A guide to writing student-friendly unit descriptions (for MQBS).

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Unit descriptions are so much more than an administrative field. They are a ‘front window’ to your unit - an opportunity to communicate with future students and other stakeholders and show them the relevance and importance of your subject. As we craft these descriptions, the students, our prime audience, must be at the heart of our considerations.

Students often have concerns and doubts that our unit descriptions should address. They may be unsure of the subject’s relevance to their degree, future career, or personal life. They might have reservations about their ability to manage the unit material, or harbour preconceptions about course content and assessments.

Unit descriptions present an exceptional opportunity to address student concerns head-on and set a supportive and inclusive tone from the get-go. It’s also an opportunity to communicate with other audiences (employers, staff, other universities).

The MQCMS provides a 1400-character limit for these descriptions, which translates roughly to 250-350 words. It’s crucial to utilise these words effectively.

This 7-step template below seeks to help you in drafting effective and impactful unit descriptions.

1. Compelling opening (e.g., a question or excitement-builder)
2. Key topics and outcomes
3. (optional) Contributions to a degree
4. Embedded values/transferable skills and capabilities
5. Milestones overview
6. Key activities
7. (optional) Support
The ‘phrase bank’ below aims to help you draft effective and student-focused unit descriptions. **Pick 1-2 from each category or draft your own.**

### Step 1: Compelling opening

Questions or other ‘hooks’ that ignite curiosity or excitement are a good way to start a unit description. Examples below illustrate some options. Pick 1-2 or craft your own one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Excitement-builders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have you ever wondered</strong> [a big question from your discipline]</td>
<td>Embark on a journey of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What if</strong>...[a big potential of your discipline]</td>
<td>Delve/Dive into the world of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does it take to</strong> [an important outcome or skill]</td>
<td>Unlock the power of [data]....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can businesses be both</strong> [seemingly contradictory options, e.g., profitable and sustainable]?</td>
<td>Challenge your thinking....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Step 2: Key topics and outcomes

Once you have your potential students’ attention, list key outcomes that students will gain from your unit, as well as some topics they’ll be exploring. No need to list all the topics and outcomes at this point – pick 2-3 important ones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key outcomes</th>
<th>Key topics/areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Novice students:</strong></td>
<td>From _ to _ [ADD TOPICS HERE] , this subject will ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acquire a solid foundation in</td>
<td>Bridging the gap between (list 2 disciplines), this subject will immerse you in the rapidly evolving world of....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gain a strong foundation in</td>
<td>Exploring the intersection of ___ and ____ , this subject will invite you to ....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explore ____</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gain valuable insights into</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Immerse yourself in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discover how to navigate the complex world of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intermediate students:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strengthen/Hone your ___ skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Develop a deeper understanding of ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gain a deeper grasp of ...</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Step 3: (optional) Contribution to the degree

What degree(s) is this unit contributing to? Is it a core (compulsory) unit or is it an elective that will enhance students’ knowledge/skills? Clearly state it for the students to help them plan their enrolments. This section is optional depending on the unit and course(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core component</th>
<th>Elective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__ is a core requirement in...</td>
<td>Choosing ___ elective can significantly enrich your understanding of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ is a mandatory for ___</td>
<td>___ provides a unique complement to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ is a compulsory component in__</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 4: Mention graduate capabilities/ key values/transferable skills embedded in the unit.

Our units are building blocks for a qualification. It’s therefore important to communicate key values of the unit and how they contribute to the overall capabilities/ transferable skills. Examples below illustrate options. Pick 1-2 from below or craft your own.

