

## **Guidelines for teaching in time-shortened, intensive, or summer school settings**

This guide is designed to support academic staff at the University of Canterbury teaching in time-shortened settings. The process of transitioning standard semester-length courses to intensive or summer school formats requires more than the compression of lectures and teaching and learning resources. The following guidelines have been developed following an extensive review of the most recent research literature with respect to course compression. Subsequent to a brief summary of the benefits of course compression, we will address five main areas. These are:

1. approaches to teaching,
2. course design,
3. the classroom setting,
4. the blended/online environment, and
5. assessment.

For each area we highlight relevant issues and what staff can do to address those in the context of their own teaching.

### **The benefits of course compression – sometimes less is more**

Research into compressed teaching formats generally demonstrates that summer papers – to include those in time-shortened, intensive or block formats – can be *at least as effective* for student learning as standard semester length equivalents (Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010; Tatum, 2010; Vren & McFadden, 2007; Anastasi, 2007; Davies, 2006; Crowe et al., 2005; Seamon, 2004; Wlodkowski, 2003). This research challenges the views of some teaching staff that traditional formats embody what constitute normal methods and pacing for learning and that ‘good learning’ requires traditional semester-length structures (Swenson, 2003). A common assumption is that reduced time leads to reduced quality. However, recent evidence suggests that this is not entirely so.

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The greatest challenge for compressed teaching formats rests with achieving academic rigor (Crowe et al., 2005) and devising quality learning opportunities (Wlodkowski, 2003), rather than time directly spent on task or 'contact time' in face-to-face classroom settings. Moreover, when designed effectively the learning environments created in compressed formats have demonstrated the potential to be superior to semester-based equivalents (Scott, 2003), even when student and teacher characteristics are accounted for (Seamon, 2004). This does not imply that compressed, intensive or time-shortened formats should become the norm, as the nature of such learning experiences does limit the number of courses that can be undertaken simultaneously.

Though the objective of this guideline is not to review the literature of compressed formats *per se*, we want to briefly address the benefits for both students and teachers. When high-quality compressed courses are planned and provided, benefits include the potential for:

- Less competition for available time, which can enable greater focussed time on teaching-learning activities (or more uninterrupted 'time on task')
- More challenging and engaging settings, which can stimulate higher-order learning
- Improved classroom relationships built on co-operation and better communications
- Greater emphasis on core and 'threshold' concepts
- Better overall student performance, as compared with identical assessments from semester-length courses
- More memorable learning experiences.

Greater detail on the rationale and associated research leading to these benefits can be found in the resources cited at the end of these guidelines. The authors strongly urge academic staff offering

summer courses or time-shortened programmes, particularly for the first time, to pursue them. In doing so, we draw your attention to the following articles: Scott (2003) 'Attributes of high quality intensive courses'; Swenson (2003) 'Accelerated and traditional formats: Using learning as a criterion for quality'; and Anastasi (2007) 'Full-semester and abbreviated Summer courses: an evaluation of student performance'.

Following are specific approaches supported by research and staff experience that can assist staff in developing high-quality compressed courses, both face-to-face and in blended or online teaching environments.

## 1. Approaches to teaching in compressed formats

What is the issue?	What actions can I take to address it?
<p><b>1.1 Student preparation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear expectations of students, to include day-to-day and weekly actions necessary for learning and successful completion</li> <li>• Highlight potential challenges of working in summer or compressed formats</li> <li>• Clarify course requirements explicitly, including reading materials, level of participation, workload, expected quality of work and assessment</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: time and energy spent by students on figuring out the course structure, expectations, assignment formats and specifications, and due dates is time and energy not spent on learning.</p>

