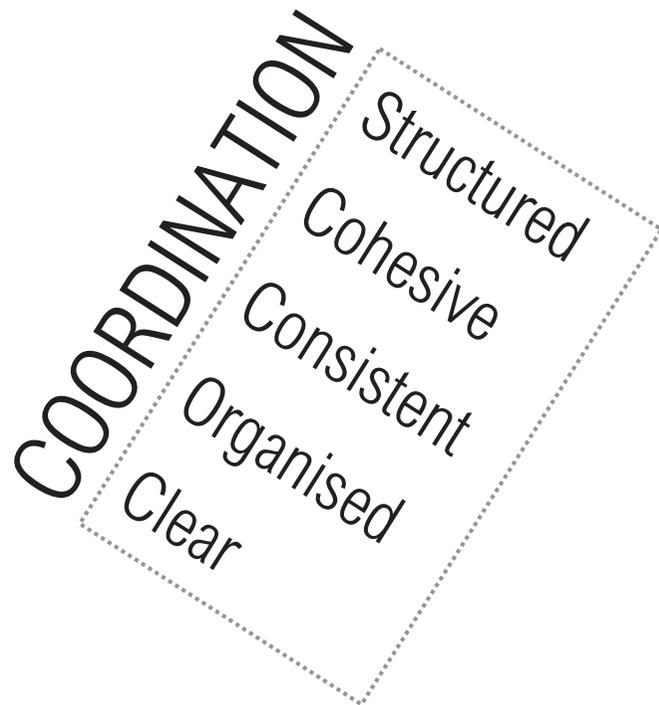
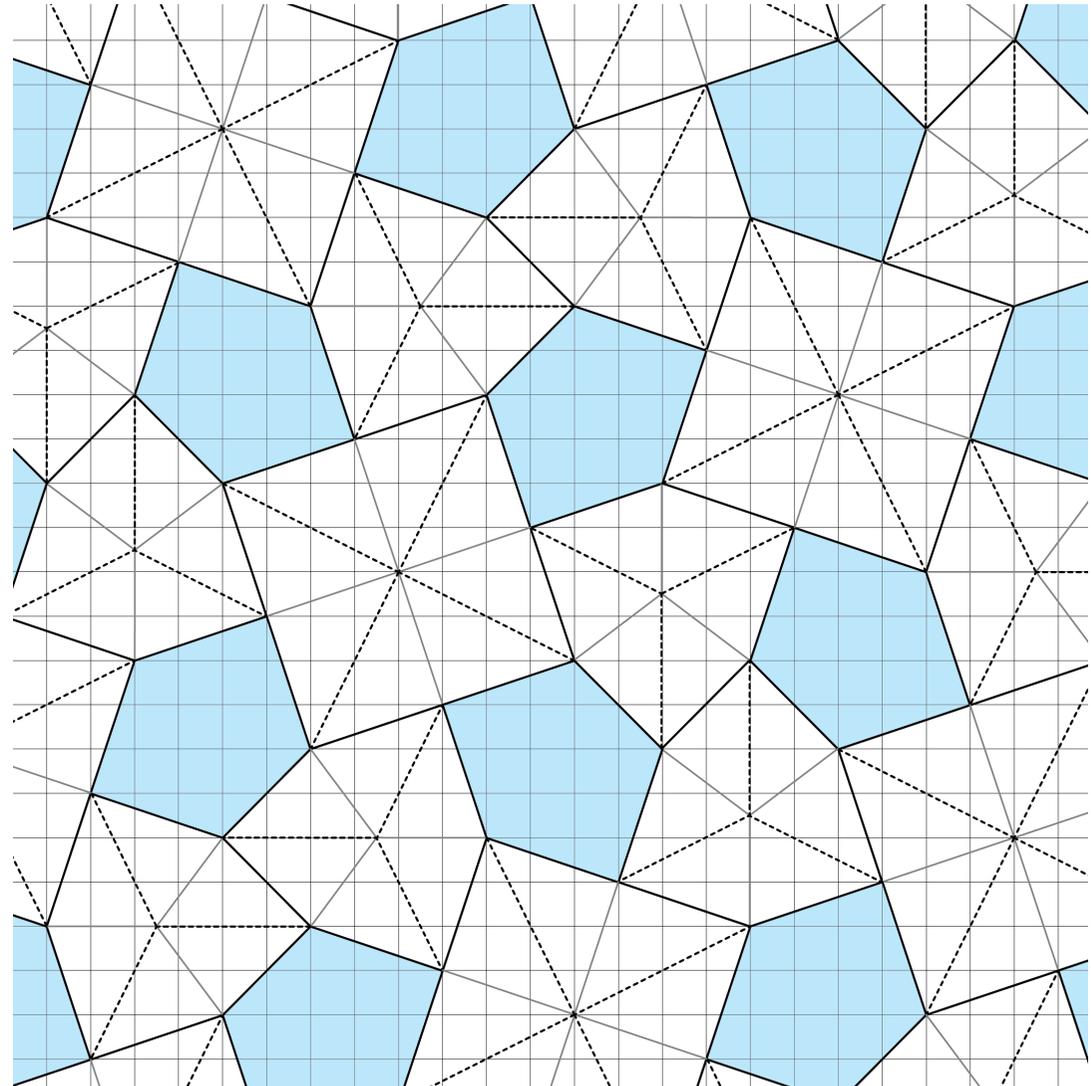


