Guidelines: Structured and Unstructured Teaching and Learning Hours

Introduction

These Guidelines support La Trobe's consistent alignment of teaching hours, improving efficiency whilst delivering quality contact time over the quantity of contact time, and ensuring a more balanced experience for both students and staff. Supported by the La Trobe Teaching Framework for design, the guidelines facilitate the implementation of the Course Design Policy.

Structure and Volume of Learning in Subjects

Subject requirements form the foundation of student engagement with their learning, defining the way they interact with subject content. Consistency in the volume and structure of learning across subjects with equivalent credit points is essential for a quality student experience and also supports staff to manage teaching workloads through defined activities with set expectations.

Subjects at La Trobe consist of Structured and Unstructured Learning Activities. Within these types, there are Scheduled Learning Activities, Unscheduled Learning Activities, and Self-Directed Learning Activities (defined in Table 1 below). Collectively these elements make up the total structure which will not exceed 120 hours volume of learning for a 15-credit point subject. The only exception to this volume is where an accrediting body specifically stipulates that a subject requires a higher volume of learning.

Table 1 - Structure of Learning Activities

Term	Descriptor
Structured	**Scheduled** Learning Activities Timetabled, synchronous, instructor led learning sessions that occur at a specific time and locations (physical or virtual).
	Unscheduled Learning Activities Structured learning tasks that are not timetabled. These are part of the formal learning design and are typically asynchronous. They may include short videos, interactive modules, required discussion board participation, or formative quizzes.
Unstructured	**Self-Directed** Learning Activities Total number of hours students should engage in self-directed study or learning activities in addition to their scheduled or unscheduled learning activities. This includes preparing and completing assessments, reviewing materials, conducting independent reading or research, practising discipline-specific skills, exploring supplementary resources, and managing their study planning and organisation.

Volume of Learning Standards

1. Structured Learning includes both Scheduled (e.g. tutorial) and Unscheduled Learning Activities (e.g. online asynchronous videos) that are required on a regular basis.
2. In most cases total Structured Learning Activities will comprise between 24-36 hours and should not exceed 48 hours per semester for a 15CP subject.
3. Where accreditation explicitly stipulates a greater proportion of structured hours is required, evidence should be provided as part of the subject approval process.
4. Placement subjects can exceed 36 hours structured learning as part of the subject approval process. It must be clear that the subject is a placement for the approval to be granted.
5. There should be a consistent pattern of scheduled learning activities from week to week within the timetable. For example, 1 x 1 hour tutorial per week for entire teaching period rather than 1 x 2 hour tutorial in weeks 2, 4 and 5 and 2 x 1 hour tutorials in weeks 1, 3 and 6.
6. Subjects with different credit point allocations should allocate volume of learning on a pro-rata basis (e.g. 30 cp subjects can include 48 – 72 hours of structured learning or 8 hours per credit point over the duration of the subject's teaching period).

Information in CourseLoop and the LMS

Both Scheduled and Unscheduled Learning Activities must be recorded in the subject class requirements field in CourseLoop. Unstructured Learning Activities do not need to be recorded in CourseLoop, however guidance should be provided in the subject LMS that sets clear expectations for self-directed study hours.

Composition of Learning Activities

Table 2 illustrates the possible composition of total study hours (the volume of learning) across different types of learning and as applied to subject delivery modes. These are not prescriptive, and the allocation of hours can be changed within the parameters outlined in this document and according to the needs of the subject and its learning outcomes.

At a course level it is important to remember that, in accordance with ESOS requirements, international students must enrol in two-thirds of subjects that are delivered face-to-face (see Course Design Policy and Enrolment Procedure).

Table 2. Sample Study Hours Composition by Delivery Mode for 15-Credit Point Subjects

Type of Learning Activity	**Subject Delivery Mode**			
	Face to Face	**Multi-Modal**	**Online**	**Asynchronous**
Scheduled Learning Activities*	36 hours	24 hours	12 hours	0 hours
Unscheduled Learning Activities*	0 hours	12 hours	24 hours	36 hours
Total Recorded Subject Hours	**36 hours**	**36 hours**	**36 hours**	**36 hours**
Self-Directed learning activities*	84 hours	84 hours	84 hours	84 hours
Total Student Workload^	120 hours	120 hours	120 hours	120 hours

*Hours split across these 3 areas are examples for reference only. Hours can be allocated in different ways. ^ For a standard 15-credit point subject, the total student workload is 120 hours, calculated at 8 hours per credit point over the duration of the subject's teaching period.

