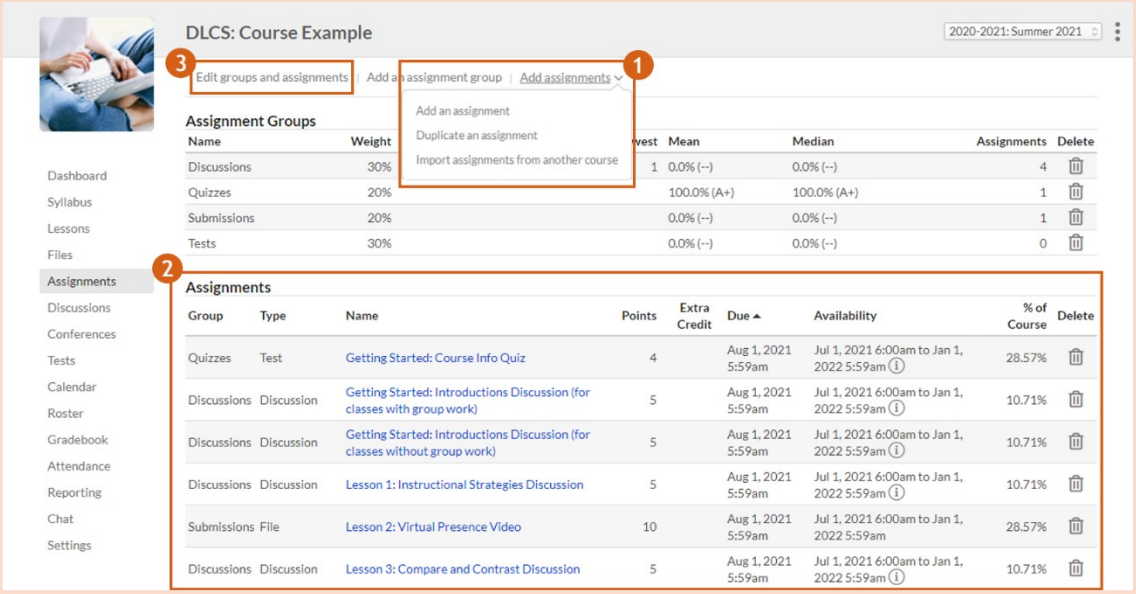
☐ **All assignments are created and scheduled before course begins.**

All assignments are added to Populi before the course begins. The availability dates and due dates are set and match those provided in the syllabus (if any).

Note that if an assignment is put into a lesson with certain availability dates assigned, the assignment will adopt those dates by default.

Assignment details (such as instructions and rubrics) may be added later, before the assignment becomes available.

**Assignments: Create assignments**



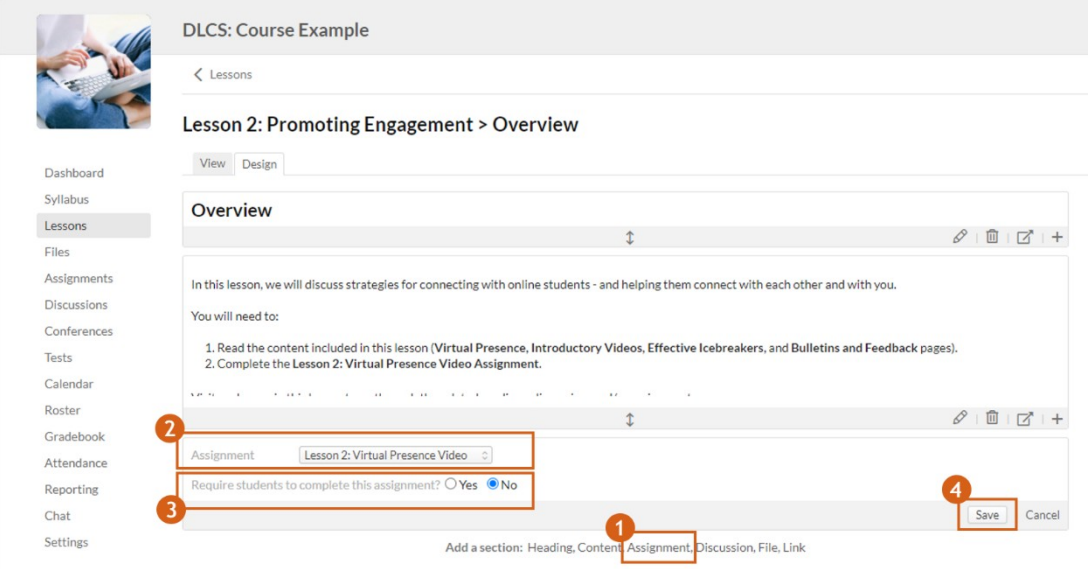
Go to the Assignments tab.

1. Click “Add assignments.” Select how you would like to create your assignment from the dropdown options.
2. All assignments will show in the assignments list. You may click the assignment name to see and edit details. Click the trash icon to delete the assignment from the course.
3. To mass edit assignment details, click “Edit groups and assignments.”

☐ **Assignments are embedded in lessons as appropriate.**

If an assignment belongs to a particular lesson, it is embedded in that lesson to provide students with easy access.

**Lessons: Assignments**




*Note that assignments must be created under the Assignments tab before they can be embedded in a lesson.*

Go to the Lessons tab. Open the desired lesson in design view.

1. Click “Assignment” beside “Add a section” to embed the assignment in the lesson.
2. Select the assignment from the dropdown list. The list will show all assignments that are not yet embedded in other lessons.
3. Use the radio buttons to select whether students are required to complete the assignment before they can advance in the course. (In most cases, this should be left to the default selection, “No.”)

4. Click “Save.”

# 3. High-Quality Content and Activities

How do we create impactful content and activities designed especially for online learners?

This is one of the biggest questions that instructors face when creating online learning experiences for the first time. It can be hard to know where to get started.

Fortunately, online teaching is just another form of teaching. You already have all of the skills you need. All there is to do is translate those skills to the new environment, keeping your students in mind and leveraging the tools available to you.

## 3.1. Instructional Approach

As you plan each lesson, consider how you can keep students engaged and motivated (Keller, 1987):

| Motivation Driver | Key Question | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Attention | How do you interest your students in the topic? | Interesting anecdote, personal story, puzzling question, case study, humor |
| Relevancy | Why should your students care about the topic? How does it help them? | Relation to students' professional or personal goals, opportunity to share own experiences, relation to other course content, impact on the field or the world |
| Confidence | What opportunities do students have to build their confidence with using this information? | Application activities, practice games, low-risk challenges, constructive feedback |
| Satisfaction | What will you do to make the learning experience enjoyable? (Remember, fun and rewarding experiences are more memorable!) | Creative and varied activities, games, student agency/flexibility, incorporation of student feedback |

It is particularly important to remember to include confidence-building opportunities in your online courses. It can be easy to default to an online course structure that involves presenting students with the information, and then testing them on their comprehension, with little opportunity for practice and feedback in between. Low-risk practice opportunities are essential to supporting learners as they move from novice levels to greater levels of knowledge.

Students are a vital source of information about what is working and not working in your online courses. Asking your group of students will help you customize your approach to the unique needs and preferences of your student body.

## Essential

- ☐ **Course includes a variety of activities.**

  Students have the opportunity to engage with the material in multiple ways.

  The varied approach takes into account how to stimulate student attention, demonstrate relevancy, build student confidence with the material, and provide a satisfying experience.

- ☐ **Low-risk practice opportunities are provided.**

  Students have low-risk opportunities to practice their new knowledge and/or skills.

  Low-risk means that failure will not cause a significant negative impact on students' grades or on their personal confidence. Low-risk opportunities are often graded as a small part of the overall course grade, on participation only, on best attempt, or by dropping the lowest grade.

  Low-risk practice allows students to "fail fast," identifying their areas of weakness and getting the feedback or help they need before gaps in their learning impact them in a major way.

## Exemplary

- ☐ **Student feedback is used to improve course activities.**

  Student feedback on course approach and activities is gathered during the semester (formally or informally).

  Feedback is used to assess how effectively the course stimulates student attention, demonstrates relevancy, builds student confidence with the material, and provides a satisfying experience.

  Feedback is used to edit learning activities and improve the student experience moving forward.

## 3.2. Zoom

Zoom is the videoconferencing tool used for engaging distance students either in live (synchronous) class sessions or in asynchronous viewing of class recordings. It is also where you may meet with distance students for online office hours.

It is important that students know how to access the Zoom classroom and recordings. This should be clear, consistent and available. You should also provide students with a link to Zoom support for technical issues.

In online learning, you should aim to split up any video content into 20-30 minute segments. This is because:

- It can be challenging to sustain attention during very long videos.
- 20-30 minutes tends to be long enough to introduce a concept. You will likely cover several concepts or arguments in a lecture. You should be able to find some natural breaking points to split your longer videos up by concept/argument, and 20-30 minutes is often about right for this.
- Asynchronous students, in particular, are often busy and juggling a lot of responsibilities. Splitting lectures into smaller segments can make it easier for students to fit the lectures into their schedules at times when they can dedicate their full focus to each segment.
- Splitting up longer videos allows you to intersperse activities, just like you would in a live class. Most instructors don't lecture for hours straight without any discussion or activity. If you cut your longer videos into shorter segments, distance students can have a similar experience of covering a topic and then engaging in a related activity before moving on to the next topic.
- Shorter videos are easier to edit as content changes. You may be able to reuse a lot of your video content across semesters, which is great for you! When edits are needed, you can replace the section of video where those edits most apply, instead of re-recording the entire video.

Another option is to replace some of your lecture segments with written lessons, readings, or other activities. This can be a fantastic option that allows students to view and digest content at their own pace, then come "to class" (on discussion boards or live via Zoom) to share their thoughts and interact with you as the instructor.

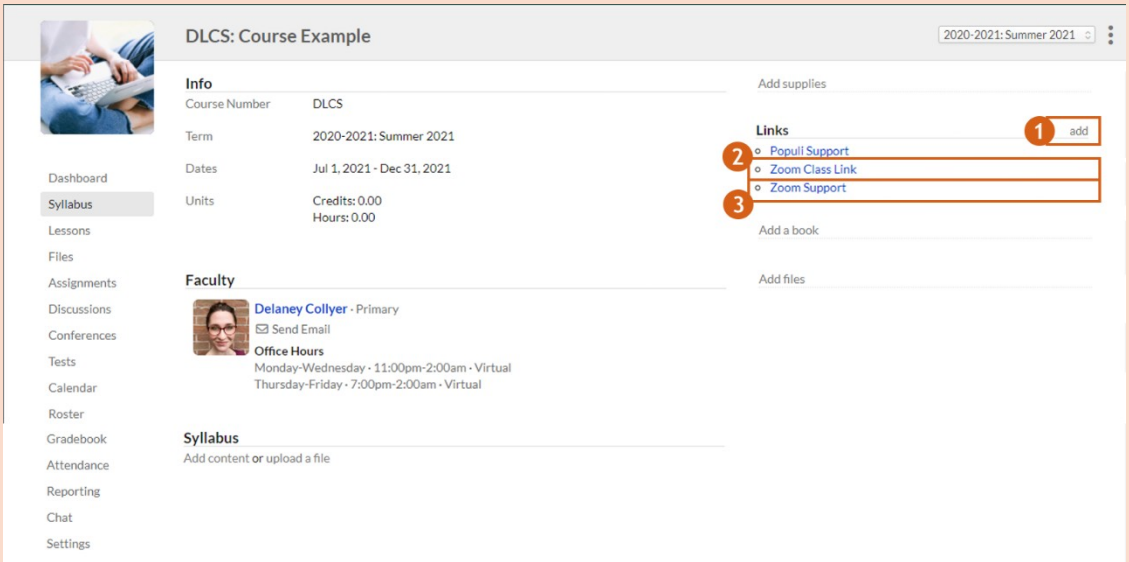
## Essential

☐ **Zoom access and support links are provided.**

The course Zoom link is provided under the Links section of the Syllabus tab. It is set up as a recurring link for use across the semester.

A link to general Zoom support is also provided under the Links section of the Syllabus tab. This directs students to technical support resources provided by Zoom.

**Syllabus: Add Zoom links**




*Set up a recurring Zoom meeting for your course. (For instructions on setting recurring Zoom meetings, visit Zoom support at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/214973206-Scheduling-Recurring-Meetings.)*

Go to the Syllabus tab.

1. Click “Add link” (or simply “add” if some links are already present).
2. Add your Zoom class link for students to access the live class.
3. Click “add” again. Add the Zoom support link (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us) for students’ technical support needs.

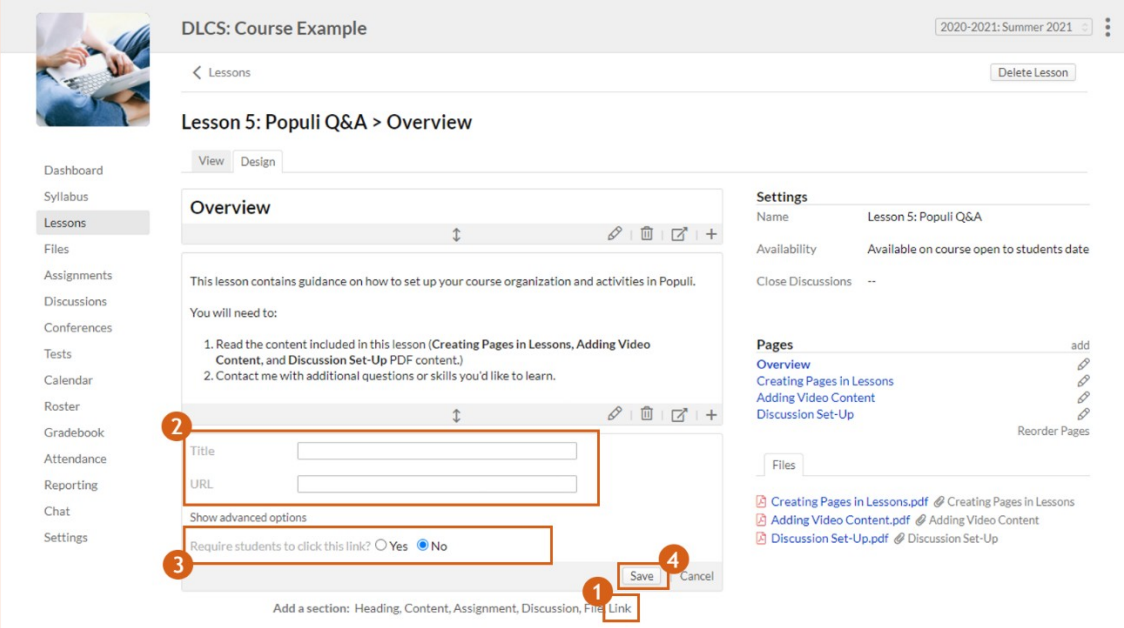
☐ **Zoom recordings are optimized for online students.**

Zoom recordings have been edited to remove segments of class that are irrelevant to online students (for example, conversations or delays at the start of class or in-class activities that are unhelpful to observe).