Tactics for Subject Coordination



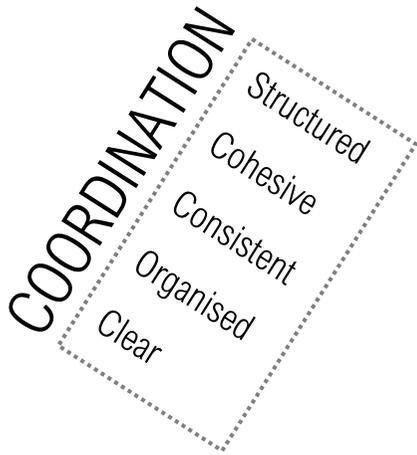
Built Environments Learning and Teaching Group
University of Melbourne
Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning
<https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/belt>

December 2019



SES Question 2: "Overall, this subject has been well coordinated"

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a "well-coordinated" subject?



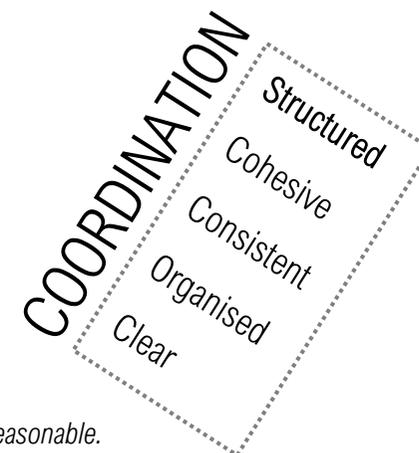
Well-coordinated subjects are...

1. **Structured**
To students, the design of subject content/activities follows a structure that is logical, predictable, and reasonable.
2. **Cohesive**
Students recognise alignment across lecture, assignment and tutorial content/activities.
3. **Consistent**
When it comes to subject expectations and objectives, students are receiving consistent messages across staff members.
4. **Organised**
Logistical planning of student activities enables a smooth learning experience.
5. **Clear**
Subject documentation is straightforward and transparent in terms of information and expectations of students.

SES Question 2: "Overall, this subject has been well coordinated"

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a "well-coordinated" subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. Consistent
4. Organised
5. Clear



Structured Sessions, Individually and Across the Semester

It is important to students that the design of subject content and activities follows a structure that is logical, predictable, and reasonable.

