



## 21C credentials: Ten tips for success

Successful implementation of 21C credentials means educators, students and industry partners will understand and embrace an innovative way to warrant learning.

### 1. Focus on solving a specific learning problem

Clearly identify what is not working for students or where engagement is lacking - then determine whether digital credentials are an appropriate solution. Consult students and key stakeholders. If they are not enthralled with your proposed solution, consider a different solution. Doing 'badges for the sake of badges' is unlikely to be worth your time, or anyone else's.

### 2. Award credentials for meaningful evidence of learning

Giving credit for turning up will not solve a learning problem. Turning up is not participating, engaging or contributing. Credentials that warrant learning must be tied to learning evidence. With regard to evidence of learning, the key task is to describe the standards and criteria carefully in words that are clear and comprehensive to students, teaching staff, employers, academic boards, and so on.

### 3. Language counts - avoid 'badges'

Using the terms 'micro credential' or 'digital credential' focuses on the function of this innovation - the learning challenge. Terms that focus on 'badges' (and 'digital badges' or 'open badges') refer to the underpinning technology. To someone trying to understand or accept this new idea, badges can sound trivial. To avoid this, use terms that focus on credentials that warrant learning. Use the badging terms only when technology solutions are being discussed.

### 4. Simplify, simplify, simplify

In launching a new system of credentials - in a unit, a course, or an institution - you need a clear, concise value statement. Be disciplined and answer each of the following in one short sentence: What does the credential signify? Who does what, when, why and how? And how will this make learning more effective or efficient? Test your ideas on a skeptical colleague - if you can convince them, you probably have a viable idea.

### 5. Repeat, repeat, repeat

It can take a few reminders before people understand the concept, so don't worry about having to explain again and again. Draw a diagram.

*21C Credentials ([tiny.cc/21Ccredentials](http://tiny.cc/21Ccredentials))*



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## 6. Replace rather than add

Rather than just adding this credential system to everyone's load, consider taking away some of what already exists: if you are implementing credentials in a unit, consider removing or replacing an assessment task. This signals to students that the credential is important to you, and to the institution.

## 7. Create meaningful credentials

Design a way for your micro credentials to 'roll up and have currency' in a bigger system - the most valued, valuable and meaningful credentials are macro (in Australia, AQF qualifications are the 'big currency'). The micro credentials that contribute to those are expressed as 'credit towards' an AQF qualification. In the same way that loyalty schemes (frequent flyer points) can be converted to money or shopping vouchers, your credentials will have greater portability if they can be traded up for higher currency systems. Credentials that cannot be carried forward have less leverage. But beware of creating an ecosystem that is so complex that no one can understand it - simplify.

## 8. Create credentials that look meaningful

Digital badging companies often display sample badges with childish or cartoon-like graphics. If you want credentials to be taken seriously, then design them to look serious. Bear in mind that higher education students generally range from 18 to 80 years of age - presenting mature learners with Mickey Mouse badges is not likely to enthuse them. This is even more important where the credential is visible to others, such as professional bodies and employers.

## 9. Make evidence the learner's responsibility

Set the standard, describe the requirements and the timeframe, and then leave the student to create and curate the evidence in a (digital) place that assessors can easily access. This assessment design builds the (employability) habit of mind that evidence of performance is the learner's responsibility. It is also the learner's responsibility to select and assemble the best evidence for the assessor - this can be drawn from a portfolio of evidence, but the portfolio is a repository and a reflection base for the learner. The assessor, like an employment panel, wants to see the selected highlights, or evidence of improvement over time.

## 10. Select a simple, seamless and sustained technology solution

Solve this problem last, not first. Choose a platform that allows you to upload your own 'serious' graphics, that works seamlessly with a system your learner already uses (Facebook, WordPress, a learning management system), and one that is likely to remain solvent. If your credentials are at institution level, make sure you abide by policies associated with use of logos, crests and other branding, and that the academic area responsible for awards, prizes and credentials is aware of and ready to assist you in archiving the awards.

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