

## **Modular Online Learning Design: A Flexible Approach for Diverse Learning Needs.**

By Amanda Nichols Hess. (2021), 128 pages, ISBN: 9780838948125. \$65.99

**Subject:** How to be a better teacher

**Useful for:** Useful for librarians who are creating new online instructional experiences or converting traditional face-to-face experiences to an online environment.

**Format:** Chapters with index.

### **Reviewer's Comments:**

The COVID-19 pandemic saw many instructors thrust into the world of online learning quite literally overnight. With so little time for turnaround, this led to many instructors delivering the same content in virtually the same format, but in a different environment. While students were, for the most part, accepting and empathetic to this venue shift, as we rolled into a new school year, now mid-pandemic, students became more vocal about the unpleasant nature of having a traditionally conducted course virtualized, and for good reason: When it comes to instructional design, face-to-face instruction and online instruction exist in almost mutually exclusive worlds.

When I prepared to teach my first online course several years ago, I spent a significant amount of time reading about online pedagogy, learning styles, and instructional design, and quickly discovered that what had worked in my face-to-face legal research course would need considerable transformation to help students achieve the same skills mastery in my online course. There are a number of excellent books and resources out there about designing online courses, as the author of this book even admits, but *Modular Online Learning Design* adds to the conversation a critical focus on instructional design for modular instruction. Modularity in instructional design challenges the instructor to structure their online learning experience with flexibility in mind, simplifying any future course reorganizations, additions, or deletions, so that you don't have to start from square one every time you make changes to your online instruction.

Designing online learning modularly also allows for greater scalability of the instruction. This can be particularly important when it comes to library-led instruction, as librarians teach everything from full-fledged, 3-credit research courses to one-off guest lectures. That's one other feature I particularly appreciate about this book: Unlike most

instructional design texts I've read, *Modular Online Learning Design* is written specifically for library-led instruction. In the first chapter, Hess provides an example of a small-scale, medium-scale, and large-scale library instructional project. Each chapter thereafter discusses a particular element of modular online learning design, and with each chapter, Hess applies the principles learned to the same small-scale, medium-scale, and large-scale instructional project introduced in chapter one, providing concrete illustrations of how the reader can implement these principles to fit a variety of instructional needs.

Throughout each chapter, Hess incorporates helpful charts, diagrams, and other graphics that enhance the principles discussed. And, each chapter ends with a "Wrapping Up and Looking Forward" section that, much like a well-designed course, both summarizes the chapter and previews what is to come. Hess also importantly includes a chapter specifically addressing accessibility issues in online instructional design. The book concludes with a future-focused chapter about maintenance considerations for established instructional projects, a practical discussion of planning for how your library will sustain and update modular online learning resources in the future.

I have read a number of instructional design books over the years, but this is one of the first I have read that is specifically directed at librarians. Librarian instruction comes in a lot of forms: it might be live or recorded; it might be a one-shot instructional session, a short series, or a full course; or it might be extra-curricular, such as instruction for patrons about a new library resource. Whatever the capacity, any librarian who is planning to teach online would benefit from reading this book. Like the very subject it covers, the book's usefulness is scalable, beneficial to both novice online instructors and the more seasoned.

**Reviewed by:** Ashley Ahlbrand, Indiana University Maurer School of Law, in 2021.