



Southern Cross Model

Unit Site Standards



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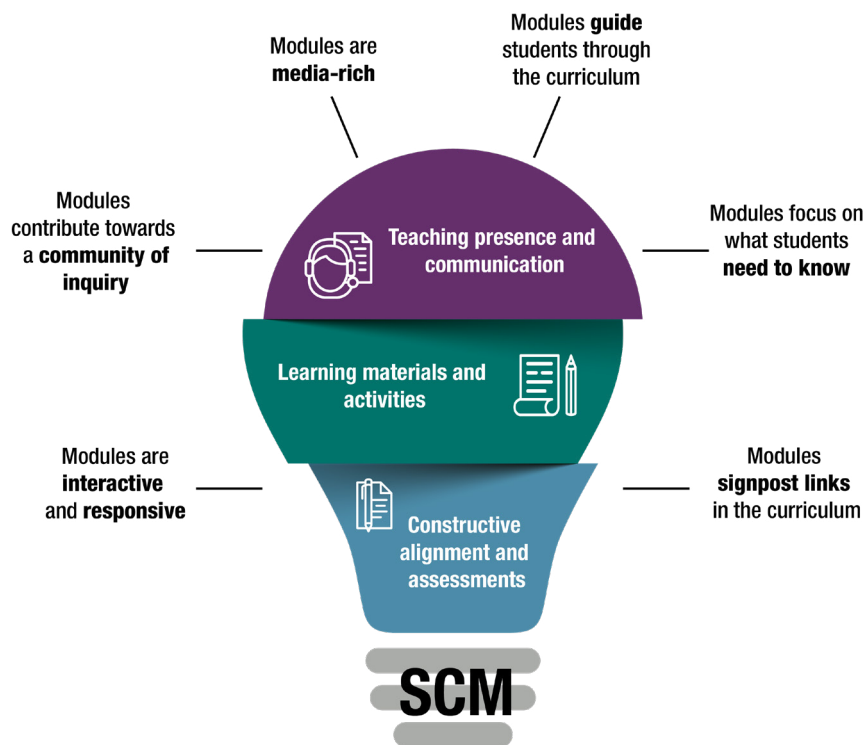


**Southern Cross
University**

The Southern Cross Model (SCM) Unit Site Standards set clear expectations for self-access content within the Blackboard unit sites.

The SCM Unit Site Standards are underpinned by established online learning theories, including the Three Types of Interaction (Moore, 1989), Online Community of Inquiry (Garrison & Akyol, 2013), and Constructive Alignment (Biggs, 2011). The Standards incorporate the Southern Cross Model Design principles, the Southern Cross Assessment, Teaching and Learning Policy and Procedures, ACODE Benchmarks, the TELAS Framework, and Quality Matters, which are at the forefront of developing standards in the sector.

The SCM Unit Site Standards draw on three domains of teaching and learning: Teaching presence and communication, Learning materials and activities, Constructive alignment and assessments.



Each standard within a domain is categorised by the following key.

Key

- (E) **E**stablished – minimum
- (D) **D**eveloping – as a priority
- (I) **I**nnovative – for the future

The SCM Unit Site Standards can be used:

- as a reference or guide when designing and developing a unit
- by Educational Designers at Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to evaluate units and/or for collaborative discussions with academic staff to address identified needs or potential enhancements
- by academic staff as a self or peer-assessment tool to reflect on their unit sites.

A checklist is available to facilitate the application of the standards outlined in this document.

The Southern Cross Model Unit Site Standards adhere to the following Southern Cross University policy and procedures.

Assessment, Teaching and Learning Policy (<https://policies.scu.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=66>)

Refer to:

Teaching and Learning Principle 5: Learning is supported by readily available, high quality learning materials and resources.

(18) Our teaching:

1. Emphasises the design and curation of quality, purpose-developed materials for self-access learning, supported through Centre for Teaching and Learning guides and best practice examples on media rich, Interactive Learning Environment (ILEs); and
2. Is supported by Centre for Teaching and Learning guides and best practice class plan examples.

Curriculum Design and Development Procedures (<https://policies.scu.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=330>)

Refer to:

Unit Content and Learning Activities

- (58) All teaching methods, learning resources and learning activities will directly and demonstrably contribute to achievement of one or more of the Unit Learning Outcomes.
- (59) Teaching methods, learning resources and learning activities will demonstrably provide students with equivalent opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes irrespective of their study location or mode of participation.

