





Blended Learning

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"Blended learning, combining the best elements of online and face-to-face education, is likely to emerge as the predominant teaching model of the future." -- Watson, J., 2008

Introduction

Blended Learning refers to courses that combine traditional, face-to-face learning with learning that takes place in an online space such as a learning management system. However, several further criteria must be met before a course is truly blended:

- 1. The course needs to include a substantial amount of both face-to-face learning and online learning. A course that is 90% face-to-face and only 10% online is not truly blended.
- The face-to-face components of the course and the online components of the course must support one another and build upon one another. A course that includes faceto-face components and online components that exist in isolation from one another is not truly blended.

Blended Learning is an effective pedagogy. Recent studies have shown that blended learning, when it is thoughtfully implemented, results in better learning outcomes than either face-to-face learning or fully online learning alone.

Rationale for Blended Learning

Blended Learning provides many benefits for both students and instructors.

- 1. Blended learning is effective because its two modes of learning face-to-face and online can be coordinated to support one another and build upon one another.
 - a. Consider, for example, a blended learning course called XYZ. The instructor of that course uses the face-to-face time to deliver course content to students in the form of lectures; students are encouraged to ask questions during the lectures and some time is also set aside at the end of each lecture so that students can ask questions for clarification. The instructor then uses the online component of the course to get the students (later that evening) to assess their own understanding of the lecture (by means of an automatically graded test in Blackboard); the instructor also has students engage in more deliberate thinking about the course content by having them respond to a

question in an online discussion group.

- b. A different instructor, one who is teaching a course called RST, uses the online aspect of the course to deliver course content to the students (by means of screencasts which are uploaded to Blackboard); the instructor then uses face-to-face time to have the students engage in debates, problembased learning, and case studies that are based on the content of the screencasts. Incidentally, this approach, in which content is delivered outside of class and class time is reserved for active learning, is known as "flipping the classroom."
- 2. Blended learning is also effective because it extends learning beyond the classroom. In a traditional course, students come to class and engage with course content only once or twice a week. For example, a traditional class might meet on Tuesday and Thursday; this means that students might not engage with the course content (or with each other, or with the instructor) for four consecutive days (Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday). In contrast, in a blended course, students continue to engage with course content (and with each other, and with the instructor) between classes. Over the weekend, for example, they might engage in peer instruction by sharing ideas in the course's online discussion board; they might assess their individual levels of understanding by means of an automatically graded test in the LMS; they might receive formative feedback on an assignment from the instructor or teaching assistant; and so on. These and other opportunities for online learning result in the students spending more time on task; and time on task, according to Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," is an essential element of good student learning.
- 3. Blended learning also provides opportunities to tailor learning experiences for individual students. For example, in the classroom the learning experience provided to students is, for the most part, the same for all students: they all receive the same lecture or engage in the same learning activities. In the LMS, their learning experiences can be adjusted to their specific needs. For example, after completing an online test, the LMS can direct students to different learning resources depending on how well they performed on the test. Students who are struggling with the course content can view it and review it several times, and can take and retake online tests until they are satisfied that they have mastered it. In the discussion board, stronger students can take on the role of mentoring weaker students. This sort of "differentiated learning" fosters a learner-centered pedagogy that results in improved learning outcomes.

4. The convenience of blended learning is also one of its benefits. Students can engage with course content and with their classmates whenever and wherever they want: between other classes, in the evening, in middle of the night, on the weekend – and they can do so from home, from campus, or from a café. The LMS also facilitates communication among all members of the class – the students, the instructor, and the teaching assistants. For example, if an instructor comes across an important web resource between classes, he can immediately share it with students via the LMS.

