
Guidance 3xx Designing a module reading list for validated programmes

The place of reading lists in the student experience

Your reading list plays a key role for students in directing their self-study, helping them understand the boundaries and key concepts of a module and acquainting them with the leading authorities on a subject. Your reading lists enable you to direct your students to a variety of sources including print books, eBooks, website, online videos, , galleries, museums, etc. Unless advised to the contrary students expect that all titles on a reading list will be readily available. When this is not the case, students will understandably be dissatisfied with the programme and the Library resources. The inability to obtain textbooks and journal articles can be a cause of complaint.

It is therefore important that not only is a reading list pedagogically sound, but also that it is aligned with the resources that the institution can offer and, where students are expected to provide materials themselves (e.g. purchase a core textbook), this is made very clear on the reading list itself. A reading list will typically include both “essential” and “recommended” readings – in the case of “essential” works, there needs to be a strategy in place to ensure that all students can access this material when they need it. Where feasible, this material should be made available digitally, which will also support courses delivered by distance learning.

Constructing a reading list – ten key principles

To help with the construction of your reading list(s), we recommend that academic staff follow the ten principles below. These are not intended to prescribe what a reading list might look like, but to ensure that it becomes an effective tool from a student perspective. It is important to think about the content of your reading list and to align it with the inclusive curriculum principles: Inclusive Curriculum Framework (mdx.ac.uk)

1. Be clear about what is “essential” reading and how students are able to access this whenever they need it
 - a. Essential means that they have to read this. Is this what you mean?
 - b. If there are several essential books – do you expect students to choose one or read all? Is this clear?
 - c. Is it clear if the book is essential for the whole module, or just a part of it?
 - d. If students need continual access to a work throughout their course, how will this be provided?
2. If you expect students to buy a book
 - a. Is this clearly stated?
 - b. Have you considered the price – is there a cheaper substitute which would suffice?
3. Where possible, eBooks should be cited, as they can be accessed by students more easily. If you have a choice of suitable books, books available in e-format are to be preferred. and provide improved accessibility features for students. This is particularly important for any module which is being studied by a disabled student at your institution

has a legal obligation to anticipate their study needs well before the module starts.

4. Where textbooks are included, is it clear to students whether or not previous editions of a textbook would be acceptable or not? In some subjects (e.g. law) it may be essential that students only use the latest edition of a text. In other cases, e.g. where the revisions in the current edition are relatively minor, an earlier edition may suffice. Guidance of this nature is particularly valuable when students are making decisions on purchasing second-hand texts.
5. Does your Library subscribe to any electronic resources such as online full text journals and databases? These might contain useful materials for your students and enrich your reading lists.
6. You may wish to consider purchasing access to services and resources via Middlesex University. Licence restrictions mean that some electronic resources may not be available. For advice contact Jamie Halstead j.halstead@mdx.ac.uk
7. Remember that you can include a wide range of resources that are freely available over the internet e.g. YouTube videos or TED talks. Most official reports are available online.
8. Check that all the details are present and correct and the references are in the correct format.
9. Ensure that the reading list is created and communicated in sufficient time for resources to be acquired and made available.
10. Finally - thinking outside the box. In some cases academic staff are working with libraries / commercial publishers / Kindles or iPads etc to find new ways to deliver course material to students. They may not be universally applicable, but is that a possibility for your course?