Subject Delivery Modes

To ensure a consistent approach to teaching hours across the University, it is important to select the most appropriate subject delivery mode for the subject.

Refer to Appendix 1 for details.

Class Types

It is important to consider the most appropriate class type for a subject based on the structure of learning. Table 4 outlines the available class types and their definitions. When selecting a class type consideration should be paid to how this class type would appear to students in the handbook and whether staff teaching hours should be allocated.

Refer to Appendix 2 for details.

Assessment Load – Assurance of Learning

The final key consideration for structure and volume of teaching and learning is the assessment workload for students and the assurance of learning. The La Trobe University Assessment Policy guides the development of assessment and should be referred to for further information.

When setting assessment workload, careful consideration should be given to:

- the AQF level of a subject
- the complexity of the assessment and intent
    - summary of ideas
    - creativity required
    - critical thinking or analysis
    - groupwork
    - professional accreditation requirements
- the time required to prepare, think about, research, sort, structure, review and draft the work
- feedback from students in relation to the time spent preparing for and completing assessment task.

Professional judgement is required in setting the workload, considering the level of study and subject complexity. Validation processes within the school support the quality assurance of the assessment itself. Key roles in assessment development are:

a. the Subject Coordinator, together with subject matter experts among the teaching staff, are in the best position to determine an appropriate subject assessment workload based on the considerations outlined below, any relevant accreditation requirements and the student effort required to successfully complete the required assessment tasks;

b. the Course Coordinator and/or Head of Major/Discipline play a key role in ensuring that assessment workload is consistent across a course of study;

c. at the School level, the Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching or equivalent is

responsible for ensuring that appropriate attention has been paid to calibrating assessment workload across comparable courses of study.

Placements

Student participation in professional, clinical or fieldwork placements may constitute a significant component of a student's preparation for their assessment in placement-based subjects, particularly when the assessment involves evaluation of student achievement of professional competencies. Consequently, a proportion of the time spent by the student engaged in the placement and associated non-contact time (e.g., preparation) should be factored into the assessment workload of placement-based subjects.

Type and weighting

The Assessment Standards (in the Assessment Policy) outline the maximum weighting of any individual assessment task and factors to consider such as the timing of early assessment.

Assessment of subject ILOs on multiple occasions (e.g., ≥ three times) can often create an unnecessarily high assessment workload for students. Where possible, the summative assessment of Subject Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) should be minimised with each ILO assessed no more than twice within a subject's assessment suite. However, in cumulative assessment, students may build upon previous work so that ILOs are partially assessed in earlier activities or assessed at a lower level.

Assessment workload should be calibrated by both length and complexity. While actual task word count or duration should be communicated to students via the subject learning guides on the LMS, task word count or duration alone is not a measure of complexity nor the effort required by the student to complete the assessment task and as such, should not be used as an indication of the weighting (%) towards the final grade in a subject.

Group assessment

Group-based assessment tasks typically require more student effort (in terms of time) than individual assessment tasks. Collaborative assessment tasks require students to engage in both active research and individual preparation to inform their contribution to group-based assessment tasks. In addition to this, communication with other group members and organising group activities (e.g., group meetings), negotiating with group members, managing group issues, etc. to progress and complete the assessment task take additional effort that would otherwise not be required for individual assessment tasks. The size of the group will impact student effort, in terms of both the individual student effort required to inform each member's contribution to the task (i.e., potential reduction in individual time) and the effort required to coordinate group members (i.e., potential increase in group management time).

Calibrating workload

Assessment workload should be calibrated by both length and complexity of an assessment piece. Details of complexity (inclusive of word counts and duration) should be communicated to students via subject learning guides on the LMS. Obtaining feedback from students in relation to the time spent preparing for and completing an assessment task will enable Subject Coordinators to adjust and refine subject assessment through an informed understanding of the average student effort

required to complete an assessment task.

Workload models

Two models for the calculation of assessment workload are presented in this document based on, respectively, word count for assessment tasks, or the estimated number of student hours spent in assessment preparation.