<p><b>1.1 Rapport with and between students</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure students perceive and recognize that they are valued as contributors to the class</li> <li>• Be enthusiastic about teaching in this approach</li> <li>• Approach students with a willingness to engage with and learn from them, particularly with respect to how their learning can be enhanced in this different time-frame</li> <li>• Show willingness and flexibility to adapt teaching practice to address learners' needs</li> <li>• Ensure communications are clear and understood</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: Both vertical (instructor-student) and horizontal (student-student) communication is vital to create the sense of a classroom community (especially online) and reduce student feelings of anonymity. A stronger sense of community can help students better meet the challenges involved and improve course completion rates.</p>
<p><b>1.2 Flexibility</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be flexible about pace and timing of the course – some tasks or areas may be completed more quickly or may take longer than initially planned.</li> <li>• Provide alternatives for students – what content knowledge can be acquired in different ways, through student or group selections of learning pathways, or via different assessment options?</li> <li>• Create time for students to reflect on what they are learning and how that learning can be applied or extended – this can enhance the benefits of 'depth over breadth' curricular approaches used in successful time-shortened formats (refer 2.3 below).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide advance information and, where possible, consult with students prior to enrolment to respond to any questions</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: Signalling to students that instructors will do what they can (within reason) to help them succeed in the course can help them feel less overwhelmed and stressed. If they have options to choose from (e.g., different types of assignments), they can approach course material in their own way.</p>
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## 2. Compressing course content and design

What is the issue?	What actions can I take to address it?
<p><b>2.1 Organisation of material and resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review teaching and study materials, including course readings, with a view to focussing on essential resources avoid the course becoming overwhelming. This is particularly vital for team-taught papers.</li> <li>• Align and link course content, learning activities and assessment tasks, and clarify those connections for students. Internal consistency between learning activities and assessment, individual projects and group work, and contact time and individual activities will help students succeed in the course.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: In summer, compressed or otherwise intensive courses, students (and instructors) have limited capacity and time to process complex information. More than ever, students need a clear structure of content and concepts.</p>

<p><b>2.2 Relevance of content</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt material to be relevant to students wherever possible. Making use of students' prior knowledge and experiences can enhance learning and foster more rapid uptake of ideas, concepts and skills.</li> <li>Individualise instruction through the use of independent journals, contextualised assessment and personal reflection tasks.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: As with clearer connections between content, learning activities and assessments, better links between course materials and students' experiences improve engagement and enhance learning.</p>
<p><b>2.3 Depth over breadth</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritise learning resources and activities that encourage deeper engagement and higher-order learning (synthesising, analysing &amp; problem solving) over straight content acquisition.</li> <li>Create opportunities for reflection. Journals, small group breakout sessions, online discussion forums, informal individual assignments that require feedback to the larger group, and contextualised projects all encourage students to reflect on material learned.</li> <li>Combine a number of assessment objectives or components into fewer integrated projects, that are accomplished through ongoing and connected stages.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: If too many topics are crammed into limited time, the heightened cognitive load on students causes them to be less likely to a) remember and b) see the connection between topics.</p>

<p><b>2.4 Availability of learning resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make materials and resources readily accessible. Unless literature searches and associated skills are part of the core objectives and measurable outcomes of the course, provide easy access resources (e.g., through course readers within LEARN, direct links to online materials, etc).</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: Rather than information gathering, focus student time and attention on learning activities, communications and engagement.</p>
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### 3. Effective learning environments in compressed courses

What is the issue?	What actions can I take to address it?
<p><b>3.1 Active learning and varied teaching methods</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimise the use of lectures in preference for more active learning approaches.</li> <li>Elevate classroom interaction and discussion (to include options for chats and discussion forums inside LEARN) as a tool for facilitating active learning.</li> <li>Provide small group exercises, skills training, simulation exercises, role playing, field trips, and other problem solving activities, all of which constitute examples of experiential and active learning strategies.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: a range of diverse activities and opportunities for student engagement foster curiosity, interaction and learning.</p>

