# Quality Matters – How to Begin Script 01

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## [Introduction]

Greetings, I'm Rick Jerz, and I'm delighted to be here to discuss "Quality Matters – Where to Begin.”

Quality Matters is a global organization that offers certification for online courses. Their 44 standards can be utilized to enhance the quality of any course, including online, hybrid, flex, or self-paced courses. However, with so many standards, it's natural to wonder where to start.

In 2010, I learned about the Quality Matters organization. Although I taught in-person classes, I used numerous digital tools like an LMS, videos, PowerPoints, and Excel models. My university was exploring online options and introduced me to Quality Matters. I found Quality Standards impressive and started incorporating them to enhance my courses.

Fast forwarding ten years, I achieved Quality Matters certification for one of my online courses.

In this presentation, I aim to assist you in comprehending the initial steps to obtain a Quality Matters course certification.

Let’s get started!

## [Objectives]

My objectives in this presentation are as follows. To describe what is Quality Matters. To describe the Quality Matters standards. To explain the two most important standards. To examine other “alignment” standards. And to describe some other 3-point essential standards.

You may have experienced both great and not-so-great courses in your academic journey, regardless of the delivery method, such as face-to-face, asynchronous online, synchronous online, hybrid, correspondence, and self-paced courses.

During this presentation, I will discuss a methodology developed by the Quality Matters organization. The goal of this methodology is to enhance the quality of online courses.

My presentation focuses on Quality Matters in Higher Education since I teach at the college level. I will use my Business Analytics course, which I had Quality Matters certified in 2019, for my examples.

To make it easier for you to access the resources I'll be mentioning during this presentation, I have created a separate web page. When I refer to "my web page" during the presentation, I refer to this specific page. For example, I provide a link to my Business Analytics syllabus on “my web page.”

I’ll share the URL later.

## [What is Quality Matters?]

Around 2005, a small group of colleagues from the Maryland Online Incorporated Consortium formed a nonprofit organization called Quality Matters. They aimed to tackle a common issue among institutions - how to measure and ensure the quality of online courses. To address this, the group created a rubric of course design standards and implemented a peer review process.

I came across Quality Matters and its course design rubric for the first time in 2010 and was impressed with the quality of their work. By that time, Quality Matters had around 700 peer reviewers and was recognized as the leading organization for certifying online courses. Today, over 1,300 colleges and universities worldwide are subscribed to the Quality Matters program, and they have trained more than 52,000 education professionals. You can visit their website to learn more about Quality Matters. The Quality Matters rubric has undergone revisions, and a 7th Edition is scheduled to be released soon. You can access a link to the 6th Edition on my web page.

The 7th Edition has some enhancements and introduced two new standards. However, the 6th Edition remains a reliable guide. Quality Matters has expanded its certification to include hybrid and synchronous courses, and the 7th Edition Workbook provides additional information on these delivery modes.

## [8 Categories Containing 44 Standards]

Briefly, courses undergo review based on 44 Quality Matters Rubric standards that are classified into eight categories: Course Overview and Introduction, Learning Objectives, Assessment and Measurement, Instructional Materials, Learning Activities and Learner Interaction, Course Technology, Learner Support, and Accessibility and Usability. Standards are worth 1, 2, or 3 points, based upon their significance.

## [QM Process]

To start the review process for Quality Matters certification, a fee must be paid. The cost varies depending on whether your school is a Quality Matters member. If your university is a member, like mine was, the fee was $1000 in 2019.

A team of three reviewers reviews your course. There is a Team Chair who handles most communications, and one team member is a “subject matter expert.”

Each reviewer assesses whether a certain standard has been met. If two or more reviewers agree that a standard has been met, then that standard is considered met and awarded points. Additionally, the reviewers provide suggestions for improvement even for “met” standards. It is mandatory to meet all three-point standards. To achieve certification from Quality Matters, your course must receive a minimum of 86 out of 101 points. Quality Matters aims for all courses to be certified.

If reviewers have questions, you are given a chance to respond.

If you don't meet the minimum point requirement during the review, you have three months to revise your course to meet the unmet standards. I had this experience during my certification, but with revisions, my Business Analytics course received the highest possible score.

## [Standards Overview]

A Quality Matters workbook contains a comprehensive description of all standards.