Assessment, Teaching and Learning Procedures (<https://policies.scu.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=255>)

Refer to:

Learning Resources for Students

- (69) Learning resources are prescribed to support student learning and build knowledge. As described in the Curriculum Design and Development Procedures, learning resources will:
 - a. directly and demonstrably contribute to the achievement of one or more of the Unit Learning Outcomes;
 - b. provide students with opportunities to engage with learning resources irrespective of their study location or mode of participation;
 - c. meet the learning needs of all students, irrespective of cultural and family background, age, and disability.
- (70) When prescribing learning resources, academic staff must consider any potential barriers that may prevent students from engaging in the unit, including the cost of learning resources and digital rights management restrictions.
- (71) The University promotes the adoption of Open Educational Resources (OERs) as the preferred option to prescribed textbooks.
- (72) Textbooks will only be prescribed in a unit where:
 - a. There is prior approval of the textbook by the Associate Dean (Education);
 - b. There is a stated accreditation or formal discipline-specific requirement to prescribe the textbook;
 - c. The cost of the textbook is less than AUD\$350;
 - d. Open Education Resources are not available.
- (73) Prescribed learning resources, such as journal articles, book chapters and other assigned readings, will not exceed 20 items per undergraduate or postgraduate coursework units. Academic staff are able to use additional, non-prescribed citations and references in the content of their teaching activities when required. If more than 20 learning resources are required to achieve the Unit Learning Outcomes, approval is required from the Associate Dean (Education).

1. Teaching presence and communication

The 'teaching presence and communication' standards refer to how interactions between learners and teachers foster the learning community and establish relationships and connections (Garrison & Akyol, 2013; Moore, 1989).

1.1 A clear orientation and introduction are provided

- (E) 1.1.1 The goals, objectives and structure of the unit are clearly explained in plain English.
- (E) 1.1.2 An introduction from the unit assessor (e.g. video, text, photo) and information about the unit are provided.
- (E) 1.1.3 All necessary contact details for the teaching team are provided, including location, availability, and anticipated response times for communications via the discussion board or email.
- (E) 1.1.4 Learners are provided with an opportunity to introduce themselves to the class through multiple means of communication.
- (E) 1.1.5 Learners are provided with expectations and advice on appropriate learner-to-learner interactions (e.g. in the first discussion board post).
- (E) 1.1.6 Answers to common questions (e.g. within a Q&A or FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) format in the orientation) and/or a support-focused discussion forum are provided.
- (E) 1.1.7 The purpose and rationale of assessments and learning activities are clearly explained to learners (e.g. explanations are given for the use of group assessments or critical reflections).
- (E) 1.1.8 The unit assessor explicitly states that diverse perspectives are encouraged and respected.
- (E) 1.1.9 The unit assessor communicates to the learners how they will utilise the Blackboard Announcements tool during the unit.
- (E) 1.1.10 In the self-access orientation module, learners are directed to appropriate support sites (e.g. Southern Cross University's (SCU) Student Learning Zone, StudyHub and the Student Access and Inclusion team).

1.2 Expectations for engagement with the learning and assessment tasks are provided and modelled by the unit assessor

- (E) 1.2.1 A unit schedule outlining the self-access modules, workshops, tutorials, and assessments tasks, is provided.
- (E) 1.2.2 Expectations for the extent of learner engagement in learning tasks (including active participation in workshops/tutorials) and assessments are clearly communicated and aligned with the Unit and Course Management System (UCMS) information (e.g. number of hours, length/depth of discussion).
- (E) 1.2.3 Information about assessment feedback (e.g. how to access, timing, format, interpretation, use) is provided.
- (D) 1.2.4 Learners are encouraged to seek and understand feedback from others (automated, self, peer, teacher) to enable them to take actionable steps before submitting assessments.

1.3 Clear and consistent instructions/guides for using technology are provided

- (E) 1.3.1 Expected digital skills are clearly articulated to learners, including guidance on how and where to look for instructional guides or further support.
If required, access and support to industry specific technology is provided.
- (E) 1.3.2 Details of how and when collaborative technologies will be used is communicated to learners (e.g. Collaborate Ultra, Kahoot).