<p><b>3.2 Classroom relationships</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster student-to-student and enhanced student-to-teacher relationships. This will increase trust and co-operation, leading to greater engagement with active learning strategies.</li> <li>• Be mindful of the learning atmosphere within and outside of the classroom (e.g., LEARN options) and encourage students to be relaxed yet engaged.</li> <li>• Employ group work and study groups to assist in the development of collegiality amongst students.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: Use the limited face-to-face time available for activities that cannot effectively be done online, particularly direct student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction to create and develop a collaborative classroom community.</p>
<p><b>3.3 Feedback and support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for regular peer-to-peer feedback as well as from teaching staff to students.</li> <li>• Respond quickly to student requests for information, and where feedback is expected ensure turn-around times of assessments are as quick as possible (less than a week). Particularly in the blended learning and online context, where students can be easily lost or disengaged, providing prompt feedback to assessment and general enquiries is critical.</li> <li>• Ensure any technical support required is available.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: In intensive courses, particularly those employing blended learning or online environments, students need personal or group feedback weekly – at a minimum – to keep them engaged with the course.</p>

<p><b>3.4 Availability of staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support feedback and rapid turn-around times, staff should make themselves available to students via regular office hours. Open door policies work well for some teaching staff.</li> <li>• Virtual office hours can compliment normal office hours. Take advantage of the University's LEARN system to support this option, such as through chat and forum activities. Additionally, virtual office hours can be offered via Skype or even Facebook.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: students in summer and other intensive courses need timely access to academic staff to answer questions and address concerns. Both physical and virtual spaces can help support this need.</p>
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#### 4. Additional considerations for creating effective blended and online learning environments in compressed courses

What is the issue?	What actions can I take to address it?
<p><b>4.1 Create a vibrant online community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use LEARN to facilitate 'classroom' interaction. Create an online profile for yourself and require the same of your students (to include pictures and short biographies or possibly statements regarding interest and enrolment in the course). Be sure you are available for students to contact via 'virtual office hours'.</li> <li>• Encourage (if not insist) that participation in the class requires participation in your parallel 'virtual classroom' through forum contributions, chat sessions and the like.</li> <li>• Create virtual groups with their own forums and chat rooms, and apply these in the same way you would in active learning contexts.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As with any other cohort of students, students in blended and online environments need to be sufficiently prepared for what they should expect and the demands of the course (refer 1.1).</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: the stronger the sense of community that is developed, the greater the engagement and active collaboration of more students – factors instrumental in improving opportunities for learning.</p>
<p><b>4.2 Lecture formats</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think about the key disciplinary concepts central to the course. Ensure time is given to clearly identify these as you work through the blended and online options and alternatives for your lectures and other presentations of materials, resources and content.</li> <li>Break up face-to-face lectures into smaller chunks of around 12-20 minutes. At the end of each section have students engage in some activity to demonstrate their understanding of the material just covered, such as through quick quizzes, forum contributions or short, written reflection tasks. If submitted, these can be used to gauge student understanding.</li> <li>Similarly, lectures and other presentations online need to be broken into smaller 'chunks', generally 5-10 minutes in length at most. As with face-to-face sessions, each section delivered online should have some quick task following to help ensure that students have engaged with the content and are working to develop their understanding and skills.</li> <li>In both face-to-face and online delivery of lecture materials, focus on the use of stronger visual images in your use of PowerPoint (or other presentation software) to illustrate the concepts you are discussing. Your lecture or accompanying audio</li> </ul>

	<p>should help illustrate and explain the materials, rather than provide a reading of a sequence of bullet points from slides. For recording materials for online delivery, many recommend tacking up a picture of a class (or images from you class roster) to help simulate talking to an audience.</p> <p>Bottom line: ensuring that lectures and other presentations of teaching materials are broken up into 'digestible chunks' with follow-on engagement or reflection activities helps advance student learning and understanding. When materials and resources are moved into blended and online environments, briefer segments are beneficial.</p>
<p><b>4.3 Feedback and support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The limited or even lack of face-to-face experiences means greater consideration needs to be paid to the manner or tone of feedback offered to students. Ensure constructive criticism is 'constructive' as routine practice.</li> <li>Make sure feedback is regular or routine, and provided, at a minimum, every week.</li> <li>Create opportunities for students to give feedback regarding their own learning experiences. Quick surveying of students will help you adjust delivery, resources and materials in a timely manner.</li> <li>Flexibility in your own approach is critical here. The (anonymous) feedback tool in LEARN can be used to gather student feedback on how the class is going and how it could be adapted to help foster learning.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: providing feedback to and eliciting feedback from students is essential to the learning process, and even more so in time-compressed, blended and online learning environments.</p>