I created this visualization of the forty-four 7th Edition standards using Microsoft Excel, which is on my web page. This provides an overall view of the standards, with colored boxes representing each one. To save space, I have abbreviated the description of each standard's workbook.

Orange boxes are the twenty-two 3-point essential standards, yellow is for the thirteen 2-point very important standards, and blue is for the nine 1-point important standards. The eight categories that I mentioned earlier are on the left. The row and column numbers, when combined, match the Quality Matter standard numbers.

For example, for Standard 1.2, my graphic displays “Introduction to Structure of Course.” The precise specific review standard states, “Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.” Since its box is orange, it is a three-point “essential” standard and must be met.

Use my visualization as an overall guide.

## [Where to Begin]

So, where do you begin?

Initially, I assumed that I needed to write a detailed report outlining how my course fulfilled each standard for the evaluation. However, that is not the case. Instead, you provide a shell course, as students see it, that the Quality Matters team uses for their review. If any issue arises with a particular standard, the team Chair will communicate with you and ask for your justification.

Before your review, it's important to review each standard and determine if your course design meets the requirements. You can use the provided Rubric and annotations as a guide. For instance, make sure your course videos have captions. And make sure that you include information on how students can get technical support. Undoubtedly, you will need to make some adjustments to ensure your course can meet all standards.

So, how should you best approach your review?

Look at my graphic. You'll notice six cross-hatched orange standards with boldface font, which are a group of special "alignment" standards that must function together. Additionally, two standards are highlighted in red font. These are critical standards and are reviewed first because failing to meet these two standards halt your journey to certification. Yes, all over. Done.

When I began my certification, I didn’t know this. Immediately, I was told that my course didn’t meet these two standards. They asked if I wanted a refund. No way! I fixed the issues to continue my review.

So, I recommend beginning with these two critical standards and then proceeding to the rest of the alignment standards.

## [2.2 – Module-level Objectives]

I suggest tackling Standard 2.2 first. This standard pertains to having specific and measurable objectives for each “module.” Module objectives can then be used to create measurable course objectives for Standard 2.1.

At Quality Matters, the term "module" refers to a topic, chapter, unit, or week of instruction. Commonly, it's similar to a chapter in a textbook that is usually covered in a week. But this can vary.

In a fifteen-week, 3-semester hour course, I usually aim to cover 12-15 textbook chapters, while also making time for student projects and exams. For my Business Analytics course, I have 11 modules (weeks) that cover 16 chapters. It is really a 15-week master’s level course but compressed administratively into a more popular 11-week timeframe.

While Quality Matters does not specify the number of topics or chapters in a 3-hour course, the U.S. Government has established guidelines for a credit hour which I have shared on my web page. The government has expressed concern over educational institutions receiving federal funding for 3-hour courses with only 1 hour of content.

Creating module objectives is easiest to do by selecting a high-quality, peer-reviewed textbook, preferably one that is not the first edition. For example, I like textbooks from McGraw Hill or Pearson. My Business Analytics textbook was in its 18th edition, representing over 50 years of development. My Operations Management textbook is in its 13th edition.

Choosing a high-quality textbook guarantees that it has suitable chapter goals, valuable resources for students, and that the materials, resources, and assessments are aligned with chapter objectives. This alignment will be easy to show to the review team.

Quality Matters “requires” that "Bloom's Taxonomy" measurable verbs for both module and course-level objectives. If you are unfamiliar with Bloom's Taxonomy, you can learn more about it online. Some instructors don’t agree with Bloom’s Taxonomy; however, this is not the time for debate, just accept this.

I discovered different summaries of Bloom's verbs. Quality Matters' provides its own document outlining them. I have included a link to it on my web page.

At first, I didn't include Bloom's verbs for my course objectives on my syllabus, which caused Quality Matters to stop my review. Revising my course objectives didn’t take much effort, prompting me to double-check chapter objectives.

The good news is that many high-quality textbooks start each chapter with objectives that are compatible with Bloom's taxonomy. I’ll give you several examples.

