As this semester winds down its last month, and now that next semester’s courses have popped up in your Canvas accounts, it is time to flesh out the structure and content of the next round of classes. This transition is a good time to double-check that your course is built in the best way to enable student success. The Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs from the Online Learning Consortium (formerly Sloan-C), provides a guide to better course design.

While it is billed as a tool for online, the classroom factors in the scorecard are relevant to both online and face-to-face courses, so this checklist is worth a look, no matter your style or mode of teaching. Available at http://goo.gl/1wP96D, the scorecard aims at program-wide improvements, so the Consortium identifies areas like Institutional Support and Technology Support that may not pertain to your individual class (although filling this out at the department level isn’t a bad idea to ensure good program design). For an individual class, start at the third section, “Course Development/Instructional Design.” Here you take a step back to examine the course as a whole before looking at specific strategies and content. Does its design really help students meet measurable outcomes? Does the technology used have a real purpose, or should it be scrapped as “superfluous?”

The “Course Structure” section specifies many course components that either prohibit or enable better student learning, depending on how well they are crafted. Does the syllabus adequately help students understand the course requirements, both logistical and academic? Are students aware of the resources available and how to access them for additional help?

The final two sections before the checklist returns to the departmental or institutional-level items are “Teaching and Learning” and “Social and Student Engagement.” These sections help you evaluate whether several components exist in the course, including high-quality feedback, strategies for teacher presence, and peer interactions.

Quality student experiences start with a course designed to ease students’ navigation through challenging content. Tools like this scorecard are a simple way to do this. For an even deeper look at your course, Sandy Valenti is our resident expert in the Quality Matters benchmarks for course design. We are both available to help you evaluate and trouble-shoot your courses at whatever level you feel is necessary, so drop us a line.

Handy Tool of the Month:

According to my To-Do list, it is grant proposal season. If you are having trouble making your applications, reports, or other educational documents sound fancy-pants enough to impress, try the Educational Jargon Creator @ http://www.sciencegeek.net/lingo.html.

With just a button click, you too can “visualize technology-infused outcomes for our 21st Century learners,” or, “agendize socio-emotional scaffolding via self-reflection.” Give it a shot!

*Note: For entertainment purposes only. Or to see you whether you have been writing proposals like an education robot.
Tips for helping struggling readers

**Dyslexie:** I saw several sensational headlines this week about a revolutionary new font called “Dyslexie” that helps readers with dyslexia breeze through text with higher speeds and fewer errors.

Okay, so reviewing the “positive” research studies showed absurdly small sample sizes and mixed results. And the most positive indicators were found in a subjective “Do you think you were faster?” type of survey. But giving the very strong anecdotal evidence the benefit of the doubt, let’s take a look at what this font does, as well as a few other guidelines that their website provides. You’re seeing several of them demonstrated here.

**Text Layout:** Perhaps the strongest takeaway from Dyslexie, if you don’t buy the hype about its scientific effectiveness, is the series of layout tips that their website provides. You’re seeing several of them demonstrated here.

Break big blocks of text into manageable chunks. This might mean writing with shorter sentences. Brevity = readability.

Use narrow columns to make it easier for readers to keep their place in the small areas of text. Dyslexie recommends a column width of 6-9 words.

Keep plenty of space around text and between columns to keep readers’ eyes from getting lost on the page.

Use left justification to make jagged paragraphs. Full justification to form text into blocks of uniform width makes it harder to keep track of which line you are reading.

So even if you stick with a sans serif font like Arial, Helvetica, or Veranda, there are a few simple things that can make reading your class materials easier for students of all abilities.

I should add that dyslexia-proof fonts have been done before. **OpenDyslexic** is another freebie with the added bonus that it is compatible with iPads, while Dyslexie is still working on that.