Zoom recordings are divided into shorter segments (20-30 minutes each) by topic. Ideally, online activities are interspersed with these video segments.

Where lectures are standardized and reused across semesters, instructors may choose to divide them by topic and record short segments for the online audience outside of the classroom recording. This can cut down on time spent editing classroom recordings (in which the instructor must identify good breakpoints, edit out extraneous information, and save segments of the video). It also ensures good audiovisual quality and pacing for the online audience.

**Lessons: Link to videos**



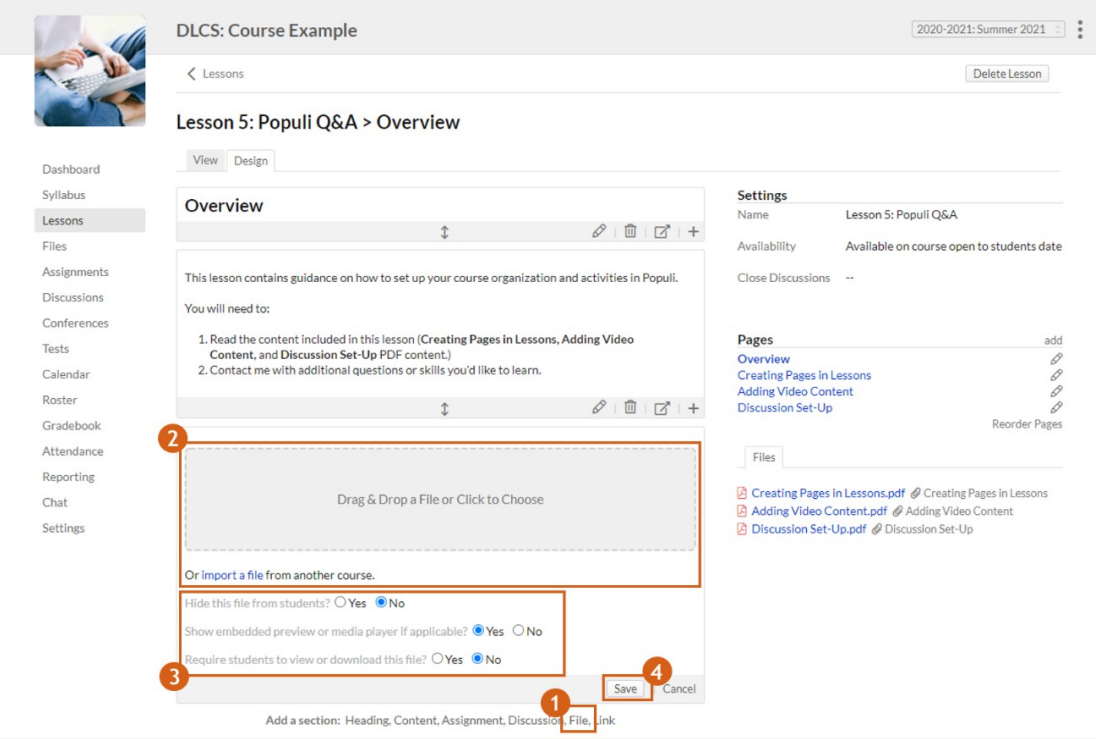

*You may link to your Zoom recordings or other video content on the web. You must have the URL for the video.*

Go the Lessons tab. Open the lesson in design view.

1. Click “Link” beside “Add a section” to link to the video from within in the lesson.
2. Fill in the title and URL for the video.

3. Use the radio button to select whether students are required to click the link before they can advance in the course. (In most cases, this should be left to the default selection, “No.”)
4. Click “Save.”

**Lessons: Embed videos**




*To embed a video in the lesson, you must have the video file on your computer.*

Go to the Lessons tab. Open the lesson in design view.

1. Click “File” beside “Add a section” to embed the video in the lesson.
2. Use the “drag and drop” or “click to choose” option to upload your video file. You may also click “Import a file” to add a video file that you have uploaded to another course.
3. Use the radio buttons to select the video settings. Select “Yes” for “Show embedded preview or media player if applicable?” Determine whether students are required to view the video before they can advance in the course. (In most cases, this should be left to the default selection, “No.”)

4. Click “Save.”

## 3.3. Instructions and Criteria

Instructions should be included with every assignment. If you have described the instructions in your syllabus, great! Just copy and paste over. This will help to minimize any confusion or questions about the assignment expectations.

Rubrics are one of the common best practices for online learning experiences. They are very helpful in setting expectations and creating transparency regarding how assignments are graded.

Of course, rubrics can be structured to be more or less strict. In some rubrics, the points are very clearly defined and there is little "wiggle room" for instructors to exercise their own discretion. In other rubrics, the standards are described clearly, but there is a point range for each standard, allowing more discretionary grading practices. What you choose to use is up to you.

The first step to using rubrics more in your online classes will be to create rubrics for your major assignments (if you haven't already).

The second step is to build those rubrics into Populi so that they are easy to see and use with your assignments.

As you design rubrics that you wish to use repeatedly (for example, rubrics you will use for each major writing assignment or discussion board), you may access and reuse these within the course, simplifying your course building workflow!

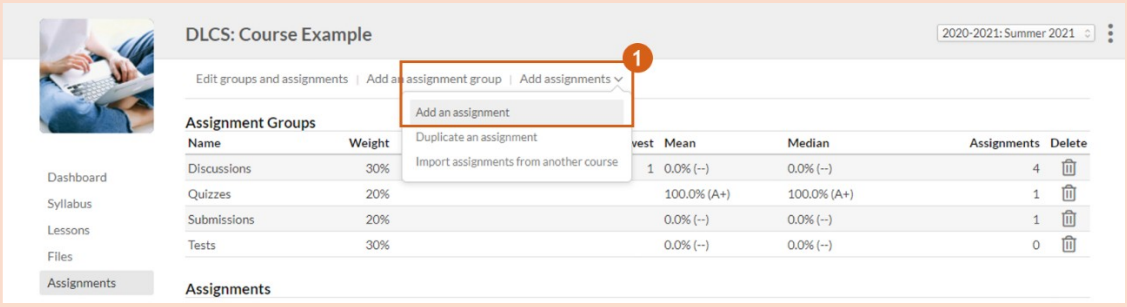
### Essential

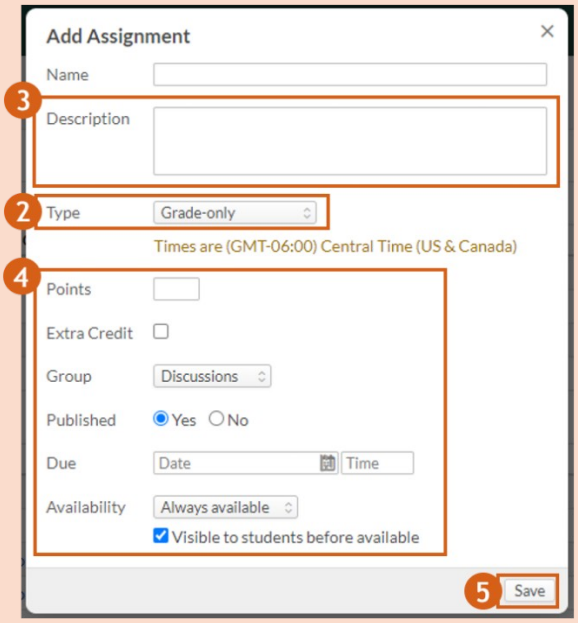
- ☐ **Clear instructions are provided for each assignment.**

  Instructions are included with every assignment. The instructions are easily accessible for students to view.

  Instructions match assignment information in the course syllabus (if any).

## Assignments: Add instructions to a new assignment



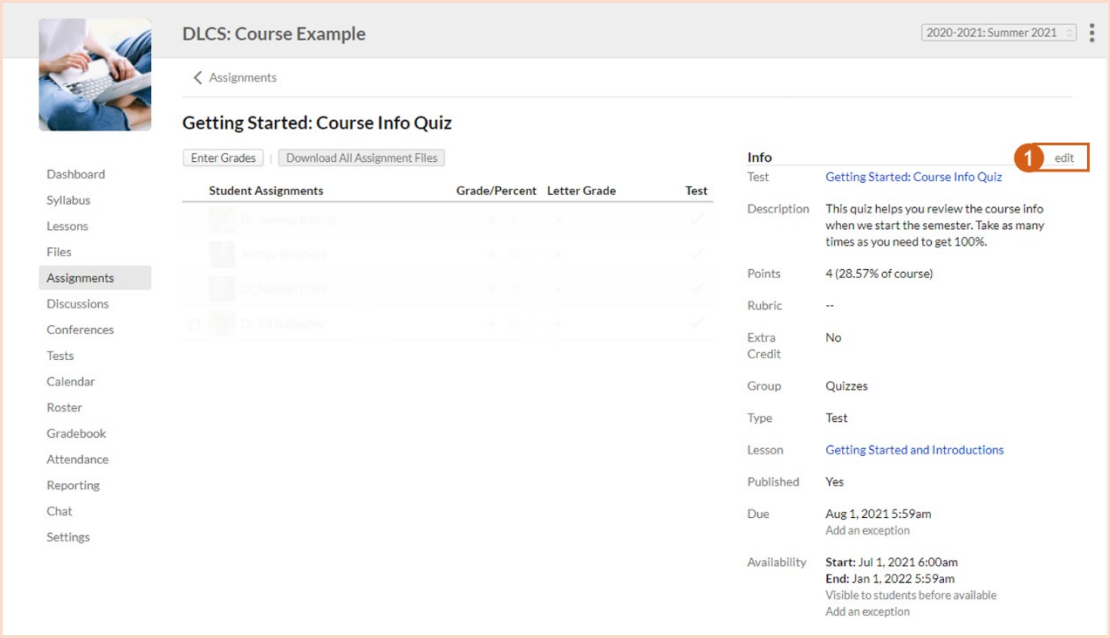



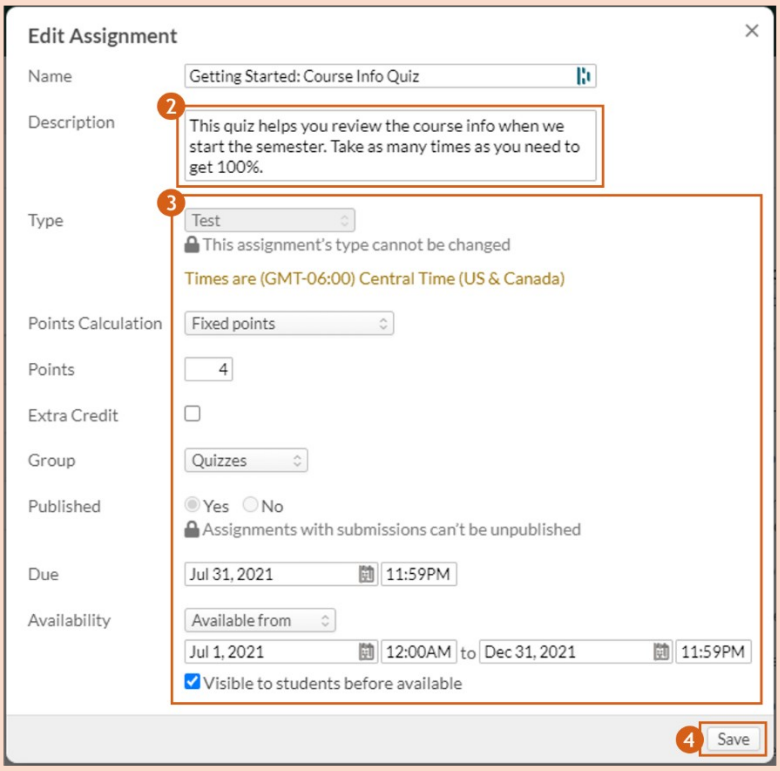

*For most assignment types, it is best to include the instructions in the assignment description field (which is present when you create or edit an assignment).*

Go to the Assignments tab.

1. Select “Add an assignment” from the “Add assignments” dropdown.
2. Select the assignment type from the dropdown menu.
3. Enter the assignment instructions in the Description field.
4. Complete other fields as desired.
5. Click “Save.”

## Assignments: Add instructions to an existing assignment




*For most assignment types, it is best to include the instructions in the assignment description field (which is present when you create or edit an assignment).*

Go to the Assignments tab. Select the desired assignment.