Evidence of Effectiveness

On Learning Outcomes

- A 2004 study found that blended learning resulted in better student learning outcomes than either face-to-face or fully online courses. The study also revealed that these improved results were associated with high levels of student and instructor satisfaction with the blended approach. (Dziuban, 2004)
- A 2010 meta-analysis of more than 1000 studies also found that blended learning results in better learning outcomes than either face-to-face or fully online courses. (Means, 2009)
- A 2012 study focusing on students in Saudi Arabia found that blended learning provided "a statistically significant and educationally important difference" and that the "blended learning approach undertaken in this study appears to have provided a clear advantage in terms of the students' achievement." (Al-Qahtani, 2012)
- In addition to improving learning outcomes, recent studies have also revealed that both instructors and students have positive attitudes toward blended learning. A 2008 study found that students had positive perceptions toward using a blended learning approach. (Wan, 2008).

On Instructor and Student Satisfaction

- A 2010 study, "blended learning model offers many advantages to the teachers in planning the lectures and assessing the students. Students feel that blended learning model has many advantages for them and are very positive on all aspects of blended teaching and learning mode." (Abdulrasool, 2010)
- A 2012 study undertaken by Al Quds Open University found that "QOU learners have positive attitudes towards BL." (Shawish, 2012)

Online Tools for Blended Learning

Typically, the online components of a blended learning course exist in a Learning Management System (also known as a Course Management System) such as Blackboard. The Learning Management System (LMS) in turn comprises numerous tools that can be used in a blended course. Here is a brief description of the key tools found in the Blackboard LMS:

Tests, Surveys, and Pools

A test in the Blackboard LMS is similar to a test given in the traditional classroom. Tests in Blackboard can include multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, matching questions, short answer questions, long answer questions, and more. Tests made from multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, and matching questions can be graded automatically by Blackboard. Short answer questions and long answer questions must be assessed by an instructor or teaching assistant. Surveys are identical to tests except for one difference: they are anonymous. An instructor might use a survey to poll students about something such as the preferred date for a midterm exam. Pools are collections of questions that can be pulled into tests. A pool might contain 100 questions, and a test can be created so that every student is presented with a different combination of 10 questions that are drawn from the pool.

Discussion Boards

Discussion boards are an online space where students can post messages pertaining to course content. Other students and the instructor or teaching assistant can then respond to some or all of the posted messages. Discussion boards can be a powerful way to encourage peer instruction.

Wikis

A wiki is an online space where students can collaborate in creating and editing a document. Unlike a discussion board, where each student contributes his or her own posts, a wiki is a shared space: it's an online version of a classroom white board where many students can work on the same material at the same time.

Blogs

A blog is an online space where students can reflect on and write about ideas pertaining to course content. A blog is different from a discussion board in that a blog focuses on the posts of an individual student, whereas a discussion board highlights a conversation that many students have contributed to.

Adaptive Release Tool

Blackboard's Adaptive Release tool allows instructors to set up "rules" so that a student can only access a given online component after he or she has satisfied the conditions of the rule. For example, using the Adaptive Release tool, an instructor could provide students with a reading (Step 1), then require them to complete a test based on the reading (Step 2); students would only be able to advance to the next

reading (Step 3) if they achieved a grade of, say, 85% or more on the test. Alternatively, the adaptive release tool could be configured so that students are given access to a certain file only after they contribute to the discussion board. The potential uses of the adaptive release tool are many.

SafeAssign

SafeAssign is a plagiarism detection tool. Students (or the instructor) upload their written assignments to SafeAssign, and the tool determines whether or how much of the assignment has been plagiarized from other sources.

"One possibility is the use of an asynchronous online classroom in this study rather than the synchronous online discussion forum as used by Dodero et al. (2003). Bernard et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis indicated asynchronous approaches tend to be more beneficial than synchronous."