Coordination Tactic	Examples	Things to Consider (potential challenges / translation to other teaching contexts)
<u>Signposting</u> at the beginning and/or end of lectures and tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – At the beginning of every lecture, show a consistent slide that communicates the timeline/major milestones of the subject to contextualise that week's content and activities. – Provide synopses on Canvas that relates weekly content to what comes before and after. – Present content across the semester as a continuous conversation, frequently referencing previous and upcoming content/activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Seeing the same slide at the start of each lecture can be boring and formulaic. – Does every subject need to be structured in a linear way? – How does cohort size impact which communication modes are most effective? – Consider multiple approaches and venues for signposting (e.g., visual/active/verbal, in lectures/tutorials/Canvas).
<u>Pacing</u> student workload and communicating "crunch times"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use a "Welcome to the Week" video or email to communicate to students applicable strategies for managing/planning their workload. – Before the start of semester, create a spreadsheet of weekly content and expected student workload (update using student feedback) – Consider concurrent subjects in curriculum by populating a calendar of key dates shared by subject coordinators. – Use an application to track how much time students spend to complete online quizzes and particular questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Delivery of messages regarding workload management may be similar or different from year-to-year, depending on how much the subject and cohort composition tends to change. – Watch out for being overambitious when it comes to estimating student workloads. – Some cohorts are comprised of students who are not taking the same concurrent subjects, meaning their "crunch times" do not necessarily align with one another.
<u>Allocating</u> weighting of each assessment task to correspond to anticipated effort required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – For tasks with significant weight (e.g., 50% or more), consider designing them as an aggregation of content/skills acquired over the semester; communicate these as synthesising opportunities. – Respond carefully to students who claim that they put more effort into a task than it was allocated; consider framing the discrepancy between time spent and time allocated as an issue of freedom/responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Given that the effort required for any given task can vary quite dramatically from student to student, how can this be managed in terms of coordination? – Anticipated time is particularly difficult to predict for creative tasks

SES Question 2: *“Overall, this subject has been well coordinated”*

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a “well-coordinated” subject?

1. **Structured**
2. Cohesive
3. Consistent
4. Organised
5. Clear

Related Student Quotations

“The assignments were well organised in terms of the time they were due in semester. It was much better to have the more time consuming/difficult assignment at the beginning of semester when people weren't as under the pump from other subjects.”

“All the tasks were so clear and there was a very clear progression from one task to the next.”

“Even as little as ten minutes at the beginning of the lecture allocated to concisely explaining the deliverables and clarifying the assignment would suffice.”

“The course structure overall is confusing and there should be more structure in place.”

“The subject seemed to jump around too much, it was hard to follow understand if there was actually a chronological order for learning things or if they were just thrown in wherever.”

References

“Design & Teach a Course” by Carnegie Mellon University's Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation:

<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/contentschedule.html>

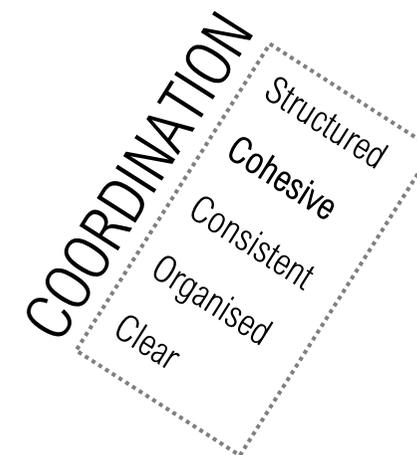
“Planning Your Course: A Decision Guide” by Cornell University's Center for Teaching Innovation:

<https://teaching.cornell.edu/resource/planning-your-course-decision-guide>

SES Question 2: “Overall, this subject has been well coordinated”

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a “well-coordinated” subject?

1. Structured
2. **Cohesive**
3. Consistent
4. Organised
5. Clear



Cohesive Alignment of Subject Activities

When content is aligned across lectures, assignments and tutorials, students consider this evidence that the subject is well-coordinated.