Here are the objectives for chapter six, Discrete Probability Distributions, from McGraw Hill’s business statistics textbook. And here are objectives from my Operations Management Pearson textbook, chapter four, Forecasting. And another example from a Pearson Criminalistics textbook, chapter 6, Fingerprints. And from my SolidWorks textbook, chapter 6, Geometric Construction Tools. Most of these use Bloom’s verbs, and when they don’t, it doesn’t take much to substitute the correct Bloom’s verbs.

There are two tasks you need to complete. Firstly, you should review the objectives for each chapter in the textbook and decide which ones you will be covering in your course. It is perfectly fine to skip certain sections. Secondly, you need to ensure that these module objectives are prominently displayed in a clear and visible location for the students.

In my Business Analytics course, I display the module objectives on my Moodle LMS, right under the heading of each topic. Here they are for Week 4. Additionally, I repeat the objectives at the top of the Week 4 Resources & Assignments web page. The objectives are obvious to students, and also to the Quality Matters reviewers.

If you are using a different LMS such as Canvas, presenting the objectives may require a different approach as Canvas does not permit text below a module heading. However, it is crucial to ensure that the objectives are clear and easily noticeable.

If the textbook you have chosen does not include chapter objectives, you will need to create them yourself.

## [2.1 – Course-level Objectives]

Once you have module objectives, move on to Standard 2.1, course-level objectives. Consider creating between four to eight course-level objectives, consistent with module objectives. Some textbooks provide these. Having already created module objectives will make this task easier, and produce course objectives that are aligned with module objectives. Make sure to use Bloom’s verbs.

Course objectives are commonly shown in the syllabus, and it is helpful to number these for reference. Here is my Business Analytics example.

Following my advice, you should be good with Standards 2.1 and 2.2, and Quality Matters will let your review proceed.

## [Build a Course Map]

Your next step is to create a course map, also known as an alignment map or table. While it was optional for the 6th Edition Rubric, it is now mandatory in the 7th Edition. The course map shows how the six alignment standards are aligned.

Quality Matters allows flexibility in how you design your course map. On my website, I provide some links to resources. I also provide you with my Business Analytics course map, which I created from a Maryland template provided to me by my team Chair.

In my example, I begin by listing course-level objectives in the left column. Below each course objective, I list the corresponding module-level objectives aligned with achieving the course-level objective. Use your best judgment.

In the right column, you detail the Materials, Activities, Assessments, and Technologies used, as described in Standards 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, and from your LMS. Creating a course map takes time. It challenges you to make sure items are in the correct place, meaning correctly aligned.

{Animation – I think I got that!}

As someone who had never created a course map before, I found the experience to be great. Although it can be detailed and lengthy, there's no need to worry. Once completed, the Course Map is an excellent tool for showcasing your course to colleagues, department chairs, and external program reviewers.

## [3.1 – Assessments Measure Objectives]

Next, I suggest you focus on the other four “alignments” standards, meaning 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1. The order of these items is not important, so I will review them in sequence.

Standard 3.1 states, “The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives.”

Assessment can include quizzes, exams, discussions, projects, assignments, essays, presentations, etc. Good textbooks typically provide a variety of ways to assess learning. For example, my textbooks provide question-banks that can be loaded into my LMS for quizzing. My Business Analytics textbook provides instructor resources that describe how one might assess learning, even exams. By following the textbook's advice, you can be assured that the assessments align with the module objectives.

During a course peer-review, I noticed that the quizzes were lacking in substance. It turned out that the instructor was unaware that question banks were available. We suggested that the instructor use the publisher's question banks, and they were appreciative of the suggestion.

Every week in my Business Analytics course, students take quizzes and sometimes submit assignments. The course centers around problem-solving, so the discussions are less important. On the other hand, in my Operations Management course, discussions occur weekly and play a critical role.

Make sure that assessments are aligned with objectives. For example, if the course has an objective to “write a persuasive essay,” a multiple-choice exam would not be aligned with this objective.

All assessment activities show in my LMS. I then itemize these under an “Assessments” heading in my course map.

## [4.1 – Instructional Materials]

Standard 4.1 is about course materials.

A good textbook becomes the primary source, along with publisher-provided instructor resources, such as videos, case studies, assignments, simulations, images, calculators, and PowerPoints. To this, you can add instructor’s lecture videos, external readings, external videos, and journal articles, as examples.