## 5. Evaluation and assessment in compressed courses

What is the issue?	What actions can I take to address it?
<p><b>5.1 Vary assessment methods</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider varied but equivalent assessment options that allow multiple ideas to be assessed.</li> <li>Ensure assessment items enable students to work around individual time constraints characteristic of time-compressed formats and schedules.</li> <li>Preference should be given to quizzes, essays and take home exams that encourage the demonstration of knowledge rather than exams that encourage 'cramming'.</li> <li>Ongoing assessment practices with a mix of high- and low-stakes tasks generally foster better learning than a small number of high-stakes examinations, essays or projects.</li> <li>If more substantial projects are essential to the learning process for your course, consider how those may be split-up or divided into smaller tasks that can build to form the comprehensive work.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: Use clear milestones to break up larger assessment tasks. This helps keeping the students engaged (they have to do something every week) and makes the assignment seem less daunting.</p>
<p><b>5.2 Relevance of assessment to students</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where possible, locate assessment topics within the context of individuals' lived experiences. This can elevate the potential for student engagement and lead to more active participation in their learning processes.</li> </ul>

<p><b>5.3 Relevance of assessment to course</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider assessments that diminish 'busy work' and instead draw out higher-order thinking and analysis relevant to the course objectives.</li> <li>Ensure strong links are present between assessment items and course content and learning objectives.</li> <li>As standard courses are revised for time-compressed and/or blended learning delivery, the backwards planning process for curricular alignment between activities, assessments and learning outcomes is worth revisiting.</li> </ul> <p>Bottom line: students in time-compressed courses benefit from even tighter alignment between learning activities, assessments and outcomes.</p>
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### Principles of good teaching practice – some final thoughts

In 1987, the American Association of Higher Education, published Chickering & Gamson's seven principles of good teaching practice in higher education. These widely accepted foundations of higher education theory have been taken up worldwide and underpin productive research examining undergraduate student learning. A quick internet search using *Google Scholar* reveals some 2,213 cases of citing this work and a further 81 versions (in numerous languages) of the 'Seven Principles' currently being circulated and used across the globe. Given the widespread dissemination and uptake of these principles, it is useful to consider them alongside the research-supported guidelines noted above to support teaching in time-compressed, intensive and summer courses.

Each of the principles characterises good teaching practice:

- Good practice encourages contact between students and faculty or teaching staff
- Good practice develops reciprocity and co-operation amongst students
- Good practice uses active learning techniques
- Good practice gives prompt feedback
- Good practice emphasizes time on task
- Good practice communicates high expectations
- Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

The rationale for the inclusion of Chickering & Gamson's (1987) work here is not to revisit the arguments. Rather, they serve to highlight the similarity between what constitutes sound undergraduate teaching in standard formats and quality compressed teaching, even in blended and online learning environments. Each one of the *Seven Principles* can be found amongst the guidelines, developed from the most recent findings of research addressing compression effects, which constitute this document.

We would suggest that quality teaching and preparation for compressed courses should largely mirror sound undergraduate teaching practices. Additionally, teaching staff using these guidelines in the preparation of compressed courses should consider those characteristics of effective teaching practice which they currently employ in their semester-based papers. Incorporating these, alongside the consideration of the content of the above guidelines, will serve as a fruitful point of departure for building successful compressed, summer and intensive courses.

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