Designing each session to directly support learning aims follows the principle of “constructive alignment” and can address this challenge of cohesion.

Coordination Tactic	Examples	Things to Consider (potential challenges / translation to other teaching contexts)
<u>Aligning</u> weekly content and learning activities to explicitly support learning aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In weekly presentations and documentation, make explicit reference to the current assessment task and associated learning aims. – Present a subject calendar that clearly communicates alignment across subject content, activities, and assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider how cultural/academic background might impact expectations of constructive alignment. – Does every lecture and tutorial need to be explicitly tied to specific subject learning aims?
<u>Designing</u> tutorials to reinforce deeper/applied comprehension of that week’s focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explain to students the justification for when alignment is and is not happening; remind them of this as needed – Communicate to students that drawing connections between different subject activities is, in fact, part of <i>their</i> responsibility as critical independent thinkers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider how explicit the connections between different subject parts need to be; involve students in this conversation. – Some subjects budget for tutors to attend lectures, which can accentuate connections between lecture content and tutorials – How much structure you provide to tutors may depend on the nature of the subject, the size of your teaching team, etc.
<u>Curating</u> guest lecture content to align with current assessment task and content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discuss with each guest lecturer how their content fits into the subject structure and how signposting might help emphasise this to students. – Engage the guest lecturer (or a panel of them) in a dialogue during the session, purposely relating the material to other subject activities; allow students to also participate in this way. – Communicate to students the value that guest lecturers bring to the subject (e.g., that their specialty/perspective falls outside your own area of expertise/worldview). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Framing guest lecture content often requires communicating this to speakers well enough in advance to allow it to inform their presentation. – Not all guest lectures are receptive to having their content framed by the coordinator, whether done in advance or “live”. – Always confirm with each guest lecturer whether they approve posting their slides to LMS—or whether the slides need amending before posting.

SES Question 2: *“Overall, this subject has been well coordinated”*

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a “well-coordinated” subject?

1. Structured
2. **Cohesive**
3. Consistent
4. Organised
5. Clear

Related Student Quotations

“The content was interesting and the tutorials provided an excellent place to discuss and deepen knowledge and understanding of the lecture content. The assignments were also great, they facilitated better application of skill and knowledge, all around excellent course planning and delivery of information.”

“The best aspect of the subject was how the lecture content directly related to the [project]. This way we were able to apply our knowledge directly to the [project] while simultaneously getting clarification through the tutorials.”

“The general organisation of the subject felt really messy, and often the timing of lectures, workshops and tutorials did not seem to be carefully thought out of how best to interact with each other.”

“Guest lectures could be improved. There have been a few where they were overly general, or some that have repeated previous content.”

“Guest lecturers were all over the shop at times and often failed to link back to the content, ended up just giving their life story / experiences and seemed irrelevant to our learning.”

References

“Aligned Course Design”, by University of Minnesota’s Center for Educational Innovation:

<https://cei.umn.edu/aligned-course-design>

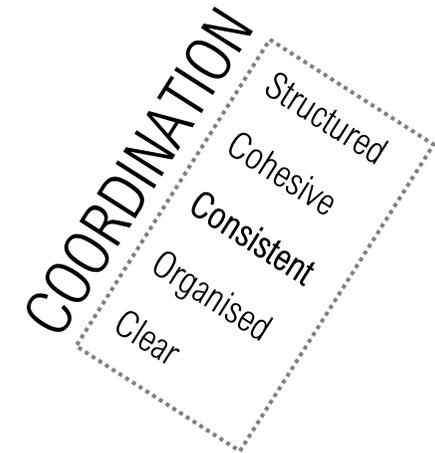
“Constructive Alignment”, by Charles Sturt University’s Division of Learning and Teaching:

<https://www.csu.edu.au/division/learning-and-teaching/home/assessment-and-moderation/assessment-resources-and-information/constructive-alignment>

SES Question 2: “Overall, this subject has been well coordinated”

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a “well-coordinated” subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. **Consistent**
4. Organised
5. Clear



Consistent Staff Expectations and Objectives

Many subject offerings in ABP are comprised of teaching teams. A key challenge is to ensure that students are receiving consistent messages across staff members, as students interpret this as evidence of a well-coordinated subject.