WORD-BASED MODEL

Table six – Indicative word counts by credit point and level

Level	Essay words per credit point	Total essay words – all assessment items
Undergraduate – (15 credit point subject)	250-300	3750-4500
Postgraduate (15 credit point subject)	300- 450	4500-6500

As not all assessment items will be essay-based the following equivalencies table is provided as a guide. The equivalences may vary according to the complexity of the assignment and other criteria outlined above.

Table seven – Suggested equivalents for essay word counts

Assessment	Broadly Equivalent to 1000 essay words
Written/Multiple Choice Examination	1 hour
Essay in foreign language	500 words
Group essay	750 words/member
Unstructured reflective journal	2000 – 3000 words
Verbal presentation	20 minutes
Group presentation	10 minutes/member
Clinical practicum assessment	20 minutes

TIME-BASED MODEL

To establish the notional time available for student work on assessment in a subject in the time-based model, contact hours of study and their associated non-contact hours of study (e.g., preparation time) may be subtracted from the total subject workload hours.

Example: In POD1PPA, a 15CP first-year undergraduate subject, students are required to undertake one 4-hour problem- based learning (PBL) activity each week in addition to one 4-hour practical session every two weeks which aim to develop preclinical skills required for professional accreditation purposes.

The Subject Coordinator determines that preparation for the fortnightly 4-hour practical sessions is such that students need to spend approximately 2 hours preparing for these sessions in addition to their weekly online 4-hour PBL activity. Of the notional 120 hours of workload, 84 hours are accounted for by the combination of the weekly PBL activity and the fortnightly practical sessions and their associated preparation time (i.e., 12 x 4hrs (PBL) + 6 x (4hrs+2hrs) (practical sessions) = 84hrs), leaving 36hrs for assessment and any other non-contact activity.

The student task time presented in Table Eight is indicative rather than a definitive measure of the hours that would be required to complete the assessment task. Subject Coordinators and/or discipline teaching experts are best placed to make decisions regarding student task time based on the complexity of the assessment task and other factors outlined above.

The Table lists commonly utilised assessments across the University; however, different academic disciplines may utilize other types of assessment not listed below that may be considered typical for the discipline. (Examples used are based on discrete activities rather than compound tasks, such as a report with a presentation on a report.) Academic staff are encouraged to share and discuss new and innovative ways of assessing student learning and to work collaboratively to quantify the student effort required for other forms of assessment.

Table Eight – Examples for calculation of student effort by assessment type

Assessment	Indicative Time on Task	Indicative hour (total)
1 hour of examination	1 hour assessment plus 15 - 19 hours of student preparation	16 - 20 hours
1,000-word essay or similar (individual)	4 hours writing plus 4- 6 hours of student preparation (e.g., research)	8 - 10 hours
1,000-word essay or similar (group)	4 hours writing plus 6 hours of student preparation (e.g., research) plus 4 hours of group coordination (e.g., team meetings)	14 hours
Practice report or similar	2 hours writing/drawing graphs, etc. plus 3 - 5 hours of student preparation	5 - 7 hours
Presentation (10 minutes, individual)	6 - 10 hours of student preparation	6 - 10 hours
Oral presentation (10 minutes, group)	6 - 10 hours of student preparation plus 5 hours of group coordination	11 - 15 hours
Poster (individual, e.g. infographic)	6 hours of design (including gathering and organizing information) plus 4 hours of assembly (including drawing figures, etc.)	10 hours
Poster (group, e.g. infographic)	6 hours of design (including gathering and organizing information) plus 4 hours of assembly (including drawing figures, etc.) plus 2 hours of group coordination (team meetings)	12 hours
1-hour Clinical practicum assessment (e.g. Viva voce, O.S.C.E, patient examination)	1 hour assessment plus 12 - 14 hours of student preparation	13 - 15 hours
Professional competency evaluation as part of a full-time professional placement (e.g., clinical or fieldwork placement)	For each full-time week of professional placement (35 hours), 20 hours will be associated with preparation for a professional competency evaluation	20 hours
250-word Discussion forum posts	30 minutes of initial post plus 30 minutes of research time	1 hour
10-minute Video	10 hours of student research plus 5 hours of video production time (storyboarding, recording, editing)	15 hours

Appendix 1.