2. Learning materials and activities

The 'learning materials and activities' standards promote instructional design that supports positive, active, and effective learner interactions with the content. This may include the ability for students to maintain access to units they have previously completed.

2.1 Navigation and layout of the unit is functional, consistent and intuitive

- (E) 2.1.1 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles form the foundation of unit design to ensure universal access is provided to all learners.
- (E) 2.1.2 The unit uses the standard Blackboard template and consistent styles are applied (e.g. text formatting, easy to read fonts, white space, heading hierarchies, bulleted or numbered lists are consistent).
- (E) 2.1.3 The sequence of learning (order/flow) is logical and enhances ease of navigation.
- (E) 2.1.4 The content is engaging, appropriate to the unit level (1000, 2000, 3000, etc.) and divided into manageable segments that are appropriately labelled.
- (E) 2.1.5 The volume of learning in the unit site, including activities, readings, and assessments, is consistent with the UCMS details and aligned with the Southern Cross Model principles.
- (E) 2.1.6 A [conversational tone and inclusive language](#) are used to establish an appropriate teaching voice throughout the content.
- (E) 2.1.7 The reference list is complete, uses the discipline appropriate style (e.g. APA 7th Edition style) and is included at the end of each module.

2.2 Learning materials are relevant and support learner engagement

- (E) 2.2.1 [Signposting](#) is used throughout the modules to explain the connection between the module content, and other associated activities, which include tutorials, workshops, and assessment tasks.
- (E) 2.2.2 Context, time commitment and instructions are provided for the learning activities (i.e. what it is, why it is relevant to the learning outcomes, how it should be completed and how long it should take).
- (E) 2.2.3 Learning resources and materials are current and accurate and contribute to the achievement of the unit learning outcomes.
- (E) 2.2.4 Textbooks are prescribed only when alternative scholarly information resources such as open resources, journal articles, book chapters, and multimedia are not adequate substitutes. Prescribed textbooks require prior approval from the Associate Dean of Education and must be directly aligned to the Unit Learning Outcomes. Textbooks should not be listed as optional.
- (I) 2.2.5 Learning materials provide opportunities for learners to develop digital fluency skills relevant to their discipline/industry including elements such as accessibility, access, and inclusion.
- (I) 2.2.6 Learners are provided with a variety of meaningful learning materials to allow for different learning experiences and to form mental representations ([Mayer, 2005](#)).

2.3 Opportunities for learners to actively engage in a variety of meaningful learning activities

- (E) 2.3.1 Opportunities and support materials are provided for learners to engage in [active learning](#).
- (E) 2.3.2 Opportunities are provided for learners to receive feedback from online active learning activities.
- (E) 2.3.3 Opportunities are provided for learners to consolidate (understand, reflect, review) their learning.
- (D) 2.3.4 Opportunities are provided for learners to engage in a variety of appropriate activities and formats (e.g. co-creation, quizzes, presentation, written work, audio, video).
- (D) 2.3.5 Learning activities enable learners to actively participate, think critically and/or focus on real-world, industry-relevant issues.
- (D) 2.3.6 Opportunities are provided for learners to choose relevant topics of interest as their focus (within learning activities and/or assessments).
- (I) 2.3.7 Opportunities are provided for learners to observe the work of others (e.g. peers, teachers, industry leaders).
- (I) 2.3.8 Learning activities are underpinned by scholarly evidence-based approaches (e.g. [problem-based learning](#), [inquiry-based learning](#), [peer learning](#), [team-based learning](#)).

2.4 Learner interactions with each other and their teachers are supported by the learning materials and activities, enhance collaboration, and develop a learning community and sense of belonging.

(D) 2.4.1 The activities foster a learning community by actively encouraging engagement between students, their peers, and the teaching staff (e.g. networking, teamwork, collaboration, negotiation skills).

(D) 2.4.2 Opportunities and resources are provided for learners to engage in [collaborative learning](#) and peer review/feedback.

(D) 2.4.3 Learners have opportunities and resources to provide feedback during unit delivery and after unit completion.

2.5 Learning materials are functional, inclusive and compliant with copyright, attribution and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG2.2)

(E) 2.5.1 Learning materials are appropriately sized, fit for purpose, responsive, functional on contemporary devices and appropriately optimised for screen readers (e.g. large files/formats should be optimised/compressed where applicable).

