

Step 1. Situational Factors

The first thing to do when designing a course is to size up the situation carefully. This means reviewing information already known about the teaching and learning situation and, in some cases, gathering additional information. This information will be used to make important decisions about the course.

There are several potentially important situational factors affecting a course. The general categories I have found useful to consider are the following:

- Specific Context of the Teaching/Learning Situation
- General Context of the Learning Situation
- Nature of the Subject
- Characteristics of the Learners
- Characteristics of the Teacher

The specific context factors are always important. The other factors are sometimes important, sometimes not. But it's always useful to review all of them.

The general categories (and the specific factors associated with each category) are shown in the Step 1 Worksheet. Review each of these factors with regards to your specific course. If you have information about any factor, write it down. If you don't have information, but think it could be important, write down ideas about how you might obtain it.

Step 1. Worksheet

SITUATIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

1. Specific Context of the Teaching/Learning Situation

How many students are in the class? Is the course lower division, upper division, or graduate level? How long and frequent are the class meetings? How will the course be delivered: live, online, or in a classroom or lab? What physical elements of the learning environment will affect the class?

2. General Context of the Learning Situation

What learning expectations are placed on this course or curriculum by: the university, college and/or department? the profession? society?

3. Nature of the Subject

Is this subject primarily theoretical, practical, or a combination? Is the subject primarily convergent or divergent? Are there important changes or controversies occurring within the field?

4. Characteristics of the Learners

What is the life situation of the learners (e.g., working, family, professional goals)? What prior knowledge, experiences, and initial feelings do students usually have about this subject? What are their learning goals, expectations, and preferred learning styles?

5. Characteristics of the Teacher

What beliefs and values does the teacher have about teaching and learning? What is his/her attitude toward: the subject? students? What level of knowledge or familiarity does s/he have with this subject? What are his/her strengths in teaching?