Subject delivery modes

Term	Description	Teaching Mode		
		In Person	**Online**	**Synchronous**
Face to Face	All scheduled teaching and learning activities take place in an in-person setting at an assigned day/time and location and at a physical location either on or off campus** (e.g. placements or field trips). Supporting learning materials will be available online. **any location that is not part of a La Trobe Campus	Y	N	Y
Online	Teaching and learning takes place online through virtual meeting software, requiring students to be present at assigned days and times. Interaction with instructors and peers is 'live' in an online environment and all learning materials will be available online.	N	Y	Y
Online Asynchronous	Students participate in self-paced learning activities, without scheduled classes but guided by set deadlines. Interaction with both instructors and peers occurs in an online environment and all learning materials will be available online.	N	Y	N
Online plus intensive/ placement	Teaching and learning takes place online through virtual meeting software, requiring students to be present at assigned days and times. Interaction with instructors and peers is 'live' in an online environment and all learning materials will be available online – the subject also has a requirement for in person attendance for a specific intensive, such as clinical workshops or work integrated learning (e.g. field or industry placement).	Y	Y	Y
Multi-Modal	Teaching and learning takes place via a combination of Face to Face and Online (Synchronous and/or Asynchronous) delivery. There is a requirement to engage Face to Face (on or off campus) on specific days and times. When not meeting in person, students and instructors will interact online, either through scheduled synchronous sessions or asynchronous activities. All learning materials will be available online.	Y	Y	Y (Face to Face) Y and N (online could be either)
StudyFlex **tag only; not a designated delivery mode*	StudyFlex subjects offer students flexible delivery options. Each subject has at least one on-campus (Face to Face or Multi-Modal) instance and one online (Asynchronous or Synchronous) instance. This allows students to choose their preferred mode of learning for each subject.	N/A	N/A	N/A

Appendix 2.

Class type guidelines

Class Type	Available Online	Definition	What this means for Students	Staff Teaching Time Allocation
Field Trip	No	An excursion (e.g. to a museum, an archaeological site or a particular environment) for the purpose of making first hand observations or gathering data	Off campus class	Yes
Independent/ Supervised Research	Yes	Research undertaken under the general guidance of a formally appointed supervisor	Student research undertaken according to the specific requirements of the supervisor (NB. Supervisor consultation should be used for time with supervising academic)	No
Laboratory Class	No	Students engage in hands-on experiments and practical exercises in a supervised environment	Scheduled class that may be on campus or online	Yes
Lecture	Yes	Information, explanations, and insights on a particular subject presented to a large audience	Scheduled presentation that may be on campus or online	Yes
Placement	No	Any work experience, work placement, practicum, clinical or field placement that requires students to undertake activities in a work setting and forms part of the formal requirements of an academic program	Off campus work related to studies (NB. Supervisor consultation should be used for time with supervising academic)	No
Internal Placement	No	Any work experience, work placement, practicum, clinical or field placement that requires students to undertake activities in a work setting and forms part of the formal requirements of an academic program. These activities are conducted on campus.	On campus work related to studies (NB. Supervisor consultation should be used for time with supervising academic)	No
Practical	Yes	Students actively participate in hands-on exercises or real-world applications, promoting practical skill development and immediate practical understanding	Scheduled class that may be on campus or online	Yes
Seminar	Yes	A presentation by an individual (or a small group) followed by an open discussion or forum with a larger group, where an instructor has prepared materials in advance and participants have also prepared for the session	Scheduled class that may be on campus or online	Yes

Class Type	Available Online	Definition	What this means for Students	Staff Teaching Time Allocation
Supervisor Consultation	Yes	One-on-one sessions between a student and a supervisor, facilitating guidance, feedback, and discussion to support the student's academic or research endeavours	Scheduled session that may be on campus or online	Yes
Tutorial	Yes	A focused instructional session where the instructor prepares materials for the session to deepen understanding through engaging with tasks and activities, clarify concepts, and provide opportunities for students to ask questions and receive detailed explanations	Scheduled class that may be on campus or online	Yes
Unscheduled Learning Activities	Yes	Asynchronous learning activities that will not be timetabled	Any online subject content that students must engage with to meet SILOs and prepare for assessments (eg. short videos, multimedia resources, online learning activities)	Yes
Workshop	Yes	An interactive, hands-on session where participants engage in activities to develop specific skills or knowledge. It can involve small group discussions, practical exercises, and collaborative projects	Scheduled class that may be on campus or online	Yes