(E) 2.5.2 Links provide accurate descriptions and are functional (i.e. easy to understand without students having to read the surrounding text).

(E) 2.5.3 Visual elements convey content-relevant information and minimal decorative images are included.

(E) 2.5.4 All learning materials are appropriately referenced, including attributions for public domain or Creative Commons content.

(E) 2.5.5 Learning materials are culturally inclusive and reflect diversity (e.g. include sensitive topic warnings where appropriate, images reflect diverse groups, inclusive language is used).

(E) 2.5.6 Learning materials adhere to accessibility guidelines (WCAG2.2) in all respects.

(E) 2.5.7 Alternative formats are made available for multimedia (e.g. images and alternative texts, subtitling for video or audio, transcripts for video and audio) to support accessibility and usability.

(I) 2.5.8 If relevant, learning materials are contextualised to more than one global region.

3. Constructive alignment and assessments

Constructive alignment is a design for teaching and learning that optimises the alignment between course learning outcomes (CLOs), unit learning outcomes (ULOs), assessment tasks, and teaching and learning activities to enhance the learning experience (Biggs, 2011).

3.1 The learning outcomes allow learners to build a clear understanding of what they will be able to do upon completion of the module and unit

(E) 3.1.1 The unit learning outcomes are clearly defined, measurable and describe what learners will be able to do upon completion of the unit.

(E) 3.1.2 The intended learning outcomes are clearly defined, measurable and describe what learners will be able to do upon completion of the module; they show an explicit connection to the unit learning outcomes.

(E) 3.1.3 The learning activities and assessments are aligned with the unit learning outcomes.

3.2 The assessments accurately measure learner attainment of the unit learning outcomes and provide explicit feedback on performance

(E) 3.2.1 The assessment tasks clearly measure student achievement of the ULOs and are appropriate to the relevant unit level (1000, 2000, 3000, etc.).

(E) 3.2.2 Each assessment is valid, reliable, authentic and has undergone peer review, internal and/or external review:

- validity (the rubric measures what it is supposed to measure e.g. the ULOs)
- reliability (refer to SCU's [moderation](#) guidelines)
- **authenticity** (consistent with discipline, industry and/or accrediting bodies - refer to SCU [Policy](#)).

(E) 3.2.3 The **assessment brief** is complete and uses plain English to provide learners with detail of the assessment including rationale, instructions, resources, submission processes, special consideration instructions, GenAI (Generative Artificial Intelligence) use, Turnitin instructions, assessment criteria and rubrics.

(E) 3.2.4 The accessible PDF version of the assessment brief is in the relevant assessment folder in the unit navigation.

(D) 3.2.5 Exemplars or samples of work for each level of performance are supplied to provide a clearer understanding of expectations and standards.

(D) 3.2.6 Where applicable, industry standard technology is used in assessment tasks.

(I) 3.2.7 Assessments are designed to maximise academic standards, integrity, and security (e.g. purposeful use of GenAI; designing multiple modes of assessment such as vivas, practicals, or personal reflections).

(I) 3.2.8 Assessments are designed with a UDL focus and the three tenets of inclusion, equity and access are evident as central pillars at the assessment design stage.

3.3 Rubrics provide clear criteria and transparency to ensure consistency in grading and guide learners toward specific learning outcomes in assessments

(E) 3.3.1 Rubric criteria are aligned with the ULOs, task description/instructions, and are independent without reference to quality (e.g. instead of 'excellent depth of analysis,' use 'depth of analysis').

(E) 3.3.2 The rubric contains four to six independent criteria that do not reassess the same attribute.

(E) 3.3.3 The rubric criteria are weighted out of 100%.

(E) 3.3.4 Criteria for academic writing conventions, such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, tone and referencing, should in total not constitute more than 10% of the overall assessment, unless related explicitly to the ULOs.

(E) 3.3.5 The rubric descriptors:

- are measurable (e.g. uses an adverb to enhance the description of how a cognitive action is performed such as *correctly reproduces*).
- use advanced cognitive action verbs for higher performance and simpler cognitive action verbs for basic performance (e.g. *skilfully analyses* vs *adequately identifies*)
- show clear improvement from a passing grade to a high distinction, emphasising increased value at each performance level (see [Policy](#) for details).
- are framed positively (i.e. avoid using negative language, particularly in Pass descriptor).

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