1. Click “edit” in the upper right of the assignment info panel.

2. Enter the assignment instructions in the Description field.
3. Edit other fields as desired.
4. Click “Save.”

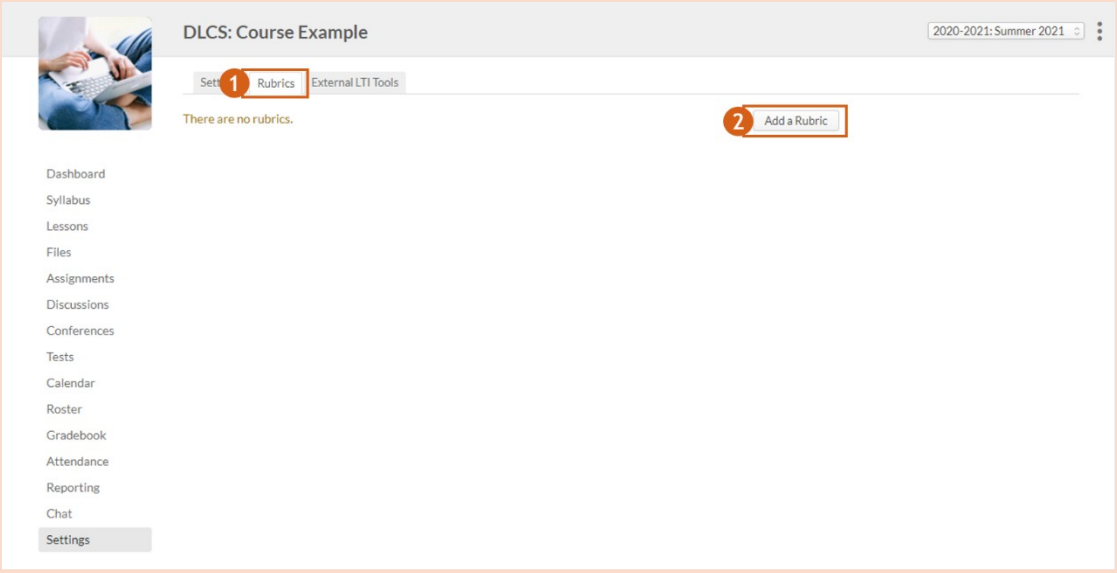
*For discussion assignment types, it is best to include the instructions in the discussion topic, where students are most likely to see them. You will learn how to edit discussion topics in section 3.4, “Discussions.”.*

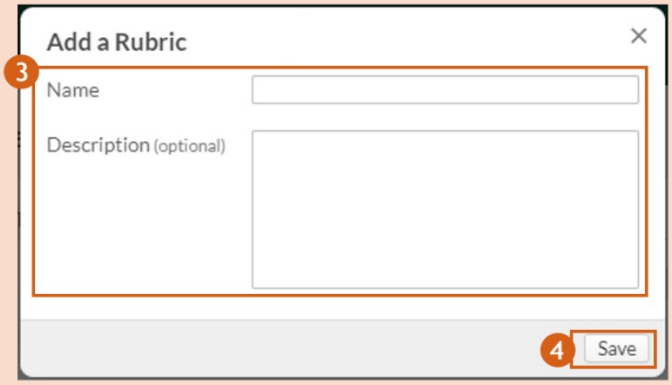
## Exemplary

☐ **Rubrics are provided for each major assignment.**

Each major assignment has a rubric explaining the grading criteria.

**Settings: Create rubric**



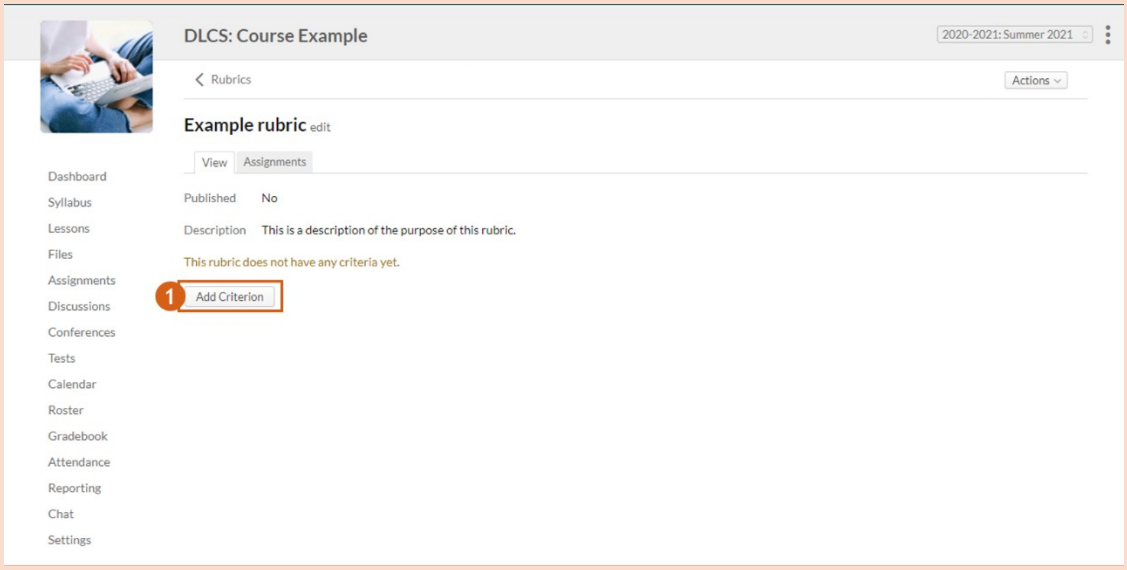


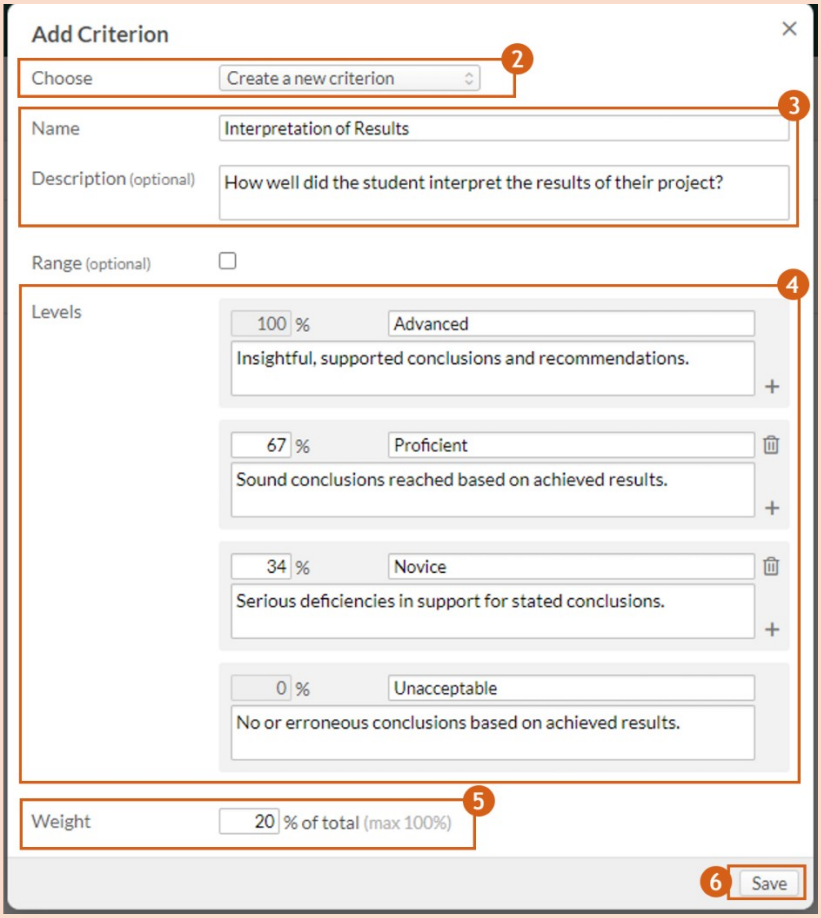

*Rubrics are created at the course level, then attached to particular assignments.*

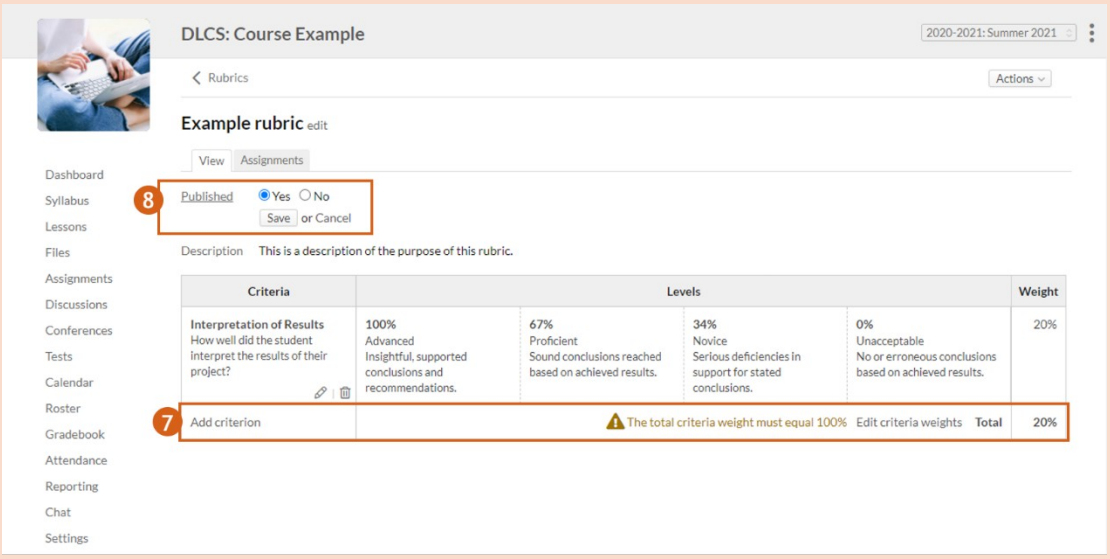
Go to the Settings tab.

1. Click the “Rubrics” tab along the top.
2. Click “Add a Rubric.”
3. Enter the Rubric name and description (if desired). Click “Save.”

## Settings: Add rubric criteria



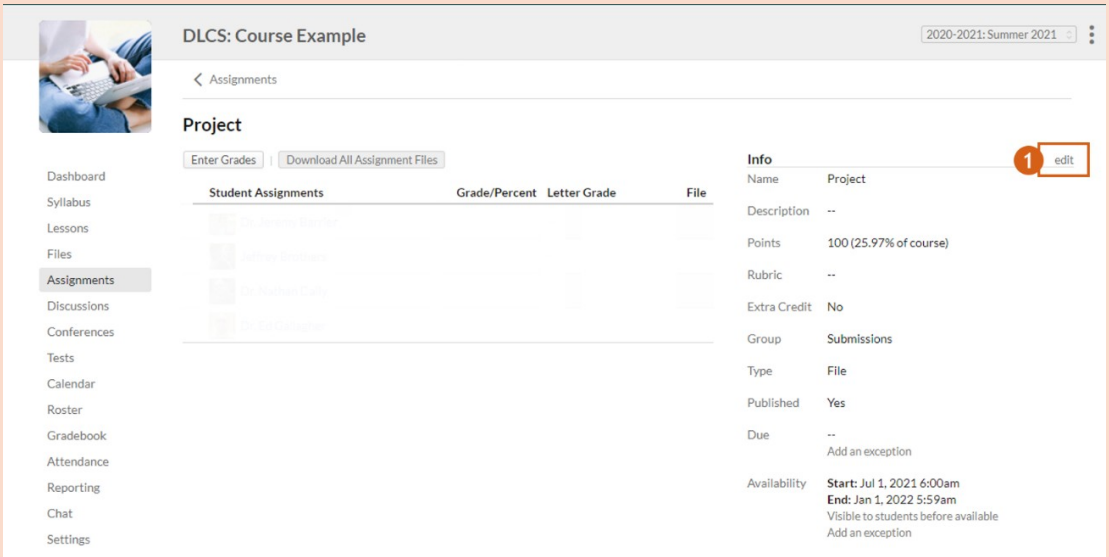



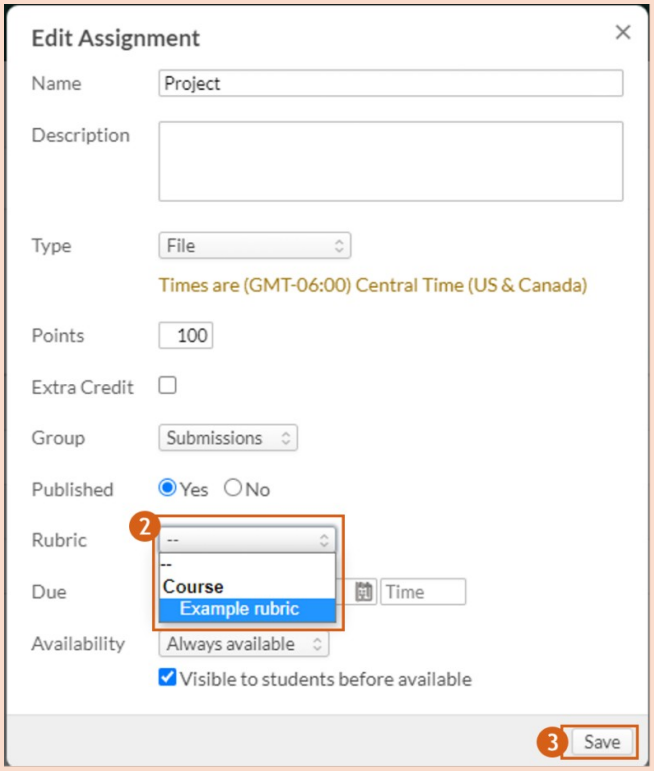



The new rubric is now created. Click the rubric name to add criteria.

1. Click “Add Criterion.”
2. Use the dropdown to select “Create a new criterion.” (Alternatively, if you have already created criteria, you may use an existing criterion or duplicate an existing criterion to edit.)
3. Add a name for the criterion. If desired, add a description to note the goal of the criterion.
4. Identify the Levels of the criterion. These are the different levels of success students may achieve. By default, there are two levels (representing fully achieved – 100% and not at all achieved – 0%). Click the plus icon to add more levels. For each level, add a label and description. You may adjust the percentage of credit awarded per level if desired.
5. Set the weight that the criterion contributes to the overall assignment score.
6. Click “Save.”
7. Add criteria to the rubric or adjust criteria weight until the total criteria weight equals 100%.
8. Click “Published” and use the radio button to change to “Yes.” Click “Save.”