- **Ethical Decision Making**: By fostering an ethos of ethical behaviour and integrity, this unit provides opportunities to weigh the moral implications of business decisions. This fosters transferable skills such as critical thinking, judgement, and personal responsibility that are invaluable in any professional setting.
- **Leadership**: This unit underscores the importance of inspiring, equitable leadership, and the art of leading teams through change. These elements strengthen key skills such as decision-making, communication, and resilience, which are integral for effective leadership in any field.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration**: By emphasising the role of collaboration and teamwork in __, this unit builds critical skills in diplomacy, coordination, and negotiation. These abilities are vital for team-based environments across various industries.
- **Innovation**: This unit cultivates an innovative mindset, encouraging students to devise new ideas and solutions for business challenges. This approach enhances skills like creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability, which are crucial in the face of rapid technological advancements.
- **Professionalism**: By emphasising the importance of professionalism in all business interactions, this unit develops transferable skills like effective communication and professional etiquette. These are critical in cultivating an inclusive, respectful, and productive work environment.
- **Sustainability**: This unit highlights businesses’ roles in maintaining sustainable operations and valuing environmental stewardship. It instils skills in strategic planning and adaptability with an emphasis on long-term sustainability, increasingly relevant in our eco-conscious world.
- **Respect for Diversity**: This unit promotes appreciation for diversity and the necessity of cultural competency in the global business environment. This fosters key skills like empathy, respect, and understanding, essential for thriving in our increasingly interconnected world.
- **Continuous Learning**: By underlining the significance of ongoing learning and adaptability, this unit reinforces skills such as curiosity, self-improvement, and resilience to change. These are crucial in the ever-evolving landscape of business and beyond.
- **Social Responsibility**: This unit emphasises businesses’ role in positively impacting society and their communities. It promotes skills in corporate ethics, civic engagement, and altruism, which are significant in the drive towards more conscientious businesses.
Accountability: This unit accentuates the importance of accountability, emphasising the critical role of accurate financial reporting and transparency in business operations. This nurtures key skills like reliability, honesty, and integrity, vital in establishing trust in professional relationships.

Step 5: Milestones overview
It’s important to flag the key milestones of the unit to give students a good understanding of what they’ll be doing and engaging with.

For example:
You’ll start by ____ [milestone 1]. You’ll then ____ [milestones 2, and 3]. Along the way, you’ll learn ____.

Step 6: Key activities/assessments
Students need to know what types of activities and assessments they’ll be doing in your unit. Examples below illustrate some options. Feel free to adapt them for your purposes.

✓ **Case-studies:** In our engaging case study discussions, you’ll experience being a strategic advisor to ____.
✓ **Problems:** Our weekly problems will have you acting as a forensic accountant, dissecting and understanding companies' financial health where you’ll learn how to identify the optimal mathematical solution.
✓ **Paper:** Your end-of-term paper will invite you to provide guidance to a real company's path to growth.
✓ **Role-plays:** Through role-plays, you’ll step into the shoes of managers solving workplace dilemmas.
✓ **Debates:** Your weekly debates with peers will challenge what you know and think, sparking new ideas.
✓ **Collaborative projects:** The collaborative projects will invite you to become a data analyst, actively seeking out trends in situations taken straight from real life.
✓ **Simulations:** Our engaging interactive simulations give you an opportunity to act as an economic researcher, considering the intertwined forces of inflation, unemployment, and GDP growth.

Step 7: Mention available support
What kind of support is available in your unit? Communicate it to allay students’ fears and doubts.

✓ **Online Resources:** To make sure you have support, we’ve compiled a library of online resources - from readings to videos, practice quizzes to discussion forums - to supplement your learning.
✓ **Feedback Loops:** Regular feedback on your assignments will provide you with insights into your strengths and areas for improvement. We'll guide you on how to learn and grow from each task.
Peer Study Groups: Connect with your classmates in study groups, where you can discuss course materials, work on assignments, and learn from each other. It's a safe space to express your thoughts and doubts openly.

Open Communication: Your ideas, doubts, concerns are always welcome. This unit is a dialogue, not a monologue, and your contribution is valued.

Interactive Sessions: Engaging group discussions and debates will help you better understand the subject matter.

Sample unit description:
Are you interested in ____? Do you want to use your ____ and ____ skills to make a positive impact on society?

Acquire a solid foundation in ____ by exploring ____ and learn how to ____. You'll be introduced to the ____ [new methodologies/frameworks, etc] and learn how to apply it to real-world problems. This unit highlights the importance of ____ and underlines the value of ____.

This unit is an important component in ____ [list degrees]

You'll start by ____ [milestone 1]. You'll then ____ [milestones 2, and 3].

One of the best parts of this unit is ____ [learning activities, e.g., collaborating with others]. You'll work in teams to ____ learning how to effectively communicate and work together to achieve your goals. You'll also have the chance to ____ and ____ [describe opportunities and potential gains].

To make sure you have support if needed, we've compiled a library of online resources - from readings to videos, practice quizzes to discussion forums - to supplement your learning.

Other resources

Unit guide L&T Quick Guide

MQ CMS Wiki section on unit descriptions – the official advice
https://wiki.mq.edu.au/display/manual/Unit+description

MQBS 2019 guidance on unit descriptions provides a template/structure and examples
https://wiki.mq.edu.au/download/attachments/311954291/2019%2007%2010%20FBE_UnitDescription.docx?version=1&modificationDate=1563170174000&api=v2