Coordination Tactic	Examples	Things to Consider (potential challenges / translation to other teaching contexts)
<u>Communicating</u> regularly with your teaching colleagues to develop a consistent team approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Schedule teaching coordination meetings at several points during the semester to discuss challenges and strategies related to communicating with students. – Meet with tutors in Week 0 to decide on communication protocols. – Use group communication tools (i.e. Zoom, WhatsApp) to share communication strategies and announcements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Account for costs of coordination meetings; budget accordingly – Consider using a limited number of communication platforms and adapting to whatever works best for the tutors – New tutors may require guidance for communicating with students in a way that remains consistent with other tutors. – Some students may strategically ask the same question to multiple staff members to see if they receive different answers.
<u>Sharing</u> documents with tutors that provide a structure and set of objectives for each tutorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Share weekly outlines with tutors of tutorial tasks and objectives. – Rotate responsibility for designing weekly learning activities amongst teaching team (use these as a basis for following year). – Record a video/podcast to be played by tutors in tutorials at the launch of each assessment task. – Provide tutors with slides to use as visual references or talking points to encourage/structure tutorial discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not everything requires consistency across tutorials (i.e., teaching style), but consider what students expect to be consistent and what requires explanation/justification – Be aware of “rogue” tutors adjusting expectations and deliverables—or giving mini-lectures during tutorial sessions. – Beware of tutors getting competitive with one another and using student outputs as a proxy for their own self-worth
<u>Observing</u> at least one of each tutor’s sessions per semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Schedule visits to each tutorial by the end of the third week, followed by one-on-one debriefs with tutors about what you observed; a group discussion with the team may also be useful. – When visiting, draw an annotated diagram of spatial arrangements, including students and tutors; discuss with the teaching team. – Rotate tutors around tutorial groupings to reduce discrepancies. – Collect feedback from students midway through the semester specifically regarding the level of consistency between tutorials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Scheduling visits may be challenging if coordinator has concurrent tutorial; in this case, consider rotating instead – Consider pros/cons of making active contribution during visit – Consider the dynamic between tutor and students, which can be affected by student demographics/background/level – Students may feel disadvantaged being assigned to particular tutors; consider “talking up” each tutor in the first lecture as a way of reducing this perceived discrepancy

SES Question 2: "Overall, this subject has been well coordinated"

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a "well-coordinated" subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. **Consistent**
4. Organised
5. Clear

Related Student Quotations

"There wasn't always a clear set of expectations. They differed between tutor groups, and some tutors either weren't able to clarify them, or would be giving incorrect information to the class, seemingly due to a lack of consistent information between all tutors and coordinators."

"Different students had different requirements because of different tutors and I feel that this should be improved... There should be more consistency between the different tutors in terms of objectives."

"Tutors and lecturers were not consistent in how they explained the modules and the requirements they were expecting in final submissions. This made assessment completion confusing and stressful."

"There seemed to be a serious lack of communication to the tutors as to what was expected from each submission."

"I do understand that tutors might have different opinions from one another, but the workload requirement should be consistent across the subject."

References

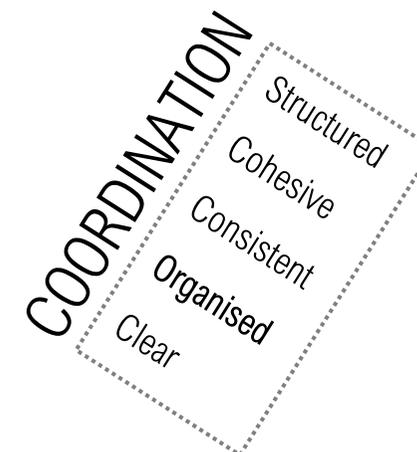
"A CLASS Act: The teaching team approach to subject coordination," by Lefoe *et al.* in *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice* 10(3), 2013:
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1375&context=jutlp>

For more information on the Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) project, funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC):
<https://research.uow.edu.au/class/index.html>

SES Question 2: “Overall, this subject has been well coordinated”

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a “well-coordinated” subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. Consistent
4. **Organised**
5. Clear



Organised Logistical Planning

The degree to which a subject appears to have been logistically planned directly contributes to its perceived degree of coordination.