## Assignments: Add rubric to assignment(s)



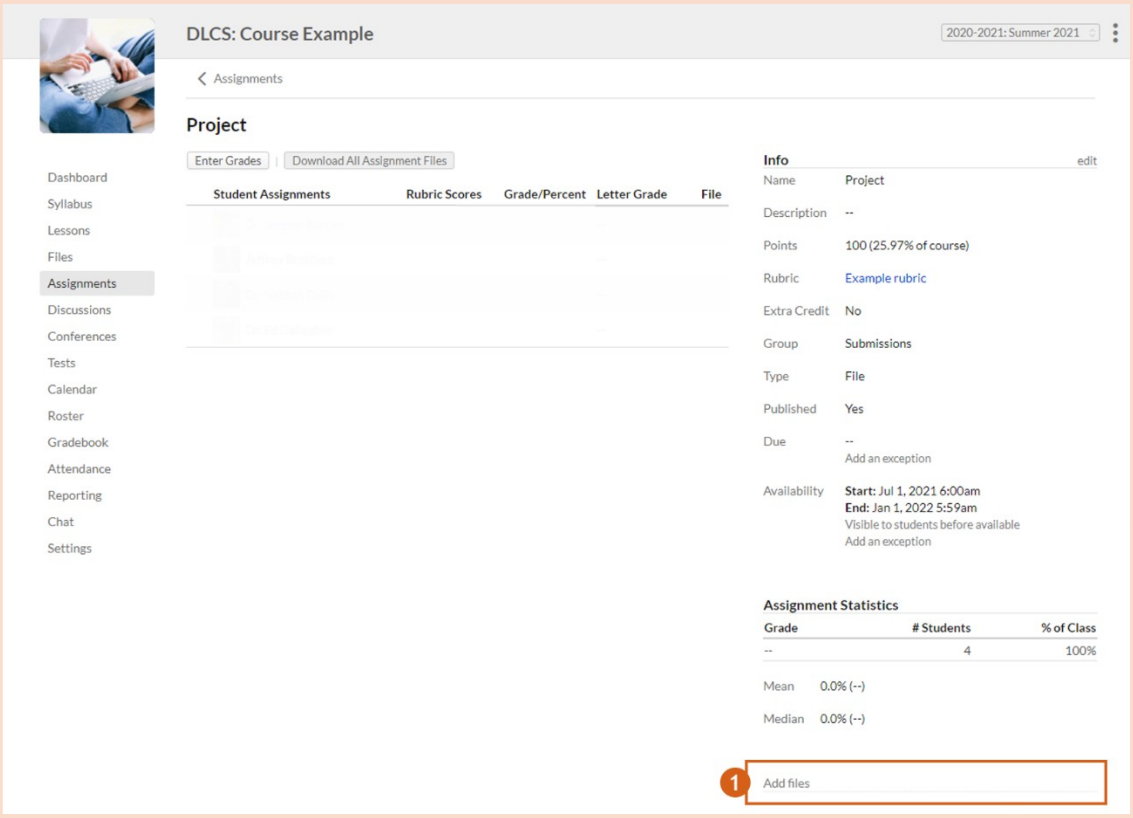

After building and publishing the rubric under the Settings tab, go to the Assignments tab. Select the assignment to which the rubric applies.

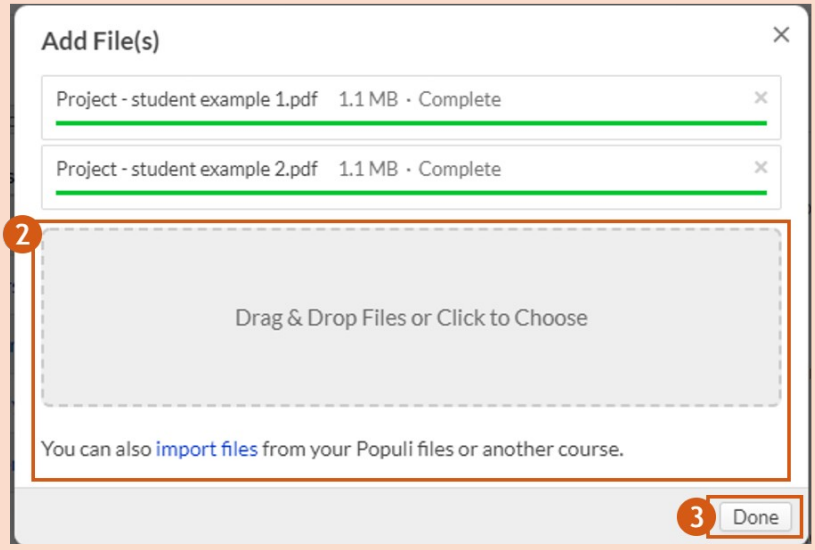
1. Click “edit.”
2. The rubric section will now show a dropdown. Use the dropdown to select the rubric.
3. Click “Save.”

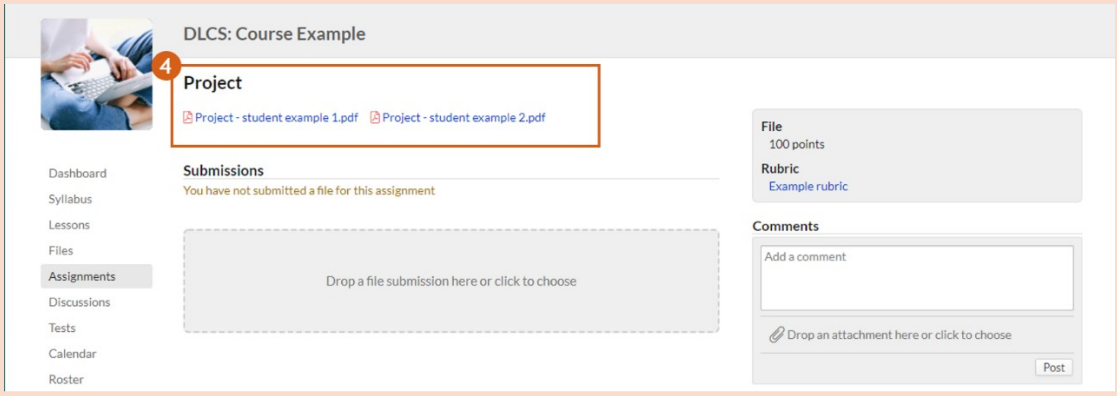
☐ **Examples of student work are provided for major assignments.**

These examples help students understand the aim and scope of the project. Be sure to ask students' permission before sharing their work as an example. You may offer to remove identifying information (such as the student's name) from the example.

**Assignments: Add student examples to assignment**






Go to the Assignments tab and select the assignment.

1. Click “Add files.”
2. Use the “drag and drop” or “click to choose” option to upload the files of your student examples. You may also click “Import a file” to add an example file that you have uploaded to another course.
3. Click “Done.”
4. In the student view, students will now see the examples under the assignment name. You may use the Bulletin Board at the appropriate time in your course to remind students that assignment examples are provided.

## 3.4. Discussions

Discussion activities are one of the main opportunities for asynchronous students to engage in the same sort of back-and-forth communication and learning exchanges as they would in a live class.

Discussion activities are not essay submissions. While it can be easy to slip into “essay mode,” this is not rewarding for students (nor instructors who find themselves grading lots of discussion essays!).

Think of discussions more like a conversation or activity in class. Use discussions to create an informal, participatory space where students can have some fun and process the course content.

With this in mind, most (if not all) discussion points can be awarded based on participation. Unless you typically grade students on the quality of their contributions to classroom discussion, there is no need to do this in online discussion. Focus instead on getting students talking and thinking. Participation points can be automatically awarded in Populi, removing any hassle for you when you take this approach.

Here are a few examples of ways to use discussions:

| **Approach** | **Example** |
|---|---|
| Ask for personal reflection. | You might ask something like, "Have you ever had a conversation where this topic came up? How did you handle it? Would you approach it differently now, based on what you learned in class? If so, how?"<br>Or "In the length of a tweet (140 characters), what stood out to you from today's class? What is still challenging you?" |
| Offer a case study and get students’ advice. | Provide a scenario and ask students to offer their suggestions on how to handle it. Then ask them to look over one another’s posts and revise their initial response to include positive elements that other people brought up which they didn't think of at first. (Have them reply to those people to say thank you for their ideas!)<br><br>Case studies over the course of a semester can be particularly effective—let them unfold and students can become more and more invested in seeing how things go!<br><br>Case studies don't have to be for medical or counseling scenarios. They could involve helping someone design a sermon, providing advice to a character writing a book, or responding to a hypothetical (or real!) blog post on the topic. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Involve multimedia by asking students to find pictures or diagrams to demonstrate ideas. | If you've just tackled a tricky concept, ask students to find ways to explain it. Maybe ask them to share a picture or diagram that represents how they might think about or explain the concept.<br><br>This can also be a review tactic—ask students to find a picture to represent each lesson or chapter of the text so far. This serves as a memory tool to recall the content and may encourage them to review the content as they search for representative pictures. |
| Give students options on which prompts to answer. | If you have a few possible discussion prompts for a lesson, let students choose which one they want to respond to. A little bit of agency helps students feel happy with their learning experience. Then ask them to respond to at least one classmate's post on one of the other discussion prompts. |

Additionally, your involvement and feedback in discussion boards makes a big difference in the quality of the learning experience. If you are uninvolved or overly strict in your feedback, students may feel shut down and shift their focus to just “getting by” rather than engaging.

However, if you strike the right balance, students will feel that their participation matters and that the discussion is active and important. They will feel safe to express and practice the new information they are learning and will be challenged to refine their ideas to reach a higher level of expertise.

To create a positive discussion experience:

- Start by focusing on encouraging participation (in the first half of the discussion period). Thank students for sharing, express interest, and ask for further thoughts. Keep all comments positive and open.
- Follow up by providing prompts to help students refine their ideas (in the latter half of the discussion period). Ask questions, prod for deeper explanations, and compliment well-thought-out responses.

You may also think about how your feedback will evolve over the course of a semester. Early in the semester, students are at a more novice level and may need more support. Later in the semester, students may be equipped for more challenging questions and conversations and be able to engage in more refinement of their ideas.

While you do need to be involved in discussions, be sure to leave room for others to contribute. Instructors are authority figures. This can mean that your comments are viewed as the “final word.” Try not to end a conversation by supplying your own thoughts. Instead, if you share information or your perspective, invite the student or others in the class to then share their reactions or further thoughts.

## Essential

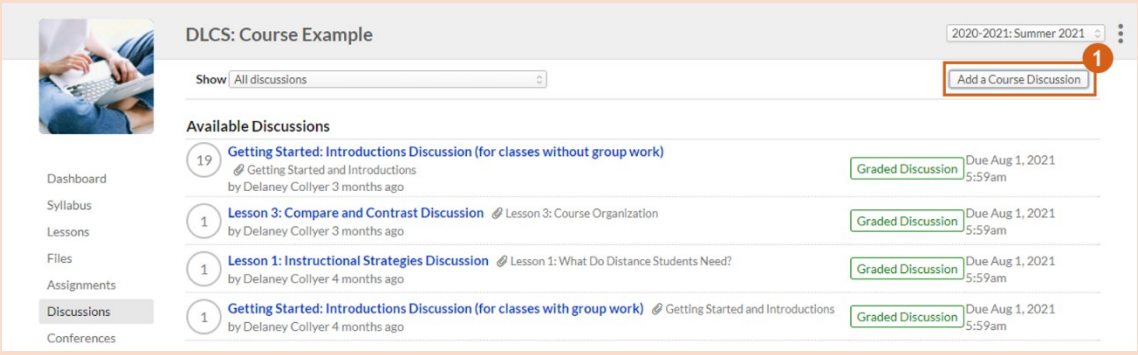
☐ **A variety of discussion opportunities are provided.**

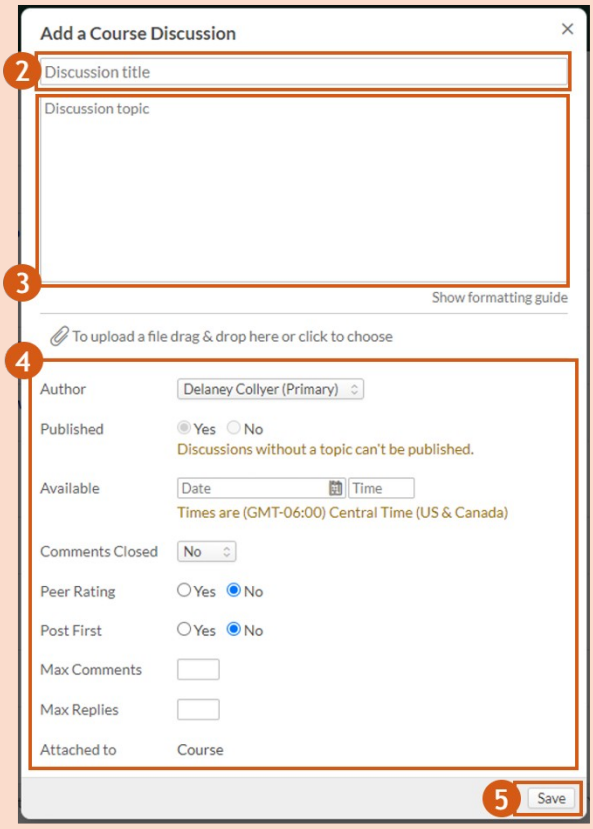
Students have the opportunity to engage with each other and the material through a variety of discussions across the semester.