When selecting materials, you should always ask yourself if the materials align with the objectives. You can be assured that using a high-quality textbook that has undergone years of peer reviews will have a strong alignment between materials and objectives.

Quality Matters is flexible about resources. In one course that I peer-reviewed, I noticed the instructor videos were only about 5 minutes long. I felt that this was too short and made me question if the instructor had more to contribute to the topic. In my Business Analytics course, my weekly videos are around 60 minutes long and contain more content than what I deliver in a typical face-to-face week.

You should list the materials for each module in the Course Map, under a heading like “Resources and Instructional Materials.” Here is an example of how I do this in my Business Analytics course map.

## [5.1 – Learning Activities]

Learning activities are practice opportunities that prepare students to complete assessments and achieve the stated objectives. Activities can take many forms, such as reading the textbook, watching videos, using simulations, participating in discussion boards, using spreadsheet models, and external tours.

The 7th Edition of Quality Matters places more importance on "practice activities" than "assessment activities." However, it is acknowledged that some activities can also serve as assessments. For instance, repetitive quizzes that offer both practice and assessment. So can graded discussion forums.

During my 7th Edition Quality Matters training, there were numerous questions about practice activities and grading. It seems to me that Quality Matters will need to see how this separation between practice and assessment ends up.

You must itemize the course learning activities in your Course Map. You can see how I did this in my Course Map.

## [6.1 – Tools Support Learning Objectives]

The most common tools include your LMS and its various resources and activities, such as its quiz tools, discussion boards, assignment uploading, video repositories, games, blogs, whiteboards, gradebooks, etc. It is essential to choose the appropriate tool that aligns with the stated course and module objectives and other alignment standards. For instance, if the objective is to "compare and contrast" something, it would be more suitable for students to submit an essay using the assignment tool rather than using the quiz tool.

In the Course Map, it is important to list the technologies in their proper sections. It is okay to include a tool that may be used for more than one objective.

In my Course Map, I show the technologies used in Week 4 of my Business Analytics course, as an example.

## [Continue with Standards]

Having addressed all “alignment” Quality Matters Standards, you will be off to a good start. I suggest continuing by focusing on the other 3-point standards, but you can jump around. Remember, you must meet all 3-point standards for your course to be certified. Perhaps use my graphic as a guide, checking off those standards that your course meets.

As an example, Standard 3.2 is about Grading Policy. It is important to clearly list the grading policy used in the course for all assessments and final grades, along with precise detail. Typically, schools mandate stating a grading policy in the syllabus, making it straightforward to meet this standard.

You can see how I address this standard in my Business Analytics course syllabus.

## [Additional Suggestions]

Here are a few additional suggestions.

It is important to ensure that your course has the appropriate level of detail considering the credit hours and course level indicated.

For high-quality lecture videos, focus on good lighting and backdrop, and use a top-notch microphone. Practice your presentation beforehand to project a professional image.

Spellcheck everything.

Pay attention to detail. The Quality Matters team members have been trained to conduct thorough reviews.

## [Notes about Rick’s Business Analytics Course]

I would like to share a few notes on getting my Business Analytics course certified.

In my case, I was the one who desired certification. My school endorsed the Quality Matters Rubric, but I was the first instructor at The University of Iowa to have a course Quality Matters certified.

I spent considerable time developing high-quality online course materials, which included mastering the use of my LMS and creating videos. Although I produce my own videos, some educational institutions provide studios for this purpose.

Initially, my course did not pass. But I made the necessary improvements and addressed the issues, and then I passed with a perfect score of 100 points.

In total, I dedicated approximately 80 hours to obtaining the Quality Matters certification.

## [Summary]

After going over the six three-point alignment standards and providing you with a graphic, you should have a clear understanding of what a Quality Matters course certification entails and how to get started. Using a high-quality textbook can be advantageous.

I highly recommend going through a Quality Matters audit. It's definitely worth it because the team's review provides valuable insights and suggestions for improving the quality of your course. It's also more cost-effective than having internal reviews conducted by your school. Plus, the Quality Matters peer reviewers are experienced and trained on the standards, ensuring a thorough and fair evaluation.

Obtaining Quality Matters certification benefits all parties involved, including the students, the instructor, and the university.

Here is the link to the supplementary web page for this presentation.