

8 Situational Lenses

S3. Subject, S4. Sequencing & S5. Space

Overview

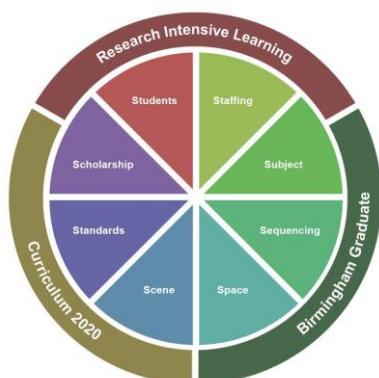
When designing or redesigning learning, whether small scale (course sections), medium (a course, module or MOOC) or large scale (programme or MOOC) the first step needs to be a careful review of the situational factors that may affect your key decisions. The situational lenses include:

1. **Students**
2. **Staffing**
3. **Subject**
4. **Sequencing**
5. **Space**
6. **Scene**
7. **Standards**
8. **Scholarship**

These all sit within the wider University of Birmingham priorities of

- Research-Intensive Learning,
- Curriculum 2020 and
- Birmingham Graduate Attributes.

You may find some lenses to be more important than others. By exploring them all you will identify the factors that are important to creating a robust learning design.



Subject

Fink (2013: 80) asks "what is the special situation[s] in this course that challenges both students and teachers to make this a meaningful learning experience?" Meyer and Land (2006) express the same concepts as the **threshold concepts** or **troublesome knowledge** that students **struggle** with.

Threshold concepts are typically core concepts or conceptual building blocks, required by the student in order to progress in understanding of a subject (eg. the idea of gravity). Meyer and Land (p.7-9) describe them as transformative, probably irreversible and integrative. Often these core concepts can be troublesome for students.

What might be the threshold concepts / special situations in your subject area?

Some additional questions to ask yourself include:

- Do you have **learning outcomes** written in clear English **that align** to the assessment and activities and content?
- What aspects of the **curriculum are becoming stale**?
- Where does **research-intensive learning feature** in the curriculum?
- How do you **embed opportunities to develop aspects of the Birmingham Graduate** or Disciplinary Graduate?
- How does **disciplinary culture impact** teaching, assessment and feedback/forward?

Sequencing

It is important to think through the time available for learning, including time "in class" and "out of class". This will depend on whether you are teaching face-to-face, blended or online and at a distance.

Curriculum 2020 may require you to move from 22 weeks of teaching to 11 weeks and require an adjustment of contact time. Distance learning (whether online or blended) can include placement and year abroad and has its own challenges. If your learners have chosen this mode of study to fit around life (work, home etc) then you should consider making adjustments to the rhythm of learning. Instead of two hours of lecturing think 5min videos or short commentaries combined with activities (multi choice questions, discussion, pause for thought submissions) or instead of an hour seminar think online text based discussion activity over two weeks or a webconference.

Don't forget that whatever you create you should include:

- a) **clear expectations** for students of themselves and staff for students
- b) **scaffolding supports** that help students engage optimally

Sequencing and space are closely aligned and should be considered together.

Space

Group Physical Space

Where are you normally or likely to be timetabled? Being aware of the physical affordances of space can help inform you of what additional technologies you might wish to explore to encourage active learning for instance.

Group Virtual Space

Everyone has virtual space with Canvas, our virtual learning environment as well as many other virtual spaces (depending on your needs and availability). Good practice, techniques and activities in traditional teaching can also be mediated by technology, opening up learning opportunities.

Have a look at the

- **Canvas Guide** (<https://canvas-guide.bham.ac.uk/>) and the
- **Learning and Teaching Gateway** (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/hefi/learning-teaching-gateway/index.aspx>) for more ideas and support.

Individual Space

The individual space of the student (part of the 200 hours of student effort per 20 credits) is also available and can be utilised through ideas such as the Flipped Classroom.

What activities might make more sense to be undertaken individually and what might make more sense to be done when the subject expert is present (group space)?

References

Diamond, R.M., (1998) Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A Practical Guide. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers: San Francisco.

Fink, L.D., (2013) Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses. John Wiley & Sons: San Francisco.

Further Reading

Advanced HE (2017) Flipped learning, <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/flipped-learning-0>

Meyer, J. and Land, R., (2006) Overcoming barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge. Routledge: Oxford.