**Discussions: Create graded discussion**

*There are two routes for creating a graded discussion: via the Discussions tab or via the Assignments tab.*

***Route 1: Create a graded discussion via the Discussions tab***

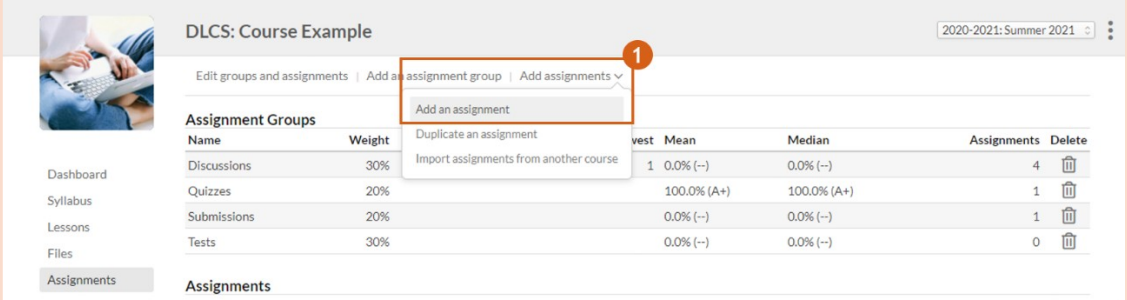


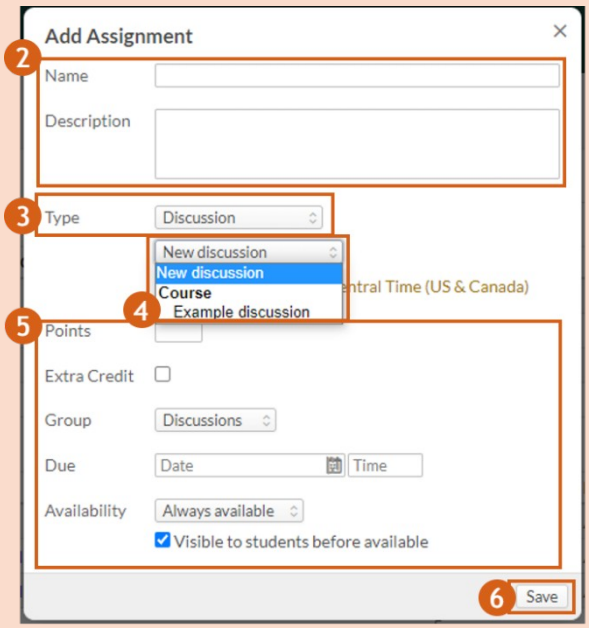



To create the discussion from the Discussions tab:

1. Click “Add a Course Discussion.”
2. Add the discussion title.
3. In the discussion topic field, add the prompt for the discussion and any instructions for completing the assignment (such as deadlines or other requirements).
4. Complete additional settings as desired.
5. Click “Save.”

The discussion is now created. However, by default, discussions created in this way are not automatically added as graded assignments.

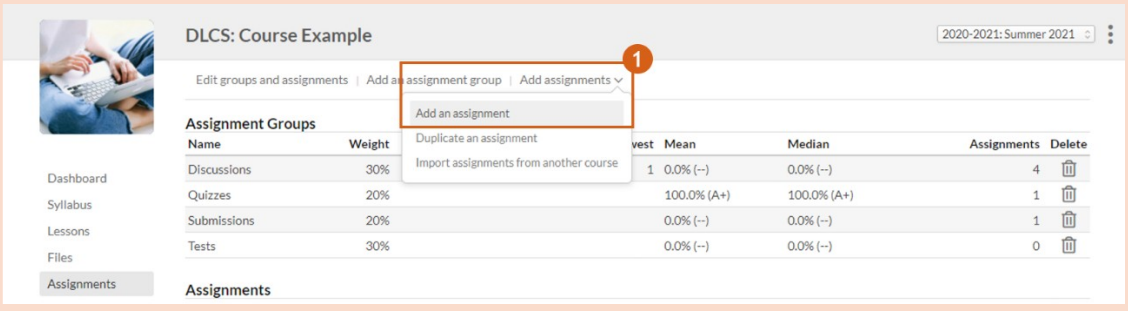


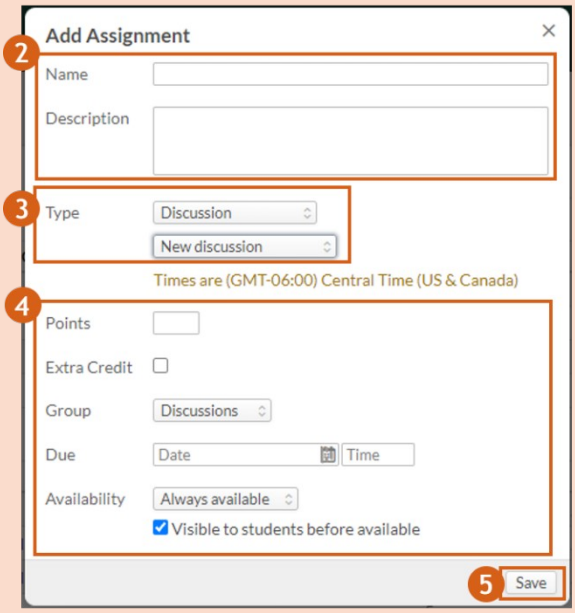



To make the discussion a graded assignment, go to the Assignments tab.

1. Select “Add an assignment” from the “Add assignments” dropdown.
2. Add the name. This can be the same as the discussion title. Fill in the description if desired.
3. Select “Discussion” as the assignment type.
4. A dropdown menu will appear with the option to create a new discussion or select a discussion that has not yet been made into an assignment. Select the discussion you just created.
5. Select the desired settings for the assignment.
6. Click “Save.”

***Route 2: Create a graded discussion via the Assignments tab***

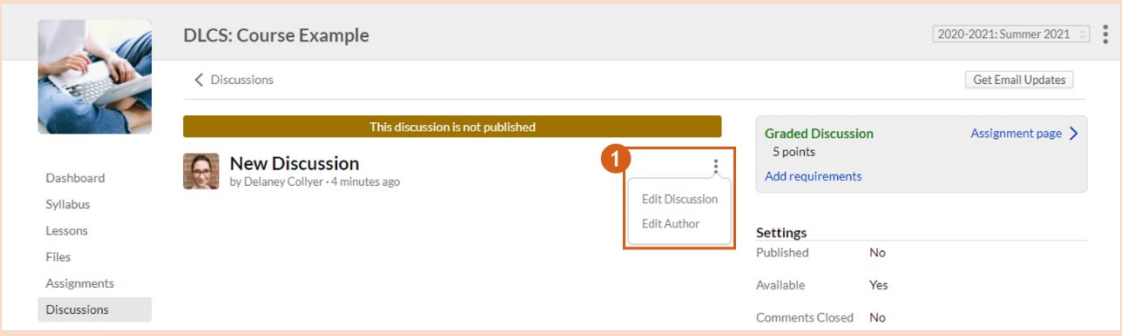


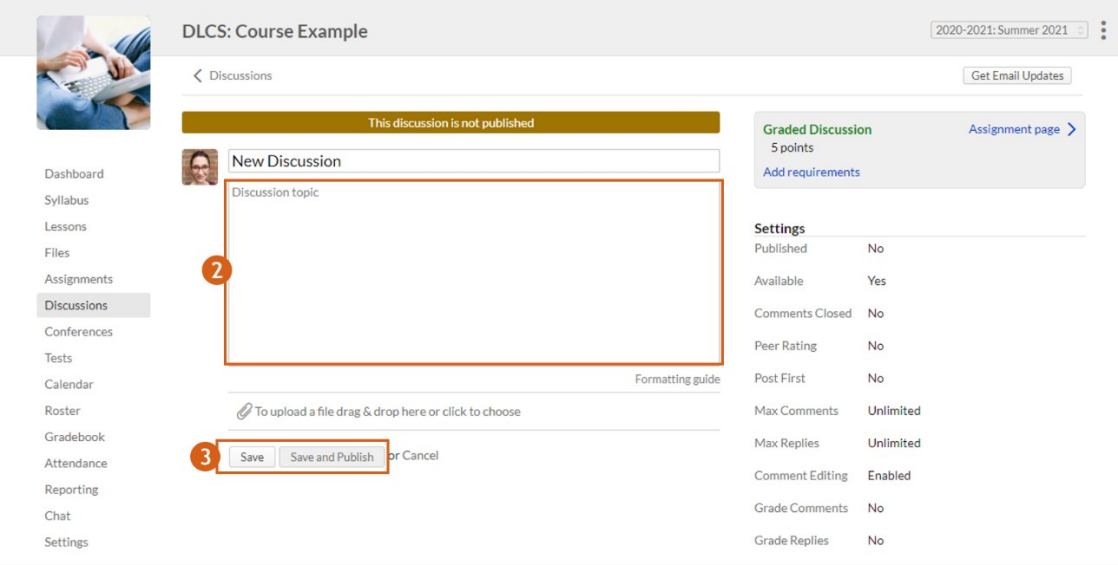



To create the discussion from the Assignments tab:

1. Select “Add an assignment” from the “Add assignments” dropdown.
2. Add the name. This can be the same as the discussion title. Fill in the description if desired.
3. Select “Discussion” as the assignment type.
4. A dropdown menu will appear with the option to create a new discussion or select a discussion that has not yet been made into an assignment. Leave this menu on the default, “New discussion.”
5. Select the desired settings for the assignment.
6. Click “Save.”

The discussion assignment is now created, but the topic is not yet filled in.






To add the discussion topic, go to the Discussion tab and click on the discussion you just created.

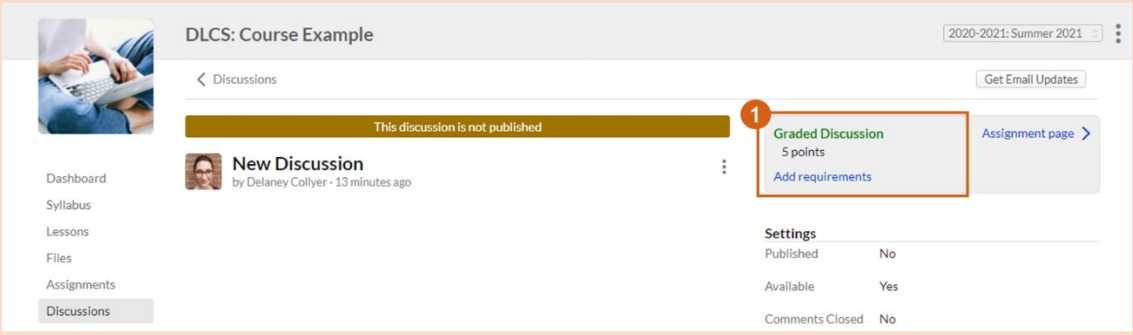
1. Click the three-dot menu and select “Edit Discussion” from the dropdown.
2. In the discussion topic field, add the prompt for the discussion as well as any instructions for completing the assignment (such as deadlines or other requirements).
3. Click “Save” to save changes. If the discussion is not yet published for students to view, you may opt to click “Save and publish” to save changes and make the discussion visible to students.

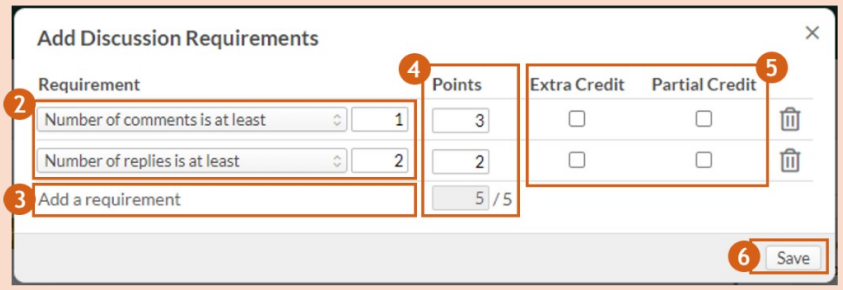
☐ **Discussion grades reflect the value of participation.**

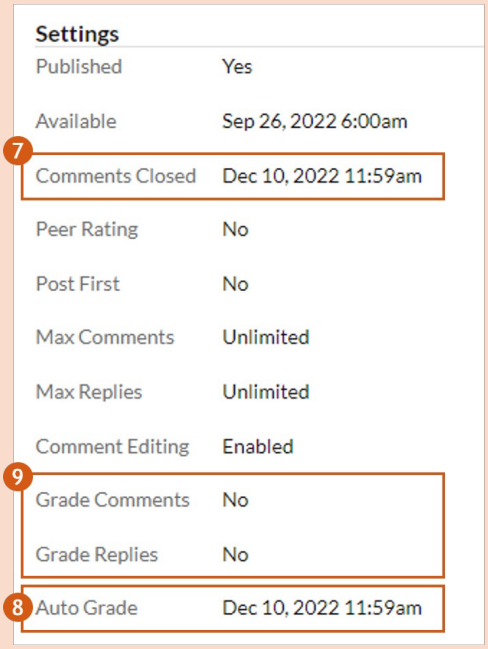
Discussion opportunities are treated as informal, participatory experiences rather than essays. Grading reflects the value of participation and is not overly focused on the perfect refinement or presentation of ideas.

Automatic grading is used (as desired) to award participation points.

**Discussions: Set up automatic grading**






Select the desired discussion under the Discussions tab.

1. Click “Add requirements” in the Graded Discussion panel in the upper right.
2. Use the dropdown menu and corresponding field to set each requirement.
3. Click “Add a requirement” to create additional requirements.
4. Assign the points that will be awarded for meeting each requirement. If the discussion will be graded entirely automatically, the total points should add up to the number of points assigned to the overall discussion assignment. It is also possible to award some points automatically and provide the remainder of the points manually.
5. Tick the appropriate boxes to allow extra credit or partial credit to be awarded for a given requirement.
6. Click “Save.”
7. Click “Comments Closed” and set the date and time. (This must be on or after the due date.) Automatic grading will only consider entries up to the date and time selected.
8. Click “Auto Grade” and set the date and time. This is when the system will assign grades based on the criteria you have set.
9. If desired, click “Grade Comments” and/or “Grade Replies” to set a number of points that you will award manually for students’ discussion submissions. A rubric can be linked to these points to show how you are grading the submissions.

☐ **Instructor involvement/feedback supports discussion activities.**

Instructor is involved in discussions. Instructor provides feedback that encourages participation and prompts refinement of student ideas.

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***EXAMPLES OF INITIAL FEEDBACK***

*Thank initial posters for getting the discussion going. Let students know that you are enjoying seeing them express their ideas and observations. Try to avoid correcting or challenging in this first half—the idea is to let students "get their feet wet" and begin talking, not to ensure they have polished responses.*

---

- *Thanks for getting the discussion going!*
- *It's great seeing your ideas on this topic.*
- *Fantastic observation. Thanks for sharing.*

---

***EXAMPLES OF ONGOING FEEDBACK***

*Try to use questions rather than statements to challenge students. The focus is on deepening their thinking to help them develop their own expertise.*

---

- *How do you think that idea reconciles with…?*
- *What would you say to someone making the counterargument that…?*

---

*Remember that your role is also to foster conversation among the members of the class, not just between you and each student. If you encounter an idea that can be elaborated further, ask others to contribute.*

---

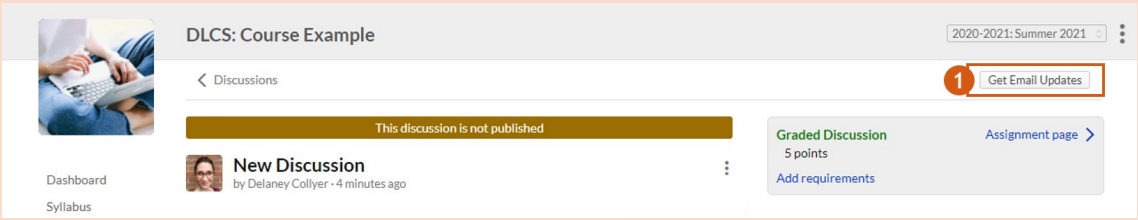
- *What else can be said about this?*

---

- *What do the rest of you think here?*
- *Who can provide additional thoughts on this?*

Instructors may wish to get email updates of discussion activity. This promptly notifies instructors of students' discussion contributions, enabling instructors to actively monitor and encourage discussion.