Coordination Tactic	Examples	Things to Consider (potential challenges / translation to other teaching contexts)
<u>Scheduling</u> and organising student access to learning spaces, equipment and off-site opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Schedule groups of students to complete any necessary FabLab inductions during timetabled sessions (medical forms required). – Before using any learning space, visit the room and test the audio/video/IT systems to confirm they are suitable and functional. – If students are likely to be accessing any sites on or off campus, communicate with site/facility managers as necessary to discuss challenges regarding accessibility. Complete risk assessment form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Avoid scheduling any opportunities outside timetabled sessions, as students will have other commitments. – Confirm student access, even to MSD facilities, especially if your timetabled sessions fall outside regular working hours. – Be aware that last-minute increases in student enrollment can lead to significant logistical conflicts; anticipate and develop a contingency plan.
<u>Setting</u> major deadlines carefully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Avoid conflicts with other commitments and deadlines shared across the student cohort, working with other subject coordinators as needed. – Avoid shifting deadlines once the semester is underway! If absolutely necessary, due to unforeseen circumstances, communicate your reasoning of these changes to students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coordinating across subjects may only be feasible for subjects with cohorts of shared pathways or degree courses. – For deadline setting, flexibility is somewhat limited by the suggested number of assessments per semester.
<u>Using</u> Canvas or other online systems effectively to deliver the subject and enhance the student experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – When it comes to LMS user experience, use templates and tools that students are likely familiar with (discuss with other subject coordinators as necessary). – Design the LMS site to be interactive rather than just a repository. – Periodically incorporate online learning as a topic for lecture/tutorial discussions. – Use migration as an opportunity to rethink LMS! Work <u>with</u> the structure and interface of Canvas, not against it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – As far as your LMS strategy, be predictable and consistent throughout the semester. – When developing a strategy for providing material on LMS (everything at the beginning or a sequential roll-out), be careful not to overload students, whilst still providing sufficient information for those who like to plan ahead.

SES Question 2: "Overall, this subject has been well coordinated"

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a "well-coordinated" subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. Consistent
- 4. Organised**
5. Clear

Related Student Quotations

"The co-ordination with [a related subject] was really appreciated. Having them due on the same week would have been very bad for both subjects."

"There was adequate time in labs and tutes to work on and review work."

"I understand as a subject you are encouraged to incorporate MSD facilities into your assignments... However, forcing [all] students to only use [certain tools] was never going to practically work. [MSD facilities do not] have the capacity to complete jobs for [this many] students within that small [of a] time frame."

"Some forewarning about site visits requiring and needing adequate timing to get to and from locations would have been nice earlier on in the enrolment process. I couldn't make it to some of the site visits because the tutorial times didn't fit with my timetable. Knowing this when enrolling meant I could've rearranged the time table."

"The subject reader and the prescribed text were unavailable at the co-op bookstore. This impacted on the first few weeks of learning negatively and was quite frustrating."