"Flipped Classes. Classroom Flipping is one method of freeing up FtF class time for more PBL activities. As a Replacement blend, typically one third to one half of instruction time is changed from FtF to out of class work. "Rather than the teacher providing synchronous inclass group instruction, students are expected to use the video resources provided, along with other materials, to learn concepts and complete tasks on their own at their own pace and at location convenient to the student" (Davies et al., 2013, p. 3). Class time is then free for Constructivist / PBL activities to build on what they have learned on their own, while encouraging critical thinking and problem solving. If any students are struggling, the instructor has more time to provide individual help during class while other classmates are working on their PBL activity (Davies et al., 2013)."

"Lower Requirements for Physical Space and Faculty Time. Several studies have been published over the past three years that report institutions reducing the hours of BL classroom space by 30-50%, and in some cases adding more sections of a class taught by the same number of instructors as before (Friedman & Friedman, 2011). One of the early institutions to reduce costs and achieve "quality improvements" for students is the University of Central Florida (Graham, 2013, p. 345). By reducing FtF class time and improving scheduling efficiencies, they have reduced the need to expand their physical infrastructure as the number of students taking BL courses has grown (Graham, 2013)."

Best Practices

As noted previously, it is crucial that a blended course make significant use of both the face-to-face component of a course and the online component. Emphasizing only one of those two components, while underutilizing the other, will encourage students to see the underutilized component as a mere superfluous add-on. It is also crucial to have the two components – face-to-face and online – build upon one another. In other words, each learning experience that takes place in the classroom should be supported by a learning

experience that takes place online, and vice versa. Represented metaphorically (Figure 1), the blended course might resemble the "double helix" structure of DNA: the face-to-face component and the online component are woven around each other, and are connected by intermittent learning activities.

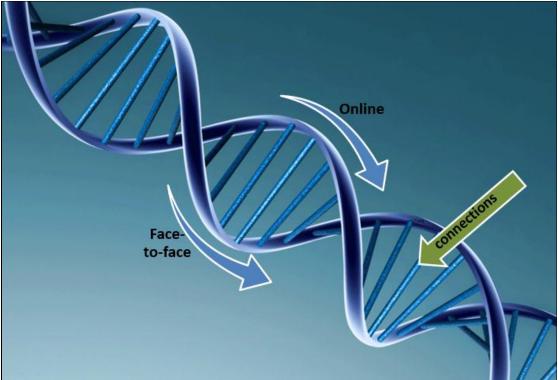


Figure 1: A metaphorical representation of a blended course: the face-to-face component and the online component are woven around each other, and are connected by intermittent learning activities.

To effectively integrate the face-to-face components and the online components of a blended course, an instructor needs to begin by identifying the learning outcomes of the course. Learning outcomes are what a student should be able to do after completing a course. For example, at the University of Waterloo a third-year course in Biology (Mathematical Modelling in Biology) identifies these five learning outcomes:

At the completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify good modelling questions that correspond to a given biological question
- Formulate a mathematical model to simultaneously answer a given question and to aid analysis
- Analyze mathematical models using a variety of techniques (e.g., phase plane analysis)
- Select appropriate methods of analysis for a given biological question and model formulation
- Interpret model predictions to answer a given biological question

After articulating the learning outcomes for a course, the instructor can then decide how to achieve those learning outcomes in way that leverages both the face-to-face component and the online component of the course. For example, with the last learning outcome -"Interpret model predictions to answer a given biological question" – the instructor might begin by providing students with a short screencast that introduces the idea of "model predictions"; that screencast would be made available to students in the LMS, meaning that they would watch it outside of class time. At the next class, the instructor might then review the idea of model predictions and work through several examples of interpreting model predictions. Then, using the LMS, he might post another example of interpreting a model prediction in discussion board, and ask students to assess whether the example is successful or not. At the next class, he might review the LMS example, taking time to refer to posts in the discussion board that did a good job of assessing the example, and clarifying student misconceptions that were revealed via the discussion board. Then, he might use the LMS to create small groups of students, and have them collaborate in the LMS on interpreting another model prediction. At the next class, several of these student groups report back to the class as a whole.