**Discussions: Get email updates**




Select the desired discussion under the Discussions tab.

1. Click the "Get Email Updates" button in the upper right. (To disable updates, simply click the button again to turn off.)

## 3.5. Peer Review

Peer review occurs when students evaluate each other's work and provide feedback. Peer review activities are great for helping students review key points from the course, promoting longer-term retention. Peer review helps students consider the topics from more perspectives and think through examples and counterexamples, refining students' understanding of course topics. Instructors using peer review have observed that students show more initiative for peer-reviewed activities: students are motivated to participate, do their best, and help each other with difficult areas. Finally, peer review helps students learn how to engage in a helpful and productive dialogue about the course topics.

For the above reasons, peer review can help support a great overall learning experience. Who wouldn't want students to deepen their understanding of the course topics, put in their best effort, and have meaningful dialogues? To incorporate peer review in your courses, here are a few best practices to follow:

To help students succeed with peer review, it is important to recognize that many students do not bring strong peer review skills or experience. Learning how to participate in a learning community—and their future community of practice—is an important part of the growth that students undergo in their university programs.

You will likely need to provide some direct guidance on what makes a good peer review. This can be done by using a rubric that explains the peer review skills you are seeking. It can also be helpful to provide examples of good and bad peer reviews, along with an explanation of what makes each review “good” or “bad.”

Peer reviews contribute to students’ grades. Grades provided by peers can form part or whole of the overall grade on an assignment. Students can also receive grades for the quality of the reviews they provide. Grading review quality is recommended, especially when students are learning how to engage in productive reviews.

## Exemplary

- ☐ **Peer review is used on a main assignment.**

  A peer review activity is set up in Populi to support learning from a main course assignment. It is worth noting that Populi only allows for peer review on File and Essay submissions.

  The activity includes guidance about providing a high-quality peer review, such as detailed instructions, examples, and/or a peer review rubric.

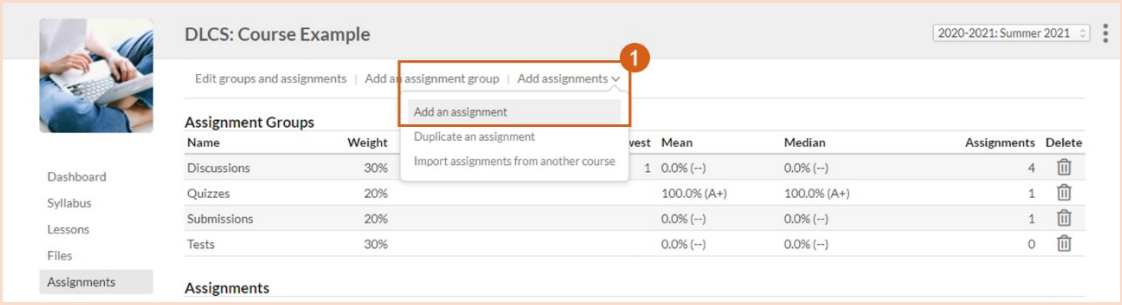
## *GRADING USING PEER REVIEW*

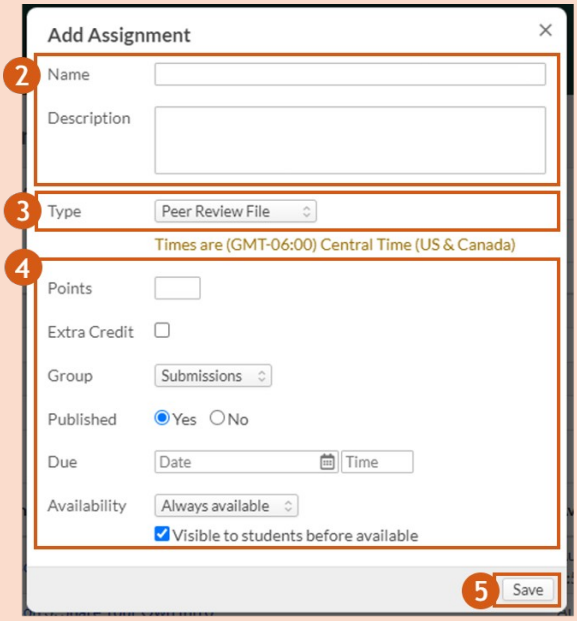
*Peer reviewed assignments typically will still have a submission grade, which is the instructor's grade for the assignment. However, the instructor also can add points based on:*

1. *the average grade students receive from their peers*
2. *the quality of peer review students provide for others*
3. *students' participation in peer review*

*The Populi guidance below details how to set up each of these grading criteria.*

**Assignments: Add a peer review assignment**

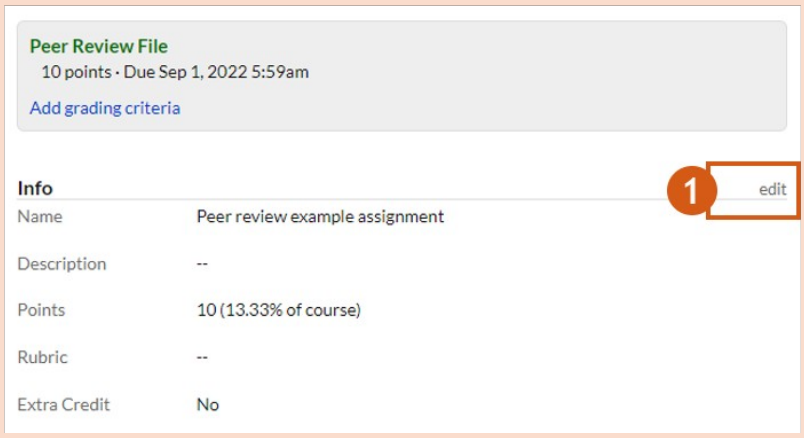





Go to the Assignments tab.

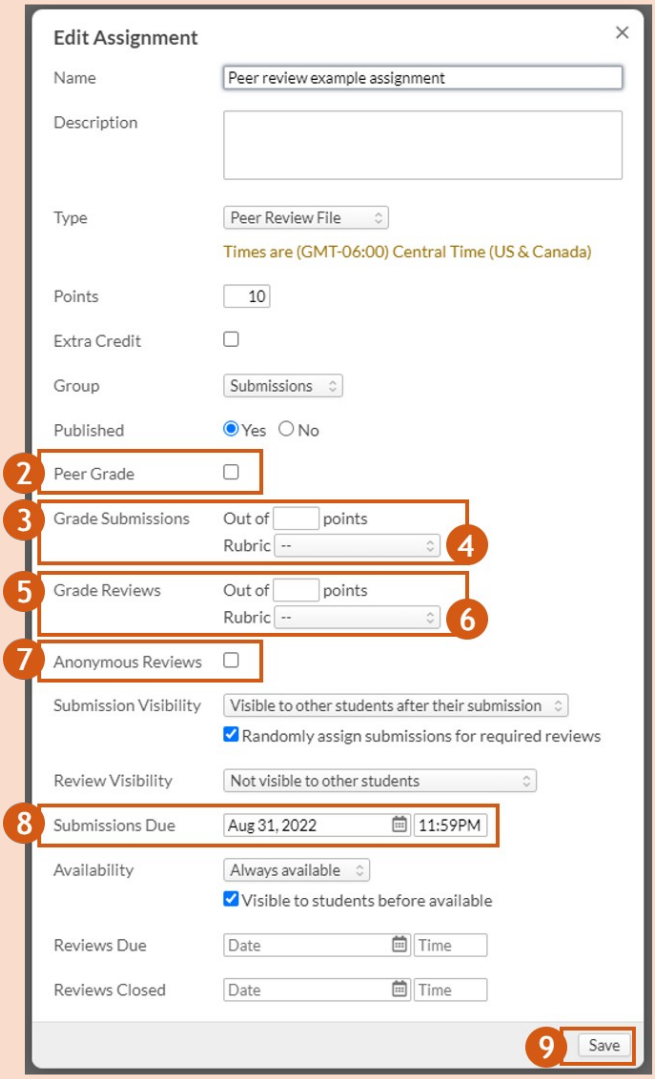
1. Select “Add an assignment” from the “Add assignments” dropdown.
2. Add the name of the assignment. Fill in the description if desired.
3. Select either “Peer review file” or “Peer review essay” as the assignment type.
4. Select the desired settings for the peer review assignment.
5. Click “Save.”

**Assignments: Set up grade options for peer review assignment**




Go to the Assignments tab. Select the desired peer review assignment.

1. Click “edit.”




***To allow peers to grade each other:***

*Note: These grades do not automatically appear as student grades. The instructor will review peer grades and decide how they inform students' final grades on the assignment.*

2. Tick the box beside "Peer Grade."
3. Enter the number of points that peers will use to grade each other. This does not have to be the same as the assignment points.
4. Use the dropdown menu to select the rubric peers will use to grade each other.

***To allow the instructor to grade the quality of students' reviews:***

*Note: Again, the instructor will determine how review grades will inform students' final grades on the assignment.*

5. Enter the number of points that the instructor will use to grade the quality of students' reviews. This does not have to be the same as the assignment points.
6. Use the dropdown menu to select the rubric the instructor will use to grade the quality of students' peer reviews.

***To hide the identity of the submitters and the reviewers from each other:***

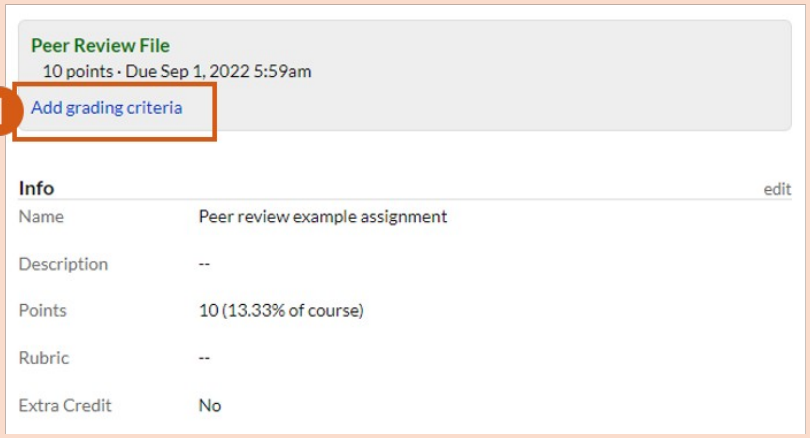
7. Tick the box beside "Anonymous Reviews."

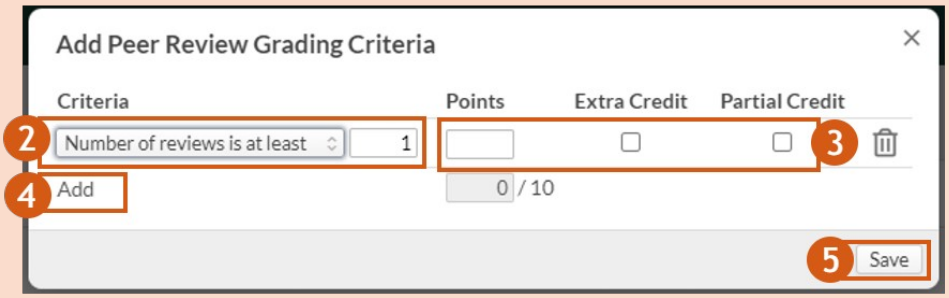
***To set a due date for initial submissions:***

*Note: It will usually make sense to ensure that initial submissions are required before the overall assignment due date so that students have the chance to complete their peer reviews.*

8. Enter the due date and time beside "Submissions Due."
9. Click "Save."

**Assignments: Set up final grading for peer review assignment**




Go to the Assignments tab. Select the desired peer review assignment.

1. Click “Add grading criteria.”
2. Use the dropdown menu to select the desired criterion. *The menu will only include criteria options that were enabled during the peer review grading setup (see above section). For example, if peer grading is enabled, the dropdown will include options to award points based on peer grades.*
3. Enter the number of points that may be awarded based on the criterion. Check the appropriate boxes to indicate whether these points will count as extra credit and/or whether partial credit can be awarded for these points.
4. Click “Add” to select another criterion and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. When all criteria have been added, click “Save.”

## 3.6. Assessment

Assessment is an essential part of any learning experience. Assessment can take many forms, including projects, activities, games, quizzes, or tests. This section focuses on best practices for quizzes and tests.

It can be easy to think of assessment as a chance to quantify students' progress. However, it is much more than just that—it is a chance for students to learn.

Used over the course of a semester, quizzes and tests help students learn by providing them the chance to "check in" with their learning and see where there are gaps. Quizzes and tests remind students to review materials and solidify their understanding.

Creating quizzes and tests within Populi allows easy access for students. It also enables you to use automatic feedback and grading where possible. When active grading is required, it is important to complete grading promptly so that students can see and learn from results soon after the testing experience. This makes the test a more effective learning tool for students.