References

From the BEL+T website

"Great Teaching at ABP: Organised Learning Experiences" <https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/belt/great-teaching-at-abp/delivering-teaching>

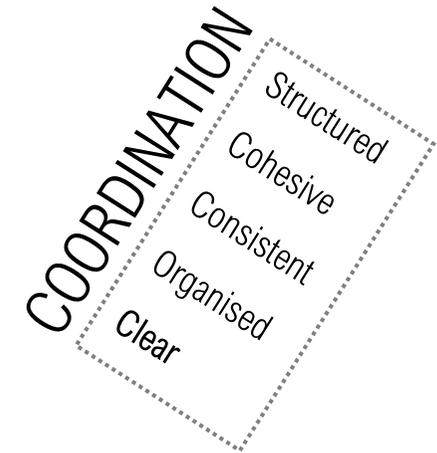
"ABP Teaching Toolbox: Administering a Subject" <https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/belt/abp-teaching-toolbox/administering-a-subject>

"ABP Teaching Toolbox: Canvas" <https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/belt/abp-teaching-toolbox/canvas>

SES Question 2: “Overall, this subject has been well coordinated”

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a “well-coordinated” subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. Consistent
4. Organised
5. Clear



Clear and Transparent Subject Documentation

Students tend to underscore the value of a clear set of written policies, information, and expectations they can use to guide their learning.

Coordination Tactic	Examples	Things to Consider (potential challenges / translation to other teaching contexts)
<u>Being</u> predictable regarding timeframes and deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide all submission details to students at Week 0, rather than distributing over the course of the semester. – Clarify procedures and rules for late submissions. – Provide a checklist of deliverables for each assessment task; align this to the assessment rubric to clarify various levels of expectations and minimum standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Be clear about what <u>cannot</u>, in fact, be prescriptive/linear (i.e., the design process or particular order of operations) – Be aware of scheduling conflicts that lie outside of your control (i.e., holidays, major events, concurrent deadlines, etc.) to limit the chance that any major changes will need to occur once the semester is underway
<u>Communicating</u> clearly to students the structure of the subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Align the subject structure to submissions, and use a subject schedule to emphasise key dates. – Present a typical “emotional map” of the learning experience, including moments of frustration/panic/anxiety to clarify to students that these should be anticipated but that they will survive. – Refer directly to subject documentation as needed and in the context of particular concerns/issues; reiterate subject structure using a variety of communication modes to (i.e., face-to-face, LMS announcements, documentation, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Students prefer receiving structure and key dates in Week 0 for planning purposes – Consider ways of encouraging students to read subject documentation/communications by employing good design/formatting and including engaging content
<u>Connecting</u> subject documentation to the University and ABP Faculty context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Include language shared across curricular pathways/courses on student expectations, as well as policy links for themes like academic integrity, accessibility and inclusion. – Other ABP-wide topics might include policies/links for off-site learning, health and safety, printing, academic support, etc. – Ensure that the current content in the subject handbook entry aligns with the subject guide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Be aware of the TLDR (“too long, didn’t read”) reaction – Consider disseminating subject documentation in parts <u>as well as</u> the whole document in advance, to accommodate different student approaches to receiving such information – Consider that Canvas now has a built-in function for linking to course-wide information within individual subject modules – Consider including a glossary of discipline-specific terms frequently encountered across the course/pathway

SES Question 2: "Overall, this subject has been well coordinated"

Through the eyes of students, what are the characteristics of a "well-coordinated" subject?

1. Structured
2. Cohesive
3. Consistent
4. Organised
5. Clear

Related Student Quotations

"The subject guide was clear and concise, and the checklists for each task made sure that requirements were met and nothing was missed."

"[The teaching team] managed to communicate very clearly the expectations of assignments, and the LMS content (including the videos, emails, announcements) [was] greatly appreciated, and very clear."

"The assignments in general were well organised and the subject guide/s were clear, concise and easy to follow."

"I have found it difficult to understand assignment instructions. I would appreciate clearer instructions as I kept finding myself confused on what I should be doing."

"Assignments brief are not explained clearly in either lectures or tutorials; the criteria and deliverable are very confusing."

"The subject guide does not help, and is formatted poorly, so it's hard to navigate."

References

"Syllabus Design" by Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/syllabus-design/>

Kevin Gannon's "How to Create a Syllabus," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-syllabus>