



How to Write Effective Course Descriptions

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This guide for writing course descriptions was developed in response to an identified need to build capacity and to support the work of curriculum developers across the college.

It is also meant to be a resource for those involved in curriculum development and the Education Approvals process, such as Faculty Curriculum Leads, School Curriculum Committees, the Integrated Curriculum Committee, and Education Council.

The content was informed by current leading practices in curriculum, research on Canadian post-secondary practices, and scholarship in curriculum development and design.

The guide was developed by Charlotte Sheldrake, Deidre Murphy, and Mavis Smith in the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and was presented to Education Council on December 14, 2022.

HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

What is the purpose of a course description?

The purpose of a course description is to tell the story of a course. It provides a brief overview of what students will learn and experience in the course.

Who is the intended audience?

- Prospective students (on the college website)
- Enrolled students (on the course syllabus)
- Faculty
- Education Council

Other potential audiences may include articulation and accrediting bodies.

What should be included in a course description?

- WHAT students will learn in the course, as articulated in the course learning outcomes
 - Key concepts, themes, principles, topics
 - Skills and abilities
 - Attitudes, values, and other attributes
- HOW students will learn
 - Significant, unique, or applied learning opportunities that students will experience

What are the guidelines for writing a course description?

- Write from a student or learner-centred perspective by articulating what is learned and experienced, rather than what is taught. For example, focus on key themes, knowledge, skills, and abilities, rather than listing a series of topics.
- Write the description in a way that shows why the learning will matter to students.
- Ensure that the description broadly reflects and aligns with the focus and intent of the course learning outcomes.
- Consider starting the description with an impactful statement or question directly related to the discipline or course that will draw prospective learners in or arouse curiosity about the course.
- Use clear, accessible, and dynamic language and vocabulary that will appeal to the audience and reflect the nature of the subject or discipline.
- Length: Approximately 100 words

Who can I consult with if I need help with writing course descriptions?

- **Faculty Curriculum Leads (FCLs)** in your School, who can direct you to resources and provide support as you proceed through the Education Approvals process
- The **Curriculum Development & Program Renewal (CDPR)** team in CETL, who can be consulted on creating and revising all aspects of curriculum, including program and course descriptions and learning outcomes
- The **School Curriculum Committee (SCC)**, whose function is to review and assess the benefits of curriculum changes to ensure that the changes meet student needs and institutional standards and priorities

Who reviews course descriptions?

- The [School Curriculum Committee](#) (SCC) within each school
- The [Integrated Curriculum Committee](#) (ICC), a subcommittee of Education Council, reviews and evaluates curriculum and recommends it for approval by Education Council (Ed Co)

Who approves course descriptions?

- Ed Co approves all program and course curricula at the College
 - Only approved curriculum may be used in program and course-related documentation such as a [course syllabus](#)
 - Any changes to program and/or course curricula must be approved by Ed Co

For more information on the Education Approvals process, see [Approvals Steps Explained](#) on the [Education Approvals SharePoint](#) site.

Following is a list of approved course descriptions from across the college. Each reflects different elements of an effective course description.

Annotated Examples - Approved Camosun College Course Descriptions

Written from a collaborative student and instructor perspective

ANTH-280 Anthropology of Death

Students, using an anthropological approach, will explore one of life's inevitabilities: death. While death is a biological reality, its definition and meaning are profoundly shaped by culture. We will survey a wide variety of funerary traditions to understand how these rituals help define death, guide the behaviour of those grieving, and structure the ongoing relations between the living and their dead. We will examine the similarities and differences in conceptions of the human body, death, and death rites in time and space, and consider our own cultural practices in cross-cultural perspective.

Has an intriguing, compelling hook

Clearly articulates key concepts

ICS 223 - Gaming and Graphics Concepts

Have you ever wanted to learn how games are designed? In this course you will learn about game design, development skills and processes needed in the interactive entertainment industry through the use of software development tools. At the end of this course, you will have developed an event-driven interactive game.

Draws in prospective learners

Shows why the learning matters to students

IST 120 - Indigenous Peoples/TELTIN TTE WILNEW

TELTIN TTE WILNEW, a SENCOTEN phrase meaning Understanding Indigenous People. This unique, award-winning course is intended for students unfamiliar with Indigenous world-views. Participants will learn from Indigenous people about Indigenous worldviews and colonization through video, audio interviews, radio shows and scholarly articles. The purpose of the course is to dispel stereotypes and myths, to enable learners to understand the experience of Indigenous peoples in a Canadian context, and to equip them with the knowledge and skills to begin to interact respectfully with Indigenous peoples in community and in the workplace. Discussions are conducted in circle format with an Indigenous facilitator.

Starts with a definition and an impactful statement

Clearly states the purpose

Describes unique learning opportunities

Written from a student perspective

BIOL 090 - Biology for Post-Secondary Preparation

Broadly describes content and themes

Learners will gain an understanding of basic life processes and acquire the human biology theoretical and laboratory foundations required for successful transition to first-year post-secondary majors biology courses, including anatomy and physiology. Learners will discuss animal and plant cellular structure and function, the mechanisms underlying cell reproduction, gene expression and energy production, and the anatomy and physiology of whole animals. As a preparatory course, an emphasis will be placed upon teaching learning skills effective for studying biology.

Emphasizes the course purpose and its preparatory focus

Written from a student perspective

ELC 170 - Working with Family and Community

Students will be introduced to understanding the changing roles of families in our current society. Students study developmental tasks of families, historical and emerging themes with an emphasis on supporting families and establishing respectful, reciprocal partnerships. Students will be introduced to Indigenous world views in order to broaden their thinking about children and their families, including the impact of residential schools and on-going colonization and skills of reconciliation. Families are viewed within a strengths-based perspective and special emphasis is placed on the knowledge, skills, beliefs and values required to work in partnership with diverse families.

Broadly describes key themes and knowledge

Reflects attitudes and values of the discipline which inform the learning

Written from a student perspective

Begins with an impactful statement

BUS 318 - Recruitment, Selection & Retention

Students will examine current and future recruitment, selection, and engagement strategies in high performance organizations. With an emphasis on applied learning, students will analyze the complexities of employment issues, trends and legislative requirements affecting recruitment and selection. Students will develop and apply competency-based selection processes and methodologies to source, recruit and elect the best candidates for the organization.

Broadly describes both what and how students

Broadly reflects and aligns with the focus and intent of the course learning outcomes

Shows why the learning will matter to students

BUS 318 Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Identify how strategic recruitment and selection functions relate to organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
2. Identify, adapt, and implement strategic recruitment approaches that are effective, efficient, and legally compliant.
3. Develop comprehensive recruitment and selection processes including clarification of job competencies, designation of selection criteria, and utilization of appropriate screening procedures.
4. Apply competency-based selection interviewing to implement recruitment and selection processes.
5. Critique and assess the effectiveness of recruitment and selection techniques.
6. Select and adapt retention strategies to meet employee needs and reflect the requirements and values of the organization.