### Essential

- ☐ **Tests are created within Populi.**

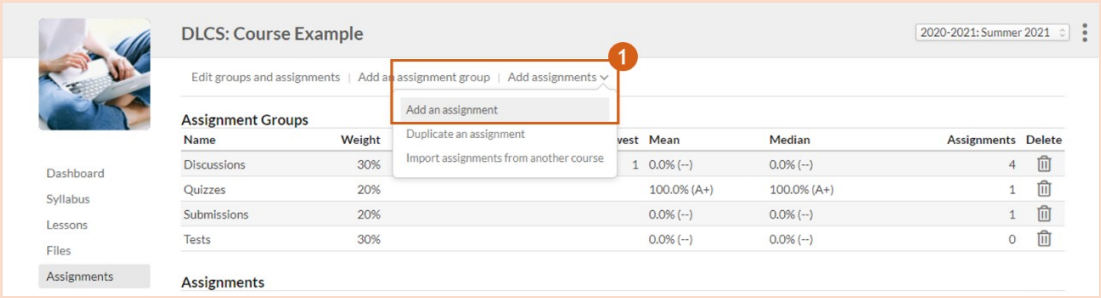
  Quizzes or tests (if used in the course) are created within Populi.

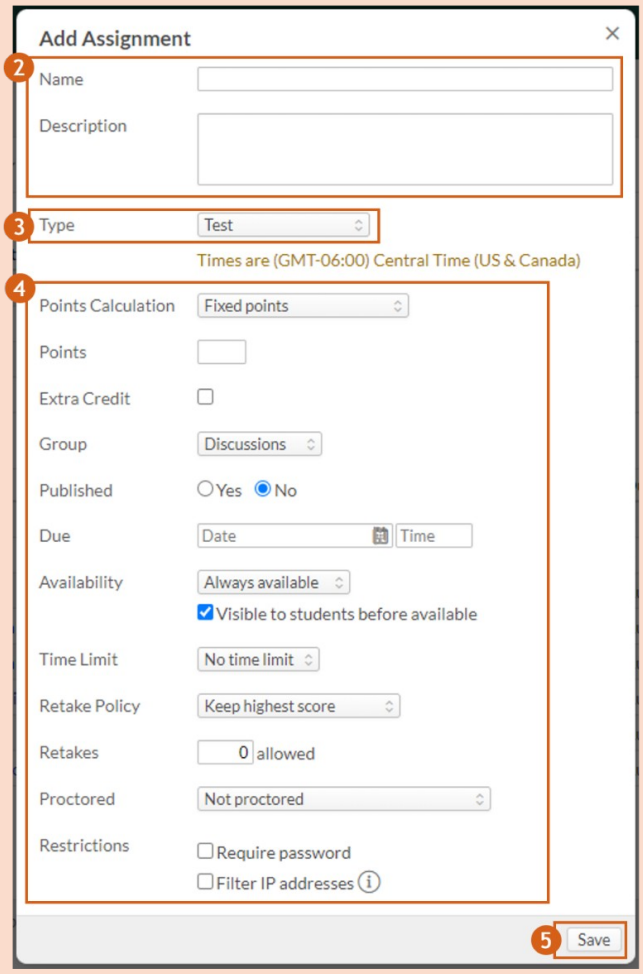
  Instructors may wish to create a question bank for the course. The instructor can draw from this question bank to create quizzes and tests. This makes it simple to build these assessments and helps the instructor overview the questions being used across the entire course.

  Within the question bank, questions may be put into categories. For example, questions may be categorized by topic or module. If categories are used, quizzes or tests may be set up to randomly draw a desired number of questions from each category.

  The random selection of question from each category means that tests vary more across retakes and across semesters. This challenges students and decreases memorization or recording of test questions and answers.

## Assignments: Add a test



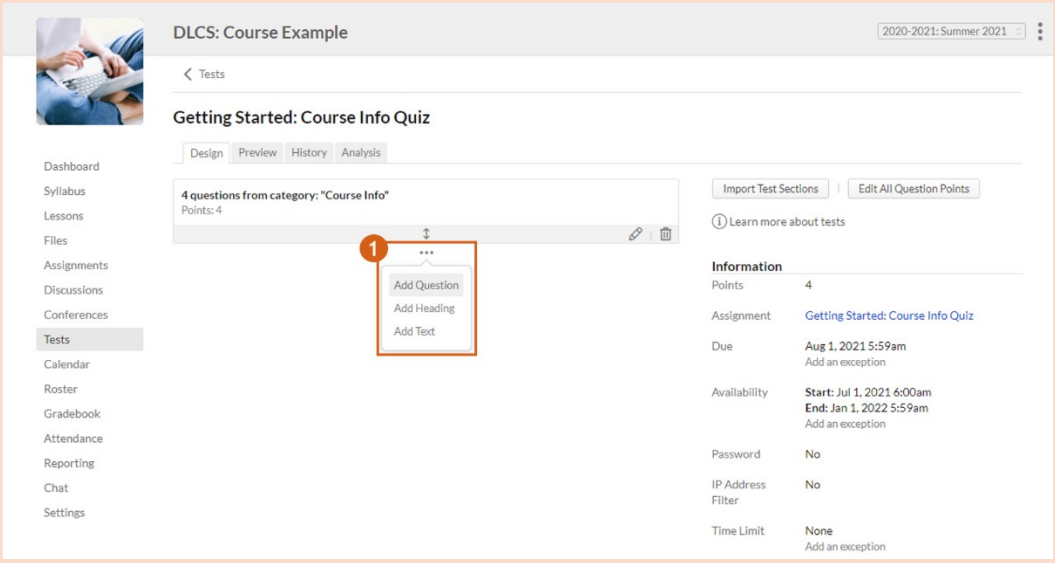

Go to the Assignments tab.

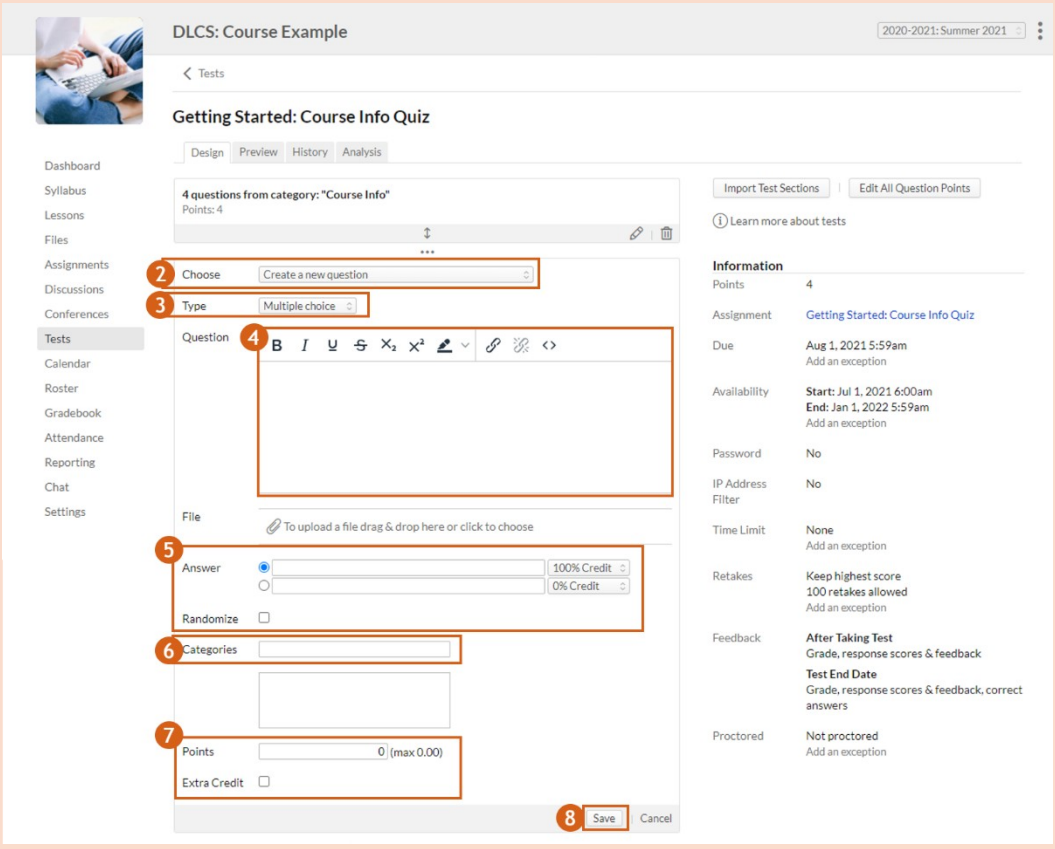
6. Select “Add an assignment” from the “Add assignments” dropdown.
7. Add the name of the test. Fill in the description if desired.
8. Select “Test” as the assignment type.
9. Select the desired settings for the test.
10. Click “Save.”

## Tests: Create test questions

*There are two routes for creating test questions: within a specific test or within a question bank for the course.*

### *Route 1: Create test questions within a specific test*

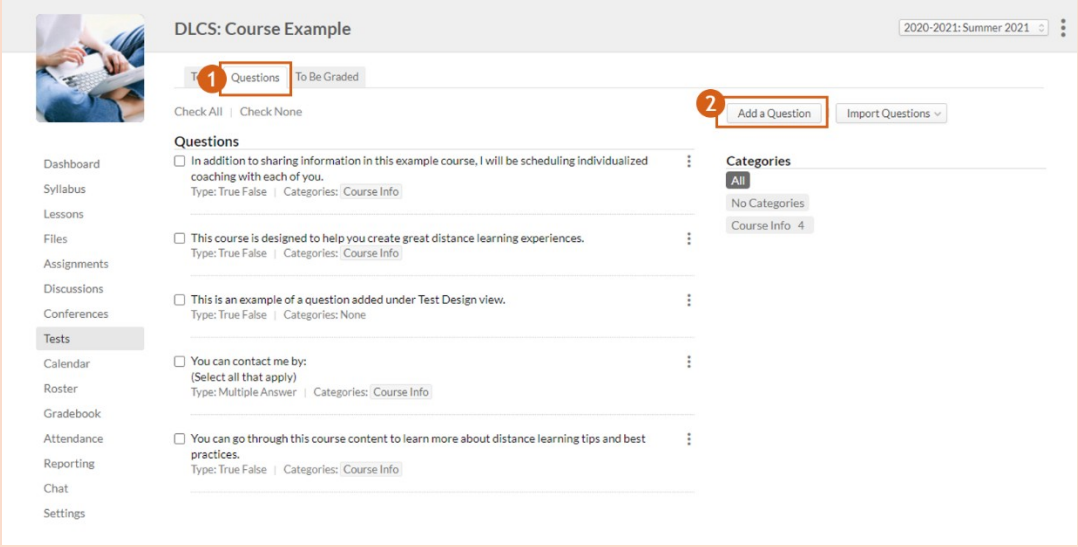


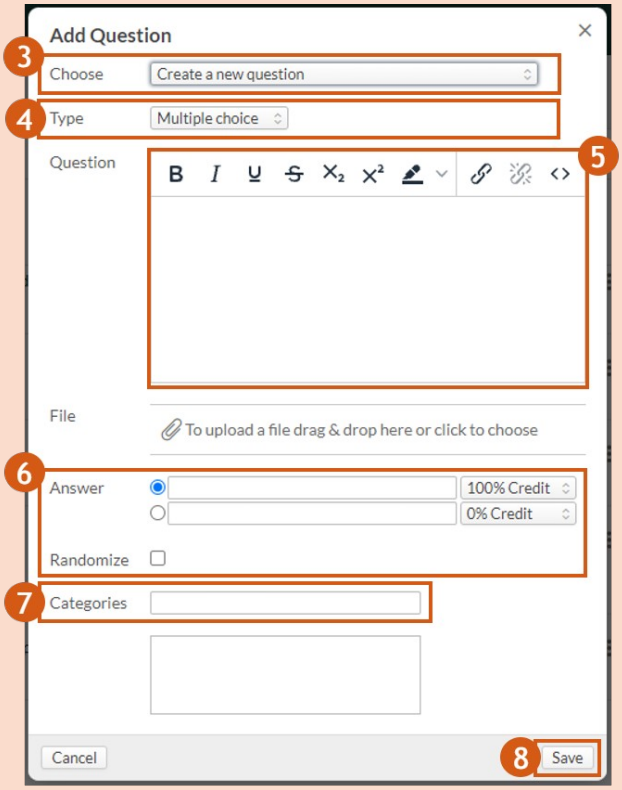



Go to the Tests tab. Select the desired test.

1. Click the three-dot menu. Select “Add Question.”
2. Leave the dropdown menu on the default, “Create a new question.”
3. Use the dropdown menu to select the type of question you would like to add.
4. Enter your question text.
5. Enter your response options and the amount of credit awarded for each one. Tick the box if you would like the response options to appear in a randomized order.
6. If you wish to use categories, type in the categories field. This allows you to view existing categories or add a new category.
7. Type in the point value of the question. Tick the box if the points will count as extra credit.
8. Click “Save.”

***Route 2: Create test questions within a question bank***






Go to the Tests tab.

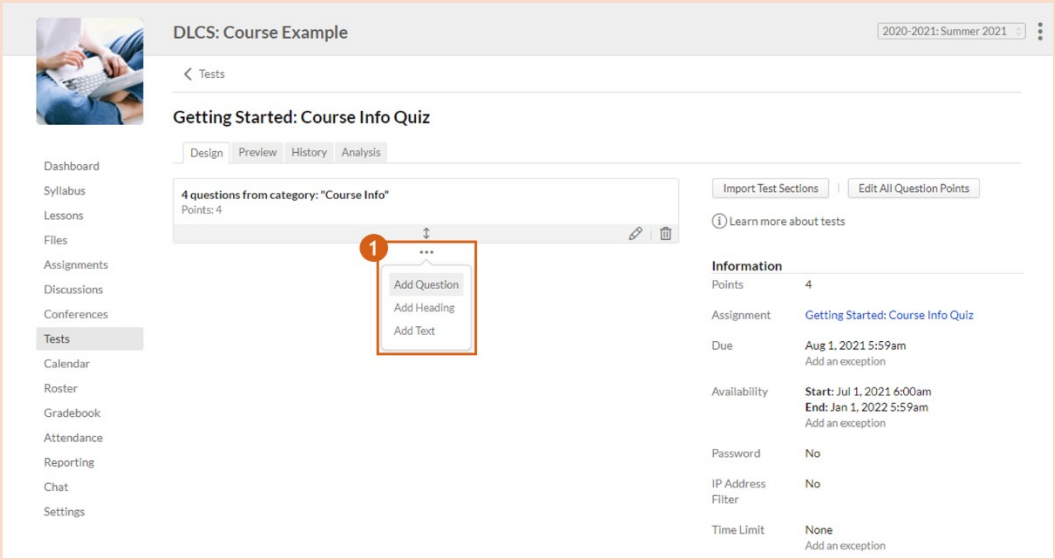
1. Click the “Questions” tab at the top of the page.
2. Click “Add a Question.”
3. Leave the dropdown menu on the default, “Create a new question.”
4. Use the dropdown menu to select the type of question you would like to add.
5. Enter your question text.
6. Enter your response options and the amount of credit awarded for each one. Tick the box if you would like the response options to appear in a randomized order.
7. If you wish to use categories, type in the categories field. This allows you to view existing categories or add a new category.
8. Click “Save.”