The foregoing is just one example of how an instructor might use face-to-face learning and online learning to support one another and build upon one another. Different instructors, different courses, and different learning outcomes would make use of a different blend of face-to-face and online components.

In addition to this fundamental "blending" principle, Randy Garrison and Norman Vaughn (authors of *Blended Learning in Higher Education*) identify seven other principles that should inform an effective blended course:

1. Design for open communication and trust

Learning is social in nature: students learn by interacting with their instructor and classmates in relation to the course content. In order for this social element of learning to succeed, students must feel that open communication is valued by everyone in the course, and that they can trust their instructor and their classmates. For example, they need to feel that if they share a new idea, they won't be ridiculed. This is especially important in a blended course, where online contributions are, in a sense, more permanent: if a student asks a peculiar question in the online discussion board, that question will continue to sit there till the end of the course; if the same question were asked in class, it would probably be forgotten by the next day.

2. Design for critical reflection and discourse

Students need to be encouraged to critically reflect on what they are learning. That is, they need to be given opportunities (and learning activities) that get them to evaluate what they have learned and to "fit" their new knowledge into their previous knowledge. Engaging in discourse with their classmates by sharing

perspectives about course content is an effective way of fostering critical reflection.

3. Create and sustain sense of community

In a blended course, the community of learners exists in two spaces: the physical classroom and the online space of the LMS. Students need to be encouraged to see these spaces as extensions of one another. A conversation that began in the classroom might be further pursued in the LMS, and vice versa. If the students feel that they are working together toward a common goal – namely, the acquisition of knowledge – then they will likely develop a powerful sense of community.

4. Support purposeful inquiry. The two modes of inquiry that are available in a blended course – verbally in the classroom, and text-based in the LMS – can be used in tandem to develop and expand the students' inquiry. The verbal nature of the classroom, for example, is especially suited to quickly exploring the "topography" of an issue, and to sharing preliminary perspectives. The text-based nature of the LMS, on the other hand, is especially suited to digging deeper into an issue after it has been initially explored in class. Moving a discussion back and forth, from the classroom to the LMS, in a thoughtful and deliberate way can help students to cultivate a sophisticated line of inquiry.

5. Ensure that inquiry moves to resolution

In a blended course, discussion of an issue raised by course content can take place in the classroom or in the LMS. In the classroom, most instructors are adept at facilitating discussion and bringing it toward closure or resolution. When this is accomplished, students feel that their discussion has taken them closer to a goal. In an LMS, instructors need to be especially careful to facilitate and guide discussions that take place in a discussion board. If the instructor (or a teaching assistant) fails to adequately guide the online discussion, the students might be unable to resolve the issue – they might feel like they are going in circles. The instructor's facilitation can help guide them toward a satisfying resolution.

6. Ensure students sustain collaboration

Learning activities that promote and sustain collaboration are ones that require students to genuinely work together. Asking students to individually solve a problem, and to then post their answer in the LMS, does not foster collaboration. However, asking them to solve a problem in a small group, and to then post their answer in an LMS, does foster collaboration. Alternatively, having them solve a problem individually, and then asking them in pairs to provide feedback on one another's solutions, also involves some degree of collaboration. Although students will grow more comfortable with collaboration as the course proceeds, they will always need

explicit opportunities to engage in it.

7. Ensure assessment is congruent with learning outcomes

As in any course, the learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessments of a blended course must be congruent with one another. When students know that these three course elements are aligned, they will engage in deeper learning. Sharing the learning outcomes for the course with students, and then linking the various learning activities to those learning outcomes, can help students see the value of what the instructor is asking them to do. Likewise, showing them that the assessments in the course are directly related to the learning outcomes and learning activities will discourage them from trying to "cram" for a test.

