# What are some successful online strategies you have used to engage students?

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Engaging students in online education is a lot like engaging students in the face-to-face classroom. I’ve found that anything that I can do in the face-to-face classroom that actively engages students in learning, I can kind of translate into the online environment. Having said that though, I think there are a few things that I’ve done online that I thought worked really well. And the first one is to make it personal. So any time a student can talk about themselves and relate it to the course content, it gives them a very human presence in the classroom and it helps the class get to know each other. So, that’s easier in gerontology maybe than it is in statistics, but I think that almost always, we can link a student’s experience to the online content.

The second one is to take advantage of the fact that they’re already online. So in my face-to-face classroom, I may struggle with put away your electronics, shut down your phones, but when you’re teaching online, you could take advantage of the fact they’re already there. And so things like web quests, or googling, which is what they want to do and they’re good at, they’re right there. It’s a great way to do it.

A third thing is to make it controversial. So sometimes in a face-to-face classroom, I might be hesitant to take on a topic that I know students are going to have very widely differing feelings about. One example of that is assisted suicide for people who are aging and close to death. Now students, there’s no right answer to this, and students have a lot of different feelings on this topic. And sometimes in a face-to-face classroom, it’s easy for a student to maybe feel offended or to offend someone else. In the online environment, they have that time, that little bit of distance. And I can really see learning as they take advantage of learning from each other’s perspectives – Instead of that’s wrong, or that’s not how I think. So controversial topics can go well in the online environment because they have to think before they respond in a typical discussion forum.

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