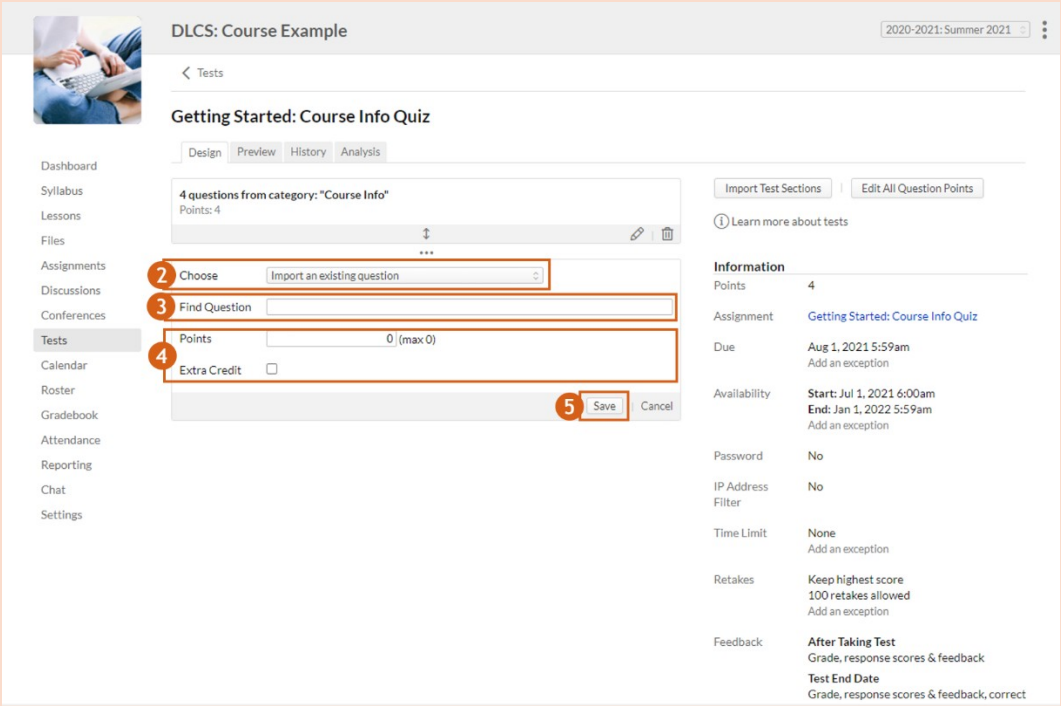
You now have a bank of questions that can be used on whichever tests you would like.

**Tests: Add question bank items to a test**

*You may add specific questions from the question bank to a test. You may also set up the test to draw in a certain number of random questions in a given category from the bank.*

***Route 1: Add individual question bank items to a test***



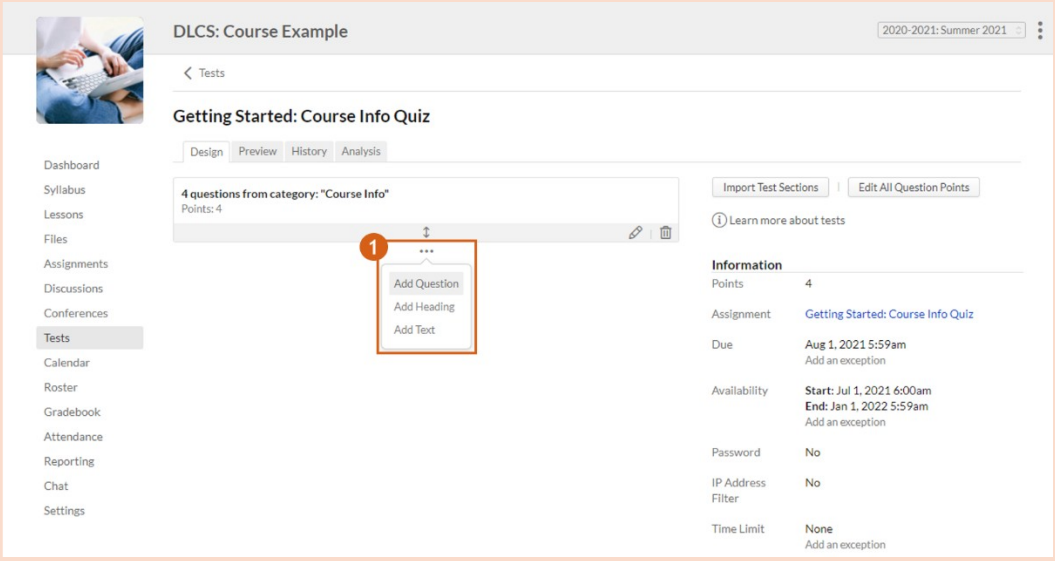



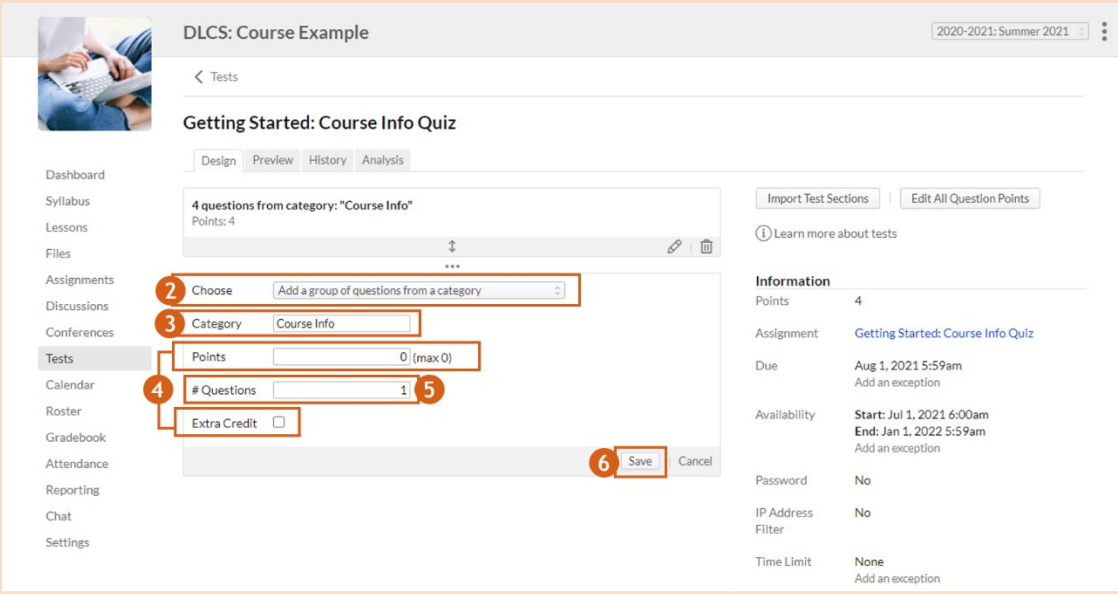

Go to the Tests tab. Select the desired test.

1. Click the three-dot menu. Select “Add Question.”
2. Use the dropdown menu to select “Import an existing question.”

3. Type in the search field to locate the created question.
4. Assign the desired point value. Tick the box if the points will count as extra credit.
5. Click “Save.”

***Route 2: Draw a number of question bank items from a given category***




Go to the Tests tab. Select the desired test.

1. Click the three-dot menu. Select “Add Question.”
2. Use the dropdown menu to select “Add a group of questions from a category.”
3. Type in the category field to select the desired category.

4. Assign the total point value for the group of questions. Tick the box if the points will count as extra credit.
5. Enter the number of questions you wish to draw from the selected category.
6. Click “Save.”

## Exemplary

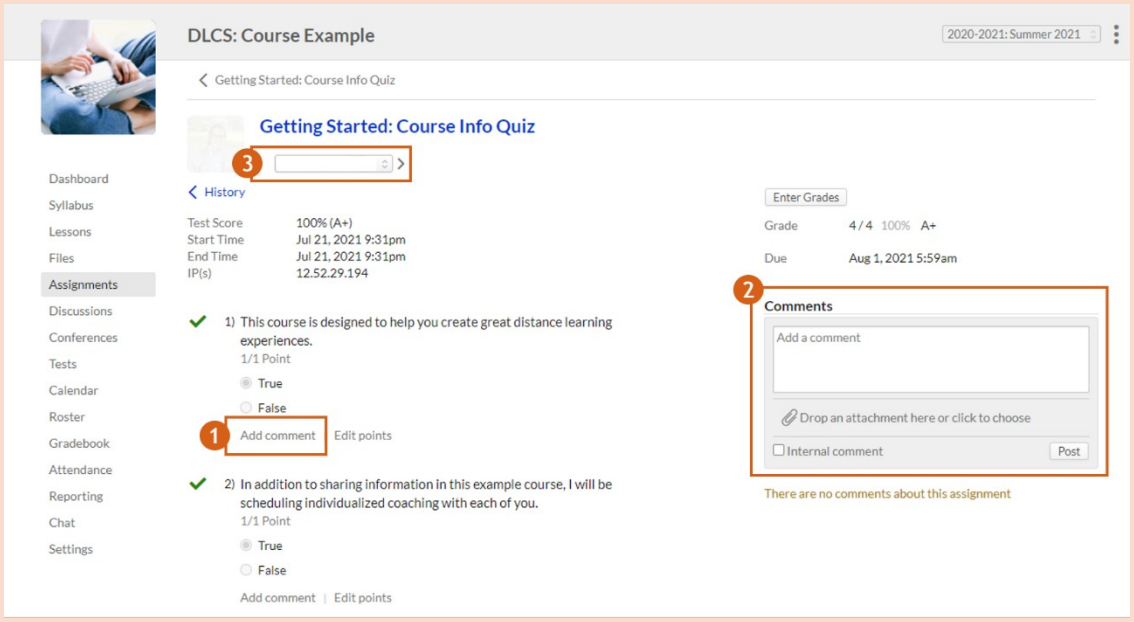
☐ **General class feedback is provided after the test.**

The instructor has identified common successes and challenges from the test. The instructor provides general feedback to the class celebrating these successes and providing further explanation or resources to address areas of difficulty. This may be done via video, email, or Bulletin Board. (See the Communication Plan section to learn more.)

☐ **Individualized feedback is provided after the test.**

Specific feedback is provided privately to each student based on their individual test results. Feedback may be provided for specific questions and/or overall, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

**Assignments: Add comments to test**



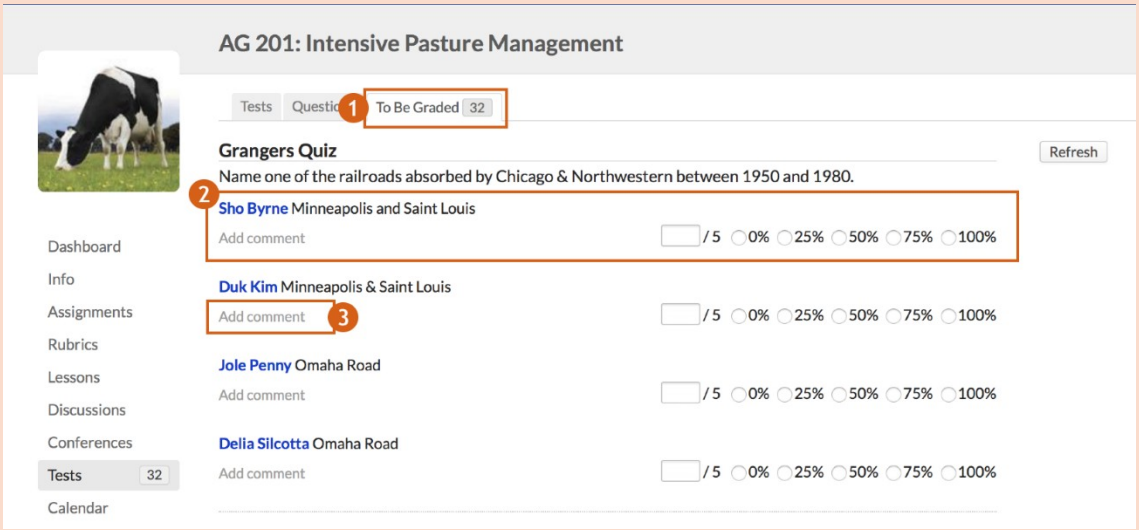
Go to the Assignments tab. Click on the test name, and then a specific student.

1. To provide feedback for a single question, click “Add comment” below the question.
2. To provide feedback on the test as a whole, type in the “Add a comment” field and click “Post.”
3. Use the dropdown at the top of the page to switch between students’ test submissions.

☐ **Finalized grades and feedback are provided promptly.**

Within one week of the test due date, instructor has graded any questions which require active grading and has given feedback (as appropriate).

**Tests: Grade essay or short answer questions**




Go to the Tests tab.

1. Click the “To Be Graded” tab along the top of the page.
2. Review responses and enter points awarded.
3. Click “Add comment” below a response to provide feedback for that response.

# In Conclusion

We hope that this guide serves as a useful resource to you through every stage of your online course design:

- Planning the learning experience.
- Creating the learning environment.
- Supporting ongoing engagement.
- Learning from your experience and planning for the future.

Your efforts to create a great online learning experience will make a huge difference to your students. By implementing these course design best practices, you help your students learn deeply, succeed in your course, and feel connected, supported, and engaged along the way.

## Contact Us

The distance learning team are here to support you at any time. For questions or assistance with online course design or with the standards outlined in this guide, contact:

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