Cautions

- 1. Designing a blended course from scratch, or turning an existing face-to-face course into a blended course, takes a significant investment of time. Moreover, while it might be possible for an instructor to build a traditional face-to-face course as he is teaching it, that is not feasible with a blended course: all of the parts and all of the design, needs to be in place before the course begins.
- 2. If you are turning an existing face-to-face course into a blended course, you might be tempted to add new learning activities (in the LMS) but not remove any of the existing learning activities (that are associated with the classroom). If this happens, you will probably end up with a course that is too onerous for the students one that will simply require too much time and energy from them. Make sure, as you develop your blended course, that the amount of work it demands of students is reasonable. In some cases, the addition of learning activities in the LMS might even mean that you can reasonably reduce the amount of class time for the course.

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More Resources

Blended Learning

- Salman Khan on Blended Learning: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwyOv7PiC40
- ELI Blended Learning Workshop Guide: http://bit.ly/eli-bl
- 16 ELI Blended Learning Resources: http://bit.ly/16-eli-bl
- CTE Blended Learning: Best Practices: http://bit.ly/cte-best-practices
- Teaching Presence: Creating and Sustaining Communities of Inquiry in Blended Learning Environments: http://bit.ly/teaching-presence
- Blended Learning: A Report on the ELI Focus Session: http://bit.ly/eli-focus

Learning Outcomes

- Examples of Learning Outcomes developed for a program in Public Health: http://bit.ly/public-health-examples (page 12 and following)
- An example of a course that includes explicit learning outcomes: https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/sites/ca.centre-for-teaching-excellence/files/uploads/files/syll36413biol.pdf
- Carleton University: Instructors reflect on the important of learning outcomes: https://mediaserver.carleton.ca/media/the-role-of-learning-outcomes

Appendix 1

The charts on the following pages can be used by instructors as templates to help them design a blended course.

BLENDED LEARNING									
+									
1. Learning Outcome What should your students be able to do?	2. Learning Activity What activity will help your students achieve the learning outcome?		3. Assessment How will you assess whether students have achieved the Learning Outcome?		Questions to ask yourself				
	Online ☐ "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. — in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☐ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? Will it take less time to develop this Learning Activity if you use again? How many hours will it take to the assessments? If this is a new Learning Activity have you decreased the worklofor students elsewhere? 				
	Online "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☐ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? Will it take less time to develop this Learning Activity if you use again? How many hours will it take to the assessments? If this is a new Learning Activity have you decreased the worklofor students elsewhere? 				
	Online ☐ "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☐ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative ☐ Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	1. How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? 2. Will it take less time to develop this Learning Activity if you use again? 3. How many hours will it take to the assessments? 4. If this is a new Learning Activity have you decreased the worklofor students elsewhere?				
	Online "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☐ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative ☐ Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? Will it take less time to develop this Learning Activity if you use again? How many hours will it take to the assessments? If this is a new Learning Activity have you decreased the worklofor students elsewhere? 				

		BLENDED LI	EARNING				
TRIPLE ALIGNMENT							
1. Learning Outcome What should your students be able to do?	2. Learning Activity What activity will help your students achieve the learning outcome?		3. Assessment How will you assess whether your students have achieved the Learning Outcome?		Questions to ask yourself		
[Course: Public Health] Explain the basic principles of epidemiology, including rates, risk factors, disease determinants, causation and public health surveillance.	Online "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☑ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning.	Summative Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity?		
	In an Online Discussion Group, students (in groups of five) will spend two weeks analyzing an epidemiological case study, and then a third week collaborating on a 400 word report that identifies the following: risk factors, disease determinants, and causation.		During the two weeks that they are analyzing the case study in an Online Discussion Group, the students will receive formative feedback (in the LMS) from one of the Teaching Assistants for the course. They will then collaborate on the 400-word report without further guidance from a Teaching Assistant. Their report will receive both formative feedback and summative feedback (i.e. a grade) from the instructor. This will account for 15% of the final grade.		Will it take less time to developed this Learning Activity if you use again?		
					3. How many hours will it take to the assessments?		
					4. If this is a new Learning Activit have you decreased the workle for students elsewhere?		
					5. Notes		

Aligning Learning Outcomes, Learning Activities, & Assessments in the Blended Learning Environment. Dr. Mark Morton. Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. mmorton@uwaterloo.ca									
BLENDED LEARNING									
+									
1. Learning Outcome What should your students be able to do?	2. Learning Activity What activity will help your students achieve the learning outcome?		3. Assessment How will you assess whether students have achieved the Learning Outcome?		Questions to ask yourself				
[Course: Shakespeare] Students will understand how Shakespeare mixes genres in his plays in order to create more complex works.	Online ☑ "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☑ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative ☑ Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? <u>50</u> Will it take less time to develop 				
	In an Online Discussion Group that will continue throughout the term, students will provide examples from each play where Shakespeare mixes genres: for example, where he puts comic elements into tragedy, serious elements into a comedy, realistic elements into a romance, and so on.		Each student's contributions to the Online Discussion Group will be assessed 3 times in the term. The first assessment will be only formative – that is, the assessment will only provide feedback. The second assessment will provide feedback and will be graded. The third assessment will be graded without feedback. This will account for 35% of the final grade.		this Learning Activity if you use it again? No 3. How many hours will it take to do the assessments? 30 4. If this is a new Learning Activity, have you decreased the workload for students elsewhere? Yes				
[Course: Shakespeare] Students will understand how Shakespeare mixes genres in his plays in order to create more complex works.	Online ☐ "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☑ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☐ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative ☑ Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? 2 Will it take less time to develop 				
	After studying each play, students will (in small groups) prepare a ten-minute presentation that summarizes the "mixed genres" in that play, and will offer some suggestions about why Shakespeare did so. Each week, two of those small groups will be chosen, at random, to present to the class.		Students who are not making a presentation on a given day will grade that day's presentations using a rubric supplied by the instructor. The instructor will consider these peer assessments but has final say over the grade assigned to each presentation. This will account for 20% of the final grade.		 this Learning Activity if you use it again? No How many hours will it take to do the assessments? 20 If this is a new Learning Activity, have you decreased the workload for students elsewhere? Yes 				
[Course: Shakespeare] Students will understand the historical background of the "Henriad" tetralogy (that is, of Richard II; Henry IV, Part 1; Henry IV, Part 2; and Henry V.	Online ☑ "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☐ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative ☑ Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? <u>25</u> Will it take less time to develop 				
	Students will watch five 20-minute screencasts that the instructor has created and uploaded to the LMS.		After viewing each screencast, students will complete a multiple-choice quiz in the LMS. Each quiz is worth 3%, meaning that the quizzes in total account for 15% of the final grade.		 this Learning Activity if you use it again? Yes, much less 3. How many hours will it take to do the assessments? 1/4. If this is a new Learning Activity, have you decreased the workload for students elsewhere? Yes 				
[Course: Shakespeare] Students will understand the editorial issues that arise when creating an edition of a play by Shakespeare.	Online ☑ "Online" means in the LMS or by means of some other web-based tool.	Offline ☐ "Offline" means in the classroom, library, lab, etc. – in other words, "traditional" learning activities.	Formative ☑ Formative Assessment provides feedback so students can improve their learning	Summative ☑ Summative Assessment provides a grade to a student.	 How many hours will it take to develop the Learning Activity? 2 Will it take less time to develop 				
	Students will use the application at juxtasoftware.org to compare one scene from the 1623 version of Hamlet with the corresponding scene in the earlier quarto version of Hamlet. They will summarize the differences in a 1000 word essay.		Students will submit a rough draft of their essay for formative assessment in the form of suggestions. They will then submit a revised version which will receive both formative assessment and summative assessment. The revised essay will account for 30% of the final grade.		 this Learning Activity if you use it again? No How many hours will it take to do the assessments? 50 If this is a new Learning Activity, have you decreased the workload for students elsewhere? Yes 				